

Proletarian Unity League

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

### Chapter 3: "Left" Opportunism in Party-Building Line D. Anti-Revisionism or "Left" Oppositionism?

The communist movement has set itself the tasks of constructing the vanguard party of the proletariat, rallying the proletarian masses around the vanguard and all popular forces around the proletariat, creating a force capable of overthrowing the bourgeoisie, and destroying the bourgeois state apparatus through the establishment of proletarian dictatorship. Rejecting the pretensions of the CPUSA to be this revolutionary party, Marxist-Leninists hold that the CPUSA has revised the principles of Marxism-Leninism and renounced revolutionary class struggle. The term "anti-revisionist movement" expresses this opposition to the CPUSA, an opposition which translates into activity aimed at defeating that party's revisionist and reformist influence.

Opposition to revisionism should not mean, however, reducing one's role to that of a "Left opposition" movement, as the Trotskyite and anarchist movements do. These trends exist perpetually on the margin of the workers' movement; they have no independent life. Unfortunately, the tendency also exists within the communist movement to restrict anti-revisionist politics to fighting the influence of the CPUSA. Representing once again a semi-anarchist strain within the movement, this tendency poses a grave threat to the development of a revolutionary party and **to a successful fight against revisionism.**

For the semi-anarchist "anti-revisionists," elaborating a strategy and tactics for proletarian revolution, establishing a party which actually unites Marxism-Leninism with the multi-national reality of a particular working class movement with its own particular history, and leading revolutionary struggles are all relegated to a ritual recitation of aims, while the present moment is taken up with directing our fire at the revisionists and their conciliators. It's true that in order to lead the masses, it is necessary to develop a correct line, and likewise true that to develop a correct line, one must combat incorrect, revisionist lines, but it's a cinch that the "ceaseless exposure of revisionism," understood literally, will not by itself give revolutionary leadership to the masses. "Anti-revisionist" activity of this kind has yet to lead to the successful formation of united revolutionary

proletarian parties in imperialist countries where anti-revisionism has had organized expression for some time. There is no reason to believe that it will in our own country, where the revisionist party is only a step above a sect as regards the masses of the working class. Spontaneist in the strict sense that it apparently believes that the masses will take care of the revolution if we will mimeo up the denunciations of the revisionists, this type of revolutionary posturing cannot advance the communist movement beyond its own narrow confines.

Many comrades recognize the futility of these "anti-revisionist" antics, yet fail to see the threat they pose to the communist movement. Sure, they reason, some carry anti-revisionism to excess, but after all, the revisionists deserve it. At the height of the anti-imperialist student movement, this liberalism toward "left" opportunism might have had some justification, but it will prove ruinous if persisted in now.

The "left" line on anti-revisionist unity can be summarized in four interdependent theses. These theses concern the strength of the CPUSA, the strength of the communist movement, the character of the differences within the movement, and how the new Marxist-Leninist party will emerge in relation both to revisionism and the anti-revisionist forces.

**One:** the CPUSA is very powerful. Many comrades completely exaggerate the ideological and political importance of the modern revisionist party in the U.S. They claim that our "tradition of reformism and revisionism is strongest," (WVO) or that "the main source of opportunism within the working-class movement is the revisionist CPUSA," (OL) or that we must aim the main blow, in our trade union work, at the revisionists. The Marxist-Leninist Organizing Committee even maintains that:

**"Since 1944,** the CPUSA has been a **fascist agent** of the bourgeois dictatorship in this country. On every major question of national and international significance, they have aligned themselves with the interests of monopoly capitalism... without accomplishing this task ["opposing and exposing and driving out of the midst of the working class once and for all"] there can be no possibility of seizing state power, for they are a vital social prop in the working-class of the bourgeoisie itself." (**UNITE!**, vol. 2, no. 3. Emphasis added)

The "Left-Wing" comrades who reason in this manner tend to place tremendous emphasis on combating revisionism, which supposedly has such sway over the working masses. This view of the CPUSA is wrong. The tactics it implies are wrong, and where implemented they will strengthen rather than weaken the revisionist party.

Let us look at the CPUSA for a moment. What distinguishes it from revisionist parties in other major imperialist countries? True, the revisionist party has some influence among the working class and within certain unions, certainly more influence than the communist movement has. True, the CPUSA endorses the major positions of international revisionism, headed by the CPSU. Indeed the CPUSA acts a particularly noisy spokesperson for some of social-imperialism's more noxious views. But as opposed to the situation in many European countries or Japan, the revisionist capture of the CPUSA did not lead to the development of a mass reformist party, but rather to the effective liquidation of the Party. Under Browder's liquidationist line, the CPUSA eliminated the Control Commission, fractions in mass organizations, shop nuclei, many Left-led mass organizations, the Young Communist League, and the Party itself. Attempting to spread its influence, the Browder clique committed outrageous acts of national chauvinism against some Latin American Parties. Despite courageous efforts by some, the U.S. Party never managed to re-establish itself as a mass force in the South, and in the early fifties set about liquidating the "Left-centers" in mass work (Cf. Harry Haywood's account in **For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question**), the Left-led unions, and any semblance of independent communist policy. **This history has no parallel in other major imperialist countries.**

A dogmatic blindness to these features of our national reality entails an overestimation of the importance of the struggle against the CPUSA. Such an overestimation to the neglect of our other tasks constitutes a "left" opportunist error. Lenin fought just such a deviation among the young communist parties of the Third International:

"We must now pay less attention to the K.A.P.-ists. By polemicizing with them we merely give them publicity...Let us propagate and implement, with greater effect, the organizational and tactical decisions of the Third Congress of the Communist International, instead of giving the K.A.P.-ists publicity by arguing with them...Similarly we are now needlessly helping Paul Levi, we are needlessly giving him publicity by polemicizing with him...Now, after the decisions of the Third Congress of the Communist International, we must forget about him and devote all our attention, all our efforts, to peaceful, practical and constructive work...." (**CW 32**, p. 515)

In a period of heightened superpower competition, the rise of the Third World struggle against hegemonism, and increased exploitation and repression at home, the opportunities for both the revisionist party and the communist movement grow. So far, the CPUSA has put the changing domestic situation to better advantage than the Marxist-Leninists have. The appreciable growth of the revisionist party over the past several years, its

more visible public profile and its increased trade union emphasis come as a consequence. Favored by the relative rise of Soviet social-imperialism and their own reformist program, the CPUSA also profits from the subjective weaknesses, and particularly the bitter internal divisions, of the communist forces. Among these weaknesses, inflated notions of modern revisionism's influence have an important place. In his "Letter to the German Communists" Lenin points out that the exaggeration of the struggle against Centrism not only prevents the German Communists from undertaking "practical and constructive work," but also **strengthens** centrism:

"Exaggeration of the struggle against Centrism means **saving** Centrism, means strengthening its position, its influence over the workers." (*Ibid.*, p. 521)

Obviously our situation is not that of the German Communists, who after all had regrouped themselves in a Party. But we have no doubt that exaggerating the position of the CPUSA will likewise strengthen the CPUSA.

Of course, Communists must conduct themselves as authentic Marxist-Leninists in all their work. But the place for authentic Marxist-Leninists lies at the head of the proletariat, not forever yapping at the heels of a still feeble revisionist party. "Practical and constructive work" will put us there; crying "wolf" about "vital social props", "strongest traditions of revisionism and reformism," or "revisionism as the main source of opportunism in the workers' movement" will not. And only unity of the Marxist-Leninist forces will permit us to undertake a concerted "ideological struggle against the opponents of [Marxism-Leninism] on the one hand, and...the development of practical party work, on the other." (Lenin, CW 6, p. 212) As we will see, the "left" opportunist notion of the struggle against revisionism sabotages both that struggle and the struggle for Marxist-Leninist unity.

The **second erroneous thesis** follows closely on the first: "the communist movement is also very powerful." Many comrades confuse the movement of the movement with the movement of the class. They act as if the exposure of revisionism or the "defeat" of this or that line in the communist movement will magically win us the allegiance of the proletarian masses. This notion arises from a classically "left" subjectivist confusion between one's own desires and the real world.

Out in the real world, the communist movement is isolated from the workers' movement. As the comrades of the League for Proletarian Revolution (M-L) (formerly Resistencia Puertorriquena) have written:

"But perhaps our gravest error was not being able to distinguish before the difference between the so-called "movement" and the masses. It was only after five years of difficult struggle and of serious and consistent study of Marxism-Leninism that we could better understand what is reality. We have realized that each revolutionary organization--and even the sum of all of them--is really a **sect**. Communism as such, the science of Marxism-Leninism, is still separated from the great masses of workers in the U.S. Due to sectarianism, among other things, the revolutionary movement in this country remains separated from the masses." (**Resistance**, Mayday issue, 1975)

And even more precisely,

"Within the working-class movement the influence of the communist movement is virtually non-existent. Even revisionists and right opportunists with all their tailing behind the masses have no real influence in the working-class movement." (**Resistance**, vol. 7, no. 6)

No amount of carrying on about the "minds of the workers being wide open" (WVO) can disguise this fact. The illusion that we march at the head of the proletariat diverts us from actually fusing Marxism-Leninism with the working class struggle.