

Proletarian Unity League

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

The Present Situation in the U.S. Communist Movement And Our Strategic Tasks

The U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement currently commands small, scattered, badly organized and poorly trained forces. It has little support among the popular masses, and very little support among the working class. The bourgeoisie which confronts the communist movement has extraordinary resources at its command. It's well-equipped and numerous operatives follow a highly organized division of labor in their unceasing efforts to secure the expanded reproduction of Capital. And unlike the revolutionary goals of proletarian revolution, proletarian dictatorship, and communism, the rule of Capital still enjoys broad if uneven support among the popular classes. To reverse this state of affairs, and in the process reverse the bourgeoisie, requires more than hard work and determination; it takes planning.

Marxist-Leninists agree that establishing a vanguard Communist Party will mark the first major step in the U.S. road to revolution. Without a Party, there can be no talk of elaborating an overall plan for revolution or implementing it. The establishment of a Marxist-Leninist Party has then a strategic importance for the working class, in the sense that the working class cannot attain its historic goals without its Party. In the terms of the Albanian Communist Ndreci Plasari, the building of a vanguard Party constitutes a **strategic task**:

"In every stage of the revolution, the PLA [Party of Labor of Albania] has solved several essential tasks of strategic importance for the achievement of its main objective. Such tasks are:

"In the first stage, the political union of the people around the Party, the arming of the masses and the creation of the people's army, the driving out of the occupationists, the destruction of the old state apparatus and the establishment of the new state power of the people's democracy...As there is no single strategic task for each stage, but several such tasks, the question might arise as to which is the most important...In reality, all the strategic tasks of the Party at a given stage of the revolution are equally important in the sense that if even one of them is not carried out, this is enough to

prevent the fulfillment of the strategic aim." (Plasari, "The Vanguard of the Revolution and Socialist Construction," **Albania Today**, No. 2, 1972)

For Plasari, strategic task does not only correspond to the strategic objective itself (in Albania at that time, people's democracy), but also to all those tasks upon which the attainment of the strategic objective depends. At this stage of the U.S. revolution, the construction of the vanguard party of the proletariat, the rallying of the proletarian masses around the vanguard and all popular forces around the proletariat, the creation of a force capable of overthrowing the bourgeoisie, and the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus through the establishment of proletarian dictatorship constitute the **strategic tasks** according to Plasari's definition.

The existence of several, equally important strategic tasks does not contradict the necessity to concentrate on one task at a given stage in the revolution. Among these tasks, one will always take precedence over the others, as the one on which the successive completion of the others depends. If we consider the several strategic tasks mentioned above which face U.S. Marxist-Leninists, the last three turn on the first--the construction of the vanguard Party, We define this vanguard as the union of Marxism-Leninism and the workers' movement, a union which expresses itself in the fusion of the politically advanced workers and the Marxist-Leninist organizations. Only through organizing such a Party can the downtrodden masses be roused to independent political life, the political and military force necessary to overthrow the bourgeoisie gain direction, and the proletarian dictatorship be established. For this reason, Marxist-Leninists take the construction of a new Communist Party as the central strategic task at this time.

But just as strategic tasks do not simply refer to the strategic objective, so strategy itself does not only concern a plan for making revolution. Any problem which comprises "many unusual tasks" and has an "extensive as well as protracted" character "has broken out of the bounds of tactics to knock at the gates of strategy." (Mao, SW II, p. 80) That problem therefore requires consideration from a strategic point of view.¹ Establishing the vanguard Party is such a task.

Now some groups deride any discussion of party-building strategy and tactics as a "military" approach which slights ideological and political line.² In theory this perspective separates ideological and political line from the organization which permits the formulation, implementation and development of that line. Though no one could deny the decisiveness of ideological line, party-building is not simply an ideological question. On the contrary, party-building concerns the transformation of proletarian ideology

into a material force, changing ideas into a struggle for political power. To bring about that transformation demands a strategy.

In practice, the attack on party-building strategy conceals ultra-left self-interest. Whenever a communist nucleus tries to give leadership to the people's struggles, it follows some plan for building the Party. If it does not pursue a correct strategy and correct tactics, it pursues an incorrect strategy and incorrect tactics. If it does not pursue a party-building plan consciously, then it does so blindly. Railing against those who pose the problem of party-building in terms of strategy and tactics serves to promote some particular strategy while pretending to follow no plan at all.

In the absence of openly debated party-building plans, practical initiatives have the field. Charles Loren of the **New Voice** group sounded the theme for this development when he wrote, shortly after the May 1973 Conference of North American Marxist-Leninists, that "it is quite clear that the material resources of the communist movement are sufficient to form a communist party." (**The Struggle for the Party**, p. 6) From all sides the argument came that the subjective factor lagged behind the objective factor. Behind these shadowy truths lurked palpable motives. For recent developments tell us that the "material resources" of the communist movement are "sufficient" to form not one, not two, but three, four or more communist parties. Whether their formation signals the overtaking of the objective factor by the subjective factor is another matter altogether. In fact, the multiplication of parties proves that for the most part, U.S. Marxist-Leninists are blindly carrying out a wrong party-building line.

For the rest of this chapter, we will examine Marxist-Leninist writings on strategy and on party-building in an attempt to find out what a strategic orientation for party-building would look like. In particular, we will concentrate on the importance of "determining the main direction of attack." A close reading of several Marxist-Leninist works on strategy and party-building will set the terms for our discussion of the present period. We will then proceed to preliminary definitions of the present strategic period and a strategic orientation for it.

Stages in the Development of the Party

Not only does the establishment of a vanguard party require a strategy, but in a situation such as our own, party-building is the principal focus of revolutionary strategy.

The development of the Marxist-Leninist Party passes through several distinct stages. We define **a stage in the development of the Party** by

the principal strategic task facing the revolutionary camp. The construction of the vanguard Party itself marks the first stage in the development of the Party. In this stage,³ Stalin says,

"...the Party focused its attention and care upon the Party itself, upon its own existence and preservation. At this stage it regarded itself as a kind of self-sufficing force...The principal task of communism in Russia in that period was to recruit into the Party the best elements of the working class, those who were most active and most devoted to the cause of the proletariat; to form the ranks of the proletarian party and to put it firmly on its feet." (CW 5, p. 104)

Similarly, Mao speaks of the "first stage" of the CPC as the "Party's infancy," implying that the building up of the Party required special attention during this stage.

Following the establishment of the vanguard Party, the principal strategic task of the revolutionary forces changes, and the development of the Party, or party-building, passes into a second stage. Instead of other strategic tasks depending on the construction of the vanguard Party, party-building now depends on another strategic task.

"The **second period** [in our terms, the **second stage**] was the period of **winning the broad masses of the workers and peasants** to the side of the Party, to the side of the proletariat... In this period the Party was by no means as weak as it was in the preceding one; as a driving force, it became a most important factor. It could now no longer be a self-sufficient force, for its existence and development were now definitely assured; it changed from a self-sufficing force into an instrument for winning the masses of the workers and peasants into an instrument for leading the masses in overthrowing the rule of capital." (Stalin, **Ibid.**, pp. 105-06)

Lenin also distinguishes "the first historical objective (that of winning over the class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat to the side of Soviet power and the dictatorship of the working class)", the first stage, from "the second and immediate objective, which consists in being able to lead the **masses** to a new position ensuring the victory of the vanguard in the revolution..." (CW 31, p. 93)⁴ In the second stage, the Russian Social-Democrats made party-building contingent on rallying the proletarian masses around the vanguard and all popular forces around the proletariat, rather than the other way around. And in China, after the stage of the Party's "infancy," Mao speaks of the "stage [of] the War of the Agrarian Revolution," (SW II p. 293) in which party-building depended on the tasks of the armed struggle:

"...having guns, we can create Party organizations, as witness the powerful Party organizations which the Eighth Route Army has created in northern China. We can also create cadres, create schools, create culture, create mass movements...All things grow out of the barrel of a gun." (Mao, SW II, pp. 224-25)

To sum up: at every stage in the revolution, the Marxist-Leninists concentrate their attention on a single strategic task. In the first stage, communists take the establishment of the vanguard Party as their central strategic task. In that sense their main **strategic** concern lies with a strategy for the completion of this task. For U.S. Marxist-Leninists, party-building is the principal or central revolutionary task in this, the gestation of our future Party.

The General Requirements of Strategy

In order to accomplish the "many unusual tasks" before them in constructing a vanguard party, the communist forces need a plan, or strategy. A strategy for party-building should meet the general requirements of strategy:

"Revolutionary strategy consists in determining the principal enemy on whom to concentrate forces in order to overthrow him at a given stage of the revolution (which boils down to determining the direction of the main blow⁵ of the revolutionary forces) in discerning the allies of the working class at each stage, and in elaborating a plan to align the revolutionary forces, win over allies, correctly use direct and indirect reserve forces, utterly isolate the enemy, deliver the main blow at the main immediate enemy, and struggle for the implementation of this plan throughout the said stage of the revolution." (Truong Chinh, **Forward Along the Path Charted by K. Marx**, Hanoi, p. 78)

In conformity with an overall strategy, Marxist-Leninists elaborate tactics which further their strategic aim.

"Revolutionary tactics consists in defining the guiding principles to be followed by the working class at each period of the ebb and flow of the revolution; in choosing forms of struggle and organization, and propaganda and agitation slogans, suitable for each period, each situation; in replacing old forms and slogans by new ones, or in combining these forms of struggle and organization to secure success for each drive or struggle." (**Ibid**, p. 79)

But since strategies fit certain conditions, and conditions change, a strategy has a limited application. As Stalin says, "Strategy alters at turns, radical changes, in history; it embraces the period from one turn (radical change) to

another." (CW 5, p. 65) Truong Chinh calls the period from one turn to another a "strategic stage" or "period of strategic significance," explaining that the Party must "first of all make out the enemy to overthrow at each strategic stage (or, as it occurs, in each period of a given stage)" (**op cit.**, p. 79).

Therefore, although the first stage of party-building has a strategic significance, this does not necessarily mean that a single strategy can guide the revolutionary forces throughout this stage. Lenin, for example, analyzes four major turns in the Russian party-building experience up until the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) (see below). The periods between these turns required distinct strategic considerations, or alterations in party-building strategy.

To determine whether a single strategy can encompass the entire first stage, we will begin by looking at the tasks and activities this stage includes.

Footnotes

¹For more on the generalized application of strategy and tactics to many fields of work, see Kun Chun, "Concentrate a Superior Force to Destroy the Enemy Forces One by One," **Peking Review**, December 27, 1974, which says in part,

"We apply the principle of concentrating a superior force to destroy the enemy forces one by one [earlier qualified as "the core of our army's strategic and tactical principles"] in fighting battles, and we should do the same in all other work. In a sense, the cause of socialist revolution and construction is more profound, complicated, and arduous than fighting battles...Though there are lots of work, difficulties and problems, we must, like fighting battles, grasp the principal contradiction, determine the direction of our main attack, correctly organize and use our forces and concentrate them to achieve a piece-meal solution."

² See for example **Workers Viewpoint** newspaper. Vol. 1, No. 7.

³In fact, Stalin uses the terms "stage" and "period" interchangeably in the following quote. In other discussions of party-building, other Marxist-Leninist works vary in their usage of these terms. We do not see any inherent significance to the use of one or another term, but to avoid confusion we will use the term "stage" to mean stage in the development of the Party. Later we will use the term "period" to refer to something else.

⁴Page references for Lenin's **Collected Works** are taken from the printings of 1961 and 1964.

⁵Truong Chinh's use of the term "main blow" differs somewhat from Stalin's conception. For Stalin, the main blow is directed at the main party of compromise in the camp of the people; for Truong Chinh, at the "main immediate enemy." There are similarities to the two definitions, but for the purposes of this book, we will follow the Truong Chinh usage.