

Proletarian Unity League

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

Chapter 6: Putting an End To the "Left" Sectarian Period

A. The Necessary and the Possible in the Struggle for Marxist-Leninist Unity

The real, not the fancied, ideological struggle for communist unity rests upon a distinction between the necessary and possible on the one hand and the eventually necessary but generally not presently possible on the other. What is **necessary** in order to unify consists principally in the thoroughgoing resolution of those few questions which constitute the main points of contention in the current two-line struggle. There exist questions upon whose resolution the fate of the revolution may one day hang, but do not have that immediate importance today. There also exist questions—in our opinion, quite a few of them—about which it will be difficult to have more than provisional and sketchy positions in the foreseeable future, and even for some time into the life of the new Party. Such questions cannot become touchstones for the formation of a single Party, since it is not necessary to reach any detailed unity around them, nor for the most part is that unity possible.

In the category of necessary questions, we would put the nature of the main danger to the communist movement, the tasks of communists in this period, the character and functioning of a Marxist-Leninist Party, and, in order to orient the work of the newly-formed party, a rudimentary programmatic, strategic, and tactical line treating principally the relationship between democratic and socialist struggle in the U.S., as well as the basic features of international line. Developed positions on other questions of the international situation, certain specific characteristics of the various national questions in the U.S., the woman question, the character and history of the CPUSA, the for revolution in the U.S. basically fall into the second category, questions whose resolution is necessary to revolution but not to the formation of a Party, and in any case cannot be adequately tackled in our present circumstances.

To head off any confusion, we should clarify the nature of this second category. The questions in category two are not **intrinsically** of any less **importance** than those in category one. Nor is there a hard and fast line between the two. In other words, the necessary does not consist in one set of isolated points, and the less necessary in another, inessential set. To unify organizationally, we need unity around proletarian ideology and, as a reflection of that unity, around organizational rules. But that basic ideological unity does not lie about in books—we must fight for it. At a given moment in the development of the Party and of the Revolution, the clash between the bourgeois and proletarian lines focuses on a very few questions (the "necessary" ones). Correspondingly, the struggle to clarify the ideological bases for the Party's activity concentrates on a few issues. Struggle over those issues, in which the ideological and social bases of differences are sought out, establishes the common ideological foundations upon which the Party can be founded.

We do not call for ignoring the questions in the second category, but simply for realizing that in most cases we must content ourselves at this point with rudimentary positions on these matters. These positions will largely take the form of agreeing on certain basic Marxist-Leninist principles on the questions concerned. Further, communists should treat differences on these issues as secondary at this time. Finally, we do not deny that some of these "less necessary" questions sharply divide the communist movement today. But we believe that an ideological struggle over the preconditions for party-formation will show that for the most part these issues **unnecessarily** stand in the way of organizational unity.

The Limits of the Present Period

Though the "left" sectarian line denies it, the maturation of objective and subjective forces sets limits to the elaboration of strategy and tactics.

From the objective side, the strength of the spontaneous mass movement determines the degree to which various theoretical and political problems of the revolution can be "solved."

"...How is one to understand the statement that the mass working-class movement will 'determine the tasks?' It may be interpreted in one of two ways. **Either** it means bowing to the spontaneity of this movement, i.e., reducing the role of Social-Democracy to mere subservience to the working-class movement as such **or** it means that the mass movement places before us **new** theoretical, political and organizational tasks, far more

complicated than those that might have satisfied us in the period before the rise of the mass movement." (LCW 5, pp. 389-90)

In an earlier period, some theoretical and political issues had to be resolved, while differences over other, "far more complicated" questions could wait. With the rise of the mass movement, however, these other questions became critical matters. The breadth and depth of the spontaneous movement inevitably limits the ability of the revolutionary forces to sum up experience and differentiate between alternative paths of class organization and methods of struggle. For instance, no amount of theoretical work can fashion a political line on the forms which the revitalization of the U.S. trade union movement may take. Yet a mass upsurge would allow the proletarian vanguard to decide issues of that kind about which it would be useless to speculate in the absence of that movement. As Lenin wrote,

"...a correct revolutionary theory...is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement." (LCW 31, p. 25)

It follows that "final" lines of demarcation on some issues cannot be drawn apart from the most intimate connection with "a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement" either.

The elaboration of a comprehensive strategic and tactical line also depends on the state of the subjective factors in particular, the extent to which Marxism-Leninism has "fused" with the workers' movement. We saw in Chapter One that the proletariat generally has to constitute itself into a political party preparatory to "taking the field" as an independent class at the political level. Without such a party, however imperfect, it is hard to speak of a proletarian political line, since such a line neither sums up nor guides the **independent** political activity of the working class. In other words, a battle may take place without an army's General Staff, but no **battle plan**, drawn up to lead the troops, would exist. The working out of a battle plan rests on a force capable of analyzing the theater of operations, the enemy's fortifications, and the strength of the people's militia. Even where a General Staff has formed, it alone could neither **wage** war nor elaborate a full battle plan. An isolated General Staff cannot implement a strategic plan and tactical line of march, nor gain all-sided knowledge of the theater of operations. Such commanders would lack all the forces upon whom turns the **conduct** of war, and not merely the declaring of it. The following passage brings out the dependence of strategy and tactics upon not simply a unified communist organization, but a powerful one:

“The Party's strategy—since strategy presupposes the existence of reserves and the possibility of manoeuvring with them—**was necessarily narrow and restricted**. The Party confined itself to mapping the movement's strategic plan, i.e., the route that the movement should take; and the Party's reserves—the contradictions within the camp of the enemies inside and outside Russia—remained unused, or almost unused, owing to the weakness of the Party.

“The Party's tactics, since tactics presuppose the utilization of all forms of the movement, forms of proletarian organization, their combination and mutual supplementation, etc., with the object of winning the masses and ensuring strategic success, **were also necessarily narrow and without scope**.” (Stalin, **CW 5**, pp. 103-04)

And Lenin puts the relationship even more forcefully:

“Without a strong organization skilled in waging political struggle under all circumstances and at all times, there can be no question of that systematic plan of action, illumined by firm principles and steadfastly carried out, which alone is worthy of the name of tactics.” (**CW 5**, p. 18)

We do not suggest that a newly formed Party have no strategy whatsoever. If a General Staff arose with no strategy, it would not be clear of just which class they were a General Staff. But a strategy or tactical line drawn up in our present circumstances will necessarily have a rudimentary and provisional character confining itself mainly to the reaffirmation of strategic and tactical principles as applied to the U.S. The small, scattered communist forces themselves limit the development of any strategic perspective, and therefore limit the importance which disagreements over strategy can have in the present period. Joint ideological struggle will doubtless clarify some of these differences. But the real implications of any strategic or tactical positions will only emerge through their implementation on a wide scale under a centralized direction. Moreover, a small Party, largely restricted, say, to mass agitation, will not be able to decide some of these strategic and tactical issues either. Their resolution must await a revolutionary party of mass action.

“The correctness of the political line of a working class Party is not appraised only from the Marxist-Leninist sound of its words, or from the proletarian, popular, socialist, anti-imperialist form of these words. This correctness is proved in revolutionary practice, in the results yielded by the line and activity of the Party. The political line of the working class Party can never be correct, never revolutionary in the real sense of the word, if there is not complete unity between its policy and its revolutionary activity...

“Revolutionary action has always been the main ground for the verification of the correctness of the political line of our Party.” (Ndreci Plasari, **op. cit.**, p. 8)

Clearly we cannot expect the thorough-going rectification or verification of one or another strategic position given the present state of the communist movement. As a consequence, differences over a comprehensive strategy and tactics should not have a decisive importance in the struggle for communist unity.

The consideration of a draft Party Program, however, does form an indispensable element in the ideological struggle over the pre-conditions for party-formation. The Party Program consolidates the views of communists on the aims of the proletarian movement.

“Proceeding from the data of theory, the programme of Marxism determines the aims of the proletarian movement, which are scientifically formulated in the points of the programme.” (Stalin, **CW 5**, p. 165)

While enabling the communist forces to assess the relative importance of dissensions within their ranks, the drafting of a Party Program will also help them to keep the struggle within definite limits, taking it out of the realm of groupist rivalries. A Program does not depend on the development of the objective, spontaneous factors to the extent that an elaborated strategic and tactical plan does. Nor does it rely on the experience of revolutionary mass action in the way the latter does. Yet some restrictions apply to the drawing up of a draft Party Program as well.

The drafting of a Party Program depends upon both broad ideological struggle and large-scale investigation. Without a free exchange of polemics, the Program will not consolidate the unity of the communist forces, but merely rehearse already familiar conceptions of one or two groups, as our present party programs do. Since the unification of the communist forces necessitates broad ideological struggle, a rough program consolidating that struggle into the Party's basis of unity not only is necessary to the "consistent activity" of that Party, but also lies within reach of the present pre-party period. At the same time, the elaboration of a Program is limited by the ability to conduct coordinated, purposeful investigation on a wide scale. And since social investigation does not politely restrict itself to asking questions and toting up figures, but demands active participation in and leadership of popular struggles, it too is linked to overcoming the disorganization and isolation of the Marxist-Leninists. Therefore the future draft Party Program must largely content itself with summarizing the level

of unity achieved in the ideological struggle for party-formation. Our Program will represent the ideological foundations upon which the Party rests, not the specifics of its political activity (as do some present Party programs). In keeping with that conclusion, Marxist-Leninists must reject Utopian demands for a Party Program encompassing a comprehensive analysis of the U.S. formation and settle for a descriptive analysis.

"Why has the PLA not worked out a complete and comprehensive program for an historical stage of the revolution right at the beginning of that stage? The sole reason is that at the outset it lacked sufficient of the necessary experience of revolutionary leadership. This experience is gained mainly in practical revolutionary activity." (Ndreci Plasari, **op. cit.**, p. 3)

"Left-Wing" communists do not recognize these limitations to the ideological struggle for communist unity. In practice, they ignore the objective and subjective boundaries to the elaboration of a Program, of a strategy or a tactical line. Since their own activity is not oriented towards the building of a single party of revolutionary mass action, capable of organizing and leading the masses, and not merely calling them to action, they do not recognize that many questions cannot be settled in the absence of such a Party.

What Threatens Us Today

On the other hand, the resolution of some questions does not depend on the formation of a Communist Party. Just the reverse: **the formation of a Communist Party depends on the resolution of these questions.** They will not pose possible threats to the revolutionary unity of the new Party in some future situation; they deeply divide the communist movement today, in its practical activities and in its efforts at unification. They consist of the principal shield and justification of our current disunity (the main danger and how to fight it), the main practical basis for division (our tasks in the present period), the chief organizational obstacle to the overcoming of ultra-leftism (conceptions of the Party and the privileged arena for ultra-leftism in political line (the relationship between democratic and socialist struggles). In order to unite, the communist movement must forge a relatively high degree of unity around these questions. But unlike the case of detailed strategic or tactical views, a high level of unity around these four issues lies in the realm of the attainable, of the possible. If "knowledge begins with experience," (Mao, **On Practice**) if correct ideas come from "social practice, and from it alone," then the communist movement stands in an advantageous relationship to these problems. We have the experience, both direct and indirect, with each of these burning questions, or we can get it in the present period.

The answers we provide will be grounded in social practice, in the experience of the U.S. revolutionary movement, and not in sketchy study of the classics, casual investigation, "left" sectarian self-interest, and inspired speculation.

Up till this point, we have argued the general importance of focusing the ideological struggle in this period around preconditions for party-formation. We have also suggested some criteria for evaluating the importance of ideological and political questions in the struggle for communist unification. In agreeing that party-formation involves the overcoming of differences, we have insisted that not all differences have an equal importance in any given party-building period.

In the following sections, we will briefly consider each of the pressing issues mentioned above. Later we will discuss the practical conditions for forming a unified Communist Party. For the most part, our remarks are not intended to state what level of unity has to be reached around different questions, but rather what questions we think the communist movement needs a developed unity on, and why.