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**Line of March's
Debate Over
Ultra-Leftism and
Party Building**

**FRONTLINE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION
OCTOBER 1989**

In fall 1987, the Line of March began a systematic review of its political line, history and practice. Within a few months, a major debate broke out in the organization over whether its perspective up until that point had been fundamentally sound or had been characterized by basic problems of ultra-leftism, concentrated in a sectarian and idealist approach to building a Marxist-Leninist party and an anti-democratic internal life. The immediate point at issue was whether or not Line of March needed a thorough process of re-examination, re-direction and democratization. The overwhelming majority of the organization concluded that such a process was required, and went on to transform the basic character of the Line of March, establishing the new Frontline Political Organization at a national delegated conference in October 1989.

This packet contains three of the main documents from the internal Line of March debate over ultra-leftism and party building. The first paper, by Melinda Paras, expressed the point of view of those who defended Line of March's previous approach to party building and opposed taking up re-examination, re-direction and democratization. The second and third papers, "Toward Re-Direction and Democratization," by Linda Burnham and Irwin Silber, and "Infantile Leftism -- A Persistent Disorder," by Linda Burnham, argued that Line of March had been afflicted by basic problems of ultra-leftism and needed a thorough housecleaning. (The first two papers are printed here in full, but a section of the third paper, which discussed the details of how the internal debate was conducted, have been condensed.) Melinda Paras, a former member of the national executive committee of the Line of March, resigned from the organization in July 1988; Irwin Silber and Linda Burnham are currently members of the national board of the new Frontline Political Organization.

For those interested in the outcome of Line of March's re-examination, re-direction and democratization, the documents approved by the October 1989 conference of the organization are available as a pamphlet entitled "The Transformation of Line of March." This pamphlet contains a summation of Line of March's re-examination, re-direction and democratization, and the political perspective of the new Frontline Political Organization. To order, send \$3 per copy plus 20% postage to Line of March, P.O. Box 3538, Oakland, CA 94609. Please make your check payable to Line of March.

Also available is a packet containing two background papers from Line of March's transformation process which address the current challenges facing the U.S. left. Copies of "The Left in a Changing World" can be obtained by sending \$3 per copy plus 20% postage to the address above.

Labor Donated

March 16, 1988

To All Members of the Line of March

Dear comrades,

I have been increasingly uneasy about the direction that the Line of March has been taking over this last several months. As the process unfolded, I have agreed to certain formulations, documents and decisions (such as those taken at the last national board meeting) with hesitations and often with serious struggle within our national leadership. However, as the implications of those lines and decisions has become evident in the practice of the organization I am increasingly critical of them. And I have gone from a position of opposing many specific lines and actions which have occurred, to a conclusion that there are different lines operating in the national center about how to proceed. This was the main basis which I believe led me to be unable to function within the Standing Committee of the NEC and which is the source of the obvious tension which exists within the leadership.

I believe that the "redirection" that Line of March has now embarked upon has objectively added up to a step by step unravelling of the Leninist party building line which the LOM was founded upon. It began with the withdrawal of our formulation that we were a party, withdrew the goal of holding a party congress, expressed itself in an indecision about maintaining the goal of leading in the class struggle, and is most fully revealed in the deterioration of the Leninist theory of democratic centralism and conception of leadership.

What is the significance of this line struggle? Is it mainly a product of our division of labor and the fragmentation of our remaining leadership into different and unconnected areas of work or the existence of qualitatively different political lines? Will we be able to work out the differences or will there be a split, or will the organization disintegrate? I believe it is hard to predict how the organization will answer any of these questions now, especially as the line struggle is just beginning to unfold. This paper is not meant to unnecessarily polarize the organization in this difficult period. However, without placing the differences, especially those which exist within our national leadership on the table and struggling them out we will not gain any real unity about how to proceed forward. Part of the tradition and unity of our organization has been the acknowledgement that polarization does not automatically mean a "split". The articulation of

different lines and often sharp struggle around those lines is the key to any lasting and serious unity. My hope is to articulate my opinions on these questions, conduct an organized and responsible struggle around these views, and build a unity within the organization around a correct party building line and conception of its role as an organization.

Unfortunately thus far, these differences have been bottled up within national leadership bodies and have not unfolded before the organization in a clear and systematic fashion. I believe that is both a product of our collective lack of experience of handling such a transition problem, as well as, the nature of the way line struggles inevitably open up. I think it is also unfortunate that the differences which have emerged between myself and other members of the Standing Committee have been characterized as "emotional difficulties", "personalization", "instability" and that I "need Bruce for my politics" - which are quite appalling in light of my long standing political role in leading this organization.

For myself, I want to acknowledge that as a member of the co-chairs collective over these last several years I bear a great deal of responsibility for the serious problems which had accumulated in the organization in this period. I could see many of the specific problems which were emerging and many were brought to my attention by comrades leading local executives, by those who I was leading in the mass intervention work, in the NOD etc. But, I did not understand the line questions involved and did not take the political responsibility to step back and make such an examination. In addition, I share the responsibility for the confused nature in which the line struggle is currently unfolding in the organization. I have been a part of the leadership as many of the steps which I now believe to be fundamentally wrong have come down. Almost all of them I had reservations about and most we had active struggle around within the National Executive Committee and in the Standing Committee. However, I have mainly accepted a series compromises on very fundamental issues in the spirit of attempting to maintain a unified national center in a very difficult period. I was willing to say we are not a party as long as we say we are trying to building one, not calling our national conference a national congress even though it will perform exactly the same functions as a party congress, etc. In retrospect, I do not believe this has been helpful or constructive for the organization. In the first place, each of these pieces of what I believe to be an erroneous line add up and become something more significant than any might have appeared in its own right. When they add up as they have over these last few months, I believe that Line of March's future as a Marxist-Leninist party is now in serious jeopardy. Secondly, I do not believe that this is the appropriate period for the leadership to

struggle out such central questions and reach unsteady compromises with each other, without the full exposure of various views before the entire organization.

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In that spirit, I would like to advance my views on a number of the important questions which have been posed to the LOM in these last several months. I would like to make note of the fact that I have drawn extensively on the comments and input of many members in the course of the discussions which have unfolded during this period. However, the reconstruction of these views into the framework advanced below is my own responsibility.

Before reviewing the current crisis and how this line struggle has emerged in the concrete, I would like to review some points on the history of Line of March and our party building line. This is the first major section of the paper. Over these last several months some level of summation has been unfolding in the organization - a summation which is being used as the foundation for our "redirection". Thus, the history of how and where our problems emerge becomes critical in setting certain assumptions about what needs to be changed in the LOM's direction. The second section of this paper covers the unfolding of the crisis in Line of March. It includes a review of both the theory and the practice of the line which has been guiding the organization, especially since the January board meeting. It includes my conclusions about why I believe these problems to be of a very serious nature objectively resulting in the deterioration of the Leninist standard which was leading the organization. My proposals about the future direction of the organization, including concrete proposals for the coming Board meeting I will advance in conjunction with a number of other board members who are in general agreement with the thrust of my criticisms.

OUR HISTORY AND PARTY BUILDING LINE

"Fusion As the Key Link"

In 1982, when Line of March adopted the formulation that "fusion" was the key link of the three component parts of party building, this formulation represented an extremely important turn in our historical development. In the five years of work prior to 1982, we had focussed on the struggle to identify the Marxist-Leninist trend in the communist movement - the political lines of demarcation of such a trend and the grouping of communists who identified with these politics. In these first years we correctly targetted theoretical work as the center of gravity for the development of the set of politics which could define and lead our emerging trend. And we took up an intensive line struggle with an economist set of politics within the trend

which was reflected in the "fusion" party building line. By 1982, we had the beginning elements of general line (the United Front Against War and Racism) and had identified a network of communist forces around the country who united around these politics and were willing to take up the party building question. However, these politics were developed in only an initial form, they had little testing or connection to the class struggle. And our network of communist forces was still relatively arbitrary in its character, consisting of circles of comrades who had worked together in previous political formations etc.- and not a full and objective reflection of all those who could be united around these politics and the work of making them a material force in U.S. society. It was in this context that we made the turn toward "fusion".

Our party building line was already framed by the earlier line struggle which fought for a Leninist conception of a party with the role of a communist line at the center of its vision. Then we identified 3 component parts of party building 1) the theoretical and political struggle for a general line 2) the unification of communists and 3) the intervention of communists in the class struggle. In 1982 we added the formulation that "fusion was the key link" in party building to our party building line. In this formulation, communist intervention in the class struggle was targetted as the key link among these components to help advance the party building process. Our intervention in the class struggle with the initial revolutionary line that we had formulated would set the basis to refine and develop that line further. It would also begin to unify communist forces who were not yet prepared to take up the party building question before this line could be demonstrated to be effective in practice and the implications of collective intervention around that line could be clarified.

With "fusion as the key link" we targetted the publication of a regular newspaper as the key institution which would crystallize the tasks of the period. This was critical in sustaining our orientation that it is the communist line that must be "fused" with the working class movement - not just the efforts of individual communists. We also struggled to sustain and develop the educational institution of the MLEP and developed the MLEP short course in order to insure the existence of transmission vehicles to systematically introduce activists attracted to these politics to Marxism-Leninism. Our other major emphasis in this period was the construction of national commissions and/or mass organizations in the different arenas that could begin to organize the intervention of communist forces from our trend under this line.

Our work in this period was extremely successful and resulted in both significant advances in the refinement of

the UFAW&R and in the influence of our line and members in some key arenas of the class struggle. In particular our line refinement critiquing the last remaining aspects of a Maoist international line settled our identification with the international communist movement. This also set the basis for the change in our party building line regarding the CPUSA. We no longer considered the CPUSA revisionist, but reformist, and we reformulated our view of our political role as a wing of the U.S. communist movement rather than seeing ourselves as the whole of the U.S. communist movement. Our identification with the ICM and adoption of a correct framework for a unitary and struggle relation with the CPUSA set the basis to qualitatively stabilize the politics of the Line of March. These elements provided] the foundation for our assessment in 1985 that the LOM was functioning as a party.

Our Decision to Formalize as a Party

In 1985, the decision taken by the LOM National Board to move toward the formalization of this organization as a Marxist-Leninist party was fundamentally correct. This decision was adopted without a careful enough study and debate in the organization and without a systematic reformulation of our party building line. But, the degree to which we moved toward these steps of formalization was an overall positive force in the progress of our work. Unfortunately, we did not implement the formalization process thoroughly enough and that led to a series of problems in our work which have accumulated over the last two years. Thus, I believe the task of a period of "reexamination" is to review that decision, unite the organization thoroughly on its objective basis, and proceed with that formalization process.

The decision to formalize LOM as a Marxist-Leninist party was premised on the following considerations, which I believe are still essentially correct:

- 1) The development of the United Front Against War and Racism represents a general line for the revolutionary process in the U.S. While it still requires update and development (particularly the centrality of the struggle for peace and in refinement of the questions of class and racial oppression). The UFAW&R is a coherent and logically consistent set of politics which has stabilized over the last several years as it has begun to be tested in practice. While the elaboration of a general line for the revolutionary process in the U.S. is a constant task and there are many specific limitations in our line which can be identified, we cannot place an idealist expectation of the formalization of a party when our line is finally "complete". The question before us is "When is our line

sufficient to guide a coherent intervention in the class struggle on a revolutionary basis?"

Thus far, the politics of the UFAW&R have set the basis for the publication of a high quality newspaper which is gaining steady influence and credibility on the left, despite the prejudices against a newspaper published by a Marxist-Leninist party. These politics have also set the basis to organize cadres, members, and our periphery into conscious intervention in the class struggle, which has also made steady progress in the last six years. In fact, it is conspicuous that in the midst of the LOM crisis there has been no open struggle over our fundamental unity around these politics. This is a clear sign of the relative stability of those politics.

2) The politics of the LOM constituted a distinct set of politics within the U.S. left and communist movement. Another key element in our determination that LOM needed to formalize its operation as a political party was the evaluation that our politics were sufficiently different from those of any other existing formation or body of forces that we require a distinct organizational formation to implement them.

The main question we were faced with when our international line was more fully rectified, was what differences remained with the CPUSA and did those differences require a separate organizational form to pursue their implementation. We did make a distinct review of the politics of the CPUSA, emphasizing their reformist strategy on the U.S. class struggle as the basis for our decision to remain outside of that organization. However, that analysis incorrectly emphasized a relatively abstract problem of the Anti-Monopoly Coalition and the requirements for the seizure of proletarian power. Later we correctly adjusted our emphasis to the specific impact of their line on the labor aristocracy as the central feature of our line difference. Given these major line refinements, then we have a much stronger obligation to make a specific evaluation of the degree of consolidation of the CPUSA's center on this central question and the scale of the political implications of our line differences on the concrete task of building the UFAW&R as the basis on which to remain outside of the CPUSA. I believe the results of these evaluations will be on the continued need for the distinct organizational form outside of the CPUSA, however, greater clarity and unity of our organization on this matter is essential.

3) The final consideration in this decision was the absolute necessity of a formal party apparatus in order to advance the development and consolidation of Marxism-Leninism in the U.S. Our trend, had development an all-sided line on the main elements of a revolutionary strategy for this period

which was internally consistent and distinct from any other existing formation. There is no basis to expect any immediate alteration in the line of other existing formations or major alterations in the class struggle in the U.S. Therefore, the advancement of these politics through their influence in the class struggle can best be accomplished with as serious an organizational form as can be constructed. The training and consolidation of forces around Marxism-Leninism and the politics of the UFAW&R can best be accomplished with a party organizational form which can systematically involve activists and provide the context for their consolidation. And the degree to which these politics can be tested and proven in the class struggle itself, and the degree to which more cadre, members and periphery can be attracted toward this organization can set the best possible conditions for the unification process among U.S. communists and revolutionary forces.

We made a categorical hedge in the 1985 Board report, saying both that we currently were already functioning as a party, and that we needed to develop as a party in the future. This helped to obscure the seriousness with which we had to approach this process of our consolidation as a Marxist-Leninist party. That consolidation had to be the principal task of the organization until it could be completed.

Some important steps were taken in the formalization of LOM as a Marxist-Leninist party from 1985 to 1987 and the degree to which they were taken and implemented were positive steps in the progress of the organization: the decision to break out of the underground character of the organization, develop new standards for membership (developing the concept of the distinction between cadre and members and changing our line on the expectations of ideological consolidation and sacrifice by our members), issuing explicit guidelines for members and making deliberate efforts to recruit new persons, expanding our operations in the secondary cities, and a number of others. This effort to reorganize a party apparatus also began to make headway in our leadership structure as we began the conscious construction of the National Organization Department as a second line of leadership connected to our local work and began to work through the questions of our national level work in the East Coast.

However, we failed to make this party formalization the as the focus of our work for this limited period and failed to place the institution of a party congress (which would crystallize this task) firmly on the agenda. Without the preparations for a party congress as our central institution for this formalization process we continually failed to elaborate our line on the United Front Against War and Racism (which should be the central document of a party

congress) in some systematic fashion and discuss and debate it within the organization. We also fundamentally lacked a conscious reconstruction of our most central leadership bodies, failed to reorganize the lines of organization, and failed to institute a systematic training process in our leading bodies. And without a party congress we did not agree upon a party constitution and election process - more formal institutions of democracy which would be required as the LOM became a broader organization.

I believe our failure to fully implement the decision to formalize LOM as a Marxist-Leninist party was the main source of the problems which have accumulated over these last several years. I believe this failure stemmed from serious inadequacies in our party building line which failed to properly locate the appropriate relation between our intervention in the class struggle and our party building tasks.

Problems in our Party Building Line

Unfortunately our party building line was not mature enough to identify a critical contradiction which was emerging in our practice. The three component parts of party building and our line "fusion is the key link" did not identify the full relation between these three parts sufficiently any more. In 1982 we were placing intervention in the class struggle as key in order to advance the party building process. By 1985 when we took up the need to formalize Line of March as a party, we were constructing a party in order to lead in the class struggle. These were qualitatively different vantage points.

It may appear obvious that the entire point of building a revolutionary communist party in the U.S. was to lead in the class struggle. For 10 years we had been operating under the vantage point that party building was the central task because we knew that without a revolutionary communist party our individual intervention in the class struggle was historically insignificant. Once we began to have a revolutionary line and organization the new question emerges of what goals we are actually attempting to establish for our role in the class struggle and when is party building no longer the central task. And our three component parts do not explain that we now have two contradictions we are wrestling with: the contradiction within the communist movement (with the development of the line and the development and unification of the communist forces) and the contradiction between the communist movement and the class struggle (reflected in the fusion of communism with the working class).

Acknowledging these two different contradictions which framed our work would have allowed us to be more explicit

about the fact that our goals in intervention work in the class struggle were obviously more than just their relevance to the party building process. In fact, any form of communist intervention in the class struggle must take into account the actual needs of the class struggle (and thus the above mentioned contradiction has always affected our intervention in the class struggle since we began the party building process). First, any communist intervention in the class struggle must place as its goal winning of the immediate improvement in the conditions of the working class. That is we fight U.S. intervention in Central America or campaign for Jesse Jackson not just for our party building goals or even just to advance the long-term revolutionary process in the U.S. We fight U.S. intervention because there are horrible crimes against humanity being committed there and we campaign for Jesse Jackson because he should be President of the U.S. If the communists forget these immediate objectives then our entire intervention is already off base. In addition to these immediate objectives, however, we have independent communist goals in our intervention work. In the earlier period, when party building was our central task, and the independent communist goals of our intervention work focussed mainly on how a general line could be developed and communists united in the course of this intervention work. Even in this period, however, our approach to the intervention in the class struggle was to lead in it - to establish the tension of struggling to win the concrete reforms necessary in the class struggle. And even in this period, we had further independent communist goals than our party building goals. We were struggling to advance the revolutionary consciousness in the working class more broadly by targetting the exposure of the capitalist system in the concrete ways it revealed itself in the reform struggle. Even in this period "fusion as the key link" did not adequately capture the nature and character of the relationship between communist leadership in the class struggle and the party building process. However, the limitations in our party building line did not become more serious in their implications until 1985.

As that general line (the UFAW&R) set the basis to guide communist intervention work and it became apparent that all the communists who could be united on the basis of that general line and our orientation to party building were being united through the LOM and its periphery - we began to shift our central task from party building to fusing a communist general line (the UFAW&R) with the peoples movement. Our independent work within the class struggle began to shift its emphasis to linking that intervention to the long-range goals of advancing the revolutionary process in the U.S. (of which party building is a part, though not the full expression of those goals).

We have hovered on the edge of this transition since 1985. In 1985 we correctly identified a new stage that was before us, in our formulation that LOM needed to consolidate as a party in order to take up this role. But, we never reconsidered our party building line and never explicitly reoriented our organization to this new central task. The decision to formalize as a party was not taken with enough careful consideration and evaluation of its implications. In part, our failure to study this important step carefully enough reflected a more general tendency to not work through our formulations rigorously enough and make explicit retractions and changes in our lines in a forthright manner. In addition, however, the decision to move toward party formalization with no serious line evaluations and plan for its implementation was made on the heels of the flow around the 1984 Jackson campaign and at a time when U.S. direct military intervention in Central America appeared imminent. These factors set the conditions for our expectations that a major flow in the class struggle was on the horizon. This made us hesitant to take too far a step back to consolidate the organization - which would have been irresponsible in the midst of a U.S. war in Central America. In making this assessment we did not accurately measure the balance of forces on the side of the international proletariat would hold off such an intervention and could force the U.S. bourgeoisie's into a regional peace settlement. No flow of this scale did unfold in the U.S. in the next two years and this made more serious our failure to move toward this consolidation as our principal task.

Without making the appropriate refinements in our party building line in 1985 and placing our party consolidation as a critical basis for this transition (that is the preparatory stage for a party congress) - we have been unable to make the hurdle of this transformation. These steps would have set the basis to unite the organization more thoroughly on its general line (the UFAW&R) incorporating some of the important refinements on the peace question and the class foundation of our anti-racist line, and on its party building line. Our party building line would have been updated to incorporate some of the important refinements of our critique of the CPUSA, would have set the basis to evaluate the appropriate policies toward other revolutionary forces, and on the more thoroughgoing transformation of the organizational and ideological standards and methods of work of the LOM to broaden its base as a party. A systematic transformation of this type was and remains critical in light of the new central task facing us, the fusing of communism with the U.S. working class movement, which is manifested in the concrete goal of building the united front against war and racism.

In the new period following such a transformation, this task of fusing our general line with the working class movement will remain the central task for an indefinite period of time, with only exceptional periods in which a particular task (such as a merger with other communist or revolutionary forces, a rectification campaign within the party, etc.) might become the focus of our work. With such a transformation the previous formulation of party building as the central task, or the three component parts of party building will no longer be guiding our party building efforts. Our party building line will be characterized by our formulations on the specific party building tasks of the LOM such as recruitment campaigns, struggles to upgrade the institutions for the study of Marxism-Leninism, etc. (which is the way all other parties in the ICM refer to their party building line). It will be distinct, however, from the party building line in many countries where there is a single communist party and the vanguard character of its relation to its own working class has already been established. For the LOM in the U.S. today, our party building line will continue to be an objective and non-sectarian line which will specifically acknowledge the existence of another wing of the U.S. communist movement and place a high priority on the struggle for the unification of the U.S. communist movement around a revolutionary line. In addition, we will formalize as a party in explicit recognition that we have no pretenses to a vanguard relation to the U.S. working class. And we will formalize as a party with an acknowledgement that the international communist movement has produced important new experiences where the vanguard party relation has been established in some unitary formations of communist and revolutionary forces. These formulations will place a conditional character on the nature of our party building task, but for the immediately foreseeable future - building the LOM will constitute the main expression of our party building task.

In 1985 we began to place fusing communism with the working class movement, through building the united front against war and racism, as our central task without conducting the appropriate transformation process of the LOM to fully implement this line. While we made important progress in actually conducting such a fusion we were able to make these advances only in limited and halting ways. We attempted to set this new vision for the broad expansion of our intervention areas of work and for the simultaneous consolidation of the LOM. But we were not able to sustain the implementation of that vision and it was applied very unevenly throughout the organization.

Without a party building line that identified this contradiction, and clearly set goals in these areas - our organization became swept up in stretching our goals in the

intervention areas to their farthest limit. We had an exaggerated assesement of the degree of consolidation of LOM politically and organizationally to engage in the party building process while its leadership was principally focussed on expansion of its leadership within the class struggle. The results of this problem in our party building line have been evident over these last two years. Our organization has objectively been swept up by our priorities in the mass movement and important elements of our party building tasks have been neglected. Our intervention work began to suffer from empiricism and the inability to summarize this work from a higher vantage point, and we were overextended within a number of our areas of this work. Our theoretical work was neglected and not brought into close enough relation with the needs of our work both in leading in the class struggle nor in uniting the communist movement. And we began to lose an important lesson we gained during the period when our theoretical work was principal - that is the importance of bringing Marxism-Leninism to bear on the main political and theoretical questions in the academic and intellectual sector. Our line and relations with the CPUSA and the rest of the left were not correctly recalibrated in relation to the task of building the United Front Against War and Racism, etc.

In addition, the failure to develop our party building line to address this new period meant that we proceeded in our organization building tasks with no plan and direction. With no reexamination of the construction of our central bodies or system of training our next line of leadership, our central comrades began to take on more and more responsibilities and became exhausted and overwhelmed. (This is of course the context in which comrade Bruce became incapacitated and all three members of the co-chairs collective which bore the brunt of new responsibilities which emerged experienced serious personal difficulty and disorientation). The overcentralization which took place failed to utilize the other leading comrades of organization and failed to train the entire membership to take on a greater share of the responsibilities which were emerging. Our failure to sharpen and collectivize the general line guiding the organization - the UFAW&R and conduct the training of our membership in that line resulted in a limitation of the capacity of every member to utilize their creative capacity to develop this line and apply it to their practice. This is the most serious error in the erosion of the democracy of the organization. In addition, criticisms and observations of these developing problems which emerged from the membership were shined on by the center which was overwhelmed by its immediate tasks and was unable to identify the problem as a problem in line and could not figure out how to step back from our situation qualitatively and rethink things. As the experience of the international communist movement well demonstrates, whenever the political

line of an organization is off base (in this case our party building line) the quality of the democratic centralism will necessarily become distorted.

ON THE CURRENT CRISIS IN LOM

As I reviewed in the earlier section I believe that Line of March was facing very serious problems in our work (which I believe was a major factor in Bruce's personal difficulties). However, I do not believe we were in a crisis. A crisis is a conspicuous inability of the organization to function. In fact, major areas of work were functioning and even making important progress during the period of these problems emerging. The crisis which our organization now faces is a direct result of Bruce's absence. Because for any communist formation (in fact even any bourgeoisie organizational formation) the loss of one's founder and leader sets the conditions for an enormous vacuum in direction for the organization and a vacuum in leadership (which is completely and thoroughly bound up in the question of direction). Line of March is facing a crisis which I believe is a result of an incorrect line guiding the organization.

The LOM has been functioning for many years with a great deal of informality about its leadership structures and even the identification of who its leading comrades are. This obviously has a negative impact now, as many comrades (especially those new to the organization) were not that aware of Bruce's role as the founder of Line of March and the comrade who cohered our national leadership. Thus, his absence was a blow of major proportion to the organization - a not just the absence of one among many leading individuals. Bruce was responsible for setting the main direction and line forward for the organization over these last ten years. And now other comrades are struggling to take up that level of responsibility. At this stage we are grappling with both a question of what line will lead the organization and who will lead the organization, as a reflection of what line will lead.

When any organization experiences a loss of leader such as we are experiencing, the members of this organization will ask, "What line is directing the organization?" and "Who is at its helm?" The remaining leadership of LOM was very inexperienced in handling such a loss and understanding its implications. And we failed to identify our crisis as such in its initial stages, take the appropriate political and organizational measures to take the contradiction into account and failed to honestly collectivize that problem with the entire organization.

The absence of Bruce from our national center and the significance of the transition of our national leadership was a very new question to those of us who remained in leadership. In fact, within days of the revelation of the seriousness of Bruce's difficulties comrades in the national leadership began caucusing with each other and evaluating who would lead the organization in his absence. This was all done privately and we became painfully aware that the members of our highest organizational bodies had fragmented experiences with each other, many stored up criticisms with each other and of other leading members of the organization, etc. which was a result of a number of problems which had been brewing in the organization for some time. However, no discussion was held at that time or any time since (to my knowledge) stepping back from the problem of transition we were facing and evaluating what we were facing and what problems might emerge. Instead, we jumped full force into dealing with Bruce, dealing with the process of collectivizing these events with the organization, the political work immediately facing us, and wrestling with the problems facing the organization which were uncovered more actively as we faced this new situation.

It is now considered vulgar to talk about the role of individuals in party leadership - "personalization" or feeding into a "cult of personality" that existed around Bruce. In fact, the Standing Committee has decided that a Frontline article on the LOM crisis will not mention Bruce's absence. If we don't mention it, it will go away. But, in my opinion our political crisis now resides in the fact that the determination to function as a Marxist-Leninist party and struggle to play a leading role in the class struggle was bound up in Bruce's leadership in this organization. And with his absence our leadership is facing a fundamental vacillation on the Leninist conception of a party and in our struggle to implement that vision.

The content of our "Redirection"

Our old vision of building LOM as a Marxist-Leninist party is out. But no new vision has been formally put in its place. Therefore, we can only examine the main concrete steps which have been taken in this crisis to determine what line is leading the organization now.

Quiet as it is kept (not even mentioned in a fifty-two page board report) a line struggle broke out in the National Executive Committee two weeks before the Board meeting and erupted center stage in the National Board meeting. That line struggle was over whether or not Line of March should be a Marxist-Leninist party. And the two comrades holding the strongest opposite positions were the remaining two co-

chairs of the NEC, Max and myself. Max held the position that the consolidation of LOM as a party and the implied goal of struggling for a vanguard relationship to the class struggle is inherently sectarian given the conditions of the U.S. political situation. And I held the position that LOM should struggle to be a Marxist-Leninist party. Now, comrades remaining in the Standing Committee will tell you that this struggle was not important, that it was premature, that it is "inappropriate to the first stage" etc. In fact, the existence of that discussion is now being actively buried. But, for all of you who know that an organization is proceeding under some line or another at every given moment - there has been intense struggle over the implications of these lines at every single juncture and on practically every issue facing the national leadership since Bruce was no longer leading this party.

At the January Board meeting we decided to withdraw the formulation that we are a party. This decision was made very little discussion at the Board meeting and was quickly voted through when it became evident that comrades at the very center didn't think we were a party and one of the co-chairs didn't think we should even struggle to be a party. In large part, the organization has wisely voted that it is not ready to make such a determination without study and discussion of this critical question. The indecision at the center as to whether or not we are a party or should be one which was brought to light at the January Board meeting is certainly good cause to instituting a period of reexamination by the organization. And thus I can now still agree with the call by the National Board for a period of reexamination - although I believe we must tighten-up our determination of exactly what questions are being reexamined and particularize the process for that reexamination to be conducted.

However, the advancement of the slogan "redirection" is very problematic in this context. Since we have not yet conducted the reexamination or determined the conclusions of this reexamination, what are we redirecting toward. After having unfolded an extremely spontaneous process of discussion (see later section on the deterioration of Leninist standards for leadership), the foundations of what Line of March is and what vision we should be functioning under has all been called into question. And the center has advanced the formulation that we are redirecting - that is heading in a different direction. Implicitly and occasionally this means that the "old direction" is now not to be followed. Presumably we must not function (or pretend to function) as a party since this formulation has been withdrawn. I believe that the adoption of "redirection" - that is some change in the basic direction of the organization in this way was a highly undemocratic process. The appropriate was to handle this question of "redirection"

is to emphasize the fact that Line of March will continue to function under all of its preceding line, until some systematic process for clearly articulating what the new direction is and how it is different from the old direction and this is debated throughout the organization and agreed upon by the majority.

In it important to note that the redirection was initiated on the basis of a shallow and subjective summation process which has unfolded in these last few months. Major questions of our history and our party building line have been put on the agenda of the entire organization in a half-assed manner. These questions are on the agenda as major assertions regarding our history and decision to function as a party were advanced in the last board report and we were asked to vote on them. But, any line struggle on these questions is not officially on the agenda as we are waiting for stage 2. The fact is that things are already being talked about in relation to our history and party building line. The summations on our last two years have focussed on entirely negative phenomena. Where is the discussion of our positive experiences and important progress which was registered over these last few years? If there was none, than we must certainly look to something fundamental in our line which was wrong and we should definately be looking for a significant overhaul in our leadership bodies. If there was important progress, but still serious problems than that means a completely different set of implications about what line alterations are necessary and even our confidence in the leadership. And what exactly is targetted as being wrong in our practice in this last period is being used to determine our "redirection".

The one sidedness of this summation was a very disorienting experience for the organization and made it extremely difficult to comprehend what scale of problems were being assessed and in what context they fell. This kind of summation process has led to a situation where comrades feel like the rug is being cut out from underneath them, everythink we are and did is up for question. Without any clear context for this summation or leadership as to what our line might be as to what problems are being targetted and limitations to the examination, everyone was encouraged to "open-up" on any problem they ever experienced within the LOM. This is a recipe for disaster as subjectivity will range out of control.

The Decision we are Not a Party

While very little leadership was provided in the midst of this "opening-up" a few themes became clear. The first thing we decided upon this one sided summation was that we were not a party. This was a decision which was made even more hastily that our decision to be a party (although I

suppose deciding not to be a Marxist-Leninist party in the U.S. today is easier than deciding to be one). Now, if we had said in 1985 we were moving toward the formalization of a party and we would begin calling ourselves that following an upcoming party congress that would have been o.k. with me. And in 1985 perhaps it would have been better than the hedge about we already are a party, so that we would have put due attention into the process of party consolidation. However, I believe that the first act of our "redirection" in deciding we are not a party, in the context of the discussions and summations which surrounded this decision and the current crisis of the LOM, that this act is a very serious statement about the "redirection" we can look forward to.

The explanations about why we are not a party have begun to put an idealist framework into place about what a party is. We'll have a party when we have the entire general line and every outstanding theoretical question before the U.S. communist movement answered. We'll have a party when we have a mass base of thousands - then we'll be serious and can call ourselves a party, etc. This kind of talk sets an idealist standard by which we can never measure up.

But perhaps its just a question of semantics, organization, party, what's the difference - as long as we all agree about what we're doing? It's true, too much is being attached to this battle over a mere word "party". If there weren't a line struggle at work in the background there would be no struggle about this word. However, party actually happens to be a very important word. In fact, it sums up what we have been struggling to build for the last ten years. Therefore, those who want this word to be removed very badly feel that LOM being a party symbolizes something very bad to them. My impression of both the assertions made about why we are not a party and the current practice of the organization leads me to conclude that there is something too "ambitious" or "arrogant" about the assertion that we are a party. And that something is the goal of struggling to lead in the class struggle. I believe that this is what some comrades find "premature" about the assertion that we are a party. And those that want the word to remain feel that it symbolizes something very important to them. And many comrades have come to realize that it symbolized something very important one way or the other and aren't ready to vote it out without a little discussion first.

Our Commitment to Lead in the Class Struggle

I believe that our determination to be a Marxist-Leninist party is a reflection of our commitment to the

next stage of our work which we have been hovering on the edge of - formalizing a party to lead in the class struggle. I do not believe we can or should return to the "old days" of making the theoretical reflection of our political line is the defining feature of our organization. I believe that such a quest for the return of theoretical work as the main substance of our work is a reflection of the fear of what the next step of our party holds. No, the period of theoretical struggle for our general line was not the period of our greatest democracy in the history of the LOM, it was one of the most painful and undemocratic for the vast majority of comrades whose main contribution to the development of a party would lie in other areas (such as the capacity to make this line a material force within the working class). And once we have developed a revolutionary line sufficient to cohere an organization and guide its intervention in the class struggle and with a real relation to the class struggle, such a retreat would be unconscionable.

We are no longer at a stage where we can step back from the class struggle and have an "internal period" of theoretical debate and reflection. We have already developed a sufficient line to lead in the class struggle, functioned as a party for several years, and developed a real relation to that struggle. Our role in building the united front against war and racism, reflected in the politics of Frontline and the practice of our members has set the basis for new recruitment into the LOM and an increasing objectification of our trend. Thus, the steps back we must take in order to conduct the necessary consolidation of our party must be clearly placed within this context. But, that has not been the atmosphere in which the question of the mass work has been addressed in this crisis.

This vacillation on our objective of leading in the class struggle is reflected in the other themes of the summation which has been conducted. Our intervention work in the class struggle tended to be "blamed" for the problems of the organization, and individuals in this area of work most targetted for criticism. The Board discussion on intervention work, and much of the summation which has been opened up revealed this problem quite clearly as the intervention work is targetted as the source of our problems (of overextension etc.), "fusion as the key link" is critiqued as a wrong line with no replacement with any other line, all references to the plans for intervention work are characterized by the slogan, "cut, cut, cut" etc. It is no surprise that many comrades are wondering, what is the commitment of the center towards the organization even participating in the class struggle, much less leading in it.

These "signals" about the intervention work are a very serious problem at a juncture when this area of work needs a much greater infusion of energy, leadership, and centralism in order to set this work on a correct course - integrated with the independent tasks we have as communists. It is evident from even our initial summations of the problems in our intervention work that the critical need facing our work was the struggle for a higher vantage point. Our center needs to constitute collectives in order to gain some overview and synthesis of the class struggle on the broadest level. This would set the basis for determining more specific goals for our intervention work, grounding each of our arenas of work in some integrated whole, etc. Our concrete intervention in the class struggle and striving to lead in it is the essential raw material for the advances which we have made in the maturation of the UFAW&R line. It has posed the key questions for advanced political commentary in the Frontline which have been critical in its role in the left.

Critical to gaining such an overview is our national level work in New York and Washington D.C. and the focussed work within the national commissions. However, with Linda's transfer and Ann's lay-off, we will have no national level comrades able to attend a day time coalition meeting or conduct the work with the key united front forces in order to gather the material for such an analysis. The most shocking thing is that we made these decisions with no discussion of the impact that these decisions would have on the struggle to gain such a vantage point. We disbanded the proposal for a National United Front Team and then disbanded the idea of a sub-collective on the mass intervention work with no substitutes in their place. This type of work has been critical to gaining what vantage point has been struggled for in this last two years and it is now perceived of as little to no priority.

No, I cannot say that anyone has publically declared their opposition to leading in the class struggle. But the confidence to make an evaluation of the key controversies in the class struggle, to organize and mobilize our organization in relationship to these movements and to even acknowledge that many of our members are in a position to play a leading role seems strikingly absent in the "redirection". Instead, the leading line for our mass intervention work is to take "inventory" of what work exists. Meanwhile all of our major initiatives were in the midst of ambitious plans to make the UFAW&R a material force in their sectors of work and are cut-off from any further synthesis of the key developments of the development of the UFAW&R on a national level. We appear to be heading back to the primitive conception that we will do mass intervention work only in so far as it builds our party (although we should no longer call it that), and the idea that we have ever led in the class struggle or that we should place that tension before ourselves seems indefinitely postponed.

"Democratization" and the Role of Leadership

Even more can be discerned about the "new direction" by the approach and orientation toward the conception of democratic centralism and particularly the role of leadership within Line of March has significantly altered over these last few months. For a new organizational mode has been adopted that is conspicuously unsuitable for leading in the class struggle. We do not need a party to lead in the class struggle (as such a notion is inherently sectarian) and do not need a leading line and leadership to lead the party (as it smacks of overcentralism and elitism).

The advancement of the slogan "democratization" within Line of March, given the nature of the problems we are facing was an irresponsible decision. Unlike the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (which is also advancing this slogan), the LOM does not have 75 years of experience being consolidated around the principles of democratic centralism. The advancement of this slogan without this kind of consolidation - at a time when political leadership is at a premium for our organization has created a serious problem.

I agree that the LOM faced serious problems in its practice of democratic centralism in our earlier periods - primarily a result of our errors in party building line. But, I believe its correction must lie foremost in the correction of our party building line (which will take very strong political leadership to both articulate and implement). This is the way in which our members can be most fully empowered. The formulation and assertion of a real summation of our problems in the past period, the formulation and assertion of a line to guide the

asserted, the organization is left with vacuuous agendas, repetitions of all the scattered ideas of attempts to develop a leading line by mass members from the floor of a conference. I believe the correction of our party building line will place the formalization of our party as the primary task for the coming period. And in this process we will develop and formalize the democratic institutions of the party. But, I believe that just like any other campaign and new task we take up, we can approach this institutionalization with a leading line and careful thought and attention. It must not be put into place in a hysterical and spontaneous fashion or we will only succeed in instituting bourgeois democracy.

The center has advanced a call for democracy which without the provision of strong political leadership has essentially focussed the character of that democracy as bourgeois individual rights. It is first of all not true that there has been no democracy in LOM until this last few months. This is acceptable as a statement of fact only if you interpret democracy as solely or most importantly the "right to vote". There is quite a powerful support for the notion that democracy is bound up with the "right to vote" from the bourgeoisie, but voting has never been the focal point of the discussions of proletarian democracy within the international communist movement. Our first discussions of unfolding the party building process in the United States paid particular attention to the question of democracy and we have struggled to implement a line on this question over the last 10 years. That line has emphasized the fact that the main substance of democracy within the LOM would be the committment to raise the theoretical and political level of the membership in order to empower our members to hold the leadership accountable. In particular, we struggled for this kind of educational work and training as the focal point of democracy in order to ensure the empowerment of working class, minority and women comrades whose life disadvantages limit their ability to "spontaneously" jump into the line discussions and debates of the organization. This was the basis upon which so much of our emphasis was placed on the development of the MLEP curriculum and the determination that every member of our party must graduate from a serious course on Marxism-Leninism as the main guarantee of democracy in our organization. To hear the exclamations of many comrades who have forgotten this central principle - we would come to believe that democracy was introduced in the Line of March when we had our first "vote".

Following the direction of the center in this last several months we would believe that what our organization needs right now is "more democracy" and "less centralism". This is a fundamental distortion of the principles of democratic centralism which emphasizes the ouantative

Line of March needs political leadership more than ever before, many comrades are being mistraigned to think that what we need is less leadership. The improvement in the quality of leadership is one of the main conditions to improve the quality of the democracy for the entire membership. Unfortunately, the idea that the leadership should struggle to develop a leading line and go out and lead around it is equated with the "old way". The new way is to open up agendas which have no clear direction, gather all the opinions of the members, then repeat back as faithfully as possible everything that was said.

While this "new way" is wrapped in the mantle of democracy (a truly envious position in the midst of the heartland of bourgeois ideology), it is a profoundly undemocratic process. Because when all is said and done, the leadership necessarily have to go off and implement something (or fail to implement what it should). But if you were not able to hear what they really thought of what you said and what others said you will just find out about the new line in the Board report, for they will necessarily implement the things they agreed with and ignore the things they disagreed with. For example, conferences in this last two months adopted some completely opposite resolutions. What did leading members of the organization think of your resolution, did they agree or disagree? How do they summarize the results of your conference in content, not just in methodology? And if conferences came up with some very opposite conclusions which direction will the organization follow?

The most democratic process available to this organization in this period is to have those comrades who are most central to this organization identify their own political views about what has happened and where they think this organization should be headed. And hiding out under the mantle of the "first stage" (where we are not supposed to have these opinions) or the "collective process" (where leadership will come up with its opinions together) and then advance this to the organization - when the reality is that the central comrades in this organization already have opinions which are the basis upon which the work is proceeding and we do not all have the same opinions; is a great disservice to the democratic process of the organization.

Unfortunately, a new standard of leadership has been adopted in the period of "democratization" which does not recognize that it is precisely in the assertion of a line which is the basis for the accountability of leadership. In the name of "democracy" we are all encouraged to believe that everyone is leading, collectives are leading, and in the "wisdom of collectives". But, one of the fundamental

forged was the acknowledgement of the role of party leaders. Now, any discussion of the role of individual party leaders is "personalization". The criteria for evaluating leadership is not on their ability to set a line for the organization and in the correctness of that line but instead it is "openness to the new way". "We critiqued the OCIC for its refusal to make conscious and explicit the role of "leading individuals" who would advance "leading lines" as the basis for the debate and line struggle which would unite the trend.

The fact is that every political line struggle in the history of the international communist movement has included and been reflected in the question of who would lead the party, because communist leaders are completely bound up with their politics. Parties place leaders in a position of authority in order to implement a line and remove them in order to change a line. And that is what "openness to the new way" as the criteria upon which comrades are being asked to chose a new national board is all about, openness to a new line directing the organization. Unfortunately, that line has not emerged forthrightly enough and has hidden itself behind the mantle of the "first period" in which we are to have no discussion of the line which is actually leading the organization now (although this will be our new criteria for leadership).

In the final analysis the "form" of an organization must suit its function. And if our vision of the LOM is to be a discussion group process for the U.S. left then perhaps this kind of "democratization" is the appropriate form. But, if our vision for the Line of March is to lead the working class movement in revolutionary struggle than let us not abandon democratic centralism. Democratic centralism is necessary to struggle out a leading line for the organization and it is essential in being able to operate as a decisive and leading force in the class struggle. Democratic centralism is an integrated whole of a proletarian organizational method which is not only the only tried and tested form for this function, but can and has functioned well for us except in the periods when our line has been off base.

The Results of "Democratization"

The impact of this mistraining around the nature of democratic centralism has been a demoralizing effect on many of the next level of leadership in the organization and a paralysis of our organizational lines. An unguided summation of all problems within the organization was "opened-up". How will all of the raw personal relations, political problems, pent-up issues, etc. which have been generated by this process be put back together? Only decisive leadership could step in and sort through what

should or should not be on the agenda, determine what work should go through and what needs collective discussion and where. Only strong political leadership and centralism could step in and lead around who was right and wrong and about what in many contradictions which were opened up. But, here we are in the period of democratization and every opinion is just as good as another. This distortion has a paralyzing impact. Now, sooner or later the national leadership will "rediscover centralism" at best to try and rescue the organization which is grinding to a halt. But, what will the centralism be used for and who is to determine that question. Perhaps the national leadership will gather up the confidence to begin exercising its centralism but where has this left other comrades in middle levels of leadership? You don't know where you can exercise leadership or where you will get jumped on for overcentralism, you will take shots from any member who has a grudge about something, someone might even write a paper about you. Once you add up all the sacrifice and difficulty it takes to be the "bottom line" of some project or area of work and add on all the new incentives of leading in this crisis, you might just want to step back from it all. Is there a conspicuous movement of people stepping forward to want to move into leadership positions under this new "democratization" or just the opposite?

In addition, the new "democratization" has worsened the racial and class dynamics in the LOM. We have now begun to summarize that one of the major ways in which centralism in the LOM has been exercised in the past has been in the struggle to improve the class and racial dynamics in the organization. The evaluation and determination of leading collectives at all levels of the organization were carefully scrutinized, organized, and constantly reorganized keeping the both the advancement of the work and the consideration of these dynamics (which is in fact critical to the advancement of the work) foremost in our consideration. The utilization of central guidance as the principal method of maintaining a high standard around these questions, however, was beginning to show its limitations over these last two years. As the organization was struggling to broaden its character to a more objective representation of our politics, that kind of centralism needed to be replaced with more systematic training and education around the problems of class chauvanism, racism, national chauvanism, sexism and homophobia in order to be able to check problems in these areas utilizing the mobilization of more conscious forces at all levels of the organization.

In this period of crisis, when almost all forms of leadership have been abdicated by the national center and nothing has been put in its place except spontaneous democracy - poor dynamics of this type have been unleashed throughout the organization. Meetings to "explore" new

theories of party building, discuss long stored up grievances, and practice our "new found" democracy have unleashed the enthusiasum of some comrades. But, others are voting with their feet. In particular, minority comrades who have been placed in leadership positions have been encouraged to "open-up" to the criticisms of those whose work they have been leading. But, no offers of assistance by the national leadership has been forthcoming as to who will sort out what may be legitimate grievances or racist backlash of other leading white comrades who may have been "passed-over" for leadership positions because of our own affirmative action policy. Instead, minority comrades are counseled to "eat some shit" behind the criticisms and hope that it all dies down after awhile. On the whole our members have very good political and ideological understanding and stands in relation to these questions. However, a wrong line will encourage backward tendencies within each of us and bring out the worst of these features. I believe that the current line on "democratization" is such a line and is exacerbating rather than improving these dynamics in the organization. And this is not a problem of "stand" and "dynamics" alone, it is an all-sided question of line and practice. For any turn away from our goal of leadership in the class struggle, in particular our practice in the struggle against war and racism will have an even more profound affect on who is attracted and who repelled by our "redirection".

The Dirty Underside of "Democratization"

One of the first lessons of Leninism is the fact that there is no such thing as democracy in the abstract. Democracy, just like centralism, is not a pure and clean thing. Democracy = good, centralism = bad (but an unfortunate necessity). No, democracy never has and never will run anything as any elemental experience in trying to make something happen in the world has well demonstrated. To make anything happen, leadership and centralism are absolutely necessary. That is true of bourgeois organization as well as proletarian. The difference between the two is that under the communist ethics of organization, the existence of centralism, indeed even the need for dictatorship is not hidden under the guise of "democracy". Of course, our use of dictatorship is limited to the use against the bourgeoisie and we do not characterize the use of centralism within a proletarian organization as dictatorship. But, communists do not hide the fact that centralism is critical to the success of any revolutionary endeavor and in the leadership of the transformation of society.

The bourgeoisie, however, operates in a completely hypocritical fashion. It says that there is no dictatorship or suppression in the U.S. It proclaims vacuuous activity

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such as "voting" in controlled election processes where the real issues are never able to be articulated, and where there are no real options for people. In fact, it also engages in the most ruthless suppression of revolutionary ideas and activists whenever they begin to gain some real effectivity, despite all the obstacles which are placed in their path. The real issue at stake is what is content of what the democracy used for and what is the centralism used for. No other question is relevant.

Rather than using our centralism to struggle with and suppress racist and poor class dynamics in the organization or to mobilize our organization for the intervention in the class struggle, it has found a new purpose. Ever since this period of "democratization" has been underway I have witnessed the first outright tendencies to suppress differing ideas by our national leadership. This is the first period where I have seen explicit requests by standing committee members for me to not maintain any communications with the other members of the organization (when Miriam L. suggested I not be in touch with anyone from the Seattle local regarding my removal from the co-chairs collective immediately following the board meeting). Papers can apparently be written by anyone about anything, except by some people about some topics. The period of "democratization" had barely begun when the first paper critical of the national leadership (written by Maria A. about the January national board meeting) evoked the first discussion about the "rules" of circulating papers. It was questioned whether she should be allowed to circulate her paper to Seattle and whether or not we should allow "irresponsible" or "dangerous" papers to circulate. And when I suggested to a co-chair that I would like to circulate a paper with some differences with the January Board report, it was strongly recommended that this would be inappropriate and that I must first discuss my opinions on these questions with the standing committee before circulating anything to the board. A caucus during the Bay Area local conference to work out alternate proposals by those comrades who had differences with the Board report was "invaded" by two standing committee members who tied up the caucus in their questions to caucus members rather than giving them the opportunity to work out their own positions (which is the purpose of a caucus).

For those who have expressed political differences with the new direction of the organization, ideological struggle has been invoked. Suddenly, comrades class origins, race, sex or sexual orientation (read emotional difficulties or bourgeois feminism) or problem of substance abuse (either one's own problem or a failure to "let go" of Bruce) has become the explanation of the failure of some comrades to "get with the program" of the national leadership. Comrades who disagree with the new direction are derogatively called

"friends of Bruce" or "friends of Melinda" as if this was a personal loyalty question. And a number of members are afraid to speak up at meetings for fear of such attack and labelling.

Comrades, there are very political questions which face the organization at this time and any attempt to reduce them to ideological problems can only serve to discourage the process of democratic debate on our future. Need we be reminded of the "white chauvanism" campaign which tore apart the OCIC which preceeded us. The OCIC was being constructed on an erroneous party building line, failed to acknowledge its errors in line, and began just such an ideological campaign when a correct party building line rose in opposition to it. But, its fundamental politics were those of our trend and its membership composed of just as good and competant a core of organizers as ours. Let us not take this road again.

The Problem of 2 Stages and Elections

The formulations advanced in the January board report about how we will get through this crisis are an exercise in mechanical materialism. There will be no confidence restored in the leadership of this organization until there is a party building line and conception of the organization which we agree upon and are collectively functioning on the basis of. Until that exists, confidence can only be reduced to a superficial question of confidence in individuals or in style of work. That confidence will not emerge through having an election when the political issues and line struggle which faces the organization is left murky, hidden (as in the case of the line that LOM should not struggle to be a party) or "deferred" until another stage. The questions posed in stage two (that is the party building line and conception of the organization) have been explicitly underway and in struggle in our center since December at least.

These stages are obviously not functioning. The struggle for the party building line and conception of the organization is already underway and any expectation that the confidence of the membership will be established short of a resolution of this line question is dreaming. Confidence will not be established by leading members running all over the country demonstrating their good style of work by listening hard to everything everyone has to say. It will be established by the determination of a leading line which can set a correct direction forward for the organization. And it will be established by the leadership's ability to implement that line and lead the organization in the political tasks which it sets for itself.

In the mean time any process of changes in leadership, such as the election process which is now underway (and the so-called election process which took place at the last board meeting) is qualitatively flawed. They are flawed not just because there is no opportunity to discuss the assessments and the qualifications of different leading comrades. They are flawed because they are taking place in the midst of the struggle to determine the future direction of this organization and they are taking place with that struggle just beginning to unfold and before the organization has an opportunity to know the different positions which exist and vote in a leadership based on a political evaluation. When an organization is firmly united on its line and functioning in a smooth fashion it is natural that the process of assessments by comrades collectives etc. are an integral part of the election process. But, in a period of emerging line struggle (especially following a period in which we acknowledge that leading collectives were dysfunctional in their character), holding elections on the basis of "objective" summations of anyones work are ridiculous. Even more ridiculous is the supposition that we will hold elections not based on anyones political opinions about the direction forward, but instead weigh such lofty principles as "openness to the new way" of doing things.

This is the reason that elections for the national leadership of a communist party are never held in any other setting than a national congress. This is because all of the members (in particular the delegates elected in proportion to membership) have an opportunity to take up the political struggle facing the organization in a national and collective setting for days before they consider who their national leadership is. They have an opportunity to hear all the different positions which exist in the organization (which for example you are not able to do in your local conferences) and weigh them for themselves. They have an ample period of time to consider their own opinions on the questions before the organization which combats the spontaneous tendency of those who can formulate their opinions most quickly to dominate such a proceeding. And the question of the elections is placed squarely in a political context and not in the murky realm of style of work. Holding our first "election" in this manner was extremely unproductive. And the coming election process promises some of the same difficulties. Proceeding in this manner is bound to undermine any remaining confidence in the national leadership.

How it all adds up.

Any one of the different steps taken since our crisis unfolded might be able to be constructed as a single political

a product of inexperience of many of the central comrades who have never had such a direct hand in leading the organization. And by and large I believe many of them are the products of such inexperience. However, the errors which I believe have emerged from our center in this most recent period lie in a consistent political direction and no matter what the intent have a concrete political result. The hesitation that a Marxist-Leninist party is a burning political necessity for the U.S. class struggle is a social democratic tendency. And the distortions of the Leninist theory of democratic centralism which are at work are consistent to a vision of an organization which can be a part of the theoretical debate of the U.S. left but not an organization which is attempting to lead in the class struggle. With this deterioration of the Leninist standards - the questioning of the capacity of a Marxist-Leninist party to lead, and the lowering of expectations that even our leadership within the party should lead, I fear that our ability to set the kind political pole we have in the U.S. left will be a thing of the past. It has been our consolidation around "the high road" of Leninism which allowed our party to go against the tide of the spontaneous current of the U.S. left whether from social democracy or infantile leftism, which vacillated on the Jackson campaign in 1984, which accepted the lies about the KAL jetliner, which can challenge the CISPES approach to solidarity work, etc.

The confidence that a Marxist-Leninist party is still a vital necessity in the advancement of the class struggle in the U.S. today is an extremely difficult vision to sustain in a period when social democracy is gaining such a powerful ideological hegemony on the U.S. left. The confidence to build such a party when we do not have any international "franchise" nor any direct linkage of our party with a long history and tradition such as the CPUSA makes it an even more difficult task.

Without a clear vision of the conception of our organization, a confidence in that vision by our leadership, and a capacity to implement that vision - the glue that holds our organization together will evaporate. I believe that our confidence that the vision of Line of March serving such a role cannot and will not be generated by exhortations from "What is to Be Done". That confidence can be instilled through an examination of our own experience, through a confidence in the correctness of our political line and in our steadily increasing ability to make that line a material force in the peoples movement in the U.S. today despite all of our limitations in size and experience.

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Toward Redirection and Democratization: An Initial Response to Melinda's Paper

By Linda Burnham and Irwin Silber

After months of rumor and speculation, Melinda has brought her differences with the line of the January national board meeting into the open. This is a positive development insofar as it enables the organization as a whole to better understand the events of the past few months, and especially to deepen its understanding of our history and the tasks that face us. We have only had access to Melinda's line for a few days, but feel a quick response, despite its limitations, will be helpful to focus these differences for this weekend's national board meeting and the rest of the organization until a fuller critique can be developed.

The virtue of Melinda's paper is that it advances a relatively coherent line which links together a definite point of view on every major question flowing out of the present crisis -- our line and approach to party building and political line, our concept of democratic centralism, our approach to intervention work and indeed our understanding of the crisis itself. On the other hand, its framework and the concrete examples used to draw it out are characterized by a simplistic understanding of the function and character of a Leninist party and a primitive vision of the political tasks confronting communists in the U.S.

While the great majority of our organization is coming to grips with the qualitative limitations of our former line and practice, Melinda proposes to reject redirection and democratization. Instead, we are to consolidate around her version of our old line and swiftly convene a founding party congress. Although appealing for its painlessness and return to familiarity, this line is out of touch with reality and would greatly exacerbate our organization's present crisis. It proceeds from the same voluntarist, idealist and elitist assumptions which have led the Line of March into our current difficulties. If adopted and put into practice, we believe Melinda's line would consign Line of March to the role of one more self-congratulatory left sect.

Developing Line of March as a force able to make historically significant contributions to the class struggle and to the maturation of the U.S. communist movement will not be a simple task. Our present crisis has already imposed upon us a much deeper appreciation for the complexities of this undertaking and the political maturity required to address it. We believe that our organization has the capacity to meet this challenge and that we are beginning to do so on the basis of the "re-examination, re-direction and democratization" (RRD) perspective. Melinda's line would derail us from this course.

Our critique of Melinda's line does not attempt to respond to every point and comment in her paper. Rather we have focused on what we consider to be the main line questions involved: the origins and nature of Line of March's crisis; Melinda's conception of communist intervention in the class struggle and her assessment of Line of March's development as a communist organization; democratization and the role of leadership in a communist organization. In each section, we will begin by reconstructing the fundamental logic and main points of Melinda's position, followed by a critique. Although basic elements of an alternative view are incorporated in this critique, these have not been elaborated here at any length. For the most part, our own still developing conceptions of the direction ahead for Line of March have been incorporated in the standing committee's report to this board meeting.

The Origins and Nature Of Line of March's Crisis

According to Melinda, Line of March was not in a crisis prior to September 1987, when Bruce left his post in the leadership of the organization. "The crisis which our organization now faces is the direct result of Bruce's absence.... With his absence our leadership is facing a fundamental vacillation on the Leninist conception of a party and in our struggle to implement that vision." While the organization had been facing "very serious problems" before then, Melinda does "not believe that we were in a crisis" prior to that development.

The basis for this assessment is threefold: (1) A "crisis," in Melinda's definition, "is a conspicuous inability of the organization to function." Since "major areas of work were functioning and even making important progress" during this period, we clearly were not in a crisis. (2) The 1985 decision "to move toward the formalization of this organization as a party was fundamentally correct," although "we did not implement the formalization process thoroughly enough." In short, the line guiding the organization during this period was a correct one; there were only problems of implementation. (Our critique of this point is incorporated in the next section where we discuss Melinda's assessment of Line of March's development.) (3) We have underestimated the impact of Bruce's absence on our organization. This was "not just the absence of one among many leading individuals." We had lost our "founder and leader" and those who remained in leadership were "very inexperienced in handling such a loss and understanding its implications."

We disagree. In our opinion, Bruce's individual crisis and absence did not *cause* the Line of March crisis. It *uncovered* it. The 1985 decision to move rapidly toward formalizing as a party was not "fundamentally correct." It was a hastily improvised measure which was barely discussed prior to its adoption and was based on a qualitatively incorrect assessment of Line of March's level of development. Certainly Bruce's inability to maintain his leadership responsibilities -- which began some time before September when it came out into the open -- has been a political loss for us. And

it will undoubtedly take some time to compensate for it. But whatever disorientation this problem has had on the organization as a whole has not been principally from Bruce's departure but from the sobering revelations about our line and practice which followed in its wake.

Melinda's assertion that our organization was not in crisis in the period before Bruce became incapacitated because "major areas of work were functioning" reveals a deep-seated empiricism. At bottom, our crisis is one of *line and orientation*; we entered a crisis because our line on party building and on democratic centralism were badly off track. The fact that the organization had not collapsed or ground to a halt is hardly evidence that a crisis of line did not exist. Indeed, the fact that the crisis was not yet *visible* is itself a reflection of the leadership's failure to make a timely assessment of our work and development during the period when our internal contradictions were mounting.

Melinda's paper overlooks the actual situation in the organization during this period. For more than a year, all semblance of a conscious, coordinated strategy guiding our overall work had disappeared. "Advance on all intervention fronts simultaneously" had become our operative line. Attention to synthesizing our experience and formulating a precise party building line that would set firm priorities was abandoned. Efforts at sustained theoretical work virtually ceased -- a fact that was formally acknowledged just before our crisis became visible with the decision to halt publication of our journal.

In every area of our intervention work, the process of line development, summation of experience, cadre training and building unity-struggle relations with other left forces -- the party-building vantage point -- had all but disappeared. Instead our work was characterized principally by the considerations of positioning and a fire brigade style of guidance from the national leadership. Major areas of our work were neglected, most conspicuously our work in minority communities and the anti-racist movement other than what we did in relation to the Rainbow. At the same time, virtually all our intervention areas were slated for expansion, without consideration of the Line of March's ability to back them up politically or in terms of human and material resources. A seemingly insuperable gap arose between the "intervention" side of our work and the "party-building" side -- resulting in a profound political and organizational fragmentation.

This fragmentation, combined with a marked deterioration in unit life and the qualitative weakening of our theoretical work led to the depoliticization of the organization as a whole. Work plans became increasingly idealist and lost their credibility as the organization reacted to a pronounced voluntarist view of our capacities with pragmatism and cynicism.

Further, Line of March was not growing, but stagnating. Distribution of our literature did not expand. Recruitment almost came to a standstill and a definite attrition of minority cadre began to appear.

The central leadership collective -- the national co-chairs -- met sporadically and had arrived at an impasse on identifying, much less addressing, the mounting contradictions at the heart of our work. In particular there was a growing chasm between the intervention work and the nominal task of cohering and consolidating Line of March as a party. Increasingly, the co-chairs collective and its individual members operated with little accountability to the national executive committee (NEC), and the organization was plunged into voluntarist commitments without any collective check or consultation. Meetings of the national executive and the national board had become empty rituals as the real decision-making in the organization occurred elsewhere.

But Melinda does not believe there was a crisis.

Even then, these phenomena -- and we have hardly exhausted the range of those which could be cited -- are not the whole of the crisis. For unlike Melinda, we do not believe that this crisis can be reduced to the absence of Bruce. These phenomena are the sobering indicators of a more fundamental breakdown. After all, Line of March had amassed a good deal of positive experience in its short history, and had developed a political line - the United Front Against War and Racism (UFAWR) -- which had proved capable of illuminating many key events in the class struggle. Given these strengths, how could all these negative phenomena have happened? How could they go on so long unchecked? What was it about our outlook, our line, our style of work, our methodology and our structures which could lead us to such a point? Most important of all, what do we have to change in order to take up the political tasks which history has placed on the agenda of all would-be revolutionary forces in the U.S.? These are the questions which our entire organization has rightfully posed before itself. And they are questions to which Melinda poses only simplistic and incorrect answers.

Party-Building and Communist Intervention in the Class Struggle

Melinda's paper focuses on two key junctures in Line of March's history: the 1982 formulation viewing "fusion as the key link" in party-building; and the 1985 "decision" to "formalize Line of March as a party." The 1982 formulation rested on an assessment that Line of March had developed the beginning elements of a general line (UFAWR) and had built a viable national network of communists. But this line had not been tested in the class struggle and we had not, in any objective way, brought together all those who could unite with these politics. The function of "fusion" was to accomplish both these goals.

The turn toward fusion in 1982, says Melinda, resulted in "significant advances" in the UFAWR line, and in the influence of our line and members in key arenas. On the strength of these advances, the 1985 decision to formalize as a party was correct. But it needed to be accompanied by a reformulation of our party building line and concrete steps toward formalization including placing preparations for a party congress on the agenda.

According to Melinda, our failure to follow through to formalize as a party is the main source of our accumulated problems. This failure is attributed to a shortcoming in our party-building line, which did not take into account the fact that we had supposedly arrived at a different vantage point in relation to our intervention work. In 1982, fusion was seen as the key link in party-building. By 1985, however, fusion was no longer principally a party-building task, and party building was no longer the central task of the Line of March. Rather, our central task had become what Melinda views as always the main task of a revolutionary party -- "to lead the class struggle." But, notes Melinda, this critical refinement in our party-building line was never made -- as a result of which we did not have a clear orientation to either our intervention work or our party-building tasks.

Melinda's line, in the name of protecting the Marxist-Leninist foundations of Line of March, takes us back fifteen years to the days of the new communist movement. The concept of fusion, the estimation of the progress Line of March has made in intervention work and the identification of the central task for the next period -- all these are marked by a gross underestimation of the scale of the task facing the communist movement, an equally gross overestimation of the gains made thus far in intervention work and an abundance of generalities in the place of a more grounded and precise assessment of Line of March's particular role and path of development. All in all, the lack of a sense of proportion, scale or perspective -- in short, a reality check -- is not likely to instill an excess of confidence in those left reeling from the voluntarist and subjectivist errors of the past.

Whatever its weaknesses -- and in hindsight there were probably a fair share -- the polemic which set in place some of our key ideological and political foundation stones was conducted against a primitive notion of fusion. This was characteristic not only of our immediate opponent in the line struggle -- the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center (OCIC) -- but the new communist movement more generally. According to our understanding at that time, the developmental pattern of choice in the new communist movement had been (1) the relatively hasty formulation of a general line; (2) uniting a few hundred communists on the basis of that line and announcing the formation of a new revolutionary communist party; and (3) on the basis of these two processes going to the working class (usually narrowly conceived of as factory workers) to "lead the class struggle" and fuse communism with the working class movement.

The critique we developed of this orientation was complex but some of what we argued was that (1) the general lines formulated by the new communist movement, apart from frequently being wrong in their particulars (international line, Black nation thesis, etc.) were also theoretically anemic and insufficiently developed to guide communist practice in a class struggle as complex as the one we face in the U.S.; (2) the seemingly broadminded edict to "unite all who can be united" in practice amounted to an implacable hostility toward the CPUSA, a rapid accumulation of forces in order to engage in the franchise wars, subjectivist party declarations, and a vast disjuncture between the size and sophistication of the parties thus formed and the scale of the task they posed for themselves; (3) apart from the economism of both the new communist movement and the OCIC, the orientation towards fusion based on such a primitive level of line development and organization necessarily led to what we, after Lenin, called "bowing to spontaneity"; that is, rather than the communists diverting the working class movement from its spontaneous path of development, the spontaneous movement diverted the communists from an unwavering focus on their particular task, contribution and role.

Melinda's paper essentially revives and repackages most of these errors. What are we to make, for example, of the idea that "we have already developed a sufficient line to lead in the class struggle, functioned as a party for several years, and developed a real relation to that struggle" (p. 18)? While most of us are trying to come to grips with gaping holes in our line -- analysis of the working class beyond the labor aristocracy, analysis of the bourgeoisie, political economy of U.S. capitalism in the context of general, structural and cyclical crises of capitalism, national strategy, intermediate tasks, etc., etc. -- Melinda has come to the conclusion that a little touching up of the UFAWR will suffice.

We cannot agree. The development of the UFAWR was a very important advance for Line of March which made it possible to put out a politically coherent newspaper and to begin our intervention work in a politically conscious and focused way. But let us not exalt this accomplishment out of proportion -- a temptation which is somewhat understandable when we contrast it to the problems and inconsistencies in our party building line. Our experiences in the mass movements and in analyzing the class struggle served as initial verification of the main elements of the UFAWR perspective. But while the UFAWR represents an important beginning for a general line, it is far from being an all-sided assessment of class and political forces on the basis of which a coherent national strategy to guide communist work could be formulated. To imagine that the UFAWR line at its present level of development/stagnation is sufficient to orient us to the task of "leading the class struggle" is itself a sobering comment on the primitive notions of "general line" and "class struggle" which infuse all of Melinda's paper.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Melinda's own formulation of both the "immediate" and "communist" goals of our intervention work. On the immediate side, she poses our tasks at the lowest level of consciousness in the mass movement. (We take up Central America work because the U.S. is committing "horrible crimes against humanity" there. We support Jesse Jackson "because he should be President of the U.S.") More long-range, we struggle "to advance the revolutionary consciousness in the working class...by targeting the exposure of the capitalist system."

We certainly share these sentiments, but as a communist organization mapping out a strategic perspective surely we need something more. Where is the reflection on those strategic tasks which fall somewhere between the immediate questions posed by the class struggle and the forging of revolutionary consciousness? Where is the national strategy that will assess the various class forces in the U.S., identify the main developing trends, weigh the reserves at the disposal of the ruling class, and postulate a direction for the working class and broader people's movement capable of challenging the bourgeoisie's political initiative? At best, Melinda's party building line declines to acknowledge the significance of these questions or allot them the rigorous attention they deserve; at worst, it regards giving them serious consideration as a hallmark of idealism and a vacillation on participation in the "real class struggle." Even more sobering than Melinda's incorrect line, however, is the fact that our supposedly mature general line -- even if we could synthesize it from the scattered forms in which these ideas presently appear -- would only begin to scratch the surface of such questions.

Melinda's paper also asserts that, by and large, "all the communists who could be united" around our advanced politics have already been united (or, being on our periphery, are in the process of being united).

The idea that all who can be united have been or are being united would be extremely disturbing if true. We are not prepared to grant that it is. For Melinda, this assessment serves as a crucial element for the conclusion that the party building stage has been essentially completed and only requires some steps towards formalization before we can get on to leading "the real class struggle." But our discussions over the past several months lead us to believe that we have hardly exhausted the pool of communists or aspiring communists who could be united into a Marxist-Leninist organization based on the UFAWR line. These discussions have stressed, among other things, the fixation of Line of March on the CPUSA to the exclusion of an ongoing assessment of and interaction with other left activists open to our politics; the absence of any accessible written expression of the UFAWR line and the consequent difficulty of exposing potential recruits to the overall political perspective of the Line of March; the ways in which our frantic pace of activity repelled rather than attracted people who otherwise were prepared to function in the context of our political trend; and the deterioration of mechanisms for recruitment and consolidation of activists, minority activists in particular. These factors -- and there are probably others in a similar vein -- make us

extremely hesitant to conclude that all who can be united are more or less in the fold. It is certainly unsettling that this formulation which served as the rationale for many a party declaration of the new communist movement should emerge as an argument for Line of March's preparedness to formalization as a party and move on to fusion.

And on the question of fusion, Melinda's paper represents substantial regression relative to our collective understanding of the concept back in 1979. Apparently Melinda has summed up the initial relatively circumscribed experiences of Line of March in intervention work and come to the conclusion that we are ready to lead the class struggle "...the new central task facing us [is] the fusing of communism with the working class movement." (P. 10.) That we have gained important experience in the mass movements, exerted influence in particular sectors, led specific campaigns is not in doubt. All this, and more, was accomplished under the line "fusion is the key link in party building." But to leap from these experiences in intervention work to the conclusion that we are ready to fuse communism with the working class movement and lead the class struggle is to demonstrate a grasp of materialism that is weak at best. There is, for one thing, the matter of scale. How much fusing can an organization of our size do in a working class that numbers in the tens of millions? Melinda grants us that the intervention work is not the be-all and end-all of fusion -- "that it is the communist line that must be 'fused' with the working class movement -- not just the efforts of individual communists" -- and thus the importance of *Frontline*. But while *Frontline* makes an important contribution to the conscious left, its circulation and influence are hardly at a level that could be viewed as fusion with the working class. As for leading the working class movement, at present we cannot claim a base in a single minority community, national union, region of the country or even neighborhood. We have succeeded, to a great degree, in establishing ourselves as a legitimate force on the left but, as we have often times noted, the left as a whole is marginal to the motion of U.S. politics and lacks an integral relationship to the working class. This is not said to discourage, frustrate or overwhelm us. But it is probably about time that we began setting goals not only relative to our ultimate aim and what we would like to do but also in relation to who we are and what we can do.

In the struggle against pragmatism we have too often surrendered materialism. In approaching our intervention in the class struggle via the "tension of Leninism" -- trying to organize our efforts on the basis of more long-term revolutionary conceptions -- have we not frequently succumbed to the delusions of idealism and voluntarism?

Melinda has argued that those advocating "re-examination, re-direction and democratization" underestimate the importance of our intervention work. To the contrary. We believe that intervention work must and will be a vital and indispensable part of Line of March's practice, both during the upcoming period of RRD and afterwards. We have accumulated a number of advanced experiences in many areas which can be built upon, and the UFAWR line, especially as we further develop it, enables us to take up intervention work as conscious elements. In every area we take up,

we must struggle to provide as much leadership as our political line and organizing/propaganda skills equip us to do. Nevertheless, it is precisely by recognizing the scope and complexity of the actual task of communist fusion that we give intervention work its political due. Rather, it is those who are ready to "lead the class struggle" on the basis of a primitive concept of fusion, an underdeveloped line, little sense of the scale of this struggle and an overly optimistic assessment of what we have thus far accomplished who actually underestimate and distort a communist approach to intervention work.

Democratization and the Role of Leadership in a Communist Organization

Melinda sees a social-democratic thrust in the National Board's call for redirection and democratization which is "most fully revealed in the deterioration of the Leninist theory of democratic centralism and conception of leadership." While noting the absence of certain democratic practices in the past, she fundamentally defends the approach to leadership and democracy which characterized our work up until recently. In light of the tasks of Line of March, she views the call for "democratization" as irresponsible and a "loss of Leninist bearings."

The main focus of the present "call for democracy," she believes, is "bourgeois individual rights." Voting is being enshrined as the most important reflection of democracy. Past concerns with compensating for class, race and sex privilege through strong centralism are being eroded. In general, strong leadership is being liquidated in favor of amorphous collectives. "When Line of March needs political leadership more than ever before, many comrades are being mistrained to think that what we need is less leadership."

Many of our views on the content of democratization are already incorporated in the standing committee's report to the April board meeting. With this in mind, our critique of Melinda's views on this topic will focus on three points: (1) The lack of attention to the actual political situation in our organization at the present time; (2) The shallow and self-serving view of democratic centralism which is their main rationale; (3) and an idealization of the role of individuals -- bordering on a personality cult outlook -- which equates "strong leadership" with overcentralism.

1. Democratization of Line of March

The most dismaying aspect of Melinda's polemic against democratization is that it is almost totally oblivious to the problems in Line of March which led to the conclusion that our organization needed to be thoroughly democratized. Instead her polemic joins the issue with a series of largely unimpeachable platitudes concerning the need for

leadership to lead and warnings against the pitfalls of bourgeois democracy. Unfortunately, what is missing is any sense that there may be some connection between our present crisis and the distorted version of democratic centralism which prevailed in Line of March up until recently.

What Melinda conveniently forgets is that our old system and the leadership collectives it spawned failed at a number of key junctures. It failed to correct a line which had gone off course. It failed to exercise a check on individual leaders' subjective assessments and individualist styles of work. It effectively prevented any but the three individuals in the national co-chairs collective from developing any working knowledge of the whole, thus making them immune from criticism and correction from below. In fact, without a clear line, strategy and collective institution, even the co-chairs overview was inherently subjective.

Certainly the Line of March is not immune from the influence of bourgeois ideology with regard to democracy and a host of other questions. But in our view, the demand for democratization in the Line of March stems, in the first place, from a well-founded and highly political concern that our overcentralism and the corresponding weaknesses of lack of led to the loss of theoretical and political rigor and vitality in the organization. These shortcomings were suffocating comrades' initiative and fostering an unaccountable style of work in our leadership.

We share those concerns. We believe that the rapid development of the institutions of democracy -- forms for political discussion and debate, cadre training, elections, structures of accountability, etc. -- are essential to creating a climate of democracy in the Line of March without which democratic centralism will become a caricature of Leninist standards.

2. Democratic Centralism

Melinda's stance that the Line of March was functioning under a system of democratic centralism prior to the recent period reflects a poor understanding of Leninism. As with her view of fusion, her concept of democratic centralism derives from the infantile leftism characteristic of the new communist movement which likewise described its glorification of commandism as "Leninist standards."

Without engaging here in an exhaustive discussion of democratic centralism -- a study of which will be a major feature of our work in the upcoming stage of RRD -- we will cite several points on which our operative line on democratic centralism was qualitatively flawed.

Unity in Action vs. Unity of Thought. The cornerstone of democratic centralism is unity in action. From the outset, Lenin emphasized that the discipline of a revolutionary party was reflected in its ability act as one. (Naturally, this commitment must be rooted

in an underlying political unity with the party's broad perspective as expressed in its general line.) But that concept was explicitly based on the understanding that differences of political opinion were to be expected in the ranks of the party and that these were not only normal but the reflection of an ideologically healthy organization. The Leninist emphasis on the minority submitting to the majority in the *implementation* of the party's line implies as much.

But our operative line went far beyond unity in action.

Increasingly Line of March functioned in a climate where ideological conformity was at a premium. Political reservations -- let alone forthright disagreements (which were rarely expressed in any event) -- were often quickly elevated to the ideological level. Melinda's haste to put a "social democratic" label on those who do not share her primitive notions about fusion and the party or her commandist conception of democratic centralism are a telling reminder of this approach. A serious "re-examination" of our history and line informed by such an outlook is hard to imagine.

Higher and Lower Bodies. Contrary to petty bourgeois prejudices, communists recognize that revolutionary organizations must function on the basis of a hierarchy of authority in which lower bodies are subordinate to higher bodies. This concept is at the very heart of democratic centralism.

But to say that and no more is a profound distortion of the Leninist understanding of democratic centralism. Unfortunately, the system of democratic centralism under which we functioned in the past rarely went beyond that point in practice. As many comrades have noted, all fine words to the contrary, in our operative line, the role of higher bodies was to lead and the role of lower bodies was to unite and implement. This relationship was cultivated as a practical matter by denying all but a handful of leading comrades at the center -- concentrated almost exclusively in the co-chairs collective -- any overview of the work of the entire organization (and, as stated earlier, even their overview was flawed.) It was also glorified as a "consensus" style of work and a reflection of the organization's ideological stability. In effect and to varying degrees, every higher body in the Line of March imposed a relationship of passivity on all the bodies below it.

Moreover, in the Line of March the system of higher bodies and lower bodies we had in place was not a Leninist one. The body that in every communist organization we know of is supposed to be the highest decision-making body of the organization -- the national conference or congress -- was never established. The national board functioned without policy-making authority. Even the national executive was in a passive position relation to the small co-chairs collective. Such glaring problems in our organizational structure virtually guaranteed subjectivity and lack of accountability in the very center. Moreover, it both reflected and perpetuated a system where we had no provision for the election of leadership -- most particularly our central leadership. Yet in the absence of

this fundamental cornerstone of democratic centralism, the authority of the center is self-perpetuating and, short of a conspicuous crisis, almost impossible to alter.

In the formative stage of a political organization, the self-assertion of leadership is an absolute imperative. Our line "from the center out" which enabled us to cohere this trend around a relatively developed set of politics was fundamentally correct. But the perpetuation of that principle beyond that initial stage works to institutionalize commandism and unaccountability.

Voting. Melinda's cavalier dismissal of voting in bourgeois society as a "vacuous activity" is a grim reminder of how stubborn an influence infantile leftism and petty bourgeois revolutionism still exerts on our trend. This reflex retreat to dogma is particularly awesome in that it has been advanced at the very moment when the Jesse Jackson campaign is utilizing this "vacuous activity" as a powerful weapon for advancing the motion of both Black community politics and working class politics more broadly.

Of course, this oversight is undoubtedly the result of Melinda's determination to remind us of the perils bourgeois democracy -- in particular, an undue concern with voting -- poses to the Line of March. But her view of the significance of voting within a communist organization is equally skewed.

No, voting is not the be-all and end-all of proletarian democracy. But it is an integral and essential part of it. We have already discussed the critical importance of a democratic process for the election of leadership. Clearly there are circumstances -- particularly critical moments in the class struggle, for instance -- where such procedures may have to be suspended. But these are exceptions and not the norm.

In Line of March, decision-making by "consensus" -- as opposed to voting -- was viewed as a higher stage of democracy. In fact, "consensus decision-making" generally functions as a disguise for over-centralism. For in the absence of clear-cut votes on clear-cut questions, the real content of decisions is determined by those charged with carrying out the collective opinion - or those with the loudest voices..

Of course, not everything can be or has to be voted on. But within its area of competence, every political body in a communist organization must begin to utilize voting as a normal way of settling outstanding questions. Clearly the democratic centralist concept that the minority must subordinate itself to the majority for purposes of unity in action rests on the assumption that there will be democratic discussion and the resolution of differences by a vote. Voting not only helps to concentrate and clarify questions, it is an important barometer of opinion within the organization. Voting forces individual members to take political responsibility for their views. And, not least of all, voting is a concrete expression of empowerment.

3. The Role of Leadership and Individual Leaders

Perhaps the single most prominent thread running through Melinda's conception of a communist organization is her view of leadership -- particularly individual leaders. In the course of laying out her perspective, Melinda asserts a number of relatively self-evident propositions on the importance of leadership and the function of individual leaders with which we have no disagreement. Unfortunately, she does so in such a way as to suggest that she is defending burning issues of principle from a heretical assault on Marxism-Leninism.

This would hardly be worth commenting on if it were not for the fact that Melinda's posture tends to obscure the real points at issue: the accountability of leadership; the contempt for collective forms of leadership which became an operative norm in Line of March; and the overcentralization of authority in the hands of one or two or three individuals. We find Melinda's approach to this question demagogic, self-serving and a gross distortion of democratic centralism.

Melinda's lop-sided view suggests an elitist world outlook and a notion of democratic centralism that sees a handful of great leaders as the makers of history. In this framework, the revolutionary organization functions principally as the vehicle through which a narrowly constricted center attempts to impact history. All sense of a communist party being an organization of leaders is lost. All sense that individuals are empowered and maximize their contributions to the movement through collectives disappears. Internally, the "best" comrades are those who function as "agents of the center" on all matters -- including the defense of line and the waging of inner-party struggles.

In time, this view gained ascendancy in the center and led power to be concentrated with leading individuals rather than collectives. It led the center to produce a system of organization whose main content and purpose was to rubber stamp and be united on decisions of the center. And it led to suppression and ideological criticism of any who dared question the line of the center, or to suggest that the center might be making some mistakes. What Melinda does not grasp is that while it is necessary and correct to recognize and promote individual leaders, it is anti-Leninist and anti-working class to make an organization dependent on individuals or to place individuals above the collective wisdom of the membership and democratic accountability to it.

In essence, Melinda's vision of a Marxist-Leninist party is one based on the centralized authority of individual leaders whose unique communist attributes must be given full rein -- not only to develop a leading line and to conceptualize an overall strategy, but to stem the tide of bourgeois spontaneity among the rest of us.

Even as an abstract proposition, it is not hard to see how Melinda's approach would foster a cult of personality. But we hardly need speculate on this as a possibility.

According to Melinda's paper, Bruce's presence equals Leninism and defense of the party; Bruce's absence equals a crisis for the Line of March. Reading such formulations makes Melinda's immersion in a personality cult view of Bruce embarrassingly self-evident.

Conclusion

Melinda's paper raises many questions we have not touched on here: characterizations of the CPUSA which we find simplistic and inaccurate; an ill-considered defense of "personalization" of political lines; a view of accountability to one's own opinions which lays the groundwork for factionalism; etc. The mean-spirited innuendo and unprincipled accusations in her section on "The Dirty Underside of Democratization" are particularly appalling. But, as we said at the outset, our purpose here was not to open up a point-by-point polemic with her. Rather, what we have tried to do is join this line struggle at its most critical intersections so that our organization can be provided with a clear-cut political choice as we move to understand and resolve our crisis.

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Infantile Leftism -- A Persistent Disorder

By Linda Burnham

July 5, 1988

The struggle that broke out in Line of March over the past several months has been extremely unsettling and disorienting for many comrades. In the course of the struggle one illusion after the other was shattered. The infallibility and steadfastness of individual leaders; the unshakable unity of leading bodies; the stability of Line of March; the sophistication and correctness of our political line; the historical significance of our endeavors. All the old verities were called into question and suddenly the Line of March seemed strewn with obstacles and pitfalls.

More unsettling still, comrades who, just a few short months ago, seemed firmly united, became bitter opponents in an increasingly nasty struggle. And those who would find their bearings based on identifying with those for whom they had respect were in a bit of a quandary -- since comrades who have earned the respect of almost everyone were ranged on both sides of the battle.

Finally, to add to the confusion, Line of March had no tradition of serious political struggle within its ranks. This in itself is an indication of both the primitiveness and the suffocation of political opinions that characterized our organization. The complete absence of sharp political contention within our ranks means that there were no established ground rules for debate and struggle. Accusations of suppression, intimidation and factionalism created a charged atmosphere, clouding the content of the issues at stake and leading many comrades to despair of ever making sense of the charges and countercharges. In actuality there were two struggles unfolding simultaneously and greatly affecting one another -- one over the direction that Line of March should take in the future; the other over how the struggle itself was being conducted.

Given this, it is small wonder that many comrades began to despair of ever sorting through the rapidly accumulating details of the line struggle. And now, with the recent resignations, it is terribly tempting to simply close the book on that chapter and move on to the challenging work ahead. But if our organization is to emerge from the re-examination, re-direction and democratization (RRD) process as a stronger and more mature formation -- and I am among those who firmly believes that it can and will -- we will have to come to terms with what this line struggle was about, both in content and in form. One of the positive aspects of Line of March's history has been a self-consciousness about those developments and processes which could mature us collectively and an orientation towards milking our experiences for whatever lessons could move us forward. This had its down-side in the form of a smug self-importance and a tendency to overgeneralize from a narrow range of experience. And, given our neglect of summations, we've grown a little rusty

at reflecting on our practice. But our generally positive orientation to learning and drawing all we can from our experiences should stand us in good stead as we attempt to make sense out of the events of the past period.

For this reason, I would add a third struggle to the two already mentioned. That is, the struggle to rise above the minutiae of agenda fights, personality defects and the astonishingly active rumor mill -- the historical irrelevance of which is absolutely beyond doubt -- to grasp the broad political lessons that are there to be drawn and that, if learned well, may serve to advance this organization's struggle for historical relevance to the cause of the U.S. working class. In my view, these lessons center on the strong ultra-left current that is apparent in Melinda's party building line; in the operative and formal party building line of Line of March; and in the way the former minority caucus chose to conduct the line struggle.

Deepening the Break With Infantile Leftism

It became increasingly clear in the aftermath of the April national board meeting that the fundamental issue in the party building line struggle was whether Line of March would be able to successfully carry out a break with infantile leftism in party building orientation and, on the basis of that break, identify a role for itself in maturing the U.S. communist movement; or whether we would do a superficial clean-up of some of the grosser symptoms of our crisis and then continue on our previous track towards irrelevance.

The stakes in this struggle were thrown into sharp relief with the distribution of Melinda's paper. That paper advocated a party building line that was immediately recognizable as a throwback to the party building method of choice of the new communist movement. As comrades took on the critique of this line, it began to sink in that what was before us was not simply a rebuttal of Melinda's position or even the political platform of a minority caucus. Rather, Melinda's paper was a crude expression of the party building line on the basis of which Line of March had actually been operating. In this sense, Melinda's paper had the great virtue of holding up a mirror in which we could see a somewhat distorted but certainly recognizable version of ourselves -- a version in which the features of ultra-leftism were extremely prominent. A close examination of this reflection revealed that a sharp demarcation with the notions in Melinda's paper is not sufficient. What is required ultimately is a careful summation of the development and degeneration of Line of March's party building line and, more specifically, the placement of that line in the context of the failure to complete the break with infantile leftism/Maoism.

Earlier in this process comrades had begun to discuss whether those problems which we identified as manifestations of the crisis of party building line -- voluntarism, pragmatism, idealist plans, overcentralism, lack of accountability of leadership, etc. -- might not add up to a pattern of political practice that could be

generally characterized as ultra-leftism or petty bourgeois revolutionism. While this seemed a fruitful strand to pursue in the course of re-examination, the centrality of this strand, and the jolt of self-recognition, came once we could link the line and practice of the Line of March with that of the new communist movement and thus with both a concrete tradition and expression of ultra-leftism as well as the general deviation in the communist movement. Melinda's paper provided those links -- though certainly not intentionally.

It is crucial that we come to understand and analyze this crisis in party building line at all these levels: the concrete analysis of the unique development of Line of March; the aspects of our individual experience that we share in common with a whole class of left deviations; and the historical context of the U.S. communist movement out of which we arise. In this way we can travel the bridge back and forth between the individual and the general, enriching our understanding at each level and eventually arriving at a more fully synthesized view of our current dilemma. This paper is intended to get us started on that route and as a spur to the re-examination process.

We Are Not Alone

The communist movement has a long history of practical struggle against ultra-left errors, tendencies and trends as well as theoretical reflection on the characteristic features and social basis of this deviation. Comrades have studied and discussed this history in the Marxist-Leninist Education Project (MLEP) "fundamentals" course, but it certainly takes on new meaning when many of the features of ultra-leftism are found to be characteristic of our own formation and the struggle against ultra-leftism becomes the axis of our first major internal line struggle. And so a brief review of the general characteristics of ultra-leftism is in order.

First a word on overlapping and interchangeable terminology: ultra-leftism, infantile leftism, petty bourgeois revolutionism. All refer to the same essential phenomenon -- the development of trends that are nominally to the left of Marxism-Leninism -- but with slightly different emphases. Ultra-leftism's reference is to the placement of this trend on the far reaches of the political spectrum and its "more revolutionary than thou" orientation. (See also the CPUSA's category of "super-revolutionaries.") Infantile leftism emphasizes the commonalities between this trend and the subjective self-centeredness typical of the early stages of human development: willfulness, impatience, a tendency towards tantrums, a lack of judgment and restraint. Finally, petty bourgeois revolutionism highlights the link between the individualistic outlook of the small entrepreneur and the political instability and voluntarism that arise from this stratum's attempts at making revolution without the full mobilization of the masses.

The communist movement cut its eye teeth in the struggle against ultra-leftism and that struggle continues up to today. Fundamentally, what is at stake in the struggle is the capacity of the communists to cohere and build their forces on the basis of an objective and materialist political line and the capacity of the working class, as led by the communists, to seize and consolidate state power and steadily build up socialist society. Short of these fundamental issues, the struggle against ultra-leftism is critical to the pursuit of particular campaigns, tactics, etc. This is so because ultra-leftists deal in spectacular acts rather than the patient consolidation of strength and resources; substitute their wishes for the objective potential of a given historical moment; are given to driving off allies -- potential and actual -- through the overpolarization of political struggles and thus can seriously derail the communist movement.

The major struggles against ultra-leftism in the communist movement have been waged against anarchism, Trotskyism and Maoism -- each a particular variant of ultra-leftism. In the struggle against anarchism -- waged for decades by Marx and Engels and the Marxist leaders of the First International, continued by the Bolsheviks and crystallized in Lenin's "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder" -- the main political issues revolved around opposition to parliamentary work, the use of terrorist tactics, refusal to work in reactionary-led trade unions and the character of the revolutionary party. In the later struggle against Trotskyism, which emerged as a struggle over "socialism in one country" and was a substantial issue in the international communist movement for several decades, the core issues included such concepts as "permanent revolution" and "deformed/degenerated workers' state," the methodological problem of jumping stages in strategy and tactics, and the ideological/organizational problem of ceaseless factionalizing with its disintegrative effect on the revolutionary movement. Finally, with Maoism, the struggle against ultra-leftism polarized around the subjectivist, idiosyncratic and ultimately class collaborationist "Theory of the Three Worlds," the gross idealism in the approach to socialist construction manifested in both the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the marked nationalism of Mao's "contribution" to Marxist-Leninist theory and politics, and the distortions in the conception and practice of leadership and proletarian democracy which had their most flagrant expression in the cult of personality around Mao.

For all the diversity of these struggles and the political, ideological and organizational peculiarities of each trend, there is a unifying thread. That thread is a philosophical idealism which distorts the relationship between the subjective and the objective and which, when carried into the realm of political line and practice, finds its manifestation in certain characteristically ultra-left deviations. In a useful little

book called "Petty-Bourgeois Revolutionism,"* Boris Leibson, a Soviet scholar, writes:

"Right opportunists always set up the level of the productive forces in opposition to man <sic> and practically leave no room for man's transformative activity. Everything, they say, depends on the material conditions. This is vulgar economic materialism, the philosophy of passivity and laissez-faire, justification of inactivity and time-serving. All sorts of "Leftists," Lenin said, commit the same mistake, only some commit it "the other way around." Placing man in opposition to the productive forces, they essentially deny the need for objective preconditions for the successful transformative activity of people. Everything, they say, depends only on man, on his will and consciousness. This is vulgar subjectivism, the philosophy absolute voluntarism, justifying adventurism and scheming." (p.51)

While all of the ultra-left trends have this subjectivism in common, Maoism trumpeted philosophical idealism as an independent contribution to Marxism-Leninism. Maoism "recognizes the role of the subjective factor in the historical process and rejects the other, which requires a sober scientific analysis of the objective state of affairs. This one-sidedness, which amounts to a break with Marxism, is 'elevated to a theory' and furthermore, has a pronounced nationalist tint, differing in this from many previous manifestations of petty bourgeois revolutionism." (p.36)

With this overassessment of the subjective factor in social and political development at its root, ultra-leftism blossoms in several related directions. First, there is the ingrained tendency towards voluntarism based in the erroneous presumption that objective conditions, be they economic, political or social, can be transformed, circumvented or leaped over by the concentrated willful activity of the conscious element. From this vantage point, revolutionary forces (or whole societies) are pressed to achieve goals that cannot be realistically reached, given the material circumstances. Thus, China's attempt to build up its steel industry and reach communism in the few short years of the Great Leap Forward and, on a somewhat different scale, our own abortive attempt to leap into the "major leagues."

Not surprisingly, idealism regarding the subjective factor also gives rise to distortions on the role of leadership and the practice of democratic centralism. Such

* Progress Publishers, 1970. The main topic of this book is the Cultural Revolution. It was written as part of the struggle against Maoism and in order to place Maoism in a historical context. I recommend it to comrades -- but not necessarily as the "definitive" work on ultra-leftism. It's just what happened to be at hand among my books. If comrades know of other good resources, I encourage you to pass on the information.

distortions may range from an idealization of leadership to a full-blown cult of personality; from violations of democratic norms to the imposition of dictatorial methods. Idealism concerning the subjective factor may also prompt a turn towards commandism in order to close the gap between objective conditions and idealist goals. All flow from a relentless narrowing of the subjective factor/conscious element to a few -- or even a single -- leaders. Both Trotskyism and Maoism are characterized by major errors on the issue of the relationship between leaders and the party and between leaders and the masses.

According to Leibson, "by the subjective factor Trotsky understood not the masses and not even the Party, but the 'leading personnel' as he called it....Trotsky endows the 'leading personnel' with super-natural powers. It can jump stages as it sees fit, make leaps, 'tighten screws.' This is unadulterated subjectivism..." (p.43) Later Leibson argues that the struggle against subjectivism is "also a struggle against an exaggerated idea of the possibilities of leaders of the liberation movement. Subjectivism develops in leaders such traits as faith in their own infallibility and intolerance to opposition" (p.133) -- qualities found in leaders of even relatively small ultra-left tendencies. Again on Trotsky, the "use of administrative methods, curtailment of democracy, individual instead of collective decision making, arbitrary action, i.e., all the methods typical of the personality cult were characteristic of Trotsky more than of anybody else." (p.137)

Finally, the all or nothing subjectivism of ultra-leftism also serves as the basis for the overpolarization of political struggle and the opportunist maneuvering that have caused endless frustration and demoralization in the communist movement. Trotsky is once again the reference point for methods of political struggle that, in the name of revolutionary purity, lead to the fragmentation and disunity of revolutionary forces. Trotskyism "recognized no other way of resolving contradictions than by their extreme exacerbation and catastrophic clashes," (p.43) and "The Trotskyists always used in their polemics a tone precluding any possibility of resolving differences. They did not endeavor to discuss or convince, they wanted to destroy, they acted by means of ultimatums or threats." (p.154) And as for factionalism, the most notorious organizational approach of Trotskyism, Leibson has this to say regarding the methods of petty bourgeois revolutionism: "It usually begins with the formation of factions which refuse to abide by general decisions, deny any obligations towards their comrades-in-arms, and recognize the will of the majority only if the majority agrees with them." (p.137)

In terms of the substance of our politics, Line of March has very little in common with Trotskyism. But, in terms of the view towards the subjective factor and towards leadership, there are unfortunate parallels to be drawn.

Our own mini-struggle aside, the consequences of overpolarization may be seen on an historically significant scale in the targeting of "capitalist roaders" during

the Cultural Revolution and in the Maoist identification of the Soviet Union as the main enemy of the world's people. And both overpolarization and factionalism contributed to the dramatic demise of the Grenadian revolution.

The concrete expressions of ultra-leftism are many and the consequences of ultra-leftism unchecked can be extremely grave. And despite the diverse ways in which ultra-leftism makes its appearance in the political world, its consistency may always be found in the distortion of the relation between subjective and objective factors in historical development.

If this review of the general features of ultra-leftism has made us squirm, it is with the discomfort of self-recognition. It is not easy navigating the straits between passivity and voluntarism, ultra-democracy and the abuse of leadership positions, the blurring of Marxist-Leninist principles and overpolarization. But if we can accomplish a more precise analysis of the ways in which and the degree to which ultra-leftism shaped and affected the development of Line of March, we will be able to adjust our course and make a significant contribution to the development of the U.S. communist movement.

Our Antecedents

The history of the Line of March to this point could be read as the progressive struggle to complete the break with Maoism. Insofar as our understanding of the world revolutionary process is concerned, that break has become increasingly profound and thorough, bringing us in line with the thinking of the international communist movement and, not coincidentally, with objective political reality. But insofar as our orientation towards party building is concerned, that break was shallow and incomplete to begin with and it has not progressed. Instead, our party building line stagnated and finally sank under the weight of the ultra-left baggage we failed to cast off.

Line of March's international line was shaped by the particular milieu out of which it developed. The struggle against Maoism was not simply a theoretical struggle but a struggle to demarcate decisively with the new communist movement of the late '60s and early '70s. But our party building line too was shaped by the approach to party building of the new communist movement. Certainly on this issue we distinguished ourselves from the new communist movement in style, but perhaps not sufficiently in substance.

To my knowledge, the "true story" of the development and impact of the new communist movement has yet to be written. Luckily that history is recent enough to be readily accessible to some initial summation. Here I want to sketch out a few of the aspects of the development of the new communist movement that have some bearing on our current struggle.

One of the frequently cited passages from "Left-Wing Communism" links the flourishing of ultra-leftism with right opportunism: "Anarchism was not infrequently a sort of punishment for the opportunist sins of the working class movement." The new communist movement developed during a flow in the mass movement that the CPUSA was incapable of intersecting with effectively. The antiwar movement, Black, Latino and Asian liberation movements, student movement, women's movement, etc., produced thousands upon thousands of revolutionary-minded activists in the period of the '60s and early '70s. But, by and large, the CPUSA was not in a position to consolidate these activists as communists. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the CPUSA had not fully recovered from the McCarthy years when it had become virtually an underground organization. CPUSA leadership had been persecuted, harassed and jailed; mass organizations under its influence disbanded; and thousands of communists hounded from their jobs and/or removed from their positions in the trade unions and mass movements. The CPUSA had not fully regrouped from this profound political and organizational dislocation when the Civil Rights movement began to percolate in the South in the mid to late '50s. And, in my opinion, the McCarthy repression instilled a conservatism from which the CPUSA has not recovered.

At least as important as the dislocation and conservatism, was the political line that guided the CPUSA's work in this period. That line presumed that the progressive and revolutionary impulses of the U.S. working class would spring inevitably from the trade union movement -- a presumption which had its basis in the actual experience of the CPUSA in the '20s, '30s and '40s but which did not take into account the changed social and economic conditions of the post-war years. The economism of the CPUSA's line led them to continue to equate progressive political motion with the motion of the trade union movement at a time when the trade union movement -- grown fat on the economic expansion of the '50s -- was sealing its opportunist pact with capital. And so, well into the '60s, the CPUSA expectantly tailed the AFL-CIO while that body was entirely beholden to the Democratic Party for its political orientation -- particularly on foreign policy issues.

Meanwhile, campuses and city streets were erupting with antiwar protests; a transition was taking place from the mainly southern-based Civil Rights movement to the northern, urban Black liberation movement; a vibrant consciousness movement had taken hold among the youth of various racial and national minorities; and the women's movement, after a 40-year hiatus, was once again a political and social force of consequence. Next to none of this motion was located in the trade union movement. Not only could the CPUSA not get out in front of this tide of consciousness and protest activity, but it was caught almost entirely flat-footed. In fact, in all too many cases, rather than trying to guide, channel, direct or raise to a higher level this admittedly unwieldy outpouring of spontaneous political protest, the CPUSA either dismissed it as petty bourgeois (in the accusatory, not analytical sense)

because it was not based in labor or attempted unsuccessfully to restrain it because it was disorderly, anarchic and too radical in its tactics. It is small wonder then that the great majority of activists who were struggling towards a more scientifically grounded revolutionary consciousness, if they knew of the CPUSA at all, found it unacceptably stodgy, dogmatic and out of tune with the times. It was into this fertile field that the seeds of ultra-leftism were sown.

And seeds there were aplenty. For the CPUSA was, in fact, quite correct in characterizing much of the spontaneous ferment of the '60s as anarchic. Anarchic in that it came to depend on the activities of a relatively thin corps of highly committed individuals which was not firmly grounded politically or organizationally in a broad social base; anarchic in that it disdained as hierarchical the struggle to build stable organizations and accountable leadership structures; and anarchic in that it romanticized terrorism on the assumption that the state could be brought to its knees by a series of dramatic actions. Both the antiwar/student movements and the Black liberation movement evolved in this general direction. The historical and socio-political reasons why they evolved in this way -- beyond the absence of a working class party -- is the subject of another discussion; the point is that they did. The capacity to mobilize tens or hundreds of thousands peaked and declined and, with it, optimism about the ease and pace of social change waned. Many who had come to equate the necessity of revolution with its imminence were sorely discouraged by the ever-receding mirage of mass rebellion. And the great tide of social protest degenerated into desperate acts performed in the name of "the people."

The new communist movement arose in the midst of, as a result of and in response to this social drama. On the one hand it promised a break with the conservatism of the CPUSA and a revolutionary alternative for aspiring Marxist-Leninists. On the other it also represented a rejection of Jerry Rubinesque "Do It!" anarchism; weather-terrorism; and the apocalyptic "By any means necessary/The sky's the limit/Revolution in our lifetime" vision of what remained of the Black liberation movement.

But of course the new communist movement was not only shaped by developments in the U.S. For more than a decade the international communist movement had been racked by the struggle over Maoism. The Maoist world-view had gained adherents in a number of countries and Maoist parties were formed with the goal of replacing the supposedly "revisionist" parties that were aligned with the socialist camp. In the '60s and early '70s Maoism was the left alternative to orthodox Marxism. It is not surprising, then, that in the U.S. thousands of developing revolutionaries would turn toward "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought" for theoretical, political and practical guidance. And, since the Communist Party of China (CPC), having withdrawn from the councils of the international communist movement, actively encouraged the formation of new "anti-revisionist" parties, it is

also not surprising that party-building came on the agenda of the revolutionary movement with a vengeance. A plethora of groups, considering themselves "pre-party formations," began to grapple with the question of how to forge a vanguard party in the U.S. A number of them -- Workers Viewpoint, October League, Revolutionary Union and the IWK/August 29th/CAP federation, for example -- arrived at the same basic solution to this complex problem. The first step was to create a "general line." These general lines were composed of a combination of the international line of the CPC together with lines on particular issues in U.S. politics. For the latter, the new communist movement often depended on borrowing and revamping analyses developed by the CPUSA in periods when it was considered to have been revolutionary. Though there is no reason to doubt the earnest effort and commitment that went into this line development, it is safe to say that the movement was not noted for its theoretical precision or sophistication. In fact, the left dogmatism characteristic of Maoism internationally also plagued the new communist movement. The movement tended to depend on sloganeering and received truths and to seriously underestimate the levels and scope of analysis required to formulate a line capable of illuminating the way forward for the U.S. communist movement.

In any case, once a general line had been arrived at, the pre-party formations set about to "unite all who could be united" on it. However unitary in intent, this process was marked by sectarianism, egoism and endless maneuvering. To a great degree this was due to the fight for the pot of gold at the end of the party building rainbow: official recognition by the CPC. The idea was to consolidate a respectable number of cadre as quickly as possible and move directly to the party declaration. In this way, the Revolutionary Communist Party, the Communist Workers Party, the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) and the League for Revolutionary Struggle were all formed within a few short years of each other. (The Communist Labor Party also formed in this period, but on the basis of its own unique political logic.) The line differences between these organizations were probably not so great that, in the context of a more mature class struggle, they could not have been contained within the framework of a single organization. But, given the immaturity of the new communist movement and the broad class struggle and also given the relatively rapid decline of Maoism's influence internationally during the '70s, all the communists who could be united were not, in fact, united in a single vanguard party. Yet and still, each of the contending parties set out to prove its vanguard character once the transition from pre-party to party had been completed.

There were probably some positive features in the development of the new communist movement but whatever these features may have been, they were virtually overwhelmed by the ingrained ultra-leftism of this trend. While there was considerable variation in the work style and approach of the various pre-parties and parties, all were framed by this deviation. In the first place, the political rationale for their existence was based in an ultra-left assessment of the world revolutionary

process and an extreme overpolarization with the CPUSA. This overpolarization was justified and epitomized by the slogan "No united action with revisionism." The hyper-polemical style and provocative posturing of much of the new communist movement precluded the possibility of serious debate or cooperative relations between these trends.

The overpolarization characteristic of the new communist movement was not limited to relations with the CPUSA. Mass organizations suffered through debates about program and strategy that were entirely inappropriate to their political level as the various parties tried to gain influence in the mass movements. Numerous progressive organizations were wrecked by the crude "rule or ruin" tactics of these parties. And, of course, sectarian overpolarization was also a prominent feature of relations between the parties themselves.

The voluntarism of the new communist movement can be traced to the example provided by the practice of the CPC, holdovers of the maximalist approach of the mass movements of the '60s, and the inevitable lapses in judgment that go along with youth and inexperience. The new communist movement developed at the crest of a flow in the mass movement. It was thus imbued with a sense of the imminence of a revolutionary moment and it took a good little while and a multitude of tactical errors before this misimpression was dispelled. Meanwhile, as its programs and tactics had less and less to do with political reality, the new communist movement became increasingly alienated from the mass movements from which it had arisen -- a phenomenon that was greatly exacerbated by the deepening ebb in progressive activism.

Some organizations of the new communist movement never recovered from the revolutionary phrase-mongering, hostile polarizations and ultra-left tactics of the '60s and early '70s -- the RCP springs immediately to mind. The combination of their politics and style consigned them to the true fringes of the political spectrum. Others made pragmatic adjustments once the consequences of their ultra-left orientation became too costly to bear. The CWP, for example, after its debacle with the Klan in Greensboro and its last hyperbolic fling ("The '80s will make the '30s look like a picnic!" -- which they have not), has settled down in its maturity to the single-pointed strategy of infiltrating the Democratic Party. And the LRS has mimicked in miniature the rise of pragmatism in the CPC. None of these adjustments have been accompanied by a thoroughgoing critique of ultra-leftism in general, Maoism, or the practice of the new communist movement. And I think it is safe to say that the question of how to build the U.S. communist movement has disappeared entirely from their agendas.

But these are the groups that survived; a number of others did not. They broke apart as a result of the inability to find their political moorings with the decline of Maoism as a force in the international communist movement and, in my opinion,

as a result of an orientation towards party building and towards themselves as parties that inadequately addressed the complexities of building the U.S. communist movement.

It was a political event that marked the end of the era of the new communist movement and opened up a new period in the development of U.S. communism. In 1976, the approaching victory of the Angolan revolution and the class collaborationist stances of the CPC and U.S. Maoist parties towards the Angolan liberation forces decisively settled in the negative the question of the capacity of Maoist formations to play a leading role in the U.S. movement. This juncture laid the basis for a break with Maoism, for the emergence of a new political trend and, ultimately, for the formation of Line of March. The issue before us now is whether we have been able to truly leave our antecedents behind or whether they continue to haunt us like shades from a prior life.

Subjective Factor Indeed

Several comrades have already begun to analyze the political underpinnings of the ultra-leftism in Line of March's party building line. The adoption of the "Rectification and Reestablishment" party building framework based in the Maoist assessment of the CPUSA as a revisionist party and the failure to re-examine that framework once our political line on revisionism had changed will be central issues of the re-examination process.

And, since the earliest stages of the unfolding of the crisis, both the leadership and the membership at the base have steadily deepened our collective understanding of the many manifestations of ultra-leftism in our practice -- voluntarism, absence of democratic structures and institutions, commandism, lack of accountability of leadership, etc.

Both these levels of analysis -- of our party building line and of our practice -- have uncovered pretty overwhelming evidence that we have not fully settled accounts with our Maoist past.

As RRD proceeds, there is another important element to be added to our discussions. That is, the philosophical strands that still link us to petty-bourgeois revolutionism in general and Maoism in particular. As with all other manifestations of ultra-leftism, the deviations in Line of March's line and practice can be traced back to a distortion in our understanding of the relationship between the subjective and objective factors in the development of the revolutionary process. Essentially, we gave tremendous weight to the activity and will of communists and very little to the ways in which objective conditions framed the development of the communist movement or the working class struggle more broadly.

In looking over the old party building documents that served as the foundation for Line of March, this distortion is readily apparent. It should be kept in mind that our party building line developed in contention and polemic with a view that seriously underestimated the theoretical/line development tasks of communists and oversimplified the process of party formation. In the course of this polemic we "bent the stick" away from spontaneity towards consciousness; away from mass intervention towards line development; away from broad democratic participation towards the decisive role of leadership. While there were many positive gains made in those early debates, all this bending of the stick left us with a decidedly idealist bent.

Two of the most pronounced features of this idealism were (1) the tendency to view the process of party building or "developing the subjective factor" in almost complete isolation from developments in the mass movement and, related to this, (2) the tendency to focus nearly exclusively on the question of line development as *the* prerequisite for party building, dropping out (or actively polemicizing against) such considerations as size, level of influence, etc. In arguing against the line of the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) that a certain measure of fusion was a necessary precondition to forging a party we wrote that:

"The fusion line focuses the attention of those who must re-establish the party principally on the present relationship between the communist movement as it exists and the spontaneous movement as it presently exists. Yet the spontaneous movement is inevitably dominated by bourgeois ideology and the present communist movement does not have a leading line to bring to the spontaneous movement to combat spontaneity and thus bourgeois ideology. Thus, focusing principally on the relationship of communists to the masses in this period inevitably limits the development of the communists and ties them to the bourgeois ideology of the spontaneous movement. It ties the development of the subjective factor to the immediate objective conditions of the present backwardness in the working class.... This view ties the communists so narrowly to the immediate experience of the working class that it negates the leading role of political line and the subjective factor altogether." ("Developing the Subjective Factor [DSF]," p. 27)

While we certainly had a legitimate bone to pick with the fusionist notion that the communist movement would find its basis for development and unity through the process of intervening in the class struggle, we also pretty decisively severed the link between the two, positing a maturation of the communist forces unhampered by and unrelated to the "present backwardness of the working class."

Along the same lines, the "vanguard potential" of the communists was linked solely to the capacity of their line to "clarify key questions for the Marxist-Leninists." We criticized the fusionists for believing that "something must change 'out there' for there to be a party, rather than that the subjective forces have to do something

themselves in order to build a party." [DSF, p. 28] The "something" that the Marxist-Leninists had to do themselves was to develop the general line that would serve as the basis for party formation. "Noting that the rectification of the general line is the crucial pre-condition for the actual reestablishment of the party means adherence to the Marxist-Leninist concept that ideological and political line decide everything.[!!]Further, it highlights correctly that the main focus must be on generating a line through struggle among the communists based on a full summation of the historical experience of the U.S. and world working class movements, rather than placing the main focus on the relationship between the present communist forces and the existing spontaneous movement. In these ways it gives the proper weight to the subjective factor, recognizing that a party is the crystallization of the subjective factor and that to build a party is essentially to develop the subjective factor." [DSF p. 36] The synthesis of extensive theoretical work into a general line was the linchpin of party development. "It is when this synthesis is developed and a number of leading comrades have united around it, that we can say that a general leading ideological, political and organizational center or party core is built. At that point, this center must assert itself, attempt to win other Marxist-Leninists to the synthesis it has developed, and develop the actual organizational process of party re-establishment -- building in the communist fashion from the center outwards." [DSF p. 38]

To the extent that we talked about intervention work at all it was in this fashion: "Of course, intervention in the class struggle will only train cadre in a correct conception if we strive to take up such work even today as communists. The Marxist-Leninists must pose tasks similar to what a party would pose if the day-to-day work is to train people as communists and not just 'narrow practical workers.' Thus, bold tasks such as overturning the Bakke decision, getting the U.S. out of Southern Africa, capturing dominant influence in a particular trade union, must characterize the goals of our practical work even in this period without a party.... If we pose tasks based only on what we can already do, we will never develop; we must pose tasks based on what needs to be done, and by struggling to accomplish these bold tasks learn what it will actually take to change the world." [DSF p. 39] Even in this period, when nearly all of our attention was turned towards theoretical work, there was a foreshadowing of our idealist orientation towards intervention in the mass movement. Unfortunately, as time would tell, we were not always able to distinguish between boldness and initiative on the one hand and voluntarism and grandiosity on the other.

(Line of March has an entrenched tradition of using the terms "subjective factor" and "conscious element" as though they were synonymous with "communist." But subjective factor refers to the consciousness, will and activity of humans in general as they interact with objective conditions. And, while the distinction between those who bring a socialist consciousness to the struggle against capital and those who "spontaneously" join the struggle against exploitation and oppression is a crucial one, our use of the term conscious element has tended to narrow the field and

downplay the fact that there are many other actors in the political arena who operate on the basis of highly developed and consciously held world-views and political lines. Further, though the distinction between consciousness based on dialectical materialism, which joins ideology and science, and every other form of consciousness is also crucial, the communist movement's longstanding tendency to claim political "omniscience" on all questions has recently become the subject of criticism and debate in the international communist movement. Maybe this is worth a discussion.)

This review of our early party building line is not meant to depress us or to hold our previous work up to ridicule. Hindsight is a great teacher and what is obvious now was not at all apparent at the time. Furthermore, Line of March and its predecessor organizations did represent a political advance over both the new communist movement and our fusionist rivals. We represented a break with short-cut schemes for party building. And the call to focus the attention of the communist movement (or one section of it) on raising its theoretical level and engaging in a systematic process of line development was a big step forward from the dogmatic approach of the new communist movement and an implicit critique of the theoretical complacency of the CPUSA.

Nor is it true that PWOC was right all along. They weren't.

But these quotes should illustrate, if not prove, that idealism was imbedded like a bad seed right at the heart of Line of March's party building line. As our organization matured, this idealism was not identified, "outgrown," or expunged. Rather, it took new forms.

Most comrades seem to agree that the turn towards the mass movement embodied in the "fusion is the key link in party building" line was a very positive and crucial juncture for Line of March. And so it was. Yet that turn was not precipitated or accompanied by any self-criticalness about the radically one-sided formulations of the previous period. Furthermore, the supposed "key link" between fusion and party building was quickly snapped as fusion became an end in itself and a conscious approach to party building receded further and further into the background. Instead of grounding us firmly in a more materialist sense of the relationship between the development of the communist movement -- and Line of March within it -- and the mass movement, "fusion is the key link" became the nodal point of a swing from an idealist view of the role of the subjective factor in the self-development of the communist movement to an idealist view of the role of the subjective factor in the mass movement. Though we made definite advances in each segment of the swing, neither was fully anchored in a dialectical grasp of the relationship between the subjective and the objective or a materialist sense of our own capacities or the potentialities of this stage of the mass movement.

Though re-examination has only just begun, the prospect of an increasingly ruthless and revealing scrutiny of our past has made a number of comrades uneasy. They wonder if anything will be left on the positive side of the scorecard and if we're not casting our history in too negative a light. Identifying the persistent ultra-leftism in our approach has been especially disturbing for some since it seems to take us back to errors with which we thought we had made a conscious break.

It is important to grasp in this regard that it is quite possible to make considerable progress on the basis of a flawed line. And in our case that is precisely what happened. At one and the same time Line of March embodied both political and ideological holdovers from Maoism and a positive, forward direction for the communist movement. For many years we were able to mature organizationally and politically and to make significant contributions to the movement in the areas of theoretical work, political analysis, intervention in the mass movement, and propaganda. The United Front Against War and Racism (UFAWR) line -- although requiring review, adjustment and further development -- remains an important political concept. *Frontline* has become a respected newspaper on the left. Our theoretical work on racism, the material basis for opportunism, the struggle for peace and the refutation of the capitalist restoration thesis has impacted the rest of the left. In our intervention work, we earned a reputation for political seriousness and a willingness to cooperate with other forces in a unitary fashion.

But our flaws were not superficial ones; they went to the core of our existence. And so it was inevitable that they would eventually catch up with and overtake us, turning our positive momentum into degeneration and, finally, crisis.

Understanding and embracing the positive aspects of our history will help provide us with the confidence that we can once again make a productive contribution to the development of the U.S. communist movement. But that confidence will be absolutely without foundation if we shy away from the hard-won lessons of the past on the grounds that we are overemphasizing the negative.

It is also important to note that different kinds of contradictions and deviations unfold at different rates. A tactical error in the planning for a coalition meeting or demonstration could become painfully evident within hours or weeks while a more fundamental problem in worldview might not surface conspicuously for many years. In our case, world events thrust upon us the inconsistencies and deviations in the Maoist view of the world revolutionary process. But repudiating the Theory of the Three Worlds and Capitalist Restoration did not go to the philosophical subjectivism that lay at the root of Maoism and of our own formation. This deviation matured more slowly, finally qualitatively distorting all the areas of our work.

In this section I have emphasized the philosophical idealism that was present in Line of March's orientation from the beginning because I think that this idealism undergirds the problems in party building line and practice that we have already begun to identify. It is not surprising that, in uncovering this crisis we started first with observations about our practice, proceeded to question the political line that guided that practice and then to the idealism at the root of both. Each level is more abstract and less immediately accessible and it makes all the sense in the world that we have come to comprehend them in the order that we have. We are not philosophers and there are probably very few of us who have any interest in the relationship between the subjective and objective in the abstract. It is primarily as that relationship is expressed in the form of political assessments and lines and, as such, forms the basis for political practice, that the question takes on relevance for communist activists. It is relevant for us because our idealist overemphasis on the role of the subjective factor has been like a fault line in our foundation which, as it widened over the years, produced more and more bizarre manifestations at the surface finally throwing into disarray all that had been built on top of it. We cannot reshape our political line and practice with confidence unless we can be sure that we are not building on top of the same fault line and that entails as conscious a break as is possible with the idealism that has been with us from the gate.

Stick With What You Know?

Understanding ultra-leftism and the degree to which it shaped our development is central to the tasks ahead. The redirection of Line of March must be based on the firm reassertion of materialism in our political assessments, line, plans and practice.

But, while our most pressing tasks lie ahead, there are still some accounts to settle with those who most strenuously defended our past line and practice and who are most resistant to the idea that Line of March may have been affected by a large dose of ultra-leftism.

The call of the former minority caucus is precisely to continue to build on the same idealist foundation that is the source of our current crisis. Rather than re-examining the operative party building line that has guided Line of March over the past several years, these comrades seem intent on simply reasserting it in even cruder terms than those in which it was originally formulated. And, in addition to staking their all on the defense of what amounts to an ultra-left orientation towards party building, comrades in the minority caucus also resorted to characteristically ultra-left tactics in the struggle to advance their views.

The organization has already discussed Melinda's paper and the ways in which it expressed what had come to be the operative line of Line of March. We have also come to understand that, at a certain level, the critique of Melinda's views is

irrelevant; the more fundamental issue is the accurate critique of Line of March's political and ideological development. It is important to briefly note, though, the specific expressions of ultra-leftism in the perspective written up by Melinda and signed onto by the minority caucus.

Apart from the general problem of clinging to a party building approach that was already tried and found wanting by the new communist movement, Melinda's paper is shot through with classic infantile left assertions. The crisis in Line of March is attributed not to a flawed party building line but to the absence of Bruce, the "founder and leader." Tremendous doubt is cast on the capacity of the standing committee to come up to the task of providing political leadership. Here we have both the idealization of an individual's leadership and a contempt for the struggle to institute a more collective and accountable leadership body. Furthermore we have the defeatism inherent in the idea that all is possible under the leadership of a great man and all is lost once the helmsman is gone -- unless, of course, a replacement can be quickly found.

The idea that UFAWR constitutes a general line and that Line of March has successfully united all those who could be united around it is a surprisingly stark example of the oversimplification of complex processes and the skipping of stages that are characteristic of ultra-leftism. And the assessment that Line of March has completed the stage of party building and is ready to lead the class struggle reveals an almost frightening absence of materialism regarding our actual accomplishments and capacities or the objective stage of the class struggle in the U.S. It also reveals a propensity towards continuing along the same voluntarist track that led to the extreme fragmentation of Line of March's intervention work.

Rather than recognizing the serious deviations in our practice of democratic centralism, there is a trivializing of elections and a call for stronger leadership and more centralism when the membership has been suffocating for lack of democracy. It is argued that the "main substance" of democracy is the theoretical and political training of cadre. But training to what end? Nothing is said about ensuring the participation of the membership in the determination of line and policy for the organization. These distortions on the issue of democratic centralism are of a piece with the narrow and individualized conception of leadership typical of ultra-leftism.

But the problems with the substance of Melinda's line have been hashed over in numerous discussions and conferences. What has not been as frankly addressed is the manner in which the line struggle has been conducted. Here too there is evidence of ultra-leftism of a decidedly infantile variety. The struggle over the past several months has been, by turn, frustrating, aggravating and depressing. But it was not a given that it had to turn out that way. Many comrades remain convinced that the political differences never matured to the level of "splitting differences" and that they could have been discussed, debated and possibly resolved within the context of

the RRD process. The fact that that did not happen can be attributed to the consistent tendency to overpolarize and factionalize that emerged in the context of the January (1988) national board meeting and continued right up until the (July 1988) resignations.

The only constant in the party building line struggle was the constantly shifting tactics and issues of the minority caucus: as soon as one position became indefensible, rather than conceding defeat, the ground was simply shifted and we were presented with a new issue and a new maneuver. We found ourselves fighting old battles, which had been advanced as points of principle, while our opponent had left the field to regroup on new terrain. Principles were reduced to tactics and tactics to dramatic episodes -- good grist for the rumor mill but politically befuddling. First it was the party building line, then the executive reorganization, then the intervention work, then the race and class moorings, then, again, party building line -- all laced with resignations, walk-outs, secret meetings, and assorted -- not to say sordid -- scurrings to and fro.

For months, Melinda refused to discuss her differences with RRD in the formal structures of the organization -- or even to state what they were -- while spreading rumors that her views were being suppressed. And though Melinda's paper was initially billed as the glue which would cohere the "anti-social democratic Marxist-Leninists" in the Line of March, within a few days of the time this document was finally shown to the rest of us it became impossible to find a member of the minority caucus who would defend the paper's line. Rather than defend the indefensible, comrades reverted to finding their unity in the realm of process, advancing charges of suppression and intimidation. (And this from the most aggressive advocates of "two-line struggle.")

In the context of the Marxist-Leninist movement, there is a name for all this shifting about and slipperiness of principle. It is called opportunism.

What was behind this approach to the line struggle? Setting aside all the charges and countercharges, it is eminently apparent that, early on, Melinda began to operate out of a particular framework. That framework was constructed as follows: The center of the organization has been taken over by social democrats (and their dupes); this center is destroying the Marxist-Leninist foundations of Line of March under the banner of re-examination, re-direction and democratization; Marxist-Leninists are under no obligation to hold themselves accountable to a social democratic center; another center must be constructed to cohere the Marxist-Leninist trend; any tactics are legitimate in the struggle to discredit the social democratic center and undermine the confidence of the membership in it.

In spite of the willful obscurantism practiced by the minority caucus, the membership engaged in the struggle to clarify the line differences and affirm a

direction forward for the organization. After a second round of discussion and debate throughout the organization, the perspective in Melinda's paper was rejected and RRD was ratified by the overwhelming majority of the membership.

The current charges that the Line of March center is theoreticist and social democratic, interested only in organizing a discussion group process for the U.S. left and not in leading the class struggle hold no surprises. Nor is it surprising that some comrades, when faced with the need for a radical reassessment of the history of the Line of March and its future role, would come to the comforting if illusory conclusion that "the overall line and practice of Line of March was fundamentally sound." The temptation toward theoretical and practical short-cuts in party building is strong -- as countless prior Marxist-Leninist formations have amply demonstrated. But there is no doubt that, probably sooner rather than later, the comrades who have chosen that route will again bump up against the objective complexities of building the U.S. communist movement. And when they do, they will either founder in the face of the scale of the task or determine to come to grips with the idealism of the past.

The legacy of ultra-leftism weighs heavy on the U.S. communist movement and on Line of March in particular. As someone who has been in the leadership of this organization for a very long time, I am acutely aware of my individual responsibility in failing to examine or check the many negative manifestations of that legacy in our political line and practice. I am also becoming more aware of the degree to which the current circumstances of the class struggle in the U.S. provide fertile ground for the growth of many variants of petty bourgeois revolutionism. Unburdening ourselves of the legacy of ultra-leftism while sustaining our devotion to the maturation of the communist movement and the broader class struggle will not be easy. But there are already many indications that re-examination, re-direction, and democratization has opened up a way for Line of March to begin to collectively tackle this task. And besides -- no one ever said that it would be easy.