

MCU's 2nd National Conference

This summer MCU held our Second National Conference. The Conference was a tremendous success; during it, we forged a stronger ideological unity, deepened our comradely bonds, sorted out several pressing questions, developed and refined our internal organizational structure, and improved our collective practice of criticism/self-criticism.

Since our last National Conference in the Summer of 2022, we have more than tripled in size. This growth has led to many new advances and exciting developments but has also raised new contradictions and challenges for us. What's more, as we have deepened our understanding of MLM—particularly over the past year as we came to understand better some key aspects of revolutionary strategy for communists in imperialist countries—a series of new questions arose about our strategy and tactics. Given this, holding a National Conference allowed us to sort through these questions and make major organizational and political advances.

Our Primary Task

Perhaps the most significant development at our National Conference was the unity and clarity we achieved on our primary task, namely the growth and development of MCU as a pre-party organization through winning over to MLM and MCU's line the potential bearers of revolutionary theory to the working class. Put another way, those who can spread MLM among the working class and help bring about the fusion of Marxism and the working class movement. In addition to uniting on this being our primary task, we also developed more specific and granular policies and plans for accomplishing this task in conjunction with key secondary tasks. We are presently drafting a longer document that explains this task in greater detail, as well as our strategy for growth and how this is tied to the longer-term goal of bringing about the fusion of Marxism with the working-class movement. This is a subject that requires further exposition, as there has been a great deal of confusion in the U.S. and internationally on how, in an imperialist country, to grow from a small communist organization into a larger pre-Party organization and then into the vanguard Party of the proletariat. Therefore, in this document, we will only provide a brief overview of the conclusions we reached at our Conference on this topic.

The growth of MCU requires both quantitative expansion (recruitment of new members and development of new supporters) and qualitative improvement (becoming more disciplined, getting more organized, raising our theoretical and ideological level, etc.). There are, at present, a large number of semi-Marxists in the U.S. who are trying to figure out how to build up the proletarian revolutionary movement in this country. However, there is deep confusion about Marxism broadly and revolutionary strategy specifically. Various revisionist and opportunist trends abound and have significant sway among the semi-Marxist milieu. Therefore, to win over these potential bearers of revolutionary theory

we need to struggle against these deviations and theoretical dead-ends, much like the early Russian Marxists waged a struggle against Narodism and legal Marxism.

To wage this struggle effectively and recruit new cadre into MCU, we identified five main tasks for us at present.

First is participation in semi-Marxist circles. An integral part of this is the theoretical debate against various popular revisionist distortions of Marxism (e.g. Tanky politics, Kim Moody's "Rank-and-File Strategy," etc.); however, participation is not reducible to this. It also means engaging with various events, groups, and social circles to establish—where possible and appropriate—good working relations with various semi-Marxist groups and to identify potential contacts who can be won over to MLM. Only in analyzing and understanding the multitude of trends among the semi-Marxists can we concretely understand how to win the best among them over.

Second, is a systematic and methodical approach to contacts. To not only grow the ranks of MCU but also develop a broad network of supporters and sympathizers, we need to be systematic in assessing contacts and their possible trajectories of development. This means training our cadre to be skilled in not only developing contacts theoretically and winning them over to MLM but also skilled at identifying and working through contacts' internal contradictions. Likewise, we need to be internally organized to handle the hundreds of contacts that we are now developing, to assess them objectively, and to chart paths forward for their respective development. This is no small task and requires a high degree of organization, political unity, and sharing of lessons and experience.

Third is our education work for contacts, sympathizers, and supporters. For the time being, this will be principally through open studies on MLM. These are ways for contacts to begin to work more closely with MCU, to study some basic aspects of MLM (e.g. political economy, philosophy, revolutionary history, etc.), and develop more as communists. These studies provide a means for us to assess and guide the development of contacts, especially in the theoretical realm.

Fourth is carrying our agitation and propaganda specifically online and through social media. The recent Palestine protests, despite their various limitations, have shown how many young people consume a huge amount of agitation and propaganda through social media and how integral these are to the mass movements in the U.S. Therefore, if we can develop our presence and ability to carry this out we can help to popularize MLM and clarify a proletarian class analysis of key events and dynamics in society. Agitation and propaganda alone cannot do this, but they can help to clarify some topics, spread the word about MCU, and draw contacts into our orbit. At present, the bulk of our agitation and propaganda needs to be aimed at the potential bearers of revolutionary theory, and not at the proletariat. However, as we grow and develop this will change.

Fifth is our work in the labor unions. While this is not, at present, the main

focus of our work, it is an important secondary aspect for a variety of reasons. First, it is how we maintain and grow our ties to the working class movement and provide some leadership to the proletariat's struggles. Second, it serves as an important way to demonstrate the correctness of our line, strategy, and tactics. Given the prevailing empiricism and pragmatism in U.S. leftist circles, proving the correctness of our approach *in practice* is very important for winning over semi-Marxists. Third, our work in the labor unions provides an important way to link up with both advanced workers (who are themselves semi-Marxists and can be recruited into MCU) and also other left-wing forces in the working class movement. This, in turn, expands our reach and influence among the proletariat more broadly and lays the foundation for a significant expansion of our work among the proletariat in the future.

All these tasks contribute to the growth of MCU, which is, in turn, key if we are to develop into an organization capable of bringing Marxism to the proletariat and eventually bringing about the fusion of Marxism and the working class movement. Because we are at such a preliminary and primitive stage, it is currently unclear how long it will take to get to the point of bringing Marxism to the proletariat in a systematic way. That being said, we should aim to run a study for training relatively class conscious workers in Marxism¹ in a years time, and then work with them to spread Marxism to the intermediate workers. This will be a small first step towards bringing about the fusion of Marxism and the working class movement, and is quite different than our previous understanding that this fusion would be brought about² by primarily sending a large number of cadre into the working class movement.

To accomplish our primary task we have taken various steps to reorganize ourselves internally, created new committees and dissolved others, and adjusted our internal division of labor to reflect the primacy of these tasks concerning other important, but secondary tasks. All of this is a tremendous step forward for MCU as an organization and will lead to significant gains and advances in the next few years.

Internal Reorganization and Democratic Centralism

To accomplish our key tasks we carried out a systematic reorganization of MCU's internal structure. This was necessitated not only by our newfound clarity and unity on our key tasks but also by the organizational growth and development that we have experienced in the past year, as well as our plans for future growth. This reorganization has involved things like adjusting our organizational division of labor to have more comrades focus on leading educational and recruitment efforts as well as having more comrades work on social media agitation and

¹While some of the advanced workers can be won over more easily to MLM and our line, sometimes advanced workers are attached to various revisionist and reformist ideas and groups despite having some existing knowledge of Marxism. In such cases, this attachment makes it harder to win over these workers, and it can, at times, be easier to win over dedicated intermediate workers and develop them into advanced workers.

propaganda. These steps help to align our organizational structure with our key tasks. In the future, we will adjust our organizational structure as our tasks change and develop.

Additionally, we have gained a deeper and more scientific understanding of how to practice democratic centralism. As a relatively small organization, it was possible, to an extent, to rely on less formal structures to concentrate correct ideas and have a strong centralized leadership based on a broad democratic foundation. Even so, our ad-hoc approach to some things hurt the functioning of democratic centralism in MCU. Therefore, given how we have grown and how we are poised to grow much more in the coming years, we needed to make some adjustments.

Through study of the practices of the Bolshevik Party and the CCP—as well as some important discussion—we came to a higher level understanding of how to practice democratic centralism as a growing pre-Party organization. In particular, we understood that democratic centralism is, as Mao put it, “first... a centralization of correct ideas” and “if there is no democracy we cannot possibly summarize experience correctly.”³ However, we failed to appreciate how crucial a systematic structure of reporting was to this concentration of correct ideas; we did not fully grasp how leading bodies should function as processing plants.⁴

However, in studying democratic centralism we concluded that, as Mao put it in his talk at the 7,000 Cadre Conference, leading bodies first must achieve unity of understanding (through concentrating the correct ideas they receive from lower bodies and cadre), then come to unity on policies, then achieve unity on plans based on these policies, then develop unity on division of labor and responsibilities, and only then is true unity in action possible. This clarity has allowed us to define the responsibilities of leading bodies much more clearly and how they should handle the feedback and information they receive from lower bodies and cadre. We likewise developed a plan for systematic reporting of lower bodies to high bodies and for higher bodies to, in turn, report to and guide lower bodies. In addition to more formal reports, we have also developed a plan for an internal podcast comprised of short, more empirical updates from each body of the organization to facilitate more horizontal communication and to keep comrades up to date on the work that various bodies are taking up.

While all of this is fairly basic and foundational to the systematic practice of democratic centralism, it represents a tremendous advance for MCU. What’s more, all of this also set us up well to handle future growth and development in the coming years.

³https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_62.htm

⁴While we upheld this in name, given our ad-hoc methods, some of our leading bodies struggled to consistently produce regular guiding policies and plans to direct the work they were overseeing.

Criticism and Self-Criticism

One of the most powerful and profound aspects of our Conference was the organizational advances we made in the practice of criticism and self-criticism (CSC). While we have practiced CSC since the founding of MCU, it has developed fairly unevenly, with some branches and committees having a much more developed and regular practice than others. In sections of MCU where CSC was a weakness, various mistakes tended to accumulate without being rectified.

However, in the lead-up to the Conference, a number of branches, committees, and leading comrades came under criticism for various mistakes and shortcomings. This process continued into the Conference as we worked to properly identify the root of various individual and collective failings. This, at times, involved sharp struggle but ultimately was profoundly transformative. Comrades who had made various mistakes came to grasp not only the nature of their own mistakes and the root causes of them but also the path forward for transformation through collective struggle. This helped to reinforce our collective understanding of the difference between shallow CSC and CSC that really gets to the root causes of mistakes comrades have made, and through this rational knowledge, helps to clarify how to struggle to overcome the root causes.

One comrade who went through this process in real-time at the Conference noted how profoundly it had deepened his understanding of criticism and self-criticism and how we, as communists, can spread this practice to the masses as we grow and develop the revolutionary movement in this country.⁵ This and other aspects of our discussions on CSC deepened MCU's theoretical understanding of criticism and self-criticism and helped us to refine our practice across the board.

Cultural Front

Speaking of literature and art (two component parts of the broader cultural front) Mao noted:

Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn exert a great influence on politics. Revolutionary literature and art are part of the whole revolutionary cause, they are cogs and wheels in it, and though in comparison with certain other and more important parts they may be less significant and less urgent and may occupy a secondary position, nevertheless, they are indispensable cogs and wheels in the whole machine, an indispensable part of the entire revolutionary cause. If we had no literature and art even in the broadest and most ordinary sense, we could not carry on the

⁵This was a central lesson of Chinese Revolution: "By combining 'correct theory and practice,' [one] can transform himself, as one can see in the common Chinese word fanshen, which may be freely rendered as 'transformation of identity.' The Chinese communists thus believe that the arena of class struggle cannot take place abstractly within the class a whole, but must be fought for within each individual human being," from Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, (Berkeley, UC Press, 1966), p. 32.

revolutionary movement and win victory.⁶

Prior to our Conference, MCU had taken up cultural work in a few branches, and had a good deal of success in one branch in particular. However, we did not have a systematic plan for our work on the cultural front. During the Conference this changed, as we came to unity both on our basic plans for our cultural work overall and for how we will go about further developing internal theoretical clarity on a Marxist analysis of culture and cultural work. This is incredibly important, not just for the development of revolutionary art and not just for expanding the influence of proletarian politics in the broader artistic world, but also for our social media presence, propaganda, and more.

We also developed a clear understanding of how we plan to build up a mass organization of artists and art critics, as well as a broad vision for how developing these artists can help aid the labor union front in the future.

Educational Work and the Development of Contacts

To carry out our primary task of growth, we need to develop not only a systematic study program—winning over people to MLM involves a good deal of teaching them MLM—but also a systematic approach to developing contacts. Therefore, at the Conference, we summed up the lessons of our past three years of educational and recruitment work and, based on these experiences, made various adjustments to our organizational structure and division of labor.

We collectively gained a great deal of clarity in how to assess and develop contacts, above and beyond just their theoretical level. Given the complexities of changing one's life to become a revolutionary and cadre of a pre-Party organization, it is not enough for us to simply examine how much theory a given contact knows or how quickly they learn it. This is only one piece of the puzzle. In the Conference we came to realize that both our studies themselves and our framework for recruitment tended, at times, to emphasize theoretical development in a one-sided fashion to the detriment of assessing other aspects of a contacts' overall political orientation. To address this shortcoming we have not only worked to change our basic process of assessing contacts but have also begun to modify our educational curriculums to ensure that our public-facing studies allow us to not only teach people MLM but also sufficiently evaluate their political development in an all-around fashion.

We also decided to host public-facing studies as MCU. Previously the student mass organization, Revolutionary Marxist Students, which was under MCU's leadership, ran public facing open studies. However, the experience of the past few years has shown that restricting these studies to largely students was a mistake, as there are literally hundreds of non-students interested in participating in them.⁷ For example, the recent online RMS Summer Study on the Socialist

⁶Mao, *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art*, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_08.htm

period in China had around 150 participants to start, the vast majority of whom were not students.

However, as we transition from leading RMS studies on campuses to running some local studies, but also a lot of larger national studies, we will need to be far more systematic in how we assess contacts and communicate internally on these matters. This involves both getting more organized overall and training our cadre to assess contacts and guide their political development. At the Conference, we made a fairly systematic general outline for how to do all this, which we are now in the process of refining.

The Working Class Movement

Over the past two years, we gained a good deal of experience in the working class movement. In conjunction with this, we made numerous theoretical advances as we grappled with the role of Communists in the working class movement on a much deeper level than we had previously. In a separate document, we will analyze how our line and practical work have developed since the publication of *MCU and the Working Class Movement*. However, suffice it to say for now that with the clarity that organizational growth and development are our primary tasks, we have made some changes to our understanding of what is presently possible for us to take on in the labor unions.

Given our modest forces, it is not possible to have comrades seriously organize in all the major unions in the country, let alone all the important industrial workplaces. Only once we have grown significantly will work of this scale and scope be possible. In the meantime, we are largely focused on building off the successes of our efforts in the Teamsters Union, where we have some significant, though modest, influence. However, by working with the militant and fighting workers in the Teamsters we will not only grow our influence in this union and challenge, in various ways, the reactionary union leadership, but also link up to other left-wing and militant forces in the unions.

While these forces are of a variety of different political tendencies, and while we have different levels of political unity with them, there are numerous openings for united front work. These forms of collaboration help us, as MCU, build our knowledge of and connections to various strata of the organized working class. In particular, the more advanced contacts we make through this work can be drawn into studies of MLM, so that we can win over advanced workers to Maoism and, in turn, work with them to win over the intermediate workers.⁸

⁸The history of the working-class movement in all countries shows that the better-situated strata of the working class respond to the ideas of socialism, more rapidly and more easily. From among these come, in the main, the advanced workers that every working-class movement brings to the fore, those who can win the confidence of the labouring masses, who devote themselves entirely to the education and organisation of the proletariat, who accept socialism consciously, and who even elaborate independent socialist theories. Every viable working-class movement has brought to the fore such working-class leaders, its own Proudhons, Vaillants, Weitlings, and Bebels. And our Russian working-class movement promises not to lag behind

We still have a number of open questions as we go forward with these efforts and work to bring about the fusion of Marxism and the working class movement. After further internal discussion and debate, we will publish an article with our general theoretical conclusions as well as our particular tasks at present. However, despite these open questions, we have a clear path forward on this front of work and two years of very successful experience off of which to build.

Consolidation of Branches

With the growth and development of MCU over the past two years, many smaller branches were founded. These branches, and some of our older branches struggled to grow regularly. This was partially due to internal issues in these branches but was also tied to the objective limitations of carrying out a wide range of local and national tasks as a small branch of a handful of people.⁹ Since the beginning of 2024, we have begun consolidating branches, and at the Conference, we took further steps forward in this direction. While we ultimately need branches in many cities across the country, at present it does not generally make sense to have small branches without sufficient cadre to carry out the basic tasks required to grow.

With larger branches, it is more feasible to have a rational division of labor, where, for example, some comrades focus on local educational work, others take up tasks for the cultural front and prepare the grounds for founding a mass organization, others investigate and engage with the local labor union movement,

the European movement in this respect. At a time when educated society is losing interest in honest, illegal literature, an impassioned desire for knowledge and for socialism is growing among the workers, real heroes are coming to the fore from amongst the workers, who, despite their wretched living conditions, despite the stultifying penal servitude of factory labour, possess so much character and will-power that they study, study, study, and turn them selves into conscious Social-Democrats—the working-class intelligentsia.” This “working-class intelligentsia” already exists in Russia, and we must make every effort to ensure that its ranks are regularly reinforced, that its lofty mental requirements are met and that leaders of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party come from its ranks. The newspaper that wants to become the organ of all Russian Social-Democrats must, therefore, be at the level of the advanced workers; not only must it not lower its level artificially, but, on the contrary, it must raise it constantly, it must follow up all the tactical, political, and theoretical problems of world Social-Democracy. Only then will the demands of the working-class intelligentsia be met, and it itself will take the cause of the Russian workers and, consequently, the cause of the Russian revolution, into its own hands.”

-Lenin, *A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy*

⁹Additionally, there were various aspects of our line as MCU which impeded the ability of branches to grow. This included comrades having too much national work to devote sufficient time to local work as well as our lack of systematic approach to evaluating and developing contacts. The Conference also represented a great step forward in addressing these organizational shortcomings.

Prior to the Conference we also abandoned our prior secrecy policy, which severely hindered our organizational growth and development, both locally and nationally. Under the secrecy policy we would only discuss MCU with contacts who we concluded would be ready to become cadre; this generally involved a long period of work and evaluation prior to disclosing the existence of MCU. This policy also was a major factor in us not promoting MCU openly through social media.

and still, others mostly focus on national-level work. All of this allows for a much more vibrant branch life, where comrades have one main area of responsibility instead of trying to go everywhere and do everything.

These changes will allow us to establish MCU more firmly in the main cities in which we are currently operating. This will aid not only in our growth but also allow us to better develop cadre and work through internal contradictions that they have. By growing strong and large branches in a smaller number of cities, we will set ourselves up well to establish more branches in other cities in the future. Comrades who have good practical organizational experience in a well-functioning branch will be better able to aid in the establishment of a new branch.

From NC to CC

At the Conference, we decided to transition from having a National Committee (NC) to a Central Committee (CC). This decision is in line with our organizational growth and development. Historically, the NC acted as both a national leading body and a representational body. At the founding of MCU, each branch had at least one representative on the National Committee (generally the branch leader). Given our limited numbers and our lack of systematic reporting at the time, this system worked fairly well. The NC members functioned not only as the leaders on the national level but also as the transition belt between the local branches and the national leading body.

As we grew and developed we maintained this practice for a time but began to move away from the NC being a properly representational body. Over the past year, with the proliferation of several new MCU branches, it was no longer feasible to maintain a system of representation of each branch in the NC. What's more, as we prepared for the Conference, it became clear that many of the tasks that previously fell within the scope of responsibility of the NC should not be carried out by the national leading body of our organization.

For example, the NC had previously handled the onboarding of many new members, especially those new comrades who got involved in MCU outside of an existing branch. Given the multitude of tasks and responsibilities that the NC had, this led to various shortcomings in onboarding new members and also pulled the NC away from other important tasks. Therefore, in the Conference, we developed plans for various new bodies to be created (such as an Onboarding Committee) and the responsibilities of other bodies to be modified to allow for the NC to devote the vast majority of its time to the tasks specifically required to provide strong centralized leadership to MCU as a whole.

In line with these changes, we decided that it made sense to transform our National Committee into a Central Committee. This change came with the now explicit expectation that the CC will not have a representative from each branch (a change which is made easier with the development of our reporting system). What's more, we concluded that no CC member should also play the

role of a Branch Chair. While CC members will be involved, to some degree, in local branch work, they must have sufficient time to devote to the task of leading MCU. What's more, we need to train up new leaders capable of taking on national-level work in the future.

All of this is a very promising development, which will strengthen the centralized leadership of MCU, improve the functioning of democratic centralism in our ranks, and set us up well to handle the multitude of tasks in front of us.

Conclusion

Our Second National Conference was an overwhelming success. We made numerous advances as an organization, strengthened our internal unity, and arrived at newfound clarity. We are now poised to seize the time and make big strides forward as a pre-Party formation. For the first time in decades, there now exists a genuine Communist organization in the United States with real clarity on how to grow and develop into a Communist Vanguard Party. This is a tremendous accomplishment, even though we have a long way to go to reach this point. Given our ideological unity, our strategic clarity, and our organizational abilities—all of which took qualitative leaps forward at the Conference—we will tackle the challenges in front of us with proletarian determination and a collective spirit.

To continue to advance on the long and winding road to proletarian revolution we will need to pass through many trials and tribulations. However, as Mao noted so long ago, the future is bright, but the road is tortuous. We are well suited to meet these challenges and walk this long and winding road. In the coming years, we will win over hundreds and thousands of potential bearers of revolutionary theory, bring about the fusion of Marxism and the working class movement, and, through the fires of the class struggle, forge ourselves into a Party of the proletariat.