

Our Contributions to Building MLM Websites in the U.S.

A Rough Partial Sketch Including the Role of the Single Spark Collective

(Feb. 2, 2011)

(Edited for posting, Dec. 5, 2024)

Last evening I had a conversation with my friend Dave Pugh about a whole range of topics, and one of the things discussed was how we can improve the MLM websites we work on or support. And, in passing, the topic of the Single Spark Collective and its role in helping to create the impetus that led to these various websites came up. I was somewhat startled to find that though Single Spark is still fairly recent history (it existed from 2006 to 2008), its contributions in this area have already been forgotten, and its very purpose is still misunderstood and misrepresented. Indeed, Dave seemed not to understand that *his own* very important initiative in establishing the Frontlines of Revolutionary Struggle (FRS) website actually had its roots in the work done by Single Spark!

So here is a beginning rough sketch of the historical development of our contributions to MLM websites and blogs in the U.S. (Corrections, additions, comments and criticisms are of course welcome.) I'm not trying to blow my own horn, but I think I, like others, have played a role in the story.

I set up my own political sites on AOL in the late 1990s, including one devoted to the mass line (and criticism of the RCP in this regard). I took a number of computer courses at City College of San Francisco to learn the programming techniques for doing this, and for improving my websites. (At that time you had to know how to code in HTML to set up websites.) For a while I also had a website on the CCSF Unix public system which promoted revolutionary posters from China, Spain and elsewhere.

Other political sites, such as that of the RCP then started appearing in large numbers. (The rwor.org site was registered in late 2000, and years later moved to revcom.us) But there was as yet nothing like MLMRSG.com, BannedThought.net, FRS, [South Asia Revolution \(SAR\)](http://South Asia Revolution (SAR)), or Kasama.

In October 2002 I set up massline.info and moved the mass line site there from AOL. In June 2003, I also set up the massline.org site for political materials not directly associated with the mass line (including sections for MLM philosophy, political economy, politics, etc.), and moved those sorts of materials there from AOL. I added considerably to the materials on massline.org over the next few years, and also included a few things explicitly designed to promote MLM study, such as a short reading list, a list of revolutionary bookstores, and so forth. And with the later huge help of a friend in England we began the project of scanning and posting all the issues of *Peking Review* from the Mao era.

In May 2006 the tiny Single Spark Collective was formed. Some have viewed SS as an attempt to form the core of a new MLM party, or something of that sort. It was no such thing, and never thought of or presented itself that way. Those of us who formed SS were very dissatisfied with the few existing U.S. organizations that called themselves “Maoist” (the RCP, MIM) or which sort of came out of the Maoist tradition (such as the two FRSOs). We thought actual Maoists should naturally try to *work collectively*; should start to form committees (or collectives) to promote a more genuine MLM perspective; should work toward promoting such a view publicly (including via the Internet); should promote the mass line method of working with the masses; should engage in collective study; should try to connect up with other committees and collectives of the same general sort; should each try to educate and recruit additional people; and should try to engage in mass struggles and bring revolutionary ideas to the masses in the course of them (especially when local committees or cooperating local committees could be established). All of this of course was viewed as one of many initial small steps toward building a new party eventually. But SS never viewed itself as the “core” of any new party or even as a part of such a core. That sort of thing just didn’t enter into our thinking.

Overall SS was not successful in most of these goals, for a number of reasons. Of course there were only 3 people to begin with, and only 4 others were later recruited (though there were several more fairly close friends and associates). But the tiny size was *not* the primary problem. Nor was the fact that we were mostly white males; they need revolutionary collectivity too wherever they can find it. (And we did recruit 2 people of color.) But it turned out that we had less agreement on the few key principles than we thought (such as the nature of the mass line), and a couple of the new people—young students—were brought in way too prematurely. They were not really Maoists nor reasonably well educated in the basics of MLM. Then too, one of our key original people left (probably due at least in part to temporary mental illness).

Single Spark did engage in some limited collective study (especially around the issues of Stalin and Nepal). The 40-page collection of Mao quotes on Stalin that I prepared was one result of this.

However, the main positive result of the collective was the creation of the SS website, which was in full operation by the fall of 2006. Setting this up technically was almost entirely the work of Patrick (who had learned how to run websites using newer methods, such as PHP). As far as the posting went, it was mostly done by me and Patrick, though Matt also made contributions, especially in acquiring materials from Latin America.

This was really a new kind of website, which as far as we knew had not existed before, at least for MLM materials. It especially focused on making available documents from ongoing revolutions in Asia. Patrick and I scanned and posted *The Worker #10* from Nepal, which was not available anywhere else on the Internet. Then I did the same for *The Worker #11* (which was also not available elsewhere). We also posted issues of *People’s March* and other materials from India and Nepal which were difficult to find elsewhere. And we had some documents from the Philippines and other countries as well. In effect, the Single Spark website was one of the first to begin doing what other websites are now more routinely doing, such as BannedThought, MLMRSG, Kasama, SAR, and FRS.

I don't want to exaggerate the importance of SS; it only made a *start* toward doing these sorts of things, and as internal difficulties developed in the Collective it became more erratic in carrying out these functions. But the website did attract attention and a steady (though small) stream of letters from people who were intrigued by and supportive of what we were doing. (In most cases we didn't follow up on these because of our growing internal problems.) Moreover, it promoted the idea in other people of doing similar sorts of things.

BannedThought was itself a direct result of the SS website. There were fears (whether paranoia or not) about how posting materials from certain foreign groups might put SS and its members at risk. So, as a satellite (and independent) website I took it upon myself to set up BannedThought.net (BT) for the more "dangerous" items.

In September 2007 four of the five of us then in SS met with Mike E. and a couple of his friends in Chicago to discuss the possibility of merging our two small groups. Mike did not (and does not) understand the mass line and what it means to have a genuine mass perspective. He demanded that we change the wording of our principles of unity in this regard before he and his friends would merge with us. (I strongly resisted doing this, but was outvoted. See the [Revision Statement](#) and [my later commentary on it](#).) Even after our buckling under in this way, Mike made an unrelated demand that we expel one of our members (based on Mike's own paranoid reasoning). We wouldn't, and so the merger was off. It was apparently only going to happen if Mike always had his way on any point he considered to be important.

(Unfortunately Mike communicated his bizarre paranoia in this case to one of our SS people, where it rose to an even wilder extreme and led to that member's withdrawal from the group. This was a major loss and marked the beginning of the decline of SS even though we did recruit one more person after that.)

Mike had been working on his essay that became the "9 Letters to Comrades" document, and even after our failure to merge groups we made it clear that we were quite happy to post it on SS. (I also offered to post it on my massline.org website.) But Mike did not want it there even as a mirror copy.

In the meanwhile, by around 2004 "blogging" had pretty much become mainstream. This is a simplified form of Internet website that does not require much technical knowledge to run. And there was an explosion of political blogs over the next several years. One of them was the "Red Flag" website run by Mike's son Jed. Besides the stream of mostly off-the-cuff political disputes, blogs like this also began posting some documents of the sort that SS had been doing.

So when Mike finished his "9 Letters" in December 2007, he set up his own blog site to post it, and the discussion around it. This was the first version of his Kasama website, and it also almost immediately began to post the sorts of foreign documents which had been appearing on SS and BT. The SS Collective faltered throughout 2008, formally disbanded in Oct. 2008, and the website completely disappeared in Dec. 2008. So Kasama began to partially fill the void that the collapse of SS opened up (though the big documents were still mostly just being posted on BT, which was always much larger).

In April 2008, Mike and his friends set up the Revolution in South Asia satellite site, and from that point on a lot more documents of the sort that FRS or BT post were made available there (and only sometimes on Kasama as well). But Mike himself focused his work on the Kasama site and needed help to handle the SAR site. This was rather erratic until Dave took over the responsibility. As we know, Mike tried to censor the materials posted on SAR, which had the effect of forcing Dave out. (Mike and Kasama completely failed to understand that Prachanda and his party had abandoned MLM and revolution.)

I believe it was in April 2007 that MLMRSG first set up its website to post original research on MLM topics. But this didn't seem to be the appropriate venue for news articles about revolutionary struggles in South Asia and elsewhere. So after the falling out at SAR, Dave and his closest comrade ("DC") began locating and informing me about large numbers of such articles, at first about the struggles of Adivasis near Lalgah, and then on a growing range of topics, which I then posted on in special sections on BT.

However, this sort of journalistic activity—while admittedly very important—started to become a torrent, and began to take up more and more of my time, interfering with my other projects (mostly other posting, study and writing). And as a consequence I more and more regularly fell behind in getting items posted. Finally, I sort of rebelled!

At that point Dave took the initiative to set up the very valuable FRS website, and his close comrade joined him in seeking out and posting a truly wide range of news articles and documents from around the world, and for several years on a near-daily basis.¹

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At this point we have several important websites to tend and improve. The most important two are probably FRS and BT, but there are several other important ones as well. Moreover, we see the need for many additional materials to be written and/or posted on MLMRSG.com, massline.org, and other websites, including a number of new historical summaries, theoretical documents, studies of the economic crisis, and so forth. So as much progress as we have made (and we should be proud of what we have already accomplished), we strongly feel the need for further efforts, additional advances, and for recruiting more people to help us in these and other tasks.

At the same time we should remember that we have gotten this far with the help and inspiration of others, including the Single Spark Collective while it lasted.

—Scott Harrison

¹ Note added 12/05/24: The Frontlines of Revolutionary Struggle website still exists at RevolutionaryFrontlines.wordpress.com It started in 2010, and was very active for the first 4 years (through 2013), and more sporadic after that. The last posting was in January 2017. Ideally, it should be taken over by younger Maoist revolutionaries and become active again.