

Proletarian Unity League

2, 3, Many Parties of a New Type? Against the Ultra-Left Line

Chapter 2: The Danger from the "Left"

B. Party-Building Line is Key: On the Mis-organization of the Communist Movement

Dozens of small, often competitive organizations, scores more of local collectives, hundreds of study groups, and at least four declared parties or parties-to-be make up the current organizational picture. This disarray aggravates the ideological and political weaknesses of the movement. It holds back the study and independent elaboration of theory, the propagation of Marxism-Leninism among the politically advanced workers, and other activities designed to fuse communism with the workers' movement. But what has hamstrung the Marxist-Leninists is not disarray itself, which under some circumstances could be overcome rather quickly, but rather the justification of disarray, the excusing of group interests, the apologetics of the "group spirit."

The "group spirit" has disastrous effects on theory and theoretical struggle. For the empiricist tradition, theory and action (or practice) oppose one another. Within this context, the "interests" of a particular organization assign two roles to theory. Either it functions as the "guide to action" for that group's own agitation and propaganda alone--in which case it often consists of no more than slogans and phrases--or else it acts as a handy signboard to differentiate one group from another. It serves ritual internal purposes and aggressive external ones. Theory becomes profoundly **politicized**, reflecting not the objective situation but instead the immediate tactical interests of the various groups. As Enver Hoxha describes the early Albanian communist movement:

"Everyone was striving for himself, each thinking that the essential thing was to form groups and to make themselves a "party," by abusing the others, pointing out all their "mistakes," saying that the others were "to blame" for everything, while they alone were "absolutely right..."

"They have gathered around themselves a few people with whom they have some influence, and have kept them "for their own ends." (**SW I**, pp. 4-5)

Thus the group spirit liquidates the discipline of the science in favor of the more immediate gains promised by the politics.

Once each organization tries to justify its own existence against all the others, theoretical work on the movement's **common** problems takes a back seat to the search for and defense of every distinctive emphasis or shaded nuance in a group's orientation. In such a situation, no rational division of labor can emerge. Each group must turn its attention to whatever question the movement is choosing up sides about that month: Angola, the Soviet Union's threat to world peace, trend in U.S. cotton production, tactical alliances with trade union reformists, the history of class struggle in the U.S.S.R., whether Puerto Rico forms a "classical colony," budget cuts and super-seniority, the nature of feminism, etc. Yet the life of most small groups would be seriously disrupted were they to undertake alone concentrated theoretical work on any major issue. And since any conception of "group interests" prohibits joint theoretical activities on a large scale, year after year goes by with work on major theoretical questions in much the same impasse.

The present organization of the Marxist-Leninist forces and the prevailing attitudes towards that organization limit the development of theory in two further ways. The existence of many communist centers makes the centralization of ideological struggle difficult. Sectarian attitudes towards ideological struggle--the refusal to publish opposing points of view, the resort to demagogic bravado in debate, the groupist refusal to distinguish between matters of principle and questions of tactical emphasis--render it impossible. This deprives the movement the most accessible means by which to develop and test theory: in disciplined theoretical struggle with other points of view. As comrade Dave Davis wrote in 1972,

"When one speaks of testing out various theories existing among the new forces--the differences on the national question, on the question of the elections, on trade union tactics, on "party-building," etc.--one is speaking of theories which can only be genuinely tested over a protracted period of time, and by the combined forces of the existing groups and more. But we cannot just wait for such testing.

"In fact, there is another test, a preliminary test, which we must require ideas and theories to pass before we allow the movement to put them into practice. This is the test of debate, of the ability of a given theory to clash with other theories, to grapple with the problems treated by other theories and see whether such a theory is able to prove its superiority in the eyes of revolutionaries." ("The New Economism," **New Marxist Forum**, p. 59-60)

Instead of consistently published, commonly recognized vehicles for ongoing ideological debate, the separate organizations manage occasional pamphlets, polemical newspapers which they and their relatively few supporters read, or popular newspapers which ignore ideological struggle altogether. Many viewpoints emerge, but owing to the splintering of the movement, they do not necessarily contend. Each group devotes its newspaper almost entirely to its own views, and frequently to only those subjects which it believes enhance its own position. Consequently, no concentration of correct ideas occurs, and no new level of unity among communist forces develops.

Second, the small, organizationally weak character of the separate anti-revisionist groups severely limits their capacity to investigate, intervene in, or learn from the mass struggle. The lack of experience in or investigation of large areas of working class life means that political line remains narrow and one-sided, even where a serious deviation has not taken hold. As a consequence, theoretical work can either race off in all directions from our actual tasks, or simply plod along dutifully in the trail of communist work. The activities of individual groups do not have a sufficiently broad nature to permit profound theoretical summaries of experience. Where such summaries are made, particularly by the largest organizations, they often merely systematize a "left" one-sidedness, bragging about imagined successes and "methods" which supposedly insure quick victories. Those groups which attempt to manufacture universally applicable formulas out of a few sketchy experiences end up producing tracts which, as descriptions of **facets** of everyday work, sound plausible, but as guides to action are pretty much useless.

"Organized disunity" likewise frustrates the work of fusing Marxism-Leninism with the workers' movement and compromises communist organizations in their struggle with the bourgeois repressive state apparatus. The winning of the politically active workers to communism in any numbers requires relatively stable organizations with established divisions of labor. Independent propaganda circles, isolated one from the other, cannot perform this task alone. But the present organizational tendencies in the communist movement produce weakened groups immersed in inter-organizational struggle, capable of at best sporadic political exposures, local initiatives with no wider focus, or paper "national actions" with no base in any section of the proletariat. Finally, the desire of each group to make itself widely known prohibits the development of legal and illegal, open and closed divisions of labor, thereby rendering the movement as a whole extremely vulnerable to any form of state repression.

The current activities of the major groups themselves present a further argument for the central importance of the organizational level. Debate over political or ideological line among the major groupings has given way to organizational initiatives aimed at consolidating parties around existing political lines. The calling of Party Congresses, the printing of "collective organizers," and the election of "organizing committees" has eclipsed principled ideological struggle. Instead of further theoretical struggle, the drafting of party programs and other efforts allegedly directed at "reaching broad unity among Marxist-Leninists" around the political lines of particular organizations have become the order of the day. The formation of communist parties by vote of the membership of former leagues, unions, or other organizations is the dominant party-building line among the organized forces. The most acute struggles of the communist movement today center on this passage between ideological and organizational unity. The dominant conceptions of how and when this passage can or will occur place the further advances of the movement in jeopardy.

If the struggle at the organizational level has this pivotal importance, then we need to take line on organizational matters as the main focus of the fight for the Party. How it wages the struggle to unify Marxist-Leninists and begins to root the future Party in the working class determines whether or not a given tendency will play a progressive or backward role. Unless the communist movement concentrates on its weaknesses at the organizational level, it risks confining itself to a covey of propaganda sects at the margins of the working class movement. In other words, party-building line is key in the struggle for the Party at this time: it is the key site of struggle between the proletarian and bourgeois lines, the key link in consolidating proletarian ideology against semi-anarchist ideology.