

OC Investigation Sum Up

Introduction

We formed the MSU and joined the OC following a period of intense and prolonged struggle over party building in the Milw. Alliance. Throughout 1978, the first year of the OC, we became increasingly dissatisfied with the progress of the OC. The priority to be placed on national work and views on the correctness of the general course being followed by the leading forces in the OC were key points of difference in the struggles in the MA. Yet, now that the OC was formed we felt the same lack of direction nationally, the same isolation as a local group, and a painstakingly slow pace of development in the OC. We had a hard time seeing how party building work was advancing in a more systematic manner after the OC's formation than before.

We first voiced these concerns nationally in July 1978 to one of the leading comrades in SUB. His response was that we were pushing in the right direction. We raised our concerns once again in Oct. '78 in a letter to the SC of the OC regarding the controversy over the participation of the PUL in the up coming Pt. 18 Conferences. Then by the end of Nov., with as yet no response from the SC, we felt compelled to begin a deeper investigation into the state of the OC; and to attempt to raise our concerns into a more systematic criticism. The OC was approaching its first birthday and the only substantive political development that we saw was the "Dogmatism" paper written by CN for the SC.

We planned trips to Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia. Our visits to Chicago and Detroit served to verify our general hypothesis that the OC was beginning to stagnate. All three groups that we talked to felt the same lack of direction, they too had no real sense of what was going on in the OC. We found more confusion as to what the PWOC's conception of fusion was. The comrades we talked to, including a member of the SC, expressed a basic agreement with the general thrust of our critique of the OC.

We then sharpened up this critique for presentation to the PWOC and CN, the chair of the OC. By December 1978 our critique had developed into a general view of the development of the OC. We found this view to be in contradiction to that held by the chairperson of the OC. From our discussions we became convinced that our critique, although speaking to some real, objective weaknesses in the OC, was incorrect in its general view of the development of the OC.

In this report we will try to explain briefly the following:

1. Our Dec. Critique
2. CN's Response & General View of the OC
3. Our Present View
4. The Errors We Made

Our December Critique of the OC

In general we felt that the OC was stagnating. We had serious doubts as to what party building approach was objectively being followed by the OC, as to the degree to which political line was being developed, and to the consolidation and role of leadership in the OC. At the root we felt that there was a downplaying of the importance of political line and a tendency to vacillate on line in the interests of broader unity.

To elaborate on what we meant by these criticisms we pointed to the following specific problems:

1. We felt that Pt. 18 was being vacillated on as a line of demarcation. We questioned the soundness of the decision taken at the founding conference in Feb. to leave it open for a period of consolidation. We didn't see any forces being consolidated. And to the contrary, we saw the decision operating to allow those who had real disagreements over the content a cover for obstructive endeavors within the OC. We further felt that a liberal attitude

toward Pt. 18 was allowing the process of consolidation to be drawn out as the Pt. 18 Conferences were continually pushed back. And lastly, we saw the disunity on Pt. 18 objectively placing the struggle with those forces who could not demarcate with dogmatism on international line ahead of those forces who were ready to break with dogmatism, but had a "left" sectarian party building line (Guardian/Guardian Clubs). We felt that this priority should be reversed.

2. We did not understand the reasoning behind dropping the formulation that dogmatism is the root of "left" opportunism. Once again, we feared that political line was being vacillated on. In our view either one felt that dogmatism was the root, and therefore the task was to demarcate with the dogmatist lines, develop correct ones, and unify those able to break with dogmatism on the basis of this correct elaboration of political line. Or one felt that sectarianism was the root, and therefore the task was not to demarcate on political line, but to unite the entire party building mov't in one big debate irregardless of the particular political lines held by specific forces.

We didn't see a middle ground, either it was dogmatism and the task was to demarcate on line; or it was sectarianism, and the task was to avoid demarcation in the interests of broad unity.

We felt that in the objective practice of the OC the "sectarian position" was gaining dominance: the dogmatism formulation was dropped as a point of unity; Pt. 18 was being left "in the air" as a line of demarcation; the point of unity on party building was really too vague to demarcate anything; and lastly, some of the comrades from our organization that attended a UAW Conference in early Dec. came back with questions as to whether or not the OC forces at the conference had compromised too much with forces from the IS and the ISTC.

We agreed with the dogmatism formulation. We knew that this was the position of the PWOC for the last couple of years. But ~~we~~ we had doubts as to whether a different analysis was being followed in practice as one political line after another appeared to be dropping in the interests of broader unity.

3. We felt that the party building line of the OC was far too vague. And that therefore the line of the PWOC (the leading organization in the OC) was being substituted for the line of the OC. We felt that we had complete unity with the PWOC line as far as we understood it. We felt that the fusion concept, if properly formulated, was crucial, the cornerstone, of a correct understanding of the party building process.

However, we found there to be a great deal of confusion as to what the party building line of the PWOC actually was. We found that we had sharp differences with others who also claimed to agree fully with the PWOC. In specific, we felt that the fusion concept was being adopted in an empiricist manner by many. Fusion was being defined as synonymous with mass practice in the working class. And then this mass practice as being elevated above any and all struggle for unity on political line.

On the other hand, some forces (such as the Guardian) seemed to be purposely painting the fusion concept as a worshipping of mass practice in an effort to discredit it and win forces to their own sectarian party building designs. We did not see the OC or the PWOC adequately countering these distortions.

Comrades from the Bay Area Guardian Club were putting forth that the PWOC had abandoned the fusion line in the practice of its own organization. One of the comrades that we talked to in DMLO felt that the PWOC was confused as to what they meant by fusion. The confusion and misconception seemed to be growing.

We felt that the misconceptions and lack of elaboration of the fusion concept ^{were} objectively holding back the party building process because they were serving to obscure the centrality of the struggle for unity on political line. We were critical that the PWOC had not made more effort to highlight the role of political line in the fusion process and very pointedly criticize the empiricist formulations of fusion. We saw the OC's developing unity on a

more precise party building line as crucial to its success in establishing an ideological center.

4. We felt that national was supposed to be primary to local work, but in practice this did not appear to be the case, Localism was still very strong. We saw no efforts on the part of the leadership of the OC to struggle against localism and to make the national primary within the OC.

Coming from this localism we saw a weakness of federationism in the OC. This view saw the OC as a coming together of separate local organizations on a completely equal footing. Obviously, this was not the case, there was extreme disparity in the level of development of organizations in the OC. To move forward we felt that the most advanced forces had to be consolidated into a leading core regardless of what part of the country or what organization they came from. The federationist views were holding back this process.

5. We sensed that there was a great deal of "behind the scenes" struggle among individuals nationally - both internal to the OC and external. We heard of meetings and debates between forces in the PWOOC, the PUL, the Guardian, the Guardian Clubs,; but these struggles never seemed to emerge before the entire OC and trend except as rumor, or after they had been concluded.

We felt that this type of practice was objectively playing into the elitist party building line of "the most advanced individuals form the party". This line, which is just recently emerging more openly in the debates between the Guardian staff and Guardian Clubs, argues that there is no particular need to organize a mov't wide struggle over political line because this is the task of individual M-Lists. And that, in fact, organizations at this time act to retard or freeze the ability of these "most advanced individuals" to struggle for unity. (This left idealist line on party building has been historically put forward by comrades in the KDP and NCA, but has yet to be openly formulated before the party-building mov't.)

And even more importantly, we felt that "behind the scenes" struggle served to retard the over-all development of forces in the party building mov't and particularly played into sexism and the old "mov't heaviness" of the 60's.

In general our view of the development of the OC went something like this:

The crucial task was to formulate a correct leading line within the OC. Only on this basis could our party building work be put into a national context and real steps toward fusion be made. Through this process we saw a leading core emerging nationally.

The emphasis on developing a line and a core meant that we saw the primary focus of the OC as internally oriented around building a higher level of unity that presently existed in the 18 Pts. The OC, in our view, should strive for the highest unity possible regardless of the temporary consequences for it's size. Ultimately the size and the influence of the OC, and it's ability to form an IC and move party building forward, rests on the correctness and depth of it's political line. And in the struggle in the OC the main obstacle was from the right in the form of empiricism and localism.

Once Pt. 18 was resolved and a higher unity on party building established that specified dogmatism as the root of "left" opportunism, the proper relation of local to national work, and the centrality of political line in the fusion process; then we felt that the OC should move to establish an IC. We realized that there were still important forces outside the OC, and that an IC formed in such a manner would probably only be one of a number of centers in our trend. But that this path was necessary as the only way to develop a political line that would be capable of proving itself in the practice of the party building mov't. And that only the practice of the OC, on the theoretical, political, and organizational levels, would win over those forces not yet aligned with the OC.

To put our critique in perspective we felt that the OC had tremendous potential, and that the PWOC had played a crucial leadership role in bringing it about. But that this great potential in the OC, which rested in its serious approach to building ties with the working class and engaging in disciplined mass practice, could also become a crippling weakness if empiricism and localism were not uprooted, and a more correct line on party building unified on.

CN's Response to Our Critique

In the last week of 1978 we met with CN, the chair of the OC and spokesperson of the PWOC. We laid out our critique of the OC's first year. In the discussion that ensued we realized that we did not have the basis of investigation to raise our questions to the level of a general critique. CN felt that our general critique was incorrect.

First, CN elaborated a broader understanding of the development of the OC as a whole. He argued that the year that was spent on Pt. 18 was beneficial because of the degree to which it consolidated those forces in favor, and isolated the forces opposed to Pt. 18. He felt that the dogmatism and "left" internationalism that was always the essence of opposition to Pt. 18 (either on content or as a line of demarcation) was now coming out clearly. CN was able to cite examples of struggles both between organizations and within organizations that we were not familiar with. He argued that these struggles were crucial to the consolidation of the OC and the general perspective of the anti-dogmatist trend. It became clear that we had underestimated the degree to which consolidation on Pt. 18 was a key task in the first year of the OC.

CN felt that the mistake was not in going thru this process of consolidation on Pt. 18, but in doing it after the OC was formed and not before.

Secondly, CN argued for a different view of the main danger in the OC. Whereas our critique saw the main danger internal to the OC as coming from the right in the form of empiricism, CN felt that this was a secondary problem and that the main danger was still from the left in the form of a hesitation to break with "leftism". He pointed to the struggles with PUL's influence in the OC and the hesitation to break with a left international line; and the struggles with the Guardian and the hesitations of forces to break with a left line on party-building. Conversely, CN reminded us of the fact that the El Comite position, which was the most clearly formulated localist and empiricist position in the OC, received only one vote at the Feb. Conference.

Thirdly, CN disagreed that political line had been vacillated on or that concessions had been made to anything else but the objective state of the ML mov't. He felt that the forces in the party building mov't had little understanding of how to draw lines of demarcation except in the context of a single, local organization. And that in the context of the party building mov't it would have been premature for the OC as a whole to adopt the dogmatism formulation because the majority of forces did not understand this formulation or the debates around it.

Throughout all of the three points discussed above we felt that CN's perspective was informed by a broader understanding of the objective state of both the ML mov't and the OC. He was able to discuss numerous situations which we were unaware or unfamiliar with (in the main, situations on both of the coasts; whereas, our perspective was informed only on the Midwest). In this regard we had unity that the OC suffered from an inadequate level of communication and a lack of a common understanding of the process involved in building the OC. This ~~is~~ is a ~~particularly~~ particularly acute problem in the Midwest due to the lack of contact and fewer number of organized forces.

CN agreed that empiricism, most particularly in the form of localism and federationism, were problems in the OC. But he felt that these problems would be adequately brought out and struggled with in the summation of the first year of the OC that the SC is developing and in the process of uniting on a plan for an IC. Once again, we felt that CN had a broader understanding of the manner in ~~which~~ which the struggle for unity on such a plan for an IC would effect the current contradictions within and around the OC.

CN also agreed that the party building line of the PWOC was in need of clarification within the ML mov't. But added that the primary task of the OC in terms of party building was not in unifying on a higher level than is presently contained in the 18 Pts, but in defeating the sectarian, small circle mentality on party building and thereby uniting the broad forces within the trend into one IC. This struggle too was seen as largely unfolding within the context of developing a plan for an IC.

On the whole, and aside from the differences in perspective between CN and ourselves that flowed directly from CN's broader knowledge of the national mov't; CN presented a different conception of the development of the OC and the struggle to create an IC;

CN saw the struggle not as a struggle internal to the OC, but more between the OC and the broader trend. That the task was still to unite the broad forces of the trend into the effort to create one IC. That an IC shouldn't be formed until the trend could be united on a broader basis. And that this was the task of the OC.

Therefore the work at hand is not to unite the present OC on a higher level, but to defeat the sectarianism that prevents the vast majority of the forces in the trend from being brought into the work of building an IC. That an IC will only be successful if it encompasses the trend as a whole and thereby will allow political line to be developed beyond the 18 Pts. in an open and organized manner before the trend as a whole.

CN felt that only an IC that encompassed the whole trend would be capable of developing a correct elaboration of MLism to the class struggle, and of unifying the party building mov't. And only by maintaining this trend wide unity as our goal could we break the sectarian line held by some forces; or the fear of just another sectarian party building attempt harbored by others.

In summary CN's view of the way forward for the OC was:

To demarcate and consolidate on Pt. 18. Then to develop a draft plan for an IC. Such a plan would elaborate what the IC would be and who would be united within it. The main focus of the plan would be in defeating sectarianism in party building and thereby bringing the trend as a whole into the organized effort of building an IC. The secondary focus would be the defeat of localism and empiricism within the trend. The main arena of struggle was still seen as with those forces in the trend who are still outside the OC.

Our Present View

On the basis of the broader view of the OC and the ML party building mov't that CN was able to provide, we now feel compelled to drop our critique of the "stagnation" or "vacillation on political line" in the OC. In the main we ~~accept~~ accept CN's assessment of the necessary delays in wrapping up Pt. 18, and in not yet consolidating on the dogmatism formulation. We also feel that our basic strategy for the OC had errors of empiricism, and that this gave an incorrect and sectarian direction to our views of the OC. Our critique would objectively have set the OC on a sectarian, small circle party building course. We feel the general strategy outlined by CN is correct.

However, we still hold a criticism of the SC for not communicating more fully a strategy for the first year of the OC. The one year delay in developing any sense of overall direction in the OC has left it with a vague ~~and~~ and

unclear atmosphere. We feel that many organizations, both inside and outside the OC, are somewhat lost as to just what the OC is and what it is attempting to build.

We presently see three tasks as the key to resolving the problems we still feel in the OC:

- 1) A full summation of the formation and first year of the OC.
- 2) A move by our organization to take more initiative in developing ties between OC groups in the Midwest.
- 3) The development of the draft plan for an IC; and the struggle against sectarianism and localism and federationism that it would entail.

Why We Made the Errors in Our Critique of the OC

To be complete this report has yet to speak to the reasons why we developed a generally incorrect critique of the OC. On the whole, our critique formulated what would have objectively developed into a 'small-circle' mentality on party building.

The 'small-circle' perspective recognizes the fact that prior to the party there will develop numerous wings or sectors in the M-L mov't based on different degrees of development and variations of political, ideological, and organizational perspective. It obviously sees the need for unity among these sectors, but it primarily sees that unity developing through the development of each sector. Generally, each broad political grouping within the M-L mov't (for example, those forces around the Guardian as one grouping, and those around the ~~WOC~~ as another) should, more or less independently, develop its own elaboration of M-Lism, its own ideological perspective, and its own organizational presence. It is not seen as possible to establish one ideological center for the entire party building mov't at this time. Such a center is seen as only developing gradually through the struggle between these independently developed lines.

This perspective on party building is 'in essence' no different from the approach of the RCP and OL. It greatly exaggerates the degree to which one sector of the M-L mov't can develop a correct elaboration. It is a view which places no priority on establishing a systematic, and mov't-wide struggle over line which would unfold in an open manner before all M-Lists.

Such a perspective on party building is 'left' sectarian.

However, even though the view of the OC we were developing would have eventually (if played out to its conclusion) led to a sectarian line; the root of our error was empiricism. We feel that our Critique of the OC is a clear example of how an objectively sectarian line can develop from an empiricist, as well as a dogmatist, standpoint.

Empiricism is a theory of knowledge that elevates narrow experience as a sole basis for understanding a thing or a process. It is opposed to dialectical materialism and does not see the inter-relatedness of things or adequately understands them as processes of development.

Our view of the OC was based "too much" on just what we had experienced locally and were able to observe in our brief investigation into the Midwest. We did not have an adequate understanding of the necessary processes of development of the OC nationally. We tended to view ~~the~~ certain struggles and concepts within the party building movement in a separated, rather than an inter-related way. We grasped the primary aspect and lost sight of its relation to the other aspects.

For example, consider our understanding of the differentiation and relation between dogmatism and sectarianism in the "left" opportunism of the new communist movement. We reduced the analysis to the point where if we felt that dogmatism was primary then the task was to demarcate on political line; conversely, if sectarianism was primary then there is

no need to demarcate on line. From this point it became simply an either/or situation for us: either it was dogmatism and you demarcate on line, or it is sectarianism and you don't. Our position was that it was dogmatism.

Drawing such an impassable line between dogmatism and sectarianism weakened our understanding of "left" opportunism and therefore also how to build a trend in opposition to "left" opportunism.

Our view of the major obstacle in the OC's development suffered from a one-sided understanding of "left" opportunism that focused solely on dogmatism. And therefore we arrived at a narrow and one-sided view of the OC which saw it only in terms of its present state and composition of forces, and not in terms of its development in the party building movement as a whole.

However, we also feel that the errors of empiricism we made are largely a result of the lack of communication and direction that we suffered. Without central direction, no matter what the task, we will be condemned to empirical observation of our separate local situations. Our view of the way forward will then be colored by this partial understanding. We feel that the errors of empiricism in our critique of the OC reflect the lack of a clear national context in the OC.

In an organization, either a rank and file caucus, a local ML collective, or a national formation such as the OC, it is the role of leadership to provide a sense of the whole process to which the organization is directed, and an understanding of the inter-relations between the various parts and stages of the process. The larger the scope of an organization, the more the tendency will emerge for parts of the organization to develop an empirical viewpoint, and thereby a sectarian practice within the organization. If leadership does not provide an overall context and direction, then the various parts of the base of an organization are condemned to an empirical understanding of the organization based on the limited phenomenon that are readily observable.

The first year of the OC has been largely without direction around the development of our most immediate party building task - the creation of an ideological center. Starting with the confusion on the exact relation of the Pt. 18 debates to the present level of unity in the OC and the building of an IC, the questions continued:

What is an IC? How do we see it's relation to party formation? How do we proceed in building an IC? Who should be united in such an IC? What is the relation between local M-L collectives and an IC? How do we see the level of unity developing in this IC?

All these questions have remained unanswered in any specific terms. And without answers even our most immediate, local party building initiatives are directionless and subject to errors of both a right and "left" nature.

For example, the SC minutes focus more on the informational details and not the political content of SC meetings. The material the SC has provided on the development of local centers has been helpful, but has not really given a clear political context and direction to this work. We need a broader theoretical background on the relation of local centers to other M-L organizational forms and party building tasks in general. And the study guide for the 18 Pts. - there is no overall framework for how this is to be used. What priority is there on it? Who is it aimed at?

An overall plan for an IC is the only thing that can pull together all these particular projects and initiatives. Without the context of an overall plan they are all just "bricks without the mortar".

We realize that the need to consolidate on Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation has held back the progress toward a plan for an IC. And we realize the difficulties in pulling together a new national form. We commend the SC on the job they have done under such difficult circumstances. But we want to stress the degree to which we feel that the lack of unity on a general perspective toward developing an IC has held back progress in the first year of the OC.

The Executive Committee of the
Milw. Socialist Union

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