



***Forward for the Chicano
Student Movement***

**A View of the Albuquerque
Chicano Student Conference**

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Chicano Students Unite!



The struggle of Chicano students is entering one of the most critical periods in its history. All of the gains that the movement has won over the past twenty years are under attack: the hiring of Chicano faculty and staff, special admissions programs, financial aids, Chicano studies, and other programs.

Like Chicanos everywhere, Chicano students are feeling the brunt of the economic and political crisis of U.S. capitalism. These attacks are part of the stepped up oppression of the entire Chicano Nation, which includes the alarming increase in police murders and brutalization of Chicanos, the large-scale destruction of Chicano lands by the nuclear energy corporations, the terrorization and deportation of millions of undocumented Latinos, the drastic cuts in social, educational and health care programs for Chicanos, the slander of Chicano culture through such movies as "Walk Proud" and "Boulevard Nights," etc.

In response the Chicano Movement is fighting back, growing stronger, broader and more militant. Chicano students are part of this fight, and in different areas are winning the battle to protect and expand the gains of the 60's and 70's. Recently, Chicano students at the University of Colorado forced the school administration to fund their summer institute for prospective new students. The school tried to completely cut out the program and only gave in after the students organized and confronted the administration.

At Sonoma State College in California, Chicano students organized broad support for their demand to name the new school library after Ruben Salazar, the martyr killed at the 1970 Chicano Moratorium. They won their demand.

These are victories for all Chicano students and for the whole movimiento. They reflect the tremendous efforts and struggles being made by Chicano students all over Aztlan.

Nevertheless, the movement has lost a lot of ground in the past several years. There has been a drastic decline in the overall rate of Chicano enrollment at the college and university level. The numbers of Chicano faculty, staff and administrators has also declined sharply. Chicano studies programs have been cut out or reduced on almost every campus in the Southwest. Financial aids and Educational Opportunity program budgets for Chicanos have been slashed to the bare bones in every Southwestern state.

The question we have to face now is: how do we organize to meet and beat back these attacks, and to strengthen the struggle of the Chicano Nation for self-determination?

This question is being answered every day by the practice of Chicano students:

- Strengthen Chicano student organizations on every campus. All Chicano students should get actively involved in groups like the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), the United Mexican American Student Organization (UMAS), La Raza Student Organization, Chicano Business Student Association, La Raza Law Student Association, etc. All of these organizations help to build and strengthen our capacity to resist.
- Develop links among Chicano students locally, regionally, statewide, and Southwest wide. This process, too, is already taking place in many parts of the Southwest. The current attacks make it even more urgent to step up and solidify these types of contacts.
- Strengthen the ties between Chicano students and other sectors of the movement. Chicano students have always set a positive example with their active support for such struggles as the Farah strike, the struggle of the campesinos, the struggle against police brutality and many others.
- Build alliances with the oppressed peoples of other nationalities. On many campuses Chicano students have been able to build links with the struggles of Native American, Black and other third world student organizations. In various parts of the Southwest Chicanos are building unity with students of all nationalities to oppose the military draft.

The recent National Chicano Student Conference held in Albuquerque, New Mexico represented an effort to carry out these tasks. This conference, which brought together more than 600 students from all parts of the Chicano Nation, was intended to build stronger links between Chicano students, and between Chicano students

and the rest of the Chicano Movement. The conference was unable to meet all of its objectives. It is important to understand the reasons for this, to build on the strengths of the conference, and to draw lessons for the future struggles of the Chicano Student Movement.

THE NATIONAL CHICANO STUDENT CONFERENCE

The National Chicano Student Conference was the latest step in a growing trend towards Chicano student unity. Since the mid-70's, in different parts of Aztlan, there have been a number of efforts to build stronger local, regional, statewide and Southwest wide links among Chicano students. In California the Chicano students have developed a fairly large network of centrales (regional groups made up several MEChAs) and a statewide organization. Last October a number of UMAS students from Colorado attended a statewide MEChA conference to show their solidarity and share experiences. Also last year, Chicano students in Tejas held their first statewide conference in 8 years.

In April, 1979 several hundred Chicano students from all parts of the Southwest attended the first National Chicano Student Conference in Denver, Colorado where they were able to discuss the common issues facing them, to share lessons from the struggle, and to determine how best to confront the burning issues facing the entire Chicano Movement.

It was in order to build on this momentum that the second national Chicano Student Conference was scheduled for April of this year. Chicano students from Nuevo Mexico took the initiative to prepare and organize this conference, with help and input from Chicano students in Califas and Colorado.

The students at the University of New Mexico had to fight the administration for funds and facilities for the conference. Students met regularly for months in advance to plan out the outreach, the program, and logistics of the conference. The conference was seen as a vehicle for giving a new impetus to the struggle under the slogan, "Creциendos Unidos -- Self-Determination Through Unity."

Chicano students from Arizona, California, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, Nebraska, Utah and elsewhere attended the Albuquerque Conference. For several days they were able to meet together as a body and in workshops to discuss issues such as the draft, the land struggle, the struggles of La Chicana, how to build communications among themselves, police repression, and campus-related issues such as cutbacks, etc.

The conference workshops were well attended, the discussions were both lively and concrete. The political level of the discussions showed that the overwhelming majority of Chicano students desire not only the defense of their own rights, but the liberation of their people. The theme of self-determination was heard over and over again, and was clearly expressed in one workshop which concluded that "the essence of Chicano education is self-determination, embodied in the slogan 'Chicano Power'."

The Conference generally was well organized and gave students time for social activities, cultural activities, and time to make contact with each other.

Unfortunately the conference was not able to formally pass on many good resolutions developed at the workshops. Before it was able to do so, it was sabotaged by the Communist Workers Party (CWP).

COMMUNIST WORKERS PARTY DISRUPTS THE CONFERENCE

The Communist Workers Party is not too well known in the Chicano Movement. They have not yet earned the infamous reputation in the Chicano Movement of more well known opportunist organizations like the Socialist Workers Party or the Revolutionary Communist Party. But this is the company that CWP belongs with. This is the reputation that they already have in some movements.

In the Black Liberation Movement the CWP is known as the group which destroyed the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC). The ALSC had for years mobilized tens of thousands of Blacks to support the struggles in Africa. It was built into a broad based forum for Black unity. The CWP went in, stacked the ALSC, and eventually drove out every single progressive nationalist organization which had helped to build the ALSC over the years. CWP then kept the shell which remained from their wrecking and proclaimed themselves the "leaders" of the African Support Movement in the U.S.

Recently CWP tried to use these same splittist tactics in the movement to free Chol Soo Lee, a Korean man framed up for murder in California. CWP began to attack different forces involved in the Chol Soo support movement and eventually ended up attacking the very people who started the whole movement. CWP eventually dropped out of almost all support work for Chol Soo Lee.

The CWP is acting the same way in the Chicano Movement. In 1978 they were openly condemned for their splitting activities by a number of Chicano high school students in Los Angeles. CWP had tried to divide the students who had walked out of the schools to protest budget cuts.

The CWP has a history of trying to take over issues in order to promote themselves, and wrecking whenever they cannot do this. This is exactly what they did at the Albuquerque Chicano Student Conference. CWP saw the conference as a way for them to attack other groups, while at the same time pushing for the endorsement of their own plans. In this way CWP hoped to show that it was "leading" the Chicano student movement.

During the conference CWP used every opportunity it could to attack other groups. In one workshop the CWP actually introduced itself by attacking the League of Revolutionary Struggle for being "agents". It also attacked the League for being "nationalist"; and attacked the August 29th Chicano Moratorium Coalition as a "front group." The CWP referred to UMAS students from the University of Colorado as "backward" and the "bottom of the barrel".

Through these attacks the CWP hoped to create suspicion and mistrust at the conference and to divert students from the tasks at hand.

While this was going on CWP continually pushed for the conference to endorse and promote different of their so-called "anti-fascist" activities. The CWP pushed this in a number of workshops and in the general assembly. When different students pointed out that CWP was ignoring other burning and legitimate concerns of the students and of the movement, CWP would accuse them of being "narrow." CWP did not offer one concrete suggestion for helping to build the Chicano student struggle during the entire conference.

On the final day of the conference the CWP launched into a wild shouting attack. The students had to actually unplug the microphone to stop the CWP tirade. Having disrupted the conference the CWP then walked out. They had done again what they have done so often in other movements: split, wrecked, and disrupted. The Chicano Movement should draw an important and serious lesson from this.

BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF THE CONFERENCE

In Spite of CWP's maneuvering, blocking and wrecking the conference achieved a number of things which can be turned into gains for the Chicano student movement.

In the Communications Workshop the participants resolved that Chicano students should form a National Chicano Student Liaison Committee which would develop communications among Chicano students, facilitate the sharing of experiences, and work to plan the next National Chicano Student Conference.

This Liaison Committee is already becoming a reality. Chicano students from different parts of the Southwest are planning to meet

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in El Paso, Tejas on July 5, to try and set this committee up. This reflects the common desire of all Chicano students to have consistent contact with each other, and to move towards the gradual development of a strong national Chicano student organization in the future. This represents an achievement of the Albuquerque conference.

The Education workshop produced a resolution calling for the organization and strengthening of Chicano student organizations at all levels. Since that time Chicano students in New Mexico have met to form a statewide network. Chicano students in Califas will be meeting at the statewide level in late June. This shows that Chicano students are trying to carry on in a concrete way the spirit and suggestions of the Albuquerque conference.

The Conference also developed a number of resolutions aimed at building the links between students and other parts of the Chicano Movement. One such resolution called on Chicano students to support the April 26th Survival Gathering, Dalton Pass, New Mexico, against the nuclear corporations which are destroying Chicano and Indian lands. A number of students did attend this gathering.

There were also resolutions calling on Chicano students to support the efforts to build for the 10th Commemoration of the Chicano Moratorium. At the upcoming California statewide MEChA conference students will work out specific plans for building a strong Chicano student contingent for the Moratorium. Students in Texas and Colorado are also actively mobilizing for the Moratorium.

The Albuquerque conference produced a number of similar resolutions and suggestions. It is important not to lose sight of them as we attempt to sum up the strengths and weaknesses of the Conference. For it is these positive achievements which provide the basis for picking up the pieces and reconstructing the framework of Chicano student unity.

BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF THE CONFERENCE THE ROAD AHEAD

Already, in the few short months since the Albuquerque conference, Chicano students have begun to move to draw lessons from it and to take steps to build their struggle. It is important to continue this effort if we are not to go backward. To go backward now means to sacrifice the interests of the thousands of Chicano students now in school, and the interests of the tens of thousands of future Chicano students who will be denied access to higher education if we don't act now.

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The only choice is to go forward! There are a number of concrete steps which can help strengthen the movement:

- * An all-sided summation of the Albuquerque conference, drawing out both the strengths and weaknesses of the conference and building off its achievements. This summation should be done with as broad student input as possible. The entire movement can benefit from such a summary.
- * To have the National Chicano Student Liaison Committee be a reality. Chicano students from all over Aztlan should try to attend the first meeting to organize this committee, July 5th, in El Paso, Tejas. The Liaison Committee could perhaps be the vehicle for summing up the Albuquerque conference and for planning out a future National conference.
- * For Chicano students from all parts of the Southwest to strengthen their ties and communications with each other. Besides the Liaison Committee other avenues of contact can be explored. Already students from Colorado and Califas are beginning to establish links between themselves. This same process is taking place between students from Tejas and Califas. It sets a positive example. Sending representatives to statewide conferences or such events as Cinco de Mayo and September 16 are one way in which contact can be developed.
- * For Chicano students to continue to build their ties with other sectors of the movement, such as the land struggle, the struggle against police brutality, building for the Chicano Moratorium and so on. These ties can be built up locally, regionally through forms like the centrales, statewide, and nationally through forms like National conferences or the National Student Liaison Committee.

"Self-Determination Through Unity" -- this should remain the rallying call for Chicano students. It applies to the whole Chicano Movement as well. Unity is the key to our winning victory in the struggle for freedom and equality. Chicano unity is our only weapon for finally achieving the noble aspirations for land and political power. Chicano students can play an important role in building Chicano unity. This is the tradition which should be upheld now, in summing up the Albuquerque Conference, and in going forward to build a new and higher level of struggle throughout the Southwest.