

Dirty Linen: The Struggle in the Bay Area MLEP

by Rafael, Scott and Norton

Editor's Note: While the editorial board is obviously not in agreement with the authors of this article in their assessment of Line of March's theoretical and political contributions, we think that their analysis of the process which unfolded in the Bay Area MLEP will be of interest to our readers.

This article is excerpted from a longer paper, entitled "*Line of March and the Anti-Revisionist, Anti-'Left' Opportunist Trend.*" This paper consists of an Introduction and two main parts. The first part is our summation of a struggle which took place in the 1980-81 session of the Bay Area Marxist-Leninist Education Project (MLEP), during which two of us were expelled from MLEP. The Introduction and the first part of our paper, along with some of the concluding remarks, are reproduced here.

The second part of our paper, which is not printed here, critiques the recent proposal of LOM for a United Front Against War and Racism, and offers some comments about LOM's analysis of the nature of fascism. We argue that LOM elevates the struggle against war and racism to the essence of the struggle against capitalism, and relegates the class antagonisms between the working class and the bourgeoisie to secondary importance. The bulk of this section was recently published in the October 14, 1981 issue of the *Guardian* newspaper. We go on to argue that the sectarian manipulation of the struggle in MLEP on the part of its leadership, and the political errors in LOM's analysis of fascism and proposed United Front Against War and Racism, are both reflections of a weak and vacillating class stand on the part of LOM.

It will be evident from this article that, despite our criticisms, we have a good deal of agreement with some of the political analysis LOM has done. At the same time we obviously have some significant disagreements with the editors of *Theoretical Review*. Nevertheless, we are grateful for the opportunity *TR* has offered us to present our summation of the struggle in MLEP.

Finally, it should be noted that Rafael, Scott and Norton are pseudonyms.

Introduction

In the last several months the center of gravity in the political movement which describes itself as the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend has moved steadily towards those forces associated with the "rectification" party-building line, led by the Editorial Board of the journal *Line of March*. This has been the twin result of the advanced theoretical work being done by the rectificationists, and the rapid degeneration of their leading contenders in the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center (OCIC).

The most significant theoretical contribution to date by the rectification forces has been their exposure of the thesis of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union. Although this contribution is not as original or path-breaking as the rectificationists would lead us to believe, given such works as Jonathan Aurthur's *Socialism in the Soviet Union* (1977) and Albert Szymanski's *Is the Red Flag Flying?* (1979), they have nonetheless done much work to break the grip of anti-Sovietism that has infected the left in the US for all too long. This is an important contribution because it was precisely behind the thin veil of the thesis of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union that the Communist Party of China and its associated parties were able to conceal their "left" opportunism, lead astray many genuine Marxist-Leninists, and hinder the development of a materialist analysis of modern revisionism. *Line of March* has also done some excellent political analysis on such related questions as the conflict in Vietnam and Kampuchea, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, and the nature of the crisis in Poland.

However, anti-Sovietism is hardly the only negative legacy which the US communist movement must overcome. Our movement must also come to grips with a long history of sectarianism, which has bedeviled every serious political trend on the left at least since the collapse of the CPUSA into revisionism. By sectarianism we mean the placing of the interests of a particular political organization or grouping above the interests of the working class as a whole. The caricature of a sectarian organization is one that succeeds only in isolating itself from other political forces and the broader working class movement. But sectarianism is just as much a problem for sizable and influential political

organizations which have the capacity to seriously hold back and damage the growth of a revolutionary working class movement. At root, sectarianism is the result of a weakness or vacillation in class stand, an inability to firmly uphold the interests of the working class, and consequently to allow the perceived interests of a particular organization, group, or section of the class, to dominate one's political perspective.

Sectarianism in turn gives rise to a whole host of associated political problems. When organization is placed above politics, the correctness and internal consistency of an organization's political line becomes secondary. The most outrageous political and theoretical constructs can be justified by appeals to the authority of the organization. Often pragmatism replaces politics—whatever works to build the influence and hegemony of the organization must of necessity be deemed politically correct. An organization's followers are inculcated with a flunkyist mentality, trained to religiously follow the "big heads" of the organization. Dealings with those outside the organization become filled with intrigue and confusion.

Even a brief survey of some of the organizations which at one time or another have been prominent within the US revolutionary left since the sixties—Progressive Labor, SDS, the Black Panthers, the Weather Underground, the Revolutionary Union, the October League, the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee—almost inevitably calls these problems to mind, despite the often important advances which these organizations represented in their particular historical circumstances. Our movement is littered with the carcasses of political trends done in by their confused class stand and consequent sectarianism, by their inability to grasp the fundamental essence of the struggle against the exploitation and oppression of finance capital—the fight for the seizure of state power and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Unfortunately, despite their important contributions to date, the rectificationists have recently exhibited the same old vacillating class stand and sectarian tendencies that are the bequest of the US left. The original conception of the rectificationists, that of creating a wide-ranging political, theoretical and ideological debate among all principled sections of the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend in order to rectify the general line of the US communist movement, was an important step forward, inasmuch as it helped to reorient us toward our pressing theoretical and practical tasks. However, these days the leaders of the rectification movement have increasingly been promoting a kind of hand-me-down rectification, whereby a select few formulate their theoretical constructs and deliver them to their base almost by fiat. At present, the conception of a wide-ranging rectification seems to be taking a back seat to an attempt by *Line of March* to establish its organizational hegemony over the trend. This process has been somewhat obscured by the continuing theoretical contributions being made by the rectificationists, but has become evident nonetheless.

Probably the clearest example of this process is the new formulation by the Editorial Board of *Line of March* of their proposed United Front Against War and Racism, which even took many of the middle-level cadre of the rectification movement by surprise, despite the fact that it has been proposed as a strategic concept to guide the work of the

communist movement for several years to come. Instead of calling first for a serious debate on their proposal among rectification and other communist forces, the Editorial Board has simply declared that the task at hand is to conduct a struggle to win the communist movement and the entire left in the US to their proposed United Front. The process of taking a critical look at this proposal among the base of *Line of March*, much less among the political forces to which they are close, has been summary at best. Such schemes are all too familiar in the history of our movement.

The tendency to attempt to rectify the general line by fiat becomes increasingly dangerous precisely as the prestige of *Line of March* grows. There are at present a whole slew of folks dredged up from the ruins of the new left and the new communist movement who have recently been jumping on the rectification bandwagon, with their bourgeois baggage firmly in hand. Probably the most outrageous example of this is the announcement by the Communist Workers Party (CWP) that, by virtue of their superficial abandonment of the thesis of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, they are now "squarely" in the center of the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend. But more significant are the former cadre of a whole variety of petty-bourgeois organizations, from the New American Movement (NAM) to the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (PFOC), who are now herding towards *Line of March*. This fact alone mandates that there must be a most thorough-going ideological struggle, in the full sense of that term, to prevent the rectification movement from collapsing under the weight of this new realignment. The mere pronouncement of new leading lines by the Editorial Board of *Line of March*, no matter how brilliantly conceived, will simply not suffice to effectively combat the weak class stand and sectarian tendencies of the overwhelmingly petty-bourgeois base of the present-day US communist movement.

In this article we will discuss one recent manifestation of the direction which leaders of the rectification movement are taking at present, an intense controversy that erupted within the Bay Area Marxist-Leninist Education Project (MLEP). This struggle focused on the authors of this article and our views. A description of the events in this struggle, and of the line and practice of the MLEP leadership, will help to demonstrate the political confusion and sectarianism which are taking hold in the rectification movement.

The Struggle in the Bay Area MLEP

A. The Events

MLEP is an educational institution, run by *Line of March*, which defines its task as educating active communists within the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend in the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism. MLEP, originally founded by the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP), is a national organization which is about three years old.

The struggle in this year's Bay Area MLEP had rather humble origins, despite the heat which it ultimately generated. A woman in one of the study circles complained that some of the concepts which other students had been using were too advanced for the level of study. Rafael, a working-class Latino in the same study circle, disagreed and

argued that the study should not be reduced to the lowest common denominator. Another student in the study circle, a paid functionary of *Line of March*, criticized Rafael, asserting that his comment had been elitist and sexist, and that his tone of voice had been abusive. Rafael strongly disagreed with this criticism. However, the woman who had made the initial point, a cadre of KDP, insisted that she had been grievously insulted, almost broke out in tears, and succeeded in getting the entire study circle to agree with the criticism of Rafael, with the exception of Rafael and Scott, a white worker.

After this incident there were several more discussions at subsequent meetings concerning this criticism. Some members of the study circle proceeded to elaborate further complaints about Rafael's allegedly elitist and sexist behavior, although these complaints were quite vague. The study leaders actively encouraged this development. Rafael and Scott became increasingly frustrated with what was perceived to be a decided tendency for a study circle to take on the characteristics of a petty-bourgeois encounter group, using Rafael as a scapegoat for the circle's need of emotional catharsis. As even the MLEP leadership had to later admit, the study circle developed an "instinctive" antagonism towards Rafael, and later towards Scott.

That such a minor criticism, whether valid or not, could provoke such an extended controversy is only an indication of the subjectivism and petty-bourgeois moralism within the US left. Finally, after this controversy had boiled for several weeks, two of the students in the study circle disrupted a meeting to criticize Rafael for reading a *Guardian* during a discussion (not an uncommon practice for MLEP students in the long study sessions). At this provocation, Rafael finally exploded and began yelling that he was tired of this kind of petty criticism, and that he was not going to put up with it any more. The meeting proceeded, but the situation had clearly reached crisis proportions.

Rafael and Scott then attempted to take up this problem with the Bay Area MLEP leadership, hoping to get a more objective airing of the situation than was possible in the emotion-charged atmosphere of their study circle. The MLEP leadership met with Rafael and Scott once, but refused to seriously consider any criticism of the process unfolding in the study circle. Instead, they responded by encouraging a rumor-mongering campaign of slander about the alleged racism, sexism and elitism of Rafael. Scott was also a target of this campaign, for the sole reason that he had joined Rafael in a critique of the process of struggle within the study circle. At the same time, the MLEP leadership attempted to divide Rafael and Scott, refusing to meet further with them together, and proposing to conduct separate "all-sided" evaluations of Rafael and Scott's political practice inside and outside of MLEP. This proposal was made despite the fact that none of the MLEP leadership had any serious common practice with either Rafael or Scott on which to base this "all-sided" evaluation, much less any clear political standards on which to base such an evaluation.

At this point, Rafael, Scott and Norton, a black working-class member of a separate MLEP study circle, wrote a paper outlining our view of what was going on, and presented it to the MLEP leadership. Norton joined Rafael and Scott in this project because he had seen similar tendencies in his own study circle. The MLEP leadership

responded to this paper by declaring that the criticisms of their line and practice were wrong, and that our paper was not written in the spirit of unity. They announced that they were going to immediately write a reply to our paper, and organize an MLEP-wide meeting to defend their line and practice. Privately, we were informed by the MLEP leadership that we would have little input into the structure of this meeting, and that they would not even schedule it to make sure that all three of us could attend. When we tried to explain this to other MLEP students, we were called liars by the leadership.

By this time the emotional level in Rafael and Scott's study circle had been whipped up to the point of near-hysteria. At a special meeting of the study circle, called allegedly to prepare for the MLEP-wide meeting, two members of the Editorial Board of *Line of March* showed up unannounced, although they had previously, to our knowledge, nothing to do with this struggle. The MLEP leadership laid out its position, claiming that the essence of this struggle was that Rafael had been unwilling to admit to his allegedly elitist and sexist behavior, and that Scott had "blocked" with Rafael and provided him with a "theoretical cover." Before the meeting had gotten half-way through its agenda, one of the members of the Editorial Board cut in and announced that the National MLEP leadership was upset with Rafael and Scott's refusal to show any "movement." He then declared that the National MLEP leadership was going to take action to "resolve" this problem. A few days later Rafael and Scott were informed verbally that they were being expelled from MLEP, effective immediately.

Now that Rafael and Scott had been removed from the scene, the MLEP leadership delivered on its promised written reply to our paper. This reply, predictably, was crammed full of crass distortions of our views, but of course neither Rafael nor Scott were around to question their erroneous assertions. The MLEP reply summed up this struggle by baldly asserting that we were unwilling to struggle against racism, sexism and anti-working class bias, that we were opposed to the collective process, and that we were anti-communist.

Last, but not least, the MLEP leadership held their special MLEP-wide meeting to present their views. Rafael and Scott were barred from attending. Norton, who was still a member of MLEP, was allowed to present our views, but was met with a series of highly-subjective accounts of the events in Rafael and Scott's study circle which he obviously could only discuss second-hand. In addition, the MLEP leadership allowed him to be interrupted at several points, and gave a nod to considerable snickering and some open ridicule. Norton asked for this meeting to be taped, as had previous MLEP general meetings, but was told that this could not be done for "security reasons." Simply put, this meeting amounted to little more than a kangaroo court, held in absentia, after the sentence had already been decided and meted out.

B. MLEP's Line on "Ideological Struggle"

The reader is entitled to ask just how such a travesty could have been foisted upon the entire membership of MLEP with so little opposition. To answer this question, we must examine the ideological, theoretical and political justifications which the MLEP leadership used to defend

their line and practice, and demonstrate how they conciliated with the inexperience and weak class stand of many of the MLEP students. We will break this down into three sections. First, we will discuss MLEP's definition of "ideological struggle"; second, their concept of "strategic relations"; and third, their understanding of collectivity.

The Definition of "Ideological Struggle": The controversy in MLEP was exacerbated by the repeated assertions of the MLEP leadership that this affair was an important "ideological struggle" which required serious attention from all concerned. Curiously, the MLEP leaders used an operative definition of "ideological struggle" which was restricted to questions of interpersonal relations. While the criticisms of Rafael and Scott's behavior were alleged to be part of an "ideological struggle," all other work in MLEP, from elaboration of the meaning of dialectical materialism to discussion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, was categorized as distinct "theoretical work." Thus the MLEP leaders tore the criticisms of Rafael and Scott completely out of the context of the far broader ideological tasks before both MLEP and the communist movement, and magnified the seeming importance of these criticisms a hundredfold.

Operating under this confused definition, Rafael and Scott's study circle was increasingly led to view the study of the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism as nearly impossible until this alleged "ideological struggle" had been resolved. But since we did not agree with the petty and vague criticisms that had been made, first of Rafael and later of Scott, there was no way to resolve this controversy. At this, the whole study circle was thrown into despair.

The MLEP leadership's explanation of this phenomenon was that Rafael and Scott were mere academics who were "unwilling to engage in ideological struggle." This became the refrain, repeated time and time again, implanted by the MLEP leadership in the minds of the study circle. It did not matter how many hours we spent discussing this situation with the study circle, with the study leaders, or with the MLEP leadership. Since we would not agree with the criticism made of us, and continued to object to the subjective process that was unfolding, was it not obvious that we were unwilling to engage in ideological struggle? Such was the picture painted by the MLEP leadership.

While the MLEP leaders employed an original theoretical device, this tactic is a familiar one. There is a long history in the US left of investing such inflated importance to a group's interpersonal dynamics and of distorting the process of criticism/self-criticism into a near-mystical, purgative rite that draws upon all the subjectivism, sentimentality, pity and guilt that are the hallmark of petty-bourgeois moralism. In short, the grossest kinds of squabbling are transformed into the most serious political controversies, while the most significant political differences are viewed as mere squabbling.

"Strategic Relations": The centerpiece of the MLEP leadership's defense of their line and practice was their concept of "strategic relations." According to the MLEP leadership, all the forces who are "objectively" part of the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend share these strategic relations. When Rafael and Scott, in the midst of the struggle within their study circle, protested that they did not understand or accept this concept, this was taken as a sure sign of their elitism, sexism and racism.

The precise meaning of these strategic relations was never made clear by the MLEP leadership. In one of MLEP's introductory papers, strategic relations is explained as the "struggle for higher levels of unity," the need to "tear down the barriers within our movement," the necessity of building "strategic ties stage by stage," etc. "The building of strategic relations within our movement has been an important arena of struggle in deepening our unity as comrades, enabling us to accomplish the political and theoretical goals of MLEP." Such vagaries result in strategic relations meaning any number of things to all people at any given time. Yet this concept was presented to the MLEP students as if it were a scientific category that true Marxist-Leninists would not dare to challenge. Of course, one could search the classics of Marxism-Leninism in vain for any reference to strategic relations or anything even similar.

Long after Rafael and Scott had been expelled from MLEP, in large part based on their refusal to support the concept of strategic relations, the MLEP leadership was still struggling for a definition of this concept. At their final summation meeting in June, over three months after Rafael and Scott had been expelled, they admitted that the definition of strategic relations still needed "more work."

It would seem obvious that any supposed strategic relations should at least be based on the acceptance of some common political strategy. Yet the rectificationists, more so even than most others within the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend, admit that our movement lacks anything even approaching a common political strategy. In fact, the political unity of this trend is limited to a rather short list of what it is *not*: not revisionist, not ultra-"left," not Trotskyite, not "Maoist." There is even substantial disagreement over the meaning of these terms. This lack of common strategy is implicit in the recognition of the absence of a general line sufficient for reestablishing the party, much less contending for state power. We are not even unified around a common strategy for reestablishing the party. To confuse matters more, the concept of strategic relations is stretched to include such forces as the Communist Labor Party (CLP), who the rectificationists claim are "objectively" in the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend, despite the fact that they long-ago constituted themselves into a separate political party.

That the need for firm political unity could so easily be replaced by the concept of strategic relations is a sad reflection of the immaturity of the communist movement in the US. We must learn to recognize that the process of reestablishing a genuine communist party is going to be far less simple than just "transforming the Trend into a communist party," as the rectificationists have been putting it lately. This is sheer idealism, for it assumes a degree of political unity that simply does not yet exist.

In practice, MLEP's conception of strategic relations was destructive within Rafael and Scott's study circle. From the very first moment, it served to foster among the students a whole series of false expectations about the depth of their political unity. Although neither Rafael nor Scott had previously met any of the other students in their study circle, and barely knew each other, they were all expected to have already been bound together by some deep and everlasting political tie. Given the absence of any firm political basis for this kind of relationship, it was hardly surprising that strains could develop so easily. Given the absence of even common

practice among many of the students, it is not surprising that these strains could develop from the most minor and insignificant incidents, both real and imagined. The result was an "ideological struggle" shrouded in the unfortunate political rhetoric of "strategic relations."

The concept of strategic relations serves the aspirations of the leaders of the rectification movement by fostering organizational ties among aspiring Marxist-Leninists based, not on common politics, but on instinct and personal trust. It is a theoretical excuse for placing organization above politics, and can lead to the most narrow form of sectarian manipulation imaginable, as was concretely demonstrated by the struggle in MLEP. Since, so the theory goes, we are all opposed to revisionism and ultra-"leftism," doesn't it follow that we must have strategic relations? If your answer is 'no', then you are refusing to be "accountable" to the trend, and are, ipso facto, a bourgeois individualist. This line of argument thoroughly confuses the distinct categories of strategy, tactics and political relations.

In this light, it is interesting to examine a recent statement by the Editorial Board of *Line of March*, contained in their pamphlet, "The OCIC's Phony War Against White Chauvinism and the Demise of the Fusion Line," on page 41:

... within the development of the rectification movement, the terrain on which our trend's future maturation will proceed has already been established. Ideologically our trend has already become accountable to more advanced communist criteria. Politically our trend is achieving its correct focus—rectification of the US communist movement's general line. Organizationally, the key institutions for an all-sided, all-embracing rectification movement are already in place. (our italics)

One can only assume that the organizations which the Editorial Board are claiming are "already in place" are *Line of March*, MLEP, their various associated study projects, and the organizations led by rectification forces such as the national Anti-Racist Organizing Committee (NAROC), the Northern California Alliance (NCA), etc. Of course, it is a condition of participation in any of these rectification organizations that comrades recognize their "strategic relations" with the Editorial Board of *Line of March*. Otherwise, one will sooner or later find yourself outside of "the terrain on which our trend's future maturation will proceed."

Ironically, this arrangement bears no small resemblance to the schemes of the leaders of the OCIC. The OCIC claimed that it was necessary for all of the forces in the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend to unite organizationally in the OCIC in order to subsequently establish a political basis for unity. This, of course, turns politics on its head. The rectificationist's version, on the other hand, is that the prerequisite for political unity is not a particular organizational form, but the recognition of strategic relations. This also turns politics on its head, but not quite so nakedly. While the OCIC declares any forces who refuse to affiliate with their organization to be sectarian, the rectificationist's attempt to read out of the trend all those who refuse to recognize their strategic relations with the Editorial Board of *Line of March*.

The concept of strategic relations is, in the final analysis, the rectificationists version of that old call for "unity" of the

revolutionary movement before the actual political basis for genuine unity has been laid. It is the tried and true tactic of those budding leadership groups who think that they have established sufficient hegemony over a broad-enough base to get away with such a call for unity, of course behind their leadership. They stretch the particular contributions which they have made into a claim to be the vanguard of the revolution in the US, long before they, or anybody else, has even the remotest right to this position.

The Collective Process: Another accusation leveled at us was that we were "displaying contempt for the collective process."

Collectivity—putting the whole above any of the individual parts—is a goal which nearly all of the organizations of the new left and the new communist movement have set for themselves. This has been both a reaction to the bourgeois individualism that is fostered by competitive capitalism, and a recognition that the tasks of waging a struggle to overthrow capitalism will require the maximum participation and effort of literally millions of people.

However, collectivity has often been vulgarized, misunderstood and grossly abused. More than a few new left and new communist organizations have fallen into the trap of ultra-democracy, fearful of not fulfilling the collective ideal. The result, of course, is neither democracy nor collectivity.

MLEP makes just such a deviation towards ultra-democracy in their so-called process of "ideological struggle," that is struggle over interpersonal dynamics. They postulate that whenever a student has a criticism of another student, the only proper way to deal with this is to bring the criticism first to the study as a whole, and discuss it fully. It is then "collective" responsibility of the study circle, as a whole, to decide if the criticism is correct or not, and worth discussing further.

One must keep in mind that this is in a study circle, not an ongoing collective or political organization. As such, MLEP study circles include students of widely varied backgrounds and stages of development, from those who have just begun to look to the science of Marxism-Leninism, to those who are quite theoretically-developed.

This frank encouragement of ultra-democracy in the process of "ideological struggle" is an abdication of the responsibility on the part of the MLEP leadership to guide the process of criticism/self-criticism. It opens the door to endless talk fests about sometimes minor, sometimes major, and sometimes imagined incidents. It gives a green light to the most backward forms of subjectivity, moralism and petty squabbling, while making light of any serious attempt to objectify criticism.

Alternatively, we proposed to the MLEP leadership that once a serious criticism is raised, the study leaders should make an objective investigation and assessment before there is extended discussion by the study circle. The MLEP leadership rejected this suggestion out of hand.

While the MLEP leadership encourages this ultra-democratic process of "ideological struggle," the "theoretical work" of MLEP is directed by a highly-centralized process. There is relatively little input by the students of which works are to be read, of the amount of time to be spent on particular subjects, or on the process of discussing this material, except in after-the-fact

summations. We have no quarrel with this, provided of course that the MLEP leaders are qualified for their responsibilities, and that provision is made for opposing viewpoints in unsettled theoretical questions to be aired. Students who are studying the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism generally need strong guidance, and should be given it.

But, just as many MLEP students are new to the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, many are also new to the group dynamics required to do genuinely collective study and work. It should be apparent to an experienced leadership that such students require firm guidance in order to properly conduct criticism/self-criticism. The MLEP leadership, however, showed no interest in providing this guidance. Quite the contrary, they actively encouraged the grossest forms of ultra-democracy, as well as outright rumor-mongering and character assassination.

This process took on a particularly strange form as the result of the introduction by the MLEP leadership of a concept which we dubbed the "impact thesis." According to the MLEP leadership, if a minority or woman student feels that an action "impacted" them in a racist or sexist way, this is sufficient basis for establishing the objective existence of a racist or sexist dynamic. It does not require a great deal of astuteness to recognize that this thesis thoroughly negates the need for any kind of objective assessment, and completely throws materialism out the window. Simply put, the belief that a racist or sexist dynamic is in operation doesn't make it so.

Of course, there is no doubt that minority and women students are generally more capable of recognizing racism and sexism than white or male students. But this concept of "impacting" goes far beyond this recognition. It is instead a very crass form of paternalism, which puts certain minority and women students on a pedestal, and actually discourages critical thinking on the part of students of all races, nationalities and sexes.

At times, especially in individual discussions with us, the MLEP leaders would be quite frank about this strange idea. At other times they would deny holding to this conception, while practicing it nonetheless. When pushed they would claim that the perception by a single student of an alleged racist or sexist dynamic did not make it so, but that the perception by a majority of a study circle did. "How else can we decide?" we would be asked. For instance, as this struggle developed, there were repeated references to our line and practice having been "proven wrong" by virtue of the fact that the study circle had been won to the view that our practice was racist, sexist and elitist. This is sheer ultra-democracy and idealism—reality could now be determined by consensus, rather than by material analysis. Or, as any liberal knows, the majority is always right.

Probably the best example of the fruits of this process took place in Norton's study circle. A white, male student stated during the course of discussion that he disagreed with a particular theoretical point with another student, a theoretically-developed KDP woman cadre. The white student was then accused of making a racist comment by disagreeing with the KDP student! This allegation was not based on the content of his disagreement with her, nor on any evident hostility, but was based simply on the fact that he had disagreed with a minority student.

The white student was then directed that in the future he should not be so blunt as to say that he disagreed with a minority student. Instead he should say something to the effect that "I don't think I understand your point fully."

We know this may be hard for the reader to believe, but it is true. While this gross example was certainly not the norm in MLEP, the fact that it could happen at all, pass virtually uncriticized, and even be given the approval of the MLEP leadership, is indicative of the paternalism fostered by the MLEP leadership, under the rubric of "collectivity" and "ideological struggle."

Conclusion

The theoretical and political justifications which the MLEP leadership used to defend their line and practice during the struggle with Rafael and Scott are an eclectic grabbag of assorted deviations from the science of Marxism-Leninism. Their botched definition of ideological struggle, their confused concept of strategic relations, the ultra-democracy and idealism inherent in their misuse of the collective process, the paternalism which they foster—all this is testimony to the political muddle which results from allowing the sectarian impulse to dominate political line. Instead of appealing to the interests of the working class to conduct a genuine rectification of the general line of the communist movement, they end up appealing to the most backward prejudices of the petty-bourgeoisie base of the present communist movement. This is a road which leads nowhere but back into the old sectarian swamp of the new left and the new communist movement.

Ironically, one of the best summations we have encountered of the process which overwhelmed the Bay Area MLEP last year is laid out in the pamphlet by the *Line of March* Editorial Board critiquing the OCIC's "campaign against white chauvinism." We quote, from pages 28 and 29:

Any ideological campaign without a strong political anchor is headed for trouble—an invitation for unleashing subjectivism and petit bourgeois moralism of all sorts. An 'ideological campaign' of this nature concentrating on contradictions as volatile and complex as racist dynamics and errors is an invitation to double trouble. Communists who narrow the struggle against racism to an 'ideological struggle' to root out incorrect attitudes, both conscious and subconscious, are essentially practicing a bourgeois line on racism. The resulting 'encounter' and emotional catharses and breakdowns are qualitatively no different than the antics of guilt-ridden bourgeois liberals, regardless of whether or not the spectacle is carried out in the name of Marxism-Leninism.

We could not have put it better.

Originally we had hoped that our summation of the struggle in MLEP might be printed in *Line of March*, accompanied by whatever comment the Editorial Board deemed appropriate. However, the Editorial Board nixed this suggestion. Their response was that "it is generally inappropriate to publish such material in the pages of a theoretical journal such as *Line of March*." In addition, just

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Varieties and Problems of 20th Century Socialism

by Louis Patsouras and Jack Ray Thomas, eds.

Nelson-Hall, 1981. \$15.95 (paper \$8.95)

This ambitious anthology covers a broad field, discussing in turn "Democratic Socialism" (Leon Blum, Salvador Allende); anarchism (Jean Grave); and Communism (Georgi Dimitrov and Ho Chi Minh). Also included are essays on Lucio Colletti, Erich Fromm and Nicos Kazantzakis.

Unfortunately the essays are all too short to do more than provide a brief overview of their subjects, and usually from a quite laudatory perspective which fails to adequately reflect the real problems of 20th-century socialism to which the book's title alludes. Thus, for example, Jack Ray Thomas' essay on Allende gives over considerable space to defending the disastrous policies of the Popular Unity government from left-wing criticism which sadly turned out to be so accurate.

The essay on Ho Chi Minh is a useful summary of his life, although it contains no new information. The essay on Georgi Dimitrov, if uncritical of the theory and practice of the Comintern line after the Seventh Congress, and vague about negative postwar developments in socialist Bulgaria, is nonetheless interesting for its comments on his early life and his perceptive, if timid opposition to the ultra-leftism of the Comintern's third period (1929-1934).

Perhaps the most interesting of the essays in this volume from a theoretical point of view is Norman Fisher's piece on Lucio Colletti and socialist democracy. Fisher follows Colletti's reading of Rousseau, Marx and Gramsci to develop the Marxist understanding of the democratic character of socialism and how it is antithetical to bourgeois notions of democracy as well as the anti-democratic character of classical German Social Democracy and the Stalinian deviation.

Cuba: Democracy or Dictatorship?

by Marta Harnecker, Lawrence Hill & Co.

1980. \$14.95 (paper \$6.95).

This book represents the efforts of Marta Harnecker and a team of Chilean journalists to investigate the operation of people's power in Cuba, both at the grass roots and the national level. Based on extensive interviews and discussions made in 1975, 1976 and 1978, the book "consists largely of taped interviews and recordings of peoples assemblies, union meetings, Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) sessions and peoples power delegates elected under the new constitutions of February, 1976." Also discussed are the work of administrative departments, the armed forces, and top state organs.

While many of the interviews and discussions contained in the book are of great interest, overall the book suffers from the lack of a critical perspective. All problems and difficulties in the development of the Cuban revolutionary process are treated from the perspective of how they are being successfully handled and overcome, without sufficient attention to the objective contradictions and structural

problems inherent in the socialist transition period. Thus, for instance, there is no indication in the book of the kind of factors which would have given rise to the recent phenomenon of the "Cuban boat people" and the exodus to the United States. Likewise the ideological question of overcoming racism, sexism and the oppression of gays is not discussed.

These criticisms must be seen in perspective, however. Harnecker says at the outset that this is not a "theoretical book." Instead, it is intended to show "how the Cuban people live their revolution," in their own words. In that respect it is largely successful.

Principles of Political Economy

by Kozo Uno, Humanities Press,

1981. \$50.00

Japan has a strong Marxist theoretical tradition which dates back to the 1920s, although since the 1930s that tradition has been divided among several contending schools of thought. Among the most developed works of Japanese Marxism have been several important and influential studies of the political economy of capitalism. Until now, most of this work was inaccessible to English language audiences. Now an important text by Kozo Uno, formerly Professor of Political Economy at Tokyo University, first published in Japanese in 1964, is available in English.

Subtitled a "theory of a purely capitalist society," the book seeks to distinguish those elements of capitalism which are essential to it as a mode of production, from those features which are simply expressions of one of its particular stages of development. In discussing "pure capitalism" Uno divides the book into three sections, discussing in turn circulation, production and distribution. Uno's Marxism cannot be considered entirely orthodox; in particular he has a number of criticisms of *Capital*, perhaps most importantly, his opinion that the labor theory of value holds true only for capitalist societies rather than all societies in general.

To the English language edition the translator, Thomas T. Sekine, has appended an essay on "Uno's Dialectic of Capital," and a glossary of technical terms.

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to make sure we got the point, the Editorial Board reversed an earlier decision to print a letter from one of the authors critiquing their analysis of the nature of fascism.

We think that *Line of March* has in recent months moved towards a dangerously sectarian approach to struggle. We were at first honestly surprised at this, given the quality of the theoretical work on which they have so far staked their reputation. But, as three individuals at least, we have had this flung in our faces. This can only have a negative effect on the further development of the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend, unless it is corrected in short order. We earnestly hope that the leaders of the rectification movement will be willing to engage in a little more rectification, and respond to our criticism in a forthright and principled manner.