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October 18, 1978

STATEMENT FROM IRWIN SILBER CONCERNING HIS RESIGNATION FROM THE POSITION OF EXECUTIVE EDITOR OF THE GUARDIAN

(The following statement was submitted to the Guardian in the form of Irwin Silber's regular column, "Fan the Flames." It was submitted to appear in the issue of the Guardian dated October 18, which contains the full text of the document, "The State of the Party-Building Movement," or to run in the following week's issue. The Guardian staff voted not to publish the column. Instead, a news article quoting from this column appeared in the October 25 issue of the Guardian.)

Several days ago I informed the Guardian Coordinating Committee and the members of the Guardian staff of my decision to resign from the position of Executive Editor. Since actions of this kind are always the subject of rumors, gossip and speculation in our movement, it is only politically responsible to make the reasons for this action known to Guardian readers-- and particularly to Marxist-Leninists in the party-building movement.

First let me say that I retain the greatest respect for the general political line of the Guardian and for the indispensable role that it plays as a newspaper and as a leading voice in the struggle for the rectification of the general line of the U.S. communist movement -- the task which, in my view, is the indispensable precondition for reconstituting a revolutionary working class vanguard party in our country.

I hope that the movement as a whole will keep in mind the urgent necessity for continued support to the Guardian and not in any way allow the important political disagreement underlying this decision to diminish in the slightest all efforts to advance the circulation of the Guardian or the financial contributions which remain an absolute requirement for the continued existence of our newspaper.

For my part, I intend to remain a member of the Guardian staff and to continue writing for the paper on a variety of subjects both through the news pages and in the "Fan the Flames" and "Ruling Class" columns. I also intend to continue playing an active role in the party-building movement.

My reason for resigning from the post of Executive Editor is based on a fundamental disagreement with the decision by the Guardian staff as announced in the final section of the document, "The State of the Party-Building Movement," to build a political organization around itself as an expression of a "left trend" within the party-building movement. In my opinion, this decision is unsound both politically and practically.

At the same time, I strongly support the general critique of the political line and organizational efforts underlying the formation of the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center (OC) which comprises the main section of that document. I also endorse the decision by the Guardian not to affiliate with the OC at this time.

Within the Guardian staff I have urged that these two questions -- the political critique of the OC and the decision to proceed with the establishment of the Guardian's own political organization -- be separated. In my view, one is not the logical consequence of the other.

The context for this disagreement is bound up with differing views on the actual state of the party-building movement and on the principal tasks before that movement at this time. Involved in this, too, are significant differences over a general party-building strategy for our movement.

On a political level, I believe it is a serious misreading of the present state of affairs in our movement to postulate the existence of two distinct "trends" among

Marxist-Leninists with the points of difference so sharply defined that separate and inevitably competing organizational forms are required. Many Marxist-Leninists are critical of the principal underlying political errors of the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) and the OC. Many of them have come to such an understanding as a result of the ideological struggle waged by the Guardian, particularly around the "fusion" question. But this is hardly the same as postulating the existence in our movement of a definite "Guardian trend" with sufficient unity on other leading political questions to now put itself forward as the "left" (and therefore leading) trend in our movement.

The task of uniting Marxist-Leninists around a single general leading line remains before us. Does that single general line yet exist? Has the task of rectifying the general line of the U.S. communist movement proceeded to the point where we can speak realistically about uniting Marxist-Leninists around such a line? The answer to both those questions in my opinion is--no.

The fundamental error of the PWOC and many of the other local organizations who constitute the OC is that they have subordinated this critical task of developing a general line to a precondition, the establishment of "fusion" (or some significant measure thereof) between the communist movement as it exists and the spontaneous struggles of the working class and oppressed nationalities. Their thesis is that trying to effect this "fusion", which, in their latest pronouncements, has been reduced to "fusion in its embryonic form," will identify the principal questions of political line before Marxist-Leninists and also identify the priority of those questions. They also hold the view that this "embryonic" form of fusion will provide our movement with a means of verifying the correctness or incorrectness of the general line in the process of its development. Guardian readers and activists in the party-building movement are familiar with the general critique of the backwardness of this line which has appeared in these pages and there is no need to repeat it here at this moment.

But just as the PWOC subordinates the task of line rectification to the process of "fusion," so does the approach by the Guardian staff, in my opinion, subordinate the task of line rectification to the premature development of a consolidated political organization which is bound to take on the character of a national preparty formation. As such, despite the best intentions of the Guardian staff, this decision is bound to promote divisiveness and sectarianism within the ranks of party-building forces and unduly tie the ideological struggle of this period to differing organizational forms.

The organizational effort to which the Guardian has now committed itself -- particularly by defining it as the expression of a Guardian "left trend external to the formation organized by the OC in order to better sharpen the principled struggle against right opportunism within our party-building movement"--says, in effect, that the OC is a consolidated right opportunist formation (rather than a grouping characterized by rightist errors) and that the struggle to unite Marxist-Leninists in a single party-building effort must be indefinitely postponed to some future time. On the part of the Guardian, such an analysis becomes, in effect, a self-fulfilling prophecy. I believe it is an incorrect view and is, in effect, an abandonment of the correct task of trying to unite all Marxist-Leninists in a common plan to build the party.

The decision by the Guardian staff represents a qualitative change in the form and content of Guardian Clubs. The Clubs, organized roughly one year ago, represent an important base of material support for the Guardian, the paper's eyes and ears on the world outside of New York City, and a most useful organizational form for the training of Marxist-Leninist cadre, particularly around the principal theoretical tasks of this period. They also represent a force that can play a leading role in a widespread rectification movement that will help bring into being the best possible conditions in which the organizational task of re-establishing the party can be accomplished.

But the decision by the Guardian staff goes considerably beyond this conception. It

imposes upon the Clubs political responsibilities for which they are not equipped and which are bound to weaken their efforts in the tasks outlined above. Even if this course of action were correct, it cannot be said that the Guardian has laid the theoretical and political foundation for establishing such an organization at this time -- or that it has summed up the first year's experiences of the Club network in an all-sided and scientific way -- so that, in conjunction with the Clubs themselves, the new path was being properly charted.

Likewise, as a practical question, the decision to go ahead with the establishment of a Guardian political organization is, in my view, unsound. The Guardian has an enormously valuable role to play in our movement -- both in the party-building movement and the broad progressive movement as a whole -- as a newspaper! It is particularly well-equipped and well-situated to make an extremely valuable contribution to the general task of line rectification -- which includes not only helping to develop a correct line, but popularizing the process as well. No organization or group in the Marxist-Leninist movement made a more substantial contribution to the critique of the class-collaborationist line of the October League and others which manifested itself most sharply around the question of Angola. Indeed, no other existing organization could have accomplished this task -- which required access to facts and information from the front-lines of struggle in Africa as well as an international overview required for the weekly publication of the Guardian. The same can well be said on many other important national and international questions -- and also on some of the more substantive theoretical questions before our movement.

But the very strengths of the Guardian as a newspaper -- particularly the kind of newspaper it is -- point up its inherent weaknesses as the operational and political leadership of an all-sided Marxist-Leninist political organization. Developing and building such an organization, even if it were the correct thing to do at this time, will require a major commitment of cadre, funds and material resources on the part of the Guardian. It will require the constant and close attention of its leading political body. It requires a level of political and theoretical development within the Guardian staff commensurate to such a task.

In my view, the Guardian is poorly equipped and not well-situated to undertake this task. The demands of producing a weekly newspaper -- and promoting, circulating and supporting it -- are enormously time-consuming and require the fulltime efforts of its leading political cadre. While there are many devoted, hard-working and enthusiastic comrades on the Guardian staff, they have not yet developed the experience, political maturity and organizational capacity to lead such an effort. This task is made doubly difficult by the fact that the Guardian staff is inevitably one step removed from even the limited social practice of Marxist-Leninists today. I also believe that the Guardian is foolishly jeopardizing its material base and its future as a newspaper with this course of action.

For all these political and practical reasons, I have urged the Guardian staff not to embark upon the course laid out in the last section of the document, "The State of the Party-Building Movement." But by a very sizeable majority within the Guardian staff, my views did not prevail.

Clearly the Executive Editor of the Guardian -- of all staff members -- must be a person who has confidence in a political decision of this magnitude and is prepared to execute it, defend it and argue it before the party-building movement as a whole. Just as clearly, I am not the person for that job.

I have carefully weighed this decision in the one-week period since the Guardian staff voted to adopt the document published in these pages. It seems to me that out of respect for the Guardian and my fellow staff members, my own political integrity and my concerns for the Marxist-Leninist movement as a whole, it is the only principled decision that can be made in the circumstances.