

Proletarian Unity League

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

**Chapter 3:"Left" Opportunism in Party-Building Line
H. Factory Nuclei-ism or...**

"If Right opportunism is the main danger, this must be 1928. Let's Bolshevize!"

The majority of groups within the communist movement call for basing a new Party in the workplaces, and specifically among the industrial proletariat. Most of the largest organizations (with the possible exception of the RCP) also call for making factory nuclei the basic unit of organization of a new Party, in keeping with orthodox tradition. We share this conception of the future Party. But it remains just that: a view of our goal. The importance of factory nuclei to the Party does not provide a ready-made solution for how to get either a Party or factory nuclei.

The "Lefts" reason otherwise. They confuse a desirable goal with the means for reaching it. Starting from the need to make factory nuclei the basic unit of Party organization, many of the "Lefts" assume we build the new Party basically through building factory nuclei. In raising factory nuclei into a "special slogan," our "Left-Wing" comrades prove once again that any sound tactical precept can do damage to the revolutionary cause if approached without regard to time and place.

The "Lefts" take the construction of factory nuclei not only as a key tactic in party-building, but also as a line of demarcation between Marxist-Leninist and right opportunist party-building lines. This second conclusion follows from and in turn supports the estimate that right opportunism constitutes the main danger to the communist movement. In our view, the critical importance given to building factory nuclei by the "Lefts" misjudges the real problems of the communist movement and the possible solutions available to it. If persisted in, this error can only compound the sectarian disunity of Marxist-Leninists.

The emphasis on building factory nuclei in order to revolutionize or Bolshevize the work of Communist Parties comes from the Comintern. During most of the 1920's and early 1930's, the Comintern held that right opportunism posed the most important threat to the majority of its

constituent Parties. This threat extended to their party-building lines as well as their political lines. Despite their formation as Communist Parties, most of the Comintern sections were still organized on a Social-Democratic basis. For most, electoral districts made up the basic organizations. The regular meetings, if they were held at all, functioned as huge, unmanageable assemblies. Inner-party elections rarely allowed for broad, principled discussion. These organizational practices and others favored the continued domination of undisciplined intellectuals and Communist trade union officials within the Parties. Moreover, this type of organization placed the proletarian character of the Parties in jeopardy and promoted passivity among the factory workers, as it had throughout the history of the Second International.

If we compare these conditions to our own, we can only conclude that those earlier deviations do not threaten us in the same way today. Social-Democratic or modern revisionist vestiges in the present communist movement just aren't the problem. Most Marxist-Leninists, like millions of their compatriots, have only the vaguest idea where their local Congressional Districts, or Democratic wards, begin and end, and couldn't care less (this isn't altogether a virtue). The basic organizations (collectives or cells) of most groups meet regularly, and they do not function as general assemblies. We do not lack disciplined control over our communist trade-union officials; we lack communist trade-union officials, and all that they imply. Admittedly, the proletarian character of the present-day communist movement is in question, but that doesn't result from the weighty organizational heritage of the Socialist Party USA, the Social Democrats USA, the CPUSA, or the various new Social-Democratic groups.

To sum up: since the conditions within the U.S. communist movement do not resemble those within the Communist Parties of the 1920's, our solutions should not take over uncritically their solutions. Further, we simply **cannot** take over some of their solutions. This becomes evident when we look at the practical meaning Bolshevization through building factory nuclei had for the Communist Parties of the 1920's.

Bolshevize or "Colonize"?

For the Comintern, Bolshevization through the building of factory nuclei was achieved in two ways: on the one hand, orienting the bulk of the Parties' work on the big factories, and on the other, reorganizing the Communist Parties themselves on the basis of factory nuclei. Prior to the struggle for Bolshevization, most or all of the Party branches, or cells, were organized on a geographical or community basis. We should keep in mind that these Parties had thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, of working class

members. Because they belonged to branches where they lived, however, their effect in the factories and the trade union movement was far smaller than their numbers should have produced. Party members in the same factory belonged to different branches and frequently did not even know each other. They obviously could not work to lead the proletarian masses or trade union movement in an organized way. Faced with this situation, the Comintern resolved to reorganize the Communist Parties along the lines of the Bolshevik Party, with factory branches as the basic unit of organization. As a first step, Bolshevization involved identifying Party members who worked at the same factory, and enrolling them in a new Party branch organized for work in that factory. Unemployed factory workers were to join the factory cell at their last place of employment.

It does not take inside information to realize that large numbers of factory workers do not languish today in the community-based "street cells" of the communist movement. In other words, the call for Bolshevizing the communist movement through the large scale construction of factory nuclei means something completely different for us than it did for the Comintern Parties. The comrades who sound this call cannot take over the Bolshevization methods available to the Comintern. Instead, they apply this slogan in a **voluntarist** way. Since they cannot organize factory nuclei from the communist factory workers, they propose to take the place of the communist factory workers, and organize nuclei on the basis of themselves. The same "Left" **substitutionist** logic we saw in chapter two is at work here: we want factory nuclei; therefore, let the students and petty-bourgeois intelligentsia become the basis of factory nuclei.

Thus, the "factory nuclei-ism" of our day does not correspond to the practice and policies of the Comintern. Instead, it amounts to a wholesale application of what the CPUSA, in an interesting expression, called "colonization"-- sending non-proletarian cadre into factories where no Party members worked in order to recruit enough workers to form a nucleus, "Colonization" or "implantation" is an appropriate tactic for establishing contacts with politically active workers in some situations. It did help the CPUSA build factory nuclei in some places, and it has also moved forward the work of U.S. Marxist-Leninists in some places. But the CPUSA could never have constructed stable factory nuclei by relying on "colonization" as its main tactic for building them. In the concrete conditions of the U.S. communist movement, an almost exclusive reliance on "implantation" for building factory nuclei stands no more chance of success. Under the signboard of "Bolshevization," it will only exacerbate the sectarian amateurishness of the communist movement. To illustrate this point, let's look at the actual situation in this country, in this party-building movement.

Take a not untypical factory. The factories where one group can find work are ones where several can; in our factory, say two or even more groups work there. Given the emphasis on factory nuclei, this means two or more budding nuclei exist. Each concentrates on recruiting the politically active workers. In practice, the militants of each group--or, in some cases, each party--try to win the most active workers in equal parts to communism and to the cause of their own group. The workers confront a spectacle in which the various cadre concern themselves more with the prestige and influence of their group, with selling their newspaper, with "their" parties, demonstrations, or forums, than with the political situation in the country, the state of the economy, or the local union and shop-floor struggles, much less with why a communist party represents the interests of the working class in Gary, Indiana.

In the escalating antagonism between the groups and their embryonic factory nuclei, the movement as a whole fails in its responsibilities towards the proletariat and all the oppressed. "Left" sectarianism rules out producing joint popular propaganda about different trade unions, the economic crisis, important state measures, or how to conduct working class political struggle. Inter-group "polemics" and the limited resources of individual groups severely limit the abilities of any one to carry out such tasks. In the meantime, wholesale "colonization" serves to increase the apparent influence of each organization. Marxist-Leninist education, systematic propaganda and agitation, and serious organizational training suffer as a result. Cadre have a hard time explaining why wages really don't bring inflation (beyond saying that they don't), but they can tell you (or think they can) why Jack in the next department is an Economist, with a capital 'E', or a conciliator of revisionism, or maybe both, and if you don't believe me, here, read it in our paper. In all the debate about who is really advanced over whom, no one has mentioned the day-to-day operative definition of the advanced worker for all too many comrades: one who joins or sympathizes with my organization **as against** all the others. By this logic, advanced workers are first "excellent 'militants' and first-rate 'agitators' for the cause of their own group" (**History of the Party of Labor of Albania**, p. 14), and only secondly fighters for the cause of communism and a united Communist Party.

The communist movements needs stable factory nuclei. The question is how to get them. Huge numbers of tiny factory nuclei based on poorly trained "colonizers" does not represent the only or necessarily the most rational way to attain this desirable objective. Having low seniority and so quickly gone in the event of lay-offs, sometimes given to the demoralization associated with their social strata, our "implanted" comrades cannot substitute for the real proletarian vanguard. Where that vanguard is most concentrated, how it

expresses its leadership, and how the communist movement can best focus all its efforts upon it--these are the questions which the movement has yet to settle. The answers to those questions will determine the real character of "Bolshevization" for this movement, not slogans and organizational solutions imported from the 1920's. In the absence of a concrete analysis, a dogmatic and one-sided theory of "Bolshevization" will only hasten the "sectarianization" of the Marxist-Leninists, as the Comintern foresaw in its own day:

"The basic element of Bolshevization is precisely the simultaneous further development and revolutionary heightening of the class consciousness and revolutionary will not only of the Party and the vanguard but also of the broad masses. A Bolshevization of the Party without Bolshevization of the masses contains the greatest sectarian dangers and would have as a consequence that the Party, instead of increasing its influence on the masses, would grow more distant from them." ("Bolshevization of the Press" 1925-1926, **Class Struggle** No. 3, pp. 63-4)

In the final analysis, we must rely on the proletariat itself to rid the movement of "left" sectarianism, since the "development of socialist sectarianism and that of the real working class movement always stand in inverse ratio to each other." (Marx) Though brandishing the banner of "proletarianization," factory nuclei-ism is part of the problem, not the solution. The vanguard of the class will finally destroy ultra-leftism, but we can only reach wider sections of that vanguard to the extent those already communists win victories against "left" opportunism.