

Proletarian Unity League

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

### Chapter 2: The Danger from the "Left" C. Political Line is Not Key

The dominant trend in the communist movement has not agreed that the organizational level holds stage center. Rather, it has argued and continues to argue that "political line is key."

Now important differences have cropped up in the meaning assigned to the term political line. Some comrades treat "political line" as the "concrete application" of theory or as the "sum total of tasks in the working class movement." (MLOC) In this definition, the term "political line" loses its specific relation to the political struggle of the proletariat, and becomes the general line guiding every activity. For example, the ATM(M-L) writes,

"the primary task facing us now is the application of the principles of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions facing the proletariat in the USNA--the further development of political line. A.T.M. sees that at this stage--**Political Line is Key!**" (**Revolutionary Cause**, No. 1)

Insofar as we take this definition at face value, it is too general to determine a "key link," including as it would political line in the strict sense, party-building line, etc. It does not define any current moment, since the time never comes when Marxist-Leninists need **not** apply the theory of Marxism-Leninism to concrete conditions. So in accepting these terms, Marxist-Leninists would still have to determine **around which tasks** the development of "political line" is key. Once it decided to declare itself a party (at which point everyone else's line on the OL became "key"), the October League ran right into this problem with their own emphasis on political line: "To those who agree with the primacy of political line in party building, we must also ask, what about political line on the organizational question?" (**The Call**, Dec. '75, p. 13)

Insofar as this definition really serves to specify the key link, in fact intending political line as the key link, it misreads the current situation in the communist movement, and adds to the movement's problems.

Political line guides the proletariat "in the field," in the struggle to build up its own forces, weaken and eventually overthrow the bourgeoisie. From this

it follows that for political line to develop beyond a certain rudimentary level, the proletariat must take the field. Political line, no more than any other realm of theory, does not elaborate itself. Yet for the proletariat to consistently wage class struggle as an independent class, it must first constitute itself as an independent political party.

“It is to enable the mass of a **definite class** to learn to understand its own interests and its position, to learn to conduct its own policy, that there must be an organization of the advanced elements of the class, immediately and at all costs, even though at first these elements constitute only a tiny fraction of the class.” (CW 19, p. 409)

Without that party, the political lines of various communist organizations will remain sketchy and essentially untried. To consign the communist movement to an indefinite period of "key" struggle over political line will not only set back the formation of a party; it will also prevent the collective working out of a revolutionary political line.

The historical formation of actual Marxist-Leninist parties bears out the dependence of elaborated political lines upon the existence of a party and its leading of class struggles.

“The Party of Labor of Albania has not worked out its complete political line, and programme, for one or other stage of the revolution, all at once. At the beginning it has laid the foundations of its general line, first of all, clearly defining its strategic aim, then it has enriched and completed this line in the course of the revolution. When the Party was founded, it laid the basis of its political line for the period of the National Liberation War. The First Conference of the Albanian Communist Party, held in March 1943, summed up the revolutionary experience accumulated during the 15 months of its existence, and, on this basis, worked out the general line more deeply and extensively, giving the Party a more or less complete program. However, this program was still incomplete. It was completed later on, always through the summing up of the experience which was being accumulated in the revolutionary practice of the struggle to carry out the strategic and tactical tasks defined earlier.” (Ndreci Plasari, "The Vanguard of the Revolution and Socialist Construction," **Albania Today**, No. 2, 1972)

The formation of the Albanian Communist Party permitted both the centralization of ideological struggle around political line and the rectification and advance of that line through its implementation in the war of national liberation. The Albanian Communists achieved firm ideological unity in a fierce struggle over a relatively few burning questions, and not over a complete Party program.

In a situation in which the organizational level of the Party principle has come to the fore, the ideological struggle concentrates on resolving the main contradiction at that level. It is our movement's immediate priority. The history of the CPUSA provides a telling example of such a situation. In 1929, struggle between the Foster-Bittelman and the Lovestone factions had all but immobilized the Party. Presented with this problem, Stalin and the Comintern sought to seize upon the "key link" which would move the work of the CPUSA forward. They saw that link at the organizational level. Stalin's speeches on the CPUSA bring out this point with exceptional clarity. Stalin recognized that

"These conditions [of U.S. capitalist development] lead our comrades from America, both the majority and the minority, into errors of the type of the Right deviation." (**Stalin's Speeches on the American Communist Party**, p. 12)

Nonetheless, he chose not to intervene on matters of political line.<sup>1</sup> Despite his assessment that the exaggeration of the specific features of American capitalism "lies at the root of every opportunist error committed both by the majority and the minority group," Stalin stated flatly, "I shall not deal with the political position of the leaders of the majority and the minority." (**Ibid.**, p. 11) Though he regarded this exaggeration as **determinant**, it did not play the dominant role at that moment.

"In order to put an end to these foul methods and place the American Communist Party on the lines of Leninist policy, it is necessary **first of all** to put an end to factionalism in that Party." (**Ibid.**, p. 17; emphasis added)

He goes on,

"An end must be put to the present situation in the Communist Party of America, in which the questions of positive work, the questions of the struggle of the working class against the capitalists, questions of wages, working hours, work in the trade unions, the fight against reformism, the fight against the Right deviation--when all these questions are kept in the shade, and are replaced by petty questions of the factional struggle between the Lovestone group and the Foster group." (**Ibid.**, p. 19)

Even the struggle against the Right deviation, which Stalin analyzed as the main danger at the level of political line, turns on the struggle against factionalism as the Party's immediate task.

"In its [Sixth Congress of the Comintern] decision on the American Communist Party it plainly declares that "the chief task of the Party is to put

an end to the factional struggle, which is not based on any serious differences of principle." "(**Ibid.**, p. 25)

On this basis, Stalin declared factionalism the "**fundamental evil**" of the American Communist Party. (**Ibid.**, p. 26)

Stalin's analysis of the factional struggles in the CPUSA has an important lesson for our own situation. Given the current disorganization of the communist movement, struggle over political line must take a secondary place until the stranglehold of erroneous party-building lines has been broken. Owing to the obstacles which these lines present to profound theoretical study of international and U.S. class struggles, to all-sided propaganda, to widespread agitation, and to the direction of revolutionary mass struggle, it would be foolish to expect that extensive political lines can emerge in the "inter-group" struggle. To paraphrase Stalin, an end must be put to the present situation, in which the questions of positive work, the questions of the struggle of the working class against the capitalists, of work in the trade unions and national movements, of women's emancipation, of the concrete fight against revisionism--when all these questions are kept in the shade and replaced by petty questions of the sectarian struggle between our various parties, pre-party formations, "revolutionary wings," "Leninist trends," etc., etc.

By saying the organizational level of the party principle currently holds stage center, we do not mean that everyone can simply unite into one big organization tomorrow. In the absence of a deep understanding of "left" deviations or the revolutionary questions which "leftism" has obscured, unity would be a fleeting gesture. Lenin's warnings about the necessity of strict lines of demarcation and of one line "settling accounts" with other lines still apply; but their meaning and application become concrete only in relation to our current situation.

Taking political line as key has only exacerbated the unprincipled polarization of the communist movement. Such an emphasis does not speak to the organization of the ideological struggle, even over political line. The proliferation of irregularly published and poorly distributed journals and newspapers, each giving solely its views on the other groups, the world situation, and, more infrequently, the domestic political issues of the day, does not constitute the organization of ideological struggle, and will not advance the organization of the working class' Struggle either. Concentration on political line does not combat these centrifugal tendencies, and in fact encourages them. Even elements of a correct political line can contribute to these tendencies, if the struggle for unity around them is unfolded in a sectarian, destructive fashion.<sup>2</sup> Until they address the organization of the

ideological struggle, the separate groups cannot demand that others accept their line and their line alone in a situation in which poor theoretical training, lack of common ideological debate, and inexperience mean that many cadre are simply not in a position to make knowledgeable judgements on various questions.

No one disagrees that "party-building must be linked with political line," as the Chinese Comrades say. Linking party-building with political line, though, pre-supposes that we distinguish between the two, that we do not confuse ourselves with expressions like "political line on party-building." More importantly, we have to give this slogan, like any other, a concrete application. In our circumstances, this means that **struggle over political line be subordinated to the fight against "left" opportunism in party-building line.**

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>A number of groups have downplayed the significance of this choice in their accounts, preferring instead to emphasize the Right "American Exceptionalist" errors of both factions. See, for example. **Dialectics of the Development of the Communist League; On the Struggle Against Revisionism** by Admiral Kilpatrick; **The Communist**, Vol. II, No. 8, p. 6; and PRRWO **Party-Building in the Heat of Class Struggle**, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> As Comintern representative Otto Kuusinen remarked of the faction-ridden Korean communist movement of the late 1920's,

"The characteristic point here is the fact that even if the questions of principle are raised or even if a platform which outwardly seems principled is worked out--all this is subordinated to the goals of the factional struggle. Everything, even the best platforms, become factional weapons in order to fight the opponent with greater effect. Even the authority of the Comintern is sometimes used for these purposes.... Imagine that the factionalists were right about one issue or another. Even if they had been right, we could have still replied, even in that case, that they were pursuing the correct line on a particular matter so poorly, in such a faction-like manner, and so harmfully that, as a result, they ended up in a complete isolation from other revolutionaries, the environment of the workers, and the working class." ("On the Korean Communist Movement," 1931)