Anti-Revisionist Movements in Canada, 1945-1970

by In Struggle

THE DEGENERATION OF THE COMMunist PARTY OF CANADA

For some, the Communist Party of Canada became revisionist in 1956 when the Party officially lined up on the side of the Soviet revisionists against the Marxist-Leninist line which was vigorously defended by the Communist Party of China and the Party of Labour of Albania. This point of view is erroneous. It takes into account only the most superficial aspects. If we really want to clear things up for the Canadian proletariat and arm it in the struggle to the finish against revisionism, we will not be satisfied with something which was finally nothing more than the end product of a process which had begun well before - the process of the degeneration of a proletarian party into a bourgeois reformist party. This task has hardly begun in our movement and there is absolute necessity to pursue and deepen it. The success of our current struggle against opportunism within the Marxist-Leninist movement, the success of our struggle to rebuild the authentic vanguard Party of the Canadian proletariat depend on it.

Thus it is not by accident or by intellectual curiosity that we have begun this history of the Canadian Marxist-Leninist movement with the presentation of our viewpoint on the development of revisionism within the Communist Party of Canada. We have done this because we are convinced that the lack of polemics on this point on the part of Canadian Marxist-Leninist groups constitutes a major obstacle in our current struggle against revisionism and opportunism. Finally we should add that we are undertaking this debate while being fully conscious of the important weaknesses which we still have in our concrete analysis of the subject.

To go right to the heart of the subject, it was at the August 1943 Congress that revisionism became the dominant aspect of the line of the Canadian Communist Party. Not only did this Congress adopt a new name for the Party, which became the Progressive Labour Party, (PLP), but it also adopted a new political line which was contrary to Marxist-Leninist principles. And from that moment the Party abandoned all truly revolutionary strategy and accepted to submit all of its action to the narrow framework of legality and bourgeois parliamentarism. Instead of systematically preparing the masses for revolution, for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the new party proposed the election of a workers' and farmers' government, which later would transform itself into a socialist government - without armed struggle, without revolution. The Party thus tried to make the masses believe that the bourgeoisie, by itself, would abandon its class privileges, without repression, without having recourse to the violence of its State apparatus.

In 1945, Fergus McKean, who was then secretary of the provincial wing of the Party in British Columbia, in a book entitled Communist v bourgeois opportunism launched a full scale attack against the revisionist line of the PLP, and put forward the necessity of recreating a new Party. McKean did not succeed in organizing real opposition to the leadership of the PLP and was quickly expelled from the Party. He created a short-lived party which only lasted a few months.

The PLP, and before it the CP, had always had an erroneous line on the Quebec national question, and had never been a firm defender of the Quebec nation's right to self-determination, nor a solid fighter against great nation chauvinism in English-Canada. At the 5th Congress of the PLP in 1949, there was a split within the party because of its chauvinist line concerning the national question. 300 of the 700 delegates left the Party when the leaders refused to change their positions. This split led to the departure of the major part of the Party's for-
ces in Quebec. They, for their part, fell into narrow nationalism.

The great nation chauvinism of the English-Canadian militants increased the narrow nationalism of the Quebec militants. From the viewpoint of the interests of the entire Canadian proletariat, the two parties were in the wrong, both their positions leading to a reinforcement of the division of the proletariat on a national basis.

When in 1957, the PLP formally rallied to the line of modern revisionism put forward by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it was a party which had already developed a revisionist line ten years before. Other struggles broke out in the Party which resulted in other splits. The most important of these was the struggle waged by the militants who later founded the Progressive Worker Movement (PWM).

THE PROGRESSIVE WORKER MOVEMENT

Early in 1964 in Vancouver, Jack Scott and his cell companions who opposed the line of the CP, created the Canada-China Friendship Association, which, by the way, was the first to be created in a Western capitalist country. This action was consciously and clearly the sign of a proletarian position which opposed the bourgeoise line of the CP and all the revisionist parties, with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at their head. This too obvious support for China on the part of Scott and his companions led to their expulsion from the Party in the summer of 1964. They then tried to bring together all Canadian revolutionary forces, but their attempt failed. Turning inwards to British Columbia, they founded the Progressive Worker Movement (PWM), in October 1964.

Although it was in fact the most vigorous attack at the time against revisionism in Canada, the very creation of the PWM is the consequence of the first failure in the struggle to rebuild an authentic proletarian Party. The history of this group was to be marked by the repetition of this defeat, always for the same reason. Even if it was the first Canadian group to wage struggle against revisionism during the 60's, the PWM was never really able to break with revisionism.

The PWM clearly placed its task at the level of the struggle against revisionism, and from that point of view, we must accord it much merit. Particularly on the ideological level, it traced a first demarcation between Marxism-Leninism and modern revisionism and all other opportunist and counter-revolutionary ideologies, such as Trotskyism, Castroism, and social democracy. It unceasingly denounced the class collaboration practised by the traitors of the CP. On the international level, it denounced the manoeuvres of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia), and firmly supported the socialist countries and the struggles of the peoples against imperialism, particularly the just struggles of the Indo-Chinese people. It once again took up the historical tradition of the international communist movement by establishing a center for the distribution of Marxist-Leninist books, by placing revolutionary songs in the place of honor, and by recalling the high points of the proletariat's struggle, (Commune of Paris, October Revolution, Winnipeg General Strike). The PWM was a firm defender of the immediate interests of the masses' living conditions and struggling for the democratization of unions.

However, it committed two determinant errors which prevented it from really rebuilding the Canadian Marxist-Leninist movement. It abandoned the tasks of rebuilding the Proletarian Party, as well as that of applying the independent policy of the proletariat on all questions, that is, a policy distinct from all the other classes of Canadian society. From then on, it had irremediably started down the slope of revisionism.

The PWM was characterized by its spontaneism with regard to party building. From its creation, the PWM had established the necessity of uniting the revolutionary forces in the country and creating the Party. But to be truthful, this question was more a declaration of intention. Except for the last year of Progressive Worker, where it constituted the subject of a few articles, the question of the Party was never really the object of intense propaganda in the PWM's press. Already, by its creation the PWM failed in its attempt to create the Party on a national scale. This failure rapidly led it to turn inwards on itself, to capitulate before the struggle to be waged for the whole Canadian proletariat.

Afterwards, it was to raise localism to the level of a principle for the construction of the Party, by putting forward the unification of communists on a regional basis before their unification on a national basis. In fact, the militants of the PWM devoted the essential of their energies to the development of their work in the union movement, without submitting this task to the task which must be the first of all the tasks of communists within the workers' movement, that is, the rallying of advanced elements of the proletariat to communism through the activity of communist agitation, propaganda and organization.

THE CANADIANIZATION OF THE UNIONS

Throughout the greater part of its history, all of the PWM's tactics were to be determined by the call for the Canadianization of the
unions. According to these comrades, it was necessary to rid the Canadian unions of the hold which the American union bureaucrats had on them and return them to the militant control of the rank and file in order to turn them into arms which were not only defensive, but also offensive, for the liberation of the country and the emancipation of the workers.

"Revolutionaries must, therefore, strive to show the working class how to use the unions as a weapon to shape their future, a revolutionary weapon for the abolition of the system of exploitation of man by man."

The question of the Party rapidly became nothing but a mere reference in the PFW's line. In fact, its work consisted essentially of "reviving" unions, seeking to make them militant by radicalizing workers' struggles. On this point as on many others, the great similarity between the PFW's practice and the current economism line of the Canadian Communist League (M-L) should be noted. The latter does the same work only this time with the slogan of "class struggle unions", which is no different than the "militant unions" of the PFW.

The PFW's abandonment of the central question of the Party was also manifested by the little importance that it accorded to the elaboration of revolutionary theory. On this point Marxist-Leninists have always been clear. As Lenin himself stated: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement". To this extent, the first task that the PFW should have taken up was to produce and distribute a rigorous criticism of the revisionism of the Communist Party of Canada among the masses.

With regard to the Quebec national question, the Communist Party of Canada had always adopted a chauvinist position which refused to recognize the Quebec nation's right to self-determination and to set itself up as an independent State. Once again the PFW gave a unilateral reply without making a concrete class analysis. The PFW answered the chauvinism of the CP with narrow nationalism, giving its support to Quebec independence and even going so far as to break off relations with the militants in Quebec on its own initiative. The importance of this error should not be underestimated for its direct effect was to maintain the brick wall which already separated both the proletariat and the revolutionary movements of the two nations.

The modern revisionists in Canada, as elsewhere, had, at the time, abandoned the revolutionary struggle against American imperialism preaching their rot about peaceful coexistence. According to the correct analysis of the Chinese Communist Party and the Party of Labour of Albania, American imperialism was at the time the main enemy of the peoples on a world scale. Mechanically applying this line to the Canadian reality, the PFW identified American imperialism as the main enemy of the Canadian people, to the point of advocating the alliance of the proletariat with the Canadian bourgeoisie. Through its unilateral criticism of the Communist Party of Canada, the PFW finally ended up in practice, with this type of a line of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

Here we should draw our readers' attention to the fact that this error of mechanically applying the line of another Party instead of setting down to the task of developing one's own line in all independence, by applying the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete practice of the revolution in one's own country, still persist right up to the present time. Groups like Bolshevik Union (BU) and "CPPC(M-L)" have developed such political laziness to the point of trying to make us believe that now the line of the Party of Labour of Albania and before that the line of the Communist Party of China could take the place of the line of the Canadian communist movement. For their part the CCL(M-L) and the Red Star Collective try to justify their propensity for supporting the Canadian bourgeoisie, by taking up as their own, the line of the Communist Party of China on the international situation.

In what was to be its most complete document of political line, "Independence and Socialism in Canada", published in 1968, the PFW advocated nothing less than a national liberation struggle against American imperialism:

"Recognizing US domination as being the chief obstacle on the road to socialism, socialists should direct their efforts towards removing this obstacle. This means working among the various sectors of the Canadian population and uniting as many Canadians as possible against their number one enemy, US imperialism. A broad coalition must be built whose purpose is the breaking away of Canada from the American empire, the achievement of the power of self-determination of the Canadian people."

Following this, in the same manifesto, came a whole series of tactics, which on the basis of
this strategic objective, sought to rally workers, farmers, students, and petty-bourgeois intellectuals. As history was to reveal, this was to objectively divert them rather than bring them closer to the proletarian revolution. Furthermore, it is significant that in this document which was the fundamental document of the PNM, the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat are not at all mentioned.

Thus, this first attempt to organize the struggle against modern revisionism in Canada was bound to fail. And, not long afterwards, the PNM was forced to end its activities.

THE GROWTH OF THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

The result of the degeneration of the CP and the control of the workers' movement by its corrupt stratum, the labour aristocracy, was the considerable weakening of the proletariat's struggles in the '50's and '60's.

In those conditions, the most important political movement in Canada, during the '60's, and even more so in Quebec, was the nationalist movement. It was even easier for this movement to develop, given the objective conditions of the period which really lent themselves to it. For it was during these years that the penetration of American imperialism was greatest. Favoried by the development of a tighter alliance with the Canadian bourgeoisie following the Second World War, American imperialism penetrated practically all spheres of our social life. On the economic level of course, but also in the political, military and cultural spheres.

On the Quebec scene, nationalism was even more exacerbated because of the considerable centralization of political power in the hands of the federal government during and after the war. The objective effect of this centralization was to accentuate the age-old oppression of the Quebec nation.

Thus, in Canada and Quebec, large sectors of the population reacted strongly to these phenomena. Particularly among the petty-bourgeois radicals, many began to compare their situation to that of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America who at the same time were the impetus for a vast revolutionary movement of liberation against imperialism. Frantz Fanon's ideas on anti-colonialism, Che Guevara's on the Cuban revolution and the Black Panther movement's in the United States, began to ferment in the minds of many revolutionary intellectuals. Groups like Partie-Pris (1), the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) and Red Morning (2), took up their wide propagation.

THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT IN QUEBEC

Among the debates in the nationalist movement in the '60's, the debate on the relation between socialism and independence was the most decisive. All of the nationalist groups had reform programmes often proclaiming to be anti-capitalist, or anti-imperialist. The debate was crystallized around two themes. The first consisted of claiming that the independence of Quebec was a pre-condition to the future of socialism. The other put forward that the struggle for political independence and the struggle for socialism were one and the same struggle.

Each of these tendencies was represented by a journal, Parti Pris, founded in 1963 by a group of intellectuals at the University of Montreal, applied Fanon's theses on colonialism to Quebec. Its founders supported "tactical support" for the national bourgeoisie, in order to obtain the political conditions which would permit the waging of the struggle for socialism afterwards.

In opposition to Parti Pris, the journal Révolution Québécoise, founded in 1964 by Charles Gagnon and Pierre Vallières, was against support for the national bourgeoisie, and put forward the struggle for socialism on the basis of a working class organization.

The polemic between the two journals was concretized with the creation of the Mouvement de Libération Populaire (MLP) (Peoples' Liberation Movement) whose manifesto proclaimed the rejection of support for the bourgeoisie, the necessity of building a revolutionary working class organization, the necessity of the Party and of a vanguard to build the Party.

At this point, we should bring a few clarifications. The concept of the "vanguard" at that time did not mean what it means today. It was not the Marxist-Leninist concept which designates the most advanced elements of the proletariat who must be rallied to create and build the Party. The concept "vanguard" had an elitist conception behind it. It was the "conscious" elements of the petty-bourgeoisie who had given themselves the mission of being the vanguard of the masses. The MLP was impregnated with this anti-Marxist pretension, as were the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) and the Front de Libération Populaire (FLP).

APPROACHING THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

In 1968, the more radical nationalists began turning more systematically to the workers' movement which began making strides forward on the political scene. The development of the workers' and peoples' struggles at the time, led to the sharpening of the existing contradictions among these elements. And so, two very distinct currents whose influence is still being felt today within the Marxist-Leninist movement appeared. The first, whose break with the bourgeoisie was least advanced, was the current that was at the time called "social animation". Payed and financed by various governmental organisms
or by religious and "charitable" organizations, the social animators threw themselves into the organization of citizen's committees, tenants organizations and other peoples' organizations. The characteristic of these different committees was to bring people together to defend themselves against rent increases, the destruction of homes, health problems, debts, etc. Through these actions, the social animators sought to attain political objectives, going from "workers' power" to supporting the Parti Québécois. But precisely because of their conceptions of political work based on a contempt for the masses, they camouflaged these objectives. And so they quite well represented that tendency of the petty-bourgeoisie which when it approaches the workers' movement, seeks to keep or to conquer control, and to do so, conceives of its political work as work of manipulating the masses, for, according to them, the masses... can't understand. In opposition to this tendency, the tendency called "mass political agitation" developed. Grouped together around organizations such as the Front de Libération Populaire, the Front de Libération du Québec (the 1966 tendency), the Mouvement syndical politique (the political union movement), and the Vallières-Gagnon committee (a support committee that fought for the release from prison of Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon), this tendency was at the origin of the great political demonstrations in the late '60's: McGill Français (1969), against the language Bill 63 (1969), Murray Hill (1968), Anti-Congress (demonstration led against the Union Nationale which was then in power) (1969), numerous demonstrations for the liberation of Quebec political prisoners, etc. These groups also manifested an active participation in all the important workers' struggles in these same years: construction, taxi... As opposed to the social animators, these groups were not afraid to openly present their political objectives. They contributed to the development of political debates among the masses, thus widening their political horizons, while the animators reduced these horizons to their immediate problems. However, besides stimulating nationalism, these groups were incapable of the least bit of continuity in their work, of which the bourgeoisie quickly gained control. Just like the social animators, these groups were incapable of organizing the masses on the basis of their fundamental interests.

The evolution of these two tendencies was to lead both of them to defeat. On the one hand, the social animators for whom open political action was to become a necessity, in 1969-70, united with the social democrats of the union centers, and the Trotskyists, in the electoral experience of the political action committees (FRAP). This led to a new defeat whose organizational result was the departure of the political action committees (comités d'action politique - CAP) of St-Jacques and Maisonneuve from the FRAP.

For their part, the action of groups such as the FLP and the MSP did not meet with much better results. They rallied very few workers and perpetually had to begin their actions over again.

And so, the early '70's was a time of great reflection for all these groups. And a short time later, out of this arose two new organized tendencies, that of CAP St-Jacques which withdrew from the FRAP on the basis of a criticism of its electoralism, and that of the Equipe Du Journal which was at the origin of the group IN STRUGGLE!, and which took up the ideas of mass agitation and propaganda, but this time on a Marxist-Leninist basis.

What was presented in the late '60's as a struggle between those doing work in the working class on the sly, or in secret, and those who threw themselves into vast-campaigns of mass political agitation was to reappear in 1972-73, as a struggle opposing those, who like the CAP St-Jacques, limited their work to implantation (that is, sending intellectual militants into the factories), and militant unionism, and those, such as our group, who put forward the necessity of establishing links with the working class through communist propaganda and agitation.

Or in other words, there were those who put forward that communists could only link themselves to the masses on the basis of their revolutionary objectives, and there were those who claimed that it was first necessary to link up with the masses before presenting them with objectives of the revolution. This same struggle still goes on today, but in another form. Today it opposes those who like the League, seek to radicalize the economic struggles of the masses in order to give them a political character, and those who, like us, seek to unite the working class on the grounds of the open political struggle against the bourgeoisie and its State.

We have already presented the general situation in English-Canada in the preceding chapter, by situating the role played by the Progressive Worker Movement. However it is necessary to complete this by situating, in a more precise way, the role played by certain other important groups such as the Canadian Liberation Movement (CLM), and the "C"PC(M-L).
The Nationalist Movement in English-Canada

The Canadian Liberation Movement was formed in Ontario in 1969. It produced and distributed a newspaper, New Canada, and even had its own publishing house. Its influence went far beyond Ontario to the West of the country. This group, which was able to develop thanks to the decline of the PPM in the late '60s, shared the same nationalist line. However, in opposition to the PPM, there was never any question, in its official line, of basing itself on Marxism-Leninism, nor was there question of the necessity of a proletarian Party.

The "C"PC(M-L) merits particular attention. First of all because it still exists today, although the recent successes of the Marxist-Leninist movement have reduced its influence. But also because its work of sabotage continues to produce negative effects among the masses, and above all, because at a certain epoch, it was the only one of these groups to openly declare itself as being Marxist-Leninist.

The "C"PC(N-L) had its origins in a student group called the internationalists formed in 1963 by Hardial Bains. With a leftist and ultra-leftist appearance, the "C"PC(M-L) always was and still is today, a fundamentally counter-revolutionary group.

In 1970, when it became a party, the "C"PC(N-L) self-proclaimed itself the Party of the working class.

The struggle against bourgeois nationalism in English-Canada had its start in the late '60s. In particular, it was crystallized around the Simon Fraser Student Movement, a movement of student youth in British Columbia, which criticized the PPM for having put the exploited at the mercy of the bourgeoisie, and which was opposed to the CP because of its too obvious conservatism. The youth movement of this epoch produced many different organizations which opposed bourgeois nationalism. Among them, there was the Partisan Party which supported the necessity of building a single Marxist-Leninist Party on a Canada-wide scale. However, the Partisan Party was waylaid by the "C"PC(N-L). And that spelled the defeat of the anti-nationalist movement in English-Canada.

Conclusion

The Canadian Marxist-Leninist movement had its origins in the petty-bourgeois revolutionaries who became politically active in the wake of the nationalist movement of the Sixties (particularly in Quebec). In the face of a rapidly developing workers' movement, these revolutionaries became aware of what was really involved in class struggle.

Although the history of our movement is not very long, it is rich in lessons, lessons which we must grasp in order to go forward to even greater victories. Opportunists errors, in different disguises, have a habit of reappearing during the course of the development of the proletarian line. The struggle against opportunism requires that we have an understanding of the development of revisionism in Canada and a critique of its most important manifestations. One of the characteristics of opportunism is to make compromises with the bourgeoisie. History shows us that those who tend to make compromises with the bourgeoisie in terms of the strategic plan, tend also to make secondary the struggle for building the Party on liquidating the struggle.

In short, the success of the revolution in Canada depends upon the unity of the proletariat of the two nations. The existence of a Marxist-Leninist Party is the essential element necessary in order to realize and consolidate this unity and shape it into a powerful force for the liberation of all workers.

We can say that the situation in our country is positive. We have begun to draw lessons from our past struggles, and if we are able to do so, even in a limited way, this is because we have applied Marxism-Leninism to the practice of proletarian revolution in our country. These lessons represent the results of revolutionary work in Canada. They are the products of our experiences in our revolution.

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18. See The Degeneration of PRMWO: From Revolutionary Organization to Neo-Trotskyite Sect by former PRMWO cadres.


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replace militant mass student action with missionary support work for grievances of campus workers.

9. E.A.

10. Considering he was N.Y. State trade union organiser for the CP, Rosen did not take much with him into PLM.


12. E.A.


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ENDNOTES

1. Parti-Pris: a journal published by radical intellectuals in the 1960's. It was a mixture of nationalistic and socialist writings. These writings stressed the "colonial" situation of Quebec.


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ENDNOTES

1. See especially the articles reviewing Bettelheim's Class Struggles in the USSR, volume 2, entitled "Stalin and Historical Reality" in Theoretical Review #9, and "Stalin and the Problems of Theory" in Theoretical Review #9, both by Paul Costello, for a discussion of the relationship between Stalin and Trotsky theoretically.


4. Significantly, the OCIC has begun a campaign against "federalism", without ever discussing its relationship to democratic centralism.