

May 14, 1981

Report on the Los Angeles Rectification Forum on Poland

I'm sorry that I didn't write a summation of the Line of March forum on Poland much sooner. I can only say that I was waiting for a collective summation to be written by Jeff, Gary, Bob and myself. Since the likelihood of this happening is very slim, I have collected my thoughts and am sending you my own evaluation of the forum.

Over the past year, I have become increasingly critical of Line of March and the Rectification Movement in general. However, I've continued to maintain relations with them, teaching MLEP and attending almost all of the forums. The Forums' objective is, of course, to put forward the Rectification line to the left in Los Angeles. It is the broad left that attends the forums - young CP members, "Maoists", OCIC members, social democrats, and activists that have some connection to Rectification. The Poland Forum mirrored this varied collection, although, like the last several forums, attendance was down. (Approximately 50 people were there.)

The forum began with a general introduction presented by Dan Lund. Dan laid out the framework for the discussion, and played this role throughout the forum. To the "innocent" listener his initial remarks may have been construed to be general ones of orientation, but from previous discussions with Dan I know they were intended for Theoretical Review. Dan cautioned people from concentrating on the incorrect handling of contradictions by the PUWP. He also stated that "Facts don't leap out and announce themselves." I knew that this was intended for those of us who had been citing Stalinian atrocities in previous discussions.

Bob Jacobs put forward a position which was basically his own with some degree of unity with Paul Costello's article. The strength of his presentation was that it was historical - laying the groundwork for his theoretical conclusions. He had a good critique of the Stalin era and economism as being the underlying cause of current problems in Poland. He discussed the demands of Solidarity and put forward the contention that it is basically a progressive workers' struggle against bureaucracy. I felt Bob's weakness was in not critiquing LoM on all of its points. Also, Bob is uncertain about the nature of relations of production as well as socialism being a transition period rather than a mode of production. This uncertainty manifested itself in Bob's neglecting to take this issue up at all. I felt they were the whole basis and strength of Paul's article.

Marcia Altman's presentation in defense of LoM was totally weak in my opinion. I can't imagine it convincing one thinking person. It was ahistorical and at times anti-intellectual in its mocking of Theoretical Review. She distorted the position of TR so it didn't even resemble the original, making TR appear anti-socialist. Her basic contention is that if you do not defend "existing" socialism at all cost, you are aiding imperialism. Marcia relied on lengthy quotes from Walesa to prove that Solidarity is a reactionary political movement. Generally she gave what has become the standard LoM line that the dictatorship of the proletariat was established after WWII, that revisionism emerged in 1956 and that socialism's essential ingredient is the development of productive forces.

During the discussion period, Dan was impartial and spontaneous in calling on people to speak. The LoM supporters were rather weak in their comments, sometimes even vulgarizing their own position. There were statements emphasizing the "role of force" in history as a justification of ultimately, Soviet intervention. They demonstrated a mechanical view of trade unions during the transition period. Opposition to the LoM line came from myself, "middle forces" and even two comrades that closely identify and work with the Rectification Movement. Generally we criticized LoM on its misunderstanding of the true rectification movement within the PUWP, the role of trade unions, the nature of revisionism in the Soviet Union and Poland, and the true role of the International Monetary Fund and US imperialism.

What was accomplished by the forum politically and theoretically? I feel that it awakened many comrades to the increasingly economist nature of LoM's international line. Although LoM's position could have been more sharply criticized, and TR's position put forward in a more definitively positive way, the forum presented TR to many comrades in LA for the first time. This forum, then, may be the catalyst for future dialogue with those who are not firmly consolidated "Rectifiers". My husband Jeff and our comrade Gary disagree with me on this, but I feel that LoM's organizational initiatives give an opportunity to really struggle with comrades theoretically. The mass movement could be an arena for this, also, but within this activists are more concerned with getting leaflets out on time than relations of production and productive forces.

Well, I hope that this is of some value in evaluating what happened in LA with the forum. I look forward to hearing from you again.

Your Comrade,

Marilyn

As you know Line of March finally got around to holding a forum on Poland in Los Angeles (April 5). After two weeks of rushed negotiations with LOM over the proposed forum and complete opportunism and lying on their part, our TR discussion group ultimately was divided over participating in the event (two for, two against). Because the issue of the forum disrupted our discussion group, we think its important to recapitulate briefly what happened.

Max Elbaum of LOM's national leadership was sent down to Los Angeles, at the begining of March to tighten the screws on the local LOM committee's "liberalism" (he actually had the gall to claim that he just happened to be in LA for an informal visit). LOM set up a dress rehearsal meeting for hard line rectificationists, which Elbaum chaired on March 9, for the upcoming LOM DG's on Poland. Many people were excluded from attending, even Bob Stone who teaches in MLEP and lives with the head of LOM in LA, knew nothing of the meeting. Elbaum put out a hard line attack on TR's position on Poland in particular and other forces in general who didn't support LOM's analysis. Marilyn, the only one from our group who was invited to attend as a token, found herself alone in a hostile sea, put foward TR's position. Elbaum demanded that the local LOM hold a forum, and Marilyn was told by Marcia Altman that LOM wanted us there to conduct a "two-line struggle" on the question.

We were taken by supprise because we had approached LOM in January to conduct a forum, and at that time they avoided the question like the plague, stating that they inteded to hold DG's around the question instead.

All of us were perfectly willing to participate in this undertaking and held a meeting the night before we met with LOM's Michael Downing and drew up four basic points which we presented to them. At this point in time we thought it was possible to carry on a dialog with rectification and struggle out our differences.

Our four points were: 1. We needed three weeks minimum to one month to prepare, not the two weeks LOM offered. 2. We wanted co-sponsorship since TR is the other side of the two-line struggle and a small percent of the money raised over costs. 3. We needed a draft copy of LOM's analysis of TR (which later came out under the title The Sound and Fury of Paul Costello) and 4. We wanted a moderator who could conduct the forum fairly.

They gave us three weeks to prepare, refused co-sponsorship saying that we didn't constitute a political force in LA. This was an obvious organizational sectarian maneuver, since its clear even from LOM's singling out our discussion group that they consider TR's position the most serious threat to the rectification line. LOM's never gave us the promised draft article. Dan Lund, who was the moderator they offered (and we accepted), turned out to be one of their hacks, structured the forum in LOM's favor even to the extent of how questions should be framed from the audience.

Three of us attended the LOM DG's (Dan I didn't attend because by the time my day came to take part it was clear that the whole thing was pointless.) The LOM leadership made every effort to dominate the agenda within the context of their position, formulating questions and orchestrating the DG's in such a manner as to affect as much control over them as they could.

During the DG's they vulgarized TR's position through their study guide (which was used in all three DG's). They lied, saying that TR was calling for the overthrow of the Polish government and uncritically supported Solidarity. LOM evaded discussing the central theoretical/political aspects of their own position in the LOM article on Poland. They wouldn't respond to, or allow for any historical examination of the question prior to 1956.

They held a deriding C-S-C session afterward in the DG's Gary and Marilyn attended, against both of them in which Gary was both class and race baited. We shouldn't fail to mention that they absolutely refused to discuss Solidarity's 21 points. This question was raised by us four times. There was no dialog possible, only longwinded monologs on their part when an attempt was made to draw out the ramifications of LOM's thesis. (A copy of their study guide is enclosed.)

Without consulting the rest of our discussion group Bob Stone allowed them to go ahead with a forum leaflet which distorted TR's position, grouping it together with the Guardian and PWOC.

On the basis of LOM's complete opportunism, Gary and I decided not to take part in their forum, preferring to put on a presentation on Poland of our own on more favorable terrain later on. By attending their function and responding to LOM under these conditions we become defined as LOM sees us (a left opposition) and wouldn't develop any political form of our own. This is what the Trotskyists do. We felt by attending we would by virtue of this become absorbed in their own sectarianism. They are not a politically viable center for the left and we don't intend to treat them as such.

At this point in time Gary and I are convinced that Paul Costello's position on the so-called "Rectification movement" is 100% accurate.

"Rectification does not represent a positive forward looking force in our movement. It is merely the latest form of dogmatism, not-so-cleverly concealed behind a maze of front organizations and ideological double-talk. It is moving toward the consolidation of one more dogmatist sect based on the revisionist-dogmatist problematic. The only way Rectificationists can make a positive contribution to our movement now is to break with its political line and conception of political practice. When the Rectification movement itself was positive we devoted considerable attention to dealing with them. Now that their nature has become clear, polemicising against them would be like polemicising against any other little Stalinian sect, which I think would be a diversion from directing our work at a much broader, much more sophisticated audience, the broader, independent left.

Bob and Marilyn consider this stand to be sectarian, one which to quote Bob "is drawing me away from TR...and which prevented me from opening a P.O.Box in LA".

Bob went ahead with their forum and Marilyn and I met with him to discuss his presentation. As you have already gathered he took major steps back from TR theoretical position. Prior to the forum Charlie and Jim from the Bay Area had to persuade him by phone that the Polish workingclass wasn't being led by Rural Solidarity. It also took considerable theoretical struggle on my part to get him to understand that socialism isn't a mode of production. And we still aren't sure that he's convinced that socialism is an historic period of transition even now. He derided Gary and I for not taking part in the forum and holding a circle mentality, threatened to leave the discussion group if we didn't accept his summation of us. After all that has transpired in LOM's relationship to TR, Bob in a candid statement to me said that he still has "great respect for their leadership".

We consider this a telling statement of his overall pragmatism. He only seems to grasp the phenomenal side of things, and unable to go to the root and thereby understand the theoretical poverty of the Rectification movement. On the surface they are conducting political work through a number of front organizations and although he has problems with their more obvious manifestations of opportunism,- he is always running from one side of a position to another. But as his differences with TR grow (and with LOM's United Front policy this seems to be a concrete possibility) he may end his vacillation. Up to this point he seems to have enjoyed playing the role of political fly in the ointment of the rectification movement. But on more and more questions we find him politically in LOM's camp.

He has been very explicit with us, saying that he never had any intention of establishing a political base for TR in LA. Gary and I have taken it upon ourselves to open a P.O. Box.

We are listed as: Theoretical Review
P.O. Box 29477
Los Angeles, Ca. 90029

We had sent you a letter a few weeks ago letting you know about the P.O. Box but it seems that it never reached you.

We would like an updated subscribers list, so that we can make the contacts we need. Once we establish a firmer DG we think that we can move it in the direction of a study group to a politically active collective in the LA area. We are also sure that we can extend distribution of TR on the basis of this development.

Comradely, Jeff