

PWOC response: Build a unitary spirit

by CLAY NEWLIN

As a result of two articles in recent *Organizers*, Irwin Silber has threatened the PWOC with a split. According to Silber we have been guilty of "clouding over genuine points of political difference between the *Guardian* and the PWOC", and have even begun to go over "the delicate borderline" where ideological differences (can) be fully and honestly aired while maintaining respect for the organizational integrity of the *Guardian*.

Silber objects to two "charges" reputedly made by us. First, we have criticized the *Guardian* for "an attempt at hegemonism in the party-building movement", and second, we have argued that they advocate "an even-handed view of Eurocommunism."

In our opinion, the question of Eurocommunism is only tangential. The real source of Silber's irritation (and his threat of a split) is our article criticizing the *Guardian's* call for a network of Clubs. As Silber interprets our criticism, we object to the *Guardian's* attempt to develop "a more permanent support structure", to build a series of *Guardian* Clubs whose major activities will be "supporting and building the *Guardian*" by helping to expand circulation, gather news, and develop a stable financial base. And further, that we oppose the *Guardian's* efforts to use the Clubs to strengthen the party-building movement and our emerging anti-dogmatist and anti-revisionist trend.

Nothing could be further from the truth. If the Clubs had been initially presented in the same modest tone in which they are now being discussed, and if the *Guardian* really views them in the way that it is presently putting them forward, then we support them without reservation.

The problem is that the *Guardian* has backed away from its original conception of the Clubs as introduced in the "party-building supplement". In that supplement, under the heading "Organizing for the New Party," the *Guardian* advanced its call for Clubs immediately after emphasizing that in the rest of our trend "localism and small circle mentality dominate", that our forces are characterized by the "absence of an organizational center", and that "a serious (emphasis CN) party-building effort... must in fairly rapid order take on a national character, linking up Marxist-Leninists on the basis of ideological unity and common organizational form." The discussion of the Clubs laid great stress on the fact that they would be "linked together in a network with a national political newspaper as their focus." (*On Building the New Communist Party*, June, 1977)

At the same time the *Guardian* had not a word to say about the role of the existing anti-dogmatist and anti-revisionist organizations in the party-building process. From the treatment these forces received, one would have to assume that they had no role to play whatsoever — unless, of course, they joined the Clubs.

We viewed this whole development against the backdrop of our endeavor to engage the *Guardian* in a united effort to create a single ideological center for our emerging trend. Repeated attempts were made to encourage the *Guardian* to participate in the development of a common plan, only to have them refuse without offering a satisfactory explanation.

To justify their first refusal, the *Guardian* raised their feeling "that some of the organizations participating underestimated the importance of the *Guardian*" and pointed to two trivial incidents as examples. We said at that time that while a few organizations may not fully appreciate the *Guardian's* contribution to the development of our trend, all representatives were in agreement that their participation should be encouraged in every possible way. We also pointed out that the PWOC representative had argued vigorously for the *Guardian's* involvement.

Nevertheless, it was not our position then — nor is it now — that the litmus test of an organization's political maturity is its attitude toward the *Guardian*.

The *Guardian* still refused to participate. We requested that they put their reasons in writing, specifically demonstrating how their differences prevented a common effort to develop our trend. They did not do so.

The second time the *Guardian* refused to participate, their differences with the Potomac Socialist Organization on party-building and with the PWOC on the international question were given as reasons. Since neither position was a basis of unity for involvement and there were other organizations participating that had similar disagreements, we again told the *Guardian* that we did not feel they had a principled basis for not joining us. Again we requested that they put their position in writing — and with the same results.

ADVANCE THE TREND

In the meantime we pursued our attempt to develop a common plan for advancing the anti-dogmatist trend, making certain to keep the *Guardian* informed. The *Guardian* never made a single statement on how they viewed this plan. It may have been their perspective, as Silber says, that the "plan as it was unfolding seemed to lead inevitable toward a form of federationism in party-building," but it is not true that this fear was "expressed many times over". In fact, to our knowledge, and our representative was the *Guardian* contact — it was never raised even once!

Given the refusal of the *Guardian* to join in a collective effort to develop a single center for our trend on the one hand, and its manner of presenting the plan for Clubs on the other, it seems to us that it was a fair characterization to say that the *Guardian's* plan amounted to "an attempt... to set itself up as a center for the Marxist-Leninist trend."

Furthermore, it is clear, given the context, that we did mean "a" center and not "the" center. We interpreted the *Guardian's* plan as an attempt to set itself up as a competing national center to the ideological center that we and others were pursuing.

Silber interprets our criticism as a "charge of hegemonism". We do not. To our mind hegemonism would involve an attempt to dominate the development of the party-building movement.

On the other hand, quite frankly, we did not feel that the way the *Guardian* approached our efforts to develop a genuine center exemplified an attitude of striving for the best interests of our embryonic trend. On the contrary, it tended to show an excessive concern with the place and influence of the *Guardian*.

Unfortunately, similar narrowness is apparent in Silber's article in several places. Consider, for example, his discussion of the likelihood of the development of a single national center. "Given the particular circumstances of our own movement," he writes, "it would seem inevitable that several 'centers' would emerge."

Then Silber states, without offering a shred of evidence, that the PWOC is "obviously at the center of one such 'center'." This, in itself, is a jaundiced view. As we have stated repeatedly, only the coming together of a broad range of forces in our trend on a principled basis can create a genuine center. While the PWOC did initiate an effort to develop such a center, we are no more at its 'center' than any other organization; it has been a collective process from the very beginning.

Nevertheless, after implying that the PWOC is setting itself up as a center, Silber proceeds to point out the *Guardian's* "differences" with the PWOC and the organizations "associated" with it. But he makes no assessment of the depth of these disagreements and why they prevent a common effort to create a single center.



"The *Guardian* should adopt a more unitary spirit. It should prove its dedication to the interests of our emerging trend by asserting its commitment in principle to the development of a single ideological center and its willingness to join in a common effort to develop one."

The clear implications of Silber's comments are: many centers are inevitable; the PWOC is setting itself up as a center, why should the *Guardian* be criticized for taking steps to set itself up as a center?

Perhaps it is inevitable that several centers will develop in our trend given its disparate ideological character. However, those who place the unification of our movement at the forefront of their efforts will, in principle, strive for the development of a single center. They will only support the creation of distinct and competing centers in cases where clear differences in principle make it inevitable.

Those guided by the circle spirit, however, will attempt to constitute themselves into a "center" just to advance the position of their own circle. Most likely, they will use the argument about the "inevitability of several centers" to cover their opportunism. One would assume that given the history of the party-building movement, Silber would be more in touch with the dangers of the circle spirit!

DANGERS OF CIRCLE SPIRIT

A second indication of narrowness is Silber's treatment of our remark that "the most developed of our forces are organized into local organizations and collectives." Silber removes this phrase from its original context and interprets it to mean that, in our opinion, "the membership of *Guardian* Clubs will be made up of less developed individuals." And, as if to ice the cake, he adds, "They (Club members) are hardly a group of political leftovers and misfits."

Anyone who looks up our statement about "the most developed of our forces" will see that it has nothing to do with individuals. On the contrary, we are pointing out that local organizations have done the most to address our pressing theoretical tasks and have pushed farthest toward fusing Marxism-Leninism with the movements of the working class and the oppressed nationalities. From a Marxist-Leninist point of view it would hardly seem controversial to hold that an organization is a higher manifestation of a movement than an individual!

The impact of Silber's defensive distortion of our statement can only be to create the impression that the PWOC sneers at members of the Clubs. It can only serve to discourage Club members from striving for a common effort to develop a single center for our trend.

Silber's exaggerated emphasis on our differences around the question of Eurocommunism provides an additional example of a narrow mentality. It would seem to us that our disagreements on the question are at best peripheral to our discord over the much more vital question of the development of a genuine center. And yet while Silber accuses us of succumbing "to the temptation to score a cheap shot" on the issue he devotes substantial space to discussing it himself.

Since Silber distorts our disagreements, we will take up the question briefly. Anyone who reads our article will see that the substance of our differences is whether or not the Eurocommunist "independence" from the Soviet Union is "positive" and has "a progressive political content." (*Guardian Viewpoint*, Oct. 12, 1977)

Silber chooses not to address this question. First he accuses the PWOC of failing to "appreciate the reactionary nature of Soviet hegemonism." Then he argues that to make the point that the "new element in the process (of the development of Eurocommunism)... is independence from the Soviet Union" is "hardly being soft on Eurocommunism."

Since we ourselves maintain that the "distinctive feature" of Eurocommunism is its independence from the Soviets, we could hardly be arguing that to make this point is to be "soft on Eurocommunism". Given his handling of our disagreements on this question, we find it ironic that Silber should contend that we are the ones guilty of "clouding over genuine points of difference between the *Guardian* and the PWOC."

A narrow approach is also apparent in Silber's perspective on ideological struggle. He writes, "It (the alleged charge of hegemonism) tends to cast doubt on the political integrity of the *Guardian* and could, therefore, weaken our efforts to

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from
the
other
side
of the
wall



"We Need Help from the People of the World

Many remember the case of Joann Little, the Black woman who killed a prison guard in self defense. The treatment meted-out to Joann Little is by no means unique as the following letter from a white woman prisoner testifies: (The letter has been edited for reasons of space.)

To whom it may concern:

We need help from the people of the world. Since I have been in Arkansas me

and two juvenile girls were raped in the county jail by the Sheriff and his deputies. Then I was sent to prison at Pine Bluff.

The warden told me and the two other women they would kill us because we supposedly helped kill an Arkansas police officer. I didn't believe it at the time. I thought they were trying to scare us. But I believe it now. Because I have been cussed out, beaten, drugged up, tortured and threatened to be killed.

You wouldn't believe what is going on here. Once a male guard beat me up just because I asked him not to put his hands on me. They took me to have x-rays because my face was all swelled up. Again I was beaten by Major Campbell and several male guards. One of them kicked me in the head with his cowboy boots. Then he took the spurs off his boots and raked them on my back. He said: "I have rode a horse and bull but never have I rode a bitch before." Then they gave me pills and I passed out. Again I was beaten and my finger got broken and my eyes blackened. I have been beaten so bad at times I prayed and wished I was dead.

A while ago the feds gave them money to build a new prison but its just a bigger torture chamber. We still get beaten and drugged up. I tried to kill myself because I couldn't take it any more. Now they say they have me where they want me. They say they can kill me and make it look like a suicide and people will believe I killed myself because of my record.

Its not just me. One woman was beaten unconscious. Another woman got a fractured rib. Major Lindalyn Campbell is the leader of the beatings and torture. If the other guards refuse to go along with her they get fired.

So I'm pleading for help from the people

of the world. If we don't get help soon alot more inmates will be beaten or tortured. So please help us prisoners before someone gets killed or badly hurt. The officers and Major Campbell are not going to change unless they are forced to. Write:

Mr. Robert Faulkner
U.S. Magistrate Office
Box 969
Little Rock, Arkansas 72203

Also write to the governor, David Pryor in Little Rock and Judge Smith Henley, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Arkansas, Pine Bluff Division, Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

A Sister in a Struggle
Pine Bluff, Ark.



LWS/cpf

Women Struggle Against Reaction

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Of course women are not accepting these setbacks without fighting back, and there are numerous examples of individual victories. Major sex discrimination cases have been won, such as the suit against the *Reader's Digest*. Local 1971 of the United Mine Workers elected that union's first woman president. Major demonstrations have been organized in defense of the right to abortion.

A serious drive is being organized to extend the time allotted for the ratification of the ERA beyond the present March '79 deadline. Hospital workers, teachers, and clerical workers continue their determined push to organize themselves into unions. In Wisconsin, a judge was recalled and a woman elected in his place when the judge practically condoned rape because of the "provocative" nature of women's clothing styles.

Perhaps the Houston conference best illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of the current fightback. There is no doubt that the determination and spirit necessary to win were present among the many women there. In fact, the delegates were sufficiently representative of the nation's women to push through a fairly progressive platform. The weak-kneed anti-discrimination phrases proposed were replaced by a firm resolution condemning the double oppression of national minority women, and calling for affirmative action to correct it. The right to abortion on demand was affirmed, despite organized efforts on the part of the Catholic and Mormon churches and other reactionary forces to block such a step.

But the significant weakness of the conference was that it was not tied to any ongoing and strong grass roots organization. It had only the very weakest links to organized labor, and although a number

of unions have given lip service to the demands of women, few have taken steps to translate their words into action.

The movement for the democratic rights of women continues to be divided and disorganized. Its leadership is still overwhelmingly dominated by petty bourgeois and bourgeois forces, and it is politically bound to the existing two parties, parties which have shown over the years their disregard for the needs of women.

The future of the movement for the democratic rights of women depends on our ability to turn this situation around. Increasing numbers of rank and file workers are beginning to understand the central character of the struggle against sexism, and growing sections of the women's movement are dedicating themselves to solving the problems of the masses of working class women.

As these two movements become linked, it will become possible to transform our struggle from a defensive one to one in which the joined forces of the workers' movement, the women's movement, and the movements for the rights of national minorities join together in a mighty attack.

PWOC Responds

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develop a sound material base. . . let the ideological debate continue — but this is an organizational attack that could have serious consequences."

It would seem that Silber has no problem with general ideological struggle but demands that we keep silent on the *Guardian's* organizational efforts. Now the PWOC certainly has no desire to weaken the material base of the *Guardian*. Given our own modest resources and financial burden, we have done what we could to provide the *Guardian* with needed support — including sustaining, writing articles, and limited fundraising. We have repeatedly, in public and in private, urged other organizations to do the same. And it is our intention to continue doing so.

However, if we believe that the *Guardian* is not behaving in a manner which best advances the future of our Party, we will also continue to feel compelled to blow the whistle. As much as we desire to support the *Guardian*, we cannot submerge necessary criticism just because it might undermine respect for the *Guardian's* political integrity.

One final example. Silber says, "we have no desire for yet one more 'split' in a Marxist-Leninist movement already incredibly fractionalized." And then he talks about how we have begun to go over the borderline.

In our view it is a sign of maturity in politics that one does not go around threatening other organizations with a "split" every time they raise a criticism you do not like — even if you feel that it is an unprincipled one. Those dipped in the circle spirit may take one more split lightly, but Marxist-Leninists will only support a split that is based on serious and unavoidable differences in principle.

The *Guardian* should adopt a more unitary spirit. It should prove its dedication to the interests of our emerging trend by forthrightly asserting its commitment in principle to the development of a single ideological center and, in addition, its willingness to join in a common effort to develop one. If the *Guardian* chooses to take this course, it can silence our criticism of its original plan for the Clubs without having to threaten "yet one more 'split' "!!

Photos by Veronica Silver



The International Women's Year Conference held recently in Houston reflected both strengths and weaknesses of the women's movement. A strong delegation of national minority women struggled for — and won — a firm resolution against racism.