

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST FEDERATIONISM:  
Fitting Round Pegs into Square Holes

by Scott Robinson

The OC was originally conceived as a broad anti-sectarian unity movement, with the goal of establishing a single ideological center which would bring together all forces in the anti-dogmatist/anti-revisionist movement. With its extremely general points of unity, it was hoped that the OC could begin to provide the rallying center to undermine the hegemony of the "left" sects, and to break down the small circle existence of our movement.

In its founding statement, the OC declared that an ideological center (IC) must primarily pool our common energies in overcoming the errors of the communist movement, and particularly ultra-leftism. Second, it must elaborate the theoretical foundation for future practice, and the program for revolution in the US. In the OC process, no "particular form of participation" is endorsed. "It is structured to allow input from organizations, collectives, study groups, and individuals. It is a step towards an ideological center but it is not the actual creation of one."

Yet fully two years after the OC's founding, it is apparent that instead of truly attempting to unify the movement on a sound political basis, the OC has become but one more circle (albeit, a slightly larger one) in the fragmented adar movement. Instead of building comradely relations with all forces in the movement, whether in the OC or not, the Steering Committee (SC) has embarked on the lowest form of sectarian struggle reminiscent of the New Communist Movement. (1) While it stated that a viable ideological center for "anti-'lefts'" could not just be declared, the OC has in effect declared itself to be the center of the movement, before an IC is even on the horizon. While warning against the circle warfare characteristic of the NCM, the OC itself has succumbed to "striving to establish its organizational hegemony" over the movement as a whole. (Founding Statement)

Internally, the OC has utterly failed to lay the basis for the ideological and theoretical tasks set for the IC. Despite its detailed goals of carefully prepared documents and organized struggle "in full view of the communist movement" for the IC, the OC has shirked all responsibility for ideologically training and preparing cadre; since the point 18 debate, there has been no significant organized struggle around an issue which confronts our movement. In essence, the OC has quickly sunken to placing organizational maneuvering over political struggle, of imposing unity instead of cultivating it.

The organization over politics approach is now best exemplified in the SC's new battle cry: "Struggle against federationism!". This struggle seeks in the most overt form to negate the Leninist political practice of building solid political foundations, with ideological clarity and cohesion, prior to "declaring" our unity. This struggle, while carried out in the name of unity and against small circles, in fact is a form of circle warfare and organizational hegemonism.

1) The SC's blindness to their vulgar form of struggle is shown by Clay Newlin's remark on the principled debate between the NNMLC and the Theoretical Review (TR14): "And, one only has to examine the content of the exchange between Paul Costello and Tim Patteyson to see the basic ideological affinity and backslapping affection between TR and the NNMLC." (NSC Bull. 1, p.30)

As we will also show, the struggle against federationism (SAF) is but a new form of the theoretical/political errors of the Stalin era which dominate our movement today.

This paper is divided into four sections:

- 1) the OC's incorrect analysis of the present conjuncture of party building which distorts Bolshevik history to serve its own ends, and places organization over political unity,
- 2) the failure of the OC to recognize or address the question that the SAF is contradiction with the practice of democratic centralism, that it negates democratic centralism, and that it could mean the suppression of the development of alternative lines which could challenge the SC,
- 3) the failure of the OC to perceive how partybuilding line affects ideological struggle in our movement, and that this is a failure to recognize the key contradiction in our movement.
- 4) the philosophical view manifested in these errors is a Stalinian notion of the primacy of unity over contradiction.

#### 1) The OC's Incorrect Analysis of the Present Conjuncture of Party Building.

The watch word for the present period is "federationism". From its inception, the OC was criticized by the Guardian, and then the NNMLC, for being "federationist". Soon the OC itself took up the SAF, at first in a few rules on attending conferences, and then in the more "all-sided" way we now see. (2)

If federationism can be basically described as an organization composed of various local democratic centralist organizations, study groups and individuals, with differing political lines and each maintaining its respective identity, then isn't this exactly what the OC was set up to be? Wasn't it supposed to centralize the ideological struggle of contending lines in full view of the movement, prior to unification? And didn't the OC state that all forms of participation are allowed? What then is this struggle against federationism?

For the SC, the SAF is the struggle to "forge the party spirit" and against "small circle mentality". The SC argues that to forge the party spirit, we must first "subordinate the interests of each separate individual and circle to the interests of the ML tendency as a whole. (3) This struggle against small circles is said to be

2) The Club charge of "federationism", although never fully elaborated, seems to rest on a different premise than the motivation behind the OC's present struggle. The Clubs assert the need to unite around a single line in order to create an IC; it is the varying lines within the OC which prevents it from being a correct form of an IC. The OC struggle, on the other hand, does not rest on this single line conception-- rather it rests, as we shall see, on the drive to impose a unity on an array of fragmented circles, despite line differences, in order to develop the "party spirit". However, both the Clubs and the OC emphasize the role of the individual in this period over the role of the democratic centralist organization; a position we disagree with.

(3) The SC also notes a second task of this period: to "ensure that the

based on Lenin's similar struggle as discussed in One Step Forward, Two Steps Back. The form this struggle takes is by promulgating rules to "concretely" forge the party spirit. The rules focus on the individual cadre and the need for all individuals not to be bound by "circle discipline". Thus the movement is reduced to the level of the individual, subordinate only to the OC.

First, we must look at the analogy to Lenin's period to see if this "theoretical/justification" correctly corresponds with the present conjuncture of party building. One Step Forward... was written in 1906--8 years after the founding of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). What did the RSDLP have as a basis for the liquidation of small circles? Not much really, just a "theory of workers socialism applicable to Russia" (Lenin, 1899, "A Retrograde Trend..."). Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia (1894) which provided the theoretical basis for the RSDLP's program and tactics around which they already had unity. In fact in the very pamphlet that the SC quotes Lenin states,

"As long as we had no unity on the fundamental questions of programme and tactics, we bluntly admitted that we were living in a period of disunity and separate circles, we bluntly declared that before we could unite, lines of demarcation must be drawn; we did not even talk of the forms of joint organization but exclusively discussed the new... problems of fighting opportunism on programme and tactics."

How does our period compare with that of Lenin's in 1906? In fact, very little. Rather a more appropriate quote for this period would be from the Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra (DEBI, 1900, CW vol 4 pp. 351-356) in which Lenin states,

"...the principal feature of our movement, which has become particularly marked in recent times is in recent times its state of disunity and its amateur character, if one may so express it."

What stands out is that we are still in the period to which Lenin was referring in the first quote: a period of disunity, without agreement on how to develop program and tactics, much less a unity around them. Our movement is, to be blunt, a grouping of small circles which stand apart not just organizationally, but politically

(3) cont'd) Marxist-Leninist tendency struggles to fuse its conscious interests with the objective interests of the working class." The SC never discusses this aspect again in "Forging the Party Spirit" but it certainly seems to add a fusionist orientation to the struggle.

The 18 points represent the most minimal a vague unity for this period; they are points which fail to demarcate us from dogmatism and revisionism on any but the most superficial lines. Points which purposely lack a program for fighting opportunism (party building line, in particular). The rest of the "unity" within the OC is exemplified by the superficial and bureaucratically imposed unity of the Labor Day conference. For example, where is the political unity, (one that is based on thorough political struggle) on the 1 movement two movement question? Or the summation of the National Minorities ML conference? It does not exist. Where was the "organized" struggle that the OC so boastfully declares to be its major benefit? It did not happen.(4) More significantly, where is the organized struggle around the SAF itself?(5)

In fact, no basis has been laid for the preliminary dissolution of any "circle". The rules proposed in the name of forging the party spirit must be seen as an attempt to impose unity which does not exist. Unity in organizational form is substituted for unity at the political level.

At bottom, the historical justification for the SAF is premised on a distortion of Bolshevik history. The entire bibliography for the SAF draws on documents from periods after the various communist parties had been established. The documents concern the efforts of national, democratic centralist organizations with unity around programs and political lines, to break down local democratic centralist forms.

The OC ignores the period prior to 1903 when the party was forming (and reconsolidating after its initial faltering attempt). It ignores Lenin's writings from 1899 onwards on the need for theoretical and political clarity and unity, before organizational measures are taken to structure and give a practice to that unity. It ignores the stress by Bolsheviks on the need to debate issues from all angles, raising all "views and shades of opinion".

In the early party building period, Lenin was clear that,

"...unity cannot be decreed, it cannot be brought about by decision, say, of a meeting of representatives; it must be worked for. In the first place, it is necessary to work for solid ideological unity which should eliminate discordance and confusion that ---let us be frank!--- reign among Russian Social

4) Unfortunately, Lenin's comments in his "Report of the Iskra Editorial Board To the Meeting (Conference) of RSDLP Committees" are all too appropriate to the OC: "Secondly, it is astonishing that the agenda raises (a few days before the congress!) questions that should be discussed only after thorough preparations, only when it is possible to adopt really definite and comprehensible decisions on them--otherwise it better not discuss them at all for the time being."(CW vol 6 p )

5) The ironic note here is that the Regional Centers will claim to be organizing struggles around the SAF in the coming months. However, in order to participate in these struggles, organizations must submit to all the rules of the SAF!

Democrats at the present time."(DEBI, p. )

Only secondary to this task of forging ideological unity was the task of building an "organization especially for the purpose of establishing and maintaining contact among all the centres of the movement."

The OC also fails to address the Bolshevik OC period, 1902-3. During these years, on the eve of the reconstitution of the Party, the Bolsheviks maintained their consistent view that organizational form only serves to consolidate an already established level of unity. This period is also instructive on the relations to be maintained within and without the OC.

In "Announcement of the Formation of an Organising Committee" (CW, Vol 6, pp 307-11), Lenin repeats his warning about establishing unity by "mere resolutions adopted by assembled delegates." Rather, even on the eve of the Party's founding Congress.(6) it was still emphasized that unity must be developed "systematically and gradually".

As for relations between the OC and other Russian Social Democratic organizations, there was an emphasis on the OC as "offering its services" to all movement groups. This was an "offer that(did-- SR) not entail the forfeiture of any 'rights', but rather the practical abandonment of isolation as speedily as possible, and the tackling in common of a number of joint undertakings." Thus it was recognized that the forfeiture of "rights" (eg separate organizational form, democratic centralism, etc.) could only be demanded after a higher level of ideological unity had been reached. A subordination to the OC, moreover, was not a precondition to joint work, as the present OC seems to act.

We've laid out this part of Bolshevik history and drawn on the quotes from Lenin not because we believe that they can mechanically be applied to present day conditions. There are lessons to be extracted from this historical period as it very much corresponds to our own fragmentation, disarray, desire for unity. Moreover, it is crucial to see that the OC's historical analysis draws on an entirely different period of history, one in which there was far greater political clarity and unity. It is a distortion of our history to invoke this past as the basis for the SAF now.

The SAF does not reflect the political conjuncture of the party building movement. Instead of recognizing the lines dividing our movement, the SC avoids struggle around them and conjures up a sectarian line of its own: join the OC, begin to dissolve your organization, or be a left-opportunist. The SC line is voluntarist, pure and simple-- it simply desires to wish away (or smash) small circles without the political basis to do so, (7)

6) The OC here, unlike the present OC, was delegated the task of preparing for the imminent Congress of the Party.

7) The SC line is, oddly enough, similar to that of PUL. In the struggle over pt. 18, PUL argued that international line should not be a line of demarcation since party building was our key task; "forging the party spirit" and common organizational form took precedence over international line. At the time, the OC correctly rejected this line

Does this mean that we must glorify the small circle existence of our movement? Of course not. But the correct process leading toward their dissolution must begin at the political level and consolidate at the organizational level, not vice-versa. Thus we must build the struggle around party building line, and the underlying theoretical framework of each line, in order that we may agree on the tasks ahead and how to approach them. For it is party building line which determines the tasks and the approach.

As well, we have to build the political trust among organizations based on principled political practice. Why should any organization holding to minority views want to dissolve into the OC when the SC bureaucratically overrides minority views, expels NSSO before its received responses to its questions on their unity with pt. 18, carries on sectarian attacks against the NNMLC, etc.?

Let's look at some examples of the effect of the SAF so far: At the pt. 18 conference, no one was identified by their organization, only as an individual. This left comrades at a loss to struggle over party building or any other issues an OC organization was known to have a position on. It created an air of unity only because it lacked struggle. As well, a number primacy of theory cadre were criticized for holding to particular views in the midst of struggle; the implication being that they were obviously directed to hold to that position, since they were not succumbing to unity with the OC majority.

There is also the demand that all circle members must attend regional and local center meetings. Such a demand probably has only a minor impact on organizations which hold to the majority line. It relieves the "burden" from the local (fusionist) organizations to develop and educate cadre in the OC line. From our information on the internal political practice of these organizations, study and ideological development is often absent anyway so regional centers play a useful role, at least as far as OC related issues go.

However, this demand places a great burden on cadre organizations of a minority view. Unlike the majority organizations, cadre cannot simply be sent to "absorb" the line. Rather, the leaders of these organizations must spend a great deal of time developing positions and training cadre in an alternative view. What makes it burdensome is the fact that more often than not, the alternatives must be developed around issues which are not priorities for the movement as a whole. For example, recent Regional Center struggles have concerned numerous organizational hassles of setting up an RC, minority forces attempts to prevent sectarianism toward the Clubs, and the SAF itself. Not one of these issues should be seen as of such importance as to take significant time away from the key issues which confront us. Yet, while in the OC, these are the issues that require the use of scarce political resources.

This is not to say that there aren't positive aspects to this demand. It is true that if all cadre are present, all will view the struggles first hand, build their own ability to engage in ideological (7) cont'd) as a conciliation with opportunism on the international question. Yet now we find the SC turning around and demanding that party spirit and common organizational form take precedence over the struggle over all key issues, including party building line. While party building line is not yet a line of demarcation, it cannot be subordinated to organizational consolidation.

struggle, etc. And in fact, these are the benefits that the OC points to in making its demand. But they must be balanced against the fact that merely "witnessing" such struggle cannot be substituted for the internal political practice which prepares comrades to intervene politically and theoretically in the struggle around priority issues.

Two final points stand out in the SAF rules:

1) we are told how to criticize comrades and the right to do so is reaffirmed (why, thank you!). Yet there is absolutely no mention of the "rules" concerning the rights of minority views, channels for raising the ideological struggle, or the protection of all-sided democratic debate. This issue doesn't seem too important for the SC.

2) A key goal of the SAF is to allow individual national minority ML's into the OC and to deny preference to organizations, most of which don't have a national minority membership. In this way, it is said, predominately white organizations won't have greater weight in voting.

Once again we have an organizational solution to a serious political problem. Individual memberships and organizational measures to assure that national minority ML voices are heard are important, but the struggle against racism cannot be merely reduced to an organizational practice. Rather, it depends on the political unity around a conscious strategy which can combat racism primarily in the workers' movement, as well as the communist movement. It is this type of strategy which will win national minority ML'S to the organized communist movement, and not the procedural processes the OC is focusing on. The OC'S emphasis on the link between the SAF and the struggle against racism has allowed them to denigrate the struggle to develop a political strategy in favor of an organizational solution. (8)

To sum up this section, we see that the SAF assumes a period of unity and development in the adar movement which does not exist. It rests on an incorrect and distorted view of Bolshevik history. Failing to deal with the reality of the movement by developing methods of joint work, cadre development, and principled ideological struggle, the SAF can only be seen as placing organization over politics.

Once numerous organizations and individuals in the movement did not join the OC, the OC no longer represented the unifier of the movement. The OC was and remains a circle within the broader movement. As such, the SAF, which was launched in the name of subordinating the interests of the circles to the movement, in fact is only an attempt to substitute the OC for the movement.

Recently, the SAF has been extended to impose a discipline beyond any originally expressed intentions. The RBSG, a minority force associated with Theoretical Review was a member of the OC. However the RBSG recently dissolved into the Boston Political Collective

8) The issue of racism is an extremely important one. The lack of national minority MLs in the movement is but one example of the critical nature of this problem for the adar movement. We will be addressing the issue, particularly as to how the struggle against racism is being conducted in the OC, in the near future.

(ML), a democratic centralist organization. When the individuals of the RBSG attempted to resign from the OC because the BPC(ML) had not yet determined its unity with the OC process, the RBSG was informed that it could not resign. In effect, the Regional Center Coordinating Committee was telling a democratic centralist organization, which was not a member of the OC, that its cadre had to remain in the OC!

Until this point, the contradiction between the SAF and democratic centralism was always swept under the rug. The relation between democratic centralism and the SAF was never discussed or even acknowledged. Instead of confronting democratic centralism head on-- both its bureaucratic practice and what needs to be done to rectify it--- the OC lumps the whole issue under the derogatory term "circle discipline". Once again a political question confronting the communist movement--the nature of democratic centralism-- is resolved organizationally: ban circle discipline.

Any understanding of the incorrectness of the SAF must be linked with the OC's incorrect view on democratic centralism.

## 2) Democratic Centralism and the SAF

It is obvious that the OC sees democratic centralism's (dc) main thrust as a rigid adherence to an organization's political line. That is, just as the SAF is seen in an organizational way, their conception of dc is dominated by an emphasis on organizational discipline, or "circle discipline".

In a significant way, the OC's approach to the concept/practice of dc is akin to the way revisionists approach other fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism. For example, the Eurocommunists rejected the dictatorship of the prol. because they viewed it as a set of repressive/bureaucratic political institutions (ie: its organizational form) and found it inappropriate for countries with "democratic traditions". They thus froze the dict. of the prol. in its Stalinian form and then threw it out. The theoretical practice of rectifying the concept of the dict of the prol, placing politics over organizational form, and recognizing its necessity for the successful transition to communism is totally absent ~~ix~~ from the revisionist problematic.

In a similar fashion, the SC (and the Clubs) define dc by its organizational form, freeze it in its Stalinian deformity, and declare it inappropriate for the present period. There is no move to re-analyze the concept, recognize its underlying political necessity, and rectify its practice.

But, the OC cries, we are not throwing it out-- we are just applying it later, after we've formed the pre-party formation and the party!



Which is worse, the revisionists who throw out the fundamentals of MLism altogether, or those in our movement who throw them out now, only to reappropriate ~~them~~ in the degenerated bureaucratic form later? Must we choose?

What should become clear is that these apparently "different" positions and the "anti-revisionists" on these crucial issues are all rooted in the same problematic: the dogmatist-revisionist problematic. Simply stated, the revisionist aspect lies in the subordination of politics and political relations (ie class struggle) to organization; the dogmatist aspect lies in freezing of the concept in its historical form and accepting it or rejecting this form as a whole. While the anti-revisionist forces place these two aspects in a different relation than the Eurocommunists, they stand in the same theoretical framework. And it is this entire problematic which must be rejected if we are to place ourselves within a MList problematic.

As we tried to make clear in TR 13 & 14, and the points of unity of the Boston Political Collective (ML), dc is not primarily how fastidious

one holds to a line, but rather the nature of the actual internal political relations of the organization; relations which must serve to continually advance the theoretical and political skills of each comrade such that centralization becomes dominant only when the democratic aspect has been encouraged to run its course. It is only upon these internal relations that we can evaluate whether the "rigidity" of one's adherence is "circle discipline" (ie adherence to the organization) or the product of debate and synthesis of contending lines (adherence to the political line).

Democratic centralism is extremely necessary period for it is with this practice that we can begin to rectify the theoretical ideological basis of the movement. A correct practice of dc allows for much more advanced struggle among all cadre of the movement and help reinforce maintainig principled stances in the struggle because demagogy would have lost its value as the unifying force. Leadership of the various lines would have a far more difficult time bureaucratically imposing its views on the rank and file.

The fact that this type of practice of dc is practically anti-thetical to the fusion line simply makes the struggle to place politics in a dominant position within our movement that much more important; it does not mean we capitulate to a negation of dc.

Despite this fundamental criticism, we must admit that the SC has certainly put its finger on a particular problem in this period: the sectarian struggles of cadre blindly following their organization's line; struggles which bring no unity whatsoever. The goal to make

each comrade accountable for her/his political position is definitely an important one. Yet the OC's solution is the SAF: to simply break the organizational ties and allow "free" struggle among all individuals.

However, absent an emphasis on cadre development unlike our movement has historically seen, the SAF merely "liberates" individual cadre without any foundation for conducting advanced individual struggle. Rather, the newly freed individual will simply be prey for the organizationally and ideologically hegemonic force in the OC--the SC.

The SAF then objectively represents ultra-democracy and an attack on dc in the service of organizational hegemonism and the fusion line. That is, the movement presently consists of contending party building and other political lines. The lines are embodied in organizations of varying levels of strength and development, due to historical reasons. These organizations were originally founded, in most cases, to give a presence and a coherence to a particular party building line. Moreover, given the small and amateur character of our movement, it must be recognized that the present balance of forces among the various lines in no way foretells the future leading line of the communist movement and the workers' movement.

In the coming few years, we are in for many shifts of power and influence, changing of lines, unification and dissolution, and the probable emergence of new party building lines. Thus, our commitment to the development of the movement must be to promote the contention of varying lines to be evaluated by all communists. For our movement to grow, the perspective must be how to encourage struggle over the most advanced expressions of each line, and not so much the struggle among individual cadre.

By attempting to reduce organizations to a mass of individuals, the OC's proposal serves to undermine the impact organizations which are presently in the minority can have, as organizations. In the name of unity, the organizations are sapped of their strength and their cadre are placed more directly under the leadership of the SC.

It is only in this context that we can seriously approach the OC's demand that no one be bound by circle discipline and that minority views from each organization be represented. Given the present state of the movement as one characterized by disunity on the most fundamental questions, when an organizational representative is sent to a conference, s/he should be required to wage a forceful struggle for the organization's views and vote along those lines. This would only be reflecting the political reality and divisions of the movement. Otherwise, how could we consider a vote to be binding on the OC or the tendency if it were simply delegates voting as individuals without reflecting the contradictions which actually persist? This point is even more important when we consider how low level most of the rank-file are, how the SC sways them, and how they are theoretically and politically unprepared to go against the tide.

Any vote taken along the lines suggested by the OC would only reflect the "unity" of the delegates and should in no way be allowed to settle the debates of the entire tendency or set its agenda. (Of course if an individual is ultimately swayed by another position, s/he should raise the issue in her/his organization and struggle it out)

Similarly, the demand that representatives of minority views within the organization be sent to a conference stands in direct contradiction with dc. Full democratic debate is undertaken in a dc organization in order to come to a centralized position with which to effectively influence the pbr in a unified way. If minority reps are sent, the collective will and position is made irrelevant and sacrificed to individual views. Moreover, the only importance this demand has is when it concerns matters of principle or of fundamental importance (eg pt. 18, PoT vs. fusion, nature of pfe-'56 CP, etc.) However, the reality of a solid dc org is that on upon reaching a unified position around such issues, all cadre must be committed to implementing it. This is a basic of dc. Those maintaining a position in opposition to the majority on an issue of principle would either have to submit to the line or leave the org anization. They would not be sent to represent a faction of the organization at a national conference.

For example, should an organization which has unity around pt. 18 send a cadre who disagrees with pt 18 to a national conference? The fact that some organizations did so only speaks to their lack of political unity on such matters and the low level of general unity needed to be in the organizations, and not a commitment to fight the "circle spirit".

From this perspective, the SAF can be seen to only serve to consolidate the majority forces, ie the fusionists, in the OC. Local organizational forms are rapidly becoming fetters to the unification of the fusionists. This is because the general unity of these organizations with "fusion-ism" is very undeveloped, and the SC needs to rapidly consolidate it. In addition, local fusion groups are having a difficult time staying together as party building organizations. Before these groups either leave the OC to refocus on local mass work (SOC) or before they split or dissolve from a lack of real political

unity and leadership (BWM, Detroit), the SC needs to bring them into a common organizational form, as individuals,

The minority organizations however are in no position to give up their organizational impact and discipline to a larger organization dominated by a totally different party building perspective. There is just no political basis to do so.

The SAF thus serves only one sector of the movement, the fusion forces, under the cover of serving the whole movement. Whether the SC recognizes it or not, their failure to confront democratic centralism constitutes a failure to confront their own organizational chauvinism.(9)

### 3) Party building line

The fundamental division in our movement at this time is over party building line. At this point, the lines taken on key issues can all be shown to relate to the particular party building lines, and their underlying problematics. Thus, it is no accident that the SAF only serves to consolidate the fusion forces, and to undermine the struggle to bring all lines to the fore. It is of great advantage to the SC to carry out its SAF before the principal contradiction in our movement has been resolved, since the SAF resolves that contradiction organizationally in favor of the fusion line. "Indeed, we regard one of the drawbacks of the present day movement to be the absence of open polemics between avowedly different views, the effort to conceal differences on fundamental questions." (Lenin, DEBI)

Party building line must be placed on the immediate agenda of the movement for only its resolution will lay the basis for clarity and political unification in the movement. A crucial aspect of deepening the party building line struggle (and one the Clubs fail to recognize) is to expose the determinant role that the general theoretical framework, or problematic, embodied in each line, plays in the present and future struggle.

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9) It is important to situate these comments on dc in the context a period of separate organizations representing different views on key questions confronting the movement. In a period in which there is a much higher level of unity, reflected in a dc organization which covers more than one local group, minority views from lower bodies would of course be fully represented in meetings of higher bodies. This is actually the way the Party (or any dc organization) is supposed to function, but one would never know it from communists' traditional practice in the past decades.

One's problematic, implicit or explicit, determines both the way one orders and perceives the world (including the party building movement). If the problematic of the SC is different than that of Theoretical Review's, and we assert that it is, then the SC will perceive the nature and tasks of party building in a different way. In the present period, a crucial component to one's problematic is the view taken about the communist movement's theoretical/political legacy, and the present "health" of Marxism-Leninism. (The TR is quite critical of/legacy and sees MLism suffering from a political and theoretical crisis; the Clubs reaffirm our legacy, often uncritically, and see only a political crisis of Marxism; the OC and the fusion forces take the same view of our legacy as the Clubs but have yet to directly address what, if anything, is in crisis.)

It is these differences which underlie, for example, the one movt/two movt debate and the various formulations of the character of our "movement" (anti-"left" tendency(OC); anti-revisionist/anti left-opportunist trend (NNMLC); anti-dogmatist/anti-revisionist communist movement (TR ). The OC contends that the break with "left-opportunism" has been made only on international line. This break, they claim, must be broadened to the other aspects of the "left" line (party building, reform and revolution, etc.) in addition to developing a positive "alternative system of politics" to each such line before we can call it a complete break into two movements, and before the main danger shifts. This flows well from the fusion line since it locates the main deviation at the level of political practice in the workers movement. Hence any line that places an emphasis on theory, or which fails to see the need to "consolidate" the break with leftism (political practice) and join the OC in this venture is declared to be a vestige of left-opportunism in the movement. Hence, this proves that we have not fully broken with left-opportunism (Will the circle ever be unbroken?)

On the other hand the NNMLC and the POT forces both recognize the existence of two movements (or trends--the two have never been distinguished). The Clubs call it the anti-rev./anti-left-opp, trend because they locate the break at the level of line (the revisionist

general line of the CPUSA, and the left-opp general line of the NCM sects; note how, with this formulation, they have narrowed revisionism to a line deviation, not a theoretical one, in order to achieve harmony between the two terms). As proof for this assertion, they cite the fact that the two movements no longer work together as do groups in our trend.

We too recognized that there are two movements but not simply because they don't strategize together. (In fact, at a local level it sometimes happens that NCM groups do work with forces in our movement on community or workplace struggles.) Not developing common strategies with "left" sects may be one manifestation of two movements but it is not very all-encompassing. Rather we base our position on the fact that the two movements have developed their own internal dynamics, dynamics which have now become the prime motive of development for each movement. In other words, while the NCM sects may have an external impact on the development of our movement in the sense of continually forcing us to analyze their incorrect lines and come up with alternatives, our movement's development is determined primarily by the nature of its <sup>own</sup> internal contradictions. The main internal contradiction has been located by the TR as the failure<sup>ed</sup> or inability of our forces to develop the necessary theory to unite MLs and to fuse with the working class. At this time this contradiction is expressed, politically, in the differing party building lines and their varying conceptions of the nature of our theoretical tasks.

Further, in TR P. Costello exposed the essentially revisionist nature of the Three World Theory that the so-called "left-opportunist" sects follow. Hence while left-opp is certainly one deviation of the NCM sects, the key deviation must be located in relation to the main obstacle to our movement: at the theoretical level.--dogmatism and revisionism and their particular historical inter-relation in both left and right forms. (Here we have, for example, the NCM representing the left form, with the fusionists representing the right form in terms of their respective relations to the workers' movement. The main <sup>obstacles</sup> to resolving this contradiction are posed by the empiricism and pragmatism of the fusionists and the failure of the NNMLC to deal in a non-dogmatic way with our theoretic-

*its impact on our*

cal legacy and <sup>^</sup>future. This is why we call it the anti-dogmatist (deviation at the level of theoretical practice)/anti revisionist (not just revisionist line) movement.

Obviously different tasks and theories flow from each position. The screams from the OC that left<sup>op</sup> is "obviously" the key obstacle merely exemplifies their blindness to their problematic and their line (or their cover up) To assert, as the OC does, that we all have unity on left-opportunism being the main danger in the single anti-revisionist movement and that we should therefore start around this issue is to once again impose a unity where none actually exists. What does exist is contradiction--a contradiction which can only begin to be resolved by openly struggling over pb line. Therefore we must seriously question the ability ~~to~~ of the SC to lead an

OC which organizes the struggle around pb line some time in the future. For it is pb line (as embodiments~~xx~~ of underlying theoretical problematics) which will determine the agenda, the tasks, and the quality of the theory we produce. And while one may struggle over this agenda ~~in~~ in the OC, a loss at the hands of a "democratic vote" would set an entirely right revisionist course for our movement.

Had we the space, we could address the links between other political positions and party building lines and problematics. For now, we will leave it with the recognition that just as the OC is attempting to voluntaristically wish away our political fragmentation, it is also trying to wish away the key contradiction which is reinforcing the political fragmentation. The reality of our movement, however, must be confronted directly and politically.

4) Unity over contradiction

"The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts... is the essence... of dialectics." (Lenin, CW, Vol 38 p.359)

"The fundamental cause of the development of a thing is not external but internal; it lies in the contradictoriness within the thing" (Mao, "On Contradiction" SW Vol. p. )

As simple and well known as these phrases are they are not the driving philosophical conceptions behind the OC SC. (10)

10) Errors in philosophy, when not explicit, are ones that manifest themselves in the analyses and practice of an organization. While the SC may deny that what follows is actually the philosophy they hold to, the consistency of the errors which the SC has made reflect

Rather, we can now see that the errors and deviations we have targeted have a root in an implicit philosophy which views unity as primary over contradiction. This view is by no means unusual in the communist movement; nor is it an accident that it has been rejuvenated by the SC.

"The thesis of unity over contradiction... holds a central position in the altered conception of 'dialectical materialism' which emerged (implicitly or explicitly) after the late 1920's" (Bettelheim, 'CS in the USSR, II, p.538) As Bettelheim so correctly notes, this deviation can take both left and right forms. Today, in the world communist movement, we can see the right form exemplified by the Eurocommunists. The Eurocommunists deny (or subordinate) the existence of contradictions between the proletariat, the petty-bourgeoisie, and the left-wing of the bourgeoisie in the struggle for socialism via the "anti-monopoly coalition". They renounce struggle in the name of unity at any price.

The left form of this deviation is probably best exemplified by the modern "originator" of this conception, Stalin, and the Bolshevik Party's political practice from the 20's to the '50's: the imposition of unity through sectarian struggle.

Another political consequence of this conception is the Stalinian notion of the "monolithic party" which leads to a rejection of the correct practice of democratic centralism. While maintaining dc in name, Bettelheim shows how the degenerated practice cultivates only "a formal 'unity'...secured, in an always illusory way, by means of ruthless struggle."

Oddly enough the OC can be seen to incorporate both right and left forms of this deviation. By twisting principle 15 in OC Bulletin #2, the OC shows how even those who think right opportunism is the main danger (in that case, the Guardian) can be in the OC.

Unity (ie organizational unity) can be had no matter what your line. In fact, the entire 18 points are purposely constructed without a pb line so as to include as many forces as possible--- even those with fundamentally different pb strategies.

(10)cont'd) an incorrect, if implicit, general orientation to politics, in addition to the specific errors we have discussed above. We are not asserting in this section that all the errors discussed in the previous sections can be summed up in a philosophical error. We are asserting that an incorrect philosophy held by the SC has the tendency to allow for specific political errors.



More recently, we have witnessed the left form of this deviation (although <sup>we</sup> I would hesitate to call Clay Newlin "ruthless" just yet): The struggle against federationsim without the political basis for the struggle denies the existing contradictions between organizations and operates in an objectively sectarian fashion. And while the OC acknowledges that it has no ~~pxe~~ political basis to be democratic centralist, we have seen the bureaucratic suppression of opposing views and the cultivation of the most superficial unity, characteristic on the Stalinian view of democratic centralism.

Finally there are two other manifestations of this incorrect conception of the relation between unity and contradiction, although they are not perfectly "right" or "left". First, the failure to perceive that it is contradiction internal to the tendency which is determining our development leads them to take a one movement view. In effect, this gives primary emphasis to contradictions external to our movement as our prime impetus for development and, as a corollary, implies the unity (the essential totality) of our tendency. Second, related to this is the denial of the main contradiction within our movement embodied in the struggle over pb line. This denial has so far served only to further bog our movement down in organizational questions and to hasten its degeneration.

While the ~~the~~ <sup>approach</sup> unity over contradiction <sup>^</sup> certainly solved pressing issues very rapidly at the recent Labor Day conference, the result has been that "the unity that was achieved remain(s) formal. It (is) not based on an ideological struggle which could have made for a unity that was profoundly real..." (Bett p.542)

Yet it would be idealist to assert that the OC's bourgeois practices emanate from this incorrect philosophical thesis. Rather this implicit thesis must be seen as partly a response to the fusionists' objective need to consolidate its forces as rapidly as possible in a wide-open pb terrain. At first this took a right form in its attempt to get all forces into an organization in which it had hegemony. The move toward the left form (Sectarianism, bureaucracy, rapid "unity") was given impetus in April of 1979 ~~year~~ when the formation of the rival NNMLC refused to join its "consolidation" efforts. This move undermined the OC's legitimacy, viability, and in some ways, its very reason for existence. Hence, the virulent and demagogic attacks on the NNMLC as the new headquarters of the main danger, left-opportunism, (thus laying the

basis to define them outside the tendency) and the suppression of any views which thwart the effort to unify the OC around the SC's positions.

As we have seen, the form this process has taken has historical roots and the fusion line's (and, for that matter the rectification line's) uncritical devotion to that history leaves it particularly vulnerable to rapid degeneration along the lines of the various parties and sects of the past. (11)

### CONCLUSION

The SAF carries on the SC's organization over politics approach to struggle. In seeking to impose a unity on our movement which does not exist, the SC is actually trying to impose its hegemony. For all its warnings in the Founding Statement, the SC has now declared itself the center of the movement. In reality, it is one circle among many. The SAF must be opposed by all MLists.

However, in opposing the SAF, we must not oppose the goal of overcoming our small circle existence. For all its errors, the SC was addressing itself to a real problem of our movement: disarray and fragmentation. In stead of a campaign to break down local groups organizationally, or by targeting democratic centralism, we must recognize that the political conditions to render local groups obsolete do not yet exist.

Rather, the political conditions for unity must be created. In order to do this, the OC must cease its sectarian attacks on the NNMIC. Joint study and struggle should be initiated at the national and local levels among all party building forces, whether in the OC or out. Principled ideological struggle, especially around party building line, is absolutely crucial for clearing up the confusion of our movement. Thorough ideological struggle must precede organizational unification, and not the other way around.

Our movement is very fragile-- we can either begin to strengthen it politically, or we can shatter it organizationally.

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11) It is here that we can really see the problem in simply "applying" or "reaffirming the principles of MLism. Those principles have not only been subject to much bourgeois degeneration but they function very differently when structured in different ways by varying problematics. For example, all forces in the movement hold to the principles of contradiction and unity, democracy and centralism, etc. Yet the differing emphases one gives to unity and contradiction in their relation to one another, or in the relation between democracy and centralism can lead to vastly different practices; so different, in fact, that one is MList, while the other is a deviation from MLism.