
Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain

Principles of Marxism-Leninism

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PRINCIPLES OF

MARXISM - LENINISM

An elementary course

Class Five : The Party of the Working Class

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the INTRODUCTION to the course, which contains details of the recommendations of the Marxist-Communist Organisation of Britain as to the methods of conducting the course and its aims, was published in Class One.

SYLLABUS

- Class One: The Development of Society.
Class Two: How Capitalism Works.
Class Three: The State and the Road to Socialism.
Class Four: The Party of the Working Class.
Class Five: The National Question.
Class Six: War.
Class Seven: How Socialism Works.
Class Eight: The World Outlook of Marxism-Leninism.
Class Nine: Leninism.
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Class Five : THE PARTY OF THE WORKING CLASS

1. WHAT IS REFORMISM?

The trend in the labour movement which seeks to limit the aims of the working class to piecemeal social reforms within the framework of capitalism.

In practice, reformism rejects the concept of class antagonism between working class and capitalist class and preaches that social reforms can be obtained gradually and indefinitely, so as to bring about a radical transformation of society, by a policy of class collaboration between the working class and the capitalist class.

The overwhelming majority of the leaders of the British labour movement have long been totally reformist. Their practice of class collaboration has led them to become unprincipled opponents of any militant action on the part of workers. Their resultant role as lieutenants of the capitalist class within the working class movement is demonstrated daily: support of wage freeze and state control of trade unions, the use of troops to break strikes and -- as in Germany after the First World War -- the shooting down of workers in the name of "law and order".

2. WHAT IS FABIANISM?

The theoretical basis of reformism in Britain, elaborated by the intellectuals of the Fabian Society at the beginning of the 20th. century. The name is derived from the Roman general Fabius Maximus (the "Delayer"), who developed the military theory of guerilla warfare against a more powerful enemy.

Fabianism holds that the social system can be gradually transformed without violent opposition on the part of the capitalist class if each piecemeal reform is sufficiently small. Thus, any proposed change which arouses the violent opposition of the capitalist

class is, for the Fabians, "too drastic" and must be dropped. But since any proposed reform which seriously affects the profitability of capitalism inevitably arouses the violent opposition of the capitalist class, the logical consequence of the Fabian outlook is to postpone any radical reform indefinitely.

3. WE HAVE SEEN THAT THE VIEW THAT THE WORKING CLASS CAN GAIN MORE BY CLASS COLLABORATION THAN BY MILITANT CLASS STRUGGLE IS AN ILLUSION. NEVERTHELESS, IF THE WORKING CLASS HAD MADE NO GAINS DURING THE PERIOD OF THE DOMINANCE OF REFORMISM IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT, THIS ILLUSION WOULD HAVE BEEN THROWN OFF LONG AGO.

THESE REAL GAINS HAVE PROVIDED THE OBJECTIVE BASIS FOR THE SUBJECTIVE ILLUSION OF REFORMISM. WHAT HAS BEEN THEIR SOURCE?

The exploitation of the working people of the colonial-type countries by the British capitalist class.

The first workers' organisations in Britain (before 1835) were militant and socialist (and illegal). But Britain became the first industrialised capitalist country in the world -- "the workshop of the world" -- and the British capitalist class were able, at a relatively early date, to build up "an Empire on which the sun never sets". From about 1850 they began to use a portion of the vast super-profits flowing in from the colonial-type lands to pay an upper stratum of skilled craftsmen somewhat above the value of their labour power.

It was this bribed "labour aristocracy" which created a new kind of trade union -- the "New Model Unions" -- which rejected class struggle and socialist aims and confined their activities to negotiations on questions of wages, hours, etc.

A large portion of these super-profits, however, was used for the accumulation of capital, giving rise to a great increase in productivity, in the degree of "civilisation" existing, and so in the value of labour power.

The real gains obtained by the working class of Britain over the past hundred years have been due primarily to the rise in the value of labour power and have provided the direct objective basis for reformism, since the adjustment of wage rates to approach the higher value of labour power can be carried out by reformist negotiating machinery.

As a result of the dominance of reformism in the British labour movement the rate of exploitation of the British working class has significantly increased over the past century, and had it not been for "unofficial" militant working class struggle outside the reformist negotiating machinery the rate of exploitation would have increased still more. But the aim of the reformist leaders has always been to use negotiated wage-increases to damp down militant working class struggle where it develops.

It must be stressed that at no time have the mass of the working class shared directly in colonial super-profits by being paid above the value of their labour power. Direct bribery of this kind has never affected more than a small upper stratum of the working class, and today this "labour aristocracy" consists principally of the bureaucrats of the labour movement.

4. WE HAVE SEEN THAT A POLITICAL PARTY IS AN ORGANISATION WHICH REPRESENTS THE POLITICAL INTERESTS OF A CLASS. WHAT CLASS INTERESTS ARE REPRESENTED BY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY?

The Conservative Party is the more or less open party of the monopoly capitalists. Were it, however, dependent on the votes of monopoly capitalists alone, it could hardly play a role in the game of "parliamentary democracy". Thus, the Conservative Party directs its appeal to working people whose level of class consciousness is so low that they identify their interests with those of Big Business and the aristocracy, as common "interests of the nation".

5. WHAT CLASS INTERESTS ARE REPRESENTED BY THE LIBERAL PARTY?

Because of its cries against "monopoly" and its calls for "freedom of the individual", the Liberal Party is sometimes thought of as representing the interests of the middle class, the petty bourgeoisie. But with the development of imperialism, the middle class is also exploited by the monopoly capitalists and its objective interests are fundamentally the same as those of the working class: the abolition of capitalist society.

But the Liberal Party stands openly for the maintenance of capitalist society. Objectively, therefore, it represents the interests of the monopoly capitalists, but its appeal is directed towards the middle class and to working people who support capitalist society but are uneasy about the development of monopoly capitalism and who recognise to some extent the Conservative Party as the open representative of monopoly capital.

6. WHAT CLASS INTERESTS ARE REPRESENTED BY THE LABOUR PARTY?

Founded to give the working class "a voice" in Parliament, the Labour Party was, however, never a true party of the working class, i.e., a revolutionary socialist party. Anti-Marxist from its inception, it preached the reformist theory that the state was a neutral apparatus which the working people could control by obtaining a majority in Parliament, and its Fabian ideology led Labour governments to operate along lines calculated to make capitalism work profitably during the (infinitely long) period of gradual, piecemeal social reform.

Despite the fact that its membership is largely working class, therefore, the Labour Party represents the interests of monopoly capital also. Its appeal is, however, directed to middle class liberals and workers who desire to see a radical but constitutional transformation of society. The fact that the Labour

Party has presented the image of being a "workers' party" has enabled Labour Governments to introduce anti-working class legislation with considerably less opposition than if this legislation had been introduced by a Conservative government.

7. WHAT CLASS INTERESTS ARE REPRESENTED BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN?

The Communist Party claims to represent the interests of the working class, claims to base itself on Marxism, claims to stand for socialism (and for the first twenty-five years or so of its existence these claims were fundamentally true).

But we have seen that the leadership of the Communist Party has abandoned Marxism-Leninism and now repudiates the need for the working class to organise for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state. By seeking to divert socialist-conscious workers away from organisation for revolution -- the only road to socialism -- into the harmless (to the capitalist class) channels of electoral activity, the Communist Party objectively serves the interests of monopoly capital, but its appeal is directed to socialist-conscious workers who recognise the true character of the Labour Party.

The revisionist leaders of the Communist Party, in fact, now seek to present their party (or a broader modification of it) to the monopoly capitalists as an acceptable substitute for the discredited and disintegrating Labour Party within the system of "Parliamentary democracy".

8. THERE IS TODAY IN BRITAIN NO PARTY WHICH REPRESENTS THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING CLASS. IS SUCH A PARTY NECESSARY TO BRING ABOUT A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND IF SO, WHY?

It is absolutely essential.

We have seen that socialism cannot be established without the organisation by the working class of a

machinery of force capable of destroying the capitalist state. But just as an army cannot wage a war successfully without a General Staff to lead it and coordinate its actions, so the "army" of the working class cannot wage a successful revolutionary war against the capitalist state without its General Staff to lead it and coordinate its actions.

This vanguard organisation cannot be a party of the old type, of the type of the Labour Party, which is designed for electoral activity within the framework of capitalist "parliamentary democracy". It must be a party of a new type, organised in such a way as to enable it to fulfil its role as revolutionary vanguard of the working class and guided by the compass of Marxist-Leninist theory.

9. WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM AND WHY DO MARXIST-LENINIST PARTIES ORGANISE THEMSELVES ON THIS PRINCIPLE?

To lead an army to victory, its General Staff must put forward a single line of action to the troops. If different generals were to put forward different lines of action, their army would certainly be defeated. A Marxist-Leninist Party must, therefore, be based on unity of will and this is obtained by the organisational principle of centralism: decisions of majorities are binding on minorities, decisions of higher organs are binding on lower organs and on every Party member; thus every Party member puts forward to the workers with whom he is in contact the same line of action, which is the line of the Party.

This centralism must not, however, be autocratic, but democratic in character. There must be freedom of discussion and criticism at all levels, the right to send statements to higher bodies, and all higher organs must be democratically elected by the membership. The members elect to higher organs those of their Comrades whom they believe to have the highest political level, the highest class and Party loyalty, and agree to accept their leadership

-- unless and until they cease to have such confidence, when leaders may be removed by the same democratic process.

10. WHAT IS: 1) STRATEGY; 2) TACTICS?

Strategy is the determination of the direction of the main blow which the working class should strike at a given stage in the revolution.

Tactics is the determination of the line of action which the working class should take in a particular immediate short-term period.

While the aim of strategy is to win the war, the aim of tactics is to win a particular battle. Tactics is a part of strategy and subordinate to it.

11. WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL SECTIONS OF THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT?

The trade unions, organisations of workers in their capacity -- employees;

the cooperative societies, organisations of workers in their capacity as consumers;

the Labour Party and Communist Party, organisations of workers in their capacity as electoral workers and voters.

12. WHAT MUST BE THE RELATION OF THE MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY TO THESE MASS ORGANISATIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS?

Although these organisations, by reason of their leadership, policies and dominant ideology, in the main serve the interests of monopoly capital, nevertheless they are composed of workers -- and of workers who have a higher political consciousness than workers who yet remain outside the Labour movement.

Party members must, therefore, work within these mass organisations, even the most reactionary, so as

to participate in -- and to lead if called upon -- their day-to-day struggles, so as to expose the right-wing leaders in practice. Their aim must be, as a result of patient principled work, to win the expulsion of the reactionary leaders from their positions or -- where this proves impossible and is seen to be impossible by the mass of the members -- to draw the honest rank-and-file members into new, independent class organisations freed from the control of the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class.

The masses cannot be convinced by propaganda and agitation alone, and the Party's political strategy and tactics must be designed to lead the masses in these day-to-day struggles in such a way as to raise their political consciousness stage by stage and ultimately to revolutionary consciousness, to win acceptance of the Party as the vanguard organisation of the working class and to draw the most advanced workers into the ranks of the Party.

13. WHAT IS TROTSKYISM?

The organised presentation of policies which serve the interests of the capitalist class, disguised under a cloak of "leftist", "Marxist", "revolutionary" phraseology.

Trotskyites, in the name of "Marx" and "Lenin", devote their main energies to disruptive activity directed against Marxist-Leninist organisations and parties, and against organisations of the working class under honest, militant leadership. For example, during the Spanish Civil War in the '30s, when a progressive republican government was fighting for its life against reactionary fascist aggression, the Spanish trotskyites organised armed struggle against it alongside the fascists under the slogan "Revolution against the Capitalist State!", and in the recent period trotskyites have sought to disrupt the national-liberation war of the Vietnamese people against U.S. imperialism with the same "revolutionary" slogans.

The father-figure of trotskyism, Leon Trotsky, fought against Lenin's policy of building a disciplined workers' vanguard party, opposed (under the slogan "for a workers' government!") Lenin's policy of building an alliance with the peasantry, claiming that the peasantry were a counter-revolutionary class, fought Stalin's policy of building socialism in one country (urging in its place the "export of revolution" by force to other countries), and finally entered the service of the fascist states with the aim of overthrowing the political power of the working class, which then existed in the U.S.S.R., under the slogan "Down with Stalinist bureaucracy!"

Since the triumph of revisionism in most of the international communist movement and the acceptance by the revisionists of Trotsky's slanders against the Soviet leadership during Stalin's lifetime, trotskyism has, in the absence of a Marxist-Leninist Party, gained some temporary successes in influencing militant workers and students.

14. ANALYSE THE TROTSKYITE SLOGAN "WORKERS' CONTROL"?

This slogan is based on a vague policy of encouraging the workers in individual plants to demand increasing participation in management functions until they have established "workers' control".

The dangerous and diversionary character of this policy is that it ignores the capitalist state, the machinery of force in the hands of the capitalist state. The trotskyites do not seek to build a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party of the working class, they do not seek to organise the working class to build up their own machinery of force in opposition to the capitalist state. Under these conditions the incitement of workers to take control of a plant could only lead to its reoccupation by the forces of the state and the physical destruction of the militant organisation built up by the workers concerned.

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Next class:

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

including

CASTROISM and
MAOISM.