

IRENE

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REPORT ON MEETING WITH NATIONAL NNMLC REPRESENTATIVES

Ricky, Irene, and Laura met with Max Elbaum, national chairperson of the NNMLC, and Catherine Candee, National NNMLC coordinator, on 1/27/80. The agenda was discussion of the party-building movement, and some exploration into our differences over the historical legacy of the ML movement. There was some discussion of the PWOC's trade union position, as well.

State of the PBM

The NNMLC reps made the following points:

- 1) The key question before the movement right now is pb line. The struggle over pb must be the key struggle right now. Sectarianism is the main obstacle. Sectarianism is inherent in the OCIC's concept of the single center without a single guiding line.
- 2) History of the trend: The rectification line was held by some organizations in the Bay Area, specifically the Northern Calif. Alliance (NCA), and the Third World Women's Organization, before it was taken up by the Clubs. It became the Clubs' line during the struggle with the Guardian. The OC tried to kill the validity of the rectification line when it first came out through organizational attacks. But the Clubs survived, and are growing. M. located four "centers" (not the same as ideological centers) of activity in the trend- TR/BPC, Rectification/NNMLC, PWOC/Fusion, and El Comite/MINP. The fusion line is falling apart, so it resorts to organizational maneuvering.
- 3) Relations of NNMLC with the OC: M. criticized the NNMLC for saying the OC is fusionist because PWOC is at its head, rather than because the line of the OC is fusionist.
- 4) BPC's and p of t forces' interventions in the OC:
 - a. M. criticized us for not linking the organizational aspects of the OC line with its political aspects, thereby drawing out the OC's underlying logic. Our failure to do so means we were conciliating the OC leadership, M. says. Our being in the OC allows people to think organization is the key link in organizing the ideological struggle, which it's not.
 - b. We may unite with others who are discontented with bureaucracy in the OC, but that struggle will only burn people out unless we can offer an alternative.
 - c. If we are building a minority within the OC, we must withdraw our criticism of the NNMLC for sectarianism for not joining the OC. M. does not criticize our belonging to the OC, but feels, in order to be consistent, we must support other organizations' right not to belong, if we are building a minority.
- 5) State of the rectification movement:
 - A. Journal: The OC conception of how to wage the ideological struggle is wrong because communists must be subordinated to a center on the basis of political unity. A journal is a much better way to organize the ideological struggle than setting up a council of representatives of differing views. Hence, the rectification journal (no longer to be called Rectification; perhaps "Line of March"). The journal will be responsible to criticisms from readers, and to its own line. They do expect to influence the development of the rectification line, although there are no formal organizational connections. There are some 80-90 people prepared to contribute to the journal on various topics. They anticipate having the same policy as the TR- they will print, and actively solicit,

opposing points of view from within the pb movement, and look forward to exchanges like the one we have been having in the pages of TR.

- b. Clubs: The development of the journal has led to a review of the Clubs' role. The Club now thinks that not every cadre must take part in the struggle over pb line. The Clubs are a vehicle to engage in this struggle- they will attempt to reorient the whole pb movement, deepen and advance the rectification line, provide cadre training in organizational experience, and funnel people into the rectification movement. In the next two months, the Clubs plan to study all the pb lines, and issue a publication reviewing them from their perspective.
- c. MLEP, the study projects, and their various mass work components are all now independent of the Clubs and the journal.
- d. The journal represents the practice of the r. line, and the clubs will struggle for the line in the pb movement. (This distinction would be like the distinction between out TR and education depts., and the pb dept.).

Reps. of the BPC made the following points:

- 1) Described the state of the collective and the level of development of our work.
- 2) Accepted the criticism of the NNMLC of our having previously conciliated OC leadership.
- 3) Did not withdraw the criticism of sectarianism of the NNMLC for not joining the OC, but indicated that it was not going to be a major part of our dealings with the NNMLC in the future, particularly in the context of the OC's unprincipled attack on the NNMLC.
- 4) Briefly described the possibility of an organized minority in the OC. Described our dilemma, as we see it, between having either to wage a major battle that would absorb a lot of resources, or get out.

Discussion of the history of the communist movement, 1929-1956.

On the basis of the new article from Tucson, R. took the position that 1929 was the turning point, in our view, in the character of MLism. Its primary aspect past this time was degeneration.

At first, M took the position that the Clubs agreed "phenomenologically" about what happened between 1929 and 1956 (their "magic year"), but disagreed about criteria by which to make generalizations about that period. M held that the ability of countries to make revolution in that period (notably China) could not be separated from the existence of the S.U. M said that the Comintern played a positive role up until the 1940's, even in the U.S. communist movement- that the identification of socialism with the S.U. was an advance in that period. Revolutionary class consciousness expanded during that time, he said.

R responded that those criteria of measurement negated the theoretical degeneration taking place.

M. responded that our assessment focussed on the wrong things- we should look at political line struggles taking place, and put them in the historical conjuncture, rather than evaluating them from the point of view of pure or impure theory.

Here it became clear that there was disagreement on what happened "phenomenologically", after all, in that period. M. stated that in the line struggles of 1929, Stalin's was the basically proletarian line, whereas R. held that Bukharin's was.

In defense of Stalin's line, M. stated that he believed there are no antagonistic class contradictions under socialism, and that we must defend the S.U. in the '29-'56 period against Trotskyism. He believes that people take up the capitalist restoration thesis because they find it too hard to defend anything about the S.U., and simply would rather not try. M. believes that the S.U. did have d. of p., in the main, in this period, and he would defend the practice of the d. of p. in the S.U. up until 1956. He said that our line conciliated with aspects of Trotskyism.

R. replied that Trotsky shared economism with Stalin.

M. responded that to say "there are similar things about the two lines that were errors" is to raise to primary what is really secondary in this situation. What is primary is that there was a bourgeois and a proletarian line, and we should look at the historical conjuncture to decide which was which.

R. repeated that our difference is that he (R.) believes that Stalin's line was not the proletarian line.

At one point, M. summed up our differences this way: R. would say M. was making a pragmatist error by saying, "the line in the 30's and 40's worked, so it was right." M. said we were making an idealist error by not situating the line struggle in its historical context and deciding which line was fundamentally more correct, but instead measuring the lines against some "pure" Marxism.

R., I., and L. unanimously felt the character of M.' error was not pragmatism, but dogmatism, in evaluating the period in question.

M. said that he had been influenced by "Roots of Revisionism", and that his view of party history was moving to the left. He agrees with our criticism that the NNMLC has put forth a simplistic "right" view of CP history.

M. said that the discussion bore on the present conjuncture in this way: that we could have differing views in a party on what kind of party we had in the 40's, but we couldn't have differing views on what kind of party we should have today. On the other hand, the Clubs do critique the idea of a monolithis party; what is required for a party is unity of action, not of thought.

The PWOC's Trade Union Tour

M. reported that the PWOC people have behaved somewhat opportunistically on their tour on the west coast, by raising issues on pb or not raising them, depending on whether rectification forces were strong in the area.

M. made the following critique of the PWOC's trade union position:

- 1) PWOC's conception of the left-center alliance in the t.u.'s is tailist. In it, the center always leads, and the left picks off the advanced- always in work with individuals militants. M. emphasized the need for the left to lead in the alliance.

- 2) The PWOC takes the traditional CP categories, such as "advanced worker", and takes them down one notch. They see an advanced worker as an active, militant leader. M. says winning the advanced to communism is taking socialists and making them into scientists- PWOC sees it as winning militants to socialism.
- 3) PWOC conception of the vanguard- they see the party as one simply with influence among the masses, not with influence leading to the seizure of state power. This is pragmatism on the part of PWOC. They put gaining immediate, short-term influence over the long-term goal of revolution.
- 4) Finally, PWOC makes a fetish of the left-center alliance in the T.U.'s- everywhere else it's called the united front. PWOC says t.u.'s are special, being at the point of production, but M. holds that they are not particularly special in the process of the formation of revolutionary consciousness.

Summary:

The atmosphere of the meeting was more than comradely; one would almost have to say it was friendly. Both sides were clearly listening carefully, in the spirit of principled struggle. M., in particular, was an impressive advocate of the rectification line, and certainly represents it better than anyone in Boston.

On the one hand, it was a relief to actually talk politics, as opposed to organization. Both sides expressed appreciation for the opportunity to exchange views in the pages of the TR, and to struggle over theoretical questions, rather than over who was more sectarian than whom.

On the other hand, this kind of small meeting, involving only a few cadre, is exactly the kind of spontaneous struggle that is inherent in the r. line, and of which we have been critical, as being an elitist method of struggling out political differences. We, however, no longer feel confident about advancing the OC as an alternative- which left us in a bind, with no alternative proposal on how the ideological struggle should be conducted.

In the historical area, it was fortunate that we had at least one cadre who could advance a position in that area, since M. and C. had asked to discuss that, and the p of t line does make the crisis of Marxism its centerpiece. But the lack of a consolidated collective understanding of the controversial period, and of the historical particularities of the crisis of Marxism, put us in the awkward position of relying on R.'s own background and the newly-arrived article from Tucson. This situation is clearly a problem for us in advancing our line right now.

Finally, R.I. and L. were all uncomfortable that the three women present all dropped out of the discussion when it came to the historical/theoretical questions. M. suggested that in the future, we should agree on some readings in advance, so as to maximize everyone's participation, but he did not make any explicit reference to the objective sexism of the situation. R., I. and L. all felt we should have raised this aspect openly.

Overall, we gained a lot of useful information (probably more than they did). If there are future meetings, we should probably plan to involve many more BPC people. Everyone can gain from experiencing a confrontation between our line and opposing lines.

LB
2/5/80