

Proletarian Unity League

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

The Present Situation in the U.S. Communist Movement And Our Strategic Tasks

D. The "Left" Sectarian Period-A Period of Strategic Significance

That something is wrong in the communist movement needs no emphasis. And the most visible feature of our difficulties is the multiplication of communist parties. All classes are led by political parties. But while the bourgeoisie is frequently represented by several multi-class parties (in each of which a fraction of the bourgeoisie exercises hegemony over other bourgeois fractions, sections of the petit-bourgeoisie, sections of the working class, or the remnants of the former ruling classes), the proletariat needs a single class party. Since the working class has one set of short-and long-term strategic and tactical interests, the identity of working class interests naturally finds expression in a single party. No basis exists for two parties both representing the interests of the proletariat. With the imminent formation of the OL and WVO "Parties," however, the working class will have four allegedly Marxist-Leninist parties, all in declared opposition to the bourgeoisie, modern revisionism, Trotskyism, and each other. Yet they are but the most visible evidence, the most developed result, of a deviation which embraces a much larger section of the Marxist-Leninist forces. This deviation has a name: "left" opportunism.

Today the organizational level of the party principle has moved to stage center; it has become the dominant level. In the two-line struggle between "left" opportunism and Marxism-Leninism, party-building line is the chief focus of contention.¹ This "left" opportunism in party-building line largely takes the form of sectarianism. Because it draws its ideological inspiration from "left" opportunism, we term the main deviation at the level of party-building line "left" sectarianism.

The "Left" deviation in party-building line poses the main danger to the completion of our tasks. Today our situation is not that of a single Party which has fallen under the influence of a "left" adventurist line. Rather, our situation is one of extreme organizational disarray, brought about and

sustained mainly by sundry shades of "left" opportunist thinking and policy. "Left" sectarianism so dominates our movement that the different "left" groupings themselves cannot unite under a single "Left-Wing" banner. The Marxist-Leninist movement will never rally its forces, welding them to the working class, without overcoming the scourge of ultra-leftism in party-building line.

The deviations at the level of organization, however, have ideological roots. They belong to an entire trend, a "system of politics." To combat "left" sectarianism; we must get at the fundamental assumptions behind it. While the main struggle for the Party now takes place around party-building line, the decisive struggle will occur on in the ideological realm. Whether or not the communist movement succeeds in defeating "left" sectarianism depends on whether or not it manages to root out ultra-left ideology and base itself on the proletarian world outlook.

On the basis of these remarks, we can term the present strategic period in the U.S. communist movement the "'left'-sectarian period." As we saw earlier, Lenin referred to the third period in the history of Russian Social-Democracy as the "economist period" even though at the time he said that the content of the opportunist trend was "incorrectly and too narrowly characterised as 'Economism'," (LCW 5, p. 378) The Right opportunism of the third period affected every aspect of Marxist practice and policy. But the two-line struggle broke out over the principle of tactics, over the relations between the daily economic struggle and working class politics. Because that problem remained the main site of struggle, and because the economist line posed the main danger to the Marxist line, in fact dominating it, Lenin called the third period the "economist period."

Today "left" opportunism manifests itself in every aspect of communist activity. Its characteristic expression is "left" sectarianism, since the "left" line achieved its first and most developed form in party-building. This "left" line dominates the Marxist-Leninist line. For these reasons, we call the present period the "left" sectarian period, though in one sense this represents too narrow a characterization. We do so with the understanding that "left" sectarianism **is** a form of "left" opportunism. Because the struggle for the party concentrates itself at the level of party-building line, and because the main danger is a deviation at that level, the **key link** in the fight for the Party is party-building line, specifically, the fight against "left" sectarianism.

"Left" sectarianism poses the immediate danger to the completion of our current tasks. It follows that the main overall task of the present period is to overcome immediate enemy, "left" sectarianism. The change in the relations

of force between "left" sectarianism and a Marxist-Leninist party-building line—a change which pre-supposes uprooting the ideology of "left" opportunism—will usher in a new strategic period. In that period, Marxist-Leninist thought will "work mainly in one direction." That relative ideological unity will necessarily seek to strengthen itself practically and organizationally through the formation of a central organization or a united Marxist-Leninist Party. In other words, to the question, What is to be Done?, we respond: Put an end to the "left" sectarian period!

The main form of activity in the present period is propaganda, and this for two reasons. First, Marxist-Leninist thought does not "work mainly in one direction." Therefore, in Lenin's words, the communist forces must devote themselves principally to "clearing up and deciding various internal Party questions." Until the Marxist-Leninist forces work "mainly in one direction," they cannot successfully "broaden and deepen" their ties among the masses on a large scale, and cannot prepare the transition to widespread agitation as the main form of activity. Second, taking propaganda as the main form of activity reflects the actual state of fusion of Marxism-Leninism with the U.S. workers' movement. The communist movement has not made the progress in its theoretical and propaganda work that would justify passing over to widespread agitation as our chief form of activity. A review of the Marxist-Leninist literature produced over the past eight or nine years shows that in the main our theoretical tasks have not been seriously taken up. The communist movement has only the vaguest of analyses of the U.S. social formation or of the prospects of U.S. imperialism. We have no adequate **descriptive** account of classes in the U.S. We have little unity around a series of major theoretical questions, and worse yet, no unity around which theoretical matters we must resolve, and how we can resolve them. Still worse, the communist movement devotes its major literary efforts to competitive polemics and not to serious theoretical work.

As for its propaganda work among the vanguard of the class, the communist movement has so far made slight progress. Working class activists have turned to Marxism-Leninism in some numbers. Nonetheless, the dominant class basis of the communist movement remains what it was, ex-students and intellectuals of petit-bourgeois and to some extent working class origin, many coming from the popular mass movements of the 1960's and early '70's, movements themselves rooted in these politically sensitive strata.² Propaganda among the politically active workers suffers from the ideological and organizational weaknesses of the Marxist-Leninist forces, and those weaknesses have yet to be overcome. With a few exceptions, those forces have a local character. We have no program founded on a scientific analysis, nor even simply an accurate descriptive one, of present U.S. conditions, and consequently, no overall guide to communist work. The few

programs issued by the declared parties merely consolidate the sketchy analyses of their organizational predecessors. Finally, the communist movement lacks trained agitators familiar with all aspects of working class life. For all these reasons, propaganda work to win over the vanguard best suits the actual needs and possibilities of the present-day communist movement.

Although we do not believe that the preconditions exist for a transition to broad agitation as the main form of activity, political agitation retains a high importance in the present period. The main obstacle to an expansion of the communist movement's practical work is not a disdain for "practice," but rather the domination of "left" lines in the practical work and in party-building. A few shades of ultra-leftism do look contemptuously on practical activity and lead to the abandonment of revolutionary work among the masses. The dominant strain of "left" opportunism, however, simply conducts its mass work in such an adventuristic way that it abandons the masses. In combatting the "left" trend, the fight for a mass policy and for broad agitational work have key roles to play. Finally, as we saw section B., the training of communists from among the politically advanced work assumes continued agitational and organizational work on the part of both the communists and the non-communist class vanguard.

From this characterization of the present period, a particular strategy follows. The forces representing the long-term interests of the communist movement must aim the **main blow** at "left" sectarianism, which constitutes the immediate danger in the present period (a "period of strategic significance"). To do so they need consolidate an organized tendency with unity around the danger and extent of "left" opportunism in our movement, win over the broad masses of cadre currently laboring under various "left" lines, and isolate the relative handful of hard-core "left" revisionists while guarding against the Right deviation. In carrying through this task, the anti-"left" tendency will have to turn to the masses of the class vanguard not presently engaged in the communist movement. The interests of the politically active workers lie with the eradication of "left" sectarianism organizationally and ideologically. Therefore, our party-building strategy must aim to convert the masses of the non-Party class vanguard from a secondary force to the main column in the struggle for the Party. Lastly, the contradictions among the various "left" lines and among the "left" sectarian groups provide the indirect reserves of the anti-"left" sectarian forces. Our two **strategic slogans** become: defeat "left" sectarianism in order to unite the Marxist-Leninists and win over the proletarian vanguard to communism; and win over the proletarian vanguard to communism so as to defeat "left" sectarianism and unite the Marxist-Leninists.

In order to establish this strategic orientation, we will proceed in the following way. First we will develop in depth our view of the main danger to the anti-revisionist movement. As mentioned above, at any one time in the party-building process, struggle around one level of the party principle comes to the fore. In our view, the organizational level has this importance at the present time, and the principal contradiction there pits a Marxist-Leninist party-building line against "left" sectarianism. "Left" sectarianism constitutes the immediate or main danger to communist forces in the U.S. Following this presentation, we will take up the more familiar arguments that, on the contrary, "political line is key," and "right opportunism constitutes the main danger."

The second part of the book will explore "left" lines in greater depth, treating successively "left" approaches to party-building, "left" opportunism in political line, and the social, historical, and ideological bases for present-day "Left-Wing" Communism.

The third part of the book will present our views on the way forward: the necessity of debate around preconditions for party-formation, of an anti-"left" tendency, and of a Party spirit in the communist movement.

Footnotes

¹In other words, the contradiction with "left" opportunism is the principal contradiction in party-building line. There are other contradictions: between a Marxist-Leninist line on party-building and a Right sectarian line; between a Marxist-Leninist line and a line advocating something like a mass social-democratic party; between the "left" line and the above lines; etc. But the existence or development of the principal contradiction determines or modifies the existence or development of these secondary contradictions. In other words, the strength of these other lines is a function of the strength of the struggle between "left" opportunism in party-building line and the Marxist-Leninist organizational line and practices. Without attacking the principal contradiction and devoting our major energies to resolving it (while paying attention to the secondary contradictions as well), we cannot correctly treat these other contradictions. And within the principal contradiction, "leftism" plays the leading role as the principal aspect, and currently dominates the Marxist-Leninist line.

²The national movements of the 'sixties had more of a multi-class character. Even within those movements, however, it was mainly ex-students and other members of the revolutionary intelligentsia who first turned to Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-Tung Thought.