

Proletarian Unity League

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

### **Chapter 6: Putting an End To the "Left" Sectarian Period E. An Anti-"Left" Tendency**

The struggle against the "left" line needs leadership. Without a Marxist-Leninist direction, Rightist or "left"-influenced understandings of the different ultra-left groups will prevail. Right opportunist conciliationism cannot lead a fight to overcome our disorganization; it will only tend to justify the position of the "lefts". Nor can anarcho-syndicalist-inspired appeals to the redemptive powers of shop floor action; that and other "left" approaches all too often end up opposing one party-building adventure with another. A definite Marxist-Leninist tendency, with a comprehensive analysis of the present-day sectarianism and its "left" opportunist premises, must assume direction of this struggle. Only such a tendency can provide consistent leadership in the fight against the unprincipled polarization of the communist movement.

A majority of the organized Marxist-Leninist groups sharply disagrees with the conclusion that the hegemony of a "left" line defines the present period, that the ideological struggle concentrates itself on party-building line, that the fight against "left" sectarianism is key in the fight against deviations, and even with the observation that the communist forces are relatively isolated from the working class movement. Most of the major organizations believe right opportunism is the main danger, that political line is key, and have yet to wake up to the isolation of the movement as a whole from the masses and from the proletarian vanguard. These comrades "are building the new Communist Party but don't know where the bourgeois line is"—in the "left," not the as yet relatively weak Right line within the communist movement.

Underestimating the bourgeois line in favor of turning towards the working class will not build the Party.

"There is no construction without destruction. Destruction means criticism and repudiation, it means revolution. It involves reasoning things out, which is construction. Put destruction first, and in the process you have construction." (Mao)

It is not possible to put construction first, and get destruction—that is revisionism, it is Khrushchevism, it is the CPSU saying we will put the "construction of socialism" first, and in the process get the destruction of the class enemy; in the process, after we build the better washing machine, the imperialist West will crumble. We cannot put constructing the Party first; first we must root out the "left" line. The process of criticizing the "left" line will involve construction—initially of an anti-"left" Marxist-Leninist tendency, then of a unified communist organization, be it the Party or some lower form. Following greater agreement with the conclusions listed above, with "the reasoning of things out," a practical solution at the level of the movement as a whole becomes possible.

As to the form practical solutions might take, we can only speculate. The temporary formation of a confederation, taking as its main purpose the heightening of joint ideological struggle and the coordination of united action might recommend itself at some time (this is not to be confused with a federal approach to party-building). A journal on the order of Lenin's **Zarya** might also serve the centralization of ideological struggle. The choice of one or another at any given moment will obviously depend upon the state of the communist movement and the class struggle. Whether a comparatively backward form such as a confederation will be necessary, or whether a more direct route will open before us, turns on the strength and organization of anti-"left" sectarian sentiment within the communist movement. Given this indeterminacy, comrades would make a mistake to wed themselves today to one particular tactical proposal, whether a new **Iskra**, a new **Zarya**, or yet another National Continuations Committee.

## **A Common Literature**

Whatever the form various practical solutions assume, they must advance the development of a "common literature" for the Marxist-Leninist forces. We cannot improve on Lenin's definition:

"In the first place, it is necessary to develop a common Party literature—common, not only in the sense that it must serve the whole of the Russian movement rather than separate districts, that it must discuss the questions of the movement as a whole and assist the class-conscious proletarians in their struggle instead of dealing merely with local questions, but common also in the sense that it must unite all the available literary forces, that it must express all shades of opinion and views prevailing among Russian Social-Democrats, not as isolated workers, but as comrades united in the ranks of a single organization by a common programme and a common struggle." (CW 4, p. 323)

At the present time, no single organizational form, or even combination of forms, can represent that common literature, as **Iskra** and **Zarya** did for the predecessors of the Bolsheviks. Dozens of publications compete for the attention of communists and other politically conscious workers and intellectuals. Yet even where all our separate publications are temporarily maintained, the struggle can continue for a common literature.

Fighting for a common literature and revolutionary unity demands the commitment of organizational resources. "If we do not want unity in name only, we must arrange for all local study circles **immediately to assign**, say, a fourth of their forces to **active** work for the common cause." (Lenin, **CW 5**, p. 506) The establishment of such a "Leninist proportion" should extend to our literature: a common literature despite dozens of political organs means that each one devotes something like one-quarter of its space to the common issues and the polemics of others. If organizations do support the development of a common literature, then they need to print the positions of others. One would think that this would be a matter of habit for an anti-revisionist movement. After all, the willingness to present the respective views of opposing polemicists before all concerned differentiated the Chinese Communist Party from the CPSU in the early 'sixties.

"Since a public debate has been provoked, it ought to be conducted on the basis of equality among fraternal Parties and of democracy, and by presenting the facts and reasoning things out...

"Since certain Party leaders have published innumerable articles attacking other fraternal Parties, why do they not publish in their own press the articles those Parties have written in reply?,...

"Since you describe our articles as 'groundless' and as so very bad, why do you not publish all seven of the 'groundless attacks,' in the same way as we have published your articles, and let all the Soviet people think for themselves and judge who is right and who wrong?....

"Although you call our articles 'groundless' and our arguments wrong, you do not tell the Soviet people what our arguments actually are. This practice can hardly be described as showing a serious attitude towards the discussion of problems by fraternal Parties, towards the truth or towards the masses."  
**(Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement, pp. 56-58)**

As a minimum organizational step, freely publishing the views of others would go a long way towards breaking down group exclusiveness and towards clarifying the two-line struggle in our movement.

To advance communist unity, then, an anti-"left" tendency will organize a common, movement-wide ideological struggle, and within that struggle, fight for its particular agenda. In our view, debate over the preconditions for party-formation gives a central focus not only to party-building discussion but also to the unfolding of polemics against the ultra-left danger. While a wide variety of groups might recognize the necessity of establishing preconditions to party-formation, they will agree on preconditions according to their ideological leanings. An anti-"left," Marxist-Leninist tendency would attempt to convince other communist forces of what needs to be resolved in order to unify. It would also indicate what issues need organizational unity before we can agree on much beyond a rudimentary position. And obviously it would attempt to resolve both types of questions.

Finally, the communist movement needs a tendency which fights for the role of the mass of politically active workers in the struggle for the Party, and not simply in building up one or another individual group. Only by rooting in the working class the fight against "left" opportunism can we create an authentic anti-revisionist and anti-"left" trend.

### **Carry the Struggle Against "Left" Opportunism Through to the End**

The Marxist-Leninist movement may see the beginnings of such a tendency taking shape today in the growing number of communist groups which recognize the need to break with ultra-leftism. But it remains to translate that anti-"left" sentiment into a definite ideological tendency, and those many separate groups into a material force in the working class. Based on the past experience of the anti-revisionist movement, the present evolving tendency has to guard in particular against two types of errors.

One: since the principal contradiction lies between the "left" line and Marxism-Leninism, the first line of demarcation should separate semi-anarchist ideology in general from a more Marxist-Leninist position. The different perspectives on the nature of the "left" danger constitute secondary contradictions, and should be treated as such. To treat the secondary as principal and draw a line which lumps a section of anti-"left" forces with our "Left-Wing" comrades would split the anti-"left" tendency. In its initial phases, the anti-"left" current should unite all those honest forces who recognize the ultra-left in one form or another as the main danger to the anti-revisionist camp. Within that broad consensus, we need to undertake a disciplined struggle to analyze the character and extent of the "left" danger, deepening our unity on its nature and how to fight it. To do otherwise risks failure in the attempt to grasp the social, historical, and ideological roots of "left" opportunism, a failure which would lead to the consolidation of anarcho-syndicalist, Rightist or other erroneous influences on our understanding of contemporary "Left-Wing" communism.

Two, and connected to the above, the anti-"left" forces have to fight against a spontaneous over-reaction to the errors of the ultra-left. For the most part, owing to the social base, previous history, and ideological framework which the anti-"lefts" share with our "Left-Wing" itself, we think this over-reaction will lead in a sectarian rather than a conciliationist direction, and have roots more in revolutionary syndicalist ideology than in reformism. We recognize that the anti-"left" struggle will necessarily set in motion greater tendencies towards the Right. But as we have noted, earlier struggles against semi-anarchism in the anti-revisionist movement have spontaneously manifested certain "left" assumptions. Even earlier tendencies which have grown up in explicit opposition to the dominant ultra-left line have themselves given way before "left" social and ideological influence. In reaction to the adventurism of the "Lefts," the anti-"left" current may tend to emphasize building a base in the working class to the exclusion of theoretical and political struggle. In reaction to the party-building voluntarism of the "Lefts," with their profusion of "national" party organizations, a renewed tendency towards localism has already set in.

Now of course we should build models of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist activity. But this is a separate question from "building the Party" in a small area. **Building** the Party in a single locale, or even in a few places, can only mean **acting** like a Party there. That effort would fail even in its own terms. A single capitalist class wages struggle at the national level. The political struggle against that class must also be fought on a national scale. Local organizations cannot wage political struggle in any consistent way, though no one can deny that some types of political exposures and political struggles can take place in a local context. But the real testing of political line, except as it applies to very limited aspects of the class struggle, can only occur at a national level, and only through the kind of protracted implementation that the frequent instability of local organizations rarely allows.

More importantly, "acting like a Party" in local situations can run at cross purposes to the general aims of creating an anti-"left" tendency among Marxist-Leninists and putting an end to the present period. The differences between how a Party acts, no matter how small, and how one group in a disorganized communist movement acts concerns precisely how each views the struggle to settle questions "internal" to that movement, unite its forces, and constitute a national, albeit skeletal leadership for the proletariat. If the emerging anti-"left" elements are to make a contribution to constructing that leadership, then we have to devote considerable resources to taking those questions in hand, and through their resolution, establishing the ideological foundations for a Party. Close connection with the working class struggle and greater merger with the proletarian vanguard is a precondition to that foundation, but will not of itself establish it.

### **Towards a Unified Marxist-Leninist Party**

No one can say how soon and under what conditions the communist movement can put an end to the "left" sectarian period. It could take many years, and it could take a few. If Marxist-Leninists cannot break the stranglehold of "leftism" within a relatively short time, then we can expect important changes in a number of the communist organizations, in the extent of the support which the petit-bourgeois intellectual and student strata give to the anti-revisionist cause, and correspondingly in the relative weight of the class vanguard in forming a new Communist Party. For either the major "left" organizations, including the parties, rectify their positions and repudiate the "left" line, or their defense of "left" opportunist deviations will lead to their total degeneration into "left" revisionism of the Progressive Labor and Trotskyite type.

Sooner or later, perhaps in the wake of a genuine mass upsurge, perhaps following some major disaster provoked by the "left" line, reality will break through the "left" subjectivist fog which surrounds sections of the communist forces. Like other "petit-bourgeois socialisms," our petit-bourgeois revolutionism will plunge into demoralization and decay:

“Ultimately, when stubborn historical facts had dispersed all intoxicating effects of self-deception, this form of Socialism [petit-bourgeois socialism] ended in a miserable fit of the blues.” (Marx and Engels, **The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels Selected Works**, V. I, p. 130)

Finally aware that reality does not conform to their wishes, that they do not march in the vanguard of the working class movement, and that revolution, like prosperity, is not just around the corner, petit-bourgeois elements and fellow-travelers will desert the communist banner. Misled by these subjectivist analyses, by boasting and lies, many honest comrades, in whom Marxism-Leninism has perhaps not taken deep root, will also drop out, temporarily lying low and nursing their wounds. Unless the domination of the "left" line is steadily reversed, a certain amount of dissolution will follow inevitably, as it always follows a long period of domination by any opportunist line. In that case, the massive intervention of the class vanguard—its destruction of "left" revisionist sects, its remolding of existing communist organizations, and its construction of new organizations—can alone clear away the "leftist" debris and rebuild the communist forces on a new and sounder basis.

However long it takes, the reign of "left" sectarianism will end. Regardless of the obstacles placed in its path, Marxist-Leninist unity will come, and with it, a unified communist leadership for the working class. The unity won will be that much more important, solid and revolutionary, the more tortuous the struggle to achieve it.