

WHAT WE MEAN BY

Revisionism

Marxism is the revolutionary world outlook of the proletariat, expressing its true needs and interests, but it was not adopted by the workers movement automatically. In the 19th century, it had to win the working class to its banner in a protracted struggle against a series of contending petty bourgeois ideologies--particularly utopian socialism and anarchism--before the working class could confront the ruling class as a revolutionary force in society. With the consolidation of the

social democratic parties in the later part of the 19th century, Marxism emerged as the dominant trend within the workers movement, but, as we know, this victory of Marxism was only a formal one. The struggle against the revolutionary outlook began anew within the social democratic parties--as ideas and practices alien to the working class imposed themselves in new forms.

It was the tireless practical and theoretical struggle of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party that exposed the origin

Revisionism, continued

and content of the revisionism of the Second International. They showed how the perspective of class and revolutionary struggle was replaced by the characteristic revisionist illusions of class-collaboration and gradual evolution, and they showed the social base of this gutted "Marxism." The social democratic parties emerged in the age of imperialism and rested in the main on the organized sectors of the working class. Imperialism was able to create a relatively small privileged labor aristocracy because of the super-profits it looted from the colonial world. This privileged labor aristocracy--whose interests and needs were different from the whole working class--provided the material base for the revisionist leadership of the Social Democratic parties, particularly the German party, the leader of the Second International, and its classical theorists of revisionism, Bernstein and Kautsky.

In the acid test of World War I, the social democrats revealed their class-collaborationist and anti-revolutionary outlook by abandoning proletarian internationalism to ally with "their own" capitalists during the war and then by helping crush the revolutionary upsurge of the workers afterward.

MODERN-DAY REVISIONISM

This was the first form of revisionism to appear, but a newly gutted "Marxism" reappeared in modern-day revisionism, which developed in the Soviet Union with the working class in power. It, too, opposed class and revolutionary struggle, but its form and content were different. There has been a great deal of debate about the development, but the world Marxist-Leninist movement has not yet come to a definitive conclusion on all the questions modern-day revis-

ionism raises, questions about the precise material base and content, when and how it appeared, its identity and differences with the "first wave" of revisionism, and the consequences of revisionism in power. These are questions of the transitional period between capitalism and socialism, which have only been addressed over the past two decades.

Modern-day revisionism, like its predecessor, tends to deny (or conceal) the central role of class struggle in history, and undercuts the workers' ability to wage persistent class struggle. The Chinese Communist Party first identified modern revisionism in public in the 1960 document *Long Live Leninism*. Prior to that time they had conducted a struggle with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for some time within the confines of the leading bodies of the two parties.

The CCP pointed out three main aspects of Soviet revisionism. 1) Denying the necessity of revolutionary class struggle in historical transitions ("peaceful transition.") 2) Denying the class struggle between socialist and capitalist countries ("peaceful coexistence.") 3. Denying the continuation of the class struggle after the revolution (claiming that the CPSU was the "party of the whole people" rather than the party of the working class.)

In the Cultural Revolution of the mid 1960s, the Chinese also fought their own revisionists, whom they called "capitalist-roaders." This form of revisionism rarely proclaimed itself openly, but undercut Marxism-Leninism by denying and sabotaging the class struggle in practice and attitude, with arbitrary, commandist and bureaucratic practices and by putting "economic development" in the driver's seat above class struggle and the struggle over political line.

The world Marxist-Leninist movement is agreed that these practices developed on the material interests of a privileged stratum in the Party

and plant administration, but it is not fully agreed on the precise class character of this stratum or the consequences of their dominance of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Despite the lack of a fully comprehensive theory of modern revisionism and the transitional period, many practices of modern revisionism have been identified: insensitivity to the needs of ordinary workers, "leading" manipulatively and bureaucratically from the top down rather than trying to involve the workers at the lowest levels; secrecy and concealing "unfortunate" information from the people; contempt for the people's current ideas; championing the needs of small groups rather than the whole working class, and putting central direction primary over democracy.

All these practices undercut the ability of the working class to wage class struggle, and disrupt the necessary link between theory and practice and between party and people--that is, they make impossible the development of a mass line, the root of genuine Marxist Leninist practice.

"ULTRA-LEFT" REVISIONISM

When a revolutionary movement is large and powerful, the classical right-wing forms of revisionism discussed above are historically the central danger. When, however, it is small and isolated, and particularly when it is made up largely of communists with petty bourgeois backgrounds and it is reacting to the disasters of right revisionism, "ultra-left" forms of revisionism can "gut" the revolutionary content of Marxism just as effectively. *Dogmatism, sectarianism and adventurism* sabotage the class struggle in different ways, but fundamentally also by making the development of a mass line impossible. Often these forms do not repudiate the *idea* of class struggle, but they make consistent class struggle impossible by isolating communists and communist theory from the experience and practice of the working class.

DOGMATISM develops its "theories" in isolation from the experience and practice of workers in struggle, importing policies by rote from the past or from other countries without regard to the living experience of the present. Dogmatists are incapable of analyzing the particularity of a concrete situation. They try to appeal to other petty bourgeois radicals by demonstrating the "purity" of their ideas, that is, the absolute identity of their ideas with respected communist movements of the past or other countries, even though conditions here and now may be totally different.

SECTARIANISM puts the immediate interests of small groups--today the so-called new communist parties--above the interests of the whole working class. Sectarrians will not work with other revolutionaries or even with middle groups of workers--whom they alienate by calling "hopeless reformists," as if there were no need to wage reform struggles along the road to revolution. Not only do petty bourgeois sectarians isolate themselves from the working class, they also try to isolate advanced workers from the rest of the workers--to keep themselves and their friends "pure."

ADVENTURISM cannot wait for revolutionary consciousness to develop in a significant sector of the working class and seeks to "spur" the workers on by leading immediate struggles for which the workers are unprepared. The petty bourgeois adventurists seek to cast "sparks" of action in all directions rather than understanding the present consciousness of workers and seeking patiently to raise it to a higher level so that the workers themselves can take action.

Only a genuine respect for the working class and a true understanding and application of the role of the mass line as the link between theory and practice, between party and working class, can combat revisionism of all types.