



LINE OF MARCH

P.O. Box 2729, Oakland, California 94602

Theoretical Review
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Dear comrades,

We are writing to you at this time because we believe that it has become necessary to discuss openly and forthrightly the sharpening contention between Theoretical Review and Line of March.

This contention is, in our opinion, of a qualitatively different character than the line struggle between fusion (centered in the leadership of the PWOC and the OCIC) and rectification (centered in the editorial board of Line of March) which shaped the life of the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend until recently. That contention involved serious differences over party building line, but it occurred between forces who generally shared a common view of the content and historical legacy of Marxism-Leninism. By contrast, the contention between our two centers is rooted in much more basic ideological and philosophical differences concerning the very nature of Marxism and the history of its development. In our view, it is in essence a struggle between Marxism-Leninism and the idealist and politically eclectic body of thought which has come to be termed Althusserian Marxism.

Clearly, this contention between Theoretical Review and Line of March is having an important impact on the life of our entire trend. Because we believe that the future of communist politics in the U.S. presently depends upon the ability of this trend to mature into a genuine vanguard party, we are concerned that this significant contention be conducted in a manner that advances the trend as a whole. It is from this vantage point that we offer a number of criticisms of Theoretical Review's objectively irresponsible approach to this contention; we also put forward a concrete proposal in an attempt to reverse this negative course.

In our view, the Theoretical Review consistently demonstrates little if any concern for the development of the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend as a whole. In fact, it appears to us that TR is actually in the process of abandoning the trend altogether, lingering within it for the moment largely for want of a better place to settle and mainly to recruit whatever forces it can on the way to "greener pastures" elsewhere on the "broader left."

The evidence to substantiate this conclusion appears on a number of levels and has been increasingly visible for some time. To begin with, TR-affiliated individuals and groups have stated recently both privately and publicly that they question the very existence of the trend. TR supporters have increasingly boycotted Line of March sponsored trend forums, study projects, and discussion groups; meanwhile TR organizes no such activities open to the trend as a whole, and in a number of cases has specifically excluded Line of March supporters from the limited discussions they do organize. In the few areas where TR-affiliates are actively involved in mass work, they have often declined to caucus on a trend basis concerning intervention in the class struggle. As well, it is increasingly clear TR representatives in various cities place equal or greater priority on discussions with various Trotskyist and Social-Democratic forces than they do with trend forces; this latter tendency is indicated most starkly by TR's recent promotional mailing of the Trotskyist journal Against the Current to its entire subscription list.

This irresponsible approach to developing the trend was particularly

highlighted by TR's sectarian attack upon and boycott of the recent trend-wide Conference on Racism and National Oppression. TR justified its stance based on the assertion that any trend-wide activity initiated by Line of March which did not from the beginning include other trend forces such as themselves or where Line of March supporters had the preponderance of influence had to be inherently sectarian. With this flimsy excuse, TR chose to abstain from--and in fact to attack and misrepresent--the trend's most comprehensive effort to date to address the question of racism, an effort which was at the same time a key step in fostering some cohesion to the trend in the aftermath of the fiasco of the OCIC Campaign Against White Chauvinism. Theoretical Review's stand toward participating in the actual political life of the trend cannot be separated from TR's overall policy toward the underlying philosophical and theoretical struggle which lies at the heart of the differences between the TR and the bulk of other forces in the trend. Essentially, this policy is to avoid frank and open debate over Althusserian Marxism as such within the trend.

We do not mean to imply that the Theoretical Review has hidden its allegiance to the ideas of Althusser, Bettelheim, and Poulantzas. It has not. At the same time, TR has not pursued the principled course of placing Althusserian Marxism as a totality before the trend, explaining what is new and distinct about it from the views of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and attempting to win the trend to Althusserian Marxism as a comprehensive school of thought. Instead, TR has put forward various conclusions of Althusserian Marxism, consistently--and erroneously--implying that these views of the Althusserians were identical with Marx and Lenin's. TR's leading figure, Paul Costello, has even resorted to doctoring quotations from Lenin in an attempt to accomplish this task. (See "The Sound and Fury of Paul Costello" in Line of March Vol.1, No.5. While the tone of this article has been criticized by TR-supporters, TR has remained conspicuously silent regarding the substance of the criticisms advanced in that piece.)

In addition, TR has all too often framed the differences involved in such struggles as essentially between those who are "critical", "open-minded" and interested in "re-examining the history of the communist movement," vs. those who are "dogmatic," "close-minded," and wed to "pre-1956 Marxism." (Ironically, one of the main presentations at the Conference on Racism and National Oppression was a critique of the Comintern's line on a "Black Nation" in the U.S.) What gets obscured by this self-righteous posture, of course, is that a real line struggle over different summations of the history of the communist movement and the nature of Marxism-Leninism is the real content of the contention. Overall, the result of this approach is that the TR objectively adopts the stance of an "oppositionist" force, critical of others but not held accountable to the trend as a whole on the basis of its own overall theoretical and philosophical framework.

To be frank, we believe this is an opportunist approach to the rigorous line struggle required to thrash through these differences within the trend. It is quite consistent with the eclectic tradition of the Althusser school, but not with the Leninist standards which our trend is struggling to attain.

Our criticism of this approach is sharp precisely because we believe that the struggle over Althusserian Marxism is a crucial one for our trend's maturation process. This is said not only because TR has brought this perspective into our trend, but because--in a broader sense--the bourgeois sociology which is at the heart of Althusserian Marxism impacts the communist movement in a variety of ways. At stake in this line struggle is the ability of our trend to maintain and deepen our demarcations with both modern revisionism and "left" opportunism, for, under the convenient cover of opposing the "Stalinian deviation" the TR is presenting both the right opportunist lines of Nicos Poulantzas, Jay Lovestone, and Nikolai Bukharin and the ultra-leftism of the Cultural Revolution as Marxism-Leninism. (See "Althusserian Marxism--A Beginning Critique" in Line of March Vol.1, No.6 and Vol.2, No.1)

Precisely because of the stakes involved, we believe the struggle over Althusserian Marxism must be waged in a responsible and thorough fashion before the entire trend.

Concretely, then, we propose that Theoretical Review and Line of March jointly cooperate to bring the discussion of Althusserian Marxism squarely into the center of the theoretical struggle within our trend. We believe the most appropriate manner to do this would be a series of debates before the trend between the editorial boards of our two publications. These debates would be held in at least one city each in the east, midwest, and west, and preferably other cities as well. We imply no preconditions to the debate except that representatives of our two centers meet to discuss questions of content and format as well as logistics.

While these debates are our concrete proposal, they cannot be separated from the larger context in which this proposal is made. To us, the debates are one mechanism to bring about TR's serious interaction with other trend forces and involving itself in a strategic relation with the trend. A key part of that process would be for you comrades to clarify before the trend precisely where you stand in relation to the trend: do you believe that this trend has an objective existence and that its maturation has a historical significance? Do you regard your relationship to the trend as strategic or tactical and transitory? And also, do you have a plan to take responsibility for the development of the trend as a whole, and if so, what is it?

We look forward to your early reply, both to our concrete proposal and to these questions of concern to all trend forces.

Comradely,

Editorial Board

Line of March

July 22, 1981

cc: Party building movement