

Proletarian Unity League

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

Chapter 5: The Social and Ideological Roots of "Left" Opportunism A. Why Deviations Take Two Basic Forms

Ultimately, the basis for all deviations resides in the ideological and political pressure exerted by the bourgeoisie on the workers' and communist movements. But bourgeois ideological influence takes different forms depending upon the history, social composition, and relative strengths and weaknesses of the proletarian movement. When Marxist-Leninists speak of the "roots" or "sources" of deviations, they refer to the specific forms in which bourgeois influence on the working class manifests itself.

Beneath the seemingly endless variety of deviations which have appeared in the history of the international communist movement lie two basic currents: reformism and anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism. Within the communist movement, however, these two trends do not proclaim themselves openly. For if bourgeois influence announced itself as bourgeois influence, it would not have even a toehold in a movement dedicated to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie; if anarchists called themselves anarchists, they could hardly belong to a communist movement. Rather, bourgeois ideological and political pressure produces two main currents which cloak themselves in Marxist-Leninist garb: revisionism or Right opportunism ("semi-liberalism") and "Left" opportunism or revolutionary adventurism ("semi-anarchism").

The existence of two and only two major currents departing from Marxism-Leninism—the existence of two and only two major forms of opportunism within the communist movement—corresponds to four broad determinations: (1) the two main tendencies of capitalist development; (2) the two main tactics of the bourgeoisie; (3) the two main kinds of periods in the class struggle; and (4) the two strata of the proletariat most connected with the bourgeoisie.

In the article, "Differences in the European Labour Movement," (**LCW 16**, pp. 347-54; also available in **Marx, Engels, Lenin on Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism**) Lenin writes that "Both anarcho-syndicalism and reformism must be regarded as a direct product of [the] bourgeois world outlook and its influence.' Both "exaggerate, elevate to a one-sided theory...now one and now another feature of capitalist development, now one and now another 'lesson' of this development." Reformism exaggerates the evolutionary "progressive" features of capitalist development, which "destroys the old methods of production and develops productive forces." Anarchism, on the other hand, recognizes that

"Capitalism creates its own grave-digger, itself creates the elements of a new system, yet...without a "leap," these individual elements change nothing in the general state of affairs and do not affect the rule of capital."

But the anarchists swing to the other extreme, seeing only the reactionary and crisis-ridden aspect of capitalist production. Each anti-Marxist trend seizes upon one feature of capitalist development and raises this feature to a special theory. Yet capitalism obviously encompasses both historical tendencies, both evolutionary, gradual change and abrupt leaps in development. Reflecting one side of this development,

"The revisionists regard as phrase-mongering all arguments about 'leaps' and about the working-class movement being antagonistic in principle to the whole of the old society. They regard reforms as a partial realisation of socialism. The anarcho-syndicalists reject 'petty work', especially the utilisation of the parliamentary platform. In practice, the latter tactics amount to waiting for 'great days' along with an inability to muster the forces which create great events."

Second, the two main deviations in the workers' and communist movements reflect one-sided reactions to the two basic tactics of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie rules by two main methods—reform and force, the carrot and the stick, the priest and the hangman. Each deviation mirrors one or the other aspect of bourgeois rule. When the bourgeoisie relies mainly on concessions, on establishing an ideological "consensus," it strengthens the reformist current in the working class, that current which believes that class struggle, violent revolution, or an illegal apparatus have become obsolete, that capitalism will reform itself out of existence. When it resorts mainly to force, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie creates greater receptivity to anarchist ideas which renounce legal forms of work and the reform struggle.

Third, different periods in the class struggle, and in particular, shifts from one period to another, also produce confusion, disorganization, and erroneous tendencies in the proletarian movement. Periods of relatively peaceful struggle and those marked by stormy class conflicts may lead one or another section of the revolutionary forces into serious deviations. Each anti-Marxist current magnifies the peculiarities of a given period, raising its specific features into a general, rigid theory. The absence of severe economic and political crises and the predominance of legal forms of struggle cause reformism to declare revolutionary situations a thing of the past, and the seizure of power both unnecessary and impossible. Conversely, periods of mass insurgency, and economic or political upheaval may lay the foundation for an ultra-left trend which refuses to recognize any ebb in the power of the revolutionary forces, or the growth of unfavorable conditions for a continued frontal assault. The horizon of the immediate period, or the experiences of a period now past, blind each trend to the need for a Party capable of organizing the struggle under **any** conditions, of seizing on **every** possibility for strengthening proletarian class consciousness and organization—retreating in good order, patiently accumulating forces, or mounting the assault as conditions warrant.

Finally, the existence of several distinct strata within the working class accounts for the emergence of two and only two anti-Marxist trends. In his remarks on "Sources of Contradictions Within the Party," (**SW**, pp. 212-14), Stalin describes three such strata: "the main mass of the proletariat...who have long broken off connection with the capitalist class" and which is "the most reliable bulwark of Marxism"; the "newcomers from non-proletarian classes—from the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie or the intelligentsia...who have only recently merged with the proletariat and have brought with them into the working class their customs, their habits, their waverings and their vacillations. This stratum constitutes the most favorable soil for all sorts of anarchist, semi-anarchist, and 'ultra-Left' groups"; and lastly "the labor aristocracy...with its propensity to compromise with the bourgeoisie" which constitutes "the most favorable soil for outright reformists and opportunists." (To the social basis for ultra-leftism, we would add the **declassed** strata of the proletariat, including sections of the permanently unemployed and, in particular, the lumpen-proletariat, with its criminal ties to the bourgeoisie; and, in certain historical situations, those for whom the proletariat is an "adopted class," such as the revolutionary intelligentsia). Both the strata most closely connected to the bourgeoisie strive to gain influence over the basic proletarian masses.

Taken singly, none of these four determinations could account for one or another deviation. The ebbing of acute class struggles or the outlawing of workers' organizations will not necessarily produce a strong ultra-left tendency. Whether a major "left" or Rightist trend takes hold in the workers' movement or in the Communist Party depends on the **combined effect** of these four determinations, as well as the history of ideological struggle, the toll taken by repression, and a number of other factors. An all-sided analysis of the combined effect of all these factors will enable the revolutionary proletariat to understand the types of deviations most likely to affect it in a given period.

All present-day deviations draw from one or another of these two big currents. In other words, their historical and ideological roots lie in either the reformist or anarchist trends. Within the communist movement, incorrect tendencies harken back to either the revisionist and right opportunist tradition or the "left" opportunist tradition: they borrow principles either from liberalism or anarchism. These are the "sources" or "roots" of deviations, the specific manifestations of bourgeois ideology in the workers' and communist movements.

How these two currents in turn manifest themselves concretely depends again on historical, social, and ideological factors. Though two "left" deviations belong to the same general "left" tradition and have a basic ideological affinity, they may take very different forms and present very different dangers. A deviation rests on a particular class base, and the spontaneous class instincts of that social base, its historical experience and the national traditions in which it exists will all give a specific complexion to a given deviation. Where the social base and historical experience differ, the characteristic forms of that deviation will also differ.

We can trace the present "stream" of "left" errors back to its ideological "source" in the anarchist forms of bourgeois ideology. But the concrete forms in which anarchist ideology makes itself felt, the specific characteristics of contemporary "left" opportunism, stem from the definite historical and social conditions in which the U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement arose.