

Proletarian Unity League

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

Chapter 4: "Left" Opportunism in Political Line E. Some "Left" Analyses of Social Classes

The various fractions of the petit-bourgeoisie play a critical role in revolution. The fact needs no emphasis in the countries of the Third World, nor in many of those which the CPC defines as the Second World--countries where the peasantry may constitute the main force of the revolution (Vietnam) or one of the chief historical bulwarks of bourgeois rule (France). But the several fractions of the urban petit-bourgeoisie also assume critical importance in the revolutionary process. Among other events, the student revolts of the 'sixties in the U.S., Europe, and Japan attest to the growing importance "new" fractions of the urban petit-bourgeoisie hold in the reproduction of social relations for imperialist countries. The numerical increase of these intermediate sectors throughout imperialist countries and in those dominated by imperialism place both practical and theoretical problems on every communist's agenda. Socialist revolution depends on the successful resolution of these problems, as their irresolution during the Chilean Popular Unity period reminds us. Third force without its own third camp, the petit-bourgeoisie and other intermediate strata form both the site and stake of mortal combat between the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary proletariat.

Some comrades in the Marxist-Leninist movement have yet to grasp the practical importance of the petit-bourgeoisie and other middle strata. Instead they have promulgated a series of "left" subjectivist analyses of classes and class fractions in the U.S., and combined these notions with "left" sectarianism towards the petit-bourgeoisie, under the guise of ideological struggle against the bourgeoisie. "Anti-revisionism" has provided the general rationale for these policies. Modern revisionism in capitalist countries reflects the ideological influence of the labor aristocracy, the petit-bourgeoisie, and ultimately the bourgeoisie. Within the CPUSA, this influence manifested itself in such policies as promotion of petit-bourgeois over proletarian cadres, segregation of worker "clubs" from intellectual "clubs," and in the dissolution of factory nuclei in favor of units based on electoral districts. More fundamentally, it manifested itself in the general political line of the CPUSA, which stressed the relationship between the struggle for democracy and that for socialism, but belittled the distinction between the two. Consequently, the CPUSA restricted the struggle for socialism to the

struggle for democracy. Against the dressing of petit-bourgeois democracy and anti-monopoly populism in communist clothes, some comrades have opted for the other side of the CPUSA coin. As discussed earlier, they one-sidedly emphasize the distinction between the struggle for democracy and that for socialism, and ignore the relationship between the two. This has led these comrades practically to identify the struggle against the petit-bourgeoisie with that against revisionism. Thus does the revolutionary movement pay "for the sins of opportunism."

Current "left" policies towards the petit-bourgeoisie, towards contradictions among the bourgeoisie, and even towards the proletariat itself, base themselves on very hazy ideas about the class structure of the U.S. Some of the publications in the communist movement lack basic conceptual distinctions without which no progress in this theoretical work can be made. Of particular importance to us here are the distinction between the bourgeoisie in its several fractions on the one hand, and the petit-bourgeoisie on the other, and the distinction between a class and a class fraction (the component sections into which a class can be broken down). The bourgeoisie, for example, breaks down into three main fractions: the commercial bourgeoisie, the financial ("banking") bourgeoisie, and the industrial bourgeoisie. While "fusing" to a greater or lesser extent in "finance capital," banking and industrial capital continue as distinct moments in the production and reproduction of capital. At the same time, we must distinguish between the monopoly bourgeoisie, which may be further broken down into predominantly industrial monopoly capital and predominantly banking monopoly capital, and the non-monopoly bourgeoisie in its several fractions. Finally, all fractions of the bourgeoisie must be distinguished from the various fractions of the petit-bourgeoisie, which, despite its name, does not constitute a "smaller" bourgeoisie. Rather, it is a distinct class, comprising class fractions which share definite relations to the means of production and reproduction of capital not shared by any fraction of the proletariat or the bourgeoisie. Even the traditional petit-bourgeoisie does not exist chiefly by exploiting wage-labor, as do all fractions of productive capital, for example.

Neglect of these distinctions gives rise to both "left" and right errors. The modern revisionists habitually ignore different class fractions within the monopoly bourgeoisie, the uneven concentration of capital within different branches of production, and the uneven centralization of banking capital. This leads to a blindness to the different strategies within the bourgeoisie, with two effects: first, concentration on the "ultra-Right," which the CPUSA, like other economists, identifies with the most monopolized capital, an identification which will not stand scrutiny, particularly in a period when the productivity of U.S. industry compares so poorly with that of Japan and

Germany; and second, mistaking differences between advanced monopoly capital and more backward fractions for differences within the decisive sections of monopoly capital, and thus exaggerating those differences. At the same time, in pursuit of their anti-monopoly coalitions, the modern revisionists amalgamate the non-monopoly bourgeoisie to the petit-bourgeoisie, through the use of concepts like "small" and "medium" capital. Thus they identify contradictions among the bourgeoisie--specifically, between monopoly and non-monopoly capital--with those between the petit-bourgeoisie and monopoly capital, often talking of the "oppression" or even the "exploitation" of non-monopoly capital. Similarly, their view of the working class extends to the "proletarianized" intelligentsia (see Bettina Aptheker, **The Academic Rebellion in the United States**), and even with this "expanded" notion of the working class, they frequently fail to differentiate the proletariat from the "working people."

Where revisionists and reformists amalgamate various classes and class fractions in order to exaggerate the importance of contradictions between non-proletarian classes and the monopoly bourgeoisie, "leftists" perform the same operations in order to ignore those contradictions. "Left-wing" communists have almost as little use for the concept of the non-monopoly bourgeoisie as the revisionists do. This leads them to merge the non-monopoly bourgeoisie with the monopoly bourgeoisie. Within the monopoly bourgeoisie, different fractions are either ignored, or no importance is attributed to them. In PLP's condescending phrase, "Watergate: Billionaires' Dogfight." Finally, "Leftists" lump a large portion of the petit-bourgeoisie with the bourgeoisie itself, a procedure particularly apparent in discussions of agriculture and of the oppressed nationalities, but by no means limited to them.

The traffic in abusive simplifications so typical of "leftism" (an outgrowth of its idealism) has critical political consequences. As we have seen, some groups set all sorts of super-revolutionary conditions for utilizing contradictions among the bourgeoisie. But only a relatively small number of "left-wingers" will argue against utilizing contradictions in principle. More commonly, they reject its very possibility in fact. The ahistorical and undialectical notion of a monolithic bourgeoisie denies the scientific basis for utilizing contradictions among the enemy. In effect, it reduces contradictions within capital to differences of opinion between "liberal" and "conservative" **ideas** on repression, inflation, etc., which have no objective basis in the difficulties or opportunities confronting different fractions of capital. From the indiscriminate merger of distinct sectors within the bourgeoisie also follows flip dismissals of the importance of the contradiction between fascism and bourgeois democracy. This error conditions another, the failure to differentiate between the social base and leading force within a nascent

fascist movement, and the class character of fascism in power. Where the various fractions of capital are not recognized, and where the petit-bourgeoisie has no independent conceptual status, no support exists for telling Nelson Rockefeller from George Wallace, or David Duke of the KKK from either. Fascism and the bourgeoisie become synonyms for one another, and bourgeois democracy not a form of rule, but merely a clever if outdated ruse: "In this stage of parasitic, decaying and moribund capitalism, bourgeois democracy has become the feeder with which the bourgeoisie is trying to straitjacket the working class movement to usher in fascism." (**WV**, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 55-56)

The analyses of the October League offer proof that the problem does not lie in one's stated attitudes towards ultra-leftism, but rather in a "left" myopia which blurs all sectors of the bourgeoisie together. Even back in the period of its emphasis on the dangers of ultra-leftism, the **Call** not only considered a Louise Day Hicks and a David Duke as interchangeable, but distinguished a Ted Kennedy or Judge Arthur Garrity from either only by the latter's "modesty": "The liberals like Senator Kennedy and Judge Garrity have shown themselves to be little different than the open fascists." (**Call**, Nov. 1974) The Boston busing struggle then reads as an intra-fascist battle between the open and "closed" fascists, a good premise for conspiracy buffs but poor working theory.

In passing, we might note the effect of "leftism" on analyses of the proletariat itself. "Left" analyses of capitalist social formations generally recognize only one, all-embracing contradiction, that between wage-labor and capital, beside which all other contradictions, economic and political, pale into insignificance. Thus Bakunin and his cohorts gained infamy within the First International for opposing self-determination for Poland on the grounds that it would only benefit rich nobles, poor nobles, and priests. The attempt to explain all phenomena by the workings of one fundamental contradiction obviously renders the contradiction itself a kind of "ideal type" whose various realizations can be found in every area of social life. This ideal type is then subject to further idealizations. As regards the proletariat, the contradiction may assume the form Capital versus **productive** wage-labor, in which only those workers engaged in the four spheres of material production--extractive industry, agriculture, manufacture, and transport--are considered part of the working class, or proletariat. Some Marxist-Leninists therefore relegate what Marx refers to at least once as the "commercial proletariat" (**Theories of Surplus Value**, III, 17, 301n) to the "new petit-bourgeoisie."

"Left" subjectivist class analyses not only undermine taking advantage of contradictions within the enemy, but they also argue against tactical or

strategic alliances with any class or class fraction other than the proletariat. In effect, they deny a substantive basis for almost all united front policies, and indeed, for almost any tactics at all. This reduction of other classes and class fractions to a "reactionary mass" (The Gotha Program) runs completely counter to Marxist politics.¹

"The working class must perceive not only the enemy but also the revolutionary forces, the motive forces of the revolution at each stage, and the allies in a given revolution with a view to rallying broad revolutionary forces, securing allies, uniting all those who can be united, and neutralizing all those who can be neutralized if winning them over proves impossible. All this aims at utterly isolating the immediate concrete enemy and mustering all revolutionary forces to smash him." (Truong Chinh, **Forward Along the Path Charted by K. Marx**)

In the case of the U.S., the consequences bear chiefly on the relations with fractions of the petit-bourgeoisie.

Noisy Declarations

Due to the low level of theoretical struggle, the large number of comrades of a petit-bourgeois class origin within the present-day communist movement undoubtedly still affects the movement's analyses of the petit-bourgeoisie. These tend to condemnations of the vacillating and treacherous character of that hapless class, in which every ideological deviation--anarchism and revisionism, reformism and Trotskyism, movement radicalism and left-liberalism, white chauvinism and narrow nationalism--are simply traced to petit-bourgeois social origins. All the protestations brings to mind Lenin's remarks:

"Our author has simply come out with a "noisier" declaration against the petty bourgeoisie, in accordance with the "practical rule," which Turgenev expressed through an "old fox" in one of his "Poems in Prose": "Cry out most loudly against those vices you yourself feel guilty of." And so, **since** the Socialist-Revolutionaries feel that the only social basis of their position between two stools can be perhaps provided by certain petty bourgeois sections of the intelligentsia, they **therefore** write about the petty bourgeoisie as if this term does not signify a social category, but is simply a polemical turn of speech." (**CW 6**, p. 199)

The "noisier declarations" betray a confusion between combatting the ideological influences of the petit-bourgeoisie on the proletariat and rallying sectors of the petit-bourgeoisie to the proletariat's banner, ensuring their sympathy, or simply their neutrality. It is no accident that we have

mentioned the same problem in discussing the women's and national movements within the U.S., since both these movements include petit-bourgeois revolutionary democrats and even a smattering of bourgeois forces. Various "left" prejudices produce this political sectarianism towards the petit-bourgeois masses. The "left" hostility to reforms reinforces the theoretical subjectivism which fuses sections of the petit-bourgeoisie with the non-monopoly bourgeoisie. If you believe that the widening of bourgeois democracy merely tightens the "strait-jacket" with which the bourgeoisie ushers in fascism, then distinctions between petit-bourgeois democratic aspirations and bourgeois reformists have no practical meaning. Conversely, if you merge the petit-bourgeoisie with the bourgeoisie, then the demands of the former take on a very different class character. These interrelated errors combine to deny the petit-bourgeoisie any autonomous (not independent, obviously) social role. The conclusion that the petit-bourgeoisie has little practical significance in the class struggle makes light of their numerical importance in this, the commercial, financial, and ideological center of the U.S. imperialist empire. Moreover, it neglects the strategic ideological and political importance of this disproportionately white class in the maintenance of white supremacy, or in any reactionary mass movement. Sections of the petit-bourgeoisie can be led against the bourgeoisie, but not if Marxists confuse one with the other, or mistake its contradictory democratic aims for fascist machinations. In matters of policy, "left" sectarianism towards the petit-bourgeoisie refuses to educate the various fractions of that class to their possible allies, tramples on their admittedly dimly-perceived interests, and leaves an open field to bourgeois capture of the entire intermediate strata.

"The Communists' proper tactics should consist in **utilizing** these vacillations, not ignoring them; utilizing them calls for concessions to elements that are turning towards the proletariat--whenever and in the measure that they turn towards the proletariat--in addition to fighting those who turn towards the bourgeoisie." (Lenin, **CW 31**, p. 75)

Footnote

¹ CLP General Secretary Nelson Peery goes even further, reducing other classes and class fractions to...nothing at all. According to Secretary Peery, we verge on "a time when the workers of the world stand face to face with the enemy without significant classes in between." (**People's Tribune**, 12/1/75)

