

## Ragnar Røed

# 46 Years Since the Foundation of AKP(m-l)

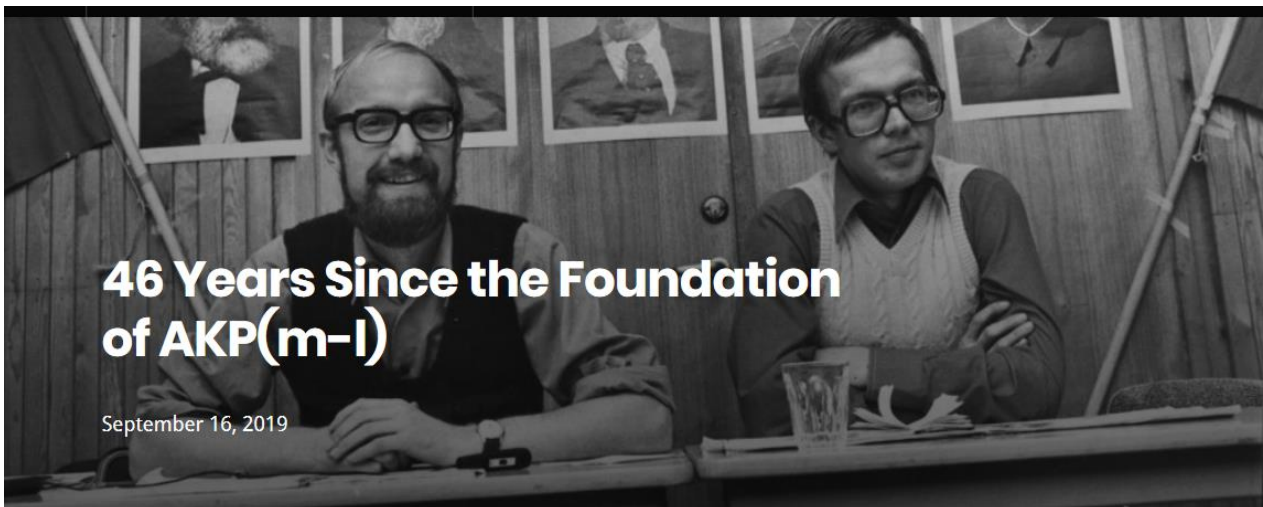
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***In February 1973, the foundation of Arbeidernes Kommunistparti (marxist-leninistene) [Worker's Communist Party (marxist-leninists), or hereafter AKP(m-l)] was made public. In 1973, it was also 50 years since the foundation of the Communist Party of Norway (NKP).***

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AKP(m-l) took becoming the fourth attempt to organize the proletariat's revolutionary party in Norway as its task. It became one of the most important European parties in the so-called new communist movement in the 1970s. The forerunners of AKP(m-l) were the youth organization SUF(m-l) and the pre-party formation Marxist-Leninistiske Grupper (MLG) – along with a portion of Marxist-Leninistisk Front within NKP.

## **From SF's Youth League to Marxist-Leninist Party Project**

SUF was the youth league of Sosialistisk Folkeparti (SF) [*Socialist People's Party*]. In the 1960s, parts of the SUF members began to orient themselves in the direction of Mao Zedong Thought and the line of the Communist Party of China. And over time, they were inspired by both the cultural revolution in China and by the rebellions and the revolutionary upswing in Europe, particularly in France.

In Porsgrunn, an environment that was inspired by Mao Zedong was developed early on. Eventually, his thought also became more influential in the student environment of SF (SF-stud), but in competition with radical academics like Herbert Marcuse, Bettelheim, Sartre, and so on. Those who would take the leading role in developing a new communist movement in Norway would become students from the Bryn/Hellrud chapters of SUF. In this chapter of SUF on the east-side of Oslo, Tron Øgrim, Pål Steigan, Jorun Gulbrandsen, Astor Larsen, Morten Falck, and others stood at the fore for taking SUF from the left social democratic youth league to a Marxist-Leninist opposition against the SF leadership.

Tron Øgrim in particular was considered to be the ideological leader and political entrepreneur. His cousin, Helge Øgrim, who was for a period a leader for AKP(m-l)'s youth league Rød Ungdom [*Red Youth*], describes Tron Øgrim as a type of charismatic guru in the ML movement. Even Steigan and others who were leading in the movement acknowledge Øgrim as the foremost ideological leader. But the very same who acknowledge his ideological and political creativity claim that he was "scatterbrained" and lacked organizational abilities. He is also considered to have been scrupulous in the struggles against countering lines and milieus.

## **Contact with the Red Opposition in NKP and the Swedish KFML**

Outside of SUF, the youth revolutionaries received inspiration and help from the red line in NKP. Kjell Hovden, Esther Bergerud, and other leading NKP members, particularly in the local chapter in east-side Oslo, oriented themselves towards Mao and China. Hovden visited China during a delegation tour. Bergerud operated the party's bookstore in Oslo, which translated and sold Mao's works in Norwegian. Bergerud was in the central committee of NKP, where she developed the struggle against modern revisionism in NKP. The red line organized itself as Marxist-Leninistisk Front in NKP (MLF), and established the periodical *Røde Fane* [Red Flag].

Tron Øgrim has later claimed that it was in response to pressures from him and the Marxist-Leninists in SUF that kick started the NKP opposition. Øgrim and his environment viewed the older Marxist-Leninists as lagging behind and lacking offensive. This argument was in any event used for all it was worth in the polemic that developed itself in 1970 and 1971 between Øgrim and the MLG leadership and Hovden and the MLF leadership. That Hovden and MLF members were "lagging behind" in their support for a strike, according to Øgrim/MLG, was tantamount to

strike-breaking. Hovden was thereafter accused of being a scab – and a Trotskyist. The MLF leadership, on the other hand, criticized Øgrim and MLG for nationalist deviation, for waging a petit bourgeois line, and for wishing to construct the Communist Party without an anchor in the proletariat. And the MLF leadership maintained that Øgrim and MLG operated infiltration and fractioning operations within MLF.

MLG and SUF(m-l) were also very inspired by Swedish Marxist-Leninists. They fostered close contacts with the Swedish KFML. KFML was established by the opposition to the Swedish Communist Party, SKP, which changed its name to Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna (vpk) [*Left Party The Communists*] and eventually became the Swedish counterpart of present-day SV [*Socialist Left Party*, a parliamentary social democrat party in Norway]. KFML also sprang out of the revolutionary student environment, particularly active in Vietnam solidarity work. The Swedish KFML were ahead of their Norwegian comrades in their development. They had veteran Nils Holmberg, who had represented Swedish communists within COMINTERN and was for a short period a sitting member of Swedish Riskdagen. Holmberg became an important mentor for Tron Øgrim. As did Bo Gustafsson, a Marxist-Leninist academic and leading member of KFML and eventually of the reconstructed party SKP as well.

## **Development in SUF and the Break with SF**

Bryn/Hellerud SUF would quickly become the strongest local chapter of SUF. They eventually allied themselves with students, who had for a long time oriented themselves more towards the center in the disagreement between revolutionary communists and reformists. AKP(m-l)'s first chairman, Sigurd Allern, came from this environment. But according to his own statements, he was radicalized by a trip to Paris, where he and others were exposed to violence at the hands of French riot police. Furthermore, no other tendencies in SUF had a fully-fledged ideological alternative. Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, with Mao's works and the example he provided in the Cultural Revolution, had enormous weight when compared with all others.

But Bryn/Hellerud did not win the struggle in SUF exclusively for having the most correct ideological line. They built up the chapters organizationally. They recruited a large number of members. They drove a campaign where members donated money from their summer jobs, so that they could operate a printing press! In this way, they eventually had a strong material position in regards to the organization than the central committee themselves had. They rented locales for their printing press, and were incredibly aggressive within SUF. In the course of a few years, Bryn/Hellerud, in alliance with individuals within the student chapter, established Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought as the commando for SUF. And this eventually led to a break with SF.

At the SF national congress in February 1969, 50 years ago this year, on February 9, the party congress decided that they could form an alternative youth organization to SUF. In protest, 70 delegates left the congress (roughly one third) and the split

between SUF and SF became fact. In September of that same year, SUF became SUF(m-l) and the year marked a step closer towards reconstructing the Communist Party in Norway.

## **The Core in Bryn/Hellerud SUF and the Struggle in Time**

In the description of the ML movement's birth in Norway, there is a good reason that a lot of weight is placed on Bryn/Hellerud SUF. Leaders from here were to have been incredibly central, and the foremost leaders in the ML movement all the way until the start of the 1980s. This is despite the fact that they took up the struggle against the SF leadership as high school students. In this regard, historians emphasize the role of the authority of Mao Zedong, the Cultural Revolution, and the so-called "youth rebellion" and its high point in Paris, 1968. But an important role must also be prescribed to the ML opposition in NKP (MLF, Hovden, Bergerud, Østkanten NKP, *Røde Fane*), the "Porsgrunn Maoists" (among them Harald Berntsen and Jørgen Sandemose), the SF students (among them Sigurd Allern and Sverre Knutsen) and the Swedish Marxist-Leninists in KFML (Holmberg, Gustafsson, among others).

Bryn/Hellerud SUF had important qualities under Øgrim's leadership, along with a lot of guidance from his comrades and the young activists' radical parents, which made it so that they could stand at the fore and even form the basis for the so-called "diamond gang" that dominated the central leadership in the ML movement throughout the entire 1970s. But an important quality was precisely the environment's relative openness towards cooperation and inspiration from "outside". A combination of such "openness" and a pretty uncompromising offensive leaning forward, strong unity, and focus on building an organizational apparatus, was decisive for the position that they would assume. That, and it was decisive for them being able to establish a leadership that lasted throughout the entire 1970s.

That it ended up being Bryn/Hellerud SUF and Tron Øgrim did not only have to do with Øgrim's personal qualities or peculiarities with the environment. It also had to do with context. Øgrim, Steigan, and other members had radical parents, typically with backgrounds from NKP and from the resistance work during WWII. At home, they had a lot of Marxist literature and held an open door for active youth. They were on the east-side of Oslo, where one could find China-friendly Marxist-Leninists in East-Oslo NKP and it was a short trip to party offices and ambassadors, as well as to the University of Oslo; it was the place in the country that had the most people and logistically speaking, was the shortest route abroad. The combination of the internal forces of the environment and these outer conditions was the starting point for the ML movement revolving around them for 15 years.

The movement did not only grow through internal line struggles. SUF, and eventually the ML movement in general, fostered their cadres through the great solidarity struggle alongside Vietnam. They organized local chapters of Solidarity Committees for Vietnam and large demonstrations. Eventually, they established the Working Committee Against EEC and Dyrtyd (AKMED), which took an active role in the opposition towards the EEC (the forerunner of the EU). They took an active role in

strike support solidarity work and the class struggle was the material wave that the ML movement surfed and was a part of. Their cadres were here raised in practical political organizational work, and the spirit of the times influenced the young Marxist-Leninists and their movement.

## **A Founding That Would Lead to Europe's Largest ML Party**

After the line struggle between MLG and MLF, which ended with the MLF taking a great defeat, the rest of the movement forced the foundation process for the party rather quickly. It was established early in 1973, almost at the same time that the Swedish SKP was constituted on the basis of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. This was of course no coincidence, and it would not be surprising if this was an important reason that the leadership of MLG claimed that it was urgent to establish the party. The concurrence of the 50 year anniversary for the establishment of NKP was also not coincidental. But this is just speculation.

In most Western countries, there were several different and competing Marxist-Leninist parties and leagues. Germany had at least five national organizations of this type. France had three. And in addition to the national groups, there were myriad smaller Marxist-Leninist groups. In Sweden, there were two large ones: SKP, which had contact with AKP(m-l) and KFML(r), which later became KPML(r) and today is called KP and is a clear-cut reformist party. In Norway, there were several groups of this type, but AKP(m-l) dominated completely when compared with these. Around 1977, AKP(m-l) had around 3000 members, in addition to 2000 or so in their youth and student's leagues.

Additionally, Marxist-Leninists led a number of mass organizations (like Kulturfronten [*Culture Front*], Kvinnefronten [*Women's Front*], strike solidarity committees, the Palestine Committee, Solkom Vietnam, the Third World Committee, and so on), which numbered several thousand members. They also ran the daily newspaper *Klassekampen*, Oktober Publishing House, Duplotrykk Press, the election front Rød Valgallianse, and on on. In short, the movement was enormous, and it may very well have been the largest and strongest Marxist-Leninism movement in Western Europe in the 1970s. Not only relative to the number of people involved, but also in absolute numbers!

## **Necessary Critical Consideration of AKP(m-l)'s Rightist Line**

It is high time that Norwegian Maoists do away with an uncritical position towards the Norwegian ML-movement. The new communist movement was primarily good. And it was an important and necessary movement against modern revisionism, and for the development of Mao Zedong Thought. The leaders Øgrim and Steigan later claimed that the party, in its practical-political and tactical work, was more inspired by Stalin and Albania than they were of Mao. Steigan claims that these had insights into organizing that were better suited to Norwegian conditions than Mao's, who had waged people's war in an underdeveloped country in the third world – far from the

European (Norwegian) context. And the party even voted, not by coincidence, to refer to themselves as a Marxist-Leninist movement. In other words, they placed more weight on *Marxism-Leninism* than they did on Mao Zedong Thought.

The party had as early as 1975 already made a comprehensive break from the right deviationism that characterized the movement from before the establishment of the party. But the break was not a Maoist break, or a break that pointed in this direction. It was primarily a break with the weakness in regards to the modern Soviet revisionism. But this did not hinder the party from supporting Hua's counterrevolution in China in 1976 and 1977. They supported and participated in the condemnation of the revolutionaries in China, under the boogeyman term "Gang of Four". They supported the reactionary Chinese foreign policy under Deng's "Three Worlds Theory". And the party did not by any means address the opportunistic practice of participating whole-heartedly in elections. On the contrary, in 1977, party chairman Pål Steigan stood in the fore for placing even more emphasis on election campaigns. And the party newsletter *Klassekampen* also applied for public funding during the same period in order to continue as a daily newsletter, despite the movement's economic crisis.

In short, the party stood for a rightist line all the way from its establishment. And this rightist line logically led to a complete capitulation to right opportunism in the 1980s. Ideologically, the party became a revisionist party, which accepted Deng Xiaoping's capitalistic policies in China and which watered down Marxism-Leninism when they denied the necessity of the Communist Party's leading role in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Under the cover of both feminism and anti-imperialism, even more petit bourgeois opportunism was smuggled into the movement.

## **The Party Itself Was a Compromise with Revisionism**

Even the party name says something about AKP(m-l)'s dual nature, right from the start. Instead of reconstituting the Communist Party of Norway, they allowed modern revisionists to keep their claim on it. Perhaps this was because the party, in its constitutive congress, had a plan and a desire to unite themselves with SF and "NKP" in an electoral front in the Parliamentary elections in 1973! They placed great emphasis on working to establish unity with revisionists and reformists, and claimed that one should build further on this unity in the struggle against EEC all the way until the national referendum in 1972. Even the foundation of AKP(m-l) can be seen as a form of compromise with revisionism.

Maoists today must more closely study the ideological line of AKP(m-l) in the 1970s. We know that Maoism had not yet been synthesized and formulated as a third and higher stage in the development of Marxism. This happened first in the 1980s and was done by the Communist Party of Peru and Chairman Gonzalo. The understanding of people's war as the proletariat's military strategy, of the two-line struggle as the driving force in the development of the party, cultural revolution as necessary for developing socialism until communism, the law of contradiction as the fundamental law in all development and so on, was not completely developed when AKP(m-l) was founded.

Instead of breaking with the revisionist practice, AKP(m-l) fell to the very same and greatest errors that the old NKP had. For instance, this applies in regards to their participation in the election circus, where AKP(m-l) doggedly attempted to create electoral leagues with revisionists and placed great focus on developing representatives within the LO apparatus.

Something else that should be studied is the critique of AKP(m-l) from KA. After the break with MLG, MLF was reformed into KA. They developed an incredibly sharp criticism of AKP(m-l), particularly in regards to the party's view on imperialism and nationalism. Their analysis was that AKP(m-l) was not the proletariat's party, not a Communist Party, but on the contrary a petit bourgeois and social chauvinist party. They write that AKP was blind to Norwegian imperialism, or at the very least that they understated it, and that the line in regards to questions such as Svalbard was an expression for an extremely national chauvinist line.

KA saw the political errors of the party as a logical consequence of AKP(m-l) being a petit bourgeois party from its start, with a petit bourgeois socialism, which attempted to appeal to, for instance, small-scale farmers' reactionary opposition towards capitalism's development rather than organizing a proletarian revolutionary class struggle for socialism. KA drew lines and parallels to the development of nationalism within NKP, and particularly to Peder Furubotn's nationalistic and reformist standpoint.

## **Those Who Wish to Reconstruct the Communist Party Must Study AKP(m-l)**

These are analyses and questions that should be studied further. Not because they are exciting in and of themselves for those with an interest in history, but because the reconstruction and reorganization of a Communist Party in Norway demands it. A blind relation to AKP(m-l) or NKP's history, one that is not critical and does not analyse the two-line struggle in each stage of the development of the Norwegian communist movement will lay the basis for repeating errors. In particular, it is important to reveal and analyse the roots of the errors. Only in this way can one ensure that the errors do not simply open up for new errors that only appear to represent a red line.

To reconstruct the Communist Party of Norway as a Maoist party does not mean copying NKP in 1923, 1928, or 1942, and does not mean copying AKP(m-l) around 1973 or 1976. Even if AKP(m-l) was a Communist Party in the 1970s, it would have been a party with incredibly great errors. Errors that today would place the party clearly alongside today's revisionist parties. Just as a blueprint of NKP in 1928 would with great likelihood develop itself in the same right opportunist direction that ended up liquidating the party as a revolutionary party, and turn it into an appendage of modern revisionism. An anti-revisionism that "turns the clock back" is not revolutionary, but rather conservative or reactionary. We would refer to this as dogmatic-revisionism. Marxism's living soul is the concrete analysis of the concrete

situation, and only a Marxism that develops itself in the two-line struggle is true Marxism.

AKP(m-l) is nonetheless worth commemorating and celebrating, as a beacon on the island of Soviet revisionism, and as an important experience in the organization of the communist movement in Norway. An experience that among other things teaches us that in one of the world's wealthiest imperialist countries, we can build a declared revolutionary and communist movement that numbers thousands of dedicated and active people.