

Proletarian Unity League

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

### Chapter 3: "Left" Opportunism in Party-Building Line

Though progress on every important task before the anti-revisionist forces suffers from the ravages of "left" opportunist thinking and policy, ultra-leftism today concentrates itself on party-building line. To say that the struggle for the Party is mainly fought out at the level of organization (and therefore theoretically at the level of party-building line) means that the struggle over party-building line determines or influences all other struggles in the party-building process. The present organization of the communist movement--the existence of many weak and competitive centers--presents the main obstacle to the further fusion of Marxism-Leninism with the workers' movement, to the achievement of a new phase in the development of the communist forces. Therefore the ideological struggle over party-building line is the key ideological struggle of this period, and "left" opportunism in party-building line the main target of that struggle.

The history of the recent attempts at party-formation reveals a consistent pattern. First, the larger groups devote almost all their attention to struggle over political line. Concentrating on those strategic or tactical emphases which separate it from all the "opportunists," the group in question competes with other organizations over the recruitment of advanced workers and revolutionary intellectuals. Its "left" sectarian attitude towards the common ideological struggle leads it to dismiss those who fall beyond the particular boundaries of its own political line.

"The sect sees the justification for its existence and its point of honor not in what it has in **common** with the class movement, but in the **particular shibboleth** which distinguishes it from the movement." (MESC, p. 258)

Finally the large organization reaches what it considers a respectable "party size" in numbers and geographical reach. After having engaged in enough harangue to ensure that no other group of major influence will consider a joint Congress, the "pre-party formation" assumes a new attitude towards the ideological struggle. Political line recedes into the background; suddenly, party-building line acquires a new significance.

In practice, by party-building line they mean setting the date for the Party Congress, rounding up the delegates, and choosing a name. Organizing committees sprout up. The sponsoring organizing committee announces the burning need for a Party, "immediately and at all costs," explaining that the spontaneous struggles of the masses cannot wait a moment longer for their proletarian headquarters, that "**objectively** the mass movement has come up against the lack of a genuine communist vanguard," (RU), that party-building has become a task of "immediacy," (OL), etc. The "pre-party formation" publishes a vague program or unity statement which, because it does not represent the fruit of a common ideological struggle, regroups only its own ranks of supporters. Assured that it has the overwhelmingly predominant, organized interpretation of Marxist-Leninist principle on every question, the party-to-be calls for "unity on the basis of Marxism-Leninism" at the impending Party Congress. Through this appeal, it hopes to "box office" enough undeveloped or unorganized Marxist-Leninists to give its "unification" pledges some semblance of legitimacy. In the latest twist the October League has published a series of statements by up to now non-existent organizations which have "recently formed" in order to "participate" in the OL's Unity Conferences.

In theory, their argument now runs that we cannot answer every major question today; that some preliminary lines of demarcation exist (**which** lines is, of course, the subject of ruthless dispute); that an organized party provides the best means to struggle to correct positions; that therefore we must now unite around Marxism-Leninism. In practice, however, the whole procedure amounts to an adventurist form of spontaneism, in which some comrades--in every case, a small minority of Marxist-Leninists--declare the Party, invite everyone else to join, and watch to see if it develops into a real vanguard.

The combination of first exclusively emphasizing political line and then discovering the "immediacy" of party-formation produces a continuing series of malformed Marxist-Leninist parties. To use a military metaphor, the advent of two, three, many Marxist-Leninist parties betrays a **putschist** mentality. Among Mao's five criteria for putschism, the focal point reads, "blind action regardless of subjective and objective conditions." (**Selected Military Writings**, p. 63) And Lenin writes:

"The term "putsch" in the scientific sense of the term...may be employed...when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses." (**CW 22**, p. 355)

In party-formation, "putschism" does not aim at mobilizing all available forces for the founding of the Party and the conduct of the revolution. Rather, the putschist mentality advocates declaring oneself the Party, and thereby discredits the already-shaken prestige of Marxism-Leninism, degrades the name Party one more time, isolates the communists from the masses, and prepares the liquidation of the communist movement at the hands of police provocateurs, state repression, the employers, and the labor lieutenants of capitalism. Failing to make a sober-minded analysis of the state of objective and subjective conditions, the groups fall into subjectivism and then head off on an isolated adventure. The ensuing Party Congresses "reveal nothing but a circle of conspirators" or faithful devotees, and "arouse no sympathy among the masses."

The fault does not lie with the urgency of party-building. But discussion ends, and the Founding Congress gets underway right where debate should have begun--with party-building line and the preconditions for Marxist-Leninist unity. Prior to that, the almost exclusive concentration on political line can only serve sectarian ends, since it implicitly assumes that the class organization already exists to implement a full political line. The shift to party-building line comes too late to make any difference, and usually only concerns the mechanics of party-formation, not the guiding line for it. Everything the would-be Party chieftains tell us at that point is true enough, but it has been true for years and does not support their pointed conclusion, namely that we should join their party as against all the rest. Of course we cannot definitively resolve every major question short of party-formation--we never could. Of course an organized party provides the best means for struggle to correct positions--it has for years. Of course "**objectively** the mass movement has come up against the lack of a genuine communist vanguard," (RU) and "the present period of pre-party organizations cannot adequately serve the people's complex and difficult struggle which lies ahead" (**The Call**, August 1975)--all of this has been true for twenty years. And of course we should unite around Marxism-Leninism. These truisms point to the need for an ideological struggle--they do not conclude one. Precisely because the proletariat needs a political party, because we cannot adequately resolve many revolutionary problems in the absence of one, and because such a party provides the best means for arriving at a revolutionary line--precisely for all these reasons--we must open a discussion on the preconditions for Marxist-Leninist unification, in order to form a united Communist Party at the earliest possible date. Only with agreed upon preconditions in hand can we measure the conflicting claims of different groups for recognition as **the** Marxist-Leninist Party, or assess the character of various party-building lines.

In introducing the question of pre-conditions for communist unification, we need to distinguish between party-formation and construction of the vanguard, between forming the guiding nucleus for the building of the vanguard Party and the vanguard Party itself.