

REPORT ON BPC-LOM POLAND FORUM, 11/80

Approximately 100 people came to the forum, which was a good turnout given the lateness of the planning for the forum, and LOM's insistence that it be open only to the trend, thus limiting the type of publicity we could use. We would have preferred an open event. The audience included LOM and BPC in full force; one BOC member tending a lit table; several CC independents; CLP members; FUL members; participants from the local MLEPs; ^{City Life;} and members of two study groups we're in contact with. In addition, John Trinkl covered the event for the Guardian. Many members of the audience were known from their participation in local community and labor groups.

IS gave the opening speech, and it was no less vulgar than the printed material from LOM on Poland. IS also gave the rebuttal. The three LOM panelists were poorly prepared and collectively answered only three of the six questions posed, the other three being answered by IS.

RD gave our opening speech. It was well-written and well-delivered, given RD's lack of experience in such tasks. It was much more dense and challenging than IS's speech, and it was very polemical toward the LOM position. It was received well by the audience. Our only subsequent self-criticism on the content of the speech was that it needed more economics and a less-cryptic treatment of Polish nationalism. The extensive effort that went into the writing of the speech paid off.

Our rebuttal was given by GH, and it struck a very responsive chord in the audience in pointing out LOM's defeatism in the face of revisionism: "We have to defend socialism (the Polish government) despite its flaws." The presentation was choppy due to nervousness, but the political points brought out were excellent.

The same was true of the three-minute summary, despite our lack of preparation for it - IS slipped it into the program at the last minute.

The Q/A period showed up our lack of experience more than any other section of the program. Our biggest error here was our failure to use the Q/A period to broaden our line of argument and sharpen our polemic against LOM's line. Several examples illustrate this failure: 1) A representative from a non-Leninist group close to several BPC members made a very polemical attack on LOM, pointing out their lack of inclusion of the working class in the building of socialism, and attacked it by positing the bureaucracies in Eastern Europe as the new oppressor class. After IS responded, we passed up our option to respond. The reason was that we didn't want to unite with the questioner's "new class" analysis, and we

didn't want to diminish his polemical impact on the LOM line. This analysis of the situation was basically correct. What we failed to do was use the three minutes to either deepen the questioner's polemic in light of IS's answer, or extending an independent critique of IS's answer. We failed to see that we didn't have to directly address the "new class" issue. A second example was that in one answer we used less than one minute of the allotted three. The answer was sufficient, but again we could've used the remainder of the time to clarify a less-clear aspect of our position, like the role of the Catholic Church in the Polish workers' movement.

Still, the extensive preparation of our panelists made for a good showing, especially compared to the LOM panelists. We had fully written answers for three of the five questions we answered, and partial answers for the other two.

The audience reaction was very favorable to our position. This was due to the clear incorrectness of the LOM line, and the lack of consolidation of local LOM supporters around their Poland line in particular, and around the LOM Editorial Board in general. Two unconfirmed comments from IS were telling. He admitted to a comrade on the West Coast that he had lost the debate, placing the blame on the Boston LOM committee; and he told a Boston comrade that it was obvious LOM didn't have an adequate theory of the role of the working class in building socialism. There were reports that several MLEP participants were won over to our line. All our contacts were favorably impressed, if slightly lost at times. Trinkl was also impressed.

The effect of the forum experience on the BPC was excellent. It was really the first major public task the BPC had undertaken in the Boston area, and the collective felt we did a good job. The cadre who participated in the preparing of the speech and the answers to questions were very charged by the experience; and the collective as a whole was galvanized, becoming very consolidated around our line, and well-prepared by the studies done of PC's Poland article in IR 19. The beneficial political effects of the participation in the forum illustrate the importance of such line struggle in both the political consolidation of the collective, and the development of political line. We are now aware of some of the areas in which more clarity is needed: Bukharin's role and the struggle over collectivization in the USSR; the question of the restoration of capitalism; and a clarification of the correct aspects of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's anti-revisionism.

The other noteworthy benefit of the forum was the participation of IB on our panel. She felt well-prepared, and answered two questions. She felt it had been a positive step in the combatting of uneven development within the Executive Committee, and within the collective.

Implications for the party-building movement:

As far as the BPC's role in the party-building movement in the local area, the Poland forum made clear the value of active intervention in the movement. This by no means implies that we should jump at whatever opportunity presents itself; the Poland forum was somewhat special in that we already had a complete and theoretically sound line, thanks to PC and the Tucson comrades. But what is implied is that we will now be looking for appropriate opportunities to intervene rather than taking a reactive and defensive approach.

We also came to recognize the importance of distinguishing between building the BPC and building the influence of PoT. The forum was a good intervention, because we took on the ideological struggle to win people to the PoT line, and we did it fairly effectively. Whether or not our intervention generates any recruits to the BPC out of the contacts we brought to the forum is of secondary importance and is not the yardstick by which we should measure such interventions. The two approaches are in no way synonymous, and the confusion of the two will result in the placing of our local P-B activities over our national P-B responsibilities, at the expense of the latter.

It is apparent that LOM needs us as their opposition, given that the GCIC forces won't talk to them. While it is clear that the political differences with LOM are immense, their willingness to take us on should not be ignored. It would be sectarian to refuse further struggle with LOM because of their acceptance of the Stalinian deviation; rather, we should use their openness to struggle as a means to advance our arguments on the Stalinian deviation.

It seems as though PoT is going to be the standard-bearer within the trend for the Cultural Revolution and Bukharin's role in the int. communist movement (Maoists and Bukharinists). We are alone in talking about combatting economism, so we should begin to prepare to advance our qualified defense of both positions.

The forum highlighted the extent to which LOM's line on organization (the "multiplicity of individuals") was taking its toll in terms of the failure of the Boston LOM committee and their supporters to politically consolidate around the Poland line. Their lack of unity around the position was evident at the forum; more evident still was their lack of theoretical preparation. This was in sharp contrast to our own high level of unity and extensive theoretical preparation of all BPC cadre. So the rapid consolidation of the LOM Editorial Board seems to be leaving many LOM supporters in the dust. This is especially apparent in Boston, where the rectification line is historically weak. The LOM committee is simply falling in line behind the national leadership, scarcely able to defend their positions. This limits the value of struggle between the BPC and LOM locally.

It was abundantly clear - as it has been for awhile - that the fusionists have effectively written us out of the trend. Though they were offered a ten-minute slot at the forum to present their position and ask a question, they sent only one person to staff the lit table. It's highly doubtful they even announced it to their membership. Their abstentions will continue to define BPC-OC relations.

Taken as a whole, these implications for relations with the trend forces illustrate the effective dissolution of the trend as a politically defined form. PoT forces are very limited in positive ways in which we can interact with either LOM or the OC. One implication of this is that PoT must begin to build support in the broader left, particularly among non-Leninists. Unfortunately, the narrowness of the audience limited the outreach we could do to those forces, with the important exception of City Life. As we reach out to the non-Leninists we should also be clear that our line of argument will shift somewhat: away from the attack on the Stalinian deviation, and toward an argument for the resurrection of Leninism. We must avoid the danger of building unity on terrain outside Marxism-Leninism.

The forum did serve, however, to lay the basis for extending and deepening our relations with City Life, the HN study group, and the SF study group, as well as several individual contacts, none of whom are affiliated with any of the three P-B lines current in the trend. Such working relationships will be the basis for winning these individuals to PoT.

Also important was the contact we made with the Guardian through John Trinkl. He showed great interest in our line and indicated he would consult PoT representatives when he is looking for comments from left groups on any particular issue. We also hope to make greater use of the "Opinion and Analysis" column in the future.

Of course, the clearest P-B implication from the Poland forum is that we can in no way expect to reach unity with the LOM Editorial Board in the foreseeable future. PoT has always been clear that the rectifiers are theoretically mired within the economism of the Stalinian deviation. Never before has this produced such a clearly incorrect political line in the rectification camp; never before has PoT had such political disunity with the rectifiers. Given the consolidation of the LOM Editorial Board around such incorrect politics, we can only anticipate the disagreements PoT will have with future LOM political lines, in party-building line as well as international line.