

Proletarian Unity League

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

Chapter 3:"Left" Opportunism in Party-Building Line C. A Class Stand, A Party Spirit

Whenever communist forces do set up a party, no guarantee exists or can exist that the party formed at the founding congress will, in fact, assume its historic responsibilities:

"In the revolutionary situation, the party of the working class either comes to the leadership of the masses thanks to its own correct policy and its determination and ability to carry this policy through to the end, or, on the contrary, the revolutionary situation rejects it, destroys it, or turns it into an unimportant fag-end because the Party has not worked out a correct political line, or is not capable of applying its political line, however right it may be, because it has been unable to convince the masses of the correctness of this line." (Ndreci Plasari, "Some Features of the Revolution in Albania," **Some Questions of Socialist Construction in Albania and of the Struggle Against Revisionism**, pp. 43-44)

But granted that a newly-organized Party may or may not develop into a true vanguard, we do not see why the success or failure of the Party should be left entirely to chance. In other words, we oppose the call for forming a party, any party, and seeing what happens. Every possibility should be given the new party to fulfill its historic obligations. Only the meeting of definite preconditions, preconditions recognized well in advance by all serious Marxist-Leninists, can provide this kind of assurance. These preconditions must take account of the actual circumstances of the U.S. communist movement--they cannot be copied out of books, spun out of thin air, or tailored to suit sectarian taste. In a later chapter, we will deal at length with the question of preconditions to party-formation; here we only wish to set out the most general prerequisite to successful communist unification.

Some comrades will protest that debating preconditions to party-formation has no relevance in a period when a new Communist Party does in fact exist (as well as several pretenders). They argue that our place is inside the new Party (whichever), fighting for the correct line. Now we agree that a party organization provides the best context for struggle. But joining one of the several Parties for that reason presupposes communist practices of

democratic centralism. If M-L Party I or M-L Party II really practices democratic centralism, then such a procedure might have a chance. After all, most of the Third International parties began without coherent strategies for their countries, and managed to rectify their lines. Democratic centralism consists, however, in an organizational system where "the minority is subordinate to the majority, the lower level to the higher level, the part to the whole, and the entire membership to the Central Committee." (Mao, SW III, p. 44) Good practices of democratic centralism reflect a proletarian class stand; for a communist, proletarian class stand means Party spirit: "Whether to work for interests of the vast majority or for the few is, in essence, a question of taking which class' stand." (**Peking Review**, No. 26, 1976, p. 6) Conversely, bad practices of democratic centralism reflect an incorrect class stand. They point to a circle spirit, not a Party one. The refusal to struggle to unite all who can be united--the establishment instead of a Party around one relatively small section of the communist movement--do not indicate the presence of a Party spirit. And if a group refuses to "subordinate the part to the whole" in the very formation of its Party, what evidence exists that it will do so in its internal workings?

A Party spirit, embodied in a commitment to unite all who can be united around Marxist-Leninist principles, to subordinate the part to the whole, the lower level (the separate communist groups) to the higher level (the Party coming into being)--this is the fundamental prerequisite, the first precondition, to successful communist unification. Lenin consistently adhered to this view:

"Unification, the re-establishment of a united Party, is the most pressing task of the Russian Social-Democrats, a task that urgently requires immediate accomplishment. This task is a very difficult one, for it is not unity of a few handfuls of revolutionary minded intellectuals that we need, but unity of all leaders of the working class movement, which has roused the whole of a large class of the population to independent life and struggle. **We need unification based on a strict singleness of principle which must be consciously and firmly arrived at by all or by the vast majority of committees, organizations, and groups, of intellectuals and workers, who act in varying conditions and have sometimes achieved their Social-Democratic convictions along the most diverse paths.** Such unification cannot be decreed; neither can it be established immediately, by mere resolutions adopted by assembled delegates. It must be prepared and developed systematically and gradually, so that the general Party congress can consolidate and improve what has already been accomplished, continue what has been started, and complete and formally endorse the firm foundation for further, more widespread and intense work." (**CW 6**: pp. 309-10; emphasis added)

"Conscious" and "firmly arrived at" unity of "all or a vast majority" of Marxist-Leninists requires a principled, democratic and increasingly centralized ideological struggle. We regard as "**left**" **sectarian** all party-building lines which either treat this struggle as a "brief period" of "rolling on and rolling over," (RU/RCP) or consider it largely completed, despite the continued dominance of "left" opportunism and the consequent disunity of the Marxist-Leninists. ("We can now clearly distinguish between Marxism and revisionism on each of the main questions facing the communist and workers' movement."--Organizing Committee for a Marxist-Leninist Party.) We characterize those who deny its necessity before party-formation as **Rightist, or conciliationist**. In practice, both "left" and Right lines refuse to open up the ideological struggle to all Marxist-Leninists, barring the one road to uniting all who can be united. And not uniting all who can be united means not forming the only Marxist-Leninist Communist Party the proletariat has need for.

Premature Party-Formation: A "Left-Wing" Disorder

Sectarian party-formation is premature party-formation. Now, both "Lefts" and Rightists can attack a given Founding Congress as premature, claiming that we lack the objective and subjective conditions for it. As we saw above, the anarcho-syndicalist influence within the "left" camp may oppose party-formation because it does not include most of the proletarian vanguard. They fail to relate this alleged deficiency to any ideological or political tasks--not enough communist workers for what?--and usually demand that any newly-formed Party have all the capabilities and resources of a full-fledged vanguard Party. An even more common "left" criticism puts off party-formation because the decisive ideological and political break has not been made with revisionism or right opportunism. To a certain extent, however, "left" sectarians simply find other "left" sectarian Founding Congresses "premature," while discovering all the necessary, if undefined, ingredients when their own turn approaches, when their evolutionism gives way to their voluntarism.

Rightists, on the other hand, frequently dismiss party-formation as "premature" because it lacks a "mass base." To acquire such a base, they advocate minimizing the need for principle and discarding those Marxist-Leninist tenets which have become "antiquated" or go against "American democratic traditions" (an illegal apparatus, the necessity for armed overthrow of the bourgeoisie, or even the dictatorship of the proletariat). In these objections, they may bloc with semi-anarcho-syndicalists. Owing to the ideological immaturity and largely petit-bourgeois basis of the communist movement, the two critiques tend to merge. Other Rightist elements may oppose party-formation as premature because the revisionist

degeneration of the CPUSA is not clear to the masses, including the masses of CPUSA members, or because the bankruptcy of reformism has not been established in the masses' consciousness. This reverses the second "left" objection: where the "Lefts" oppose party-formation because they claim the **conscious element** has not yet broken with revisionism and reformism, Rights object because the **masses** have not made the same break.

By premature party-formation, we intend neither of these critiques.

Premature party-formation is the unification of a relatively small section of the communist forces into a party-form, a unification taking place before the necessary preconditions for a united Party have been met, and before a Marxist-Leninist line has established its hegemony. It most often consists simply in the renaming of a large organization and a few dependent collectives, which then announce that no genuine communist **organization** remains outside its ranks. Of course, real party-formation, understood as the unification of all or a majority of genuine Marxist-Leninists in a Marxist-Leninist Party, is not itself premature. The unification of communists can never come too soon, provided it is a principled unity "prepared and developed systematically" and not a mere declaration of goodwill. What comes prematurely is the end of the struggle to resolve our disagreements, before the dominance of the "Left" line is reversed. For at this time, the strength of "left" opportunism makes unity impossible, undesirable, and therefore premature. Reflecting on the sad experiences of the first four Korean Communist Parties, Kim Il Sung said,

"...founding a Marxist-Leninist Party is the most pressing and fundamental task confronting us Korean Communists. Needless to say, this does not mean that we must just now, under the prevailing situation, create a Party as some factionalists insist. If we think that we can immediately found a Party without any preparations and accumulated revolutionary force, we will indulge ourselves in day dreams, in which we are attempting to build a castle in the air. Therefore, we must, with greatest caution and with might and main, lay step by step the organizational and ideological groundwork for founding a Party." (quoted in Baik Bong, **Kim Il Sung**, p. 347)

As the passage from Lenin also argues, this process of uniting the proven Marxist-Leninists must be well underway before the founding congress heads up the orders of the day. Marxist-Leninists need to prepare a sound basis for a united Party **before** the Congress; otherwise, no basis will exist for political work the day **after**.

"In fact, it was far from possible, when incurable factionalists who had destroyed the Communist Party in the 1920's still remained within the communist ranks, to speak about producing new Communists, creating a

mass basis for founding a Party and firmly rallying the Communists and revolutionary organizations into a united body, apart from practical struggles over a rather long period." (Baik Bong, ***ibid.***, pp. 347-48)

Far from being an "innocent" or casual error, the formation of several "Left-Wing" Communist parties will have extremely serious consequences. The presence of such parties will discourage many unaffiliated Marxist-Leninists and other revolutionary-minded proletarians. Their existence will prejudice the work of other revolutionaries, much of whose work must then devote itself to explaining why these others are not the Party they intend to build. Moreover, if the parties themselves do not turn from their ultra-left course, and work to unite all who can be united, subordinating their interests to that of the revolutionary whole, they will inevitably degenerate into counter-revolutionary sects, obstacles to rather than comrades in the construction of a proletarian vanguard party. Their party congresses will not "formally endorse the firm foundation for further, more widespread and intense work;" they will plant their parties in quicksand.

Unite the Many, Defeat the Few or Damn the Many, Unite the Few?

The ultra-left party-building line in the communist movement does not openly reject uniting all who can be united on the basis of Marxist-Leninist principle. But they counterpose the necessity of a communist Party to the need for uniting all who can be united. For example, the "left-wing" comrades often cite a well-known passage from Lenin in support of their impatience:

"It is to enable the mass of a definite class to learn to understand its own interests and 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)

From this, our "left" sectarians dogmatically conclude that where no "genuine" Party exists, we must form one immediately, no matter how small, even at the "cost" of some communist unity. We say "dogmatically" because Lenin obviously intends an organization which includes all the advanced elements of the class. According to the passage, the organization may constitute a tiny fraction of the class **as a whole**, not a tiny fraction of the advanced elements. The "left" sectarians, however, act as if Lenin means that their parties can, in a pinch, constitute a tiny fraction of Marxist-Leninists, and still justify their formation.

The above argument for "my party immediately and at all costs" could not by itself support the proliferation of "Left-Wing" Communist parties if it did not accompany another. The second argument counterposes a certain conception of the struggle against revisionism to uniting all anti-revisionist forces. On the one hand, this conception reduces the struggle against revisionism to a struggle against revisionist ideas; on the other hand, it elevates the struggle against errors in the communist movement to the level of the fight against revisionism. The two go together: they belong to an anti-revisionist critique based in the material circumstances and ideology of the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia. And they result not in uniting all who can be united, but in "drawing the line around one's own interest"; not in the isolation of the revisionist CPUSA, but in a strengthening of its influence.

For the remainder of this chapter, we will examine in detail the "left" theory and practice of anti-revisionist struggle as it relates to party-building line. The next three sections will take up four widely-held assumptions about the fight against revisionism. The last two sections will look at two common "left" remedies to the ills of the communist movement--a new **Iskra** and a particular conception of Bolshevization.