

An Appendix to "A Critique of the Northern California Alliance"
written by one of its authors

My basic purpose in writing this appendix is to go beyond the negative criticisms we made of the NCA by presenting some tentative ideas on the direction I think Marxist-Leninists in the Bay Area should be moving. I will do this by summarizing the positions of the PWOC on trade unions and party building and contrasting this to the NCA approach. (I would like to state from the outset that I find the PWOC (Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee) literature the most helpful of any I have seen on these questions, but I have just begun to study the issues and my positions are not fully resolved. I have unity with many of the PWOC's positions, but they have several aspects or positions I am critical of.)

I will contrast the NCA and the PWOC in three ways. First I want to concretize the criticism made in the paper of the NCA's lack of longer-range strategy by summarizing how PWOC guides its day-to-day work in the trade unions with its longer-range strategy of party-building. Then I will develop further the criticism of Max's party-building approach that is in the body of our paper by summarizing and contrasting the PWOC's approach. Third I include, as an example of a higher level of political unity than that of the NCA, the 18 points of unity of the Anti-Revisionist, Anti-Dogmatic Marxist-Leninist Trend, a group of organizations (including the PWOC) that have had a series of conferences on questions facing the movement and are working together in various ways.

This appendix is an individual contribution as there was not enough unity around its contents to include ~~existing Trade Union Work with Party Building Strategy~~ it as part of the collective document.

Guiding Trade Union Work with Party Building Strategy

When I was a member of the NCA, I read an article by PWOC called "Party Building and the Trade Unions." This article seemed to me to be a good example of how an organization could guide its day-to-day work in reform struggles by longer-range revolutionary strategy. This link as well as the clarity and content of the approach contrasted sharply with the confusion and floundering character of the NCA. A series of quotes from this article will show in a very schematic fashion the link between their day-to-day work in reform struggles in the trade unions and their longer-range revolutionary strategy of party-building. (The quotes are somewhat difficult to read as they are only bits and pieces of the original article. You can get the article by writing PWOC, Box 11768, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101.)

The PWOC article states:

Communists have a definite role to play in the rank and file caucus and without the assistance of scientific theory, without proletarian ideology, the workers will never be able to regain control of their trade unions and mount even a partial defense of their day-to-day interests.

. . . not only is Marxism essential to the transformation of the trade unions, but . . . only a socialist revolution can really secure the basic and fundamental interests of the working class . . . a socialist revolution is inconceivable without a vanguard party.

For this reason we have identified party-building as our

A leading M-L party would work to connect the economic struggles of the rank and file to the political struggles of the whole working class. This party would guide the rank and file movement to support the interests of the whole class, instead of just a section, by developing programs to organize the unorganized and to unite the class along ~~racial, national, & sexual~~ racial, national, & sexual, & income lines. The party would struggle against any tendencies of the rank & file to be co-opted or repressed and would work to build lasting

START → central task. And to say that this is our central task signifies that party-building is organically connected to all other subordinate tasks, that party-building is an integral link or aspect in all of our mass work, particularly in our trade union work. We must therefore approach our presence in the trade unions primarily as party-builders and not primarily as builders of the rank and file movement. To do otherwise would not only undermine the struggle for socialism but it would also undermine the development of the rank and file movement. [Insert (my comment)]

. . . . To say that party-building is central is not to say that that's what we do first . . . but everything that we do, even though in the very early stages 98% of our actual practice may be limited to what we could call trade union work, all of this has to be geared and lead to an eventual integration of communist work into that work, otherwise it's going nowhere.

They then describe some ways of carrying out this central task of party-building:

The perspective of the PWOC on the question of party-building is that we must fuse communism with the workers movement . . . The process . . . can be expressed as the process of building a communist current in the working class . . . The first dimension to the problem is the fusion of communism with the advanced workers . . .

. . . having identified the advanced workers, the next thing that we have to do is to develop their class consciousness . . . One area is that we need to do communist agitation and propoganda with the advanced workers . . .

And one of the things that I think that we should link, one of the questions we can link to all of our communist agitation is the question of party-building. There's the time to talk about the developing communist movement. There's the time to talk about a specific organization that you're working in. There's the time to show the worker how they could become involved in putting into practice the struggle for socialism in a very concrete way.

The second whole area for developing the advanced workers is study or discussion circles . . . it's an intermediary form between the rank and file caucus and the communist organization . . . for us its primarily a recruitment form it's a form to help the worker move from the rank and file movement into a communist organization . . . But where the advanced worker is coming from is how can this study form, how can this discussion group lend assistance to their work of organizing the rank and file movement . . .

Now the third whole area for developing the advanced workers is their participation in broader struggles . . . Political action and experience in broader struggles establishes the links between the struggles of the worker at the point of production and in the society at large . . .

In this process of winning over the advanced, PWOC stresses, care must be taken to avoid isolating the more advanced from the bulk of the workers in the rank and file movement. PWOC's strategy is distinct from that of the sectarian groups who think that recruitment of a few advanced workers into their organizations amounts to success. Such an approach does not push forward the rank and file movement; neither does

it build a genuine Marxist-Leninist organization with real roots in the working class:

~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~
Obviously, winning the advanced is key because its the advanced workers who will make up the cadre in any revolutionary party in the U.S. Now, while it is true that winning the advanced is the key, we will not be able to do even this except for a handful . . . if we are unable to fuse communism with the mass movement as well. Fusion with the mass movement . . . establishes the only context for really winning the advanced. It creates a broad base out of which the advanced can become communists and do open communist work. It is absolutely essential as safeguard against the isolation of the advanced workers.

. . . what will fusion with the mass movement mean? It will mean that communists will move into a position where they have become leaders of the rank and file movement openly and it will mean that the advanced workers are becoming communists. Openly. Both together . . . The rank and file movement will have developed both the leadership and sufficient consciousness among a broad strata of workers to go over to the political struggle, to move its program from the struggle against its own capitalists to the struggle against the capitalist class. We will have created a real vanguard. We will have communists with a mass base in the rank and file movement and after we do that then we can call a convention, then we can call a congress, and then we can have a genuine communist party.

Since 1976 when this speech was delivered the PWOC has clarified or modified its view--they have stated that only an embryonic communist current can be built before the founding congress of the party. In any case their basic view that trade union and other mass work should be integrated with and guided by party-building strategy continues. In the NCA the low level of political unity and the lack of unity around the need for a M-L party made such an approach impossible. In contrast to the clearly outlined strategy of the PWOC, the NCA approach did not go beyond pushing the rank and file movement forward and talking about socialism when possible.

Party-Building

In the body of the paper we criticize Max' views on party-building and the organizational forms appropriate in this period. In trying to understand his views and how they affected the NCA, I found the debates between the Guardian and the PWOC extremely helpful. It is a debate that I feel that anyone involved in the NCA in the past or present should be familiar with. A summary of this debate follows along with some of my thoughts on its implications for the NCA. The original debate can be found in the Guardian Fan the Flames 3-16-77 and 5-4-77, the Guardian Radical Forum 4-13-77 and the August, September, and October issues of the Organizer (PWOC newspaper).

As we stated in the body of the paper, Max's views (Guardian Radical Forum November 2, 1977) are very close to those of the Guardian. He supports their party-building plans and is involved in the Bay Area Guardian Club. The Guardian holds that the main task of party-building in the present period is uniting existing Marxist-Leninists around

ideological questions. After the party is formed, they say, then the task of fusing Marxism-Leninism with the working class can be addressed. Max states: "the key link in the reestablishment of the party cannot lie in the field of the practical work . . . the advanced in this practical work cannot be the precondition to the development of the party because of its inherent limitation without a party's guidance." ~~There is no~~ The PWOC agree that coming to unity on the application of Marxist-Leninist theory to the U.S. is key in party-building, but maintain that it is incorrect to separate the theoretical debate from practical work in working class struggles.

PWOC asserts that "the essence of party-building is the struggle to fuse the independent elaboration of Marxism-Leninism with a significant section of advanced workers." They state that the theoretical debate must address itself to the concrete questions facing the U.S. working class, that the theory must be tested by trying to win over the advanced workers to it. A certain degree of fusion with the working class must be established before the party can be formed. A few quotes from PWOC's debates with the Guardian will help to get across this idea:

If we are not to fuse our movement to the class struggle of the proletariat and thus establish our vanguard character in fact, then . . . we would be content with addressing questions in an abstract and general way, be content with the 'paramount' importance of 'ideological unity on the basis of the inherited legacy of scientific socialism' . . . there would be no reason to demand that our theory be capable--now and not at some future time-- of solving the concrete political, organizational and tactical problems posed by the working class movement.

It is only in conjunction with the effort to win over the advanced to Marxism-Leninism and build a communist current in the workers movement that the the full range of our tasks--theoretically, politically, and organizationally--become clear. It is only in conjunction with the struggle for this fusion that revolutionary theory and political line acquire any degree of validation.

Here again, Silber's counterposing of 'party-building' to 'fusion' gets him into a muddle. His fixation on the 'which comes first' question . . . he cannot bring himself to understand how party-building and fusion can proceed in tandem because he is incapable of grasping the fact that party-building is in essence a question of fusion . . . Marxist-Leninists strive to develop revolutionary theory, to mold communist cadre, and to win the advanced workers to communism throughout the entire process of party-building. But it is only when the process matures to a significant extent that it attains the qualities necessary to be transformed into a real party through a party congress . . .

Winning over a section of the advanced workers and creating a communist current in embryo in the working class must take place before the party is formed. Some degree of fusion with the working class, some evidence of the vanguard character of the party must be achieved before the founding congress. PWOC speaks of the kind of party the Guardian would create as follows:

Never mind that such a party will not have established its vanguard character in any respect. Our intention to be the vanguard will suffice. But as the experience of OL and PU shows, the road to sectarian isolation and ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ impotence is paved with such good intentions.

Closely related to the debate around fusion and party-building is the debate around the correct organizational forms for the party-building period. Max believes the Guardian clubs can play a leading role in the theoretical debates:

. . . the clubs have a number of advantages over existing M-L organizations in taking this step toward organizing the rectification work. First, the clubs overcome the local character which still predominates among most formations. Even more significantly, the clubs have the potential to overcome the extensive diversity of organizational affiliation which has divided genuine Marxist-Leninists in this particular period. The clarification that the Guardian clubs will not attempt to directly guide the mass struggles which its members are engaged in will allow us to avoid the constant splits and divisions over the immediate practical work. They can instead allow for an alignment and realignment of communist elements on the more substantial questions without placing the organizational roadblocks of 'preparty' organizational affiliation as a barrier to struggle.

Max goes on to talk about the limitations of practical work without a party and his view that advances in practical work cannot be a precondition for forming the party. He then asks:

Does this recognition mean that aspiring communists should not work in the mass movement until the party is built? Absolutely not. But it does mean that the form in which this work should be organized must be distinct from the various organizational forms necessary to organize the rectification work.

It is in this way that the particular conception of the MISO form ~~xxxxxx~~ of the NCA (and the proposed form for the organization the Transformation Caucus will become) fit into Max' approach to party-building.

In response to Max' argument about the advantages of the Guardian Clubs over local M-L organizations, it must first be stated that the local organizations in the Trend are very much aware of the limitations of their local character and have taken steps to set up a national ideological center to centralize debate within that Trend. Secondly, avoiding debate about the immediate practical work may make things easier, but it won't help in the task of developing a theory which really addresses the concrete problems faced by the working class movement in the U.S. (though we don't advocate getting bogged down in the details of practical work.)

FWOC argues that the local M-L organizations in the Trend must play the leading role in party-building, and they argue that the Guardian is in no position to be able to do this:

The most highly developed of our forces are organized into local organizations and collectives. While still primitive, these forces have gone beyond being mere study circles and have begun to take up the task of elaborating an application of M-L to the concrete conditions in the U.S. A few have done fairly ~~extensive~~ extensive theoretical work on some questions, which is being refined in the process of repeated testing in practice.

. . . they have taken the first tenuous step toward the working class and oppressed nationalities. Some have even evolved a measure of strategy and tactics to guide them in this work . . . internally they have begun to apply the Leninist principles of organization, developing primitive democratic centralist ~~structures~~ structures, programs for developing communist cadre and real division of labor in their work.

. . . the Guardian is not capable of playing the role of a center . . . To the extent that it has done theoretical work, that work has remained on the most abstract and general level, and is not capable of serving as a guide to action. The Guardian has no direct way of testing its theoretical formulations, and thus is unable to concretize and refine them in relation to an actual working class movement . . .

Seeing the fusion of Marxism-Leninism with the working class as essentially diversionary, the Guardian naturally underestimates the critical importance and central role that those organized forces which have taken the first steps toward this fusion must play.

In Max' approach to party-building as quoted on the previous page, the organizational forms for carrying out the theoretical debate around applying Marxism-Leninism to the U.S. must be distinct from the organizational forms for carrying out work in the mass movements until the party is built. In the Bay Area this has meant that the NCA has carried out the practical work in the mass movement while the newly-formed Guardian Club has been involved in theoretical debate. (To our knowledge no formal organizational link of the NCA to the Guardian Club exists--the connection is through Max' party-building concept.) The proposal for the future is that the organization formed out of the Transformation Caucus would carry out the work in the mass movement. As was argued above, we feel that this is an incorrect separation of theory and practice which advances neither the mass work nor the theoretical debate of the party-building effort.

The NCA did not (and it has been proposed by some that the future Transformation organization will not) discuss and debate ~~an approach~~ an approach to party-building as it was a deferred question. It did not participate as an organization in the theoretical debates (being carried out in the Guardian Club) or, as an organization, test (by trying to win over the advanced ~~workers~~ workers in the actual struggles of the working class) the application of ~~the~~ M-L theory to the U.S. which is being developed in the Guardian Clubs.

Therefore, we are left with two questions. What kind of party will be built by the Guardian approach and what kind of an organization has the NCA been or will the new organization be with the question of party-building deferred. The answer to the first question, ~~is~~

I think, has been outlined above in PWOC's critique of the Guardian's party-building approach. The Guardian approach does not require that M-L organizations test the theory through involvement in the actual struggles of the working class and through efforts to win over advanced workers. Nor does the Guardian approach require that M-L organizations demonstrate an ability to lead working class struggles in the period before the party is formed. Rather the Guardian proposes to postpone any serious efforts at fusion till after the founding congress of the party. A party built in this manner would not, in my opinion, be a genuine Marxist-Leninist party.

In response to the criticism that the theoretical debates in the Guardian clubs will be separate from the practical involvement in working class struggles, it will be asserted that individuals from the NCA or the future Transformation organization can use their experiences in the mass movement in the theoretical debate in the Guardian Club. This, ~~however~~ however, is not an adequate way to make the necessary connection between theory and practice. The NCA experience in working class struggles has not been the consciously directed work of an organization committed to a clear strategy of party-building that involved testing the ~~xxx~~ theory, winning over the advanced, building a communist current in embryo, etc. Instead the practice of the organization was guided (in Max' conception) by an awareness of the limitations of practical work in the absence of a party with the organization doing the best it could in the meantime--without efforts, as an organization to link this practical work to efforts to build a party. Even if ~~xxx~~ the practical work in working class struggles does manage to indirectly shed some light on the theoretical debates, it should be the members of the organization as a whole, not only individuals, who sum up the lessons and the implications for the theoretical debates going on.

The second question is what kind of an organization has the NCA been (or will the new organization possibly become) with the question of party-building deferred? How is mass work guided in such an organizational form? It cannot be an organization trying to integrate its practical work in working class struggles with ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ a longer range plan for party-building, because it does not have a position on party-building. In the preceding section of this appendix, I discussed the effects of this on the NCA's trade union work.

As we stated in the paper, we think the NCA ^{was} ~~is~~ an inadequate organization (and the MISO form an incorrect one) for building the movement for socialist revolution in the U.S. What we think are needed are Marxist-Leninist organizations involved in the struggles of the working class and in the theoretical debates of the national Marxist-Leninist movement with the goal of building the U.S. working class movement and a genuine communist party able to provide revolutionary leadership in the class struggle.