

I Wor Kuen's Reactionary Line on May Day and the Workers' Movement



*WEI MIN SHE' Reply to
IWK Criticism of
1974 May Day*

Asian Contingent Statement

September 1974

WEI MIN SHE REPLY TO IWK CRITICISM ON MAY DAY ASIAN CONTINGENT STATEMENT 1974

On June 24, 1974 WMS received a position paper from IWK which attempted to criticize the solidarity statement presented by the Asian Contingent to the Bay Area May Day Celebration, 1974. This statement was initiated by WMS and represents generally our view of Asians in the working class movement.

The paper that IWK refers to is not the final statement that was read on 5/1.* When the first draft of the Contingent's statement was shown to groups we were asking to join us in the Contingent, it was made clear that the statement was open to criticisms and changes. At the final Asian Contingent meeting, many honest forces offered a number of suggestions. A new draft was written which in essence was the same as the original plus more examples of Asian American working class struggles.

IWK did not take the opportunity to raise honest criticism about the statement before it was revised and read on 5/1. Rather they chose to criticize it after the fact—extracting small sections of our statement and interpreting it totally out of context. Although the statement in general reflects the political line of our organization, we did not expect it to cover every detail of our analysis of the mass movement in this country.

However, we do see the IWK written criticism as a good thing because:

- 1) As IWK puts forward its politics, it can be struggled over.
- 2) It helps to sharpen the struggle in the Asian American movement for the correct political line, and
- 3) It provides us with an opportunity to put forth our line more broadly, which based on our practice we feel is the correct line, in contrast to the erroneous line and practice of IWK.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRUGGLE OVER POLITICAL LINE AT THIS TIME

We feel it absolutely important, at this juncture, to clarify our differences with IWK not just to show differences between two organizations which represent the differences of two political lines; but also to show how IWK's line is sabotaging the mass movement against imperialism. This struggle is not only against IWK. In the revolutionary movement various groups hold similar tendencies as IWK which only serve to harm the mass struggle. Therefore this is a struggle against the incorrect political line IWK represents.

Mao Tse-Tung once said that not following a correct line is like having no soul. The line of any Marxist-Leninist or anti-imperialist organization determines everything. It can bring the masses closer to revolution or it can isolate revolution from the masses. Political line can be defined as the strategy** that we take in making revolution. Included in this strategy is an analysis of the concrete conditions in the economy and the mass movement. Also included is an analysis of who we should rely on to make revolution.

If a political line is correct, people will move forward and actively build the mass movement against imperialism. If it is incorrect, the movement can be directed away from our common foe—imperialism. It is our contention that IWK's line on the national question and the trade union question can only retard the working class movement against imperialism. By putting forward as **primary** the necessity to organize workers separately along national lines, and relying on union bureaucrats, IWK is promoting further divisions and confusion within the working class. This plays directly into the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Five years ago when the Asian American movement was still young, differences over line were not as sharp because our mass work was just developing and we didn't have the *practice* to gauge which line was correct. The mass work at that period was mainly centered around alternative institutions. Now we have 5 years of experience in which we can SUM UP which line has proven to be correct. The application of theory to practice is directly linked to the recent development of mass activities in workplaces, communities, and campuses, and the significant influence of anti-imperialist forces in these movements. Because of this a correct or incorrect line can determine the further development of the revolutionary movement. Struggle over political line then is not a struggle over semantics, rather it is a fight to put forward the outlook of the working class in opposition to that of the bourgeoisie, and as such to put into practice that line which will build the revolutionary movement.

*Attached to this paper is the final Asian Contingent statement delivered at the Bay Area May Day Celebration at San Antonio Park, Oakland, April 28, 1974. See last page.

***Strategy is the determination of the direction of the MAIN BLOW of the proletariat at a given stage of the revolution, the elaboration of a corresponding plan for the disposition of the revolutionary forces (main and secondary reserves), the fight to carry out this plan throughout the given stage of the revolution" . . . from Foundations of Leninism, On Strategy and Tactics by Stalin. Strategy is based on the analysis of the conditions—if you have the incorrect analysis, you cannot strike a correct blow. Tactics, which are subordinate to strategy, is the determination of the line of conduct in a short period, depending on the flow and ebb of the movement. The aim of tactics is to win some engagements in battles but is not seen as the war as a whole.

MAY DAY: A DAY OF INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIANISM ?

Our political differences with IWK exist in all areas of the united front against imperialism. We have sharp struggle in such areas as building U.S.-China friendship; student organizing; and how to build the workers' movement. We expect these differences to exist as long as differences exist between our political lines. This paper will focus mainly on our differences over how to build the anti-imperialist workers' movement—differences which came out over this year's (1974) May Day (5/1) event.

WMS saw this year's 5/1 as a day to build proletarian internationalism—a day to build unity between working people throughout the world. Historically, this has been the tradition of 5/1. It has always been the day when workers of all nationalities come together to sum up the past year's struggles and to raise the issues and demands for the coming period. Issues that were taken up by workers on 5/1 dealt with all forms of oppression fostered by the capitalist system.

From its inception in 1889, 5/1 was a "political" workers day—when the working class confronts the bourgeoisie with not economic trade unionist demands of better wages and conditions, but political demands about the political oppression that stems from this system. It started out as a fight for the 8 hour work day—a political demand put forward by the **entire** working class to the **entire** bourgeois class. In later years, other demands that the entire class took up on 5/1 focused on the fight against national oppression of Black people. Hundreds of thousands of workers marched in the streets in 1936 to demand freedom for the Scottsboro Boys—9 Black youths who were unjustly framed by the capitalists for allegedly raping a white woman. Freedom for all political prisoners also became the rallying point that workers took up on 5/1. In the 1950's, hundreds of thousands of workers in the U.S. as well as the world over took the streets again to demand freedom for the Rosenbergs, a couple that was active in building the struggle for socialism in this country.

5/1 has not been confined to just within the U.S. It has been celebrated by the entire international working class. Millions take part every year in 5/1 celebrations in countries such as Britain, France, Japan, Mexico, Italy, Argentina, Middle East, Europe, China and recently, Portugal.

WMS felt it was important for "Asians" to participate in the Bay Area 5/1 event for a number of reasons. Firstly, Asians are part of the multi-national working class. 60-70% of the Chinese in S.F. work in workplaces employing many different nationalities. The majority of Japanese and Pilipino workers hold jobs in multi-national workplaces. Secondly, the fight against national oppression must be taken up by the entire working class. Third World people in this country cannot fight national oppression in isolation. The root cause of national oppression is imperialism. In order to fight national oppression and its cause, imperialism, we must unite with the whole working class. Thirdly, Asians can play an important role in bringing the national question to other workers and in promoting the need of other workers to take up the fight against the special oppression of national minorities, while building for the multi-national unity needed to defeat U.S. imperialism.

The slogan of the Asian Contingent: ASIANS UNITE! FIGHT ALL NATIONAL OPPRESSION! BUILD WORKING CLASS UNITY! sums up our position on the relationship between Asians and working class movement. The slogan can be broken down into three parts: ASIANS UNITE! points to the necessity for Asian Americans as a whole to take up the fight against imperialism. FIGHT ALL NATIONAL OPPRESSION! brings out the need to combat the oppression of all national minorities. And BUILD WORKING CLASS UNITY! puts forth that the way to fight imperialism and national oppression which stems from imperialism is to build working class unity.

This year's Bay Area 5/1 event was a monumental success. Over a thousand people—workers, students and community—marched and rallied in Oakland under the banner "WORKERS UNITE TO LEAD THE FIGHT AGAINST ALL OPPRESSION!"* The event was a celebration of struggle, with speakers from various struggles telling the audience how they are fighting back. Speakers spoke on the following themes: 1) Learn from the truckers and miners! Fight the energy freeze! 2) Fight layoffs! Jobs or income for the unemployed! 3) Unionize, Organize, Defend the right to strike! Support the United Farmworkers! 4) No more Vietnams! Hands off the Middle East! 5) Stop police terror against Black, Chicano, and all oppressed people! **Indict the murderers of Tyrone Guyton!** (Tyrone Guyton was a Black youth who was brutally gunned down by the Emeryville police as part of the bourgeoisie's efforts to create terror in the Third World community. Since his murder, the struggle to indict Tyrone's murderers has been taken up by workers throughout the S.F. Bay Area.) 6) Real equality for women! Defend and extend protective laws!

Each speaker from the farmworker Jesse Ortiz to Mrs. Mattie Sheppard, Tyrone's mother, spoke of the need for the entire working class—Black, Raza, Asian, White—to take up their struggle. The tone of the entire program was that the social, political and economic problems of our society stem from the system of capitalism and from the class contradictions within that system. The Bay Area 5/1 pointed the way to correctly direct the workers movement—the need for the **entire** class to take the lead in the fight against **all** oppression.

An outgrowth of the Bay Area 5/1 event was the forging of a multi-national political workers movement. Since the Bay Area 5/1 event, an anti-imperialist workers organization, the May 1st Workers Movement, formed out of those participating workers. It is made up of rank and file workers from many industries to take up all the various questions (not just economic but also political questions) facing the working class. For example, the fight against

*See appendix for list of groups involved.

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police repression in Third World communities (in particular, the fight around Tyrone Guyton and Alberto Terrones struggles), and the fight of minority immigrant workers (against the special oppression of Third World workers), and the fight for the right to organize in the Ruckers electronic strike.

WMS sees this as a concrete step toward building a revolutionary workers movement. And that this advancement forward in the workers movement was made possible because organizing along national lines was not seen as *an end* in itself but as *a means* of linking up the struggles of Third World workers with the rest of the working class movement to overthrow imperialism.

IWK'S POSITION ON MAY DAY: A DAY TO BUILD DISUNITY

The 1974 Bay Area 5/1 event² was initiated by a group of about 100 active workers and included some WMS members. This group of workers was called together by the Revolutionary Union and formed the Workers Committee for 5/1. This committee called together a larger general meeting for working people in the whole Bay Area—and started up the Bay Area Committee to Celebrate May Day.

At the first 5/1 general planning meeting on March 24, IWK along with the East Bay Labor Collective (EBLC) put forward that the general slogan should be Third World Workers Take the Lead. People in the general audience felt that this type of slogan would tend to separate the class rather than unite it. People felt that the entire class should take the lead in the fight against imperialism and against the particular oppression of Third World people as national minorities and not just one section. Offers were made by the chair to struggle things out more thoroughly in the publicity and steering committees but IWK and EBLC representatives never bothered to take up the offer and never further participated in the work of building the Bay Area 5/1 after that. The date for the Bay Area celebration was discussed during this same meeting.

After that meeting, IWK became the major influence in building a separate 5/1 event *on the same day* in Chinatown. The Bay Area committee felt that it was important to have a program in Chinatown. Due to the conditions of national oppression, language barriers, culture, and mobility of the community, celebrations held within national minority communities should be held to put forward the political importance of 5/1 in relation to the struggles of those communities against national oppression and class exploitation, and to build working class unity. In the planning stages of the Chinatown event, representatives from the Bay Area 5/1 Committee met with people in the Chinatown Committee to Celebrate 5/1 to propose a date change of the Chinatown event so that the 2 programs would not conflict in time. Despite the fact that Carmen Chow, a leading member of IWK was at the first general meeting of the Bay Area 5/1 Committee, IWK disclaimed responsibility for either reporting on the date of the Bay Area celebration to the Chinatown Committee or raising the idea of the Chinatown celebration to the Bay Area 5/1 Committee.

Although IWK claims to be a “communist” organization which is supposed to (by the very definition of communist) hold the interests of the entire class at heart, IWK opposed changing the date of the Chinatown 5/1 event and forced the two celebrations to compete rather than complement one another. Thus IWK caused a split in the mass movement—their actions built disunity rather than unity of the working class.

IWK claimed that the Chinatown 5/1 was for a different audience and would not conflict with the Bay Area event. WMS felt that there was a definite need for both events and that the two could have been built effectively by drawing people from the Chinatown event to the Bay Area event and vice versa if the two events were coordinated. We felt that this would have correctly fostered multi-national working class unity rather than disunity which was fostered by having two events planned at the same time and day.

Faced with two activities to work on the same day and time, we felt that the Bay Area 5/1 event should be our main focus of concentration, though we helped to publicize the Chinatown event. Evaluating the 2 events on a political basis, we encouraged our membership and individuals close to the organization to help build the Bay Area event. With the growing mass movement caused by the economic crisis, it was the time to sum up the mass struggles of the past year, bring out the question of national oppression to the whole working class, and begin forging the way to multi-national unity. While the Chinatown 5/1 event was very important at this time, it was of primary importance to build for a mass celebration which would bring out the need to struggle against all oppression to the whole working class.

Having the 2 celebrations at the same time not only forced WMS to set a priority, but forced many to make a choice. Many asked if the Chinatown event was for Asian Americans and the Bay Area event for whites? Many Asians asked what was the difference between the 2 events and which should they participate in. The confusion was a direct result of IWK's insistence on having the Chinatown event on the same day, which objectively forced people to make a choice. This objectively holds back rather than advances the multi-national unity necessary to building the revolutionary workers movement. Rather than advancing the idea of proletarian internationalism, IWK tails behind the most backward ideas of bourgeois nationalism of “my nationality first” rather than putting the interests of the whole class FIRST.

At this time of the decline of imperialism, and the growing mass movement among workers, there should not have been a vast difference between the principle (political level) of the 2 events. 5/1 is a WORKING CLASS HOLIDAY—a day to sum up class struggle. It is the responsibility of conscious elements to raise the level of un-

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derstanding beyond the spontaneous struggles of the masses. 5/1 in Chinatown could have been a day of summing up past struggles of immigrant Chinese workers and laying out the struggles which must be taken up in the period to come—the right to organize; the right to quality education within the community; the right to child care; etc.

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While the Bay Area event was consciously an anti-imperialist program at the level the mass movement demanded, the Chinatown event was nearly apolitical, aside from a few workers speaking about their struggles. But workers struggles were not the main focus of the Chinatown event nor did it take up a working class outlook as a whole. Those who attended the Chinatown event pointed the political significance of 5/1 was watered down and consciously hidden. The M.C. brought forth the political level of the event with "We're not for the right or the left, we're in the center." As a communist organization, IWK had the responsibility to bring out the political nature of 5/1—that it is a day of working class struggle and not a "middle of the road between employer and employee" day. Instead IWK pushed for it to be a Third World people's event as an end in itself. In the context of the M.C.'s introductions, the slogans used at the event become "UNITY IS STRENGTH" or class harmony and "LABOR CREATES ALL WEALTH" or capitalism is a fact of life.

Not only did IWK leadership not struggle with individuals on the Chinatown committee to bring out the political nature of 5/1 and to help build the links between the Chinatown and the Bay Area events, but instead they attempted to sabotage and discredit the Bay Area event. They put forward distortions to individuals working on the Chinatown event to further cover up their line—they stated that the Bay Area 5/1 event was dominated by white movement people; that the Revolutionary Union dominated the event; that WMS, one of the "few" Third World organizations participating, was a front for the RU. They put out rumors in LA that WMS put out a leaflet in S.F. Chinatown telling people not to go to the Chinatown 5/1, and that it would be attacked by reactionaries, and instead for everyone to go to the Bay Area 5/1.

We have only one answer to these lies and distortions of IWK; stop hiding your politics in the closet and let's talk about political line! In meetings IWK put forward that the conflict in time for the 5/1 events was a technical matter. Outside meetings, to middle forces, IWK smeared the Bay Area celebration as being racist. Luckily we have their "Criticism of the Asian Contingent Statement" so we can find out what exactly IWK's political line is. This paper leads to a larger issue beyond just 5/1, as it has to do with political line differences that affect all areas of political work.**

FIVE MAIN POINTS OF CONTENTION IN IWK'S PAPER

Through the IWK position paper we are able to unravel a number of disagreements in political line. Cutting through the vagueness and distortions, we are able to drag out their line on a number of questions which we will go through one by one. Basically there are 5 main points of contention.

I. The first main point of contention is over the questions: Where does racism and class division stem from? What is the material basis for divisions in the class today?

IWK states that "We feel it is much more than lies or trickery that have divided the class for all these years. There is a definite **material** basis for the divisions in the class—i.e. the systematic buying off of a section of white workers both here and abroad." (We note however that the IWK Journal has omitted the phrase 'here and abroad' from the original statement they gave all groups within the Asian Contingent.) We would like to ask IWK: If it isn't the lies and trickery **fostered by the CAPITALISTS** that has divided the class for all these years, then what is the real reason for divisions in the class?

WMS has no doubts that it is the capitalist class which has fostered class divisions, racism, national oppression, and not the working class. IWK will have us believe that it is the conscious or genetic fault of white workers for being bought off. Does not IWK know how to make class distinctions? They further confuse the issue with their fantasies by including white workers abroad, regardless of conditions and contradictions with imperialism.

White chauvinism is an ideology perpetuated by the bourgeoisie to create divisions in the working class and to prevent unity. We must struggle against these white chauvinistic ideas but never think that as a whole, white workers are our enemies. While it's true that some white workers get higher pay and better positions than some Third World workers, the contradictions between them as part of the single multi-national working class and the bourgeoisie still exist and are still antagonistic. The petty privileges that some white workers get are given to them as concessions by the bourgeoisie as an attempt to pacify them. But these privileges are still petty ones, especially now with the economic and political crisis heightening.

No part of the working class benefits from national oppression. Anytime a section of the working class is kept down, discriminated against, and paid the lowest wages, the living standards and the fighting capacity of the rest of the workers is also held back and weakened. This is why campaigns to organize the unorganized and to fight against national oppression are important issues for the entire working class to take up. Recognizing that white chauvinism and privilege exist, we must understand that they are **tools** of trickery of the capitalists to divide and conquer the **entire** working class.

IWK claims that there is a "definite material basis" for the divisions in the class. We put forth that there is a

**We are glad to see the IWK JOURNAL which further enables us to determine IWK's erroneous line and struggle over it.

But which is
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definite material basis for both unity and disunity in the class. However, because of the present crisis of imperialism, the material basis for unity in the class is *rising* whereas the material basis for disunity is *declining*. Because of the present crisis of imperialism, working people are finding that they do have more in common than in difference. U.S. corporations throughout the world are in a weakened position because of the rise of national liberation struggles which are kicking U.S. imperialism out of their countries. And they are facing the increasing competition of smaller and intermediate capitalist nations, besides the ever growing contradictions between imperialist powers. U.S. imperialism is declining and they are attacking the living standards of American people to try to regain their footing. But because of their attacks on the whole working class, there is an even greater basis for forging more unity in the working class than ever before.

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The Farah strike, which was a struggle involving 4,000 Chicano women against their oppression as women, as workers, and as a national minority, was won primarily by the determination of the strikers and by the multi-national working class support it received throughout the country. In 1973, Black and white woodcutters in the deep South united and struck against the huge paper companies—completely breaking the Dixiecrat lies that Black and white cannot unite. Recently, Black and white longshoremen have refused to unload South African goods and materials in protest of its racist government.

Workers, who we believe IWK says are “bought off”, are fighting back against the economic crisis with multi-national unity. Carpenters, construction workers, auto workers are all uniting across racial lines and waging industry wide strikes. Citing these examples does not mean that white chauvinism and privilege or national oppression have disappeared. Rather, the examples show that multi-national working class unity and not disunity is the rising trend. As revolutionaries, we have to build on the positive aspects which are developing among the working class in order to unite against imperialism. What we have to struggle against is capitalist ideology such as narrow nationalism and white chauvinism, which feed on the backward ideas of the masses—creating confusion and division rather than unity.

II. The second main point of contention is over the question of how real unity in the class can be achieved.

IWK says that real unity can be achieved by recognizing “. . . the absolute right and primary necessity to organize, activate, and raise the political consciousness of Asian and other Third World workers.”

“Absolute right” and “primary necessity” are the key words here which point to IWK’s idealism and incorrect analysis of the objective conditions. While it may be necessary to organize along national lines because of the concrete conditions of national oppression, language barriers and cultural differences, it should not be an end in itself but rather a means to an end. WMS, as a national form of anti-imperialist organization, sees the need for organizing Asians along national lines, however, we do not see it as a way to separate and wall-off the struggles of Asians from the rest of the American working class. Rather, we see our role is to link-up the struggles of Asians with the overall struggles of the American working class against the imperialist system.

IWK’s position of “absolute right” and “primary necessity” to organize Asians and other Third World workers completely negates the particular role of revolutionaries from oppressed nationalities in the overall fight against imperialism. Whereas organizing along national lines should be viewed as a *tactic* in the *strategic* struggle against imperialism, IWK raises it to the level of strategy. IWK’s position completely negates the necessity to build the united front against imperialism led by the multi-national working class.

A further note: Most Third World and Asian (as mentioned earlier) workers are employed in multi-national workplaces. To organize primarily along national lines in these multi-national workplaces would lead to isolation and quick defeat of any struggles—economic or political emanating from those shops.

In actual practice, this political line is divisive and tailist. Divisive because it emphasizes disunity in the class more than the similarities. Tailist because it demands that each racial grouping be ready to move before any mass action can take place.

For example, in the Ethnic Studies Defense struggle on Berkeley campus, this same line was put forward: that they must hold off activities because other Third World groupings weren’t ready to act yet; that there were too many Asians involved and not enough Third World students; that Asians should cool it until the other Third World groups got ready, etc. All the while, the struggle over the criminology school was mobilizing thousands of students against the university. But people who held the same political line as IWK in the ESDC (Ethnic Studies Defense Committee) put forward that the criminology struggle was mainly for white students and the ethnic studies struggle mainly for Third World students. This line kept the 2 struggles from linking up and dealing a united blow against a common enemy--the University--in fighting against cutbacks of both the crim and ethnic studies departments. And at the same time, it held back Asian students from moving the fight for ethnic studies forward because there was not "equal" participation among Third World students; and excluded white students from taking up the fight against national oppression.

IWK does not recognize that there are different levels of development, and that different sections of the working class will be able to provide leadership according to the concrete conditions of the situation. To make a principle of “the absolute right and primary necessity” to organize Third World people is to deny the existence of these conditions.

This year's 5/1 points to how IWK sees organizing along national lines in practice and how WMS in practice sees organizing along national lines as a tactic in fighting national oppression and building for multi-national unity to advance the struggle.

III. The third point of contention centers around the statement that: "Organizing along national lines on the one hand can be divisive and a bad thing if the struggle is led by narrow nationalists, but on the other hand can be and is a progressive thing which activates and raises the consciousness of masses of Asian workers when the struggle is led by class conscious Marxist Leninists. Such struggles can be the basis for real unity among the class based on equality."

Firstly, leadership is not proclaimed but has to be won and developed through struggle. And the struggle does not somehow automatically become progressive and raise consciousness because Marxist Leninists (M-L) are participating—especially if the so-called M-L are not putting forward M-L ideas. Organizing along national lines can be a progressive thing when led by M-L *only if* that leadership clearly points to the capitalists as the enemy; clearly points to the material basis for multi-national unity to fight the common enemy, and strives to develop all workers into fighters for all. However, in order to understand the difference between this and what IWK is putting forth, we must look at their practice.

IWK seems to think that if you call yourself a M-L, then whatever you do is progressive. But on the contrary, while they call themselves M-L, they have consistently put forward a right opportunist line in the Jung Sai Garment Strike.

IWK's Reactionary Line on Linking-Up Lee Mah & Jung Sai Struggles

Aside from pushing to divide the struggles of Asian workers from the rest of the working class during the 5/1 celebrations, IWK has also played a divisive role among workers' struggles *within* the Chinese community.

One example of this has been around the question of linking the two simultaneous struggles of the Jung Sai garment and Lee Mah electronic workers. Although the Jung Sai strike is a strike for union recognition and the Lee Mah struggle is a struggle for reinstatement with backpay (42 workers at Lee Mah were fired or forced to quit after a union election was postponed), WMS has tried to develop the link between the two struggles because of their importance in building the fight against national oppression and class exploitation of immigrant Chinese workers. The two struggles are *both* the fight of Chinese immigrant workers against the usage of immigrants as cheap labor pools, against the sub-contract system, and against the exploitation of immigrant women workers. Linking these two struggles together raises to the whole Chinese community and the whole class, the need to take up the questions of national oppression and the need for multi-national working class unity.

In one of the union meetings with the Jung Sai Strike Committee, the question was raised whether or not the Lee Mah and Jung Sai workers should jointly sponsor the Chinatown Workers' Festival or similar events. While some of the workers felt that such events were a good thing, other workers held the opinion that no such event should be held in the future. WMS and other supporters present at the meeting tried to struggle with the ideas of these workers, bringing out the similarities of the two struggles—the importance of broadening their struggle in order to build unity and support from the Chinese community and the working class.

On the other hand, two IWK members were also present. Their role was one of playing on the most backward ideas among some of the strikers. In every struggle, there are advance, intermediate and backward elements among the workers. It is the role of M-L and anti-imperialists to help build the leadership of the advanced, win over the intermediate and neutralize the backward elements. Instead, what IWK did at that meeting was to encourage the blossoming of the most backward ideas of the backward workers.

IWK actively pushed for disunity between the Lee Mah and Jung Sai struggles. Some of the less-advanced workers put forward the union leadership's position that the Lee Mah and Jung Sai struggles should not be linked-up. IWK supported and encouraged this divisive and narrow outlook.

Supporters who were present reported that IWK members raised that the Lee Mah workers have no union, unlike the Jung Sai workers, that less than the majority of Lee Mah workers voted for the union while Jung Sai was a clear majority, that they had heard different stories of why the Lee Mah workers were fired or quit, that Lee Mah is electronics and cannot generate as much support as the Jung Sai struggle (since every family in Chinatown has some member working in the garment industry).

IWK completely failed to raise that the two struggles were both the fight of immigrant workers against national oppression, class exploitation, and for the right to organize. That the working conditions in Lee Mah and Jung Sai were similar, and that wherever there is oppression there is legitimate resistance with a union or not.

The main point is that IWK completely failed to struggle with the backward elements of the workers, and instead built on the backward ideas of some of the workers. They promoted the narrow outlook of not only "my nationality first" but "my trade first" and "my struggle first." *This is not the work of class conscious M-L, but of narrow trade unionists.*

Secondly, IWK says that the road to "equality" rises from fighting separately—that Asians should have a struggle to match every struggle white workers have. In practice, this position promotes bourgeois nationalism and

white chauvinism. It takes the question of national oppression entirely out of its class nature and does not point to imperialism as the main enemy. It promotes separatism and gives no basis for white workers to struggle against white chauvinism which stems from imperialism.

Historically, most isolated struggles of minority workers were defeated by the capitalists because there was no support from other workers. In 1867 when Chinese railroad workers went on strike for the 8-hour day and better working conditions, they lost the fight because they were not able to get support from other workers.

Yet in the 1930's, when Chinese, Mexican, Pilipino, Japanese and white Alaskan cannery workers united together and fought for unionization, they successfully threw out the exploitative contract system, established a union hiring hall, upgraded their oppressive working conditions, and formed one of the strongest multi-national unions in the U.S.

In comparison, IWK's line makes a principle of disunity, denies the historical and present necessity of multi-national unity in building for revolution, and serves only the bourgeoisie.

IV. The fourth point of contention is based on the question of trade unions. IWK proposes that: "We must vigorously struggle against and expose trade union misleadership and the leadership of those political organizations which try to gloss over the question of disunity within the class and therefore perpetuate white chauvinism and divisions among the workers."

From WMS's experiences with IWK in the Jung Sai struggle, we see that IWK in practice does not "struggle against and expose trade union misleadership . . . which try to gloss over the question of disunity within the class . . ." but in contrary does not struggle against and expose **any** trade union misleadership. Rather IWK has united 100% with the union bureaucrats in trying to run the workers struggle. They consciously from the start pushed that the workers should totally follow the leadership of the union—whatever strategy or no strategy the union put forward. In all there have been 4 different union organizers in charge of the strike at different times. Each has put forward different strategies in contradiction to the other or none at all. In each case IWK tailed behind whatever that organizer put forward whether it hurt the strike or not, and has consistently told the workers to do likewise. They have not provided any independent strategy nor exposed the union's limitation in not being able to expand the struggle beyond just unionization or rally support to the workers. Instead they put forward that everything the workers did should be done through the union which results in binding the worker's struggle within the confines of trade unionism. In fact IWK is outdoing the union bureaucrats in stressing that unionization itself is the main focus of the struggle, the right for Chinese workers **to have a union** the main demand of the workers. IWK has not, as conscious elements, tried to advance the workers political consciousness but instead is suffocating the workers' struggle with economism* and nationalism, and aiding the union leadership in keeping the workers' initiative and leadership on a tight leash.

IWK's role in the Jung Sai struggle has not been one of class conscious Marxist Leninists advancing the struggle, but of right opportunists, tailing behind the union, promoting economism, and seeking to gain leadership not by winning over the workers but by uniting with the union leadership to gain credibility.

From past practice, Wei Min She has been able to sum up the dual nature of unions. While on one hand, unions are a defensive form of organization which workers can use as a tool to fight for better economic gains, and to fight against attacks on their living standards; on the other hand, unions are limited in that they limit the workers movement within the boundaries of the fight for economic gains and the boundaries of the existing system. The objective role of trade union bureaucrats is one of collaboration with the capitalists to harness rank and file independence and leadership and destroy it. And no matter how "progressive" a union might be, trade unionism is reformism. Marxist Leninists and anti-imperialist must take the spontaneous struggles to advance workers' class consciousness and not just trade union consciousness. We must not lead workers to think that capitalism can be made to work (e.g. through unionization)

Wei Min She has consciously been putting forth the dual nature of the unions in the Jung Sai and Lee Mah struggles. From our experience a year ago when we were involved in the fight of the garment factory workers at San Francisco Gold for unionization, we were able to sum up the dangers of just putting forward the positive side of the union. After the victory, the union collaborated with the boss to enact an efficiency drive within the plant which resulted in the firing of 40 of the workers, most of whom were active leaders in the struggle. During the struggle, the workers had trusted the union leadership and were not organized strong enough to fight this action. After the leadership of the strike was dispersed, some sought jobs within union shops, others preferred to go to non-union shops rather than be under the control of the union bureaucrats again. While anti-imperialists were able to aid the workers in rallying community support and public pressure against the employer, we made the grave mistake of not clearly presenting the dual nature of the union, nor the nature of the system and its growing crisis. This allowed the long term goal of building a workers movement towards revolution to be sacrificed for the short term goal of unionization. These mistakes led to the ensuing cynicism among the workers about unions and how to change the present situation.

In building the Lee Mah struggle, we are able to apply many of the lessons mentioned above. In the Lee Mah struggle, anti-imperialists have linked up with the advanced workers in helping to develop this core of leadership.

*Economism: Limiting the workers' movement to a trade union level under the cloak of Marxism Leninism.

From the onset, the struggle has been built by relying on the masses—workers and supporters. Anti-imperialists have consciously and consistently raised 1) the dual nature of unions; 2) the struggle as being threefold—a struggle of workers, of women, and members of a national minority; 3) the need to build multi-national class unity; 4) the broader perspective of the role of the state (police, courts, etc.); and 5) the crisis of imperialism and the nature of the system.

Through our practice, we are learning that we must not only expose all “trade union misleadership”, but expose all forms of opportunism that holds back the workers movement through tailist and divisive tactics. We must expose the *entire system* and all its parasites.

V. The fifth point of contention is over the solution to the national question. IWK says that the “Solution to the national question and true emancipation of all oppressed and exploited people will not come until the victory of socialism.”

IWK seems to say here that socialism will lead to unity automatically and to a one step solution to the national question. Scientific Marxism-Leninism says that struggle over the national question and all forms of oppression will forge unity and lead to socialist revolution; and that the struggles continue even AFTER socialist revolution. IWK’s idealism is saying that we should hold back other workers (other than minority workers) from fighting against national oppression “until the victory of socialism”; that we should emphasize (as they do) the disunity of the class until unity somehow falls from the sky, as will the “victory of socialism”. This is nothing but metaphysical idealist thinking—in other words, bourgeois thinking.

The struggle of Farah workers pointed to how to build toward the solution to the national question instead of waiting for it to jump out from nowhere after the “victory of socialism”. Two lines developed out of the Farah strike which was similar to the two lines developing in the Jung Sai strike. The lines that developed around the Farah strike were: 1) it is solely a struggle of Chicano people; and 2) it is a fight of the whole class against the special oppression of Chicano workers.

One of the Farah strikers summed it up that while it was a struggle of Chicano people as workers, as women, and as members of a national minority, it was the unity of the whole class that built the strength necessary to win the fight. The Farah strikers brought out that the fight against national and women’s oppression are component parts of the united front against imperialism and must be taken up by the whole working class because they cause class divisions and are a way in which oppression is carried out.

Through WMS’s work and contact with the Farah struggle, we were able to learn these lessons and carry them over to our work with Chinese workers as in Lee Mah and Jung Sai.

In the Lee Mah struggle, we were able to bring the question of national oppression of Chinese immigrant workers to the Chinese community, electronics industry and the general working class.

Since the Lee Mah struggle began on June 24, 1974, Chinatown has witnessed huge car caravans, several marches, massive distribution of tens of thousands of leaflets, petition drives and a Chinatown Workers’ Festival—a workers’ celebration that attracted over 600 people. During the car caravans which toured the entire Chinatown area, garment workers rushed out of their shops to grab leaflets while the garment shopowners slammed their doors shut. During the Chinatown Workers’ Festival, which was jointly sponsored by the Lee Mah and Jung Sai workers, hundreds applauded as speakers and skit performers put forward the need for working class unity as the key to winning their struggles.

In the electronics industry, thousands of leaflets have been distributed to electronics workers in the S.F. Bay Area and Peninsula regions. Electronics bosses were shaken as Lee Mah workers and supporters distributed leaflets calling for support from other electronics workers. Old man Farinon—the owner of Lee Mah—has had to come out himself with his lackeys to take movies and snapshots of the leafletting activities at IBM. Other plants leafletted included: Farinon Electric (the parent company of Lee Mah located in San Carlos), Hewlett-Packard (partially owned by David Packard, former Assistant Secretary of Defense), National Semi-Conductor, and Lenkurt. At each of these plants, response from the workers was overwhelming. Many have watched the TV debate between the Lee Mah workers and Farinon management.

Even at Farinon—which is flooded with company security, intimidating supervisors at the entrance and cameramen everytime the Lee Mah workers and supporters show up—the workers’ response has been positive. Each time leaflets were distributed, the company has called stand-up meetings with all the workers in the plant—using all kinds of lies to discredit the Lee Mah struggle.

Significant support has also come from the Rucker electronic strikers at Concord. Through exchange pickets and other support activities, both groupings have been able to build working class unity concretely on the strike lines.

The Lee Mah struggle has also been able to get much support from other workers throughout the Bay Area. Teamster truck drivers have honored the picket lines. Autoworkers, postal workers, garment workers from Jung Sai, glass bottle-blowers from Owens-Illinois have come to weekly mobilizations at the Chinatown plant.

The Lee Mah workers have also participated in a city-wide workers demonstration called by the May 1st Workers Movement. The demonstration linked together the different struggles going on throughout the city—the city workers, Jung Sai, phone workers and Muni drivers—putting forward that the system was the root cause of the

APPENDIX

1. Finalized Asian Contingent Statement presented at '74 May Day Rally
2. IWK's Letter, "draft" of Asian Contingent Statement, and IWK's Reply
3. Partial list of contingents in Bay Area May Day Rally of '74
4. What's Wei Min She.

ASIAN CONTINGENT STATEMENT Final

The Asian Contingent to May Day is proud to unite here today with working people of all races and nationalities.

The organizations which make up the Asian Contingent include:

- Asian American students and employees at UC Berkeley — Ad Hoc Committee to Celebrate May Day.
- Students for a Better Understanding of China — a U.C. Berkeley student organization devoted to promoting U.S./China Friendship.
- Taishu — a Japanese American newspaper.
- Asian Community Center — a community organization based in S.F. Chinatown.
- Everybody's Bookstore.
- East Bay Asian for Community Action.
- Wei Min She — an Asian American anti-imperialist organization.
- Asian American Studies Coordinating Council at UC Berkeley.
- May Fourth Singers — an Asian American Singing group.
- Wei Min Bao — an Asian American newspaper.
- International Hotel Tenants Association — a tenants organization located in S.F. Chinatown and Manilatown area, dedicated to fighting for low-cost housing.

It's only through working class unity/and support of each others struggle that we can effectively fight against all forms of oppression. The capitalist realize this fact and they have been able — at times — to prevent Asians from uniting with other workers.

Historically, in times of unemployment and recession, the employer spreads lies that it was the Chinese, Japanese and Pilipinos who were the causes. Rumors were spread that Asians drove wages down and took jobs from other American people. In this way capitalist confused and divided the American People. The favorite trick of the capitalist is to use one racial group as scabs against anothers strike. In 1910, Colorado mineworkers struck against John D. Rockefeller's Fuel and Iron Company, the strikers attacked an burned scabs, including Japanese scabs that Rockefeller brought in. Rockefeller was able to diver the anger of the strikers to fight the scabs rather than their boss and the strike was lost.

But people are not always fooled by these attempts to drive a wedge between working people. In 1935, the California Japanese Agricultural Workers Union was organized with over 800 members in Los Angeles. They strove to work with other unions including the AFL as well as small farmers. In 1936, they joined with Mexican workers and Celery workers in Southern California to win the strike for wage increase and union recognition.

Both historically and today we see that — the only way for Asian Americans to combat racism and national oppression is to link our struggle with the struggle of the American working class into a single united front against the capitalist class in this country. That's why we are here today under the slogan: "ASIAN UNITE! FIGHT ALL NATIONAL OPPRESSION BUILD WORKING CLASS UNITY."

June 22, 1974

TO: WEI MIN SHE

Dear Friends:

After our last exchange of letters you stated your organization was going through a series of internal consolidations and therefore could not meet with us. However, we understand that your organization has met with a few other organizations since that time. As we stated before the difference between our organizations are serious ones and ones which affect the unity and future of the Asian movement and therefore we have the duty to seriously try to understand and if possible resolve those differences.

Toward this we have written a paper criticizing a statement put forth by the May Day Asian Contingent which we believe could be a basis for further discussion and struggle between our organizations. We are sending you a copy of our paper in the hope that it will contribute to more clarity and struggle, and ultimately unity, between our organizations.

We are prepared to meet at any time, at any place and with any agenda you may choose. Please call us at the following number to set up the procedure we can begin to meet.

In unity,

Telephone:

ASIAN CONTINGENT SOLIDARITY STATEMENT Draft

On behalf of the Asian Contingent to May Day and on behalf of Asian people in America who have been separated from the American worker's movement, we are proud to unite here today with working people of all races and nationalities.

It's only through working class unity and support of each others' struggles that we can effectively fight against all forms of oppression. The capitalist realize this fact and they have been able — at times — to prevent Asians from uniting with white workers.

Historically, in times of unemployment and recession, the employers spread lies that it was the Chinese, Japanese, and Pilipinos who were the causes. Myths and lies were spread about Asians; that we were apathetic and unorganizable, that we drive wages down, and that we could never unite other American workers.

We hold that these are lies handed down by the capitalist to confuse and divide the American people. Our history in this country has shown that we have been willing to unite with all workers when the door was opened to us. We've participated in numerous strikes on our own when we were excluded from the American labor movement. And we've participated in strikes and labor struggles with workers of all races when we were allowed to do so.

But we have more in common than in difference. That's why we are here today under the slogan: **ASIANS UNITE! FIGHT ALL NATIONAL OPPRESSION . . . BUILD WORKING CLASS UNITY.** The only way for Asian Americans to combat racism and national oppression is to link our struggle with the struggle of the American working class into a single united front against capitalist class in this country.

The organizations which make up the Asian Contingent include:

The statement above, a draft of the final Asian Contingent Statement which was read at the Bay Area 5/1 celebration, was printed as is in the IWK Journal. Individuals and organizations, including IWK, were welcome to criticize this draft, which was initiated by Wei Min She, and to participate in writing the final statement. However, IWK only chose to criticize the statement well after May Day. IWK also deleted the list of groups in the Asian Contingent from the statement they printed in their Journal.

IWK Reply

In the interest of building principled unity within the Asian Movement around the question of the role Asian workers play within the overall working class, we would like to offer some comments and criticisms of the "Asian Contingent Solidarity Statement."

In general, we feel that the statement takes an incorrect approach to the question of how to build unity in the working class. The statement takes a subjective and almost apologetic or defensive view to the question of why there is disunity in the class and therefore doesn't provide a clear and scientific way to analyze how real unity can be built.

To begin with, the statement defines the "American workers' movement" too mechanically and narrowly. Asian workers are a part of the working class and as such have contributed in many ways to the overall development of the American workers' movement. Their contribution can be seen in historical examples of Asians struggling against exploitation on the job and the leading role Asian workers have played in fighting national oppression in the Asian Communities.

The American workers' movement is much more than just the officially organized segment of the workers' movement — by the narrow definition, the majority of Third World and women workers have simply been "out of it" for the past hundred years. The American worker's movement is also more than just those particular struggles in which workers of all races took part together the strikes of Chinese garment workers, Japanese farmers, etc. are also part of the American workers movement which has dealt blows against the capitalist system. Trade union leadership and political organizations such as the CPUSA and PL have not paid enough attention to the national question and to organizing Third World people on the basis of equality we should not accept their narrow and chauvinist definition of the workers' movement.

Secondly, the statement asserts that disunity among the class is caused by "lies handed down by capitalist to confuse and divide the American people." We feel that it is much more than lies or trickery that have divided the class for all these years. There is a definite **material basis** for the division in the class — i.e. the systematic buying off of a section of white workers both here and abroad. Asians and other Third World workers are found in the lowest paying jobs, in non-unionized industries, have the hardest time being promoted, live in ghetto communities.

Thirdly, we definitely agree that workers of all races "have more in common than differences." Only through a united working class can Asian and all other workers achieve emancipation. The question is, how can real unity be best achieved? First, we must have a historical and material analysis of why divisions exist in the working class. Second, we must vigorously struggle against and expose trade union misleadership and the leadership of those political organizations which try to gloss over the question of disunity within the class and therefore perpetuate white chauvinism and divisions among the workers. Thirdly, we must recognize the absolute right and primary necessity to organize, activate, and to raise the political consciousness of Asian and other Third World workers.

The statement implies that whenever Asians organize on their own, it is to be regretted or apologized for. Organizing along national lines on the one hand can be divisive and a bad thing, if the struggle is led by narrow nationalist, but on the other hand can be and is a progressive thing which activates and raises the consciousness of mass of Asian workers when the struggle is led by class conscious Marxist Leninist. Such struggles can be the basis for real unity among the class based on equality.

In summary, the statement doesn't help to clarify the role of Asian workers within the workers' movement but rather tends to reinforce narrow, chauvinist and opportunist ideas which have strengthened divisions in the class for many years. Although the solution to the national question and true emancipation for all oppressed and exploited people will not come about until the victory of socialism, we feel that the basis of unity on the national question must be clarified and struggled out in order to go forward in this period of time.

I.W.K.

PARTIAL LIST OF GROUPS PARTICIPATING IN '74 MAY DAY:

Phone workers (rank and file)

Owens-Illinois Strikers

Postal workers (rank and file)

Autoworkers (rank and file)

Rank and file teamsters.

Committee for Better Working Conditions

United Farmworkers, Salinas

Committee for Justice for Tyrone Guyton

Asian Contingent (Wei Min She, Taishu, Wei Min Bao, Asian Community Center,
East Bay Asians for Community Action, Berkeley UC students; SF State students)

Iranian Student Association

Revolutionary Union

Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee

Bay Area Worker

WEI MIN SHÉ

ASIAN AMERICAN ANTI-IMPERIALIST ORGANIZATION

Wei Min She is an Asian American anti-imperialist organization in the S.F. Bay Area. Our name means "organization for the people." Our organization is committed to building an anti-imperialist, multi-national, revolutionary mass movement in this country. Our strategy is to build a united front movement of all who can be united against the system of imperialism, led by the working class.

The system of imperialism is controlled by the small class of capitalists who own the majority of the world's wealth, while everyone else must work to live. We see the system of imperialism as the root cause of oppression of workers, national minorities, students, and women. While it exploits workers and national minorities at home, imperialism oppresses and exploits the people of the world. Since the end of WWII, the U.S. has become the most powerful power in the world. Its tentacles have reached out and seized political and economic control of the underdeveloped nations of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

In the last couple of years, we have seen U.S. imperialism on the decline. The rise of national liberation movements in the underdeveloped and oppressed nations have been kicking U.S. imperialism out of their countries. Vietnam and other countries in Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America have cut off the ability of U.S. companies to make superprofits. In other parts of the world, the political and economic strength of the U.S. is being challenged by other capitalist nations in Europe and Japan. Competition with another imperialist power, the Soviet Union, has also weakened the U.S. position.

Because of the rising struggles and economic resistance at home and abroad, the U.S. has found itself in a vise. U.S. imperialists find that they cannot maintain their rate of profits worldwide. Nationwide, the living standards of the people are being attacked in a thousand different ways. People are being confronted with work speedups, mass layoffs, eliminations of protective work laws, cutbacks in social services, increasing police terror in Third World communities, energy freezes and food shortages.

Immigrant and minority workers are being attacked even harder. Because of the economic crisis, the companies are coming out with all sorts of propaganda to prevent unity in the class. The recent wave of anti-alien propaganda in the news and the massive deportations of Mexicans in California are bringing back reminders from the past. In the 1890's, when the capitalists no longer needed the labor of Chinese and when the workers' movement was on the rise due to the depression, the employers put the blame for the economic crisis on the large influx of Chinese workers into the country. Hence, a misguided workers' movement began to develop around the slogan, "The Chinese Must Go!" instead of "The System Must Go!" When the Chinese were kicked out or forced into hiding in the Chinatowns throughout the West, unemployment was not solved and economic depressions continued on.

Today, immigrant workers are kept unorganized and used as cheap pools of labor. They have little job protection and work the longest hours at the lowest pay. The present crisis only intensifies their exploitation even further.

However, this does not mean that working people are not resisting. These attacks on the people's living standards have been met with a militant and ever growing anti-imperialist movement. People everywhere are fighting back. Together with the peoples of the world, the American people are uniting across national lines to begin building the struggle against imperialism.

The anti-war movement, the struggles for childcare, and the increasing numbers of strikes and walkouts are powerful testimonies to this development. Asian American and other Third World people are fighting for our democratic rights and against national oppression. The Lee Mah and Jung Sai organizing drives in the S.F. Chinese Community, the struggle for equal employment in N.Y. Chinatown and the fight for Ethnic Studies at U.C. Berkeley are a few examples. As Third World people, we must fight both oppression as minorities and exploitation as working people. Not only must the struggle be taken to the Asian communities, it must also be linked-up with the overall struggle of the multinational working class against the system.

The development of different struggles into **one** mass movement is key to building the United Front Against Imperialism. Through this united front, we can rally various sectors of the American people against this system which must exploit in order to survive.

WEI MIN SHE (Continued)

In building this united front, Wei Min She is involved with these areas of work:

- 1) **Building Labor Struggles**—building the movement of Asian workers to link up with the larger working class movement to be able to lead the fight against imperialism. We have had practical experience in building support for the Farah strikers, Farmworkers, Nam Yuen Restaurant Busboys walkout, Asia Garden Restaurant workers dispute, S.F. Gold garment factory organizing drive, and now, Jung Sai and Lee Mah.
- 2) **Student Organizing**—fighting for ethnic studies and building the anti-imperialist student movement through various forms of student organizations.
- 3) **Fighting For Democratic Rights**—building a movement in the community around the issues of health, housing, education, equal employment, etc.
- 4) **Building the Friendship of the Peoples of U.S. and the Peoples of China**—through film programs on China, forums, and U.S.-China People's friendship events such as the 1974 Friendship Fair and October 1st Celebration.
- 5) **Building the Struggle Against the Oppression of Women**—forums, supporting struggles of working women on the job, building the fight for childcare, and participation in initiating events such as International Women's Day.

If you would like more information about our organization, please contact us at:

Wei Min She

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