

Proletarian Unity League

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

Appendix to Chapter 5: The Subjectivist Friends Of the Hegelian Dialectic

*The Proletarian Unity League does not have unity around some of the specific conclusions of this appendix regarding the negation of the negation. One position holds that the negation of the negation has a place in materialist dialectics. Recognizing that no real exposition of this materialist negation of the negation exists in Marx, Engels, or Lenin, this position believes that applications of the category in their work provide a basis for demonstrating its place in the structure of the Marxist dialectic. The position represented in this appendix regards the negation of the negation as part and parcel of the Hegelian conception of contradiction. It believes that the few references to the category in Marx and Lenin are strictly metaphorical and cannot be understood philosophically. It also believes that Engels' chapter in the **Anti-Duhring** devoted to the subject does not give any real explanation of the category, instead presenting a series of examples of natural and social processes which are then described, after the fact, as negations of the negation. Therefore the position found here holds that both Stalin's and Mao's abolition of the category represents a conscious break with even the metaphorical remnants of Hegelian philosophy.*

We have included this signed appendix because we think it complements the argument of the book as a whole.

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This book has said that philosophical deviations produce definite effects both in theory and in the political and organizational lines of Marxist-Leninists. In this appendix, we will look at one of the philosophical supports for the "left" opportunist line on communist unity. This support lies in a certain conception of the relation between the Marxist and Hegelian dialectics. Though apparently academic and abstract, the conception of this relation can have direct implications for Marxist-Leninist theory and Marxist-Leninist politics.

Theoreticians from the Communist Labor Party have emerged as the most conscious champions of an Hegelian interpretation of Marxist dialectics within the revolutionary movement. To succeed in this effort, they have had to confront the philosophical work of Mao Tsetung, work which probably shows as little trace of

Hegelian phraseology as any in the Marxist tradition. That confrontation has occurred not openly, but covertly; not through a criticism of Mao's work, but rather through a piece of specious history, an attempt to reduce Mao's major essay, "On Contradiction," to an historical footnote.

According to these historians of Marxist philosophy, Mao's essay represents no more than the "synopsis" of **A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy**:

"During the past year our Party has begun a study of the **Textbook of Marxist Philosophy**, written in the Soviet Union in 1937 and reprinted by the Communist League in the summer of 1974. This book serves as the last nail in the coffin of those political corpses who tried in the past to divide Mao Tse-tung from Stalin by finding in the former's **On Contradiction** "new" philosophical formulations and truths. It is apparent that **On Contradiction** was written as a synopsis of the **Textbook**." ("The Revolutionary Struggle for Reforms," J. A., Proletariat, Fall 1975, p. 13)

Other writers from the Communist Labor Party have echoed this "self-evident" claim, as has Proletarian Publishers, now distributors of the **Textbook**, who headline their advertisements for it "Under the Banner of Stalin." But what is "apparent" to one philosophy may be less so to another. Before we "bury" those 'new' philosophical formulations," this "apparently" bibliographic or scholarly reference deserves a little scrutiny.

A Bad Synopsis, A False Banner: On Some Differences Between the Hegelian and the Materialist Dialectic

By every measure, **On Contradiction** would fail as a synopsis of the dialectic presented in the **Textbook of Marxist Philosophy**. Following an historical overview not reprinted in present editions, the **Textbook** has three main sections: one devoted to the "Unity and the Strife of Opposites," one devoted to "The Law of the Transition of Quantity into Quality," and one concerned with "The Negation of the Negation." Mao's essay has a very different structure. After setting out "The Two World Outlooks," he proceeds to "The Universality of Contradiction," "The Particularity of Contradiction," "The Principal Contradiction and the Principal Aspect of a Contradiction," "The Identity and Struggle of the Aspects of a Contradiction," and "The Place of Antagonism in Contradiction." On the one hand, Mao places the universality of contradiction and the particularity of contradiction **before** the identity and struggle of the aspects of a contradiction:

"When we understand the universality and the particularity of contradiction, we must proceed to study the problem of the identity and struggle of the aspects of a contradiction." (**SW I**, p. 337; emphasis added)

The transition of Quantity into Quality, which the **Textbook** treats as a "Law" of equal theoretical stature with the "Unity and the Strife of Opposites," does not merit any special discussion in Mao's essay, nor does he once mention the Negation of the Negation, which the Textbook defines as not only one of the "basic laws of dialectic," but also as "the general law of development of processes in nature, in society and in our thought." (**Textbook**, p. 387). On the other hand, Mao introduces categories which do not occur anywhere in the **Textbook**; fundamental contradiction, principal contradiction, secondary contradiction, principal and secondary aspect of a contradiction, forms of existence of contradictions, etc. Of two things, one: either Mao has prepared a very poor synopsis of the **Textbook**, one which ignores two-thirds of the "basic laws of dialectic"; or Mao has described a different dialectic.

At this point Cde. J.A. and company will have leaped from their chairs to protest that we have divided Mao from Stalin by "finding in the former's **On Contradiction** 'new' philosophical formulations and truths." It is true that Mao introduces categories not found in Stalin's exposition of materialist dialectics. But there are some things in Mao's work which only the **Textbook** and the CLP's history of philosophy-not Stalin-would find "new." These differences with the **Textbook** do not spell the break with the "banner of Stalin" that the CLP authors would have us believe. This is because the connection drawn by those authors between Stalin's philosophical work and the **Textbook** fails as certainly as their "synopsis" does.

Stalin's major presentation of the "principal features of the Marxist dialectical method" ignores the **Textbook's** "general law of the development of processes in nature, in society and in our thought," the negation of the negation. Though Stalin does include the transformation of quantity into quality as one of the four principal features of materialist dialectics, he also describes the struggle of opposites as the "internal content of the process of development, the internal content of the transformation of quantitative changes into qualitative changes." (**History of the CPSU(B)**, p. 98) In other words, his discussion presents a contradiction: the transformation of quantity into quality figures as both a principal feature of materialist dialectics, and as a special case of the struggle of opposites.(1) The theoretical effects of this contradiction need not concern us here; what needs stressing is the difference between this "banner" and **The Textbook of Marxist Philosophy**.

Now the **Textbook's** enumeration of the three "basic laws of dialectic" does conform, more or less, to the three laws Engels listed in **The Dialectic of Nature**. But since Engels formulates the main features of the dialectic in one way, Lenin in another way, Stalin in a somewhat different way, and Mao in still another way, isolated quotations from this or that text will not suffice. To be a Marxist in philosophy, one must abandon the illusion that a few phrases plucked from one or another source can think for us, and turn to an examination of the structure, function, and practice of philosophy in Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and

others. The very suggestion sets our metaphysical dogmatists to beating their "orthodox" chests in self-righteous indignation. A sham orthodoxy, however, conceals a profound subjectivism. The doctrinaire decides on the "essence" of materialist dialectics "spontaneously," which means, according to a definite philosophical tendency. Phrasemongering about the banner of Stalin and concocted "synopses" cannot disguise the actual drift of this tendency: idealism.

To understand the theoretical and political implications of the differences between idealist and Marxist-Leninist positions in philosophy, we will pass to an examination of the Hegelian and the Marxist dialectic. Obviously, this examination must have severe limitations; here we confine ourselves to an analysis of the negation of the negation, which strictly speaking, does not figure in Marxist philosophy.

Hegel begins with an "absolute idea" which is both prehistorical and pre-natural. He endows this idea with dialectical properties which manifest themselves in a movement towards self-realization and self-knowledge. The dialectical idea passes through three successive stages: affirmation, negation, and negation of the negation. In this triadic structure, the negation of the negation suppresses the previous individual moments (affirmation and negation) and also **conserves** that which is irreducible about them. In other words, the initial statement of the dialectical movement also contains its own result, or as Hegel says, "The principle is the end, the end the principle." Thus Hegel's dialectic represents a teleology, in which each successive moment is contained in germ in the original affirmation. Like all idealisms, Hegel's dialectic therefore revolves around the categories of essence and phenomena, with the difference that he reflects them through a **process**.

The negation of the negation constitutes the key moment in this process. In negating the previous moments (affirmation and negation) and at the same time **retaining** their irreducible elements, it expresses the idealist principle of **identity**. Its negation **preserves** the earlier contradiction of affirmation and negation; in this it represents the conservative reactionary thrust of idealism. As the Hegelianized formulations in the **Textbook** have it,

"Dialectical negation appearing as a stage in the development of a process, emerges on the one hand as the overcoming of the old, and on the other as the preservation of particular aspects of it as a subordinated moment. Such dialectical denial was called by Hegel "sublation." But according to Hegel, the idealist, it is not real things but ideas that "sublate" each other. Marx criticizing the idealistic character of this Hegelian conception, in which all actuality was shown as sublated in absolute knowledge, indicated its unreal character...Marx also indicated the positive moments in Hegel's exposition of this problem of sublation. He showed that this process is really a material movement that recovers **whatever disintegration** has taken place, so that it emerges not only as an overcoming, but

also as a preservation, a subordination to itself of the particular sides of the preceding stage in the development of the process." (pp. 368-69; emphasis added)

The **Textbook** provides no demonstration of Marx's supposed theory of a "materialist sublation," beyond quoting some passages from **Capital** about which Marx joked that he had "flirted" with Hegelian terminology. And it cannot, because materialist dialectics oppose any teleology—any beginning which already contains its end, any end which always maintains its beginning, any feudalism which already foreshadows communism, and any communism which always maintains exploitation, "on a higher level."

Against the eternal principle of identity, Marxist philosophy raises the absoluteness of contradiction. Against the resolution of contradiction in a "new" synthesis, it affirms the "resolution" of contradiction through struggle, through antagonism, through explosion. Against the philosophy of identity, the philosophy of "two fuses into one" (affirmation and negation into the negation of the negation), it insists that "one divides into two." Against the negation-conservation of the Hegelian dialectic, the Marxist dialectic "negates" through **destruction**.

"There is no construction without destruction. Destruction means criticism and repudiation, it means revolution. It involves reasoning things out, which is construction. Put destruction first, and in the process you have construction." (Mao, quoted in the **Circular of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party**, May 16, 1966)

Hegelian dialectics represents development as an original thesis which contains its own contradiction, a contradiction in turn resolved in a "new" synthesis, which functions as a "new" thesis, but one which retains, which is to say, **repeats**, the original thesis and its already-present contradiction. Marxist dialectics, on the other hand, represents development as the division of any thing into two, and the struggle of their opposites.

"Development is the "struggle" of opposites. The two basic (or two possible? or two historically observable?) conceptions of development (evolution) are: development as decrease and increase, as repetition, **and** development as a unity of opposites (the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation)." (Lenin, **CW 38**, p. 360)

It may seem that we have strayed far from "left" opportunism, but the distance is only apparent. As the struggles in philosophy represent class struggle in the realm of theory, so the struggles of tendencies in a Party or communist movement represent opposing tendencies in philosophy. Lenin ironically suggested that "not only do oats grow according to Hegel, but the Russian Social Democrats war

among themselves according to Hegel." (CW 7, p. 411) The "Left" doctrinaires do worse; they think about their own history according to Hegel.

On the "New Communist Movement"

When our "Left-Wing" comrades solemnly intone that right opportunism has historically posed, and internationally poses the greatest danger to the communist movement, and therefore constitutes the main danger to our movement, now and forever amen, they reflect not only their own spontaneous subjectivism, but also their idealism. Rather than "seeking truth from facts," "proceeding from the actual conditions," and "relying not on subjective imagination, not on momentary enthusiasm, not on lifeless books, but on facts that exist objectively," (Mao, SW III, pp. 22-23) the "Lefts" begin with an abstract truth, a "lifeless" truth taken from books, that right opportunism poses the main threat to the communist movement. They then move to identify this abstraction behind all concrete phenomena. This movement from abstract idea to the world parallels that of Hegelian idealism, and lands our "Lefts" in the Hegelian dialectical swamp, fusing two into one and effectively denying the actual struggle in the international communist movement.

The "Left" argument around the main danger to the U.S. communist movement finds support in a conception of the historical struggle against revisionism as eternally the same, as endless repetition. According to this view, the international communist movement contained both Marxism-Leninism and its negation, revisionism. To use Mao's formulations, the opposition of these two terms constituted the principal contradiction in the communist movement. After the triumph of revisionism in many Communist Parties, anti-revisionism in turn negated the negation, but conserved the essential contradiction **within itself** of Marxism-Leninism and revisionism, and conserved it in the **same place**: as the principal contradiction. The anti-revisionist movement, the "new synthesis," therefore contains within itself its own immanent negation, revisionism. Hence revisionism in the form of right opportunism always remains the main danger, because each development of the anti-revisionist movement preserves the former principal contradiction of Marxism-Leninism versus revisionism within itself.

The standpoint of dialectical materialism is entirely different. It holds that the division of a thing into its two mutually exclusive opposites and their struggle constitutes the basis of development. It demands the "appropriation of the material in detail," its concrete appropriation and the analysis of the multiplicity of its determinations. The theses of dialectical materialism aid Marxist-Leninists in their concrete understanding that the international communist movement split into two, and that the U.S. communist forces also split into two. In the course of this struggle, a new thing came into existence, the anti-revisionist or Marxist-Leninist movement, possessed of its own specific determinations and contradictions.

Some essentially deny that a real split took place, or belittle it as a "national" struggle between the Chinese Communist Party and the CPSU (cf. many writings of the CLP and its forerunner, the CL). This is the metaphysics which portrays development as quantitative repetition. In fact a qualitatively new thing emerged, a Marxist-Leninist camp opposed to the revisionist camp. This new quality has led comrades in their enthusiasm to speak of a "new communist movement." Publicists of the CLP, its various predecessors, and other "Left-Wing" groups have scored a lot of cheap, rhetorical points against the term, thundering on about the hundred-year old communist movement, etc. etc. Their sophistries do not conceal an underlying belief that they belong to the "same old communist movement," in the specific sense that the very same contradictions move it forward, that it faces the very same enemies and that it must adopt the same tactics and write the same articles as it did in 1902, 1928, 1956 or 1963. Indeed, you can pick up some issues of CLP, MLOC, RCP, OL(M-L), or "Revolutionary Wing" publications and be transported back to yesteryear, refighting the same old faction fights, not only of the CPUSA, but of the RSDLP. But our movement has not and will not split into Bolshevik and Menshevik wings, anymore than the pre-party communist movements in China or Albania did, and Earl Browder does not even now prepare to rise from his crypt at dusk, proclaiming communism "twentieth- century Americanism."

New contradictions, and new relationships among previously existing contradictions, govern the emergence of a new process.

"What is meant by the emergence of a new process? The old unity with its constituent opposites yields to a new unity with its constituent opposites, whereupon a new process emerges to replace the old. The old process ends and the new one begins. The new process contains new contradictions and begins its own history of the development of contradictions." (Mao, **SW I**, p. 318)

For thirty-five or forty years, the struggle against revisionism took place mainly inside the CPUSA, but at a certain point, an old unity (the CPUSA as a more or less revolutionary party) gave way to a new unity (the CPUSA as a full-fledged modern revisionist party). Another old unity – the anti-revisionist opposition within the CPUSA – gave way to another new unity – an anti-revisionist camp outside the CPUSA. Just as the old unity contained certain contradictions, so the new unity contained certain new contradictions. And just as the constituent opposites of the old unity determined its character as a unity in the process of division, so the constituent opposites of the new unity determined its character as a unity in the process of division. But for the materialist dialectic, this new division cannot duplicate the old division, precisely because the new division belongs to a new process which contains new contradictions, new relationships among contradictions, and has its own distinct history of the development of these contradictions. Herein lies the difference between the Hegelian category **Aufhebung**, variously translated as sublation or supersession, and the Marxist

conception of development as the splitting of wholes, the struggle of their "constituent opposites," the destruction of unities and the emergence of new processes.

In Hegel, supersession denotes the preservation of what has been negated in its very negation. In a perhaps unconscious demonstration of this method, the **Textbook** "maintains" what has been "negated" (the Hegelian dialectic) within its very "negation" (the Marxist dialectic). Within Marx it reads Hegel:

"He [Marx] showed that this process is really a material movement that recovers **whatever disintegration has taken place**, so that it emerges not only as an overcoming, but also as a preservation, a subordination to itself of the particular sides of the preceding stage in the development of the process." (p. 369, emphasis added)

It cannot be an accident that Mao chooses to give an explanation of the category "supersession," and in the process strips it of every Hegelian connotation.

"We often speak of "the new superseding the old." The supersession of the old by the new is a general, eternal and inviolable law of the universe. The transformation of one thing into another, through leaps of different forms in accordance with its essence and external conditions—this is the process of the new superseding the old. In each thing there is contradiction between its new and its old aspects, and this gives rise to a series of struggles with many twists and turns. As a result of these struggles, the new aspect changes from being minor to being major and rises to predominance, while the old aspect changes from being major to being minor and **gradually dies out.**" (Mao, **SW I**, p. 333; emphasis added)

Instead of the conserving of "whatever disintegration has taken place," the materialist-dialectic posits an intensified process of disintegration, producing

"the dissolution of unity, that is, the destruction of this solidarity, combination, harmony balance, stalemate, deadlock, rest, constancy, equilibrium, solidity, and attraction." (**Ibid.**, p. 342)

The old thing does not perpetually maintain itself in the new thing; it "gradually dies out." The struggle to fuse Marx-ism-Lenin-ism with the workers' movement is a complex process, and precisely for that reason, principal contradictions become secondary contradictions, secondary ones become principal, old contradictions disappear and new ones arise.

The anti-revisionist movement did not recover "whatever disintegration had taken place" in the old CPUSA. On the contrary, the anti-revisionist forces waged open struggle against right opportunism, until such time as the contradiction between right opportunism and Marxism-Leninism assumed the form of the open

antagonism between modern revisionism and Marxism-Leninism. Moreover, the combination of many contradictions gave this antagonism the form of explosive antagonism, and produced a split in the communist movement, in which the old unity was dissolved, and new unities emerged.

"Like any explosion it was instantaneous, not in the sense that there had been previously no signs of such tendencies, or isolated manifestations of them, but in the sense that the political fusion of diverse tendencies, including some very remote from politics, took place almost in a flash." (Lenin, **CW 16**, p. 51)

Previous to the series of splits from the CPUSA of the late 1950's and early 1960's, many comrades believed that the CPUSA could be revolutionized from within, and that splits were unnecessary. (Harry Haywood has suggested that the POC split in particular was premature; see **Class Struggle**, No. 4-5, Spring/Summer, 1976) But once the anti-revisionist forces accepted the necessity of breaking organizationally, politically, and ideologically from the CPUSA, a new historical process had begun, one subject to the struggle of a different range of contradictions, and correspondingly to different deviations.

"As soon as a wrong thing is rejected, a particular truth accepted by mankind, **new** truths begin their struggle with **new** errors." (Mao, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People," p. 37; emphasis added)

The new truth of the necessity to build a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Party began its struggle with new as well as old errors. Rather than fusing the "old" error, modern revisionism of the CPUSA type, with Marxism-Leninism, to produce the "new" negation, the new truth of anti-revisionism itself divided into two. As this book has argued in detail, anti-revisionism split principally into a Marxist-Leninist anti-revisionism, and a "left" anti-revisionism which freely borrows from the tenets of anarchism.

The Forms of Contradiction in the Communist Movement

"...antagonism is one form but not the only form of the struggle of opposites."
—Mao

Just as the place of different contradictions changes—their relative importance at different stages of a given process, or in different processes—so the form which contradictions take also changes. A given contradiction does not always assume an antagonistic form, nor is the principal contradiction of a process always antagonistic, any more than a principal contradiction remains eternally the principal contradiction, regardless of the concrete processes involved. The methods of resolving contradictions change according to the different forms which contradictions assume.

"...we must make a concrete study of the circumstances of each specific struggle of opposites and should not arbitrarily apply the formula discussed above to everything. Contradiction and struggle are universal and absolute, but the methods of resolving contradictions, that is, the forms of struggle, differ according to the differences in the nature of the contradictions. Some contradictions are characterized by open antagonism, others are not. In accordance with the concrete development of things, some contradictions which were originally non-antagonistic develop into antagonistic ones, while others which were originally antagonistic develop into non-antagonistic ones." (Mao, **SW I**, p. 344)

Those who rely upon Hegel or **A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy** for their dialectics will not find this distinction, and this absence cannot help but affect their view of the struggle within the communist movement.

The contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism is always antagonistic, but the contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and Right errors or revisionist influence is not. In certain periods in the history of the CPUSA, the contradictions between the proletarian line and Right and "left" deviations assumed the form of open antagonism, while in other periods these contradictions took a non-antagonistic form. Mao cites similar examples from both the CPSU(B) and the CPC:

"As already mentioned, so long as classes exist, contradictions between correct and incorrect ideas in the Communist Party are reflections within the Party of class contradictions. At first, with regard to certain issues, such contradictions may not manifest themselves as antagonistic. But with the development of the class struggle, they may grow and become antagonistic. The history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union shows us that the contradictions between the correct thinking of Lenin and Stalin and the fallacious thinking of Trotsky, Bukharin and others did not at first manifest themselves in an antagonistic form, but that later they did develop into antagonism. There are similar cases in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. At first the contradictions between the correct thinking of many of our Party comrades and the fallacious thinking of Chen Tu-hsiu, Chang Kuo-tao and others also did not manifest themselves in an antagonistic form, but later they did develop into antagonism. At present the contradiction between correct and incorrect thinking in our Party does not manifest itself in an antagonistic form, and if comrades who have committed mistakes can correct them, it will not develop into antagonism. (**Ibid.**, pp. 344-45)

In the mid-'fifties, the principal contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and modern revisionism within the CPUSA took an openly antagonistic form.' Therefore the form of struggle developed from one characterized principally by reasoning and persuasion to a complete ideological, political, and organizational break (expulsions on the one side, and resignations on the other). From this break arose a qualitatively different movement, the anti-revisionist movement.

The splits with the CPUSA and the rise of an anti-revisionist movement did not suppress the contradiction with revisionism, or banish revisionist influence from within the Marxist-Leninist camp. With the split in an old process and the emergence of new ones, however, the types of contradictions and the forms in which they manifest themselves changed. The contradiction with modern revisionism passed from being an openly antagonistic but internal contradiction of a given process (the CPUSA) to an openly antagonistic contradiction between two different processes (the anti-revisionist movement and the CPUSA). Within the "new" communist movement, the new truth of the necessity to build a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Party continued the struggle against the Right. But this contradiction did not have the same importance as the contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism within the "old" CPUSA. In some circumstances, this contradiction would again become the principal contradiction among the anti-revisionists and in some circumstances it would again assume openly antagonistic form. But in other circumstances it would become secondary and non-antagonistic, a contradiction among the people.

The situation invites comparison with the early years of the Comintern and the new Communist Parties of that period. At a given moment, the contradiction between revolutionary Marxism and the Right, represented by the social-chauvinist reformism of the Second International, had become openly antagonistic. The resolution of that contradiction resulted in basically two different processes (a Second and Second and a Half Internationals on one side, and the Third International on the other). Within the new International, the newly accepted truths of Communism began their struggle with "new" errors. Some of those errors had their ideological roots in anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism. Some had their ideological roots in the same reformist tradition that the so-called Socialist International championed, but these Right errors still took a somewhat different form. So though the contradiction between revolutionary Marxism and the Right continued in the Comintern, the form of the contradiction with the Right changed. In some circumstances, it became secondary and non-antagonistic, while the contradiction with the ultra-left became principal and antagonistic. This happened both in individual Parties (the German Party in the early 'twenties) and in the Comintern as a whole (1920—see the analysis in Chapter II, Section F). In other circumstances, this contradiction became principal within the new process just as it had in the "old" Second International, and developed into open antagonism. Despite the Twenty-One conditions for admission into the Third International, the break with social-chauvinist reformism had necessarily and inevitably occurred in an uneven way politically, organizationally, and ideologically. (Had Lenin and the Comintern insisted on the "pure," "absolute" break with revisionism demanded by so many of our "Lefts" today, the Comintern would have never gotten off the ground.) All during the Comintern's struggle for the Bolshevization of the Communist Parties and the determined eradication of their Social-Democratic traditions, the contradiction with revisionist or reformist influence frequently flared

into open antagonism, both in the individual Parties and the Third International as a whole.

For our present-day "Left" Hegelians, the anti-revisionist movement both overcomes the contradiction between modern revisionism and Marxism-Leninism, and preserves it as the principal contradiction within the anti-revisionist camp. It follows that the principal contradiction among the Marxist-Leninist forces, the contradiction with the Right, also always preserves its antagonistic character. The supposed division of the communist movement into a consolidated Right opportunist wing (sometimes, a "Menshevik" wing) and the "genuine" Marxist-Leninist wing logically results. Since the contradiction between these wings is antagonistic for the "Lefts," the struggle between them takes the form of open warfare:

"With the opportunist wing...the task is to draw clear lines of demarcation... and in this way call on the cadre of the opportunist wing to break with these organizations." (**Palante**, VI, No. 1)(2)

Within the "correct trend," we must act in an anti-sectarian fashion, the "Lefts" tell us:

"Along with the rest of the genuine wing of the communist movement: the August Twenty-Ninth Movement, Worker's Viewpoint Organization and the Revolutionary Bloc—and other honest organizations like the Revolutionary Workers League...Our task in the genuine wing is to unite all our strengths to overcome our weaknesses by struggling over our differences in a non-sectarian manner and build the unity based on political line, that will result in the creation of our party." (**Palante**, Ibid.; not the proletariat's party, you understand, but the "genuine wing's" party, which is just what both WVO and PRRWO/RWL now promise us).

But between the two wings we should act differently. Like the contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and modern revisionism, that between the "Right opportunist wing" and the "Leninist wing" takes a rigid organizational form. By implication, it will be fought in a sectarian way, and demand merciless struggle in which the Party spirit of unity, criticism-self-criticism and unity would be completely out of place. The suppression (or perhaps the supersession) of Marxist by Hegelian dialectics thus can produce definite splittist effects inside the communist movement.

In our present situation, the contradiction with Rightist or revisionist influence among the Marxist-Leninist forces by and large does not take an antagonistic form. Nor is it the principal contradiction: the main "new error" that anti-revisionism has to contend with at this time comes from the ultra-left, not the Right. The division of the anti-revisionist unity into opposites has produced two main

"mutually exclusive" critiques of revisionism. The Workers Viewpoint Organization gestures in the direction of this difference in attacking those who

"just point their finger at the "C"PSU and "CPUSA, who are revisionist to the Bone and whose revisionism has long ago fully surfaced. And then they proclaim "They are revisionist, and since we are against them, therefore we must be anti-revisionists."" (Workers Viewpoint, No. 4, p. 54)

Owing to its own "left" subjectivism, however, WVO cannot understand this difference as a split within a new process. Instead, it too views the anti-revisionist movement as a negation of the negation, which WVO, like the CLP, takes as a Marxist philosophical category (see, for example, **Workers Viewpoint Journal** No. 3, p. 35). So the contradictions in the anti-revisionist movement faithfully reproduce past contradictions, a repetition which WVO explains in baldly idealist fashion:

"Despite all the shouting and the exposure of the official revisionists, the very same revisionist deviations come back up in the form of conscious or unconscious force of habit, modes of thinking, prejudices and even moods and emotions. And each time they are more subtle and devious and it gets harder to 'vaccinate' ourselves against them." (**Ibid.**, p. 155)

But in fact a new process has come into existence with the anti-revisionist movement, and with it two main criticisms of revisionism. And one of these does not simply regurgitate the "very same" "forces of habit, modes of thinking, prejudices and even moods and emotions" of a revisionism perpetually maintained as the main danger within the anti-revisionist camp. Each draws upon a definite theoretical tradition, definite ideological practices, and represents a definite social basis. And each comes from the Left—one from Marxism-Leninism, and one from the ultra-left.(3)

The Place of Philosophical Struggle

Of course, philosophical theses cannot establish the main danger to the communist movement, anymore than they can demonstrate the necessity of proletarian dictatorship or the possibility of capitalist restoration. The assertion that one divides into two does not prove that "left" sectarianism constitutes the immediate danger to the communist movement, nor that the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie under socialism may result in the bourgeois capture of power. But it does represent proletarian class interests in the realm of theory: it gives a correct class orientation to the theoretical struggle.

The identification of the main danger depends on a concrete historical materialist analysis of the present ideological and political conjuncture in the anti-revisionist movement. Philosophy does not demonstrate truth; it asserts, and most

importantly, it serves—serves the work of historical materialist analysis by orienting it along a class point of view. As Engels remarked, the "materialist dialectic... for years has been our best working tool and our sharpest weapon." (**MESW III**, p. 362) In other words, dialectical materialism guides scientific investigation and analysis, but cannot substitute for it, regardless of the claims of those who take dialectical materialism for a science, for a "scientific philosophy," or for the "law governing the development" of Marxism (**Workers Viewpoint**, No. 4, p. 114).

For this reason, this book has not attempted to prove its perspectives on the basis of philosophy but instead has taken up a concrete historical materialist analysis of the communist movement. Philosophical struggle, however, has an important role to play in combating deviations, if not in analyzing their ideological and political importance, their social origin or their overall structure.

Time and time again we have seen that the arguments of our "Left-Wing" comrades did not base themselves on concrete analysis, on the patient elaboration of theory and the strict marshalling of evidence. Rather they fell back on doctrinaire absolutes and theoretical conceits. They did not address the present-day U.S. communist movement, which arose in definite circumstances, but a communist movement fashioned from faded photographs of earlier Parties and scraps of dated information torn almost randomly from books. From the concrete realities of our historical situation, they fled for the shelter of idealist philosophy, the one justification for their conclusions, and finally, the one proof. If a metaphysical truth is always abstract, then philosophical struggle allows us to demonstrate precisely what abstract truths we are dealing with: namely, the "truths" of idealism, and with them, the appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic.

It takes concrete historical materialist analysis to demonstrate the predominantly "left" opportunist character of the line and practice of groups like the Revolutionary Communist Party. But since philosophical deviations invariably finish by rendering scientific problems philosophical ones, and offering philosophical discourse in the place of scientific demonstration (even where they pretend to "suppress" philosophy entirely in favor of a positivistic science), philosophical struggle becomes of paramount importance in order to remove the "ideological blockage" to further theoretical work. Hegelian dialectics constitutes one such blockage, not only in analyzing the communist movement, but also in approaching a series of other problems. As a final example of the effects of the Hegelian dialectic, consider the profusion of "third periods" in the "Left-Wing" vocabulary.

The Hegelian dialectic begins with an absolute idea (the essence) which realizes itself through the world (through phenomena, or expressions of its essence). Hegel reduces all concrete existence (matter) to successive stages in the self-actualization of the idea—consciousness determines being. The auto-development

of the Absolute Idea passes through three periods. "According to Hegel, the evolution of the idea in accordance with the triadic law determines the evolution of nature" (Lenin). Materialist dialectics, on the other hand, asserting that being determines consciousness, requires grasping the multiplicity of concrete determinations which define the movement of a given process. In proceeding from their subjectivist notions about social reality, and attempting to fit reality to those notions, the "Lefts" have unavoidably been drawn to the Hegelian dialectical method. Casting aside its sublime speculative "shell," the "left" subjectivists wield the Hegelian dialectic as a handy club for pounding social reality into shape. And their favored shape is the "third period," that fresh, conveniently innocent period in which "old" historical tendencies no longer apply, the constraints of concrete circumstances give way, and reality marches to the beat of a metaphysical drummer. Past generations of U.S. Marxists having failed to make significant contributions to the body of Marxist theory, the "Left-Wing" Communists have set out to fill the gap in one eminently dialectical leap.

Hegel, not historical materialism, intervenes to rescue the RU/RCP's concept of a "proletarian nation," whisking it away to the "third period" of the national question.

"In this analysis of the three periods of the national question we see not the negation of the national question, but the NEGATION OF THE NEGATION. The first period—an internal state question, but essentially a question of bourgeoisie vs. bourgeoisie. Second period—NOT an internal state question, and NOT essentially a question of bourgeoisie vs. bourgeoisie—but of the peasant masses against imperialism (and feudalism). The character of the first period is negated in a dialectical sense in the second period—changed in a dialectical way that makes possible a further qualitative change. Third period—once again an internal state question, but under new conditions, of a new type. The negation of the second period is negated in the third period, and we have an internal state question once again, not in the same way as in the first period, but in a "far higher and more developed form." (Engels, "Dialectics, Negation of the Negation," Chapter XIII, **Anti-Duhring**). Now it is IN ESSENCE a question of the proletariat vs. the bourgeoisie in a direct (single stage) showdown. This is a dialectical analysis of the question and is the exact opposite of the "two-into-one" approach of lumping together the first two periods of the national question." (**Red Papers 6**, p. 38)

Though taking a more disguised form, the triadic law also brings us the "third period" in the movements of the oppressed nationalities,

"there were three periods in the movements of the oppressed minorities. The first period was the period of passive resistance and civil disobedience. The second, during the middle and late sixties, was the period of massive urban uprisings. And the third period is the one now, when the bourgeoisie is taking back whatever concessions they have made before and becoming more repressive due to the fact

that they can no longer make as many genuine concessions." (**Workers Viewpoint Journal**, No. 3, p. 17)

In an outburst of inspired dialectics, the WVO has also broken through to the "third period" of the communist movement discussed above and the "third period" of bourgeois democracy dealt with in Chapter Four, Section One. None of these discoveries rests on a concrete analysis of the "totality of historical conditions." In the logical authority of the Hegelian dialectic, they find an instrument designed to subordinate historical development to the movement of thought.

If ultra-leftism reflects the influence of bourgeois ideology in general, then ultra-left theory will have good use for bourgeois philosophy. The subjectivism and voluntarism of contemporary "Left-Wing" Communism predispose it to idealist positions in philosophy. Just as the spontaneous ideological tendencies of radicalized students and intellectuals incline them towards the semi-anarchist critique of revisionism, so these tendencies, complemented by that critique, incline the "Lefts" to an idealist understanding of dialectics.

All this suggests that calls for concrete analysis alone will not defeat metaphysical dogmatism, much less rout semi-anarchist ideology as a whole. The theoretical inventions hatched by "left" opportunism increasingly and necessarily gravitate towards various shades of idealism proper. Taking up Hegelian dialectics as its "best working tool" in turn produces definite effects in "left" theory and politics. The need for lines of demarcation in philosophy, for class struggle in the realm of theory, grows accordingly. Then seemingly academic differences between Hegelian and Marxist dialectics can become questions of immediacy.

—Roxanne Mitchell Frank Weiss

Footnotes

1. Lenin also regarded the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa as simply an "example" of the unity of opposites.
2. Though PRRWO ("the Revolutionary Wing") no longer has any credibility among Marxist-Leninists, many of its former comrades in and around the so-called "Wing" failed to denounce these types of provocations at the time. We doubt that the communist movement has heard the last of this line of reasoning.
3. The leaders of the WVO have not grasped this split in a new process fundamentally because they do not analyze real processes, but rather proceed subjectively on the basis of quotations and phrase-mongering. Only their own philosophical links to subjective idealism could account, for example, for a number of otherwise inexplicable errors in their critique of anarcho-socialism in

the communist movement in the person of PRRWO: their view that mechanical materialism constitutes the chief philosophical bulwark of ultra-leftism; that **Materialism and Empirio-Criticism** directs itself mainly against Bogdanov's "mechanical materialism" (p. 117); their inability to apply a critique of ultra-leftism to "left" opportunism in political line, a critique which would necessitate a concrete analysis of the actual reform struggles taking place in the U.S., such as those around busing, the ERA, etc.; and most symptomatically, their silence around the "left" line in party-building, which would require a concrete analysis of the party-building movement. Of course, it is hard to expect an analysis of "left" opportunism, "left" subjectivism or "left" sectarianism from an organization which headlines articles "our correct trend is developing and irreversible!", and has discovered one of its many "third periods," this time a third period of the communist movement, on the basis, PRINCIPALLY, of itself, and secondarily, on the "flow of the mass movements," and then describes this as the "totality of historical conditions"!

"Principally because of the emergence of the mighty, irreversible trend based on building the party on the ideological plane, and secondarily because of the flow of the mass movements—because of this 'totality of historical conditions,' today the second period of the communist movement has ended. Now we are entering the third period, when political line is the key link." (**Ibid.**, p. 99) Pity the poor Communist Party of China! It has yet to "vaccinate" itself against the class struggle, such that the CPC might also be an "irreversible trend" which would never change its color. As it is, it must constantly wage concrete struggles against concrete deviations, when it could simply take the right "anti-revisionist" anti-bodies against those "forces of habit, modes of thinking, prejudices, moods and emotions."

