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SWP National Office  
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Dear Comrades,

The following report covers several related areas: the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center (OC); the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC); relations between the PWOC and the SWP here in Philadelphia; and some suggestions for a national approach to this current.

The OC was formed out of meetings between several local groups from different parts of the country in February of 1978. The leading groups in developing the OC, which includes around 20 local affiliates, are the PWOC; the New York City-based, predominantly Puerto Rican El Komite/MINP; the Washington, D.C. based Potomac Socialist Organization; the Socialist Union of Baltimore; and the Dayton Marxist-Leninist Organization.

Enclosed are the 18 "Principles of Unity" of the OC.

The OC current, or "trend," as it calls itself, represents a breakaway both organizationally and politically from the Guardian, and reflects the deepening, general crisis of the Maoist movement.

Briefly put, here's what I think is happening in that overall milieu, an understanding of which is helpful in assessing the OC.

a ( The Communist Party(M-L) continues to consolidate itself as the officially designated exponents of Chinese regime, and is in the process of absorbing the Chicano August 29th Movement and Asian I Wor Kuen group, both based on the west coast, along with other, smaller groups. Sooner or later it will dawn on elements of the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters group that they must answer the question of questions--merger with the CP(M-L) if they want to be in the good graces of Hua. Contrarywise, the Revolutionary Communist party appears headed in Albania's direction (an appropriate meeting of minds) and towards the small world of contention for Enver Hoxa's nod of approval.

What this means, over time, is that the main elements of the Maoist "regroupment" which grew out of the demise of SDS and the ex-Maoist Progressive Labor party express themselves in hardened, Mao-Stalinist forms, each linked to a bureaucratic caste ideologically, and, in the case of the toadies of Peking, materially.

The softest component of that regroupment process adhered to the Guardian, which, to its credit, broke with China over the "three worlds theory," beginning with its counterrevolutionary application in Africa.

With the deepening of the Guardian's break came China's decision to boot the Guardian out of the Maoist family. At the same time, however, the Guardian was not, and has not been able to build an organization, something which its more activist supporters began to realize was chronic to the paper.

The "new communist movement," of which the Guardian was part, along with the progenitors of the CP(M-L), the RCP and the RWHq, among others, also called itself the "anti-revisionist" current, the Moscow loyal Communist party being the revisionists.

The Guardian's political evolution reflects a split in the movement which it helped launch. The Guardian and the OC consider themselves part of the "anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionist" movement, the dogmatists being the hard Mao-Stalinist groups and sects.

The OC has emerged out of a series of disagreements with the Guardian, the most public of which are its disputes on the tempo and character of the "party-building" process. Of larger importance, I believe, is the fact that the OC has taken greater political distance from China, Mao Tse-tung "thought" and all of its baggage. While the Guardian retains such trappings, the OC is far less encumbered by them.

It's interesting to note that in the OC's "Principles of Unity," there's no mention of China.

The Guardian in laying out its criticisms of the OC's line, states the following:

"Our independent Marxist-Leninist tendency heralds a new era wherein have been born the revolutionary forces capable of carrying through the struggle against revisionism to the end by simultaneously waging political combat against the dogmatist deviations of the third tendency (hard Mao-Stalinists-JH) and the Trotskyism (SWP-JH) of the second." (my emphasis)

This "new movement," a "fourth tendency," is "antirevisionist, anti-Trotskyist and antidogmatist." Trotskyism is represented "principally by the Socialist Workers party." Despite the centrality of opposing Trotskyism, the Guardian notes paranthetically that, "...an analysis of recent developments in the Trotskyist movement is long overdue and should be the subject of further discussion in a more appropriate document."

In other words, anti-Trotskyism is an article of faith troubling the flock.

Aside from the utter pomposity ("heralds a new era") of the Guardian's characterization of the meaning of its development, or perhaps because of such an attempt to puff up the sails of a rudderless ship, what's clear is the emergence of a developing centrist current, a current in crisis.

While the Guardian has made the characterization, the OC lives up best to Trotsky's definition of centrism--"the sum of all positions between

Marxism and reformism." Irwin Silber's resignation from the Guardian executive editorship symbolizes the crisis in this hardy current.

Silber believes the left is "consumed with practical tasks." He believes the modest little step of Guardian clubs is too much organizationally, and poses a formal split with the OC. He holds the notion that what the "fourth tendency" should occupy itself with for the next two years is study designed to "rectify" the errors of the "dogmatists."

The Guardian majority, propelled by the initiative of forces once in its orbit to move independently of it, seeks to rejuvenate the hardly bubbling club structure.

The Guardian considers the OC soft on the Soviet Union, anti-intellectual because of its effort to put forward activity--as opposed to heavy study--as a key area of work, and, I think, soft on Trotskyism--a potentially "right opportunist" grouping.

The PWOC, which is central to the OC's structure and organization and politics, bears scrutiny in this regard. It really isn't helpful to get a hold of the dynamic this whole current is caught up in if we try to use the discussions within it as our primary gauge. Rather than wade through and translate such obscure debate and discussion, I'd like to state crudely what I think the differences between the Guardian and the OC, through an estimate of the PWOC are, and what this holds for us.

The OC wants to start really moving on building a party; it (notwithstanding great internal heterogeneity) rejects Mao-Stalinism; many of its components are getting into industry; elements of it are open to Trotskyism, despite the ritual disclaimer in its unity principles: "Trotskyism shares with modern revisionism and 'left' opportunism" a petty bourgeois essence...it is a viewpoint which objectively coincides with the interests of the bourgeoisie."

The OC lacks the vintage cynicism of the Guardian, a product of its 30 years of tailing popular currents, particularly of Stalinist origin, and its historic inability to produce anything more than a paper.

The PWOC's Organizer has characterized aspects of Mao's "thought" as "idealist"; noted that Trotsky was the "energetic leader of the Petrograd soviet"; and printed an excerpt from Teamster Rebellion.

For the past half a year or so, we've tried to define a formal sort of relationship with the PWOC, after having periodic contact with members of the organization in Africa solidarity work prior to such efforts. We'd bump into a PWOC member here or there, but our worlds didn't really overlap.

Six months ago, on my request, there was a meeting arranged between the PWOC and the SWP. The PWOC sent someone who I think was assigned to function as an emissary of the leadership. We had a fairly nondescript conversation, an exchange of information, and waited for them to follow things up. Nothing, of course, happened. A month or so later, in the Organizer the excerpt from Teamster Rebellion appeared, with an introduction we didn't think was very good, and we sent a reply to it in mid-July. Our reply appeared, unedited, with the PWOC's rejoinder, in the October/November

issue of the Organizer which came out a couple of days ago.

Prior to that, on Oct. 23, I spent three hours with Clay Newlin, the central leader of the PWOC. We'd met and chatted at a couple of picket lines and were on friendly terms. Newlin had recently completed a series of debates with Irwin Silber over the early spring and early fall in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles, respectively, which had drawn 1200 or so people.

Our conversation was frank and friendly. We exchanged views on our perspectives for party building, he taking notes while I talked. He found it interesting when I mentioned to him that we thought any current had to define itself in relation to the three major currents in the workers movement internationally, that there was no future for a "fourth tendency" over time.

I told him that notwithstanding that the differences between the SWP and the PWOC outweigh our areas of agreement, that we saw some important areas of "rough convergence." These include: a similar approximation of Cuba's role in Africa and the revolution in the Horn; a belief that the USSR is a workers state (we of course disagree what went wrong and why); rejection of China's counterrevolutionary foreign policy; support for the FRA (the PWOC mobilized its members for July 9 but did not build it, which I mentioned to Newlin as a different approach to the women's movement); support for school desegregation and mandatory busing; and related areas.

The PWOC's history reflects its general isolation from the mass movement. It developed out of workerist currents in SDS and the Quaker pacifist milieu here and was influenced by the CP a bit. Newlin explained that as far as he understood things, he disagrees with us on the questions of the united front (Trotsky's "class against class" line in Spain was "ultraleft"); socialism in one country (although he is attempting to piece together the relationship between the Soviet CP and the degeneration of the Communist International) and two stage theory of revolution in the colonial countries.

He believes Trotsky's criticism of the CP's German policy during Hitler's rise was correct; that Trotsky played a principal in organizing and leading the Russian revolution--this is, Newlin said, "the truth" and should be told and explained. He thinks the distortions by Stalinism and its falsifications need to be cut through. He told me the PWOC is particularly concerned with how to explain the relationship between socialism and democracy, the fight for democratic rights, how to relate to the democratic aspirations of the American workers. The PWOC doesn't read Mao or Stalin much, relies heavily on Lenin, and, to a lesser extent, Gramsci and Amilcar Cabral.

The PWOC holds that while the Democratic party is a capitalist party, it's a tactical question for revolutionaries on whether or not to support Democratic party candidates, particularly Black candidates, including people like Conyers.

Newlin noted that for the SWP and the PWOC to "get together" that "one of us would have to change," to which I agreed. I explained that our purpose in such a meeting was to define a relationship whereby we could deliberately find areas of agreement to arrive at points for common political work, that both of our organizations, because such areas do exist, and are not insubstantial--particularly Africa--had a responsibility to ensure such a process unfold, so as best to advance and organize the class struggle. I said we could set an example for principled debate and united front type initiatives.

Newlin said the PWOC favored debate and discussion particularly where it could lead to unity in action; that it wasn't interested in an exchange where divergences appeared so far reaching (history of the CP) that there would be no practical accomplishment. He said, however, that there might be occasion where such an exchange could be useful, as well.

We also debated a bit the charter change issue, and are planning to send a fairly substantial critique of their stand to the PWOC's executive committee--this document is still in the works, and explains our concept of independent political action, among other things. He said he be interested in it, perhaps printing an exchange.

Newlin, and other PWOC leaders, have read some Trotsky, and, from the rejoinder to our criticism of their introduction to Teamster Rebellion excerpts, Cannon, Dobbs and probably other SWP leaders.

We had a good discussion in the executive committee and the branch about this all. The following are the main points of the report I gave.

We see the PWOC as a centrist group, zigzagging between reformist and revolutionary poles (i.e., positions on the Democratic party and the revolutionary upsurge in the Horn), inherently unstable and subject to flux. Our main task is to find areas for common activity to best explain to the leadership and membership of the PWOC our ideas and perspectives. We want to develop a leadership to leadership relationship as well--exemplified by the circulation of our views on their errors and our stand in the charter change fight. As an opponent of the SWP, the PWOC rivals us for recruits and influence, and therefore an obstacle in the process of the construction of a mass, revolutionary party. But our approach to them is based up the dynamic of the centrism of the group and its current, which gropes for answers, which is faced with big, sharp questions of theory and practice for which only we have answers. Most importantly, it appears, for now, the PWOC leadership is willing to engage in the leadership relationship which can systematically favor discussion, exchange, debate and unity in action.

We are presently involved in participation in the United People's Campaign Against Apartheid and Racism (UPCAAR), in which the PWOC plays a leading role. And we want to think out what's the most appropriate form for united activity. Most importantly, we want to think such initiatives out carefully and patiently.

The PWOC's response to us in their paper--the last paragraph of their reply--is quite positive, I think.

What do all these developments pose for our movement?

I think we need to find a way, nationally and locally, to intervene in the discussions of this milieu, seek its varied components out for united-front type initiatives, while explaining our strategy for party-building and our concepts of genuine Leninist methods of struggle and organization.

This is an important development--not, as the Guardian lamely boasts, a "new era"--in the disintegration of Maoism. The centrist current includes many potential Trotskyists, who'll be won to us--as individuals, groups, parts of groups, etc.--in the course and evolution of the class struggle, and the battle of ideas on how to effectively organize the fights which define it. There is a ferment in this milieu, and we can help direct the most healthy expressions of it towards revolutionary Marxism.

The development and crisis of the centrist current--and "Mao-centrist" Guardian--reflect the same process that moved the Revolutionary Marxist Committee towards us, and breathed a bit of life into the moribund Socialist Labor party. It's what challenges groups like the Sojourner Truth Organization, which has evolved from hard Mao-Stalinism to a point at which Trotskyism is considered a revolutionary current. That's the process of class struggle, and its impact on different people and groups as they seek answers to the most pressing questions of socialist revolution.

One thing the RMC experience did for us, among many others, is that it made clear we could not afford to write any one off. Seeing the STO at Oberlin confirmed that: Noel Ignatin trained Klonsky, had been a Stalinist and a Maoist for nearly 20 years, and now (or at least at Oberlin) thinks himself neither a Trotskyist nor an anti-Trotskyist (I recently heard that the STO just split, losing all its Black members and about a third of its white members, over the question of the right of autonomy in developing Black work by Black members).

Not only can we not write people off, we have to aggressively go after such individuals and their groups--in an intelligent way, to be sure.

Our comrades need to become more attuned to the developments in the left--particularly, I think, among the centrists and the Guardian. We can't afford an attitude that because what these people say is so off the wall--and much of it is--that it isn't worth the effort to read and study up on their ideas, learn about them and find appropriate approaches to them. We understand the mass revolutionary workers party required to lead the American revolution will be forged through a whole series of splits, fusions, regroupments, manuevers, etc., and what is evolving before our eyes are some early signs of that process, and new ingredients in it.

That's why we have to take up the discussion of the centrists and approaches to them, the Guardian, etc., nationally, deepening the education of the whole party in the process.

Paranetically, it seems to me that we're dealing with a whole different kettle of fish with this development than with the SLP. Not in regard to fusion--to even talk about that is totally premature--but in reference to the composition, vitality and overall potential of the milieu.

In the case of the PWOC, it includes serious younger activists, many of them in basic industry--auto in particular--who carry on work, Black activists, serious organizers in different movements, who want to build a revolutionary party, whose political point of reference approximates ours--Lenin.

We're going to find all sorts of types in this opponent current: left-social democrats, soft Maoists, hardened anti-Trotskyists, social work types, semi-anarchists, syndicalists, etc.--a lot of unfinished thinking and people who will end up in DSOC, the trade union bureaucracy, the CP, the CP(M-L)--and the SWP.

Concretely, and aside from the leadership discussion which we need to place on our agenda, a couple of suggestions.

- \* publication of the pertinent items in the exchange between the PWOC and the SWP in the Organizer, with an additional reply by us to their rejoinder, in the ISR
- \* a request to the branches to see if there are any OC affiliates in their areas, getting publications into the center, reports about them, etc.
- \* an initiative by the N.O. to set up an exchange of publications (Militant) with OC and the PWOC
- \* particular attention to El Comite, perhaps a New York forum on questions around Puerto Rican liberation, the national question, etc. (Luis Castro, who was the first El Comite member to join another tendency, the SWP in Boston, might have some helpful ideas)
- \* periodic polemics on key questions in the centrist milieu which they are discussing (the ISR article on the "new right" was especially pertinent in this regard)
- \* a meeting between Jack, when he's down here for the Militant rally, and Newlin, if possible
- \* approaches to the Guardian; for instance, solicitation for greetings by it to our PRDF rally in December and similar initiatives, however modest (protest letter in behalf of Leo Harris, Hector) as well as in the mass movement--co-operation with Guardian clubs, for forum speakers, etc.

The main question which precipitated the break leading to the developments I've described is the evolution of the Chinese leadership and its political perspectives, principally the three worlds "theory."

I think we should turn our howitzers on the Hua leadership-- and its forebearers, Mao and Stalin. While our coverage of the betrayals by the government of Mao's heirs has been adequate, it has lacked sufficient gravity and dramatic presentation. I think we've missed some opportunities--which can easily be recouped-- to score some big blows at the expense of our Maoist opponents, particularly the CP(M-L) and the RWIq, and thereby modified the most powerful education of our readers and our comrades.

The more boldly we drive home our estimate of what the Chinese bureaucrats are doing, the more we explain why they are compelled to carry out such policies, the more we describe the historic roots to such a reality, the more effective we are in posing questions to the centrists that they cannot answer.

The break with Maoism opens Pandora's box, and no admonitions from the OC or Silber or the Guardian majority can shove back the questions which flow out in rivers. We pose to this current the only consistent analysis, the straight line their zigzags, half-explanations, semi-apologies and demagoguery approach--and avoid. That is, the Stalin-Trotsky debates. But to get there, we should drive our ideas on China forward with greater vigor than heretofore. Since a previous letter noted some of my thinking on this, it isn't necessary to repeat it; I think, however, that the more we maintain the character of coverage thus far in the press--the content of which I agree with--that is, a less than sufficient profile, the less we gain, to the point that it becomes a weakness and less than what's really necessary.

Enclosed is some material I hope is of use.

Comradely,



Jon Hillson