

THE GUARDIAN SUSTAINER

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Guardian
Sustainer
program

FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR:

Discussion of supplement moves ahead

By IRWIN SILBER

Readers and Sustainers are beginning to respond to the Guardian's party-building supplement published in the June 1 issue.

So far the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Most people agree with the general political perspective of the supplement and feel that it will help move the party-building process forward.

We have also been told that many small collectives and study groups are undertaking extended study and discussion of the supplement among themselves. This is reflected, too, in a large number of orders for copies of the supplement in quantities of five or 10 or more. (These are available at 20 cents each.)

CRITICAL DISCUSSION

Discussion, debate and amplification of the political content of the party-building supplement represent the most serious kind of response. In our view, such critical discussion should naturally fall into certain broad categories:

1. An assessment of the present stage of development of Marxist-Leninist forces in the U.S.

2. The critique of revisionism as "the principal danger within the working-class movement as a whole and within the left in particular" and as "the starting point for uniting Marxist-Leninists today."

3. The historical critique of the "new communist movement" and the view that within this movement "class collaboration around the question of international line has emerged as the principal opportunist tendency to be opposed."

4. The recapitulation of the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism dealing with the nature of imperialism, the working class, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the vanguard party, armed struggle, the role of the state and the strategic political goal of the working class being the seizure of state power, as summarized in "principles of unity" 1-11 and 28.

5. The general application of these principles to the situation facing the multinational U.S. working class today as developed in "principles of unity" 12-15.

6. The general appraisal of the international situation today, particularly on such matters as the principal contradiction in the

world today, the relationship between national liberation struggles and the working-class movement within the U.S., the class character of the Soviet Union, the threat of war and the particular tasks of proletarian internationalism today.

7. The view of the political autonomy of a U.S. communist party (see point 27) and its independence in political line as well as organization from all other Marxist-Leninist parties in the world at this time.

8. Point 29 reaffirming that party-building is the central task for U.S. Marxist-Leninists today.

9. The proposal for a network of Guardian Clubs.

Listing these main "discussion areas" of the supplement can help focus the attention of Marxist-Leninists on the broad categories of topics under consideration. Agreement on some of them, such as the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism, is clearly indispensable if we are to move ahead. On others, there is room for debate, amplification and further development. On some, such as the question of the Soviet Union, we ourselves see the need for a fuller and more thorough investigation and discussion.

GUARDIAN CLUBS

Interestingly enough, one of the most "controversial" points in the supplement is the use of the term "Guardian Clubs." Most readers who have responded thus far are enthusiastic about the idea. But many have objected to the name "club" for the network of groups we plan to develop. Some people think the word is too "frivolous" for such a serious undertaking and have suggested instead names such as Guardian Solidarity Committee or Guardian Organizing Committee.

A name is important and we think there is a lot to be said for the term "club"—especially since our plans are relatively modest at this stage—but we do not consider it a closed subject.

Meanwhile, the Guardian has designated staff member William Ryan to be the acting coordinator for the Guardian Clubs with a view of beginning serious, concrete organizational steps to their formation in September. During the summer months, we urge all Guardian readers and Sustainers to continue discussion around the supplement, com-

municate their ideas to us and let us know of their interest in developing Guardian groups in their particular localities.

PAMPHLET FORTHCOMING

During this time, we plan to publish the party-building supplement as a pamphlet, adding to it a number of other materials—particularly important viewpoints and several columns and radical forums—in order to present in one piece of literature a more fully developed elaboration of the Guardian's political stand.

We believe that current discussion about party-building should proceed in a strategic fashion; that the principal emphasis be on questions of ideology and political line and that the discussion help develop a national perspective with comrades throughout the country beginning to forge a common ideological practice through such discussion and debate.

All attempts at by-passing or downplaying the struggle for ideological unity among Marxist-Leninists at this time can only divert the party-building forces from the task of forging principled unity among themselves. Such unity is the indispensable prerequisite for bringing into being a strong organization of revolutionaries capable of becoming the vanguard party of the working class.

In this respect, it is also crucial that the Marxist-Leninists immediately begin to develop a national and an international perspective on their efforts at party-building. The ideological principles of the party will not be found in the small-circle mentality which arises inevitably out of the restricted practice of local groups.

While we have now taken a major initiative in trying to move the party-building process forward, the Guardian will continue to perform its function as a newspaper for the broad left and progressive movement as a whole. We urge that a similar approach be taken by the party-building forces who should conduct the necessary ideological discussions while maintaining their activity in the developing mass movements and arenas of struggle that are before the working class, the oppressed nationalities and the democratic women's movement at this time.

FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR:

Guardian Clubs should help us improve our co

By JACK A. SMITH

A number of friends of the Guardian have expressed a particular worry in relation to the idea of Guardian Clubs.

Even though they agree to one extent or another on the political and organizational necessity for Guardian Clubs, they are concerned about what will happen to the newspaper itself.

It boils down to this: will the Guardian degenerate into just one more sectarian organ of a small Marxist sect, renouncing its responsibilities to the broad progressive movement in general and the independent Marxist-Leninist forces in particular?

The answer is no—but it's a valid question that cannot be dismissed with a one-word answer. In fact, it's going to take vigilance to prevent this from happening.

We're pretty vigilant, however, and feel very responsible to our supporters, virtually all of whom have let us know over the recent years that they want a broad-reaching paper that speaks to as many people as possible without sacrificing fundamental political principles. We are dedicated to this approach.

We all realize that at the very heart of the Clubs idea is having a relatively large-circulation and influential newspaper holding it all together, a highly visible anti-capitalist propaganda instrument around which the Clubs would cluster.

In addition to giving a national organizational expression to independent Marxist-Leninist politics, providing meaningful local political work and pushing forward the party-building process, a network of Guardian Clubs could be extremely helpful in building the paper itself.

What kind of paper do we want to build? Well, far from converting the Guardian into some kind of "voice of the Clubs" or narrow, sectarian paper that only puts forward "Guardian" politics, we have our eye on a much larger goal, one that only the formation of Guardian Clubs can help us to achieve.

THE PAPER'S GOAL

That goal, simply, is to produce in time a mass circulation left-wing newspaper of excellence, read by communists and non-communists alike; a newspaper which—while continuing to put forth independent Marxist-Leninist politics—would be characterized by a quality of reportage and depth of analysis that would make it indispensable reading for many varied constituencies from workers to intellectuals, communists and progressives to left-liberals.

The need for building such a paper should be self-evident. It's an objective requirement for the left and progressive forces in general, certainly not just the Guardian and

those forces around it. At this stage, the Guardian serves these broader forces with its independent Marxist view, commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle and knowledge of how to publish a serious and useful left weekly—but not as adequately as should be done. At the same time, in our opinion, only the Guardian has the commitment, political line and ability to develop into the kind of paper we're talking about.

We think it can be done—again stressing the phrase, "without sacrificing fundamental principles." What we're seeking is a balance between a sharp Marxist political line and a well-edited, interesting and informative political newspaper. We hope to build a paper that is good not only in its uncompromising anti-imperialist politics but in its ability to cover (and uncover) the news and astutely analyze current events in a simple and clear style of delivery.

EXPAND OUR RESOURCES

The germ of all of this exists in the Guardian today but our resources are much too limited to fulfill this larger goal. This is where Guardian Clubs enters into things and why we think it's so necessary for you to play a part in building the Clubs. In addition to its other tasks, a successful Guardian Clubs system can vastly expand our resources.

What does this mean concretely? Look at it this way. The life-blood of any commercial newspaper is in its circulation-advertising equation. The more the circulation, the more the advertising; the more the advertising, the more a (good) newspaper plows back into the product to enhance its news-gathering facilities, appearance, mass appeal and circulation techniques. The objective is to make money.

We are not a commercial newspaper, of course. Our equation is circulation-fund raising (of one form or another). The broader the base of circulation, the broader the fund-raising base; the broader the fund-raising base, the more we can plow into the Guardian to improve news-gathering and overall quality, mass appeal and circulation techniques. The objective is to make revolutionaries.

Right now, we do a fairly good job with the paper and have an excellent idea of what to do with the Guardian once we leave the hand-to-mouth stage and are able to invest in making it better. Our stumbling block is in circulation-distribution and fund-raising.

The good thing about Guardian Clubs is that they could not only help out a lot in circulation and fund-raising but also in news-gathering and political input.

The one big advantage of the left-organization press that we don't have is cadre to facilitate distribution and fund-raising. That they have been unable to convert this into tru-

ly excellent newspapers is another matter. In general, they simply don't know how to put out good newspapers that will reach broad numbers of people—but that's a political and journalistic question. The objective conditions for doing so are there in the form of organization and cadre.

ORGANIZATION AND CADRE

Guardian Clubs, in a sense, will provide us with the beginnings of organization and cadre. Through them it is possible for us to considerably expand our circulation base because they will provide us with new forms of distribution in the various areas where Clubs exist—from one-to-one distribution at demonstrations and meetings to opening up new book stores and news stands to hooking up with regional commercial distributors that we don't know about. This broader circulation will simultaneously expand our number of potential Sustainers, increasing our income. An unusually high percentage of Guardian subscribers are also Sustainers and we expect this ratio to continue once our circulation increases.

In addition to helping fund-raising through increasing circulation, the Clubs would do fund-raising in other ways, from conducting public meetings to organizing fund-raising events that would help finance both the Clubs and the Guardian.

Thus, a successful network of Clubs could cooperate with us in removing our two biggest obstacles toward producing the broader, better newspaper I'm talking about: circulation and fund-raising problems.

I think it's possible to double circulation over time. It's not easy and there are no "magic" solutions, just hard work and good planning. Look at it this way. If the 10 Guardian Clubs we project as a beginning were able to collectively increase circulation by 5000 copies in a year or so (500 copies per city on an average for a total 20% jump in overall circulation), this—combined with the new Sustainers we'd get from larger circulation, our own national circulation, fund-raising and business (Guardian Typesetting) efforts—would provide us with "X" dollars more a year to operate with.

This would present us with a choice—retiring to the Riviera or plowing the money back into the paper. Let's safely assume we'd resist temptation, having done so for 28 years, and that we'd invest in the paper. First off, we'd be able to bring several more talented people on to our staff in writing, editing and administrative areas—filling gaps that have existed as long as I can remember. In addition, we'd be able to better pay writers off our staff who are experts in this question or that. We'd also be able to build up the bureau network,

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expand our on-the-spot foreign coverage, improve the speed of communications and improvise in techniques that would produce a better quality newspaper.

JUMP IN CIRCULATION

Since our political framework would be to publish a mass circulation, left-wing weekly of excellence, all of these improvements would go toward this goal. I have no doubt that after a period of time the first big step in this direction would be taken on the basis of a 20% circulation increase. Good breeds good. Just as better circulation can help us get out a better newspaper, a better newspaper would enhance circulation.

At this stage we're convinced that if a paper of our quality with shoe-string finances, no organization and very little circulation and fund-raising work can circulate to 25,000, then a better paper with improved finances, the Clubs for an organization and real efforts at circulation and fund-raising could reach twice the number of people.

Beyond this we're not projecting. But this is our goal if the Club system works.

Preparing for this and for announcing the Clubs proposal several months ago, we launched the beginnings of a campaign to "broaden and deepen" the Guardian—broadening in the sense of expanding the scope of our coverage; deepening in the sense of improving the Marxist content of our analysis. So far we've made some progress and have opened up areas of news coverage we didn't pay too much attention to in the past. At the same time we've tried to become better Marxist journalists.

We're pleased with the experiment so far, although in some articles we've published over the months we have "broadened" without "deepening" (right opportunism) and in a few others we have "deepened" without "broadening" (a "left" error).

With the help of Guardian Clubs—and this means real work on the part of every member plus good organization and support from us—combined with our commitment to eventually producing a mass newspaper without sacrificing political principles, based upon broadening and deepening our coverage, we think the worries some friends have expressed about the Guardian possibly becoming "one more sectarian organ" are unnecessary. It's the last thing we want.

The Guardian Sustainer is published monthly for members of the Sustainer program of the Guardian Independent, radical newsweekly. All correspondence should be addressed to The Guardian Sustainer, 33 West 17th St., New York, N.Y. 10011.

You are our greatest asset

We have a businessman friend who sends us a \$250 contribution every Christmas. It is always accompanied by the same message:

"Here's my annual contribution to the Guardian. You still put out the best left-wing newspaper in America. But when will you people put yourself on a business-like foundation so that you won't have to rely on contributions to keep publishing?"

With all due respect for our friend's concerns for our future—and with appreciation for his contribution—the answer is "never!"

No, we don't make a fetish of poverty. But the fact is that from a "business" point of view, the Guardian doesn't make much sense. Our "bottom line" never has been—and never will be—determined by anything but our political purpose.

The newspaper "business" in capitalist society is defined by profitability. The key to this is advertising. Take a minute to examine the daily newspaper or weekly news magazine you read regularly. Count up the amount of space devoted to "editorial" coverage and the amount paid for by commercial advertising. Rarely does the advertising constitute less than 60% of the total. In addition, about half of the editorial copy isn't news but is consumer information designed to supplement the advertising pages (i.e., restaurant guides, home news, fine arts listings and so forth).

There is no way that a "radical" publication can base itself on such a foundation.

Some publications are the house-organs of a party or similar organization. Others rely on foundation grants or the philanthropic donations of a handful of wealthy individuals.

None of these avenues are really open to an independent Marxist-Leninist newspaper.

Our answer to this problem is 2-fold:

Help keep the Guardian in the prisons

The Guardian is well-known in the prisons of this country.

Each week we receive dozens of letters of support from inmates, who are probably our most dedicated and appreciative readers. Some have just learned of the Guardian as it passes from cell to cell. Others have been reading the paper for years and want to remind us how much they value the Guardian. Almost without exception they mention our stories supporting frame-up victims and our coverage of the liberation struggles in southern Africa.

The most rewarding letters are those which indicate that reading the Guardian has deepened the inmates' political perspective by showing the connection between various people's struggles in the U.S. and abroad. These letters are frequently from prisoners who have developed a Marxist-Leninist outlook while in prison.

The Guardian also receives letters docu-

menting the horrendous prison conditions. While we cannot provide the legal help that is often requested, we always put the prisoners in touch with organizations that can.

The most common type of letter asks for a new subscription or a subscription renewal. Many prisoners are unable to afford even the \$1 a year prisoner sub and ask that we send the paper for free. We always oblige these requests.

Of course we lose money on our prisoner subscriptions. But there's no way we will change our policy.

To make up for the loss, we recently started an inmate subscription fund. The response has been good, indicating that many of our readers understand the political importance of continuing to send the Guardian into the prisons. If you haven't already contributed to the fund, we hope you'll do so now.

Your response to our urgent call for increased help was immediate and resounding. Most Sustainers increased their pledges (many were doubled), straining their personal budgets to keep us going. And many of you became Sustainers at that time, helping us to reach our stated goal.

We know that your response was, in essence, a vote of confidence in the Guardian's independence and political line—even if some of you do not agree with everything we say. We know that you value what the Guardian is—a reliable, hard-hitting newspaper whose one commitment is to a set of clearly defined political principles that can be summed up in the continuing, militant struggle against the imperialist system.

We do not consider it a liability that the Guardian is dependent on its Sustainers to keep publishing. To the contrary. We think that you are our greatest asset—and we wouldn't have it any other way.

Letters from our Sustainers

This spot in *The Guardian Sustainers* will be reserved for your letters every month. Try to keep them as brief as possible. All letters will be printed with the author's initials but you must send in the communication with your full name.

PARTY-BUILDING—1

L.D., Chicago: Although it will take me a while to completely evaluate the party-building supplement, I can tell you this: more than any other political document I've read in quite some time, it's stimulated my thinking and made me face serious questions about where I stand.

As with many others, I've used the errors of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and the October League (OL) to put off my theoretical development and tone down my political commitment to party-building. The *Guardian* supplement was somewhat like a shot in the arm. It made me ask myself whether I merely wanted the comfort of calling myself a Marxist-Leninist without understanding the responsibilities that entails.

The supplement also jolted me out of my tendency to superficially dismiss the RCP and OL as mindless dogmatists. I thought it was correct of the *Guardian* to focus on their political errors. Far too many people only stress their sectarian practice and then jump to the (often unspoken) conclusion that such practice stemmed from their Leninist structure.

PARTY-BUILDING—2

A.S., Seattle: The *Guardian* party-building supplement is a welcome contribution to the process of creating a Marxist-Leninist program around which a party can be built. On the whole, I think your 29 principles are good ones. They are broad in scope and at the same time concrete on both domestic and international questions. I do have some differences with a couple of points, however.

Point 21 discusses the "united front against both superpowers." While this sounds fine in theory, what does it mean in the real world where most countries are ruled by neocolonial regimes more or less under the thumb of U.S. imperialism? Any revolutionary movement in those countries should be entitled to take assistance from the USSR, even though it is revisionist....

GUARDIAN CLUBS—1

E.B., Cambridge, Mass.: I would like to express my support for the idea of beginning *Guardian* Clubs.

It is essential to begin organizations now which will help increase communication among Marxist-Leninists throughout the country and be more actively responsible for building a solid party in the U.S....

In order to counteract the incorrect line of groups with which we have strong disagreement, it is important for us to meet together, to talk and study together, to

formulate strategy and to begin to develop the leadership necessary to carry out our ultimate task.

I am in agreement with the three major purposes of the Clubs. It is extremely important at this time to channel the efforts that have been going into organizing and study in a more cohesive way. I think the tendency toward localism is strong, both within small groups who are involved in one kind of political work, and within each city. *Guardian* Clubs would be an excellent way to help correct this tendency.

GUARDIAN CLUBS—2

T.A., Brooklyn, N.Y.: As a Sustainers and one who is interested in both the continued improvement of the paper's circulation and quality, and the advancement of the *Guardian*'s political position, I think the idea of *Guardian* Clubs is a positive step forward. However, I do not think the two goals of party-building and support for the paper should take the same organizational form, or be confused with one another.

The Clubs should be limited to promotion and news gathering and perhaps organization of study groups. A serious party-building effort, on the other hand, requires a commitment that just can't be made within the narrow context of *Guardian* support work.

GUARDIAN CLUBS—3

F.A., San Francisco: As one who has supported the paper for years and many a time wished there was a *Guardian* organization to do day-to-day political work, I want to let you know that I support the idea of *Guardian* Clubs.

There are numerous questions yet to answer and undoubtedly many problems will erupt. But that's okay. If the *Guardian* waited until all questions were answered or all problems solved there might never be organizational support for its politics. And I personally feel that would be a loss not only for the paper but for the left in this country.

GUARDIAN CLUBS—4

P.G., Berkeley: I want to express my support for the *Guardian* Clubs plan. It is about time that the "independent" Marxist-Leninists had an organization.

One point that you mention in your party-building supplement, that the Clubs will "strive to become multinational organizations" is worth emphasizing. The *Guardian*'s 29 points are clear on the need to combat racism within the working class as the key to building unity. Analogously, I think, the key to building a multinational

We'd like to hear your point of view

Many friends, collectives and study groups have taken up study and discussion of the *Guardian*'s party-building supplement and have expressed an interest in *Guardian* Clubs.

We hope that all serious Marxist-Leninists will study the political ideas put forward in the supplement, with a view toward furthering ideological unity. While the forms and methods of study will be determined by the particularities of each group, a good framework for such study is given in Irwin Silber's column in this newsletter.

The *Guardian* is naturally interested in response to the supplement and every letter we receive is read carefully. We particularly desire to hear from those who might be interested in helping to build a regional *Guardian* Club. We value your opinions and they are important in filling out the details of our plans (for example, we have not completely determined the 10 cities where the Clubs will be built.) We also need to know your degree of general agreement with the 29 points of unity; your political background and experience, and whether you're writing as an individual or on behalf of a group. We're developing further material on the Clubs, which will be sent to those interested as soon as it is available.

Let's hear from you, so we can get on with the building of *Guardian* Clubs!

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communist party is the relentless struggle against racism in the movement (bourgeois nationalism must also be opposed, but this is a secondary aspect). I hope that the *Guardian* Clubs take up this struggle seriously.

LABOR COVERAGE

S.R., Iowa City: I appreciate very much the coverage on labor unions in the U.S. We excerpted parts of Ben Bedell's article on J.P. Stevens for our April newsletter. Our local is really struggling to get enough active members to hold the line. I hope the *Guardian* will expand coverage of organized and unorganized labor.

One of the trial subscriptions I am sending is for a woman who rides out to the worst factory in Iowa City on my bus at 6:15 am. We got to talking about capitalism once and she asked, "How long is this system going to go on, anyway?" I said only as long as the workers let it.

Silber's articles on the role of communists in unions have been food for thought. In four years in unions, I have become aware of what they do not do. But because they can be so vital they are very important for the left to work within.