

Proletarian Unity League

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

Chapter 3:"Left" Opportunism in Party-Building Line F. The Shadows of the Past

Armed with an erroneous analysis of the maturity of contradictions within the communist movement, the "Left-Wing" comrades draw a logical but equally erroneous conclusion. **Thesis four:** the new Marxist-Leninist Party will be formed or has been formed by breaking with the consolidated Right revisionist trend within the movement. As the Revolutionary Union's slogan put it, "dump the baggage, on to the Party!" And the CLP later congratulated itself for "break[ing] our relations with the 'left,' or as they would like to be called, the "young communist movement." (**People's Tribune**, Nov. 15, 1975)

In the movement of the present, the "Lefts" spy mainly the shadows of the past. They assume that the Marxist-Leninist Party must arise in the same way that many Third International Parties did, or as a smaller number of present-day anti-revisionist Parties did--through a split with the Right, be they former members of the same party or the same movement. Behind this assumption lies the belief that the two-line struggle in any pre-Party period always develops into an openly antagonistic contradiction, and that this antagonism always develops between the Right and the genuine Lefts. This perspective is founded neither in history nor in concrete material conditions.

Historically, the formation of Communist Parties follows three general patterns, with some variants. In a relatively small number of cases, most revolutionaries of a given country join together in some kind of pre-party organization. This organization prepares the preconditions for forming a party, and then a struggle ensues over the transition to that party. The Viet Nam Revolutionary Youth Association had this function for the Indochinese Communist Party. In the Viet Nam case, two-line struggle within the Revolutionary Youth Association temporarily resulted in three communist organizations. Under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, however, all three united into a single Communist Party, clearly indicating that the two-line struggle before party-formation did not call for an organizational break.

In a second pattern, a section of a social-democratic or revisionist party splits off and declares immediately, or soon thereafter, the formation of a

Communist Party. Many of the Third International Parties formed in this way after splits precipitated by the national bankruptcy of reformism coupled with the international example of the Bolshevik Party. For the numerous anti-revisionist Parties built in this way, the national bankruptcy of revisionism had been less broadly established, as evidenced both by the extreme minority character of many of these splits and by the quick degeneration of some of the anti-revisionist parties.¹ In these cases, two-line struggle obviously took an openly antagonistic form. In a third category, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, Albanian and other Parties of both the Third International and the world-wide anti-revisionist movement formed as a fusion of many circles. In the Russian and Albanian cases, as well as others, two-line struggle before party-formation again did not take an openly antagonistic form and result in an organizational split (unless, of course, someone comes forward now to say that Lenin made an opportunist error in allowing the Economists and future Mensheviks to attend the Second RSDLP Congress).

Finally, some Third International party-building experiences combine the "split" and "fusionist" models, such as the CPUSA, the German Party, or, most especially, the CPGB. Others, such as the Vietnamese and the Korean, combine the "pre-party" with the "fusionist" pattern.

To sum up: historical evidence does not support the view that two-line struggle in the communist movement **must** lead to open antagonism, or that the party must arise from an organizational split with the revisionist line in the communist ranks. Further, the present-day U.S. communist movement differs radically from parties of the Second International and the modern revisionist parties with respect to social composition, history, and ideological basis. We have simply no reason to assume that fighting deviations within the movement is analogous to fighting revisionism outside of it.

The four theses of "Left-Wing" Marxism-Leninism on the anti-revisionist struggle have a certain cohesion. First the "Lefts" overestimate revisionist influence within the workers' movement as a whole and within our own ranks. In turn exaggerating the strength of anti-revisionism, they suppose a more ideologically and politically mature movement than the present one. A more mature movement implies for them a more completely elaborated two-line struggle, in which full-blown revolutionary and right opportunist trends have emerged. Consequently, the "Lefts" assume that the new party will be born by splitting with the opportunist wing.

No communist doubts that the communist movement, like the workers' movement, constitutes a "unity of opposites," that a bourgeois line and a

proletarian line constantly confront each other. We do not take every claim of "Marxism-Leninism" at face value. With Marxism-Leninism currently enjoying a great vogue among the U.S. left, all sorts of elements flock to its banner, and the communist movement needs to weed out the non-Marxist influences. But in an overwhelmingly young, still poorly trained and inexperienced communist movement, lines of demarcation over principle, clearly comprehensible to all concerned, come with great difficulty. Careful, painstaking clarification, grounded in a consistent political practice, will be necessary to differentiate the consolidated ultra-left or reformist element from the ideologically immature. If vagueness characterizes many opportunists, it also characterizes the untrained (including many of our "Lefts"). If dogmatism marks many "left" opportunists, it also marks the inexperienced. Especially where results are concerned, splits are no substitute for patient education, merciless blows no recourse where persuasion is needed. Or perhaps our present-day voluntarists fear precisely that test which principled ideological struggle brings? Those who cannot explain the principles of Marxism-Leninism such that the masses of communists and politically active workers understand and agree with them have not learned the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

"Left" in Form, Right in Essence

All the above shows that the dominant line among Marxist-Leninists on the struggle against revisionism and deviations within the communist movement is "Left" in form, but Right in essence. Right opportunists minimize the differences of principle between the revisionist parties and Marxist-Leninists. They do not draw a clear line between ourselves and the enemy, but mistake the enemy for our own people. The sham "Lefts," on the other hand, draw their "clear line" (a line which only they can find) among our own people. They tell us that the line among our own people is basically of the same nature as that between us and the revisionists!² Like the struggle against the revisionists, the struggle against deviations in our movement consists mainly in a struggle against the Right. Like the line of the revisionists, these deviations require a complete ideological, political, and organizational break. For the "Lefts," the new party will emerge from this break just as the anti-revisionist movement itself came out of the break with revisionism. Thus the "Lefts" end up confusing contradictions among the communist forces with contradictions between the communist and revisionist forces. Denying any basis of unity to the communist movement, they doom the communists to a marginal political existence. They mistake our people for the enemy, thereby letting the real enemy off the hook. They too minimize the communist movement's fundamental differences with revisionism. **In the end, exaggerating the struggle against revisionism has the same results**

as conciliating it: splitting the Marxist-Leninists and strengthening the hand of the CPUSA.

Where Marxist-Leninists seek to unite "all or the vast majority" of proven communists, the "Lefts" pursue a diametrically opposed line: splitting the communist movement. Where Marxist-Leninists strive to unite the many to defeat the few, the ultra-left line advocates attacking the many in order to protect a few, and "drawing the line around one's own interest." If the "lefts" persist in their ultra-left splitting and wrecking, they will certainly have demonstrated the openly antagonistic character of contradictions within the communist movement.

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Having established the general strategic orientation of the "Left" party-building line, we can finish with some examples of its tactical application. When we speak of "left" or Right lines, the terms "tactics" and "strategy" need to be treated with caution. In general, the "left" line endows certain tactics with strategic significance, while the Right line recognizes no strategic principles, only tactical means. "Left" lines frequently derive from a dogmatic application of tactics developed in other places or periods. "Left" communists treat historical experiences as fetishes and raise various slogans or tactics to the level of "fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism." Right opportunists, on the other hand, tend to dismiss real principles as "outdated" or "time-bound" ideas which have lost all relevance to current party-building efforts.

The examples we have chosen--the "**Iskra** principle" and building factory nuclei--bear this out. They and other essentially tactical questions serve the "Left-Wing" as both tactics and strategy. Various groups have put them forward as practical solutions to the problem of creating a new communist party and to the problem of breaking with the "right opportunist" or "non-Leninist" "trend" within the movement. The earlier analysis has shown that the "Lefts" see these two tasks as identical. At the same time, these tactics take on the status of principles for demarcating the genuine Marxist-Leninists from the revisionists or "petit-bourgeois democrats."

Aside from their typicality and familiarity, however, these two tactical examples merit discussion for a further reason. Both respond to real problems facing the anti-revisionist movement: how to create a leading center, in the **Iskra** case, and what organizational forms best serve merging Marxism-Leninism with the workers' movement, in the case of factory nuclei. Moreover, the arguments advanced in favor of each tactic contain some truth. In each instance, however, tactics which are appropriate to and still

valuable for certain situations have been raised to a one-sided **theory** and to a tactical **system** which does not take into account the current situation in the communist and workers' movements.

Footnotes

¹ For example, the Communist Party of Belgium (**Voix du Peuple**). The founding nucleus of this party published a pamphlet, **Marxist-Leninists Unite!**, which was republished by Foreign Languages Publishing House, Peking. The Jacques Grippa clique which led this Party opted for Liu Shao-chi at the time of the Cultural Revolution.

² "The signed Appendix to Chapter 5 considers a philosophical support for this analysis.