

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

In the past two chapters we have seen how "left" opportunism manifests itself in party-building line and in political line. Though the concrete characteristics of the deviations differ at each of these two levels, they obviously have some connection to each other. "Opportunism in programme is naturally connected with opportunism in tactics and opportunism in organization." (Lenin, **CW 7**, p. 398) Lenin's use of the word "connected" clearly implies that opportunism does not take an identical form in every question, but that specific errors in different questions form "links" in a chain. We briefly outlined this relationship in the recent history of the U.S. communist movement, and discussed the interaction between "left" sectarianism and "left" political lines. But their affinity in fact goes deeper; it extends to common ideological roots and expresses common class interests. If the main struggle for the Party at this time takes place around party-building line, it nevertheless cannot be won at that level. In the final analysis, the decisive struggle will occur in the ideological realm, in the struggle between fundamentally opposed ideological positions.

Mao Tsetung drew the same conclusion from the Chinese Communist Party's struggle against the three "left" lines of the late 'twenties and early 'thirties. At that time, the main struggle in the Party took place around policies of the united front and armed struggle. To fight the emerging "left" line, Mao called for paying particular attention to uncovering its ideological roots. His resolution, "On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party,"

"raised the task of Party-building to the level of ideological and political principles, firmly upheld the leadership of proletarian ideology, correctly condemned the pure military approach, subjectivism, individualism, egalitarianism, the ideology of roving insurgents, and adventurism and pointed out the sources and harmful consequences of these deviations and the methods to rectify them." (**SW III**, 1965 Ed., Appendix, 205)

Unfortunately, the CPC as a whole did not implement Mao's resolution and, failing "to liquidate and rectify the ideological essence of Li's line" (**Ibid.**, p. 180) fell under the influence of another "Left" line. The CPC did reject certain "Left" policies of that time, but in leaving the sources of the "Left" line intact, could not prevent a new "Left" line from emerging, one which avoided some of the crudities of Li Li-san's line; "yet, compared to the 'Left' deviation of Li Li-san's line, it was on the whole even more resolute, more overpowering, more fully 'armed with theory' and more full-fledged in form." (**Ibid.**, p. 182)

In summarizing the shortcomings of the struggle against the first two "Left" lines, Mao later wrote:

"...the cadres were not brought to a full ideological understanding of the causes of these errors, the circumstances in which they were committed and the detailed ways and means of correcting them, so that errors of a similar nature came to be repeated...we should lay stress...on the analysis of the circumstances in which the errors were committed, on the content of the errors and on their social, historical and ideological roots." (**SW III**, pp. 163-164)

The CPC's difficulty in overcoming the Li Li-san deviation carries an important lesson for the struggle against "left" opportunism. A fight against ultra-leftism which restricted itself to party-building line would not break the stranglehold of the "Left" line on the U.S. communist movement. Merely thwarting this or that party-formation, or exposing the wrecking tactics of some "Left" organization would only buy a little time. Unless and until the communist movement sets about analyzing the social, historical, and ideological roots of "left" opportunism, new "left" organizations will spring up to replace the discredited ones, and new "left" lines succeed the defeated ones. Just as Progressive Labor succeeded the POC and other completely isolated sects of an earlier period, and the RU with others succeeded PL, so numerous, "more resolute, more full-fledged" ultra-left sects followed on the heels of the RU's own isolation, and the process has by no means ended. A thoroughgoing repudiation of "left" sectarianism, then, requires the defeat of "left" opportunism all along the line—its ideological root and its party-building branch. It is to the historical, social, and ideological bases of "left" opportunism that we now turn.