

Proletarian Unity League

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

Chapter 6: Putting an End To the "Left" Sectarian Period C. Party Spirit, Group Spirit

Just as the custom has developed of identifying party-building with party-formation, and party-formation with rechristening one's own ranks, so too the habit has grown up of identifying Party spirit with group spirit. Loyalty to one's own circle or even factional party does not constitute Party spirit. The essence of Party spirit lies in the willingness to subordinate the part to the whole, individual or sectional interests to the Party's interests, the Party's interests to those of the proletariat. The communist movement, historically defined and including the several parties, exists as a lower form of the Party. Those who recognize that whole, and in the name of the future Party oppose every manifestation of group exclusiveness, stand for the long-term interests of our movement and the working class:

"We should encourage comrades to take the interests of the whole into account. Every Party member, every branch of work, every statement and every action must proceed from the interests of the whole Party; it is absolutely impermissible to violate this principle." (Mao Tse-tung **SW III**, p. 44)

Throughout this pamphlet we have stressed the objective unity of the communist movement. We have noted its common historical, social and ideological bases and its broadly common aims: to build a communist party to lead the proletariat and all the oppressed in overthrowing the bourgeoisie and establishing proletarian dictatorship. To accomplish these tasks, the communist movement shares a recognition that it must oppose modern revisionist distortions of Marxism, as well as Trotskyite, anarchist, and social-democratic ideologies. In upholding the contradictory unity of the Marxist-Leninist movement, we have rejected subjectivist definitions of the communist forces. These subjectivist definitions have two main variants: 1) the movement is dead, long live my party!, which we have dealt with at length, and 2) the parties are dead, long live my movement! We have

not treated this second definition, and since the tactics of party-building must take account of the existing parties we will briefly discuss them here.

In rejecting the claim that any of the parties constitutes a higher stage of the communist movement, we continue to see most of them as a part of the present lower stage. They are not the whole; but they are still, in the main, a part. They share roughly the same historical origin, the same social roots (with some variations), and the same common goals as the rest of the anti-revisionist camp.

An Example: The Communist Labor Party

In a number of respects, the Communist Labor Party appears to lie outside the accepted basis for unity for the Marxist-Leninist movement. The CLP's views on world revolution tend to Trotskyism, and, like Trotskyism, echo a number of the Soviet revisionists' principal theses. For example, Nelson Peery has sighted those "fundamental changes in the alignment of forces" which bring "a time when the workers of the world stand face to face with the enemy without significant classes in between." He implies that these fundamental changes bring an end to an era, an era which "Lenin noted...was characterized not simply by oppressor classes but also by oppressor nations." "The development of the neo-colony means the end of the tactic of the two stage revolution." (**Peoples Tribune**, December 1, 1975) Trotsky, of course, had long ago hailed these "fundamental changes" brought about by a "single world-wide capitalist economy," denying the existence of "significant classes in between" (the nationalist bourgeoisie, the urban petit-bourgeoisie, and those few remaining peasants in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe...). Basing himself on these "new developments," Trotsky also rejected the two-stage revolution. (To the CLP's discredit, even Trotsky recognized that what he rejected was not a "tactic," but rather two related **strategic** objectives—democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry [or, depending on the country, New Democracy] and proletarian dictatorship—as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao maintained, and Communist-led revolutions in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam have so recently demonstrated.)

Like Trotskyites, the CLP speaks of revisionists in the leadership of the CPSU, yet sees no basis in the relations of production for their seizure of state power, and no consequences to those relations from their exercise of power. Armed with an economist conception of socialism and an evolutionist notion of history, they haughtily dismiss the analysis of the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union with sophistries about man not turning

into an ape and socialism not turning into capitalism. Like Trotskyites and revisionists throughout the world, the CLP views the leadership of the Communist Party of China as a "gang of nationalists" opposing revolution through its foreign policy (see same issue of **Peoples Tribune**). Moreover, the CLP has taken to repeating Soviet bombast about detente (see **Peoples Tribune**, July 1, 1975), and wildly shouting that "the tragedy of betrayal in the Congo" by the "counter-revolutionary Khrushchev gang" is "being repeated" "on a higher level" by a CPC "gang" led by Teng Hsiao Peng.(1) (No matter how confused they may be on what is going on, some writers in the CLP are always sure it's going on at a higher level.) And in its 1976 election campaign literature, the examples of what socialism does for the people come entirely from the Soviet Union.

Despite these thoroughly erroneous and counter-revolutionary elements in the line of the CLP, at the present time we do not regard the CLP as a consolidated counter-revolutionary, Trotskyite, "neo-revisionist," or "social-fascist" organization. We realize that this position is not a popular one among Marxist-Leninists, that many groups whom we respect do not share it, and we admit that we have had relatively little contact with the CLP or its forerunners. Nonetheless, we believe that the CLP remains a part of the communist movement, and that its wrong views should be struggled with, not dismissed. In other words, the ideological struggle in the communist movement has not developed to the point where the CLP represents a consolidated counter-revolutionary trend on every question as against the rest of the Marxist-Leninist forces.

Although obviously not all sectarians are revisionists, sectarianism reflects revisionist influence, whether of the "left" or the Right. Sectarian party-formation marks a step down a road—if not the road to the Marxist-Leninist Party, then a road away from Marxist-Leninist politics altogether. The Progressive Labor Movement began as a Marxist-Leninist tendency, but in the process of consolidating and justifying its organizational isolation from other Marxist-Leninists, it also consolidated its most distinctive and most erroneous ideological features. The PLP did not seek to unite all who could be united around Marxist-Leninist principle, nor had its line by any means settled accounts theoretically and politically with other lines. Under these circumstances, what distinguished PL from other Marxist-Leninists came also to distinguish it from Marxism-Leninism, not long after it renamed itself the political party of the working class. To the extent that the present Marxist-Leninist parties turn their back on the communist movement, and attempt to justify their isolation from ideological and political struggle within it, they will meet with a similar fate.

As the first section of the communist movement to declare itself the Party, the CLP has proceeded a certain distance down this road. On the one hand, it shares a number of the premises of anti-revisionist activity with the rest of the movement: it regards the CPSU and CPUSA as modern revisionist parties,(2) it fights for the dictatorship of the proletariat, it usually recognizes the necessity of destroying the bourgeois state apparatus,(3) it recognizes in principle both the necessity and possibility of "socialism in one country." On the other hand, its international line, including its analysis of the international communist movement, diverges sharply from that of Marxist-Leninists, and since the formation of the CLP, this divergence has grown. The CLP.'s international perspectives borrow heavily from Trotskyism, raising the question of whether the CLP is destined to occupy a place in relation to the anti-revisionist movement analogous to that of Trotskyism itself, claiming to give support in order to further its real opposition.

But Trotskyism often plagues a developing communist movement, and its presence in elements of the CLP's political line does not necessarily mean Marxist-Leninists should bar the CLP from the party-building struggle. In Albania, for example, both Trotskyite and anarchist literature circulated in many of the early communist groups (see **History of the PLA**, p. 47). This did not prevent the Marxist-Leninist elements from pressuring all the groups to participate in the Meeting of the Communist Groups to found the Party (**1941**). Out of the ideological struggle unfolded at this Conference came the decision to dissolve all the separate groups, and to form the Communist Party of Albania. That struggle defeated Trotskyite views, and "The Provisional Central Committee was charged with the task of purging all the literature of the communist groups of anti-Marxist, Trotskyite and anarchist material." (**Ibid**, p. 88)

An invitation to the CLP, the RCP, or the October League Party to a U.S. "Meeting of the Communist Groups to found the Party" is not at stake here; the ideological struggle has not neared that point, and may never. What is at stake is whether Marxist-Leninist groups should regard most of the parties as basically revolutionary, however mistaken, or basically counter-revolutionary. What is at stake are attempts to involve them in a common ideological struggle to found a united Communist Party for the U.S. working class. Ignoring or simply heaping abuse upon the CLP (or any other group) will not educate the Marxist-Leninist forces and other revolutionary-minded workers to the errors the CLP commits. If anything, it will shield those errors from criticism and maintain them within the communist movement. Without a doubt, the practice of ostracizing or merely condemning various one-time anti-revisionist groupings (the POC, the PLP) has allowed other organizations to repeat the same theses and make the same mistakes. Reading the CLP or the RCP(4) out of the communist

movement on the basis of insubstantial evidence will have the same effect. The CLP has set off down the wrong road. How far they travel towards consolidating a counter-revolutionary position depends on the CLP and to a lesser degree, the communist movement itself. To the extent it attacks China instead of the Soviet Union, directs its fire at the Marxist-Leninist movement rather than the CPUSA, and assails the struggles of the Third World against imperialism and hegemonism rather than lending them every support, the CLP places itself outside the Marxist-Leninist forces.

From the Parties to the Party

In earlier sections of this pamphlet, we have argued for a dialectical view of the many small groups within our movement. Against those who self-servingly herald the end of the "small group period," we have emphasized those factors which condition the further multiplication of small groups. Among these factors, the sporadic character of the ideological struggle, the hegemony of the "left" line among the communist forces, and voluntarist party-formation play the main roles. Though the further growth of new centers and the maintenance of existing divisions have no historical necessity, existing "left" opportunist approaches to party-building lend the small group form a continued justification.

"The Parties are dead, long live my movement!" will have a similar effect on the parties as their line on the movement has on the many separate groups-it will serve to justify their organizational isolation and rationalize their ideological and political deviations. In countering this "left" subjectivism, the Marxist-Leninists outside the parties should adopt an attitude of unity/criticism-self-criticism/unity towards them. Two lessons of the CPC in formulating criticisms are applicable here: 1) "cure the disease to save the patient," which means that the purpose of criticism is to build unity among Marxist-Leninists, not to heap laurels on ourselves and ostracize those who may have committed errors; and 2) "leave an exit" to those who make mistakes, even serious mistakes, which means that attempts to corner groups or individuals, to trap them, to describe only their shortcomings and none of their strengths, will never bring good results.

In other words, we believe that in given historical circumstances, in which various mistakes have been made (mistakes for which the entire movement and not just the several parties bears some responsibility) parties could serve as a **transitional form** in the struggle for the Party. We are not naive, and we do not believe that the leaderships of these parties had this in mind when they convened their respective founding congresses. Nor does

their potential as transitional forms mean they will serve such a function, or change our view of the basically destructive effects of "left" sectarian party-formation. A real change in the orientation of the parties will probably await a change in the relationship of the communists to the workers' movement, which in turn may quite possibly require a change in objective conditions. By that time, one or more parties may very well have degenerated into counter-revolutionary sects on the order of the PLP. But since three or more parties will soon occupy the political scene, those dedicated to the construction of a revolutionary Party had better attempt to orient themselves in our actual situation.

"Transitions to Complete Unity"

Lenin recognized this possibility in discussing the British situation in 1919:

"If that failed to be achieved in Britain at once, if in addition, no union of the supporters of Soviet power proved possible in Britain because of a difference over parliamentarism and only because of that, then I should consider a good step forward to complete unity the immediate formation of **two** Communist Parties, i.e., two parties which stand for the transition from bourgeois parliamentarism to Soviet power. Let one of these parties recognize participation in the bourgeois parliament, and the other reject it; this disagreement is now so immaterial that the most reasonable thing would be not to split over it. But even the joint existence of two such parties would be immense progress compared with the present situation, would most likely be a transition to complete unity and the speedy victory of communism." (CW 29, p. 565)

Lenin's suggestion that the British communists might form two parties has a conditional character. It is predicated upon the idea that each party maintain proper relations with the other, and that the existence of two parties will further rather than end the joint ideological struggle. By "proper, we mean that each subordinates itself to the greater whole, "to complete unity" of the communist movement as embodied in a single communist party.

The history of party-formation in several countries bears out the possibility of several parties serving a transitional function. The early British communists proceeded to form not two but three Communist parties. First the Workers Socialist Federation, led by Sylvia Pankhurst and supported by a few small groupings, renamed itself the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International) around an anti-parliamentarian, anti-trade

unionist program. Next the British Socialist Party and split-offs from the Socialist Labor Party, together with a variety of circles, formed the Communist Party of Great Britain. Finally elements of the Scottish Shop Stewards and other Scottish revolutionary groups formed the Communist Labor Party. These three managed to merge into the single CPGB within nine months of the first party's appearance. William Gallacher of the CLP moved the formal motion for merger, prefacing it with words that a spokesperson from our own movement might someday echo: In the past, each section had seemed more anxious to impress...with its own revolutionary fervour than to get together with other sections and do something really valuable...We had failed in the past because so many of us had been too much concerned with personalities rather than with principles. (James Klugman, **History of the Communist Party of Great Britain**, v. I, p. 68) Despite its disparate components, the new Party was not wracked by factionalism on any significant scale. (Of course, it had its share of other problems, and remained more or less social-democratic in organization and program for a number of years to come.

The formation of the Indochinese Communist Party (earliest name of the Vietnam Communist Party) also passed through the "multiple party stage."

"The time had come when there had to be a real party of the working class, a communist party, to further push the Vietnamese revolution forward. The more advanced elements in the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth Association had realized that objective necessity which, however, was not recognized unanimously and in time by the Association leaders. For this reason, a single communist party could not be founded in the early days, and instead, two communist organizations were born from the Association, the Indochinese Communist Party and the Annamese Communist Party. This event caused the New Viet Nam Revolutionary Party, a patriotic organization with a progressive tendency, to be transformed into the Indochina Communist League.

"Thus after 1929, there were three communist organizations in Viet Nam. But this state of affairs did not last long, because under the banner of Marxism-Leninism, the struggles of Vietnamese patriotic forces, especially those of workers and peasants, rapidly united into a powerful upsurge of nationalism and democracy, which required leadership by a single communist party. In these circumstances, Comrade Ho Chi Minh in his capacity as a representative of the Communist International, convened a meeting of representatives of different groups on February 3, 1930, at Kowloon, near Hong Kong, to settle the question of uniting Vietnamese communist forces into a single Viet Nam Communist Party." (**An Outline History of the Viet Nam Workers Party**, pp. 5-6)

Needless to say, factional groupings did not maintain themselves in the new Party.

Finally, three parties came together to form the Communist Party of America, the original name of the CPUSA (the Communist Labor Party and two Communist Parties of America, one a split-off from the other.) This merger, however, was not as successful as that of the British or Vietnamese, and factional strife plagued the party throughout the 'twenties. Though each party had managed to subordinate itself to the communist movement as a whole, influential leaders within the unified Party failed to do so. Instead they placed "the interests of the faction above the interests of the Party, above the interests of the Comintern, above the interests of the working class." (Stalin, **Speeches on the CPUSA**, p. 27)

These party-building experiences show that the existence of several parties is no cause for despair. In founding a series of parties, many comrades have taken a false step. The refusal to struggle to unite all who can be united around Marxist-Leninist principle represents a deficiency in **party spirit**. But this false step need not prove irrevocable. To the extent that the formation of several parties pushes forward the two-line struggle, it will have an unintended beneficial effect. To the extent that the formation of several parties brings serious two-line struggle to a close, however, voluntarist party-formations will have dealt the cause of communism a severe setback. So far, the latter course is winning out.

In order that our multiple parties may "get together with other sections and do something really valuable," they must fight to reestablish comradely relations with the communist movement. The touchstone of their truly Party spirit lies in the recognition that they have merely consolidated a section of the movement into a party-form; they have not consolidated most or even a majority of the honest forces.

The struggle against the "left" danger within our movement will prove difficult enough: maneuvers aimed at isolating some arbitrary set of groups from democratic ideological struggle will only preserve "left" opportunism within our midst. The parties and the parties-to-be regularly guard their activities and membership against the viewpoints of the smaller groups. The smaller groups would make a big mistake if they were to respond in kind. At this point, the ideological struggle has become so polluted by unprincipled name-calling that comrades make no distinction among "driving out" a particular line which may be held by several groups, "driving out" the "CLP/RU/OL line," or simply (and most commonly) "driving out" the CLP, OL, or RCP itself. The attempt to quarantine some organizations plays into the hands of revisionist elements, "left" or Right. Isolation reinforces the cadre

monopoly which revisionist elements would like to maintain over their membership, a cadre monopoly which in some cases exists partly by default. At the same time many forces were exorcising the CLP or the RU/RCP to the netherland of "neo-revisionism," RU publicists called on their members to "dump the petit-bourgeois baggage," by which they meant the communist movement, among other things. And CLP writers counted as one of their "breakthroughs" within this country, "break[ing] our relations with the 'left,' or as they would like to be called, the 'young communist movement.' We turned away from these armchair revolutionaries and began digging into the proletariat." (**People's Tribune**, November 15, 1975)

Against premature attempts to isolate tendencies or groups, be they parties or collectives, Marxist-Leninists must continue to stand for democratic and increasingly centralized struggle involving every shade of communist opinion.

Footnotes

1. With a die-hard obstinacy, the leadership of the CLP continues to defend its shameful attack on Teng Hsiao Peng, which it now justifies on the grounds that the CPC itself has stripped Teng of all responsible posts.

"Leftists around the country attacked us for exposing Teng as the Khrushchov of China, whose policy toward the Angolan Revolution would lead to a disastrous defeat, not of the Angolan Revolution, but of the Teng grouping. Once again, who proved right?...we state again, as we have always done. Long Live the Chinese Revolution!" (**Peoples Tribune**, August 1, 1976)

The international communist movement has always considered completely impermissible any speculation on differences within Marxist-Leninist parties. Need anyone remind the CLP that Stalin denounced just this factional practice on the part of both the Foster and Lovestone groups in the old CPUSA? When the Lovestone clique called for the removal of Bukharin from the Comintern, didn't Stalin call it "unprincipled" and "disgraceful"? When the CPSU and the Comintern later removed Bukharin, did any Communist in the world suggest that this proved the Lovestone clique correct? (see Stalin's **Speeches on the American Communist Party**)

Finally, the CLP should give some thought to just what collection of so-called Marxists always claims to "support" the Chinese Revolution, always claims to "defend" the Chinese "workers' state," yet always opposes

the Party which leads that revolution and that state. For reference, we suggest **From Trotskyism to Social-Imperialism**, by Michael A. Miller.

2. Although it defines the latter as a non-Marxist "militantly pro-labor anti-monopoly organization that believes in socialism."

3. Revisionist phrases like, "It is only when the workers **take control of the state apparatus** and institute socialism that a better life can be achieved" (**People's Tribune**, August 1, 1976; emphasis added) also creep into its literature.

4. A number of organizations now exclude the Revolutionary Communist Party from their definition of the Marxist-Leninist forces, and until this past year the October League did as well. Many base this exclusion on the RCP's line towards the struggle for democratic rights of Black people, Chicano people, and other oppressed nationalities; its policy in the Boston busing crisis is most frequently cited as an example. We have sharp differences with the RCP's line and practice on busing, as our pamphlet, **"It's Not the Bus": Busing and the Democratic Struggle in Boston**, 1974-1975, shows. We think the RCP has made and continues to make some grave errors in that struggle. Comrades criticizing the RCP's attitude towards busing in Boston (and elsewhere), however, need to make an all-sided analysis, and avoid self-interested demagoguery. For our part, we will say this. From experience in that struggle, we know that the RCP took their line to both the white and Black workers; that they had positioned themselves in some important factories in the white communities; and that they did community work in the white communities, including communities where the conditions for work are quite difficult (South Boston and Hyde Park, for example). While agreeing that the line of the RCP (and groups like WVO, for that matter) capitulates from the "left" to the white-supremacist anti-busing movement, we also know that in their own contradictory way, the RCP took an anti-racist, anti-ROAR, and anti-busing mass line to the working class, and in communities like South Boston took their lumps for it. Granted that the RU's anti-busing position opened some doors in the white communities; nonetheless their willingness to do anti-racist agitation among the white workers in those communities distinguished them from some groups whose line on busing have a more "correct sound" in their newspaper, such as the October League. For all its talk against the segregationist movement, the OL made little sustained effort to erode the segregationists' mass influence in the white communities.