

Proletarian Unity League

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

### Chapter 2: The Danger from the "Left"

#### J. The Danger of Which "Little is Known"

A communist movement or Party conscious of and experienced in the struggle against a given deviation will have less likelihood of coming under its influence. On the other hand, a communist movement or Party which has long concentrated almost its sole attention on an opposite deviation, which downplays the study of certain types of deviations and remains oblivious to their dangers, runs the risk of falling into the deviation it has ignored. Lenin pointed out just this problem in analyzing the rise of Left-Wing Communism in the Third International:

"THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WHICH ENEMIES WITHIN THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT HELPED BOLSHEVISM DEVELOP, GAIN STRENGTH, AND BECOME STEELED

"First and foremost, the struggle against opportunism...this was Bolshevism's principal enemy within the working-class movement...The Bolsheviks have been devoting the greatest attention to this enemy. This aspect of Bolshevik activities **is now fairly well known abroad** too.

"It was, however, different with Bolshevism's other enemy within the working-class movement. **Little is known in other countries of the fact that Bolshevism** took shape, developed, and became steeled in the long years of struggle against **petit-bourgeois revolutionism** [Lenin's emphasis], which smacks of anarchism, or borrows something from the latter and, in all essential matters, does not measure up to the conditions and requirements of a consistently proletarian class struggle." (CW 31, p. 31-32; emphasis added except where otherwise indicated)

When our "Left-Wing" comrades try to explain why right opportunism is the main danger, they tell us that Rightism constitutes the greatest danger "historically and internationally." But when Stalin argued that the Right deviation posed the major threat to the Bolshevik Party, he cited the actual history of struggle in the Bolshevik Party, and not abstractions:

"Which of these dangers is worse? In my opinion, one is as bad as the other.

"The difference between these deviations from the point of view of successfully combatting them consists in the fact that the danger of the "Left" deviation is at the present moment more obvious to the Party than the danger of the Right deviation." (**CW 11**, p. 242)

And,

"At this moment the Right danger is the chief danger in our Party. A fight against Trotskyist trends, and a concentrated fight at that, has been going on already for some ten years. This fight has resulted in the rout of the main Trotskyist cadres. It cannot be said that the fight against the openly opportunist trend has been waged of late with equal intensity." (**Ibid**, p. 301)

And against our "Lefts" attempts to make up universally applicable formulas on the greatest danger "historically and internationally," Stalin noted,

"There is a controversy as to which deviation represents the chief danger: the deviation towards Great-Russian nationalism, or the deviation towards local nationalism. Under present conditions, this is a formal and, therefore, a pointless controversy. It would be foolish to attempt to give ready-made recipes suitable for all times and for all conditions as regards the chief and the lesser danger. Such recipes do not exist. The chief danger is the deviation against which we have ceased to fight, thereby allowing it to grow into a danger to the state." ("Report to the 17th Congress," in **The Essential Stalin**, p. 285)

The history of struggle within the Marxist-Leninist movement provides ample opportunity for the growth of ultra-leftism. For twenty years, Marxist-Leninists have fought revisionism or right opportunism ideologically, politically and organizationally. That struggle, and that struggle alone, has **defined** the communist movement as an **anti-revisionist movement**. It has resulted in a series of organizational breaks with the CPUSA and the establishment of new organizations dedicated to building a new Communist Party.

During that time, the communist movement has devoted little or no attention to the combating of the "Leftist" deviation. The common struggle against ultra-leftism in the movement has so far been largely restricted to criticisms of "old style" "left-wing" communism, such as dual unionism as a doctrine, and denunciations of urban guerrillism, whose main avowedly Marxist-Leninist advocates have been small groups like the Sojourner Truth

Organization and the Weather Underground or Venceremos. The danger of "leftism" has not been "obvious" to the communist forces.

Twenty years of concentration on fighting revisionism have made a serious struggle with ultra-leftism inevitable. An almost exclusive focus on right opportunism has allowed "left" sectarianism, adventurism, "left" economism, and other forms of "left" opportunism to flourish largely unchecked. Within the critique of revisionism, semi-anarchist hysteria and semi-Trotskyite complaints have moved about freely, for the most part unchallenged by the Marxist-Leninist line. After all, anarchism and Trotskyism also oppose modern revisionism and reformism. Insofar as the communist movement concerns itself solely with opposing revisionism, semi-anarchists and semi-Trotskyites--in short, petit-bourgeois revolutionists of every stripe--will be only too happy to enter the movement and spread their anti-Marxist doctrines under the cover of "anti-revisionism."

The communist movement can no longer postpone a showdown with the alien ideologies which have infiltrated its ranks; the strength of those ideologies threaten every advance towards the new Party. The time has come to turn the full force of the ideological struggle against the danger of which "little is known," against "the deviation which we have ceased to fight." **This fight takes the form of a purely ideological struggle over "left" opportunism, its ideological roots, and the methods to combat it.** The present situation places before our movement the urgent necessity of reopening an ideological struggle free from group interest and "mountain stronghold mentality," determining the preconditions for party-formation on an objective rather than subjective basis, and centralizing the movement first ideologically and then organizationally.

In dealing at some length with the principal arguments for right opportunism as the main danger, we have tried to bring out certain deep-rooted misconceptions about the nature of "left" and Right deviations. The "left" arguments we have reviewed, however, set the terms of the debate before the communist movement. They present elements necessary to any discussion of the current situation: the existence of many small groups; the consequent amateurishness of communist work; the gravitation towards a definite line which tends to justify the many centers and promote amateurishness; the "bowing to spontaneity" which buttresses this line; and the liquidation of the theoretical struggle necessary to defeat this line. What the "Lefts" have not done is prove that right opportunism constitutes the line in question. In order to determine that, they would have had to examine the real development of our movement, to see whether the leaders of the many groups do in fact draw their chief justifications from Rightist sources.

The next two chapters will show that they do not. They will demonstrate that "left" sectarianism is the immediate or main enemy of the development of the common ideological struggle at this time, and those who do not struggle against it sabotage work on our theoretical tasks, even if they do so in the name of upholding the primacy of theory. They will demonstrate that "left" sectarianism is the immediate enemy of the struggle against amateurishness, for a planned division of labor, and the strengthening of the "fusion" of Marxism-Leninism and the workers' movement, even where this sectarianism parades under the banner of combatting amateurishness. They will demonstrate that "left" sectarianism is the main enemy of Bolshevizing the communist movement, even if this sectarianism trumpets "Bolshevization" (in fact, **because of the way** it trumpets Bolshevization). They will demonstrate that "left" sectarianism is the principal shield of petit-bourgeois democracy in our movement, of the hundreds of small circles, of the fifty Central Committees that centralize little, of the fifty "general secretaries" who refuse to subordinate the part to the whole, and spend their time drafting new slanderous attacks on other forces for not recognizing some freshly-minted "principles" of Marxism-Leninism. And finally they will demonstrate that

"our movement is indeed in its infancy, and in order that it may grow up the more quickly, it must become infected with intolerance against those who retard its growth by their subservience to spontaneity," (**WITBD?**, p. 51)

but suggest that the intolerance we lack is an intolerance for the spontaneity of the "Left."