

Bibliography on Federationism

Experience of the USSR

1. V. Soren, "Federalism" from Lenin's Teachings About the Party, 22-23.
2. Lenin, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, esp. section "Opportunism in Questions of Organization.", Moscow, 1969, 175-205.
3. Summaries of One Step Forward, Two Steps Back from History of the CPSU (Bolsheviks) Short Course, 46-51 and The Political Biography of Lenin, 66-74.
4. Documents from the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP in Lenin, CW, vol. 6, especially pp's 470 (Draft Resolution on the Place of the Bund in the Party;) 479 "Withdrawal of the Bund,;" 486-488, "Speech on the Place of the Bund in the R.S.D.L.P.;" and 518-521, "The Latest Word in Bundist Nationalism."
5. Lenin, "Marximum Brazenness and Minimum Logic", in Lenin, CW, vol. 7, 59-65. (Also see "The Position of the Bund in the Party", Lenin, CW, vol. 7, 92-103).
6. Lenin, A Letter to Iskra, Nov. 25, 1903 in V.I. Lenin On Organization, Proletarian Publishers, 196-197, also in Lenin, CW, vol. 7, 115-118.
7. Lenin, The Bourgeois Intelligentsia's Methods of Struggle Against the Workers, CW, vol. 20, 471-473.
8. Stalin, The Social-Democratic View of the National Question, CW, vol. 1, 28-43.

Albania

9. Enver Hoxha, "Report Delivered to the 1st Consultative Meeting of the Activists of the Communist Party of Albania, April 8, 1942, SW, vol. 1, 3-19, 29-30.
10. History of the Party of Labor of Albania. Tirana, 1971, 85-92, 109-113.

History of Communist and Workers Movements in U.S.A.

11. History of the National or Foreign Language Federations. Various Sources. See David Shannon, The Socialist Party of America, p. 45, Oakley C. Johnson, The Day is Coming. The Life and Work of Charles E. Ruthenberg, 1882-1927, 65-67, Theodore Draper, The Roots of American Communism, 210-225 and index, William L. Foster, History of the Communist Party of the United States, pp's 102, 114, 163, 171, 177-178.
12. History of the Federation, see March 1975 issue of Collective Works, Journal of the Independent Marxist-Leninists, 5-6.
13. Proletarian Unity League, 2,3 Many Parties of a New Type?, 36-44.
14. Guardian. State of the Party Building Movement-July 1978. Concluding section on OCIC, 4th objection and section on OCIC's weaknesses.
15. National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs, "Rectification vs. Fusion. The Struggle Over Party Building Line." 29 May 1979, pp's 18-20.
16. Outline Summary of The struggle Against Localism and Federationism at the Founding Conference of the OCIC (my notes).
17. OCIC Materials on Federationism:
 - 1) C.N. "A Brief Statement on the Struggle Against Racism," 1 Aug. 78.
 - 2) Steering Committee Meeting, Sept. 8, 1978, p. 4 OC membership.
 - 3) Founding Statement of the OCIC (date?), pp's 1-2.
 - 4) Steering Committee Meeting, Dec. 1978, p. 3 on local centers.

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- 5) Steering Committee Meeting, March 1979, Chairperson's Report, 1-3 and Report on Local Centers, 5-6.
- 6) Steering Committee Meeting #5, May 1979, report on local centers.
- 7) Steering Committee, "The Circle Game: A Reply to the Guardian," in OCIC Bulletin No. 2, March 1979 (11-35) especially 22-23, 28, 31-35.
- 8-9-10) John Frampton for the SC; "Letter (on Federationism), 10 March 1979; "Letter to Twin Cities Organizing Committee, 25 July 1979); "Forging the Party Spirit - A Beginning Perspective," 22 Sept. 79.
- 11) SC, "The OC's First Year." 26 May 1979, p. 9.
- 12) SC, "The History and Conception of OCIC Centers" and "Building OCIC Centers Regionally and Locally. Presentation Outline." 1 Sept. 79
- 13) Sum-Ups of the Experience in Southern California (various sources - see bibliography)

Review Questions: Study Questions on Federationism

1. Soren, "Federalism" from section of pamphlet on "Centralism" in Lenin's Teachings about the Party, Communist International 1931, pub. by October League, 1973, 22-23.

This is a very useful, short and precise description of federalism, a term often used to mean "federationism." His description poses federalism as being opposed to centralism and hence against our efforts to construct an ideological center which centralizes the ideological struggle between Marxist-Leninists.

"The principle opposed to centralism is federalism, a principle rejected by our Party. Were the Party to be built upon the principle of federalism the various organizations would be independent of each other and their relations would be based upon agreements and understandings. Under federalism the part cannot be made to submit itself to the whole or the minority to the majority. Each organization is supreme in itself. The committees are based upon equal representation of all the organizations; only those decisions of the committee are put into effect which are accepted by 'our' representatives. Under centralism the Party committees have greater rights and power than under federalism. Under centralism the Party is based upon the submission of the lower to the higher; under federalism, upon the principle of agreements between the lower and the higher. Under federalism there can be no strong and solid organization or powerful authoritative leading organs.... The Bolsheviks are opposed to the Party representing a sum of organizations and groups coming to agreements with each other. Soren relates federationism to anarchist views. The development of a leading center "does not necessarily mean the restriction of the lower organizations; on the contrary, each organization is fully independent as far as its inner activity is concerned, but it always remembers that it is not a distinct unit but a part of the whole."

2. Lenin, "Opportunism in Questions of Organization," from One Step Forward, Two Steps Back. I am more familiar with this section of Lenin's book, pp's 175-205, Moscow edition, 1969. This section of the book seems especially useful in the struggle against federationist thinking. In this section Lenin lays out various forms of opportunism such as autonomism, noble or intellectual anarchism, 'khvostism' and Girondism. All the deviations in the realm of organization shared in common anarchism and an avoidance of a clear definition of organizational principles. Since federationism is also opportunism in questions of organization there is a lot to learn from the various justifications for backwardness which Lenin confronts. He deals a lot with centralization, accusations that his approach is bureaucratic. I found especially insightful various comments about the circles that existed at the time. His defense of the concept that an organization should be built from the top down rather than from the bottom up, from the Congress to the individual Party organizations, is to the point. We can see in our own experience that ultra-democratic concepts provide support for federationist ideas. Together they elevate the circle spirit above the party spirit.

3. Lenin, Second Congress of RSDLP (July 17, 1903), and summary of One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, from The Political Biography of Lenin, 1943, 66-74.
I find the Political Biography to be an excellent companion piece to the History CPSU by Salin⁴⁶. Its focus is explaining Lenin's writings and it contains more detail in this respect than History of the CPSU Short Course. In studying One Step Forward, Two Steps Back we can learn about the following questions which relate to our goal of building an ideological center - 1) the importance of the struggle for centralism, 2) the importance of abandoning old or obsolete methods of work and organization 3) the importance of paying attention to organization questions and organizational principles in order to build ideological unity.

4. The 2nd Congress of the RSDLP (July 17-August 10, 1903)

The 1st Congress of 1898 which proclaimed the RSDLP did not succeed in its objective of forming a single party, united ideologically and organizationally. Police repression and ideological dispersion and confusion prevented this. At the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP the first question which came up was that of the Bund's (Social-Democratic organization of Jewish workers) place in the party. The Bund wanted the party set up on federal bases, as a union of national organizations not dependent on the party's general leadership. Iskra defended the point of view of a centralized, unified party of advanced workers from every nation. The Leninist idea won: the party would be created on the basis of internationalism and centralism.

In large part what we call the Leninist principles of organization derive from the struggles at the 2nd Congress. For our purposes all of the struggles for a centralized and unified party organization are fertile material for combatting federationism in our ranks. Besides the struggles with the Bund, the struggle over the role of the Party's Central Committee as a leadership body is perhaps the most important. The opportunists wanted to limit its authority by curtailing its right to dissolve the local committees and by considering as obligatory only those of its resolutions that, by their very nature, applied to the whole party. The Congress rejected this point of view and established the principle that the Central Committee was to unify and orient all the Party's political activity and that "all the resolutions of the Central Committee are obligatory for all party organizations." Thus, the principle of centralism defeated the autonomism and federalism propounded by the opportunists. The Bund demanded that it be recognized as the sole representative of the Jewish workers and, when the demand was rejected, its members walked out, claiming they were leaving the Party.

In support of the principles of organization resulting from a creative interpretation of Marx and Engels, Lenin wrote One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, in which he examined the development of the 2nd Congress, disclosing the opportunist deviations in the matter of organization and establishing the steadfast principles that were to characterize the revolutionary party.

For our purposes in creating the party spirit, and the importance of creating organizational unity based on the 18 points and draft plan this book by Lenin is probably our most fertile source. This is not because it lays out a simple map for us to follow, but because of the need to increase our party spirit.

A note of caution. While One Step... is positive, it is not easy to approach or to read. We have also to overcome left and voluntarist uses of this work by Lenin.... At present we are constructing an ideological center not an "organizational" center. All that is a requirement for party organization is not required for the organization of this center. But we must combat the erroneous notion that prior to the party there can be no centralization of ideological struggle. It is precisely for the centralization of ideological struggle that we are united into the OCIC.

There are a number of useful documents from the 2nd Congress which deal with federationism in Lenin, CW, vol. 6 (467-522), especially pp's 470 (Draft Resolution on the Place of the Bund in the Party); 479 "Withdrawal of the Bund"; 486-488, "Speech on the Place of the Bund in the R.S.D.L.P."; and 518-521, "The Latest Word in Bundist Nationalism."

"The majority were right in making the position of the Bund in the Party the first item on the agenda, and the Bundists at once proved this by submitting their so-called Rules, but in essence proposing federation. Once there are members in the Party who propose federation and others who

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reject it, there could be no other course open but to make the question of the Bund the first item on the agenda. It is no use forcing your favours on anybody, and the internal affairs of the Party cannot be discussed until we have firmly and uncompromisingly settled whether or not we want to march together."

"The crux of the issue has not always been presented quite correctly in the debate. The point of the matter is that, in the opinion of many Party members, federation is harmful and runs counter to the principles of Social-Democracy as applied to existing Russian conditions. Federation is harmful because it sanctions segregation and alienation, elevates them to a principle, to a law. Complete alienation does indeed prevail among us, and we ought not to sanction it, or cover it with a fig-leaf, but combat it and resolutely acknowledge and proclaim the necessity of firmly and unswervingly advancing towards the closest unity. That is why we reject federation in principle, on the threshold....I repeat, we recognise no obligatory partitions, and that is why we reject federation in principle." (486-487).

Lenin makes clear that federationism stands for "organized distrust." "Federation presupposes an agreement between separate, entirely independent units, which define their mutual relations only by voluntary consent of the sides concerned. It is not surprising, therefore, that the 'draft Rules' speak repeatedly of the 'contracting parties.'....Once it has stepped on to the inclined plane of nationalism, the Bund (if it did not wish to renounce its basic mistake) was naturally and inevitably bound to arrive at the formation of a particular Jewish party....'He who says A must say B'; one who has adopted the standpoint of nationalism naturally arrives at the desire to erect a Chinese Wall around his nationality, his national working-class movement; he is unembarrassed even by the fact that it would mean building separate walls in each city, in each little town and village, unembarrassed even by the fact that by his tactics of division and dismemberment he is reducing to nil the great call for the rallying and unity of the proletarians of all nations, all races and all languages." (518-521).

5. Lenin, "Maximum Brazenness and Minimum Logic", in Lenin, Collected Works, (October 1903), vol. 7, 59-65.

In this article Lenin defeats the federationist position of the Bund. The Bund was putting forward the demand for federation by demanding that the higher bodies of the RSDLP and other party bodies could communicate with the Jewish workers only with the sanction of the Bund Central Committee. The Bund was making acceptance of this ultimatum the very condition for its membership in the party. The Bund was accusing Lenin of putting words in its mouth and fabricating line differences where there were none, whereas Lenin had been trying to get the Bund to admit for some time that it would not join the Organizing Committee (for the Third Party Congress) except as a contracting party and by presenting terms to the party as a whole.

The Bund was demanding that the party be a federation of nationalities and that local or district organizations of the Party not organized on national lines should not be a "contracting" part of the Party. In response to the Bund's claim that the word "federation" "is of no significance" Lenin responded that "In the Russian language the word has a perfectly definite significance. What it signifies in the present instance is a 'declaration' of both federalism and nationalism. We would advise the Bundists, who can see no connection between nationalism and federation, to ponder this point....federalism can be justified theoretically only on the basis of nationalist ideas..." (62-63)

The Bund convicts itself of minimum logic. Since it was unable to get Lenin to recognize federation as a valid principle of organization due to his "dogmatism", it decided to drop the word "federation," to stop calling it a principle of organization and make it into a mere practical matter which could be embodied in concrete clauses or rules: 1) the

ideological struggle
has been developed

demand that a component element of the Party should not be limited by any territorial bounds, 2) the claim to be the sole representative of the Jewish proletariat, 3) the demand for 'representation on the Party Central Committee, 4) the denial to the Party Central Committee of the right to communicate with any part of the Bund without the consent of the Bund Central Committee and 5) the demand that fundamental clauses in the Party constitution could not be changed except with the consent of the component elements of the Party. Lenin points out that these clauses reflect federationism whether or not the word is used and whether or not it is acknowledged. The suspicions of the Bund of the higher organs of the Party, the use of ultra-democratic arguments to pretend that the Party has a brutal organizational plan and wants to lay down the law on everything all reflect the federation principle of organization. His conclusion brings to mind several OCIC organizations which have expressed the fear that the establishment of OCIC local and regional centers for ideological struggle means the destruction of their cadre organizations:

"No, gentlemen, the crux of this matter of the Bund's position in the Party does lie in the declaration of a definite principle of organization, and not at all in the concrete clauses. The crux of the matter is a choice of ways. Is the historically evolved isolation of the Bund to be legitimised, or is it to be rejected on principle, and the course openly, definitely, firmly and honestly adopted of ever closer and closer union and fusion with the Party as a whole? Is this isolation to be preserved, or a turn made towards fusion? That is the question."

"The answer will depend on the free will of the Bund, for... 'love cannot be forced'. If you want to move towards fusion, you will reject federation and accept autonomy. You will understand in that case that autonomy guarantees a process of fusion so gradual that the reorganization would proceed with the minimum of dislocation, and in such a way... that the Jewish working-class movement would lose nothing and gain everything by this reorganisation and fusion."

"If you do not want to move towards fusion, you will stand for federation (whether in its maximum or minimum form, whether with or without a declaration); you will be afraid of being 'steam-rollered', you will turn the regrettable isolation of the Bund into a fetish, and will cry that the abolition of this isolation means the destruction of the Bund; you will begin to seek grounds justifying your isolation, and in this search will now grasp at the Zionist idea of a Jewish 'nation', now resort to demagoguery and scurrilities."

(Those interested in further study on the Bund should study "The Position of the Bund in the Party," Lenin, CW, vol. 2, 92-103,)

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Lenin, A Letter to Iskra, Nov. 25, 1903 in V.I. Lenin On Organization, Proletarian Publishers, 196-197. This is quite good in relation to the federationist tendency of local groups to conceal their mistakes and struggles from the judgment of the movement. Federationism impedes ideological struggle. "We must exert every effort to prevent these defeats from being concealed in the vitiated atmosphere of study-circle and groups; they must be submitted to the judgment of all. At first sight it would seem that this is not a proper thing to do and that it would give 'offense' to this or that leader. But this false sense of propriety must be overcome; it is our duty to the Party and to the working class. By this and this alone will we make it possible for the whole mass (and not a casually selected group or study-circle) of influential Party workers to know their leaders and to place each one of them in their proper place. Only wide publicity will rectify all the rigid one-sided, capricious deviations. Only this will convert, what are sometimes stupid and ridiculous 'oppositions' and 'little groups' into useful and necessary material for Party self-training." In this

respect we should recall Comrade Newlin's comments about localism in his "Combatting Sraw-Men."... "no matter how sharp the struggle on a local level, no matter how bright the flashes of political consciousness it manifests, it must of necessity lose, as Lenin put it, 'nine-tenths of its significance' if it is not connected to a national revolutionary organization." It would appear to me that those who hold to some form of federationism do not have unity with the critique of localism. A restatement of this line on localism would contribute to the struggle against federationism.

There is a somewhat better translation of Lenin's "Letter to Iskra" in Lenin, CW, vol. 7, 115-118, where the quotation above appears on p. 118. Lenin concludes that "a really harmonious ensemble of leaders" can emerge only through open ideological struggle. "Light, more light! We need a vast orchestra; and we must acquire experience in order correctly to distribute the parts, in order to know to whom to assign the sentimental violin, to whom the gruff double-bass, to whom the conductor's baton.... only given this condition will it be impossible for the workers to cease to understand us; only then will our 'general staff' really be backed by the good and conscious will of an army that follows and at the same time directs its general staff." (118)

7. Lenin, from The Bourgeois Intelligentsia's Methods of Struggle Against the Workers, vol. 20 CW, 471-473.

In this essay Lenin analyses the liquidators and the Pravdaist trends and discusses how workers judge political trends and explains how the workers viewed the narrow circle diplomacy of the liquidationists. He remarks that "lack of answers to the questions of tactics, organization and program - such is the soil on which narrow circle diplomacy thrives, and such are its assumptions." (472)

ie, in the absence of a certain degree of fusion narrow circle diplomacy is bound to reign, because lines are not tested.

8. Stalin, The Social-Democratic View of the National Question, 28-43, CW, vol. 1

In this essay Stalin opposes the form of the party which would establish a "loose federation" of separate national parties. He is opposed to reinforcing national barriers with organizational measures (barriers). He points out that in the interest of building a single, centralized party the point is to unite on the basis of the common interests of various nationalities and not to build separate parties on basis of national distinctions. "Thus, 'national distinctions,' which are of minor importance for the Centralist, become, for the Federalist, the foundation of national parties." (32)

ie, whole point is to develop an ideological center which stimulates class consciousness and helps break down localist and national barriers. These barriers are strong enough that they do not need organizational barriers.

Federationism by implication reinforces national and racial barriers;

conclusion - "They have two ways of getting out of this uncomfortable position. Either they must entirely abandon the standpoint of the

rev. proletariat and accept the principle of reinforcing the national barriers (opportunism in the shape of federalism); or they must renounce all federalism in party organization, boldly raise the banner of demolition of national barriers, and rally to the united camp of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party." (43)

Federationism is an obstacle to our struggle against racism and our goal of building a multi-national party. If we take federationist thinking to its logical conclusions we can see the racist implications.

I am not sufficiently familiar with Stalin's life or writings to grasp the scope of this struggle against federalism. Commenting on "The Social-Democratic View on the National Question" E. Yaroslavsky in Land-Marks in the Life of Stalin comments that "Comrade Stalin combated the federalist tendencies of the bourgeois nationalists, which the Mensheviks shared. He argued that the victory of the proletariat demanded the unity of all workers, irrespective of nationality.... In opposition to the policy of the federalists, which would set up partitions between the working people of various nationalities (between the Georgians and Armenians),... Stalin called for closer unity, closer contact between the proletarians of the various nationalities of Russia. Step by step he proved the falsity of the federalists' arguments." (40-41) The struggle against the federalists in Transcaucasia, about which I know nothing, would appear to have some documentation. See L. Beria's On the History of the Bolshevik Organizations in Transcaucasia. I am not familiar with it.

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*federalism / federationist
(there is a difference)*

9. Enver Hoxha, "Report Delivered to the 1st Consultative Meeting of the Activists of the Communist Party of Albania, April 8, 1942), Enver Hoxha, SW, vol. 1, 3-19, 29-30.

The Albanian Party developed from a merger of various groups. It was called the Communist Party of Albania and was formed in Nov. of 1942. By April of 1942 there was still a large degree of organizational fragmentation and lack of consolidation due to "group spirit."

"Everyone was striving for himself, each thinking that the essential thing was to form groups and to make themselves into a 'party', by abusing the others, pointing out all their 'mistakes', saying that the others were 'to blame' for everything, while they alone were 'absolutely right.' When problems of policy and practice arose would cause "old group rivalries to flame up' making it virtually impossible to organize and centralize the life of the party. On pp's 10-11 there is a good discription of how the "old style of work" of the groups manifested itself, especially in failing to work without plans, check-ups and responsibility. There was a failure to develop "the spirit of the Party and of communist work." The group spirit reflected a certain style of work and was reflected both in factionalism and in certain petty criticisms. I think a lot of the comments on style of work and petty critioms can be used as a gauge to view some of the developments in OCIC and in summing up our general experience.

It is clear that the existence of the group spirit prevented the development of a common line.

10. History of the Party of Labor of Albania, pp's 85-92 and 109-113.

"Among the ranks of the communist groups there had sprung up professional revolutionary cadres who had been able to rise above the disputes among the groups, had definitely embraced the line of an uncompromising war against fascist invaders and traitors to the country, and had striven to unify the Albanian communist movement on this basis. It was these cadres who, through their tireless efforts, prepared the ideological and organizational framework of the Albanian Communist Party." (85)

We should note that the Meeting of the Communist Groups which established the Party passed a stipulation that "none of the former principal leaders (chairmen and assistant chairmen) of the groups would be elected to the leadership. This was not the result of a simple agreement but an exigency of the development of the communist and revolutionary movement. Affected by a pronounced group spitt, the group leaders had long been a stumbling-block to the union of the Albanian communists into a single party and had shown themselves incapable of directing the communists and revolutionary masses." (87)

For some time into its history it continued to be hampered by hangovers from earlier work of the conspirator period, by the spirit of groupism as well as Trotskyism. One of the insights we can use from this work is the understanding that groupism manifests itself an old mental habits, which while valid in their historical aspect are a hindrance in our work of centralizing the ideological struggle.

11. History of the National Language Federations in the history of the Socialist and Communist Parties in the U.S.A.

My knowledge is very shallower here. There must be more detailed study of the language federations and we should find out. Sources I studied - David Shannon, The Socialist Party of America, p.45, and Wm. Z. Foster History of the Communist Party of the United States, pp's. 102, 114, 163, 171, 177-178, Draper & Ruthenberg.

Why is this history important to us? It is important because we can increase our knowledge of federationism by the study of this question in our own history. In combatting federationism we are not fighting against the importance of local cadre organizations nor are we fighting against the positive aspects of their individuality. It is quite clear from the formative days of the party that dealing with the question of federationism in a creative Leninist way was a key to the development of a party.

I have not summarized the statistics well but it's clear that a large part of the proletarian elements in the Party came from the language federations, a large part of the militance and industrial union organizing. All of this was positive.

On the negative side a centralized party could not develop unless the scope of authority of the federations were subordinated to the whole national situation and to the central leadership. The existence of the isolated language groups meant that the proletarian elements in the party existed in such isolation from each other that they could not develop an effective program to struggle against opportunist leadership.

It is also clear that lack of a common vocabulary was a huge problem in the centralization of ideological struggle in the party. Language federations were as independent of the party organization as they wanted to be. Each federation had a translator in the national office who was the only liaison between English-speaking and foreign-language-speaking groups. They were more responsible to their federation than to the party.

The key struggle organizationally against the negative aspects of the federations was waged by Ruthenberg. (relate this) from his biography). Particularly important to study are pages 177-178 in Foster on "The Formation of the United Communist Party." This relates the struggle to a new level as we see that the correct attitude towards the federations was a key stumbling block in forming a party in U.S.

The C.L.P. and C.P. united in May 1920 to form the United Communist Party. The burning question was the role of the federations. The C.P. was criticized for being a "federation of federations; these bodies had a high degree of autonomy, holding their own conventions, electing their officials, and having the power (used as they saw fit, to withdraw from the Party."

I did not have a chance to thoroughly study Theodore Draper's references to the foreign language federations in his The Roots of American Communism. The index is the most lengthy than in any of the other books I looked at. In his portrayal particularly in ch. 13 he paints a picture of the federation question as playing a very important role in the early splits in the party and sees Ruthenberg's positions as a continuation of the CLP positions, but raised to a higher level. Ruthenberg did not want to continue a policy of exceptionalism or special privileges for the federations. "It criticized the Communist party itself for being a federation of federations instead of a unified organization. It accused the Hungarian federation of 'desertion' after the January raids and the Jewish federation of withdrawing in order to remain 'neutral' in the inner-party struggle. To bring about a more centralized organization, and incidentally, cut down the autonomy of the federations, it proposed that dues payments be made

to the party's district organizations rather than to the nine federations. In this way, financially at least, the federations would be made dependent on the central office of the party instead of the other way around. This proposal was, of course, totally unacceptable to the majority and never had a chance." (212-123)

It would appear that the federationist nature of the early parties is partly a cause of the intense factionalism which existed. Probably the greatest value to be gained by an understanding of the language federations is that despite the fact that they were militant, despite the fact that they supplied the bulk of party membership, they tended to support the concept of "diffuse, loose forms of organization instead of "strict, tight" forms of organization. In this respect it would appear that ideological education on the question of democratic centralism is an important component in creating the party spirit and combatting federationism.

It is interesting to note that the United Communist Party formed in 1920 recognized the language federations but in theory stripped them of their 'autonomy.' The position of the Comintern was that "it advocated limiting the autonomy of the foreign-language federations to propaganda work in their own languages and making them subordinate to the central party organization in political and economic matters, as well as depriving them of their right to collect party dues." (244)

For Ruthenberg's struggle in the Socialist Party against federationism in 1912 and his description of the situation in Cleveland see Oakley C. Johnson's The Day Is Coming. Life and Work of Charles E. Ruthenberg, International Publishers, 1957, 65-67. Ruthenberg's strong point was organization and he correctly perceived that the federationist structure held back the Americanization of the Party and the development of theory according to U.S. conditions and isolated the most advanced Marxist-Leninists in different localities from each other:

"The cleavage between Right and Left revealed itself also in matters of party structure and party democracy. This was apparent on two occasions when Ruthenberg challenged the party's bureaucracy - first on the status of language organizations, and later on the composition of the new National Committee."

"The Socialist Party at that time included in its membership a considerable number of foreign-speaking Federations, each having practically complete autonomy, with no organizational contact with the party except through translator-secretaries in the national office. This set-up held back the Americanization of immigrants in these groups and delayed the full assimilation of foreign-speaking Socialists into the Socialist Party. The report of the Committee on Foreign-Speaking Organizations, headed by Right-winger Lewis Goaziou of Pennsylvania, recommended continuation of this arrangement."

"In proposing a change, Ruthenberg explained the situation in Cleveland, where some twenty language groups were in the party, yet - so far as the local was concerned - were not in the party. Members of these groups paid their dues to the National Office and 'never came near' the city central organization, he complained. There was no cooperation between the language sections and the city local they were supposed to be affiliated with. If foreign-speaking Socialists were required to buy their dues stamps from the city central body just as English-speaking branches did, he argued, there would be a closer relationship and better cooperation down below. Ruthenberg's stand was so clearly correct that some language federation leaders whose ties were with the Right supported him. But Spargo and National Secretary J. Mahlon Barnes tried to make it appear that Ruthenberg objected altogether to organizing language groups, and his amendment was defeated." Ruthenberg also lost his amendment on the elections to the National Committee which would have allowed direct elections of outstanding local leaders rather than the appointment of existing State Secretaries of the Socialist Party. It was objected that under Ruthenberg's proposal "every Tom, Dick and Harry could be elected to the National Committee."

12. History of the Federation. Collective Works was the journal of this tendency of independent Marxist organizations which was a federation and which called itself The Federation. I was unable to consult all issues of Collective Works and in particular CW #3 which is entitled Discussion of Internal Affairs of the Federation, and have little direct or indirect knowledge about the Federation. It would appear that such as the advanced experience of BACU brought home the importance of international line in breaking with left internationalism, so the experience of the Federation could make clearer to many just how unworkable the federationist form is. CW, March 1975 contains various papers from a major two-line struggle within the federation. In particular pp's 5-6 discusses why they think a federative (they also invent a new form called 'confederative') They lay out a very clear definition of federationism: (Their definition better than any of the others I saw exposes the bourgeois notion of democracy in the concept of federationism.)

"Federation is defined as an organizational structure in which the constituent parts cede some powers to a center, but retain a greater or lesser degree of autonomy or independence in relation to decisions taken at the center. Usually representation at the center is on the basis of bourgeois representational democracy, either each group has so many votes (which is to say, the line of each group has so many votes) or else the representation of different lines is weighted somewhat depending on the size of each group. The retention of autonomy or independence may find different forms: either each group has a veto on decisions, or the center can only make certain kinds of decisions, or the center can make decisions but there is not organizational machinery to enforce them, i.e., to insure that the constituent members carry them out according to a single plan."

"In our opinion, there is no organizational short-cut to communist unity, and the federative structure is precisely such an organizational formula. Of course, it has certain attractions: it pretends to be 'building from the grass-roots up', opposing 'over-centralization' and 'authoritarianism' and trumpeting democracy. It also constitutes a structural recognition of the wish for unity on the part of all concerned. But the notion of democracy which it embodies is a component part of bourgeois ideology."

"In consecrating the independence and organizational equality of groups, federalism also implies the equality and inviolable integrity of different political lines. This is all very well for the lofty theory of the market-place, the bourgeois election booth, or the happy pluralism of bourgeois universities, but liberalism of this kind is incompatible with an organization seeking to serve the interests of the oppressed and the exploited. In the real world, not all lines are equal. Some are more and some are less correct; ultimately, one represents the proletariat and one the bourgeoisie in any given situation. Therefore, Marxists must insist on combat between different lines, in which one defeats another, rather than establishing relations of peaceful co-existence between them."

"Acting on subjective desires for unity, federalists logically attempt to avoid questions of principle which are thought to be 'disruptive' to the unity already proclaimed. Thus unity under federalism always tends to be unity around the most backward (i.e., the most bourgeois) aspects of different lines. A federalist road to the construction of the party means in practice that no 'disruptive' issue, that is to say, no issue of decisive importance, is entirely clarified. Principles pale beside the good vibes which the security of autonomy and individualism permit. Thus, the so-called 'grass roots' approach ensures a situation in which we each conserve our own little general secretary,

our own narrow line....It is possible that federalism, under certain conditions, might provide a framework for the discussion of different (i.e., mutually exclusive) lines, but since decisions binding on the membership cannot be taken, the struggle on political lines will be inconclusive and undeveloped....Federalism, preserving as it does the autonomy of groups, cannot be directly democratic in formulating a single line, nor can it require that the majority line be tested in practice."

"Should circumstances require organizational forms short of democratic centralism in the struggle to build the party, such weaker forms of unity, if engaged in at all, must be recognized as backward, amateurish organizational expedients to be overcome as quickly as possible...."

Thus while recognizing the correctness in principle of democratic centralism the position paper recommends that a "confederationist" form be adopted as expedient, but overcome through ideological struggle around organization principles. They suggest that the Proletarian Cause editorial board which formed in 1971 and dissolved after one issue was an example of a federationist structure.

13.

Proletarian Unity League, 2,3, Many Parties of a New Type?, 36-44, 88-89.

this part of its analysis of the ultra-left danger PUL traces some of the historical roots of the "group spirit" and in particular how the "group spirit" impedes theoretical struggle and centralization: "Once each organization tries to justify its own existence against all the others, theoretical work on the movements common problems takes a back seat to the search for and defense of every distinctive emphasis or shaded nuance in a group's orientation. In such a situation, no national division of labor can emerge. Each group must turn its attention to whatever question the movement is choosing up sides about that month.... Yet the life of most small groups would be seriously disrupted were they to undertake alone concentrated theoretical work on any major issue. And since any concentration of 'group interests' prohibits joint theoretical activities on a large scale, year after year goes by with work on major theoretical questions in much the same impasse."

From this part of PUL's analysis I would think most people who have suffered through this "group spirit" can better summarize why federationism (the organizational aspect of the group spirit) is incompatible with the goals of the OCIC.

Their discussion of class stand and party spirit on pp's 88-89 makes clear that the systematic and gradual unification of Marxist-Leninists must have the party spirit as a precondition: "A Party spirit, embodied in a commitment to unite all who can be united around Marxist-Leninist principles, to subordinate the part to the whole, the lower level (the separate communist groups) to the higher level (the Party coming into being) - this is the fundamental prerequisite, the first precondition, to successful communist unification."

14.

Guardian. "The State of the Party Building Movement - July 1978."

In its discussion of the OCIC's weaknesses it states: "The national structure is essentially a formality. Different groups have a different perception of what they belong to. A strong current prevails among the forces that local work is still the principal consideration for each of the groups and that the ideological center should take up questions in relation to local work. And as presently structured, the OC opens the door to a federationist preparatory form in which semi-autonomous (if not completely autonomous) local groups, each practicing their own democratic centralism, will negotiate with each other over political line and organizational questions."

(This statement is responded to in OC Bulletin No. 2, p. 13 in a self-critical way stating that the "federationist spirit is still a very real danger" while also pointing out the weaknesses of the

Guardian in relation to federationism. In its conclusions the Guardian states in its 4th Objection to joining the OCIC: "We have serious reservations regarding the organizational premises underlying the formation and structure of the OC. The OC's outline for a preparatory formation and eventually into a party is schematic and offers few prospects for overcoming the federationism inherent two dozen or so local M-L organizations come together, each with their own democratic centralism guiding their party-building efforts."

15. National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs, "Rectification vs. Fusion, The Struggle Over Party Building Line," 29 May 1979, pp's 18-20 from Irwin Silber's Why Has the National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs Decided Not To Join...the OCIC. "Federationism is completely contrary to all Leninist conceptions of communist organization. It is contrary to democratic centralism. It means, ultimately, that the whole is subordinate to the part, the higher bodies subordinate to the lower bodies. In both a formal sense and a substantive political sense, the various constituent groups within the OCIC provide the primary political focus for their cadres....But the leaders of the OCIC have said that they are taking steps to whittle away at the federationist form of organization.... Federationism, however, cannot be eliminated through formal measures. For whether explicit or not, federationism is the organizational content of any formation of Marxist-Leninist groupings which is not based on a leading line....Without a leading line, the authority and responsibility of leadership can only flow from subjective notions or from 'representatives' of constituent groupings. Thus the very process of founding the OCIC around a set of minimal political principles rather than an advanced line...means bringing the forms of coalition politics into the communist movement." (18-19) Having proven to their satisfaction that the OCIC is a "fusionist federation" the NNMLC concludes that it cannot join the OCIC, "its conception of an ideological center flowing out of a federation of local organizations sows illusions in the communist movement on the correct path to party-building." (This quote is Documents from the Founding Conference of the National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs, 30 March 1979, p. 42) A similar comment is to be found on p. 19 in Rectification vs. Fusion, p. 19.

16. Outline Summary of the Struggle Against Localism and Federationism at The Founding Conference of the OCIC, 11 Feb. 1978 (Note: This outline is sketchy and not based on a careful review of my notes).

- 1) Correct Lines Develop in the struggle against incorrect ones
Struggles with Guardian and with El Comité in particular produced growing line against federationism and localism.
- 2) OCIC was founded in the struggle against federationism and localism. However the grasp of the Committee of "Four" was not yet well developed.
C.N. played primary role in this struggle, ie the leadership's lack of consolidation existed and was reflected in the notes from the SC summarizing the debates and decisions of the Conference. In its June 15 78 notes the SC accepted criticism that the notes were not sufficiently "political" or neglected some of the political important of the discussions.
- 3) A clear victory over localism and a partial victory over federationism resulted from the Founding Conference. This is correctly summarized in OC Bulletin No. 2, pp's 12-13, and the OC'S First Year, p. 9.
- 4) Key struggles against federationism at Conference
 - a) struggle with localism particularly in the form put forth by El Comité
 - b) principal reason El Comité did not join OCIC was disagreement with the 1st principle of the Group of Four's Concrete Proposal that the national should lead the local.
 - b) struggle over whether individuals as well as organizations could be members of OCIC. Accepted with criteria for individual's membership

left up to SC.

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- c) struggle over membership criteria for Steering Committees. PWOC motion defeated, but PSO motion passed. This meant that individuals who are not members of organizations could be elected to SC, but did not resolve question of "representative nature" of SC members. This struggle continued into the meeting of the Nominations Committee.

17. OCIC Materials on Federationism

1. C.N., "A Brief Statement on the Struggle Against Racism," 1 Aug. 78

This document is a self-critical assessment by the S.C. for the objectively racist position on steering committee nominations that the Committee of Five had advanced. "Objectively, the Committee of Five failed to take any steps to counteract the influence of racism in the elections and thus capitulated to chauvinist ideology." This statement makes clear that exclusively limiting leadership to organizations "would bear disproportionately on national minority Marxist-Leninists and was therefore objectively racist." This was because of two facts: the predominantly white character of the OCIC and the fact that a large portion of national minority communists are not in local organizations. However, the explicit connection between racism and federationism is not well drawn out though the viability of the OCIC is clearly linked to its ability to combat white chauvinism and to take special steps to involve national minority communists in the centralization of the ideological struggle. It should be clear to everyone that the struggle in the OCIC against federationism has from the very beginning been linked to the struggle against racism.

2. Steering Committee Meeting, Sept. 8, 1978.

p. 4 OC membership. Once it was agreed at the Founding Conference that "organizations and individuals who are not members of organizations may be elected to the Steering Committee" there was a need to develop some approach to the participation of individuals in the OCIC. This summarizes some initial SC thinking in response to some members concern that there was a need to guard against "diletantism."

3. Founding Statement of the OCIC (date?) pp's 1-2.

4. Steering Committee Meeting, Dec. 1978, p. 3 on local centers. States that it is important for local centers to have independent representation at conferences in order to combat federationism.

5. Steering Committee Meeting, March 1979.

- Chairperson's Report, pp's 1-3. Some of the information in this in relation to SOC and the struggle against racism were latter corrected for being incorrect. However stand against federationism is advanced: "Although it has not bowed to localism and federationism, the SC has not pursued the struggle against these influences vigorously enough." As rectification it was stated that "a concerted struggle for the party spirit and against localism and federationism must be waged." Besides these self-criticisms the SC "criticized the lack of initiative from the base. This is related to the struggle against localism and federationism. To the extent that these tendencies dominate local OC forces, these forces will fail to take up the OC's problems as their own problems and expect all the initiative to come from the national SC."

- Report on Local Centers, pp. 5-6. In response to the PSO saying that there was no need for a local center in Washington D.C. because "the PSO is the OC in Washington" the SC stated that such a narrow view of the tendency is "objectively racist" and concluded that "PSO's narrow view of the tendency is related to a federationist approach to the OC's efforts. This approach sees the OC primarily as a coming together or local organizations." In responding to doubts in Southern California that the local center should have regular delegate status in OC meetings

the SC argued for a broad conception of local centers in the OC process. "We must break with the conception of the OC as merely a federation of organizations. Most importantly, we must break with the idea that the OC needs to serve only itself, rather than the broad anti-'left' tendency. Local centers should become the focal points for drawing broad forces into a common party-building effort."

6. Steering Committee Meeting #5, May 1979, report on local centers emphasizes their strategic nature for ideological struggle.
7. "The Circle Game: A Reply to the Guardian," 22-23, 28, 31-35. OC Bulletin No. 2, March 1979 (11-35). Should be studied in order to increase understanding of the 'circle spirit. pp's 12-13 are on federationism and in response to the Guardian criticisms. "We would agree that federationist spirit is still a very real danger. At the conference establishing the OC the struggle against federationism was only begun. The issue that sparked the debate was the proposal that individuals or individual members of organizations and not organization representatives be elected to the OC steering committee. And while substantial progress was made in raising consciousness about the dangers of federationism, this proposal did not win. It is clear that a great deal still must be done to close the door on federationism."
Like any effort to develop to a higher level, the OC has had to deal with obstacles on both the right and the 'left.' "As we mentioned above, the right line was advanced in opposition to the formation of the OC and tried to provide a theoretical foundation for localism, pragmatism and federationism. At the OC's founding conference this line was defeated and the organization advancing it has since left the OC." (28). After demonstrating that the Guardian's legitimate political and organizational freedom would not be restricted in the OC since there is "full equality of propaganda for all its participants" the SC lays bare the circle mentality behind the Guardian's justification of its independence. Guardian's speculation on 'four or five' trends...expresses precisely the federationist mentality that the OC groups are criticized for: party-building based on the fusion of four trends negotiating for central committee seats is 'federationism' with a vengeance."
8. John Frampton, for the Steering Committee of the OCIC. Letter (on Federationism), 10 March 79. This letter was as preparation for the Pt. 18 Conferences. It deals with federationist obstacles to the process of ideological unity between Marxist-Leninists. It clarifies the relationship between localism and federationism seeing both as manifestations of the "circle spirit." The instruction that delegations to the Pt. 18 Conference that delegations should express the different point of view within their organizations is a radical departure from previous dogmatic and sectarian approaches which substituted organizational hegemonism for persuasive ideological struggle.
The Steering Committee correctly sees that the national process can not become predominant over the local process unless federationist thinking is defeated. Thus the 2 recommendations of the SC - the expression of different viewpoints from localities, and non-binding instructions on delegates is an attempt to rectify the left-sectarian approach to ideological struggle. "This federationist mode of participation in the ideological struggle inevitably tends towards a polarizing dynamic which plays into the hands of sectarianism, distorts the struggle, and prevents the fullest resolution of contradictions."
This letter represents the most complete position of the OCIC leadership on the question of federationism (up to that time).

9. John Frampton, for the SC, "Letter to Twin Cities Organizing Committee, 25 July 1979. It is stated that in the struggle to develop a party spirit in the tendency the dominant errors are localist. However this should not lead to a belittling of the role of local organizations. "While it is true that we must continue to direct our main effort toward overcoming localism...we will have to place more emphasis in the future in combatting tendencies toward exaggerating the struggle against localism. As one concrete step in that direction, some of the ideas above on the importance of building local organizations will be incorporated in the paper we will circulate on forging the party spirit."

10. John Frampton, for the SC, "Forging the Party Spirit - A Beginning Perspective," 22 September 1979. The struggle to forge the party spirit should not belittle the role of local organizations. The party spirit does not belittle lower organizational forms but places them in their proper relation to the whole and to higher forms. However, forging a Marxist-Leninist trend with a bias to the more highly developed organizational forms will damage the OCIC'S ability to keep the tendency as a whole in the forefront of its work and damage our effort to incorporate individual Marxist-Leninists who are outside these forms. Hence the need for "freedom of organizational form," i.e. the OCIC is fully open to individuals and the full variety of organizational forms in our tendency. OCIC centers are placed in this context "to break down circle barriers to the organization and development of the anti-'left' tendency and provide a concrete way for individuals to fully participate in the OCIC. Their development is a concrete realization of the party spirit."

Although the term "federationism" is not used in the paper, objectively the paper is the most thorough statement on federationism issued by the SC. The paper states that subjective desires to subordinate circle interests to tendency-wide interests are insufficient and summarizes the concrete policies needed to ensure that the practice of the party spirit deepens. These policies which are designed to minimize the extent of the circle spirit are defined in addition to the above as: 1) "responsibility for criticism....criticisms must be clearly formulated, written down...and communicated to the appropriate body..." The rationale for this is stated; 2) "No Circle Discipline Within the OCIC" process which has several applications: a) no circle discipline on members of OCIC bodies (defined as local and regional centers and their leadership, conferences, the SC, etc.) b) no circle discipline in the ideological struggle, and c) no circle discipline on communications with higher bodies.

11. SC, "The OC'S First Year," 26 May 1979, p.9.

"Although it has been attacked frequently for 'localism' and 'federationism', the OC has not failed to take up either in practice. The need to give precedence to the interests of national development over local needs has been emphasized consistently by the OC's leadership. Both general and particular examples of localism have been pointed out and criticized - usually with good results. As for federationism, the OC has taken a number of important concrete steps to break down a federationist mentality. In the process of the leadership nominations which occurred at its founding conference, the OC made a great deal of progress towards establishing the principle that Steering Committee members should be elected as individuals and not as representatives of organizations. In the point 18 conferences, organizational delegations (with only two exceptions) were developed which represented minority views and every organization agreed not to bind its members to its own point of view in discussions. And the OC has committed itself to organizing discussion around a set of readings and a paper on the dangers of federationism in the next period. Thus, while the OC may be short on bluster as far as federationism and localism are concerned, it has not been as short in practice." (p. 9)

12. Steering Committee, "The History and Conception of OCIC Centers" and "Building OCIC Centers Regionally and Locally. Presentation Outline." Especially pp's 3-5 in history and conception speech presented by PF at the Sept. 1-3 Conference 1979.

The SC criticizes itself for the localist and tactical manner in which it viewed local centers in the beginning. Through the practice of building a local center in Southern California the SC came to see two weaknesses in their views: 1) "we did not have a fully formed conception of an overall, non-sectarian party building approach" and 2) "we underestimated the role of federationism, localism and racism in our ranks - how these errors were presenting themselves as obstacles to the ideological struggle."

The section on federationism, pp's 3-5, explains that federationism is an obstacle to the OCIC because it "conflicts with the tasks of the ideological center, and, therefore, of the local and regional centers because: 1. if the ideological struggle remains within the confines of our small circles, our theoretical tasks will not advance. The national center will be merely a trading post for political line. 2. it will interfere with our ability to unite the anti-left tendency. In other words, if the ideological struggle does not advance beyond our small circles, the Local Center will degenerate into a recruiting ground for the various circles within it." (p. 3)

The non-federationist approach of the OCIC to the building of an ideological center hinges on the development of its local and regional centers, the Draft Plan for an Ideological Center, and the relationship between them. Since the local and regional centers are the arms of the OCIC and pursue the same tasks, their correct development is a giant step away from federationism and "a most important arena for combatting this federationism in practice."

In summarizing an attempt to build a local center in Detroit a similar conclusion was arrived at as had been developed from the Southern California experience:- that federationist thinking was quite strong. The negative attitude of many DMLO cadres toward a local center came from a narrow and racist view of the party building movement. Given the predominately white character of OCIC organizations there is objectively a close relationship between federationism and racism. The close relationship between is also revealed in summing up the June 1979 National Minorities Conference. The conclusion was reached "that most organizations in the OCIC have effectively cut themselves off from the most advanced comrades in our movement. Many of the participants at this national minority conference had politically distant relationships with OCIC organizations, even in the same city. Most participants at the conference still would have known little about the OCIC had not this conference taken place. We only bring this out here to underscore the importance of building local centers in relationship to the task of building the multi-nationality of the OCIC and in taking up the struggle against racism in our movement." (4-5).

In order to implement this approach to dismantling federationism the SC further develops its strategic conception of OCIC centers and its policy on individuals in the OC. It commits itself to developing summations of all the local and regional centers and sharing these summations.

13. Sum-Ups of the Experience in Southern California

The Steering Committee of the OC is completing its investigation of this experience which reveals the depth of some of the contradictions posed by federationism. Along with this report the SC will select a number of documents for distribution in a packet which should be listed here. I will not try to pre-judge what documents they will select and so I will not make a list here. The packet will include majority and minority opinions.

Cadres have already received a number of documents sent out previously by the SC as well as written notes from I.M.s "Presentation on Southern California Local Center Experience. National OCIC Conference. September 2, 1979." This I know will be included in written form in the packet that is coming out. Cadres who attended the National Conference should also be in possession of "The Southern California Local Center Experience. A Beginning Analysis From The 'Minority' Perspective", 8/31/79 which was passed out at the Conference and is signed by eight cadres as "The SCLC minority."

(note: This accounting of OCIC materials on federationism is not thorough or very systematic and could easily be improved).

Review Questions:

Study Questions on Federationism

1. Define federationism.
2. Discuss the experience of the RSDLP with federationism. What were the concrete manifestations of federationism that the Bolsheviks had to contend with, particularly with the Bund?
3. Like the RSDLP the Albanian party formed from the fusion of many different circles. What sort of problems did the "group spirit" cause for the party in Albania?
4. Though the term "federationist" derives from the Russian party building experience the early days of the American communist party also saw problems with a federationist structure and mentality. How was this manifested and how was it overcome?
5. Why can narrow, localist, racist and nationalist viewpoints easily support a federationist perspective?
6. Why is federationism an obstacle to the successful ideological unification of Marxist-Leninists?
7. From its founding the OCIC has been criticized as federationist. The OCIC has had to struggle against federationism and has put it on the defensive, but has not yet won this struggle. Discuss the struggles in the OCIC against federationism paying particular attention to the struggles at the Founding Conference, the policies developed for the Point 18 Conferences, the history and conception of local centers and the policies advocated for forging a party spirit. Is it accurate to call the OCIC federationist?

D.W.

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