

This document and testimonies were prepared by comrades formerly involved in the Maoist Communist Union (MCU). Previous commentary on the MCU was compiled by 100 Flowers (<https://100flwrz.wordpress.com>), whose members (together with others) were involved in this document and testimonials, but who are largely involved in other organizing work at present. For questions or comments about this document please write to thoughtsonmcu@proton.me.

Statement by Former Members and Former Members of Affiliate Organizations of the MCU

This is a warning against comrades who may come into contact with the MCU and its leader Ryan Costello aka Thomas O'Connell. A significant aim of this organization is to fulfill Ryan's personal and sexual power plays. There is scarcely a comrade that passes through the organization that does not undergo an attempt by Ryan to break up that person's personal relations and romantic partners. Such machinations are a corollary to Ryan's project of moving comrades around to fulfill a changing configuration of his own personal polyamorous love triangle. Many comrades who devoted years to building the organization had long brushed off such behavior as excusable in the face of the larger political task that Ryan was ostensibly serving. It has long been clear that such suspension of disbelief is not justifiable. After years of destructive behavior on Ryan's part, it is clear that such actions are not secondary to Ryan's political project, but are in fact a central aim. This is related to unceasing, non-collective attempts to expel any comrades who raised the most modest criticisms of these actions or of other matters, and the related transformation of the organization into a cultish formation of flunky yes-men. The political development of comrades subsequently are stalled and basic discussions over political line and strategy are stillborn. In place, a lack of internal democracy and a culture of guruism has long taken hold as the MCU bounces from city to city, attempting to take over local mass organizations and then dissolving them in retreat. This document is a warning to comrades to be wary of this organization, and to be aware of a phenomenon in the U.S. of seeing communist organization as a means to realize petit-bourgeois fantasies of control over relationships and over "subordinates", a gross mockery of MLM principles of politics and organization. Those in this small organization are encouraged to not ignore their instincts and good senses, to reach out to comrades who have passed through the structure, to ignore commands of Ryan forbidding contact with those on the "outside," (including family, friends and comrades) and be wary that they are in a dangerous group that serves to isolate them, a procedure non-conducive in the least to the task of building a revolutionary movement in the U.S.

Testimonials (In the order they were received)

A) While inevitably comrades will examine aspects of their personal lives in the context of their political development, it should be a warning sign when a single comrade, such as Ryan here, believes it as his unilateral ability to "see the correct way" while generally disdaining other comrades' insights or differences. This had a detrimental effect on the political work we were engaged in for years.

B) I was a former member of the MCU and I saw this happen too many times

C) I experienced the romantic and personal power plays in the three years I spent in the MCU, as my former partner was not a communist and I was pressured by Ryan to make him into one or break up with him. Later, Ryan would approach me romantically and sought to add me to his polyamorous love triangle. After not going forward with such an idea, I later leveled a serious criticism of him and leadership's undemocratic style of work and was effectively forced out of the organization.

D) I have witnessed Ryan Costello (Thomas O'Connell) expel multiple comrades over dubious claims of sexual misconduct, while consistently deflecting similar criticism of himself. These expulsions were always followed by slander and isolation as policy, so that opposing views could not be raised or taken seriously. I wrote off this double standard, and many other issues as well, due to the necessity of a socialist revolution, and my belief in the comrades I was struggling towards this goal with. In retrospect this was a mistake that contributed to walking down the wrong path for a very long time, following the egotistical and self-serving leadership of Ryan Costello. I agree fully with this statement, and think comrades in MCU would be wise to reflect on it deeply.

E) I worked with Ryan for several years, and can affirm much of what is described in this document. Unfortunately the decline of any substantial left in the US creates openings for this kind of behavior. Ryan's stranglehold on this organization alienated people, liquidated long term organizing efforts, and led to serious personal setbacks that take a lot of time to overcome. I hope people involved can read the writing on the wall so we can seize the time and get good things done together.

F) I witnessed Ryan attempting to groom someone for the purpose of entering into a polyamorous relationship with them, under the pretext of political guidance and coordinated meetings and trips requiring the efforts of many comrades for the purpose. This is a reoccurring pattern. I have spent many years teaching the youth about healthy relationships through anti-sexual violence education. Understanding that I was complicit in this particular instance and within a larger pattern of controlling and manipulative behavior by Ryan left me feeling isolated and confused personally and politically in the years after I was pushed out of the MCU and its associated organizations.

G) I had to drive a person to the airport that MCU made go off psych meds and had to be hospitalized

in their hometown. They tried to make me go off psych meds and maintained a line of “revolutionaries cant have ‘crutches’ and rely on medicine for emotions/internal contradictions.”

H) I was never a member of the MCU, though I was close to it and sympathetic during its pre-formation period and the first year or so when it got started. It seemed to me they were trying to do some useful revolutionary work and writing some useful papers such as their document opposing the w'universality of people's war'. I don't personally know much about the heavy pressures that were evidently put on members and associates to change their personal lives or to participate in 'polyamorous' affairs. But the number of stories I've heard about this is alarming. Equally bad, perhaps, are what seem to me to be strong tendencies toward guruism. I went through the experience of the RCP and its descent into a political cult around Bob Avakian. So it has been disheartening in the extreme to see sort of a pitiful echo of that develop around Ryan in the MCU.

I) Ryan Costello exerts power over every member of the MCU and uses the org as his own sexual playground, having dated multiple people in the org despite the power imbalance. No one has the ability to criticize Ryan within MCU, not without being ostracized from the entire group. The interpersonal relationships of MCU members are negatively impacted by Ryan's own feelings and attraction to certain members.

J) I remember thinking it questionable that Ryan and his partner had recruited a younger, less experienced comrade to move across the country and join their relationship. I judged myself too politically immature to understand. There were many other such cases, when I trusted leading comrades to the point of near-blind faith and figured any issue must only be internal to myself. I had also seen what the backlash could be and I feared it immensely. Looking back, I see this fear to criticize and blind faith as being cultivated by leadership.

K) This document reflects my experience working with Ryan. He constantly preached about the gift of criticism, yet never received it well. He once claimed to be "teaching people how to think" as echoes of affirmation followed his comments. He quoted Lenin (viewing himself as a little Lenin) by warning others of "the marsh", while dredging up people's personal struggles, making sloppy advances at women, and suffocating the entire organization with his grip.

L) I was involved in political work with Ryan prior to the MCU and I can recognize much of what's described above - his power games, the attempts to impose lifestyle changes on others and break up the intimate bonds of members, the use of criticism as way to control or discard people, and above all his unchecked egotism. It sounds like these patterns have only gotten worse since then. The ways in which Ryan often twisted political language into a tool for his own manipulative ends was particularly destructive. It took me some time afterwards to see his behavior for what it was, to separate it from the politics he claimed to stand for, and to unpack the personal impact it'd had on me.

M) I worked with Ryan for a number of years and from the very beginning he worked to isolate me and to present himself as my handler. I was regularly subjected to intense one-on-one meetings that sometimes lasted hours and usually ended in tears. He pressured me to cut off friends and family and eventually cajoled me into moving across the country with no stable housing or connections outside of MCU. I agreed mainly out of fear that he would otherwise have me pushed out. When I was later criticized for an inappropriate romantic pursuit in the organization, I sincerely submitted to discipline, as Ryan had always encouraged self-transformation through struggle. Instead he buried the investigation and opted to interrogate me about my sexual history and gender dysphoria. When his petit-bourgeois psychoanalysis failed to resolve the issue and it came up again months later, Ryan made the executive decision to expel me and forbade me from speaking to anyone about it. At the same time he was grooming a younger woman into his polycule for which he faced no consequences. He feigns vigilance against patriarchal oppression precisely to confuse comrades about his sick intentions.

N) I worked with Ryan for several years. I witnessed and personally experienced him use his authority in the group to manipulate several comrades, dissect their personal lives, bully and shame them, and impose his way on both the organization and comrade's lifestyles. While this was done under the guise of criticism, criticism of Ryan was not tolerated and met with severe backlash. This attitude also infected organizing projects, leading to confusion, inertia, and starting and stopping different fronts of work. An undemocratic and narcissistic practice developed. When his reputation of grooming younger women activists reached a student organizing project and it was revealed he had been banned from a local organizing space, he took over the internal investigation demanded by the students, produced fake evidence, reversed blame to paint himself as the victim, and had other members act as the face of the

investigation to fake credibility. This did not work and Ryan ultimately moved cities to avoid this coming up again. As I grew disillusioned with the organization and my own participation in these harms, I realized the extent to which I lost my own autonomy, sense of self, and political orientation. I hope comrades still in the organization will seriously reflect on this warning.