

Proletarian Unity League

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

Chapter 4: "Left" Opportunism in Political Line

B. Inconsistent Democracy: the "Left-Wing" Alternative

Historically, the struggle against national oppression has loomed as the touchstone of revolutionary line in the U.S. Conversely, white supremacist class collaborationism--the denial of the revolutionary-democratic nature of the Black people's struggle, the Chicano people's struggle, and that of other oppressed nationalities--has been at the very center of every opportunist line. Right or "left," in the U.S. workers' movement.

The Right position has dominated the Marxist movement, from Hermann Kriege's opposition to abolitionism through the Hillquit wing of the Socialist Party to Browderism and the consolidation of modern revisionism. But social reformism has historically given birth to a "left" reaction. The Fabianism, petit-bourgeois populism, and "AFL socialism" of the SP contributed by its very corruption to the apolitical syndicalism of the IWW. Unlike the "left" social-democracy of Daniel DeLeon, the IWW fought, sometimes heroically, for the trade-union unity of the multi-national working class. But like the DeLeonists, the anarcho-syndicalists rejected "petty" reforms and the struggle for democracy, except around isolated questions (the free speech fights). This "left" opposition to the struggle for democracy led the IWW to ignore such major aspects of the Black struggle as land, suffrage, education, etc., at a time when most Afro-Americans lived in the rural South. Again, in the struggle against the Right social-democratic positions held by the Party in the twenties, certain "left" errors were committed by the CP in the early thirties, particularly in its relationship to reformist and nationalist organisations among Afro-Americans.

In the struggle for a Marxist-Leninist Party which followed the consolidation of modern revisionism in the CPUSA, several "left" lines on the national question emerged. One envisioned a two-stage revolution set off by a Black national uprising in the Black Belt territory. A second took a classically "left" economist position, opposing national democratic struggles with phrases like "will they fight the ruling class for crumbs but support the framework of capitalism?" (PLP **Program for Black Liberation, p. 10**) Manifesting "the same Economist refusal to see and pose political questions," (LCW **23, p.**

16) which characterized the liberal integrationism of the revisionist line, this deviation gradually consolidated into the PLP.

The fight against the ultra-leftism and Trotskyism of the Provisional Organizing Committee (by then calling itself the American Workers Communist Party), the PLP, and others ushered in a second phase of organized anti-revisionist activity. The rise of new Black, Latin, and Asian revolutionary organizations which, to one degree or another, had both a nationalist perspective and an openness to Marxism-Leninism, helped push forward this struggle (organizations like the Black Panther Party, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Young Lords Organization and the YLP, the Brown Berets, the I Wor Kuen, and others). But though the ideological and political struggle of that time sealed the political fate of the PLP and others, the critique of their social-chauvinist economism remained relatively superficial. Taking their cue from certain features of the BPP's line, some fought "left" economism with other varieties of ultra-leftism (the adventurism of Weatherman and Venceremos.) Others scored the racism and open Trotskyism of the PLP line, but failed to trace either back to the metaphysical opposition drawn between democratic and socialist struggles, or to other "left" opportunist assumptions (PRRWO--the former YLP--and the RU, for example). As the level of the national revolutionary movements receded (particularly the Black liberation movement) due to severe repression, internal weaknesses and other causes, and as the at first "random, isolated" "left" errors of the communist forces began to erect themselves into a system of politics, refurbished, more sophisticated versions of "left" economism re-emerged as the dominant political line within the Marxist-Leninist camp. This line finds its concentrated expression around the struggle for consistent democracy and an end to all forms of national inequality within the U.S.

Can the Working Class Bear the "Burden" of Democracy?

Like reformism, "Left-Wing" Communism **opposes** the struggle for democratic rights to the struggle for proletarian power. Where the right opportunist views revolutionary struggles as a danger to "palpable" results, the "leftist" sees the struggle for democracy and reform as a diversion or trap for a "genuine" revolutionary movement. Both deny that

"...the awakening and growth of socialist revolt against imperialism are **indissolubly** linked with the growth of democratic resistance and unrest...a proletariat not schooled in the struggle for democracy is incapable of performing an economic revolution." (LCW 23, p. 25)

"Leftism" on the national question within our movement has certain identifiable features. The most common is the subordination of the struggle for equality and consistent democracy--even a trade-unionist equality--to "militant" economic demands of "more" or "less." The opposition of many organizations to busing for partial desegregation (the RU/RCP, the WVO, the Revolutionary Wing, CAP/RCL(M-L-M), the New Voice, etc.) has attracted most attention. Since we have dealt with busing elsewhere, we will not discuss it here. Suffice it to say that the demand for "more" quality education **as opposed to** the struggle against segregation and for equality of educational opportunity lies at the heart of most groups' objections.

The positions taken by many organizations in the struggle against budget cutbacks, layoffs, etc. displays the same "left" economist thinking. Groups like the Workers Viewpoint Organization, the New Voice, the Revolutionary Communist Party, etc., attack the struggle for even the most rudimentary forms of democracy in the name of militant "fightback" slogans like "No Cutbacks!" and "No Layoffs!" Supposedly such "broad" issues will "unite" the white and oppressed nationality workers, the men and women, in the truly "common" struggle. The argument brings to mind Lenin's scorn for the slogan "add a kopek to each ruble":

"But will not **such** unity be a loss rather than a gain? Unity is an advantage when it raises those who are united to the level of the class-conscious and decisive programme of the unifying force. Unity is a disadvantage when it lowers the unifying force to the level of the prejudices of the masses." (**CW 5**, p, 76)

Here's how WVO treats inequality and national divisions within the working class:

"If there are two workers in a factory where the white worker makes \$120 per week while the black worker makes \$100. Both of them and their families can hardly irk out a living nowadays under the heavy attacks of inflation and the economic crisis in general. Would a demand and a forced implementation of the demand to cut \$10 from that white worker to give that to the black worker, while **both** of them are in danger of being laid off be a democratic right issue of that black worker? No. Any one with common sense can see that. In fact, this can be nothing except the tactic of their bosses to incite the difference between them to prevent them from fighting him." (Supplement to Vol. 1, p, 2)

(We would like to point out that this caricature of the struggle for even trade unionist democracy serves WVO as an analogy to busing for partial desegregation--i.e., they view the busing of white children to Black schools

as a **loss** to the white students. Spokesperson Jerry Tung went so far in a Boston forum as to exclaim that "we're against the busing plan which sends whites from bad schools to worse!" [Fall, 1975])

Since the capitalists always have bad things in store for the workers, against which they should unite, the struggle against racist differentials must remain on the shelf. Or as the New Voice says, echoing the heyday of Progressive Labor:

"We must fight against all layoffs. Workers should never get caught in the bosses' trap of fighting one another for the crumbs when the bosses control the whole pie." (12/29/75)

Ultra-leftists come to define the struggle against inequality as an attack on the white workers, identifying the interests of the white workers not with their class' fight for consistent democracy, but rather with their privileged position within the proletariat.

"Under the present economic crisis, unemployment is widespread and a disproportionate number of minority and female workers is being laid off. The groups advocating super-seniority, like NOW, CPUSA, NAACP, the OL, and CAP, would push the burden of unemployment onto the backs of white and male workers." (**Ibid.**)

Apparently, the "burden" of democracy is too great for the white workers to bear.

Thus the ultra-leftists begin by opposing the struggle for any minimum program of reforms and democracy in the name of revolution, but end by echoing the AFL-CIO Executive Council.

Along with the opposition to reforms and consistent democracy go "left" sectarian attacks on reformist organizations among the oppressed nationalities. Instead of adopting united front tactics towards other classes and their organizations among the oppressed nationalities, "Leftists" pronounce them "thoroughly corrupt" and refuse to work with them. The old Black Workers Congress wrote off the entire Black bourgeoisie as one of "the most dangerous social bulwarks of imperialism in the U.S. at present," (**The Black Liberation Struggle, the Black Workers Congress, and Proletarian Revolution**, p. 42), and wrote them out of an otherwise quite expansive United Front Against Imperialism. To the same end, the Revolutionary Union/RCP invented the "proletarian nation" concept which reduced all Black "nationals" to workers. With this conclusion in hand, the RU/RCP could attack all Black petit-bourgeois or bourgeois forces as "anti-

national," or "unrepresentative" of the Black people, who are, you understand, workers, and are therefore represented by us, the RCP Marxist-Leninists, since Marxism-Leninism represents the proletariat.

The October League (M-L) presents the most striking case of a "leftist" evolution in political line. In the past, the OL has held a Right conciliationist view of united front tactics, as evidenced by their identification of "support" with "full" or uncritical support to reformist leadership in the mass struggle. This conception guided their early work with Black and Chicano reformist organizations. But as their bid for organizational hegemony unfolded, sectarian tactics took hold. These in turn necessitated a political justification. The OL's work in the Boston busing struggle provides a good example. The problems with their work do not lie mainly with their political analysis. That contained a number of errors, in our opinion--unsubstantiated alarm over a "rising fascist tide," failure to specify what in the busing plan deserved support and what didn't, some unwillingness to support forced busing of whites--but in the main correctly stressed the necessity of upholding the democratic rights of Black, Latin, and other oppressed peoples, and understood busing for partial desegregation in education as a very limited but nonetheless basically progressive reform. On the other hand, the OL's wish to aggrandize themselves led to their isolation among Left and progressive forces generally. The OL's insistence upon "initiating" its own small demonstrations entirely under its organizational control found a justification in their newly-minted views of the Black bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie. While they agreed to support the December 14th March (1974) in Boston on the grounds that it represented the "nationalist" wing of the Black bourgeoisie, they boycotted the May 17th March in the same city because it represented the "integrationist" wing (see **Guardian**, May 21, 1975).

Confusion of the ideological and political roles of Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican or other oppressed nationality nationalism also characterizes ultra-leftism on the national question. Starting from the correct premise that nationalism as an ideology expresses the interests of the bourgeoisie, many comrades, following the lead of Progressive Labor, jump to the conclusion that "all nationalism is reactionary," or, what amounts to a version of the same thing, "all nationalism is nationalism." (RU/RCP) This line "merges two into one," and in fact obscures the class contradictions among oppressed nations and nationalities. It refuses to distinguish between the different forms nationalist ideology takes among different social classes--different fractions of the bourgeoisie, the urban petit-bourgeoisie, the peasantry, and backward sections of the working class--and therefore confuses potential friends with potential enemies. This error ties into another: the merger of nationalism as an ideology expressing bourgeois class interests but held and

shaped by different classes, and the political struggle of different nationalist forces. At the political level, distinctions among different nationalist forces--sometimes categorized as revolutionary or progressive nationalists versus reactionary nationalists (so-called "cultural" nationalists)--become critical. Though in the final analysis both revolutionary and reactionary nationalism represent bourgeois and not proletarian ideology, revolutionary nationalism in the U.S. generally takes a progressive political position. To the extent that revolutionary nationalists work for the liberation of oppressed peoples and do not take an anti-communist stand, they aid proletarian revolution and communists should support them.

Marxists have always understood that since national oppression means the oppression of all classes, the struggle for democratic rights includes all oppressed classes. Each class obviously has different interests in combating national oppression. All this is elementary. But some comrades persist in denying the all-class character of the struggle for democratic rights, under the guise that democratic rights for some classes will compromise or corrupt the proletarian struggle.

A propaganda leaflet published jointly by the Workers Viewpoint Organization and the Revolutionary Workers League (M-L) makes just this "left" error. Quoting an OL resolution--"It is impossible to build unity with Black workers without holding up the struggle for Black people to own businesses and to contend as equals with white capitalists"--the groups reply:

"It distorts the real proletarian content of the national question when over 90% of Black people are workers, secondly, it blurs over the objective class contradictions within the national movement. Thirdly, it belittles the class consciousness of the advanced workers and elements in the national movement by subordinating their class consciousness to national consciousness. This is clearly the policy of liberals on the national question, reducing the demand of equality from the 'abolition of classes' to the right to compete in capitalist economy and all within the framework of monopoly capitalism where the upholding of such a right, particularly the aspect of 'equal contention,' is mere petty bourgeois sophistry."

The wording of the OL resolution seems a bit ambiguous--"holding up the struggle" as opposed to upholding the right--but the WVO and RWL obviously understood the phrase as "right" and objected to it on those grounds. A great deal of accusations fly about here, but rather than respond to each one of them, let us consider a concrete example: Black contractors in construction.

Most contractors are white; most construction unions attempt to exclude Black, Latin, Chinese and other oppressed nationality workers. In response, coalitions have grown up in many cities composed of oppressed nationality workers and contractors, demanding jobs for the workers and contracts for the businessmen. Where do the interests of the proletariat lie in this situation?

In general, the interests of the proletariat lie with the "most consistent democracy," the abolition of all national privileges, and socialism. Consistent democracy extends not simply to the oppressed nationality proletariat, but to all classes among the nationalities oppressed by the U.S. bourgeoisie. Wherever a class or stratum, or even a religious group like the Nation of Islam, finds its rights infringed upon, the proletariat must raise its voice in protest. Are we to say to the Black workers: you have a right to work, but not to have workers work under you? Jobs are working class rights, but Federal contracts are "white rights"? Certainly not. The proletariat, as part of its own interests, must emerge as the fighter against all oppression. Only such a struggle will build the unshakeable unity of the multi-national proletariat.

Are the interests of Black contractors and Black workers identical? Of course not. The aspiring petit-bourgeois or bourgeois contractor demands equality to exploit wage-labor, while the proletariat recognizes no equality between exploiter and exploited. The contractors ally with the workers in order to use the masses' power to realize their own designs. But these class interests do not change the democratic character of the contractors' struggle--they merely mark them as bourgeois-democratic interests.

Contrary to the views of the "Lefts," consistent democracy does not weaken the class-consciousness of the proletariat, no more than reforms do. Quite the opposite: it strengthens it. Reformists and petit-bourgeois democrats dull class-consciousness--not reforms or democracy. Unless the revolutionary proletariat cedes the leadership of the struggle for democratic rights to them, as our "leftists" would have us do, that struggle will curb reformist influence, not enlarge it. Black contractors will not change the construction worker's lot. In fact, experience shows that their precarious economic position sometimes forces Black contractors to offer sub-union wages, even to strike bargains with white-supremacist craft unions at the expense of the Black workers altogether. Upholding the rights of Black contractors to contend equally with white contractors is in fact one of the quickest ways to disabuse more backward Black workers of the notion that work would be fundamentally different if Black Capital ran things.