

Our Unity Must Be Concrete - An Argument for Unity on Pt.18
as a Line of Demarcation for OCIC Membership.

The long debate over the question of the main enemy to the world's people was formally opened in our tendency with the Committee of 5's first call to anti-revisionist, anti-"left"opportunist forces in June of 1976. For roughly the next 3 years the questions of whether or not the US was the main enemy to the world's people, and whether or not this question was a line of demarcation with "left"opportunism, occupied center stage in our tendency.

The debate continued through the August 1977 meeting of forces seeking to establish the OCIC. At the Founding Conference of the OCIC in February of 1978 it was established that forces must not have consolidated disunity with Pt. 18 to maintain OCIC membership. Furthermore, a process of tendency-wide debate was mandated to further resolve the requirements of OCIC membership in regard to Pt. 18. This tendency-wide debate centered around a series of regional conferences convened on the question of Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation that were held in March and April of 1979. And finally, at the 2nd National OCIC Conference in Sept. 1979, the question of Pt. 18 was to be, once and for all, resolved.

At the 2nd National Conference the body affirmed that "it is correct to uphold the identification of US imperialism as the main enemy of the world's peoples as a correct line of demarcation for building a trend in opposition to ultra-"leftism"¹. On the question of OCIC membership a 2-part resolution was put forward. Part A called for unity with Pt.18 as a requirement for OCIC membership. But Part B, in a step back from a strict demarcation on Pt.18, allowed comrades who disagreed with Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation to remain in the OCIC if they were non-obstructive.

The Resolution on OCIC membership was passed. However, the minority vote on this resolution was larger than on any other at the conference. The final vote was 47 in favor, 29 against, and 1 abstention.

So the question of Pt. 18, both in content and as a line of demarcation, and in relation to OCIC membership, has been resolved. Valuable lessons on the struggle to forge our party have been gained, particularly concerning the nature of the struggle against opportunism. And the OCIC is now moving on to confront the question of the party spirit in its efforts to unite the entire tendency on a common plan for party-building, and to defeat the small circle spirit.

However, we feel the need to address once more the questions that were raised, but not fully assessed, in the debate over Part B of the Resolution on OCIC Membership at the 2nd National Conference. We feel that the full ideological ramifications of the majority decision must be drawn more clearly. It is our view that the majority decision on Part B is conciliatory, both on the content of Pt. 18 and on the struggle to demarcate Marxism-Leninism from opportunism.

Of course, we have no desire to obstruct the progress of the OCIC by raising questions that have already been debated and voted on. In fact, we had originally planned to refrain from elaborating our further concerns until another period of general re-assessment had begun in the OCIC. But, our further consideration of the ramifications of the

1. Resolution on a Line of Demarcation with "Left" Opportunism - 2nd National Conference of the OCIC.

majority decision on Part B, coupled with the current problems being encountered by OCIC forces in Mpls., have caused us to conclude that raising our concerns at this time is important.

Briefly, in regard to the problems in Mpls: Due to the fact that in Mpls. there are forces in the OCIC (the majority of the North Star Socialist Organization) that do not uphold Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation, the whole process of building a local center has been stalled. Rather than moving on to take up the task of consolidating comrades in the OCIC and uniting the tendency on the basis of the 18 Pts. and the Draft Plan, the Mpls. Local Center has, in an effort to resolve deep differences over direction, planned to go back through the whole debate on Pt.18. A local Pt. 18 conference is presently scheduled that will debate not only the question of the line of demarcation, but also that of content. For the comrades in Mpls. the 3 year debate on Pt. 18 continues.

A full summation of the Mpls. experience will be an important practical view of the ramifications of the majority decision on Part B. But we do not feel that that summation is a necessary prerequisite to our laying out of our views on why we feel that the majority decision was in error. It is to that point that the remainder of this paper is directed.

The Majority Decision on Part B of the Resolution on OCIC Membership

The majority argument was most clearly expounded by R. Whitehorn in the Nov. '79 Organizer. In an article on the 2nd OCIC Conference, Whitehorn makes 4 points in regard to the struggle over Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation being optional for OCIC membership:

- 1 - The purpose of the 18 Pts. is to express the basic demarcation between Marxism-Leninism and opportunism.
- 2 - Within this demarcation many differences over line questions will emerge, and there will be majority and minority positions on them. The OC should not demand unity on the majority position on every question as a condition of membership. This would not "build the OCIC as the unitary expression of the tendency". Some questions, which can't be determined in advance, may require the exclusion of the minority; but such a decision should only be made after "a careful analysis has been developed and disseminated".
- 3 - The key point is whether or not the question is a line of demarcation with opportunism. Ron claims that those who agree with the content of Pt. 18, but disagree with it as a line of demarcation are still in the Marxist-Leninist camp; and therefore should be in the OC.
- 4 - To allow such forces in the OC provides the best context to consolidate the whole tendency around the position that Pt.18 is a necessary line of demarcation with opportunism.

We wholeheartedly agree with Whitehorn on points 1 and 2, or the general approach that the OCIC should take to the relationship between it's level of unity, line struggle, and the conditions of membership. Our disagreement is on the specific question of Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation. While agreeing that the degree of unity necessary for membership in the OCIC should correspond with the demarcation between Marxism-Leninism and opportunism, and not seek to go deeper; we disagree that failure to understand that Pt. 18 is a line of demarcation with opportunism is not a line of demarcation itself. In attempting to avoid the sectarian error of drawing the demarcation around Marxism-Leninism too narrowly for our young movement, the majority decision

has opened the door to what objectively becomes conciliation on the content of Pt. 18; and alters the direction of the OCIC's struggle to demarcate Marxism-Leninism from opportunism.

The Majority's Conciliation on Pt. 18's Content

We hold that understanding how Pt. 18 demarcates Marxism-Leninism from "left" opportunism is not, in actuality, a separate question from that of the content of Pt. 18. Indeed it is an important verification of one's concrete understanding of, and unity with, the content.

When we ask the question: Do you agree that US imperialism is the main enemy of the world's people?; we are not concerned with an academic poll of our movement separating those who say "Yes", from those who say "No". We are asking a basic question of how a revolutionary views the struggle against imperialism and of what meaning proletarian internationalism holds for US Marxist-Leninists at the most basic and concrete point. And as basic and concrete as the point may be, it carries widespread ramifications. Therefore we must seek more than a simple nod or shake of the head; we must expect a minimal understanding of the role that US imperialism plays in the world today, the nature of the struggle against it, and the objective class collaboration that inevitably arises from an incorrect stand on this question.

Let's explore the type of positions that must, of necessity, accompany a view that Pt. 18 is a correct position in content, but not as a line of demarcation with "left" opportunism:

First, we should note that there are two possible courses one could take to hold such a position: One is that we need not demarcate with "left" opportunism, in the form of "left" internationalism, in our party-building efforts. Two is that those who disagree with the content of Pt. 18 are wrong, but not in the camp of "left" opportunism.

The first course agrees that those who fail to uphold the content of Pt. 18 are in the camp of "left" opportunism, but claims that it is not presently necessary to demarcate around this brand of "left" opportunism in the OCIC's struggle to forge a Marxist-Leninist tendency. The gross distortion of Marxism-Leninism that such a position entails is perhaps why no one has yet to put it forward. For to argue such a position is, in essence, arguing that our emerging Marxist-Leninist tendency need not base itself on proletarian internationalism.

But regardless, those who fail to uphold Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation because they feel it is not necessary to demarcate with "left" opportunism on international line are in direct disagreement with the content of Pt. 18 - "In the present context, the practice of proletarian internationalism is impossible without correctly identifying the main enemy of the world's people." (3rd sentence of Pt.18) Certainly no one would openly argue that a tendency claiming to be Marxist-Leninist need not base itself on proletarian internationalism.

The second course, the argument that those who disagree with the content of Pt. 18 are not in the camp of "left" opportunism, is a little more complex and therefore requires a little deeper examination:

To agree that US imperialism is the main enemy, but disagree that those who would see the USSR as the main enemy are in the camp of "left" opportunism is a position rife with contradiction. Such forces are arguing both that US imperialism is our main enemy, and that we should unite with those who would seek alliances with the US to defeat a different main enemy. One cannot agree that the main blow must be struck against US imperialism, and at the same time, feel that unity is possible with those who would seek to unite (either overtly or covertly) with the US.

Such a view liquidates any meaning to the concept of a main enemy. In order to side-step the contradiction that is inherent in such a position, it is necessary for forces that hold it to pose US imperialism as an "abstract" main enemy - as a force that maybe bigger or more powerful in a quantitative sense - but not as a "concrete" main enemy against whom the united resources of the world's people must be directed. Another enemy, although not "main" in the "abstract and academic balance of forces" because they are smaller, less powerful quantitatively, maybe a necessary "concrete" main target of the world's people because they are more aggressive, more devious, more immediate, the "rising power", etc. And hence, we find our "abstract" unity with the US as the main enemy becoming quite compatible with the concrete practice of the Theory of the Three Worlds. And this compatibility between 2 different views of the main enemy is what erases the line of demarcation that Pt. 18 draws with "left" opportunism.

Holding an abstract unity with US imperialism as the main enemy, that doesn't tie this unity to the real struggle against that enemy amounts to eclecticism. Eclecticism for a Marxist-Leninist is the tendency to combine in a mechanical fashion, ideas and theories that have originated from divergent movements. It often results in an attempt to create unity between that which is irreconcilable. For example, the attempt to find a common ground between idealism and materialism by borrowing points from each doctrine. Eclecticism is kin to dogmatism in that it uses an abstract or academic methodology rather than engaging in a concrete examination. As Lenin put it; "Because no concrete study is made of this particular controversy, question, approach, etc., the result is a dead and empty eclecticism". (from Once Again On The Trade Unions, CW, Vol.32, p.95 - emphasis in original).

The eclecticism of those who hold to the content of Pt. 18, but not to it as a line of demarcation is boldly evident. Such positions as: "Proletarian internationalism is impossible without identifying US imperialism as the main enemy, but one can see the USSR as the main enemy and remain in the Marxist-Leninist camp." ; or, "The US is the main enemy, but this doesn't mean that it is opportunist (and may even in some cases be correct) to direct the strategic focus of the struggle against imperialism on a worldwide basis elsewhere"; are necessary for such forces to hold. Their main contention inevitably boils down to: "On the one hand, we have one main enemy, but on the other hand, those who disagree also hold a legitimate position".

As the concrete ramifications of the main enemy concept become aimless, so too does the struggle against class collaboration. We see those who disagree with Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation seeking to unite in the struggle against opportunism with the foremost exponents of opportunism in the anti-revisionist movement.

To demand clarity on this contradiction as a condition of membership in the OCIC would certainly not "limit the composition of the OCIC to the most advanced, consolidated forces" as Whitehorn claims. It would merely demand a concrete, instead of abstract, unity. Our concern is in where forces stand, not where they claim to stand.

In a formalistic, or schematic sense (if for example, our debate was in the context of a college logic's course) one could draw a distinction between agreement with the content of Pt. 18 and agreement with it as a line of demarcation. But we are not concerned with abstract schemes; rather it is the direction of the real, concrete struggle to demarcate Marxism-Leninism from opportunism that concerns

us here. And in this real, concrete struggle there is not a tenable position that holds that Pt. 18 is correct in content, but not as a line of demarcation with "left"opportunism.

We feel that this question of demarcation is equally true for the other 17 of the 18 Points of Unity. One cannot claim to agree that Trotskyism "objectively coincides with the interests of the bourgeoisie" on the one hand; and then on the other hand, argue that we should not demarcate with Trotskyism in our party-building efforts. The same is true for the question of the multi-national character of the party, of a peaceful parliamentary transition to socialism, or of the leading role of the working class. Agreement with the content of these points is inseparable from agreement on the demarcations they draw in party-building.

The Nature of the OCIC's Struggle to Demarcate Marxism-Leninism from Opportunism

We feel that the line of demarcation with opportunism must not only be drawn along comrade's unity with the content of the 18 Pts., but also on their ability to take up the struggle against opportunism on the most basic and minimal level. At this point that means a minimal understanding of why each of the 18 Pts. are important as points of unity for a Marxist-Leninist trend.

The central task of the OCIC revolves around defining the parameters, and then organizationally uniting the Marxist-Leninist tendency. The core of this task is the demarcating of Marxism-Leninism from opportunism, or more simply put, the struggle against opportunism. The role of the 18 Pts. is nothing more than to make this demarcation, to draw the line of struggle with opportunism. The real importance of the 18 Pts. therefore is in the line of demarcations they draw, or in what they mean for the struggle against opportunism.

Currently the general level of understanding around the 18 Pts. in this regard is very uneven in the OCIC; that is why a study of the 18 Pts. is a key initial task. However, on Pt. 18 this is not the case. This unity is not being demanded in either a hasty or arbitrary manner. The OCIC engaged its entire first year with the struggle to show that Pt. 18 is a correct line of demarcation with "left"opportunism. This struggle was carried out broadly among all the forces of our tendency. It exposed the opportunism of those who formerly claimed to have "no position" on Pt. 18. And it incontestably proved that to take a Marxist-Leninist stance toward party-building in the US today is to understand that Pt. 18 draws a necessary line of demarcation with "left"opportunism.

The criteria of engaging in the struggle against opportunism is not one that can be ignored. Because to do so changes the OCIC from an organization that is actively taking up the struggle against opportunism, to one that is merely attempting to serve as a measure of which forces hold this position vs. forces that hold another. Once again, our unity must be concrete. Members of the OCIC must understand why we are uniting on the positions contained in the 18 Pts., that is, the demarcations they draw in the struggle against opportunism and for Marxism-Leninism.

We do not feel that forces who can unite with the content of Pt.18, but do not see it as a line of demarcation, are in the opportunist camp - but then, neither do we feel that they are in the Marxist-Leninist camp. They are forces that are holding a center ground and conciliating ing opportunism. They have begun to make the break with opportunism, but

are not yet able to grasp the struggle against opportunism at its most fundamental and immediate point in the present party-building movement.

We see this failure as the result of a shallow or abstract understanding of the content of Pt. 18. Comrades have either failed to grasp the concrete reality of what Pt. 18 means for the struggle against imperialism and the practice of proletarian internationalism; or they have failed to grasp what it means for the actual struggle against opportunism in the anti-revisionist tendency.

Such a failure to grasp a concrete understanding can easily be used by some forces as a cover for actual disunity with Pt. 18. The OCIC already has rich experience with such tactics. But this failure can also result from honest underdevelopment and confusion. We think that many who hold the majority position on the line of demarcation question are motivated, in part, by a hesitancy to exclude forces because of their underdevelopment - such forces are clearly not in the camp of opportunism, they claim.

So we would like to speak briefly to this concern about underdevelopment:

On the first hand, the line of demarcation that the 18 Pts. draw does not mean that we have no relation to those that are outside that unity. Obviously the mass of advanced workers are presently outside the unity of the 18 Pts. because of underdevelopment. The task of developing these forces is, we think, given more priority by placing them outside the OCIC. Therefore having their relationship to the OCIC hinge on a deeper understanding of the 18 Pts.; rather than including them in the OCIC and demoralizing them by expecting them to function on a level that is predicated on a deeper understanding.

On the other hand, we must remember that the task of the OCIC in uniting the tendency rests not merely in organizationally uniting on the 18 Pts., but more fundamentally, in taking up the most pressing party-building task of our tendency - taking up the struggle to demarcate Marxism-Leninism from opportunism. We must see the 18 Pts. in this light. And regardless of whether or not one opposes Pt. 18 as a line of demarcation as a cover for actual disunity with the content, or due to underdevelopment; they are incapable of taking up the most pressing task of our tendency.

How many times have we repeated that Marxism-Leninism seeks not just to reflect reality, but to change it. It is a guide to action. To be in the Marxist-Leninist camp one must possess at least a minimum ability to take up the key tasks of the period. And to understand what Pt. 18 is all about is absolutely crucial to one's ability to take up the struggle against "left" opportunism, which is the center of our current party-building tasks.

Simply put, the question is whether the demarcation is drawn between opportunism and Marxism-Leninism, or opportunism and non-opportunism. Are we, in the OCIC, building a Marxist-Leninist trend, or simply a non-opportunist trend?

Our ability to "build the OCIC as the unitary expression of the tendency" rests not only on our care not to limit the "composition of the OCIC to the most advanced, consolidated forces" by demanding too developed a level of unity; it rests equally on the OCIC's ability to take up the tasks of our tendency. To allow a legitimate place within the OCIC for forces that do not see Pt. 18 as a correct demarcation with "left" opportunism can only blur the line of demarcation with opportunism and retard the OCIC's ability to move our tendency to the party.