

PROPOSAL FOR BUILDING OUR EMBRYONIC TREND AND ITS IDEOLOGICAL CENTER

Introduction

We are a very small grouping of communists in Los Angeles with a number of years experience organizing in the workingclass here. We are very excited by the developing anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionist trend; both its accomplishments so far and its potential. We have learned a great deal already through our relatively recent participation in it, and look forward to the constant challenge of contributing to its growth.

Like other organizations in the trend, we have developed in a local and national atmosphere dominated by dogmatism and ultraleftism which has thwarted the development of relationships between Marxist-Leninists. We have always had the desire to learn from and share with other organizations, but have done so only in a limited way. In addition to our own errors (which have been significant), dogmatism and ultraleftism have retarded this process in several important ways. First, there was the constant struggle that we and others have had to wage simply to survive each new wave of "party declaration. The disruption to our work caused by this idealism has been immense, affecting not only us, but our beginning contacts in the class as well. Second, was the energy we have had to put into combatting the effects of left opportunism on political struggle at our workplaces. We have often had to break through resistance to communism that came in part from the mistakes of the opportunists. Third, was the ideological confusion that dogmatism wreaked by posing "Marxists-Leninists Unite!" and "Bringing Marxism to the Advanced" as opposing rather than interrelated tasks. In the context of the party declaration trend, the debate served both to continue the illusion of petty bourgeois leftists that they could be the party, and encourage localism among those groups centering their work in the class. The final and gravest way that dogmatism thwarted the relationships between Marxist-Leninists was by misdefining the primary error in our relationship to the masses in the current period. Focusing on right opportunism, without even mentioning dogmatism, caused groups to be over more sectarian with the class. They postponed integration until "pure" lines had been decided upon through book worship and abstract debates, isolated from both the class and the objective situation in the country. The failure to define the main error was part of the inability to grasp fusion between communists and the class as the essence of party-building.

The result of all these errors was to promote a definition of national work that was totally useless to our local work. For years the choice for us seemed to be between local work that was rooted in the class, yet limited in scope; and "national" work which drew us away from the class, focusing on the dogmatists' "burning questions" in a way that produced no useful guidance. Finally now we have the chance to relate to other Marxist-Leninists around our work in the class. We have the chance to define and build national work that is very useful to our local work rather than in contradiction to it. By building off of our local work, using its most advanced experience, and confronting its weaknesses; national work can greatly hasten the development of our fusion with the class, and help us take a qualitative step toward the party. We are anxious to do within our objective limits, our part of the work in correctly building the dialectic between local and national work.

How we got into the trend

We were drawn to the embryonic trend primarily because of the work it had already done in the battle against dogmatism and ultraleftism, which included:

- rejecting sectarianism and ultraleftism in trade union work
- redefining revolutionary leadership to be something earned in relation to the masses, rather than declared in a line
- underlining (by implication and beginning practice) the deep level of integration with both the advanced of the class and the masses, that communists must have to do revolutionary work
- indicating, by resisting fantasy "party" formations, that party-building is a complex difficult and protracted task that in essence involves fusing socialism

with the working class movement

- leading the struggle to grasp dogmatism and its crippling effect on the creation of revolutionary theory that will guide the revolution in the US.
- underlining the need for serious investigation of any political question, beginning with an assessment of objective reality
- rejecting the emotional subjectivism surrounding the Black national question, and pointing to the immense theoretical work still needed in this area

-upholding proletarian internationalism by aiming the main blow against the US bourgeoisie

Even though there is uneven understanding of these struggles as manifestations of dogmatism, and not all groups in the trend participated in them, we nonetheless view them as accomplishments of the anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionist trend. The trend is both the separate stands against left opportunism each of us have taken in our localities as well as the heightening interrelations between us.

We view ourselves as a part of the embryonic trend because of independent elaboration of lines and practice in agreement with the above, specifically: 1) a long standing opposition to sectarianism, to leftists-isolated from the class; 2) our solidifying grasp of dogmatism after a split a year ago primarily due to it; 3) a long standing view of the US as the main enemy and 4) the desire to work more with other anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionists to combat our localism and more seriously address our party building tasks.

Concretely we were drawn into the trend through five important steps. First was a long standing relationship of correspondence and visits with a SUB cadre. The practice of learning from each others advanced experience stimulated an ongoing critique of our localist tendencies. The relationship helped pull us into a more national perspective by convincing us that there were a whole set of organizations who shared anti-sectarian, anti-dogmatist views. The next step was a visit by a representative from the PWOC a year and a half ago. He related some of their advanced experience on important organizational questions, and shared some knowledge of anti-dogmatist work developing around the country. We knew from that visit and the principles of unity that followed that we were in practice a part of an embryonic trend. A subsequent brief study of the ^{Black} national question, including PWOC's "Black Liberation Today--Against Dogmatism on the National Question" drew us further toward the trend. The study helped build ideological unity with the general direction of that investigation and analysis, resulting in a decision to actively work in the trend.

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Swc 97 The fourth step was the party-building conference in Baltimore. It was exciting to finally be exploring critical questions with those who had a similar approach to answering them. We came away understanding that we had a lot to learn in the areas of trade union work and organizational development as party-building tasks. We also were glad we had brought materials summing up our experience with propaganda and agitation with advanced workers. The last step in cementing our relationship to the trend was a visit this summer by El Comite cadre. Their visit increased our understanding of the trend in general by deepening our investigation of one of the leading groups within it. We learned much from their level of integration with the masses, their grasp of dialectics, and their patient ideological work. Out of the above process and our study of the trend's materials, we decided we had enough unity with these organizations to use PWOC's and El Comite's publications with our advanced worker friends.

These steps and our ongoing investigation of the trend's documents led us to continue our participation in the trend by attending the next conference in Detroit focusing on principles of unity. Our respect for the Committee of 5 was growing. We were impressed by their courage to face the situation our movement was in and begin to do something on a national level. We knew that even the beginning step they had taken was a lot of work for groups still young in their own development.

The proposal for an ideological center

We welcomed the fact that the Detroit conference was to include a proposal for an ideological center. We knew that we all badly needed "an institution for our trend

which could play the role of being a center for ideological struggle, theoretical work and the summation of practice." (letter to the trend, C.N. 6/13/77) We were critical of the idealistic and voluntaristic aspects of the proposal we received. But we are encouraged that criticisms of it have caused a regrouping to proceed which more correctly implements its essence. We feel that the initial proposal correctly states that increasing centralization and development of our unity is both desirable and possible, and that a center needs to be built to do that. We feel however that the initial proposal was too abstract, projecting too far in advance of our present development, concentrating too much on what we want, and too little on concrete thinking on how to achieve it. In failing to start from where we were actually at, it failed to present a concrete proposal for how to move forward. In addition we feel the process of coming up with a proposal should have actively involved more organizations in the trend. We see the present process as a ready for both of these errors.

Out of El Comite's decision not to sign the initial proposal, we wondered what the relationships between the five organizations were. We vaguely knew of a series of conferences undertaken in part to build unity between them, but we knew little of the results. We also knew very little of the initial steps of cooperation between the five. We still see the need for this initial history to be summed up by the five and put out to the whole trend (and to any new organizations joining in the future). It is our view that we all have the responsibility to actively build the trend. Therefore we must all know how it began in order to more accurately assess its strengths and weaknesses, and from this develop the correct steps toward centralization.

We had both support and criticism of El Comite's views on the proposal. We agreed that the discrepancy between the assessment of the trend's weaknesses and the ambitiousness of the proposal was too great to ignore. At the same time, we felt that El Comite's underestimation of the trend's unity and the centralization possible if developed correctly, meant that they too failed to present a concrete plan for moving forward. We could not tell what organizational line they were arguing for in the trend's development, but disagreed that there could be no ideological center before the party. While the party is eventually the ideological center, other centers can and will be built prior to it, as Iskra and our own experience teach us. It seems that El Comite incorrectly saw in the proposal a request to transfer primary authority to a center. While the proposal was overambitious about organizational centralization for this time; we feel that it is possible to increase our unity and centralize more ideological and political struggle, while still maintaining each organization's essential independence. We feel that El Comite has played a generally good role in the trend so far. We hope they will continue; grasping more strongly their role in building the trend, as well as learning from it and training their cadre through it.

In conclusion, we are encouraged that the Committee of Five has responded well to the criticisms of the initial proposal. We support their effort to organize a way to better involve the masses of the trend in developing the ideological center. The study bibliography included in the latest step was useful to our thinking and a good example of how to ideologically approach our organizational questions.

Develop a Plan - Center it on Party-Building

We think it is correct to call our trend an embryonic trend. Like an embryo, it must be carefully nurtured and strengthened in order for it to develop to its maximum potential. Concrete steps must be taken by each organization to develop it into a trend with definite viewpoints on all major issues.

The primary contradiction to solve in building the trend has been correctly identified as the development of an ideological center. And the primary contradiction to solve in building the center is the development of a plan based on a sound analysis of the objective state of forces in the trend, country, and to some extent the world.

to the many-sided. (On Practice, Mao)

We believe that this should be a guiding ideological principle in building both the trend and the center. It means that we must correctly assess at each historical moment what the state of our forces is and then what next step of centralization is possible and necessary. Having this principle uppermost in our minds at all times will help combat the idealism and impatience we are all prone to because of the urgency of our tasks. It means we must always devise the next step by looking at both what we want and where we are at.

We must also use this principle in approaching our ideological struggle together. The unity in the trend is embryonic, undeveloped and untested by serious struggles between us. We must always summarize the unity we do have as an introduction to struggles over unresolved questions; following the principle of unity, criticism, unity. We feel that the conferences sponsored by the Committee of Five over the last year had dual purposes; ~~first to investigate the views in the trend, and second to centralize our most advanced~~ understandings. We think that each conference should have been summarized in a timely fashion by the organization(s) sponsoring it. The reports should have covered what issues were addressed at each conference, what two line struggles occurred, what new unity was reached (even if unformalized), what questions were not resolved or addressed, and what was learned in general about the trend and its organizations through their participation in the conference and the documents they distributed. If possible, we still feel some sort of summaries should be done. Any future conferences ought to be summarized in this fashion. New organizations joining the trend should be given these documents tracing the development of unity in the trend.

As Marxists we know that knowledge develops unevenly from the shallower to the deeper. Given the particularities of our histories it is only natural that there will be uneven development within the trend and within organizations.

Raise the people's ideological level step by step. It is impossible for all people to have the same ideological level and political consciousness. Therefore there is a difference between the advanced, the medium, and the backward. The majority must be taken into consideration when ideological education is being carried on. And the method of education most acceptable to the majority must be used so that they gradually are raised to an advanced level. (Based on experiences of the PLA, by Hongqi, 1966)

It is our experience that where uneven development is extreme, it is a big obstacle to the development of deeper understanding and unified activity. A weak theoretical grasp of a question can lower effective political struggle and hide differences in principle. We think that learning from advanced experience is one of the key ways to lessen uneven development. This educational work is crucial because our center must be built on firm agreement over ideological line.

Learning from Advanced Experience Unity is built by centralizing the most advanced ideas and experiences, and popularizing them throughout the trend. It is only through the creation of a stronger center that the principle of learning from advanced experience can seriously be put into practice. The center can direct us to "carefully seek out the advanced experience of the masses in a locality, sum it up and popularize it" (On Summing Up Experience, Peking Review, 3/21/69). It is the heart of the dialectic between local and national work, and part of the struggle to put ideological work first in party building. Summing up Experience is crucial to our theoretical work of developing a Marxism for our specific conditions.

Since a characteristic of dogmatism is its inability to learn philosophy from living reality, the dogmatists are bound to fail to learn from the most advanced aspects of that reality. The dogmatists are unable to summarize and popularize the advanced experience which marks the direction of the development of a process. They are unable to lead because they cannot foresee.

We know from history that learning from advanced experience is a key principle of

Next Steps - Expand the Steering Committee, Create a Journal, Deepen Principles of Unity

We see three concrete steps that are needed now. First we must expand the steering committee, as the work of building the center is more than the Committee of 5 can handle. They should guide this process; recommending from their experience so far, who it should include and how it might function.

Second the new center must develop an internal theoretical journal to aid ideological centralization and development. The new steering committee will have to come up with a plan for the journal as one of its first tasks. We think "that an organ having a definite tendency will prove quite suitable both for the purpose of expressing various viewpoints and for comradely polemics between contributors" (Lenin, CW Vol IV p. 327) We think the journal is necessary to deepen the principles of unity. At the same time, while the principles as they stand are sufficient to start the journal, they must be strengthened in order to sustain it.

Third, we need to deepen the principles of unity in order to give us a clearer understanding of who should be members of the trend. The focus should be on deepening the principles on dogmatism, the international situation, and party building.

Deepen the struggle around dogmatism. If we do not grasp dogmatism strongly and uproot it, it will crop up again in new forms. The Chinese experience in the years 1927-1935 is instructive. Three times ultra left lines re-emerged because the root error of dogmatism was not sufficiently grasped and destroyed. We must deepen our ideological grasp of dogmatism by clearly defining it; grasping how it functions; by understanding how it can grow on the soil of empiricism, how it relates to sectarianism, and what methods we can use to combat it.

"There is great unevenness in understanding among those who share an anti-dogmatist perspective. Some, while they reject dogmatism on all points, have yet to bring that rejection to a positive expression. They can critique dogmatism but they have yet to provide an adequate alternative. Others break with dogmatism on only one or two points and share common assumptions on the remaining ones. And many oppose dogmatism on instinct rather than analysis; their anti-dogmatism is necessarily superficial and uncritical." ("Draft Resolution on the Struggle for the Party", PWOC) As part of rectifying this situation, we need to analyze the role dogmatism has played in the recent history of the movement. We must know concretely how it has functioned, what it has cost us, and how it has been combatted.

With this analysis we must arm ourselves for the fight against dogmatism. It is a stubborn enemy and will not be defeated without repeated battles. Dogmatism has enjoyed hegemony over the party building movement for years, fostered by ^{the} sectarianism that has plagued our revolutionary movement. In most cities dogmatists are dominant, better organized and consolidated; able to spread their claptrap easily through national networks. We must turn this situation around, forcing dogmatism on the defensive, and finally isolating it. Only a national center can direct the battle against dogmatism successfully; through ideological struggle, centralization, and education.

Guardian Solidify our international line---The U.S. is the main enemy. An examination of real events in the world today will clearly show that the U.S. bourgeoisie is the main enemy of the world's people. However, there are forces within the anti-revisionist movement who are willing to collaborate with U.S. imperialism. In order to consolidate our break with dogmatism and revisionism on the international question and fulfill our responsibilities as proletarian internationalists, we must soon produce a major document arguing our line decisively. It must make clear why we see the U.S. as the main enemy, and how that view is critical to building a new communist party in the era of imperialism. It must define the special responsibility we have to aid the struggles of those nations directly oppressed by U.S. imperialism. It must outline what our approach to socialist countries should be. It must suggest a beginning approach to investigating the nature and role of the Soviet

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Union internationally. All of this must be done in the closest connection to our practical tasks as proletarian internationalists in the heart of the imperialist empire. We must clearly summarize how our line differs in practice from that of the collaborationists.

Centralize and Deepen the Party Building Principle. It is no accident that our understanding of dogmatism took a qualitative leap during the party declaration trend. As we saw the results of dogmatism played out in ultra left acts toward the masses, we understood the need to oppose party declaration in order to build the party. We feel the trend's central unity is around party building. Given that party building is our central task during the period, we think that unity around our approach to that task must be deepened and further centralized. We are not clear of all the work involved, but think it must begin with 1) a strong summary of the party building conference in Baltimore, 2) a close study of party building papers within the trend, especially PWOC'S, SUB'S and El Comite's, and 3) deepening the struggle with Guardian around its party building line.

Building an ideological center involves a struggle for clearly defining who should be a member of the trend based on unity with ideological, organizational and political lines. The Guardian does not agree that fusion is the essence of partybuilding. Although they oppose party declaration in words, they uphold it in practice. We think that the Guardian has played an important role in the revolutionary movement and continues to provide leadership around proletarian internationalism. However we feel the Guardian must do a thorough self-criticism of its position on partybuilding, or leave the trend.

We hope that the above thinking helps in the struggle to create an ideological center for our trend. We are anxious to read the proposals from other groups.

Develop the Trend---Build the Ideological Center!

The Los Angeles Work Group
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