

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE EIGHTEEN POINTS OF UNITY

The 18 Points identify the basic ideological premises and fundamental aspects of political line on which we seek to develop our trend. In restating the basic features of Marxism-Leninism the points serve to demarcate with reformism and its expression within the revolutionary movement, revisionism. Moreover the points differentiate our tendency from the dominant "left" opportunist trend within the communist movement. The points should be approached with these aims in mind. The following guide briefly treats the significance of each point, drawing out the most important implications, and provides some suggested readings to facilitate study.

1) The first point establishes the revolutionary, socialist character of our movement, pointing out that the basic problems of the US people are inherent features of capitalist society as opposed to maladjustments or dislocations which somehow can be reformed away. This is in opposition to the various shades of reformism and social democracy which hold that these problems can be solved short of a revolutionary socialist transformation.

Readings: Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto
Leo Huberman, The ABC of Socialism (chs. 1-19)

2) Point 2 identifies imperialism as the present stage of capitalist society. It defines imperialism as a system as opposed to a particular policy of the bourgeoisie. It stipulates that monopoly capitalism is the "economic essence" of imperialism. This point is important in relation to those revolutionaries who mistakenly see national oppression as the only significant feature of imperialism. Aside from theoretically misunderstanding the origins and motive power of imperialism, these forces drive a wedge between the oppressed nations and the proletariat in the imperialist countries. In fact, the transition to imperialism intensifies the exploitation of the working class, aggravates the contradictions between the petty bourgeoisie and big capital, and deepens national and sexual oppression within the metropolis. By so doing imperialism matures the objective conditions for socialist revolution.

3) Point 3 identifies national oppression on a world scale as a fundamental feature of the present imperialist epoch. Understanding this point is critical to grasping the role of national liberation in the present period. The consequences of imperialism, both domestically and internationally, provide the material foundation for the world-wide alliance of the proletariat and the oppressed peoples.

Readings: Lenin, Imperialism
Stalin, Foundations of Leninism (ch. VI)
Felix Greene, The Enemy (section entitled "anatomy of imperialism")

4) Point 4 posits the working class as the leading class in the revolutionary process. The working class is the only consistently revolutionary class and the only class with the capacity to lead the entire working people to overthrow capitalism and build socialism. It is this understanding which leads communists to focus their activity in the working class. Furthermore this point provides the foundation for the building of a united front against imperialism, developing working class leadership of all popular and democratic struggles. Finally this point differentiates Marxism-Leninism from the petty bourgeois trend which steadfastly denies the vanguard character of the proletariat and substitutes some other social grouping or holds that all classes and strata are more or less equally revolutionary.

5) Point 5 goes on to locate the leading section of the working class in the industrial proletariat. This point also has important practical implications, namely that communists must give priority to activity among the industrial workers and develop this sector's leadership of the class as a whole. This point demarcates with those who negate the leading role of the industrial proletariat in favor of the "new" working class or some similar formulation. The point pinpoints the reasons why the industrial workers are the vanguard force of the proletariat as a whole--"it's socialization and discipline which grow out of the material conditions of large scale capitalist production." It is these features, and not the size or capacity for disruption, that mark the industrial proletariat for its role.

Readings: Lenin, A Great Beginning, (Wks., Vol. 29, pps. 411-34)
 Judah Hill, Class Analysis--U.S. in the 70's (pps. 47-78, 1975 edition)

6) Point 6 reiterates the essence of the Marxist-Leninist view of the state--that the state is an organ of class rule, that it cannot be taken over but must be smashed, and that the working class must establish its own dictatorship. Both in Lenin's time and our own revisionism expresses itself first and foremost as a negation of Marxist principles on the state and the transition to socialism. Modern revisionism promotes the strategy of a peaceful, parliamentary transition in which the bourgeois state will be used as a springboard to socialism, repudiating in both word and deed proletarian dictatorship.

7) Point 7 elaborates on the question of the state and further demarcates with revisionism. Marxist-Leninists hold that only the armed masses can guarantee the transition to socialism as opposed to revisionists who in essence rely on the bourgeoisie's sense of fair play and respect for parliamentary institutions.

The point outlines the reasons why this is necessary--the "military-bureaucratic" character of the capitalist state whose standing army and civil service have a life of their own independent of parliamentary institutions. Given this, the class character of the capitalist state is not, and cannot, be altered simply by the working class acquiring a parliamentary majority. It was the development of these features of the modern capitalist state which made a parliamentary transition impossible.

Secondarily, point 7 also demarcates with those ultra-leftists who advocate armed struggle on principle and deny any possibility of peaceful transition. By expressing the working class' intent to travel the most peaceful road, the onus for civil war is placed where it belongs--on the monopoly capitalist class. Point seven allows for the possibility of a peaceful transition, given an armed population and a favorable balance of forces. Consistent with Leninism, it draws the line of demarcation between a parliamentary and a revolutionary transition as opposed to making the question of violence paramount.

Readings: Lenin, State and Revolution, On Slogans (Wks., Vol. 25, pps. 183-90)

8) Point 8 states the requirement of the proletariat for a vanguard party. Implicit here is the Leninist understanding of the relationship between consciousness and spontaneity--the need for revolutionary theory and organization to break the hold of bourgeois ideology over the masses.

The point goes on to elaborate the basic features of the party--its grasp of scientific socialism, its practice of democratic centralism and the mass line, and its character as an advanced detachment of the class. This understanding of both the role and character of the party separate Leninism from anarchism, social democracy and modern revisionism.

Readings: Stalin, The Foundations of Leninism (Chapter on the Party)
For The People, Study Guide on the Vanguard Party

9) The significance of point 9 lies in its sharp differentiation of our forces from revisionism. The triumph of revisionism in the CPUSA provides the historical context for our party-building efforts. It is because of the degeneration of the CPUSA that a new party is needed.

Point 9 briefly identifies the essential features of the revisionist line--the peaceful parliamentary transition, the liquidation of imperialism's inherent tendency towards war, and the repudiation of the proletarian dictatorship.

Readings: Editorial department of Hongqi, More on the Differences Between Comrade Togliatti and Us.

10) Consistent with the implications of the above points, point 10 draws the conclusion that party-building is the central task for Marxist-Leninists in the US in the present period. To say that it is the central task means that all our activity must serve to advance party-building and is subordinate to it.

While this point is broadly shared by Marxist-Leninists, a major section of the movement (the RCP) held in the past that building the mass movement was the central task and had to precede party-building as a distinct stage. They further argued that seeing party-building as the central task led to dogmatism and sectarian isolation. Our tendency takes issue with both these arguments.

Point 10 goes on to identify, in very broad fashion, the direction our party-building efforts must take. It holds that party-building must develop in relation to the actual struggles of the working class and the oppressed nationalities. It calls attention to the special importance of the theoretical tasks facing our movement by asserting that a Party "only becomes possible on the basis of a concrete application of Marxism-Leninism" to the problems of the U.S. revolution. And it maintains that a real vanguard necessitates a joining of the communist movement to the class struggle.

These points differentiate our tendency from both the economist view which reduces party-building to a purely practical matter of integrating ourselves with the masses and the adventurist perspective that argues that a fully-formed vanguard can be established in advance of any contact with the proletariat.

Point 10, however, leaves open the hotly disputed question of party-building strategy--such as whether fusion is the essence of party-building, or line rectification is its essence, etc. While the suggested readings reflect the different views in our tendency, discussion should focus on the above points, allowing further debate on strategy to take shape within the OC.

Readings: Lenin, A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy and What Is To Be Done (chapter 2)

Inkworks Press, On Party-Building, Against Revisionism and Dogmatism
(Reprints from the Organizer)

TMLC, Party-Building Tasks in the Present Period, On Theory and Fusion.

11) Point 11 cites the need for a multi-national party premised on the existence of a multinational proletariat. This point demarcates with those who call for separate vanguards in principle. At the same time point 11 recognizes that in the present period Marxist-Leninist organizations based on a single oppressed nationality are primarily an expression of the absence of a consistent struggle on the part of white communists

against racism. While ideas of national exclusiveness must be opposed, it would be a profound error to aim the main blow at these ideas. Implicit in point 11 is that the existence of all or predominantly white organizations of Marxist-Leninists have no "historic justification" and reflect the legacy of white chauvanism.

12) Point 12 identifies the political basis for multinational class unity--a systematic struggle directed primarily against racism and secondarily against narrow nationalism. The point defines the proper relation between these two struggles, characterizing narrow nationalism among oppressed nationality workers as predominantly a reaction to racism and thus underlining the primacy of the struggle against racism.

Point 12 demarcates with those who in various guises liquidate the national question...who oppose the raising of any special demands in relation to the oppressed nationalities and making them a focus of class struggle. It also demarcates with the advocates of the white-skin-privilege line who pose these demands in an abstract fashion divorced from the struggle for the all-sided interests of the class as a whole.

Readings: Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question
PWOC, Black Liberation Today, Against Dogmatism on the National Question,
(chapter 5)
Jim Griffin, Racism and the Workers Movement.

13) Point 13 treats the relationship of the woman question to party-building. It calls for communists to carry out systematic struggle against sexism both within the communist movement and the mass movements. It recognizes the responsibility of men to fight for the special demands of women. It identifies the need for communist leadership of the women's movement. The point demarcates with those who ignore the oppression of women as a special question of great importance to the U.S. revolution. It also differentiates our tendency from petty bourgeois feminism which denies the crucial importance of unity between men and women and fails to see women's liberation as the cause of the whole working class.

Readings: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, The Woman Question
BWM, Working Paper on Women's Oppression

14) Point 14 states the need for "all all-sided struggle against opportunism" as a requirement of party-building. This highlights the importance of ideological struggle and provides the basic rationale for developing the 18 points in the first place. There will always be voices urging us to slur over fundamental differences in the interests of "unity." This sort of centrism and downgrading of ideological struggle serves the aims of opportunism and must be guarded against.

Readings: Lenin, Against Revisionism (specific selections follow)

"Marxism and Revisionism"

"Controversial Issues"

"The Collapse of the 2nd International"

"Imperialism and the Split in Socialism"

"Leftwing Communism" (excerpt)

15) Point 15 is one of the two points which sharply demarcate with the dominant ultra-left wing of our movement. First the point distinguishes between the working class movement and the communist movement. In holding that reformism is the main danger in the working class movement we differ with some ultra-left forces who argue that revisionism is the principal danger in the workers movement as well as the communist movement.

Secondly the point distinguishes between the long run danger to the communist movement, revisionism, and the immediate danger within the anti-revisionist movement,

namely "left" opportunism. This is in sharp contrast to the bulk of the "lefts" who view the main danger as coming from the right. This question is of central importance. If we do not correctly identify the main ideological source of our errors we cannot hope to properly rectify them. The view of the main danger shapes the whole approach to party-building and its related tasks. It determines who we see as the advanced among our forces and who make up the backward elements. It colors our whole approach to the development of political line and the building of communist leadership among the masses.

Thirdly this point indicates the danger that the struggle against ultra-leftism, if not properly carried out, can go over to right opportunism. The fight against "leftism" will inevitably bring to the surface rightist tendencies and enhance the danger of right errors. A tendency towards economism and an underestimation of revisionism are likely. Directing the main blow at the "left" must not be accompanied by dropping our guard to the right.

Point 15 leaves the question of the form and precise character of the "left" danger open, recognizing that there are important differences here which must be the focus of future debate. The readings reflect these differences. Study should focus on the above points as opposed to the different formulations as to the form of left opportunism.

Readings: PUL and the Committee of Five, Party-Building and the Main Danger
Mao Tse Tung, A Resolution on Some Questions in the History of our Party

16) Point 16 demarcates with Trotskyism as a petty bourgeois, sham version of Marxism. The trademark of Trotskyism is its use of revolutionary phrases to conceal positions that objectively aid the bourgeoisie. The point elaborates the key questions on which Trotskyism deviates from Marxism-Leninism--its opposition to socialism in one country which in the Soviet Union threatened to split the worker-peasant alliance and which internationally called for a policy of "left" adventurism, its repudiation of the two-stage national democratic revolution in the colonies and oppressed nations which serves to isolate the proletariat, undermine the struggle for national liberation and hold back the transition to socialism, and its narrow, sectarian approach to the united front in the advanced capitalist countries which in practice severs the connections between the vanguard and the masses. Particularly in a period of political confusion like our own, where revisionism has come to dominate the old Communist parties and where those who have broken with revisionism are dominated by ultra-leftism, Trotskyism represents a definite danger.

Readings: Carl Davidson, Trotskyism, Left in Form, Right in Essence.

17) Point 17 is a basic assertion of proletarian internationalism...that the working class in the U.S. cannot pursue its struggle in a revolutionary fashion except in concert with the struggle of the workers in other capitalist countries, the movements of the oppressed peoples for national liberation and the struggle of the proletariat to build socialism where it holds power. The U.S. working class must see its struggle as part of a world-wide united front against imperialism and it is the duty of its vanguard elements to promote that understanding.

Readings: Lenin, On Proletarian Internationalism (specific selections follow)
from: "Critical Remarks on the National Question"
"Socialism and War"
"The Socialist Revolution and the Right to Self-Determination"
"The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution"
"Left-wing Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality"
"The Proletarian ^{Revolution} and the Renegade Kautsky"
"Address to the 2nd All Russia Congress of ...Peoples of the East"
"Preliminary Draft Theses on the National And Colonial Questions"
"Terms of Admission to the Communist International"

18) Point 18 concretizes the concept of internationalism by identifying U.S. imperialism as the main enemy of the world's peoples. Without defining the main enemy proletarian internationalism remains on the level of empty abstraction. The concept of main enemy is the foundation for a concrete policy of proletarian internationalism. The proletariat if it fails to direct the main blow against the principal enemy will inevitably negate proletarian internationalism. This is no less true in situations where the proletariat faces an immediate enemy distinct from the main enemy world-wide. It is precisely in these situations where the internationalism of the proletarian vanguard is put to the test.

By identifying the main enemy as US imperialism, point 18 draws a sharp line of demarcation with those who nominally uphold that there are two main enemies, US imperialism and Soviet "social-imperialism," while actually focusing their main attack internationally on the latter. The bulk of the "lefts," consistent with the line of the Communist Party of China, openly assert that the Soviet Union presents the main danger to the peoples of the world. A much smaller grouping, taking their cue from the Party of Labor of Albania, maintains that the U.S. and the Soviet Union are equal dangers. In practice, the policy of both sections of the "lefts" has placed them in varying degrees of active collaboration with their own imperialist bourgeoisie.

Within our emerging trend the focal point of controversy has been in relations to the correctness on point 18 as a line of demarcation. Its critics have argued that it represents a level of unity unnecessary to carry out our present tasks, it excludes important anti-"left" forces, and that it is arbitrary to characterize the failure to recognize US imperialism as the main enemy as a manifestation of ultra-leftism.

In defense of point 18 it has been argued that unity around this point is essential to develop an internationalist practice, that the forces excluded by this point have failed to break decisively with "left" opportunism and are inherently unstable precisely because of their adherence to this international line...and finally that the "aim the main blow at the Soviet Union" line is "left" because it places the struggle against revisionism over the struggle against imperialism, a characteristic of the "left" line generally. A thorough understanding of this debate is critical to consolidating our unity around this point.

Readings: PUL, Party-Building and the Main Danger
Felix Green, The Enemy

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