

June 9, 1977

Dear Comrades:

The following paper was originally begun for submission to the Guardian as a "Radical Forum". Its intent was and still is a defense of fusion as a necessary and crucial task for communists in the effort to build a party. We felt that, although recent polemics have dealt with the question of fusion, no clear analysis has been presented on the arguments and reasons which have led to seeing fusion as a component part of the central task of party building. This paper is only an attempt to raise certain aspects of the question.

Although we discuss fusion extensively we do not see it as the most important task and realise that fusion alone will not guarantee a "correct political line" or create the conditions necessary to form a party. We see theoretical development and unity among Marxist-Leninists as equally important tasks. An understanding of the relationship between the three tasks needs to be developed; we did not attempt to do this.

Thus the major weaknesses of this draft are (1) the section on tasks and (2) lack of clarification on what is meant by theoretical development and unity (and how to achieve these). Theoretical development must include learning the method of a Marxist analysis. We must do this in order to avoid dogmatic errors in analyzing concrete conditions. An understanding of the role of "indirect experience" of the theory and practice of the world communist movement is also necessary. It is part of the body of scientific knowledge which a Marxist-Leninist Party must incorporate. We do understand that theory will not develop from direct experience alone.

Organizations must come to a fuller understanding and analysis of unity, and essential to this understanding is what constitutes a splitting question. Principaled ideological debate and criticism/self criticism must overcome sectarian squabbles over the "correct" political line.

This paper basically represents the views of two people involved in the struggle to build a party and some helpful feedback and comments from comrades. It is based on the experience of a serious attempt to consolidate a local Marxist-Leninist organization, study, several years involvement in the working class movement, and our work in trade unions. We welcome (and need) comments and criticism. Please send response to: H.A. c/o P.O. Box 14528; Hartford, Connecticut 06114.

The Struggle Continues,

H.A.O.C.

Hartford Area Organizing Committee

In recent polemics around the question of party-building, certain forces have raised the position that theoretical development and/or ideological unity around a political line are the key aspects or components of building a Marxist-Leninist Party in the United States. Within these polemics the role of the fusion of communism with the workers movement is belittled, and even seen as a primary block to party-building.

We have three basic disagreements with the positions that (1) fusion is second to forming a party and (2) the position which tends to see theoretical development as an exclusive task in this period. These disagreements are not based on a few quotes by Lenin, but rather on (1) our understanding of the tasks necessary to build a party, (2) the organizational forms and development which are essential for a genuine communist party and (3) the relationship of theory and practice.

Firstly, fusion is not a separate task from party-building. It is a component part of the central task along with theoretical development and unity among Marxist-Leninists. The formation of a party must be seen as the culmination of the struggle over political line and efforts to fuse communism with the working class movement, although we do not know the degree of fusion necessary for party formation.

An excerpt from An Outline History of the Viet Nam Workers Party (1930-1970), Hanoi 1970, should be helpful:

"The founding of a proletarian party, when conditions were not ripe for it would cause divisions in the impetuous patriotic movement... not only the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, but even the working class lacked a socialist tradition. Therefore, what was needed first was an adequate organization which could help these classes learn about Marxism-Leninism and apply this doctrine to their movement of patriotic struggle. The organization with such a transitional character was the Viet Nam Revolutionary Youth Association...."

"The VNRYA developed vigorously. To carry out the association policy, members who were originally petty-bourgeoisie intellectuals became proletarians by going to work in mines, factories, plantations where they engaged in propaganda, worked among the masses, organizing and leading the workers' struggle, awakening the working class to its historic mission, at the same time educating themselves to become true revolutionaries." (The Association was formed in 1925, the Party in 1930).

Any party which is built outside of the class struggle and without deep roots in the working class movement will find itself isolated and impotent. A party can accomplish its mission only if its policy is communist, that is a class policy. This policy and political line, no matter how excellent, can only be realized and tested if the party organization is so constructed that the policy and political line can be carried out among the broad strata of the working class.

Raising the question in the manner of which comes first, party building or fusion shows a basic misunderstanding of the objective conditions necessary for party formation. Fusion is the key to the development of effective party organization. The effect of fusion is to bring communism into the working class and to rally all those elements who really oppose capital, not only on paper, but in action, not only with resolutions but with real struggles, and who are prepared to intensify that struggle. "A proletarian political party is the product of the class struggle waged by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and a tool in the proletariat's hands for waging this struggle. A party emerges in the wake of class struggle...." ("Inner Party Struggle and Party Development", Peking Review # 34 1976)

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The organizational forms necessary for a communist party is the second source of disagreement with those who belittle the role of fusion. The organizational direction Marxist-Leninists take in this period will have a profound impact on the nature of any party.

The question of organizational development and direction has not been raised concretely in the current discussion. These questions were dealt with extensively by the Communist International in the 1920's, during which time a restructuring of all parties was ordered along the lines of factory nuclei. This reorganization required not a superficial tactical change, but a basic reconstruction of the parties.

"The party organization must be adapted to the conditions and aims of its work. ... The final aim of our Party is to overthrow the power of the bourgeoisie, seize power for the working class, and bring Communism into being. Its immediate tasks are to win the majority of the working class by active participation in the everyday struggles of the working masses, and to secure the leadership of these struggles. This can only be achieved by means of the closest contact between our Party organizations and the working masses in the factories.

"It was from this point of view that the Third Congress of the Communist International (1921) decided that the basis of the Communist Party must be the factory nuclei. ... The experience of the German revolution (at the end of 1923), once more clearly demonstrated that without factory nuclei and the closest contact with the working masses, it is impossible to draw the latter into the struggle and lead them, that it is impossible to gauge their moods accurately and thus take advantage of the most favorable moment for our action, and that it is useless to expect victory over the bourgeoisie." (T.C.I. Journal, 1924)

In July 1924 the Fifth Comintern Congress concluded, "The basic defect, and the origin of all weakness in our trade union work, is the absence of party cells in the factories..." and "Hence the necessity of forming factory committees where they do not yet exist, and of

intensifying the work of those already in existence..."

The work of a party must clearly be done through factory cells. Some will argue that the task of building such organizations in the shops must wait until we have a party. It does not make sense to construct an organization based on one kind of development now and abruptly alter that construction as soon as the party is in existence. Experience has shown that changing organizational structure is not an easy process. Also, if the structure and direction of our party is altered after it comes into existence, splits and dangerous dissention are inevitable. (From our understanding this is currently happening in the PSP.) Furthermore it will take years for communists to concentrate and establish themselves in basic industry, especially with no experience or skills in factories. We need to begin now.

In 1902 Lenin wrote, when forces were small, ... "it was perfectly natural and legitimate then to devote ourselves exclusively to activities among the workers, and severely condemn any deviation from this. The whole task was to consolidate our position in the working class." (What is to be Done?)

The argument is also raised that concentrating on trade union work and fusion tends to be economist in nature, and thus a block to party-building, and even the main danger to the anti-revisionist, anti-dogmatist communist movement. We are inclined to see economism raised in this manner as a cover by radical intellectuals and petty-bourgeois theoreticians to downgrade organizational tasks. We do see economism and economist tendencies as a very real danger within the developing Marxist-Leninist movement. This danger in itself, is not grounds for avoiding participation in economic struggles.

We tend to agree more with the analysis of the BACU, that economist mistakes in the period of integrating with the workers are more a reflection of the inexperience and lack of direction of cadre, than of any deeply based rightist trend. Furthermore, the masses must participate in reformist struggle and for communists to encourage and lead them in doing so is not economist. Not to attempt to lead people beyond the misunderstanding that reforms will solve their problems is economist. We should participate to the extent possible in the forms of struggle that arise naturally and necessarily from among the masses, and begin to transform them into struggles with a revolutionary character.

In addition to charges of economism, some unprincipled slander is raised against those revolutionary forces who are beginning to build a base in the shops. "...we have our fill of that brand of 'workerism' whereby radical intellectuals adopt what they perceive to be the mannerisms and cultural styles of the working class and then glorify their own

posturing as somehow the essence of revolutionary wisdom." (I. Silber, June 30, 1976) "When we can enter a plant with a concrete orientation that can be translated into a definite program, instead of simply repeating the hack phrases of 'bosses versus workers', only then can we engage in thoroughly communist practice." (Ann Arbor Collective (M-L), April, 1977). "... the individual or small group that gets buried in the workplace is more likely to be overwhelmed by the daily economic brutality for which they are not too well prepared than to become providers of a leadership...." (I. Silber, May 18, 1977)

We do not feel this adequately sums up the practice of all groups involved in trade union work and who are in the process of building factory concentrations. Nor is it an adequate argument not to do so. Factories are schools of revolution and communists must begin to teach in them. Workers are capable of understanding socialism and many communists and organizations are advanced enough theoretically to begin injecting this consciousness into their struggles.

"The ideal audience for political exposures is the working class, which is first and foremost in the need of all-round and live political knowledge, and is most capable of converting this knowledge into active struggle." (What is to be Done?)

To avoid this work is to leave the trade union movement open to bourgeois ideology exclusively; "...bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than the Socialist ideology; (because) it is more fully developed and (because) it possesses immeasurably more opportunities for being spread." (What is to be Done?)

Further, we agree with Lenin that, since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of workers in the process of their movement, the only choice is either bourgeois or socialist ideology. (What is to be Done?) This does not mean as some think that Marxist-Leninists must stay away from workplace organizing until a 'definite program' is formed in fear of perpetuating bourgeois ideology. In fact the opposite is true. It is the task of communists in their day to day work to begin to break the stranglehold of bourgeois ideology.

The Fifth Comintern Congress, in discussing tactics in trade union work made an interesting statement about the Amsterdam International. There are some obvious and important similarities to the situation in the United States.

"In its top ranks the Amsterdam International is a bulwark of international imperialism, an organization expressing particularly blatantly the conservatism, backwardness, national narrowmindedness, bourgeois-imperialist sentiments of the workers most corrupted by the bourgeoisie. The fight against the Amsterdam International remains the most important task of the Comintern and its sections These

workers will be emancipated from reformist illusions to the extent that communists manage to take lead in the industrial struggles of the working class. Industrial disputes are particularly favorable occasions for the application of united front tactics and for exposing the fascist strikebreaking role of the leaders. ... The Comintern and the Communist Parties support the left wing in so far as it really fights against the programmes and tactics of the Amsterdam International."

(July 1924)

In order to build a genuine communist party it is essential to start building factory cells. We can politically develop advanced workers and win them over to socialism and engage them in the struggle to build a party. In this way we can start the embryonic stirrings of a communist current among the proletariat of this country.

"If we are to build a really revolutionary party, a truly vanguard party, we must be guided by the most advanced theory, which must be tested and proven in the workers' movement. For it is only through direct involvement in the working class movement that the party can be constructed so as to be a revolutionary proletarian vanguard party." (PWOC, 1974)

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Inexorably bound up with the struggle around fusion is the question of the relationship and the role of theory and practice. There is a tendency for some groups to view theoretical development and theoretical unity as a key to unlock the class struggle. But, Marxism is the concrete analysis of concrete conditions. Unfortunately, these forces continue to stay aloof from the real struggles of today, while attacking those who do not. This constitutes our third source of disagreement.

"Such a tendency always underestimates the importance of participation in mass struggle for the development of the correct political line. They may understand, in a one-sided way, that 'political line determines everything' but they do not understand 'where correct ideas come from'." (BACU, Feb., 1976)

Our most important theoretical task is to learn the science of Marxism-Leninism in order to avoid dogmatist errors in its application to concrete conditions. Theory must answer the questions raised by practice. "Our dogmatists are lazy-bones. They refuse to undertake any painstaking study of concrete things, they regard general truths as emerging out of the void, they turn them into purely abstract unfathomable formulas, and thereby completely deny and reverse the normal sequence by which man comes to know truth. Nor do they understand the interconnection of the two processes of cognition - from the particular to the general and then from the general to the particular. They understand nothing of the Marxist theory of knowledge." (Mao, On Contradiction)

To belittle the role of the integration of communists with the working class movement is to separate theory from practice. We definitely agree with Lenin that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. At the same time revolutionary theory does not become a material force until it is gripped by the masses.

We do not agree that Marxist-Leninists either develop theory or engage in practice, or that the place to learn theory is in the library, although much study needs to be done. "The method of studying the social sciences exclusively from the book is extremely dangerous and may even lead one onto the road of counter-revolution." (Mao, Oppose Book Worship). The ultimate line of demarcation between the revolutionary intellectuals on the one hand and the nonrevolutionary and counter-revolutionary intellectuals on the other lies in whether they are willing to, and actually do, unite with and integrate with the masses of workers and peasants." (Mao, May 4, 1939 cited in The Morning Deluge).

Theory and practice are developed together and must not be separated. "Theory becomes purposeless if it is not connected with revolutionary practice, just as practice gropes in the dark if its path is not illuminated by revolutionary theory." (Stalin, Foundations of Leninism). And as Lenin points out "...correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement." (Left Wing Communism)

The dialectical materialist theory of knowledge places practice in the primary position and holds that human knowledge can in no way be separated from practice and repudiates all erroneous theories which deny the importance of practice or separate knowledge from practice. This is the problem with our comrades who propose to first develop theory and political line, and then present the working class with a vanguard party.

"Idealism and mechanical materialism, opportunism and adventurism, are all characterized by the breach between the subjective and the objective, by the separation of knowledge from practice." (Mao, On Practice)

By ignoring the dialectical relationship between practice, theory and knowledge, communists will make serious errors. For a party to be the vanguard of the working class, its most advanced and organized detachment, it must be born and bred from the struggles of the proletariat and guided by the theory of Marxism-Leninism. It will not arise out of the activities of communist intellectuals.

TASKS

The central task for Marxist-Leninists is the forming of a genuine communist party. Until this is done, all other work will be held back. This does not mean, though, that it is the immediate task. The party can not be formed until the concrete conditions are present for it to be founded on a solid base.

We do not know what preconditions need to be met before a party will come into existence, but see three immediate tasks which face us in the present period: theoretical development and ideological struggle, unity among Marxist-Leninists, and beginning the fusion of communism with the working class movement. These are all necessary and crucial components of party-building.

As to which among the three is primary at this time can not be determined on a national level. Forces in different areas must take into account the history and circumstances of the struggle there, and put the tasks in their proper order. The whole situation must be taken into account and a plan worked out accordingly. The important thing is determining a sequence of work for each period so that definite results can be achieved.

In this respect, areas which already have established local centers have a responsibility to give leadership to isolated groups and individuals. This help will facilitate the consolidation of local Marxist-Leninist organizations, which we see as the first step toward approaching all the tasks in a concrete way.

We see the activities of local organizations in approaching these tasks centering around three main areas: Marxist-Leninist education and theoretical study; building fractions in mass organizations (especially trade unions); and toward the development of factory cells/units. All these activities aim at the recruitment and development of cadre, developing communist theory and practice and the beginning of obtaining communist leadership and influence in the working class movement.

It should be clear that advanced work (communist agitation, propaganda, education etc.) is primary over mass work (obtaining leadership of economic and reformist struggles), although concessions to mass work are made in order to carry out advanced tasks. That is, all mass work should be done from a party-building perspective, within a plan for consolidating local organizations and moving forward on the three immediate tasks.

The tasks of unity and theoretical development need also to be carried out on a regional and national level. Indispensable for this to move forward is the development of a national center and theoretical journal as soon as possible. We can begin by increased communication and principled polemics between groups within our trend. A better understanding of the principal of criticism and self criticism as a basis for resolving contradictions between communist organizations is needed.