

Proletarian Unity League

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

Introduction

"In the United States of North America, where on account of historical circumstances, there was a total lack of broad revolutionary movement even before the war, the communists are confronted with the first and simplest task of creating a communist nucleus and connecting it with the working masses. The present economic crisis...affords very favorable soil for this kind of work." --Resolution on Tactics, Third Congress of the Comintern, 1921

Since 1968, a revitalized communist movement has emerged in the U. S. and taken as its task the "creation of a communist nucleus and its connection with the working masses." Recent developments within that movement have dealt it a serious setback and called into question its ability to carry out its work. The causes, nature, and dimension of that setback demand careful study.

For the second time since the struggle against modern revisionism began in this country, a Marxist-Leninist movement had come forth on a national scale in opposition to the Communist Party U.S.A. Though the anti-revisionist forces contained many centers, there nonetheless appeared to be a developing unity among a number of organizations four or five years ago. Definite tendencies had arisen, the largest of which grouped the Revolutionary Union, the Black Workers Congress, the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, and the I Wor Kuen, with elements of the **Guardian** newspaper in sympathy. This tendency entered into polemics with the October League (Marxist-Leninist) tendency, but also recognized a certain unity of views and a need for constructive exchange between the two. Some members of the **Guardian** newspaper sympathized with this second tendency as well. Finally, the Communist League, at first in alliance with the American Communist Workers' Movement (M-L) and other groups, formed a third tendency. All dedicated themselves to constructing a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Party.

In the past three years, the economic crisis, massive unemployment, the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Indochina, and serious contradictions within the

bourgeoisie have afforded "very favorable soil for this kind of work." The restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and its expansionist activity around the globe, the rebuilding of the imperialist powers of Europe and Japan, and the rise of the peoples and countries of the Third World in struggle for national liberation and national independence have shattered the always unstable unity of the imperialist camp under the hegemony of U.S. imperialism. These developments have resulted in increased exploitation and heightened repressive measures at home, and frantic attempts at securing its imperialist plunder abroad, particularly in Latin America. But increased exploitation and heightened repression can only lead to greater resistance by the working class and other sectors of the masses in the U. S. and the peoples of Latin America and elsewhere. The factors for both war and revolution, including revolution in the U. S., are increasing. In the meantime, the contradictions within the U.S. bourgeoisie and favorable conditions of bourgeois legality afford good opportunities for widespread communist work.

Yet the communist movement has not used these growing contradictions to the proletariat's best advantage. It has not planted its roots deep in this "very favorable soil." Despite the communist movement's growth, the undeniable optimism which previously reigned in its ranks has dimmed considerably. Fragmentation, disunity, and sectarianism have flourished; a communist current within the working class has not.

In August 1973, the IWK left the National Liaison Committee. Some time later, the BWC and PRRWO broke with the RU. Many RU members quit the RU in sympathy with their criticisms or on the basis of similar positions. **The Guardian** broke with the RU, and the OL described the latter as "social-fascist." Therefore, the RU, taking stock of the concrete situation, renamed itself **the** Revolutionary Communist Party, U.S.A

In the spring of 1973, the Communist League and the American Communist Workers' Movement (M-L) parted ways. The Communist League, El Comite', Resistencia Puertorriquena (now the League for Proletarian Revolution [M-L]), **New Voice**, the Communist Collective of the Chicano Nation, the Detroit Committee to Support the Conference, and other forces held the Conference of North American Marxist-Leninists. The Motor City Labor League (M-L), the League for Proletarian Revolution, the August Twenty-Ninth Movement, the Black Workers Congress, and PRRWO joined the National Continuations Committee established by this conference. The NCC expelled the **New Voice**; it also expelled the Detroit Collective; it also expelled ATM; El Comite' and Resistencia left; the NCC purged BWC, and PRRWO resigned. Therefore, the CL and the remaining forces formed the Communist Labor Party of the USNA.

Meanwhile the **Guardian** newspaper and the October League (M-L) broke with each other. In the fall of 1975, OL chairman Michael Klonsky announced the OL's dedication to uniting the "twenty centers" and "nearly a dozen publications" of the communist movement. A torrent of criticism of the OL's plan, the OL's regular and invariably unexplained changes in position, and its sectarian practice poured forth from virtually every other established center in the communist movement. Therefore the OL set about creating its own "centers" largely from longtime sympathizers, other comrades close to the OL, and its own members, in order to give its self-proclaimed "unity trend" some semblance of legitimacy. And it plans to form, together with these completely dependent collectives, **the** Marxist-Leninist Party of the U.S.

Any semblance of a working unity of views within the communist movement has disappeared. Since the three largest groupings have formed or intend to form **the** Marxist-Leninist Party, each considers **the** revolutionary line already elaborated, and capable of answering all major political questions. ("We can now clearly distinguish between Marxism and revisionism on each of the main questions facing the communist and workers' movement."--

Statement of the Organizing Committee for a Marxist-Leninist Party) Since the revolutionary line now exists, debate among the avowed Marxist-Leninists is superfluous; all that remains is to expose the anti-Marxists. Therefore the parties and parties-to-be have largely suspended serious ideological struggle within the communist movement. In the year after its formation, the RCP has not published more than one theoretical article of any length, and only recently has broken its silence on other communist forces to engage in "polemics" against the OL. The Communist Labor Party has not succeeded in regularly publishing its theoretical journal, or in publishing any major new pamphlet in the two and one-half years since its formation. And the October League, always the least concerned about theoretical struggle, prints mainly distorted attacks on other groups, rarely pausing to put forward a clear position of its own. Only among some of the smaller organizations does the now sporadic theoretical debate continue over the chief issues facing the movement. As a consequence, ideological struggle has largely fallen off and the theoretical maturation of the movement been held back.

It's Not Fine

Many revolutionaries maintain a blind optimism on this, the eve of the formation of two, three, many parties of a new type. A section of the leadership and membership of the parties and parties-to-be believe that "God is in his heaven and all's right with the world." According to them, their line has defeated the bad lines and finally brought (or even now brings) the proletariat its genuine Communist Party. Many members of these groups

admit that their party or party-to-be has not rallied all the "honest elements," since none represent anything more than a small minority of the communist forces. But they claim that the sincere revolutionaries "misled" by the "new leftists," "Right opportunists," "Bundists," "centrists," or petit-bourgeois running dogs will awaken to the bankruptcy of their leadership, break with them, and come over to the Party. The party or pre-party members either do not recognize or do not address the causes behind a situation in which the "honest elements" who have not rallied to their party considerably outnumber those who have.

Among some of those who do not recognize the current parties or parties-to-be as their own, a very similar optimism prevails. Many Marxist-Leninists denounce the largest organizations as "revisionist" or "thoroughly opportunist," or else they ridicule what they term the "party fad." In either case they do not regard the present congealing of different lines and organizations into parties as a serious matter. They too reason that the proverbial "honest elements" will desert their malformed parties and join in a great collective endeavor. In the meantime, the other revolutionary groups will continue as before. Just as the several Parties believe that their "vanguard" status will shine through the small-circle fog which surrounds everybody else, so many of the smaller organizations act like they will rally the proletarian vanguard all by their lonesome. Neither sees the growing fragmentation of the Marxist-Leninist movement, with the accompanying decline in ideological struggle, as a serious obstacle to this task. In this the comrades are very mistaken.

The formation of three parties has not resulted from the isolated errors of individuals. For better or worse, the CLP, the RCP, and the OL represent our movement at a certain moment in its development. Their successes or deviations do not concern simply themselves, but belong to the entire movement, in that they reflect its contradictions and current tendencies. To ignore the formation of several parties, to content oneself with denunciations, is to close one's eyes to the real situation in the anti-revisionist camp. The deviation which the parties represent will not disappear along with their now deceased "pre-party formations." Its hold has not weakened; if anything, it has grown stronger.

The Workers Viewpoint Organization, for example, boasts itself the "'firm base of operations' to build the genuine communist party," and an "irreversible historical trend." Former close allies of the WVO, the PRRWO and RWL, now calling themselves **the** "Revolutionary Wing," have made plain their intention to rename themselves **the** Bolshevik Party, U.S.A. For its part, having broken with the old CL, the **New Voice** claims it serves as nothing less than "the scaffolding for the party, exactly as

the **Iskra** organization served as the scaffolding for the Bolshevik Party of Lenin." (Jan 12, 1976) The Workers Congress modestly reprinted without comment a statement by the Party Building Committee (M-L) which announced its "support of **The Communist** as the leading political organ in the U.S. communist movement," without bothering to explain whom or what it was leading. And even some who oppose dogmatism and sectarianism as major dangers to the communist movement are not above declaring:

We're the best U.S. newspaper that bookstore ever had--and they know it. Just check out some of the drivel they merchandize in the name of U.S. Marxism-Leninism. (Guardian, March 31, 1976)

As any Marxist-Leninist or other revolutionary-minded worker knows, we could go on. These developments stem from much the same mentality we find among the parties, except that where the smaller groups have acquired a "champagne taste," they still have "beer money." The struggle against this mentality within the communist movement is not a fight against a few organizations who have attempted to detach themselves from our movement. It is a struggle against the dominant line among the Marxist-Leninist forces as a whole, a struggle which must be fought out in every organization.

Cheery forecasts about winning the vanguard do not take account of the practical, political effects of unprincipled polarization in the communist movement

The present-day communist movement arose spontaneously in the late 'sixties and 'seventies, principally among the most politically volatile strata of the population: students of a petit-bourgeois class origin, young intellectuals, students of a working class origin, older "movement" people who came from all three of these strata. Only secondarily did it arise among the working class, including communists trained in the CPUSA. Having a spontaneous character and a volatile class base, the movement is subject to rapid fluctuation. In other words, it cannot continue indefinitely in its present form. Revolutionary or Marxist ideas usually take hold first among students and intellectuals; if these strata do not manage to "fuse" Marxism with the workers' movement, however, then the revolutionary movement among students and intellectuals will itself degenerate into irrelevant sects and university Marxologists. All communist movements originally based in the intelligentsia follow this pattern; either the intellectuals successfully take Marxism-Leninism to the broad toiling masses, or the Communist forces temporarily splinter and wither away. The histories of the Chinese, Vietnamese, Albanian, or Bolshevik pre-party periods provide examples of the first case; the Korean communist movement during the 'twenties or the

anti-revisionist movements in some European countries during the late 'sixties give evidence for the second (the Korean movement also met with severe repression). As long as the U.S. movement maintains its present class basis (by which we mean the social origin of the majority of its leadership, membership, and spontaneous supporters), it faces an uncertain future. Not the least of its uncertainties lies in the possibility that the bourgeoisie, driven by the deepening contradictions of U.S. capitalism, will take advantage of the Marxist-Leninists' isolation and move to destroy their organizations.

Yet the continued disorganization of the communist movement and the collapse of a large section of it into mutually antagonistic parties threatens to frustrate the urgent work of fusing Marxism-Leninism with the workers' movement. Every day, disunity makes itself felt both nationally and at the local level. Anyone who witnessed the ineffectiveness of the many separate groups in the face of the spontaneous proletarian outrage which erupted at the AFL-CIO Washington rally (April 1975) can testify to this. Anyone reflecting on the almost total absence of organized mass response to the victories of the Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Laotian peoples during 1975 must agree. Concretely, the Marxist-Leninist forces count several times the trade-union members of all the Trotskyites combined. Only the CPUSA itself has more trade-union members and supporters, and in some unions the Marxist-Leninists outnumber even them. But when rebellion breaks out nationally in the Teamster ranks, Trotskyites like the IS are in an organizational position to do something about it, and the Marxist-Leninists are not. How is it that Trotskyites, sworn wreckers of every progressive organization and even themselves, are more united and better-organized than the communist movement!? Or when a reform candidacy takes shape in the Steelworkers union, the CPUSA is prepared to influence it, but the communist forces are basically too divided to have much impact. As workers familiar with the communist movement ask more frequently every day: how will you unite the working class if you cannot unite yourselves?

Whether you consider the lack of serious theoretical or practical advances by the communists on the struggle for women's emancipation; the day-to-day "competition" among several groups "over" the politically active workers of a particular factory; the extreme vulnerability of the communist movement to state surveillance and repression; the failure to develop a detailed class analysis of the U.S.; or the absence of systematic popular literature on socialism, national oppression, and various broad political questions of the day, the consequences of disorganization and sectarianism hang all around us. In these conditions, fusing Marxism-Leninism with the workers' movement and rallying the vanguard of the proletariat to communism becomes an increasingly difficult task.

It's Not Terrible

In the face of the unprincipled polarization of the communist ranks, some forces have given in to pessimism. They see only the twists and turns the struggle for communist unity has taken and ignore the movement's bright future. A false hope paves the way to despair. But beyond blind optimism and petit-bourgeois gloom lies a sounder and more dialectical viewpoint.

The U.S. movement has no monopoly on disunity. As any reader of **Peking Review** knows, countries like Italy, France, Germany, Argentina, and others have counted several parties for a number of years, as well as numerous groups dedicated to building others. In the last year, however, a counter-tendency towards unity has emerged. In countries such as Germany and France, leaders of Marxist-Leninist parties (Ernst Aust and Jacques Jurquet, respectively) have initiated discussion with a view towards uniting the several Marxist-Leninist parties and other communist organizations into a single Communist Party for each country. Only a few years ago, two Communist Parties of Belgium (M-L) merged into a single organization. A process of criticism has begun of past sectarian practices, including the claims that one Marxist-Leninist Party represented everything revolutionary and another everything revisionist.

No one can predict whether this international trend towards unity will bear fruit in the immediate future. That depends on analyzing objectively the causes for the multiplication of parties and groups in each country--the deviations which have inspired and maintained disunity--and taking the appropriate action. In each situation, the road to unity will have different features, according to the history and traditions of their workers' movements, the relative weight of the revisionist and Social-Democratic Parties, and the particular history of the rise of the anti-revisionist movement in that country. But no matter how tortuous the journey, each proletariat will have its Communist Party.*

In the U.S., building unity means criticizing the "Left-Wing" deviation, particularly "left" opportunism in party-building line. The bankruptcy of the "left" line has emerged more and more clearly in the past two years. The multiplication of "Left-Wing Communist" parties, the accelerated fragmentation of a broad section of the Marxist-Leninist movement, and the failure to make significant advances among the working class have driven home to increasing numbers of communists the need for an all-out struggle against the ultra-left trend. A new tendency is emerging in opposition to "left" sectarianism, adventurism, revolutionary phrase-mongering, and other "left" errors. And the opposition to ultra-leftism has spread beyond those who recognize "leftism" as the main danger. The collapse of the so-called

"Revolutionary Wing" into Trotskyite splitting and wrecking has provoked an ever wider resistance to "leftism," and ever greater interest in studying its nature. Many groups formerly sympathetic to or associated with the "Revolutionary Wing" have recently devoted long analyses to the roots and consequences of ultra-leftist politics (ATM[M-L], LPR[M-L], MLOC, for example). These and other forces recognize that in order to combat "left" opportunism, in order to keep it from wrecking still more organizations, as it did the BWC, PRRWO, RWL, and others (as well as important mass organizations, such as ALSC), we need to examine the "left" deviation in a serious way. Without an analysis of why "left" opportunism has taken such a hold of the Marxist-Leninist movement, of what tendencies and approaches have produced the current situation, no guarantee exists that new "left" sectarian trends will not emerge even from among the presently small, unaffiliated, and nominally "anti-sectarian" groups. When a group includes forty members, anti-sectarianism can represent pragmatic calculation as well as principle.

Despite the broadening struggle against "leftism," however, a great deal of confusion exists on its nature and the extent of the threat it poses to the communist movement. The "left" line promotes and in turn benefits from this confusion, as the reversal of the OL's characterization of the RU/RCP demonstrates. After years of denouncing the RU's "left" opportunism, the OL now defines the RCP as Right opportunist. Their explanation for this reversal contains a deep misunderstanding of "leftism":

While in the past, RCP has upheld the ultra-"left" pose of "jamming" the trade unions, the rightist and economist essence of RCP's line has always been evident with their economist 'workers' papers. (Organizing Committee for a Marxist-Leninist Party, "Marxist-Leninists Unite!", page 2)

But Marxism-Leninism has always maintained that all errors were **in essence** Right errors; only the **form** could be "Left." The Chinese Communists sum up this relationship in the phrase, "Left in form, Right in essence." Either the OL completely misunderstands ultra-leftism, which we doubt, or its "reversal of correct verdicts" through wordplays and evasion represents a cover for its own "left" line.

Confusion over "Leftism" is not restricted to the OL. The Workers Viewpoint Organization describes the RCP's line as both "anarcho-syndicalist" and "thoroughly right opportunist," (WV, August 1976, p. 12) giving us the unprecedented concoction, "thoroughly right anarcho-syndicalism." Among the developing anti-"left" tendency, a significant number characterize the

"left" opportunist danger as "dogmatism," defined as "bookworship" (see, for example, statements of the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee).

The present pamphlet aims to contribute to the developing discussion of "left" opportunism in our movement. The current situation urgently demands an end to the centrifugal forces tearing the communist forces apart, and the beginning of principled, unifying initiatives. We are convinced that the fragmentation of the anti-revisionist camp will only be overcome when its causes are laid bare. It is to those causes that we now turn. The first chapter will attempt to define the present situation with greater precision. Succeeding chapters will elaborate our analysis of "left" opportunism in the U.S. communist movement. The last chapter will take up an approach towards rectification.

Footnote

*The U.S. communist movement also reflects the international tendency towards unity, though so far to a lesser degree. Even the October League (M-L) has tried to associate itself with it, calling its Organizing Committee for a Marxist-Leninist Party the "unity trend." But as the facts show, the comparison falls flat: in Europe and elsewhere, communists are trying to unite already formed parties and other organizations; here, the OL promises to launch yet another party. If the OL persists in invoking this international example, they should explain its relevance: why did so many Parties grow up in other countries? Was it correct to form more when one existed? Wouldn't it be less prejudicial to unity not to claim a Party name? If others are trying to unite several, why give us another? Yet the OL's professed allegiance to the "unity trend" has produced moderate results: after more than two years of damning the RU/RCP as a "social-fascist" organization which had been "driven from the ranks of this young movement," the OL has quietly revised its position and begun speaking of the RCP as a danger inside the movement. The OL has even talked of forming a party as a step on the road to the single, unified Party (though time will tell whether it will actually take a single concrete step in this direction).