

COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA AND AGITATION

Our ability as Marxist-leninists to understand what is propaganda and what is agitation and to correctly develop both in our practice are extremely important in this period. The very creation of our future party hinges upon this. The formulation "propaganda is the chief form of activity in this period" is being used by many forces. Among these forces are the right opportunists of OL and the "left" opportunists of PRRWO/RWL. We uphold that this formulation is correct. The problem has been that the right opportunists as well as the "left" opportunists have in practice liquidated this position. In addition, these groups don't even understand what is propaganda or agitation, nor do they understand what is the relation between the two, neither do they, in practice, make good propaganda or agitation.

WHAT IS PROPAGANDA? WHAT IS AGITATION?

When all these groups speak of propaganda and agitation, they refer to Plekhanov's formulation which Lenin puts forth in *WHAT IS TO BE DONE?* Thus we see in all their publications the famous quote:

"A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people"

What is to be done? Page 82. Foreign Languages Press

Without any concern for the type of ideas to which Plekhanov and Lenin are referring to, and without any preoccupation as to how the propagandist and agitator transmit these ideas, groups like PRRWO have reduced this question to a mere formulation spouted by their cadres at the May Day Coalition as "propaganda is many ideas to the few and agitation is few ideas to the many" and that's it. If we see this from such a mechanical point of view, only the number of ideas involved would matter. From

this point of view, it would be enough to include many topics in a newspaper article or in a leaflet to make it a propaganda piece. Hence, The Call (OL's paper) would be "propaganda" because it deals with many topics: e.g. strikes national liberation struggles, party building, social-imperialism, war, fascism, etc.; and Palante (PRRWO's paper) would be "agitation" because it deals only with purges. But this is an incorrect way of looking at this question. Lenin, as a matter of fact, explains clearly what is propaganda, what is agitation and the relation between both. We are including this long, and hardly known, much less understood and applied, passage from The Tasks of the Russian Social Democrats:

The socialist activities of Russian Social-Democrats consist in spreading by *propaganda* the teachings of scientific socialism, in spreading among the workers a proper understanding of the present social and economic system, its basis and its development, an understanding of the various *classes* in Russian society, of their interrelations, of the struggle between these classes, of the role of the working class in this struggle, of its attitude towards the declining and the developing classes, towards the past and the future of capitalism, an understanding of the historical task of international Social-Democracy and of the Russian working class. Inseparably connected with propaganda is *agitation* among the workers, which naturally comes to the forefront in the present political conditions of Russia and at the present level of development of the masses of workers. Agitation among the workers means that the Social-Democrats take part in all the spontaneous manifestations of the working-class struggle, in all the conflicts between the workers and the capitalists over the working day, wages, working conditions, etc., etc. Our task is to merge our activities with the practical, everyday questions of working-class life, to help the workers understand these questions, to draw the workers' attention to the most important abuses, to help them formulate their demands to the employers more precisely and practically, to develop among the workers consciousness of their solidarity, consciousness of the common interests and common cause of all the Russian workers as a united working class that is part of the international army of the proletariat. To organize study circles among workers, to establish proper and secret connections between them and the central group of Social-Democrats, to publish and distribute working-class literature, to organize the receipt of correspondence from all centres of the working-class movement, to publish agitational leaflets and manifestos and to distribute them, and to train a body of experienced agitators—such, in broad outline, are the manifestations of the socialist activities of Russian Social-Democracy.

And so we must qualify the many ideas in propaganda as "spreading the teachings of scientific socialism", of Marxism-leninism Mao Tse tung thought and qualifying agitation as 1) "taking part in the spontaneous struggles of the masses" and 2) helping the workers to understand the problems they face, giving them political direction in their struggle and promoting class consciousness and proletarian internationalism among them. By so doing, we'll have a clearer and more complete understanding of both concepts. And it is important that we emphasize Lenin's categorical statement that "agitation is inseparably linked to propaganda" Yes, INSEPARABLY. This is why we have consistently criticized the incorrect "ultra-leftist" position of PRRWO that propaganda is not only the chief, but the only form of activity in this period.

Propaganda is understood by a numerically smaller sector of people than is agitation. In order to understand Marxism-leninism Mao Tse tung thought workers need a certain degree of ideological and political development that only through training can be achieved. We can't forget one of the basic teachings that "the socialist consciousness comes to the working class from outside." Thus, due to the complexity of the problems dealt with in propaganda; relations and struggle between classes, the State, imperialism and social-imperialism, the need for the party, the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism, etc., only the most advanced workers are in a position to understand the larger part of that propaganda, the average workers a lesser part and the less advanced workers very little.

Let it be clear that this is in terms of the contents of the propaganda. We have to make this point very clear because many comrades believe that the complexity of propaganda is not only based on its contents but that we also have to add to its complexity by using "refined" language, lots of phrase mongering and twisted syntax. That, comrades, has nothing to do with propaganda. That is pure petty bourgeois windbag attitude. The most revolutionary is not the one that best disguises the contents of his message and makes it more difficult to understand. But on the contrary, those who make the formulation in a clearer and simpler (not simplistic) way. On this question G. Dimitrov points out that:

"Furthermore it must be borne in mind that the masses cannot assimilate our decisions unless we learn to speak a language which they understand. We do not always know how to speak simply, concretely, in images which are familiar and intelligible to the masses. We are still unable to refrain from abstract formulas which we have learnt by rote. As a matter of fact, if you look through our leaflets, newspapers, resolutions and theses, you will find that they are often written in a language and style so heavy that they are difficult for even our party functionaries to understand, let alone the rank-and-file workers."

In the same speech, he adds:

"When writing or speaking, always have in mind the rank-and-file worker who must understand you, must believe in your appeal and be ready to follow you. You must have in mind those for whom you write, to whom you speak."

Georgi Dimitrov. Report to the 7th Congress of the Communist International.

Hence we have to avoid confusing our inability to transmit an idea with the workers' capacity to understand and accept scientific socialism. Let's not blame the workers for our incapacity and the sectarian way in which we write many times. We have to end the "Doctoral thesis" style of writing that is so common in the communist movement in the United States.

Our propaganda in this period, the period of the building of the party, has to be mainly directed to the advanced so that we can win and consolidate them to communism. We want to emphasize that "mainly" does not mean "equally" nor "exclusively". Thus, we have to combat the right deviation in this question which belittles the role of the advanced and the role of propaganda in relation to the advanced (PRRWO - OL) and the "left" deviation which views propaganda as only aimed at the advanced (PRRWO - RWL). The right deviation which is the main danger at this time, is substituting agitation for propaganda and the liquidating the role of the advanced, limiting the work to

economist agitation among the masses. The "left" deviation completely liquidates agitation and the work among the average and less advanced workers and in practice it also liquidates propaganda which cannot exist separated from agitation. Both deviations adversely affect the process of fusion between the communist movement and the working class movement.

"The separation of the working class movement and socialism give rise to weakness and underdevelopment in each: the theories of the socialists, unfused with the workers' struggle, remained nothing more than utopias, good wishes and that had no effect on real life; the working class movement remained petty, fragmented, and did not acquire political significance, was not enlightened by the advanced science of its time."

Lenin. A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social Democracy. Page 264. Complete Works.

FUSION, MAIN DANGER

There have been a lot of arguing back and forth, but very little analyses in relation to what is the level of fusion between the communist movement and the working class movement in the U.S. today. Some say that it's just beginning while PRRWO maintains that it's highly advanced. However, organizations put forth the basis for their position. OL, as always, is ready to build the party now. In our understanding, the absence of a communist party in the U.S. is an undeniable proof of the low level of fusion between both movements. Within the working class movement the influence of the communist movement is virtually non-existent. Even revisionists and right opportunists with all their tailing behind the masses have no real influence in the working class movement. That is why within the working class reformism and not right opportunism or revisionism is the main danger. In our work within the working class movement we must direct our main blow against the labor aristocracy. Within this movement those that have real influence are Meany, Fitzsimmons, Gotbaum, Leon Davis, etc. and not the OL and not to mention "ultra-leftists" such as PRRWO and RWL, which really don't exist for the working class. This does not deny the fact that in some areas of the country or in a particular industrial sector or service area a revisionist or Menshevik organization may have some limited influence including being in the leadership of certain struggles. In those particular cases, these organizations, together with the labor aristocracy are the target of our main blow.

This is not to say that we do not recognize the work being done in the working class movement by Marxist-leninist organizations, Marxist-Leninist collectives and Marxist-leninist individuals, which is geared to fuse these two great movements. The first and the biggest step in this fusion is concretized with the building of the party. That is why we defend as correct the formulation that all our work must be seen in the context of party building. All our activities must be seen within the context of how

they will aid in accelerating this process. Whoever deviates even a little, even for a moment is objectively affecting and sacrificing what is in the best interests of the working class. Lenin points out:

Our principal and fundamental task is to facilitate the political development and the political organization of the working class. Those who push this task into the background, who refuse to subordinate to it all the special tasks and particular methods of struggle, are following a false path and causing serious harm to the movement. And it is being pushed into the background, firstly, by those who call upon revolutionaries to employ only the forces of isolated conspiratorial circles cut off from the working-class movement in the struggle against the government. It is being pushed into the background, secondly, by those who restrict the content and scope of political propaganda, agitation, and organization; who think it fit and proper to treat the workers to "politics" only at exceptional moments in their lives, only on festive occasions; who too sullenly substitute demands for partial concessions from the autocracy for the political struggle against the autocracy; and who do not go to sufficient lengths to ensure that these demands for partial concessions are raised to the status of a systematic, ineluctable struggle of a revolutionary, working-class party against the autocracy.

Lenin. Collected Works, Vol. 4, Pg. 369.

It would do well to point out that while we hold that all our work must be seen in the context of our central task, which is party building, this quite different thing that to say "our principal and only task is to build the party" (PRRWO). The first position recognizes that because our principal and fundamental task is to build the party, all our work must be seen as a function of and in the service of this task. The second position is purely "left" infantile, petty bourgeois idealism, which results in the liquidation of all the practical activities of communists.

The right opportunists make economist agitation, crawling behind the masses, their main task. They see the party as an outgrowth of the mass movement. This is why OL after 2 or 3 years of purely economist practice can say that "the objective and subjective conditions for the building of the party already exist."

Right opportunists, in an attempt to limit the activity of the masses to mere economic struggles are in practice sacrificing the independence of the working class and converting it into a mere appendage of the labor aristocracy and liberal politicians, and consequently of the bourgeoisie.

Lenin's teaching:

"It is the task of the Social-Democrats, by organizing the workers, by conducting propaganda and agitation among them, to turn their spontaneous struggle against their oppressors into the struggle of the whole class, into the struggle of a definite political party for definite political and socialist ideals. This is something that cannot be achieved by local activity alone."

Lenin. Collected Works, Vol. 4, Pg. 216.

is distorted by the OL in order to justify their purely economist agitation among the masses and their leaving "propaganda" for certain occasions and certain places

The "left" opportunists are not an alternative but a direct complement to the right opportunists. Under the pretext of winning the advanced which for them is a rare animal nowhere to be found, these opportunists do not carry any type of propaganda or agitation among the masses.

Sticking purely to the letter of Marxism-Leninism without taking into account the conditions under which one or another position was put forward and without bothering about Stalin's teachings to do "concrete analysis of concrete conditions", "Everything depends on on place, time and conditions", PRRWO-RWL allege that in this period no agitation can be directed at the masses; none is there any need for "organic contact" between the communist movement and the working class movement. For them propaganda is to be aimed only at the advanced, no work need be done with the intermediate of the less advanced until after the party is formed. They base their position in that Stalin says that in the first period:

"...the period of the formation of the vanguard (i.e. the party) of the proletariat, the period of mustering the Party's cadres. In this period the Party was weak it had a programme and general principles of tactics, but as a party of mass action it was weak. He adds: "The principal task of communism in Russia in that period was to recruit into the Party the best elements of the working class, those who were most active and most devoted to the cause of the proletariat: to form the ranks of the proletarian party and to put it firmly on its feet." Lenin adds "to win the vanguard of the proletariat". "propaganda is the chief form of activity in this period" Stalin, "The Party Before and After the Taking of Power", Collected Works, Vol. 5.

So based on what are the principal aspects of the first period - concentrate on ourselves, win the advanced, propaganda the chief form of activity, PRRWO-RWL liquidate the other aspects - pay attention to the masses, influence and upgrade the intermediate and less advanced and carry out agitation. The way in which these "left" opportunists see the whole process is mechanical and one-sided. They don't see stages dialectically, in the process of development, but as static and lifeless; "first this, and when we're finished, then the other" is their logic. They hold that there can be no agitation at all until there is a party, that no organic contact with the masses can be had until the second period, that the advanced are won exclusively through propaganda, etc. Let's see what Marxism-Leninism says about this.

IT'S FALSE THAT AGITATION MUST WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE PARTY IS BUILT

Stalin points out in the History of CPSU(B) that:

"Lenin put before the League of Struggle the task of forming closer connections with the mass working-class movement and of giving it political leadership. Lenin proposed to pass from the propaganda of Marxism among the few politically advanced workers who gathered in the propaganda circles to political agitation among the broad masses of the working class on issues of the day. This

turn towards mass agitation was of profound importance for the subsequent development of the working-class movement in Russia." History of the CPSU(B), Pages 16-17.

That was in 1895, well before the Party was built. So although the chief form of activity was propaganda, the Russian Marxists also consistently carried out agitation. Further, referring to the need for communist participation in the spontaneous mass struggles, that they give direction and communist leadership, Lenin points out:

"Calls for action, not in the general, but in the concrete sense of the term, can be made only at the place of action only those who themselves go into action, and do so immediately, can sound such calls."

Lenin. What is to be done? Page 88, Foreign Languages Press (Peking) ..

Despite this, PRRWO calls any participation in the spontaneous mass struggle "economism" and "bowing to spontaneity" and claims that there is no need for organic contact between the communist movement and the working class movement at this time. Discussing the role of a communist newspaper, Lenin points out:

"The average worker will not understand some of the articles in a newspaper that aims to be the organ of the Party, he will not be able to get a full grasp of an intricate theoretical or practical problem. This does not at all mean that the newspaper must lower itself to the level of the mass of its readers. The newspaper, on the contrary, must raise their level and help promote advanced workers from the middle stratum of workers. Such workers, absorbed by local practical work and interested mainly in the events of the working-class movement and the immediate problems of agitation, should connect their very act with thoughts of the entire Russian working-class movement, its historical task, and the ultimate goal of socialism, so that the newspaper, the mass of whose readers are average workers, must connect socialism and the political struggle with every local and narrow question." Lenin, Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy. Vol 4. LCW

Clearly seeing that a newspaper directed only at the advanced would leave the lower strata devoid of propaganda and agitation, Lenin adds:

Lastly, behind the stratum of average workers comes the mass that constitutes the lower strata of the proletariat. It is quite possible that a socialist newspaper will be completely or well-nigh incomprehensible to them (even in Western Europe the number of Social-Democratic voters is much larger than the number of readers of Social-Democratic newspapers), but it would be absurd to conclude from this that the newspaper of the Social-Democrats should adapt itself to the lowest possible level of the workers. The only thing that follows from this is that different forms of agitation and propaganda must be brought to bear on these strata—pamphlets written in more popular language, oral agitation, and chiefly—leaflets on local events. The Social-Democrats should not confine themselves even to this; it is quite possible that the first steps towards arousing the consciousness of the lower strata of the workers will have to take the form of legal educational activities.

Lenin. Ibid

PROPAGANDA IS THE CHIEF FORM OF ACTIVITY

We reaffirm the correctness of the formulation that propaganda is the chief form of activity in this period. It is through propaganda that we can advance the process of uniting Marxist-Leninists (which is primary) and win and consolidate the advanced to communism (the secondary task in relation to the first, but which is carried out simultaneously with it.) This is so as long as we combine our propaganda with agitation, as long as we don't limit all propaganda only to the advanced and participate actively, providing direction and communist leadership in the spontaneous mass struggles. We concentrate on the advanced workers, not because we have disdain or underrate the less advanced, but because we know that only by winning the leaders of the class to our side, those who in every instance determine the character of the working class movement, can we eventually unite the class and lead in an organized manner to the seizure of power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the construction of socialism. The teachings of Lenin are essential in this respect in order to better understand - Why the Advanced? and Why propaganda? :

Hence, those who accuse the Russian Social-Democrats of being narrow-minded, of trying to ignore the mass of the labouring population for the sake of the factory workers, are profoundly mistaken. On the contrary, agitation among the advanced sections of the proletariat is the surest and the only way to rouse (as the movement expands) the entire Russian proletariat. The dissemination of socialism and of the idea of the class struggle among the urban workers will inevitably cause these ideas to flow in the smaller and more scattered channels. This requires that these ideas take deeper root among the better prepared elements and spread throughout the vanguard of the Russian working-class movement and of the Russian revolution.

Lenin. Collected Works, Vol. 2, Pg. 331.

Propaganda, like agitation, takes many different forms. The newspaper, leaflets, forums, conferences, study circles (chief form used to consolidate advanced elements), discussion of its paper, etc. are the forms we use most. We also consider important the propaganda value of conversations with advanced workers, contacts, neighbors, etc. Finally, so far as propaganda is concerned, we want to point out the publication and distribution of Marxist-Leninist works.

In finishing this first article on agitation and propaganda, we see the need to further study and deepen our understanding of this question, and thus improve our agitation and propaganda in practice. Lastly, we should point out another incorrect tendency that exists within the communist movement regarding the relationship between propaganda and agitation. That is the tendency to see agitation and propaganda in two stages: first agitation and then propaganda - agitation in order to prepare the workers to understand propaganda. This is an incorrect right position which as a matter of fact was promoted by the economists which Lenin majestically combatted in What is to be done?. The use of propaganda or agitation, or both simultaneously, or the use of one first and then the other next or whatever order they are used in a particular place, is determined by concrete conditions of the place, the specific activity, etc., and not by a mechanical formula.

Comrades, the first part of our position comes more or less completely from the LPR in their newspaper RESISTENCIA (Vol. 7#6) - with 4 or 5 minor word changes and with the deletion of all references to WVO (which LPR has labeled as opportunist; and with which LS (m-1) does not agree...we view the WVO as comrades).

In this second part on Agitation and Propaganda we want to add just a few more comments and ideas. We want to address the questions of; the two different types of agitation (economic and political) - is it correct to do both? Is economic agitation automatically economist? What is the difference between the two? Which is more important? and what did Lenin say on this? Secondly, we want to add a few more thoughts on propaganda - to help comrades in their work...what questions must propaganda ask and answer if it is to really be propaganda? and how this differs from agitation as we see it. We lastly would add that we agree thoroughly with LPR's and Lenin's formulation that propaganda can and must be written at one level (for the advanced) and at a lower level (for the masses of the less developed strata). We believe at this time (or any time) that it's a "left" error to forget or omit mass propaganda from the work of communists. But it would be a right error (and one we ourselves have been guilty of for a long time now) to do the mass level propaganda and agitation and forget or omit propaganda to the advanced - especially in this period of the consolidation of the advanced around the new party being built.

TWO TYPES OF AGITATION Lenin tells us that there are two types of agitation: economic and political. From Chapter 3 of What Is To Be Done we get: "In order to carry on agitation around concrete examples of oppression, these examples must be exposed just as it was necessary to expose factory abuses in order to carry on economic agitation)." /emphasis added/pg71 FLP. "Political exposures are as much a declaration of war against the government as economic exposures are a declaration of war against the factory owners." pg 109. Here Lenin tells us that there is such a thing as "economic agitation", which is not political exposures; but which was/is important. On pg 68 he says, "In a word, economic (factory) exposures were and remain an important lever in the economic struggle. And they will continue to retain this significance as long as capitalism exists, which creates the need for the workers to defend themselves. Even in the most advanced countries of Europe we can still witness how the exposure of evils in some backward trade, or in some forgotten branch of domestic industry, serves as a starting point for the awakening of class consciousness, for the beginning of a trade union struggle, and for the spread of Socialism."

Comrades, we included the above quotes to show conclusively (and any reading of Chap. 3 of WITBD will of course fully confirm this) that ECONOMIC AGITATION is important, necessary AND NOT - IN AND OF ITSELF - ECONOMIST. This was important to discuss not because forgetting economic agitation is the main danger (just the opposite-RU-type economic/economist exposures in the absence of political agit. and prop. work was/is the main danger here); but because in the struggle against the right danger - many have swung too far to the "left" and not understood some of the other lessons of WITBD. Some have thus equated economic agitation with economism. (In a separate summation, LS(m-1) will examine our work and the lessons to be drawn from it - in the area of agitation and propaganda and shop newspapers.) We will just note here that we consider it possibly our strongest point - our grasp of agit/prop. work both in theory and in practice, and we think, in the main, that our shop newspaper work reflects this. Clearly, then, Lenin tells us both types of agitation are important; clearly too he tells us that, of the two, political agitation is the more important - much more important.

In terms of written and oral agitation, we see them as tending to be short exposures which have their starting point as something well-known to the masses/audience and as their ending as anger at/hatred of capitalism (without necessarily imparting a very comprehensive understanding of the totality of capitalism or the solution). And we use the mass line to form the bridge between our starting point and our ending. We take the mass line to mean what Mao has said on this subject...from the masses to the masses. Take the experience of the masses (which is real but is unorganized, uneven, not fully understood by the masses) then concretize it and systematize it and then take it back to the masses until they recognize it as their own. And over again.

Also on pg. 95 Lenin in WITBD says about this: "The fact of the matter is that the masses of the workers are roused to a high pitch of excitement by the abominations in Russian life to a far larger extent than we imagine, but which it is precisely necessary to combine into a single gigantic torrent."

PROPAGANDA

We have no intention of trying to render Plekhanov or Lenin "more profound" on the question of propaganda. But we have found that more explanation and training for our cadre and others is necessary for a fuller and more complete understanding of propaganda. We have come up with 3 questions which we consider to be KEY TO ANSWER if propaganda is really to be propaganda. They are: 1) why things are the way they are (a fuller explanation than is called for in agitation- showing their relationship and interconnectedness to other parts of the system as a whole); 2) Why they have to be the way they are - under this system -(showing their inevitability and unchangeability under capitalism -short of revolutionary struggle); and 3) What is the solution - socialism, the dictatorship fo the proletariat.,etc. With these three questions as a guide we believe we have been able to come to grips with and pretty much solve the question of propaganda.

Lastly, we want to re-emphasize that Lenin pointed out the necessity of writing prop. & agit. to both the advanced stratum and to the lower strata simultaneously! Thus the line that we must presently be doing propaganda only to the advanced is wrong. As is the line that says that just because propaganda is the chief form of activity of communists at this time, that therefore propaganda must be primary in every concrete area of our work. This would be mechanical. In certain situations what is called for is mostly agitation; in others mostly propaganda.

Comrades: The party has to be built in fierce battle against all types of opportunism. On the question of agitation and propaganda OL has a right opportunist line while RWL and PRRWO have a "left" opportunist line. Both lines complement and nourish each other. We must defeat both!

And so, to work, comrades! Let us not lose precious time! Russian Social-Democrats have much to do to meet the requirements of the awakening proletariat, to organize the working-class movement, to strengthen the revolutionary groups and their mutual ties, to supply the workers with propaganda and agitational literature, and to unite the workers' circles and Social-Democratic groups scattered all over Russia into a single *Social-Democratic Labour Party!*

Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 2.

"It is our duty always to intensify and broaden our work and influence among the masses. A Communist who does not do this is not a Communist. No branch, group, or circle can be considered a Communist organization if it does not do work to this end steadily and regularly... Without this work, political activity would inevitably degenerate into a game, because this activity acquires real importance for the proletariat only when, and insofar as it arouses the mass of a definite class, wins its interest, and mobilises it to take an active, foremost part in events."

ON CONFOUNDING POLITICS WITH PEDAGOGICS
Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 3, pp 452-455.

