

## POLITICAL REPORT ON THE 12/15/79 OC/NNMLC DEBATE

Introduction: The debate resulted from discussions between the CC and the Boston Club following an initial proposal from the Club to the BOC. The topic for discussion chosen was "What are the requirements for a genuine common party-building effort for our tendency, and how do we build such an effort?" (The introductory materials and reading list circulated prior to the debate are attached.) Approximately 150 attended the debate and, while it is difficult to tell, probably about 45 of those attending were independents.

Format: JF of the OCSC (and the BOC) and TP of the Boston Club each spoke for an hour. This was followed by two hours of questions and answers posed to TP and JF by a panel consisting of representatives from the BOC, For the People, the Boston Club, and RBSG. Finally, questions from the floor were taken for about an hour.

Summary: With few exceptions there was little sharp debate or struggle. Rather than laying out speaker by speaker what was said, a summary of the positions presented by the speakers both in their speeches and in response to questions will be presented.

OCSC: JF's views were basically right out of the Draft Plan.

The organizational aspect: the key task for the ARAD trend is the building of a single center which would coordinate the ideological struggle in the full view of the movement. "The key question is party spirit vs. circle spirit." Building a single center is primary and must be put before all other political questions to avoid unnecessary or premature splits in the trend. The OC must be anti-federationist to combat "circle spirit," which is the main manifestation of ultra-leftism in the trend. Rules adopted to combat federationism include individual participation with no organizational discipline, individual election of leadership, and the development of regional centers (After the RCs are set up organizational memberships in the OC will be abolished.) Anti-federationism is also related to the goal of building a multi-national organization. Because of the historical fact of racism within the trend, most national minority comrades are outside of the existing organizations. For this reason it is essential that any common party-building effort not be based on preexisting organizations if it is to avoid being objectively racist.

The theoretical aspect: the central theoretical task is the summing up of ultra-leftism. While the ARAD trend might not have any contact with the dogmatists since Angola, there is still only one antirevisionist movement. This is because, as shown by the continued existence of circle spirit in the trend, the break with ultra-leftism still has not been consolidated. (The only concrete example given by JF of how the summation of ultra-leftism will take place is the Point 18 study plan which has been initiated in other cities and will soon start in Boston.) When accomplished the summation of ultra-leftism will provide a rudimentary general line for our trend including a critique of modern revisionism and a M-L approach to conducting the struggle against it.

The OC's Party Building line: For the first time the OC publicly acknowledged that its draft plan was part of a party-building line. In fact, JF stated that it was a complete although "rudimentary" party-building line and that while other aspects of it should be developed and debated later, now was not the time to have an all-sided party-building line debate. Instead, starting concretely with the organiza-

tional structure and proceeding step by step reaching unity at each point along the way, the trend as a whole can develop a party building line around which it is united thus avoiding unnecessary splits over secondary questions. As to the issue of the fusion pre-party, JF would not deny that PWOC was forming a pre-party, but said that there would be nothing wrong with communists forming such a national organization based on their ideological unity. This would only be a problem if this national organization saw itself as "the Party in embryo." At the same time, however, JF pointed to Russia, Korea and Vietnam as examples of how CPs could be formed from pre-party formations.

#### The OCSC Critique of the Clubs:

1)organizational opportunism: "The line of the Network is circle warfare!" This is shown by their continued refusal to engage in a common party-building effort. While they try to justify this refusal by raising the rectification/fusion issue and while they call for an immediate and allsided party-building line debate these actions are merely a cover for their sectarianism and circle spirit. While the Clubs pay lipservice to the idea of doing joint work they do not really mean it. They are only willing to let others work with them on their initiatives. That is not really joint work.

2)spontaneous approach to theoretical work: While some advances may be made in their national study projects, the Network's approach "bows to spontaneity" and should instead be placed within the framework of an overall theoretical agenda. This agenda could give needed guidance to the choosing of topics and to the approach taken to any individual topic. The Clubs' spontaneity is a product of their "radical-intellectualism." In their efforts to avoid right errors they "capitulate to left idealism and anarchism." Their left idealism is at the core of their line and helps to explain why they do not want to engage in a common effort to sum up ultraleftism. Such a summation would reveal the left idealist nature of their understanding of Mao's theory of the restoration of capitalism. Finally, the Clubs' critique of the Draft Plan as only a partial party-building line and their call for an immediate allsided party-building line struggle are "abstractionist" and reflect their "petit bourgeois radicalism."

3)lack of accountability to the movement: Rectification forces have emphasized that political line will be developed by leading individuals. Yet, they have described no mechanisms which will hold these leaders accountable to the movement as a whole. Without these mechanisms there is no way to insure that correct lines will be developed.

NNMLC: TP presented the rectification line as it is laid out in their documents. The key obstacle to building a genuine party is the lack of a general line and the key task is the rectification of the general line of the US communist movement.

On Party-Building Line: The way to build unity over party-building line or any other political line is not by organizationally structuring debate but by engaging in struggle over it. Correct party-building line will be developed by advanced elements who gain leadership through political struggle and who remain accountable to the movement by the trends ability to support them or to withhold support.

On the OC: While encouraged that the OC was finally admitting that it had a party-building line the Clubs point out that the Draft Plan is insufficient for building a party and that the OCSC in reality has another full blown plan which is the PWOC's fusion line. This involves

the PWOC's plan to "trivialize" the OC by using it merely as a united front to build a national pre-party holding to the fusion line. By not making this line clear they avoid accountability to the trend, and by limiting political struggle within the OC (the Labor Day conference as an example) they show the futility of trying to challenge the PWOC's hegemony within the OC. Within this context, anti-federationist organizational mechanisms are not sufficient to solve the problem of organizational domination. The only way federationism can decisively be overcome is through line struggle.

On Theoretical Work: The theoretical agenda cannot be established administratively as the OC would like to, but must be determined by the contention of leading elements. Due to the uneven development in our movement some issues can be raised sooner than others. As concentrations of advanced forces in different areas develop, critique and assert lines on different subjects, the movement will be able to accept or reject the worth of these efforts thus determining the agenda through struggle. The OC should stop putting organization over politics and begin to discuss the Clubs' choice of topics and not just how they chose them.

### Political Lessons Gained from the Debate:

The OC acknowledged that it had a party-building line: In its original decision not to join the OC and in its polemics since that time, the Clubs have attempted to draw the OC forces into a two line struggle between the rectification and fusion party-building lines. Up until recently the OC has resisted, stating that the dominant struggle was "party spirit vs. circle spirit" and that political questions about party-building line were secondary. However, with its new formulation, the OC can be seen to have responded somewhat to the Clubs' "organization over politics" criticisms. By now stating that "the key political question is organization" and by calling the Draft Plan a "rudimentary" party-building line the OC is acknowledging that the struggle over party-building line is primary.

Still no true party-building line struggle: Regardless of what they are calling it, the OC continues to avoid any genuine struggle over party-building line by limiting the line it puts forth to an organizational plan and by attacking the Clubs as "abstractionist" for asking for more. In this way the OC can continue to defer an open rectification fusion confrontation but can now put its organizational maneuverings within the context of "party-building line."

The Fusion pre-party strategy: In response to the OC's announcement that the Draft Plan is a rudimentary party-building line, the Clubs contend that the OC's Draft Plan is merely the organizational portion of its true party-building line, the fusion pre-party strategy. JF did not confirm or deny that the pre-party is on the PWOC agenda but would only say that such a formation would be compatible with the OC. According to JF, this is because as OC members those comrades forming a pre-party have committed themselves to struggling out party-building line within the OC. This entire issue raises numerous questions which cannot seriously be dealt with until a better political and theoretical basis has been laid. This includes study and analysis of the fusion forces actual plans, the theoretical conception of the pre-party, etc.

Comparing the OC and the NNMLC: Based on JF's and TP's presentations those attending the debate were able to compare, at least to some extent, the lines of the OC and the Clubs. The OC appeared to assume

the role of the bureaucratically entrenched incumbent, less interested in moving MLism forward than in maintaining its central position in the trend. This attitude was shown by its refusal to deal with party-building line in an all-sided manner, its unprincipled responses to criticisms of the Labor Day conference, its lack of concrete work other than that directly related to its organizational consolidation, and finally, the Draft Plan itself. The Plan attempts to limit the trend's growth and to slow its development in order to achieve organizational unity. The OC is seeking to hold the movement to the level of its most undeveloped forces. As a result, it has little to show in the way of concrete accomplishments or initiatives. In comparison, the Clubs appeared to be much more dynamic. They put forth a complete line that they seemed to believe in and they tried to force the OC to confront it on a political level. They also presented a number of initiatives which they are engaged in which, in quantity if not quality, presents a clear contrast to the OC's stagnation. Another contrast was in their differing approaches to setting the theoretical agenda. While the OC wants to set it organizationally, the Clubs want it set spontaneously through political struggle of "leading elements."

The Clubs' spontaneous approach demonstrates their failure to recognize that the choice of what political line should be developed first is in itself a political question, and further must be looked at in the context of a theoretical perspective. This can be seen in their "joint work" proposals which do not seem to recognize that any theoretical work they engage in must be provided with political leadership. Closely related to this criticism is the Clubs' failure to recognize that besides political line, M-L theory also needs to be rectified.

The Clubs' failure to provide for the accountability of their leadership also deserves mention. In response to questioning on this issue, TP stated that the leadership of the rectification line would be "accountable to the movement as a whole." By not creating a concrete process which would ensure that their developing line is subjected to a collective political and theoretical practice the Clubs neglect a crucial factor in the development of a correct general line. This relates closely to the issue of cadre development. The Clubs' emphasis on "leading elements" developing political lines could easily lead to a neglect of the problem of uneven development. The theoretical and political levels of all cadre, not just the leadership must be developed if the many problems and issues facing our trend are to be successfully dealt with.

## FOT FORCE'S INTERVENTION AT THE FORUM

The intervention and impact of the pot forces was made in several ways. The primary method was political and through four questions that were asked of the two debaters. The questions themselves had three areas of focus, 1) minority rights under the bureaucratic structure of the OC, 2) the view of theoretical history of the rectification forces and its difference from the OC forces and 3) the future relationship and association of the OC and the NNMLC. The secondary method related to our physical presence and its impact.

Minority Rights: On the first issue, Ricky from the panel questioned the methods in which the OC handled minority rights and viewpoints especially during the Labor Day conference as an example in which pot forces were continually suppressed, documents not available, votes on issues that were only superficially discussed. Framptom, representing the OC, responded in a primarily defensive manner although he did admit to the OC's having made "some errors". He stated that the "charges were false", "documents were available" and the pot forces were "freaked out" being in a minority position and due to our inexperience at political struggle as well as having "plenty of opportunity to raise issues". Much of his response was marked by this type of offensive against our practice. The error he did admit to included "the unfortunate three minute time limit" that was enforced at the conference. From the floor, Richard later followed up Ricky's question by using Framptom's own condescending and unprincipled response to Ricky as an example of the OC's overly bureaucratic structure. Richard also indicated to Framptom that documents were not available to RBSG as he had earlier stated. Framptom again tried to fend off these criticisms saying that the pot forces were "intimidated" by sharp struggle and that they had left the conference because of this although he later admitted the point that RBSG criticisms were not insignificant.

Theoretical Work: The second issue concerned the nature and substance of theoretical work. Ricky questioned Patterson of the NNMLC's view of the state of M-L theory; whether they viewed it as being in crisis, how their conception of theory was different than the OC's. Patterson had difficulty answering this question admitting that this was a serious problem and an area that needed a great deal of work. Patterson criticized pot's conception of theory stating that we overemphasized methodology and failed to understand the importance of political line. Framptom agreed with Patterson, attempted with some difficulty to repeat Patterson's statement that political line struggle develops theory.

Future Struggle Between OC and NNMLC: The final issue was a question by Irene from the floor asking Framptom whether he felt that the OC still considers the NNMLC as within the tendency and how would the OC continue to struggle with them. Framptom replied affirmatively and that future forums and debates would be the way of struggle.

Impact And Analysis of Our Political Intervention: Of the three questions, it would seem that Ricky's first question and Richard's followup regarding minority rights had the greatest combined impact in revealing the OC basic line of organization over politics. But rather than indicating problems within this line, it revealed that minority viewpoints may not be handled in a principled manner. Thus their political line was not questioned only how the OC carries out their line of organization over politics. In addition, Framptom's attitude and rhetorical style in responding to this particular question revealed a sexist, racist, anti-intellectual stance. Reminiscent of the dogmatist, he seemed to assert that a certain machoness or quality of being "tough" as a measure of success. This style plus his tactic of indicating pot's unwillingness to engage in struggle by leaving the conference served to confuse some of the participants. However most of the participants were clearly disturbed by Framptom's inability to deal in a principled manner both Ricky's and Richard's question. In this way, many could see that minority viewpoints were being handled and discussed incorrectly especially by Framptom (a member of the OCSC). More obviously, it was clear to many of the participants that the OC itself may have internal conflicts that have not been clearly struggled with and that a minority force may exist.

The second question concerning theoretical practice had less impact in terms of the general audience especially since neither Framptom nor Patterson could adequately respond to it. It did confirm to pot forces, however, of the current state of M-L theory and the unwillingness of the NNMLC and the OC to engage in theoretical practice as understood by pot forces. Their response of liquating theory to political line struggle reveals the backwardness, low level of their theoretical work and their lack of understanding of the necessary relationship between political line and theory. Finally, it also indicates their failure to break with the historical error that have dominated the recent history of M-L theory. Although it is known that Patterson of the NNMLC understands the pot concept of theoretical practice, yet he chose to mischaracterize the pot concept as only focusing on methodological issues. Unfortunately, much of the participants seemed to have as much difficulty as the debaters in understanding the question and its concepts. The reduction of crucial concepts (i.e. ML in crisis, ML as a living science, etc.) may have contributed to the confusion given the low level of familiarity with the pot line by the audience. Another unfortunate byproduct may have been that those unfamiliar with the pot line may in fact come away from the debate with the ideal that theory is developed only through political line struggle since we didn't have the opportunity to respond to the question ourselves. It is questionable whether this issue given the objective structural limitations (several minutes per question) made any difference in the forum as a whole.

The final question had perhaps the least impact on the debate given the obvious response that Framptom gave it. Yet it did indicate that despite the sectarianism exhibited in the debate, the OC was willing at least in the near future to struggle with the NNMLC. Framptom and the OCSC are not yet willing to split the tendency. This note of willingness to engage in future struggle gave participants at least a minimal sign of optimism.

Pot's Physical Presence: Although less direct than the questions themselves, the physical presence and the principled method in which pot engaged in polemics had perhaps the greatest impact. All the questions were meant to move the discussion to a deeper level rather than continuing to argue in a rhetorical and sectarian way one line over the other as most of the other questions reflected. All of our questions were principled and concise and reflected the greatest amount of preparedness of all the organizations present. Laura's presence as the chairperson, plus Ricky on the panel and questions by Richard and Irene gave us a strong showing as a substantial force not only in numbers but in the evenhandedness and principled way we conducted ourselves. Although at times, the degree of difficulty of the questions by Ricky may have been too far forward for many of the participants, there was realization of our preparedness. Finally, the fact that Richard was the first person from the floor to ask a question made us more apparent. Furthermore it was a followup question which deepened the level of struggle in eliciting a more adequate response from Framptom's inadequate answer. This presence in itself may have helped more substantially to reveal pot forces as a third force at the forum and perhaps in the tendency.

Summary: Given the objective limitations of the debate itself, the pot intervention was minimal. As a superminority, pot worked harder in order to make its impact felt. Politically, pot revealed the OC's inability to deal with minority rights, bringing to some the question it's ability to carry out their line. It was not able to expose the main issue of organization over politics. Possibly, Framptom's style helped to confuse the issue, leading some to attribute this problem to his manner rather than to the OC's general orientation. The theoretical question seemed to be most apparent to the pot forces themselves and the few familiar with our pot line. The participants in general were confused and had difficulty understanding and following the issue especially given Patterson and Framptom's poor responses. Our presence was made clear as a third force through our numbers and through our willingness to engage in principled polemics. There was realization that this force is attempting to genuinely sharpen the struggle within the tendency.

#### Lessons for our Future Intervention in the Trend:

- 1) Raising Issues: Issues need to be raised clearly and concretely oriented towards a perspective that most of the participants can understand. Use of concrete examples that most are familiar with would be useful. In addition, specific questions would elicit more productive and focused responses.
- 2) Superminority Status: Operating as a superminority force forces the BFC to function with more difficulty. Objective conditions limit us in our ability to articulate and clearly outline our pot pb line. Various methods/tactics to overcome this include:
  - a) Having newsbulletin distributed before the forum and at the forum,
  - b) Leaflets should be passed out at the forum explaining our line and position,
  - c) The background and historical framework in which we ask our questions should be included in our leaflets.