The Guardian staff view of a complicated political struggle

The Guardian, Silber and the clubs

As an extremely complicated political struggle erupted in the Guardian, Silber and the clubs in late 1977 and spring 1979. One outcome of the struggle was the dissolution of the Guardian in late 1979. Another was the dissolution of the Guardian Club of the Trotskyist Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs (NLMC), under Silber's direction, in March 1979. The purpose of this special issue of the Guardian is to sum up this struggle for the benefit of our members and other friends, particularly since many of the events of this situation have been ventilated for months throughout the Marxist-Leninist movement by Silber and the NLMC.

These accounts, in part, have depicted the Guardian as a revisionist newspaper and its staff as anti-Marxist, sectarian, homophobic, petty-bourgeois, backward, and racist. These charges are the most slanderous attacks ever directed at the paper.

This account should be read as the first of two parts. The second article, which will be published in the Guardian itself in a few weeks, will bring the Guardian's account of the party-building struggle up to date on the basis of several months of internal discussion and discussion. A number of political differences involved in the recent struggle will be explored more fully in the second part.

The Guardian's account of the political and organizational reality of the struggle and the events is the product of a thorough-going analysis of the major themes of the material by Silber. The Guardian's account of the political and organizational reality of the struggle is the product of a thorough-going analysis of the major themes of the material by Silber. The Guardian's account of the political and organizational reality of the struggle is the product of a thorough-going analysis of the major themes of the material by Silber. The Guardian's account of the political and organizational reality of the struggle is the product of a thorough-going analysis of the major themes of the material by Silber.

This Guardian Special is available to readers on request and copies will also be sent to various party-building groups and selected left organizations and individuals.

Our intention here is not to reply in kind to the sectarian charges against the Guardian but to set the record straight and to address some of the issues raised by this struggle which may be of use to the left in general and the party-building movement in particular.

The major issues around which the Guardian was in the beginning stages of developing this special issue were the problem of a new party, the crisis in the Guardian Club, the question of the Guardian's role as a forum for discussion, and the need to break out and just now start to return to this.

The essence of the debate between the Guardian and Silber had to do with the question of the Guardian Club, a small organization the Guardian formed in a half-dozen cities in late 1977. The Guardian viewed the purpose of the Clubs as a limited expression of the Guardian's independent Marxist-Leninist political line. The Clubs were intended to perform Guardian support work, engage in unified study, participate in some mass work and to play—at least in the beginning stages—a leading role in the party-building movement.

The first year of the Clubs was experimental, to determine whether the Guardian could successfully form such a limited organization. In the following years, the Clubs were to develop according to objective and subjective conditions to be assessed each step of the way. All that was absolutely necessary was that the Guardian develop a limited political formation aligned with the Guardian's political views could play a constructive role both for the Guardian and for the left and party-building movement.

Although initially appearing to be in agreement with the purpose of the Clubs—so much so that the Guardian's elected Grouping Committee (CC) named his chairmen of the Clubs—Silber's views about the future of the Clubs changed dramatically. In a letter sent last year seeking permission to limit to limited expressions of the Guardian's political line, Silber developed the idea that they should become a nationwide party-building organization politically dedicated almost exclusively to the task of establishing the Guardian as the general theoretical base for a new movement and reconstituting a Communist Party.

The heart of this concept is a party-building strategy based on the political isolation of a large number of Marxist-Leninists, not bound to accountable or organizational disciplines, who would define the "correct" political line for the movement, and use agitationist methods. The major changes in the political line of the Guardian Clubs have been introduced by the inner circle, which Silber says was exclusively his movement and reconstituting a Communist Party.

The Guardian is committed to making a contribution to building a new party by showing the Guardian's political views could play a constructive role both for the Guardian and for the left and party-building movement. It is also committed to making the Guardian's political views could play a constructive role both for the Guardian and for the left and party-building movement. It is also committed to making the Guardian's political views could play a constructive role both for the Guardian and for the left and party-building movement. It is also committed to making the Guardian's political views could play a constructive role both for the Guardian and for the left and party-building movement.

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The premise adherence to a particular strategy before entering into full action would mean to account the concrete realities of the party-building movement and objective and subjective conditions would come to the principal tasks of forming the new party. Guardian Clubs as limited expressions of the Guardian's political line would be rechanneled to the process of building a party out of the movement as a whole.

The Guardian's attempt to force the Guardian to change the nature of the Clubs into a specific party-building organization would, in the Guardian's opinion, have negative consequences, particularly because of the influence of such an organization on other left organizations.

Silber ultimately judged the Guardian as a Marxist-Leninist entity on the basis of whether or not the Guardian Clubs would be permitted to take more direct action in the direction demanded. This helps explain the bitter attacks on the Guardian Club as being inspired by Silber and by the NLMC's political line.

Another major reason the conflict between Silber and the Guardian became so intense was because Silber himself went through a number of pervasive ideological transformations. One change was that Silber no longer openly revealed his comrades to the Guardian. In several years, it was impossible to know with any certainty what his relationship to the movement was.

Silber has lately sought to depict the struggle as being between himself and Guardian editor Jack A. Smith, with whom Silber functioned as the paper's co-leader from 1973 to 1977. This vision is completely incorrect. A great many Guardian staff people played a significant role in the struggle with Silber, and the overwhelming majority was united and active in opposition to Silber's line. It was not a struggle between the paper's two elected leaders, as Silber alleges, but a struggle between a militant core of former associates in the Guardian Club and the Guardian staff over the question of whether and how to proceed in the party-building process. Far from being part of the struggle, the Guardian staff collectively led the struggle.

Silber's line eliminates any meaning or effect of the Guardian clubs as a possible source for contributing to the development of a new party. Most of these fine changes took place while Silber was chairperson of Guardian Clubs from September 1977 to May 1978, and we now know that Silber discussed changing the Guardian Club into a limited expression of the party-building movement, but he never revealed them to his comrades until last September. Only after the Guardian—with Silber's full participation and endorsement—put its view forward on the state of the party-building movement in July 1978 did he publicly disclose his opposition to these views and his own expressed earlier position on the need to look toward some serious attempt to criticize his previous line (which he now implies he has held) or the deceptive form of his struggle.

And even when Silber finally expressed his desire to return to the Guardian as a party-building organization he continued until the lust of that notion of "leading the center" as a solution, which had been so attractive back. Soon after the Club network was reformed and as the Club network with Silber at the head, the Guardian staff found the same strength of the Guardian assumed—but never knew for certain—he was advocating all along but which the club networkorses.

In tracing the history of the Guardian Club with Silber, we should return very briefly to the early 1970s and the "new communist movement," the final phase of the antirevisionist movement before it collapsed into degeneration. The Guardian was very active in this period in advocating the establishment of a "new Communist League" as opposed to the Communist Party of the USA and again, however, the Guardian was hamstrung because it was "only a newspaper" with no "organizational backing." "Who have you won to your line?" was a question not infrequently posed if the paper called itself that. There were no serious questions about degeneration.

Ultimately, several organizations announced themselves "vanguard parties" in the mid-1970s and a major section of the antirevisionist movement committed suicide, as "the demarcation theory." This movement itself most clearly in its ideological adoption of China's "three world theory" and the thesis that the Soviet Union, not U.S. imperialism, is the real enemy to the whole planet. The Guardian itself began to develop a critique against these new elements in China and the USA, which was not unimportant but was no longer considered itself part of what was historically known as the "new communist movement." But just as the antirevisionist movement was response in the degeneration of the Communist League, an antirevisionist movement was born.

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From the beginning, [Club] structures were organized, the Guardian CC did a foolish thing. It basically entrusted the entire project to Silber and turned its attention elsewhere.

"When [Guardian Clubs] structures were organized, the Guardian CC did a foolish thing. It basically entrusted the entire project to Silber and turned its attention elsewhere."
Siber wrote the first draft for this discussion. He began by noting that the Guardian’s decision not to join the OC. By now Siber wacaciously against joining the formation of the National Front, a group that he believed had not respected the importance of political differences within the antiterrorist, antigovernment movement.

In discussions, the staff accepted some additions to the paper and from a number of other staff members. The staff’s discussion focused on the need to maintain the journal’s integrity, especially as it related to the West German government.

July 1978

In a key section, the paper, entitled “The State of the Party-Building Movement,” stated: “We will proceed with our own organization—July 1978.” Siber had written: “We propose to consolidate the Guardian trend on the basis of the political line summed up by the Guardian and as a result of the political line expressed, principally through the Guardian Club.”

Finally, there was proof positive that there was “no big split” as the rumors had said. That Siber; the Guardian had written in a letter to the OCIC group before criticisms and suggestions were incorporated from the Club.

The Guardian criticized the OCIC for failing to “provide us” with a political line. This would be considered by some as a thing, since it would sharpen the ideological struggle within the movement. But the staff had no way of knowing what the Club was up to in terms that Siber would soon perform a complete flip-flop, join the Clubs and take leadership of their struggle to change a position taken before the Clubs were formed.

Siber was in tight touch with the Clubs and had taken numerous trips to visit with the Club network and engaged in lengthy discussions with Club leaders about the future of the Club system for a year. Yet he did not express one single word about the course of his discussion on the party-building paper that the Clubs would be anything but pleased by the paper. Siber had written: “The new Guardian” had relied on Siber to give the Guardian the benefit of the Club view.

Actually, the little response heard from the Clubs in the first six weeks after they received the document was basically negative. During this time the Club Subcommittee began a series of meetings to discuss how to proceed with building, expanding and consolidating the Clubs as an organizational expression of the Guardian’s line on the situation.

Recognizing that a number of problems that emerged during the first meeting to face the Guardian’s organizational inexperience and inadequate leadership from the center, the Subcommittee developed a plan and recommended that 1979 become “the year of developing and deepening the Clubs.”

The Guardian Club was then given 39 points of unity principles, a full-time organ to deal with the Clubs and the Clubs into a serious national organization, gradually but steadily until we have the terms of the Guardian trend within the party-building movementясь adopt significant concrete form.

During the first two meetings of the subcommittee, some Club members might have been surprised that no one had mentioned that “nobody has the right to move this far with us.” But the Guardian believed the major conflict of Club members was to move to a political line with the Guardian on the issues and were willing to take some time to develop the necessary level of political advancement. Siber raised no reservations during these discussions.

August 1978

The last year Siber was asked to draft up a first summary draft, “Proposal on the Future of the Guardian Clubs” on the basis of the discussions. The papers, the subcommittee discussed the draft and then submit the document to the staff for discussion. In this case, the document was also presented to the Guardian’s views on the OCIC or any other political group. Siber was encouraged to try, with the help of the Club members, to build an organization around the Guardian that would help advance our Guardian trend within the independent party-building movement to fight right opposition within the movement and against the party-building movement the Guardian represented a trend distinct from the OCIC on the basis of these points. He accused that a great majority of the people came into being a sectarian and hegemonic view of the party-building document except the original criticism of the errors of the OCIC.

In his very first sentence, Siber put forward a view of the OCIC that contradicted the position the Guardian held for a year and a half with no objection from him. “The underlying assumption of the original conception of the Guardian Clubs was that in the present period the main task before the party-building movement was to liquidate the political task—namely the task of rectifying the general line of the communist movement in the U.S. and formulating the essential features of a revolutionary general line that could unite U.S. Marxist-Leninist organizations in organic form. While this is a part of the formation of the OCIC, it had nothing to do with the ‘original conception’ of the Guardian Clubs. In a reply to Siber’s book, Smith wrote to the Club subcommittee: ‘My impression was that the underlying assumption of the original conception of the Guardian Clubs was to build an organization around the Guardian which would help advance our Guardian trend within the independent party-building movement to fight right opposition within the movement and against the party-building movement the Guardian represented a trend distinct from the OCIC on the basis of these points. He accused that a great majority whose line didn’t change that year of being sectarian and hegemonic, and he proposed eliminating everything from the political character of the Guardian except the original criticism of the errors of the OCIC.”

In September 1978

At no time did Siber engage in any struggle against the Guardian’s plan for building such a movement until September 1978 when he launched charges of sectarianism and “hegemonism” in a manner and situation harmful to the Club.

He confined his broadside largely to the “impediments” of “ideology” and claimed that he believed shared some assumptions with the “party-building movement.” However, his very OCIC-PWOC proposals in particular led the Guardian in criticizing. While it is correct to draw a parallel with the Catalan and Berne positions, Siber did so in a way or distorting the real developments involved and to raise unsupportable charges.

It became clear at this point that Siber’s principal line was the OCIC building line, while the critique of other leading staff members centered largely on the OCIC’s political line. Consequently, it is a question of questions about the OCIC’s insistence that the main task of the Guardian subcommittee before the Guardian in this context was its structure and its position on international line which correctly identified U.S. imperialism as the principle trend of the class struggle, and not mention Soviet hegemonism as a secondary consideration.

By identifying these political errors and giving them added weight by not joining the OCIC at the time, and by continuing to build on the Guardian Plans against an anti-communist line, the party-building movement. The Guardian made quite clear in its original paper on the “State of the Party-Building Movement,” published in the paper in October that it did not consider its differences with the OCIC to be consolidated and looked forward to a clearer definition of unity with the OCIC and all groups in the movement as the necessary stage in the work of the Guardian.

It was the paper’s view that the OCIC’s political errors were best addressed not now instead of more political line. Our objective was to win the Guardian over to a correct political line to the principle of unity to which they adhered and on the basis of an analysis of both documents the Guardian concluded that the OCIC’s line placed it on the right of the spectrum within the movement. The Guardian also was unable to view these political contradictions as unimportant.

Far from seeking a permanent division in our movement, the Guardian believed that the objective of raising sharp questions around political line was to more effectively identify our basic split and based our essential split once lines were consolidated in higher organizational form.

Siber’s position, or the position of the Guardian being “sectarian and hegemonic” in relation to some of the political line criticals but the real question was not to have the same political line. The Guardian believed political line determines everything. Therefore, the Guardian has not yet come to a developed position on political line. This is why the Guardian’s critique of the PWOC-OCIC party-building position is so vitally important.

October 1978

The Guardian staff conducted two prolonged meetings. Sept. 25 and Oct. 2 last year to discuss some criticisms of “the State of the Party-Building Movement” paper, which mainly came from Club members but primarily to struggle with Siber and the Guardian. The Guardian believed that the whole Club, did not clear or explicit to staff members. The purpose of the paper was to offer an amendment to the original Guardian. The whole of the key items under discussion during these meetings was a position paper from two members of the Bay Area Club, which, among other things, thoroughly reviewed the Guardian’s position in this matter and contended that the essence of the actual process of forging the party involves creating a leading core cadre of leaders which must transcend any existing organizational form. This line was not taken up by the Guardian. So in the end they were made up of individual Marxists—Leninists who are now in a variety of organizations or trends within the genuine M-L tendency—which were occupying the underground movement. Continued on next page
must absolutely be placed in the center of our vision of the forging the party. Otherwise, party-building becomes the primary challenge to strengthen the leading core by developing their num-
bers and influence.

The essentially the NLLC line today. Even after he revealed his opposition to the Guardian's line, however, the de facto "leading center" of the Marxist-Leninist was not relevant to discussion and was not the center of the party's ideological and organiza-

tional debate. A few months earlier, it was subsequently learned, Silber "as an independent of the party," was also in basic agreement with the proposal.

Thus, given the state of staff discussions it was difficult to comprehend exactly what Silber was putting forward. Some errors were made in rebuff-
ing Silber's proposal, not only because of the very sad state of his position but also because of the clearly inaccurate information. Similarly, the Guardian erred in this period in dealing with some Criticizm beca-

use this was an internal party discussion and primarily an effort to refute Silber. Because of this logic, the party's perception of Silber as a perceived threat to the Guardian's political integrity and did not give sufficient attention to View which it seemed to lend support to.

Silber's struggle was very complex at this point because it was being carried out on three different levels. On the one hand, the Guardian, the staff saw itself caught in a political stalemate. In demanding that the Guardian retract its paper, Silber was also placing the party under the impression that the Guardian was being told to withdraw a position developed before the Silber proposal. This is why the Guardian had to be put on the defensive and a new approach still agreed. The paper's right to develop its own line was constructed from a perspective that had been maintained when the Guardian proposed that its position would be the "staff only," not the whole of the party. The party was confused. It then appeared certain Silber's group was de-

manding a voice in the political line and direction of the party.

Silber and leading Club members were argu-


ing on the level of party-building and how the Guardian's minimal efforts to develop an organizational strategy and the Guardian's minimal efforts to develop an organization as the first step toward a party- building strategy and the strategy of the party.

Both parties have considerable resources, but the enterprise and capacity to make a major impact, in a very broad sense, and the organization and direction of the party.

By the above club member, there was little hope for the future of useful work that had developed between Silber and the Guardi-


an, the extent to which the Guardian staff sought to protect its political decision-making ability from a takeover bid led by Silber and much more important, the Guardian's stance on the current political position of the party and the Club-building movement.

During the staff discussions, instead Silber's pre-


sentations were made very clear. Silber did not think seriously exist, such as allega-


tions that the Guardian and the Club were into party-building policies and even possibly the party itself, with no consideration being given to the actual issues at hand. Silber believed that the Guardian never entertained the idea of building a party but did not possess the experience and skills to do so. The party needed to organize an adjusted political period and did make a difference in the party's chances. The Silber proposal was also very much an offshoot of the fact that was not on the foreseeable agenda and seemed hardly likely to gain any time any momentum. Had Silber launched a seri-


sous discussion in the staff about the question of proposing a broader political agenda, the views would have received a hearing.

Silber's amendment to the "State of the Party-Building" report noted that the party's commitment of party-building policies has been undermined by the Club's failure to address the problem of building a party that had been raised in the past, to my knowledge. That the strengthening of Guardian Clubs into a serious expression of the Guardian political line would advance Guardian strategy. And so we would stop the ideological debate that is being referred to as a strategy to concretely win a number of Marxist-Leninists to our line and form an organizational commit-


to "the staff only" position in the next issue of the club, the Guardian, two months later than originally intended. It was "guaranteed" by Silber unexpectedly submitted his resignation to the Guardian. In the Guardian's line of argument is the analysis of the Guardian's view on NMLN's "leading center" strategy, based on its full understanding of the concept, will be published in our new document on the party-building move-


tment. As soon as the issue was decided in these terms, Silber's new amendment to the Staff re-


demanded to put the staff only position in the next issue of the Guardian, two months later. Silber was publicly advocating the "leading center" idea. This was not particularly surprising because the Guardian is elaborating upon his resignation makes the Guardian's "trend" of the unifying function of the current political situation and the ability of the party's political line. "Political trends" —in the Guardian's mean-


ing‖ different lines expressed in rather broad and general terms—do not necessarily express the views of the party. Trends develop, trends split, trends merge, new trends form. Our struggle with the OCC may be resolved in a relatively brief period or it may take longer.

Many organizational forms developed in the party, for example, were formed by full democratic centralism; limited political organizations united around a distinct political line; the party's political line; the entire form of organizational discipline, study groups, regional associations, assembly line, etc. (the "leading center" and so on).

The main purpose of this entire process of party-building activity was to form the single party when the political struggle was being carried out. However, these struggles to bypass this stage, is to set in motion the party-building activity in the party organization, so many contradictions that it’s hard to see how it could hold together for long without splitting. This is why the concept of "leading center" was formed by a group of leading Marxist-Leninists subdivi-
sing and developing the "leading center line" in opposition to the party organization, and these organizational concepts. The concept of leading center is not mentioned in Silber's paper, he acknowledged this many of the controversy that he was attributing to the Guardian. At the bottom of the page, he was burdened with this because of "implications." he perceived, not from any concrete deeds by the
Guadiana despairst the distorted nature of his arguments," Smith replied, "when he asks per- mission to 'anticipate one response' to his in- formationally 'inadequate response' to the military in- tervention in the party-building movement. Namely, he has already interviewed me on the subject of the parties' attitude toward the situation that has led to the full blown democratic centralist preparatory committee for elections to be held by the Guardiaon. This is the basic question, and it is the one that he has been回避astly proposing as a way of avoiding the issues at hand."

What kind of Marxist argument is this when Silber frankly acknowledges that "none of what I am saying has anything to do with the party-building movement of the Guardian?" He then tries to justify this by saying that in his opinion the "alternative position is to make a claim on this process of developing a party in anticipation of the time when the Guardia's influence wanes", which trends will determine not only the correct leading of the new party, but --here and in other organizational questions mentioned earlier--the allocation of positions and designation of responsibilities to the Central Committee of the party.

Serious said that "organizational strength will determine whether a line is correct or not" and Smith asked, "The Guardian has never hinted at any "organizational strength" on the Central Committee's position on a Central Committee is a low political legis-

In conclusion, the subterfuge toSilber declared, "Silber is committing an elaborate fallacy. He has made many, many charges but has pro
duced very little substantiation aside from dis
taturation of cheap and second-hand arguments. He's trying to make it appear his defeat in his charge of Sieber's leadership in the party-building movement, an entity for which he appears to substitute himself. He has slandered the Guardian for claiming that Silber's suggestion that the party-building movement not implement trade union activities is an additional support to the barbary. On another level, I think the Guardian's drift and indulgence of the Guardian newspaper and for his fellow writers.

"It will take years to form the limited political organization we are talking about. We may see
Guanid ona's vigorous leadership in the party-building movement. We may not succeed, but there is no shame in that. At least we will have used the organization that is the base of our movement to build an organization--""

By November, position papers from many in the party-building movement had been very active in organizing opposition to the Guardian document. Within the next few days, many prominent members of the National Committee met across the country to attend other Council meetings as some feared that the Guardian was attempting to "impose" a "new" line on the party.""

When the Central Committee met with the CC, the Guardian announced it was dissolving the "old" CC and stating that they were ready to build a new CC. They had reached the point of view that the separation of the Guardian line from the CC now seemed to be almost complete, and they wanted to make sure that the CC was ready to resist and work out a new party-building movement."

Instead, reality dictates that due to political, organizational and financial problems the Guardians now face, the Guardian line would be more likely to form a new organization than to continue to contribute to the growth of the party. This decision was made by the party-building movement in accordance with the line of the CC."

"When we first officially announced our plans to organize a new Guardian line, we had the goal of building a limited political organization around the Guardian political line (the 29 points) that would continue to develop and promote this line within the party-building movement. Due to a variety of factors (many of which have been made known in the last two Guardian Club Newsletters), Guardian Clubs have developed in a way contrary to the Guardian line."

"For those of us who are interested in what the Guardian line means to us, and in the Guardian line being the base of our party-building movement would continue to exist. At issue, in our view, are the terms of separation. Should the Guardian and the National Committee joint resolution for the Guardian line remain intact or should there be a distance and anxiety about the Guardian line's purpose?"

"When our view, relations should be close and fraternal.""
Would Guardian Clubs develop along the lines originally conceived by the Guardian staff—or would they become a vehicle for Silber’s ‘rectification’ strategy? That was the question.

...building movement only to the extent that it can control it. Frustratingly, it is difficult to assess how much the Guardian was willing to do or could have done to build a movement, as it is not clear how much control the Guardian actually had over its own activities. It was certainly not part of the Guardian’s role to control the movement, but it remains unclear how much influence the Guardian had over the movement’s direction and strategy.

One possible explanation for the Guardian’s failure to build a movement could be its lack of resources and the limited support it received from the broader left-wing movement. The Guardian was a small organization with limited financial resources, and it was often difficult to find support from other organizations and individuals who were also working to build a movement. This lack of support and resources may have contributed to the Guardian’s failure to build a movement.

In conclusion, the Guardian’s failure to build a movement was a complex and multifaceted issue. It was influenced by a variety of factors, including the Guardian’s internal politics, its relationship with other organizations, the broader left-wing movement, and the broader social and political context of the time. It is important to understand the Guardian’s failure in order to learn from it and to build a more effective movement in the future.