DEFENSE OF UNDOCUMENTED workers in the U.S. drew 1,000 activists to Chicano Immigration Conference in San Diego last month. (Call photo)

By P. Mendez

It was very inspirational seeing so many different faces and forces at the Chicano Immigration Conference in San Diego during the last weekend of May, the most graphic reminder in many years of the potential strength of our movement.

Of course, it's only natural that the defense of the most oppressed segment of our people — undocumented immigrants — be the magnet attracting nearly 1,000 people from a broad range of political views. The participation of the left was particularly important. Left-sectarianism towards the Chicano movement has in the past kept many left groups isolated and apart from this struggle and unable to relate to its broad, united front character. This in turn evoked some unnecessary hostility towards the left.

It was little more than one year ago that the Committee for Chicano Rights (CCR), the host of the conference, circulated a manifesto stating their refusal to work with the Socialist Workers Party. Roughly one year later, the MEChA's at San Diego State and San Jose State followed suit and expelled the Revolutionary Communist Party from their respective chapters.

Though these two opportunist organizations have a long history of chauvinism and sectarianism towards the Chicano movement, and many revolutionary forces have also fallen into leftist errors to one degree or another. In fact, the left in the U.S. has all too often underestimated the revolutionary potential of the Chicano people's liberation movement, and has been chauvinist towards it.

The problems stemmed largely from efforts to impose Marxist slogans and phrases on a movement that was basically against national oppression and when these concepts were not accepted, people with different ideologies were attacked and labelled. Problems also arose from dogmatically analyzing the movement on the basis of foreign definitions or experiences.

The magnitude of the anti-deportations conference shows the potential for building a Chicano united front. In fact, this approach is already being applied within the Chicano movement. The San Diego conference followed by only one week a conference of Chicano trade union activists held in L.A. to map out a common program of work. And several revolutionary organizations have gone on record calling for the formation of such a front. Marxist-Leninists should whole-heartedly join in these efforts to build the Chicano united front.

Their objective existence as an oppressed people leads Chicanos to organize themselves into a movement to wrest from the capitalist system their national democratic rights and full equality with the rest of the population in the U.S. It also gives rise to the consciousness among some that total liberation, far beyond the "liberties" offered by capitalism, is what is needed. This movement is composed of many forces, both revolutionary and reformist.

The choice for the left is either to actively strive to unite these forces into a common front, or leave this task to the old-line, Democratic Party reformists.

The united front concept is not rigid because the movement is not static. Some individuals and organizations will take a correct position on certain issues, and not so correct a position on others. This should not

P. Mendez, a Chicano activist, recently covered the CCR Conference for The Call/El Clarín.

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activism on the Madison campus. A month-and-a-half-long militant strike by the Teaching Assistant Association politicized many students. Demonstrations took place against corporate recruiters from Exxon during Big Oil Day in October against Livermore Labs, the producers of nuclear weapons, in February.

Black students have put pressure on the University for affirmative action and retention of minority students. Latino students are beginning to voice demands for Chicano and Puerto Rican studies. As at other campuses, there have been protests against the draft and threats on Iran and Iranian students.

According to campaign manager Maureen Denny, United Progressives is "a coalition of progressives, feminists, minority organizations and individuals and students involved in single issue struggles like the draft, gay rights, and anti-nuke work." UP's platform demanded greater student control of the university—including student membership on the board of regents, support for the TAA and organized labor, affirmative action and more financial aid for students.

Teddi Michelle Beam is the first Black and the first woman to be elected president of the Wisconsin Student Association. She has been active on the undergrad support committee during the TAA strike and is a member of the national steering committee of the Reproductive Rights National Network. Ed Holmes, the new vice-president, is the former spokesperson for the Afro-American Student Organization.

United Progressives in Madison won the election May 5 and 6 in a field of 21 parties by a margin of 500 votes over the Uncommon Sense Party which was a front for the Campus Crusade for Christ.

At the 22,000-student University of Iowa in Iowa City, the New Wave party on April 28 won the president's position and 8 of 21 senate seats.

According to Joe Iosbaker, campaign manager, New Wave is a "coalition of Marxists, progressives, and feminists." Students in Iowa have been active in the last few years in struggling for the university to divest, in the anti-nuke and anti-draft movements, and in fighting an epidemic of sexual assaults on campus.

Last November 300 students at the largest demo in five years rallied in response to a reactionary demo of 30 called by the right-wing Young Americans for Freedom over the Iran crisis. "Out of this," Iosbaker told The Call, "we saw that there would have been a great benefit to the various movements on campus if we would have had the support of a progressive student association. We also realized we could make this campaign a real victory for the activists on campus."

A key reason for New Wave's victory was the support of women on the campus; women members of New Wave developed a concrete program on dealing with the threat of rape. Iosbaker described the incumbent administration replaced by New Wave as "socially unconscious liberals who acted as a rubber stamp for the administration and played at student government." A key role in the campaign was played by the Revolutionary Student Brigade. The new president, Bruce Hagemann, is a member of RSB, as is Iosbaker.

The victory of these slates is a hopeful sign for the new student movement, and the activists look to the next year with optimism. Problems need to be solved, however.

On all three campuses, progressives now control the executive positions in the Student Associations but not yet a majority of the senate positions. In addition, members of the SPC and New Wave are looking to transform the unity built around their electoral slates into building ongoing mass organizations that will help lead the struggles on campus.

Carl Drake is a student at the U. of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

The Chicano movement and the left . . .

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exclude groups nor people from participating in the Chicano united front.

Class position does not automatically exclude anyone from this front either. We should keep in mind that the great majority of Chicanos of different classes are in antagonistic conflict with the vicious U.S. imperialist system. We should unite with every organization seeking democratic rights for Chicanos, stressing the points of unity, reserving differences for patient discussion and resolution.

This brings to mind two organizations which were invited to the San Diego Conference but did not attend. They are the GI Forum and LULAC. Both these organizations espouse total immersion of the Chicano struggle into the bourgeois political system. Both employ lobbies in Washington as their main political weapons. And both were tied closely to the Democratic Party.

Many of their top leaders also rub elbows with elements of the imperialist bourgeoisie. However, these organizations will find that they have to take up the issue of justice for undocumented Mexican workers if they are to retain any credibility among the Chicano people. Their combined membership of close to 250,000 includes many whose parents or relatives entered the U.S. "illegally" at one time or the other.

It is a fact that the core of the Chicano united front will invariably be composed of individuals and groups who do not see eye to eye on every issue. Most do not yet see socialism as a solution. Some seek a separate state or reunification with Mexico. But all are united by their dedication to bring liberation to their beloved Raza, manifested in their consistent practice.

Given the history of national oppression in this country, and the suspicion which this generates among Chicanos about the Anglo majority, the task of integrating Marxism with the broad Chicano movement is a difficult one. But by humbly serving the Chicano movement and by consistently fighting around issues directly affecting the Chicano masses, communists can help Chicano activists build a powerful front in the fight for Chicano liberation.