

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 B. Theoretical Preconditions to Communist Unification

The Main Danger

In order to unify the communist forces, Marxist-Leninists must have a thorough understanding of the principal ideological current fomenting division. In the early 1900's, Right Economism and its Menshevik spawn constituted that current, and Lenin's What Is To Be Done? , along with the work of the Iskra organization, gave the Social-Democratic movement that understanding. We have argued that the main ideological current preventing the unity of the U.S. communist movement takes a "left" form, and that within it "left" sectarianism plays the leading role. Ultra-leftism, and particularly "left" sectarianism, permeates every facet of the work of the communist movement, and its defeat is the main immediate task in the chain of tasks facing U.S. Marxist-Leninists. To establish the ideological foundations for a Party or central pre-party organization, we need to draw a firm line of demarcation with semi-anarchist ideology.

A new Marxist-Leninist Communist Party needs an in-depth analysis of the character of, historical basis for, and methods for combating "Left-Wing" communism. In our view, it would be neither possible nor desirable to form a Party in the absence of agreement around this kind of intensive analysis. The current situation in the anti-revisionist movement has given rise to a broad-based reaction against the sectarianism, dogmatism and adventurism of the "left" line. This reaction has led to wider study of the ideological sources of "leftism". In some cases, however, the critics have so far limited themselves to descriptions of the bad practices of the various "left" groups. These descriptions have value, but they do not provide a basis for organizational unity in opposition to "leftism". In critiques of this largely empiricist type, Marxist-Leninist views towards "leftism" often mingle with anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist criticisms of "inaction" and the "ossification of theory,"

with reformist perspectives on "isolating ourselves from the mainstream," and with conciliationism. In these eclectic mixtures, a professed willingness to seek truth from facts may serve as a screen for an unprincipled unwillingness to confront burning political issues. The history of the struggle against ultra-leftism and sectarianism in the anti-revisionist movement teaches us that Marxist-Leninists cannot rest content with a superficial "anti-sectarian" unity.

In the almost twenty years since anti-revisionism has had organized expression in this country, the movement has seen a series of critiques of ultra-leftism, dogmatism and sectarianism. We might even go so far as to suggest that insofar as groups in the second phase of anti-revisionist activity have made important contributions to the struggle for a new Party, those contributions have been linked either to a strong critique of the practices of ultra-left organizations, or to the view that ultra-leftism constituted the main danger to the Marxist-Leninist forces. This applies even to the earlier years of the Progressive Labor Movement, which repudiated the sterile, sectarian isolation of some of the first Marxist-Leninist split-offs from the CPUSA, though its assessment had an anarchist component and very quickly took a Trotskyite turn. The RU grew up in struggle against the Trotskyite "left" economism of Progressive Labor and fought the "left" adventurism of the various urban guerrilla strategies. For a time it explicitly considered "leftism" as the main danger to the Marxist-Leninist forces. But here again its analysis combined Marxist-Leninist principles with anarcho-syndicalist elements, and eventually the RU adopted major tenets of a "left" economist position. The California Communist League broke with the Trotskyite revisionism of the old POC, and, as the CL, directed the movement's attention to the historic dangers of syndicalism, though it never quite freed itself from some of its semi-Trotskyite baggage. Drawing on the experiences of the old POC and PL, the October League correctly pointed to ultra-leftism as the main danger to the anti-revisionist movement, and only within the last two years has it "reversed correct verdicts." This reversal would not have come off so smoothly if the OL had previously devoted serious study to the history and ideological sources of "leftism". Even some groups which held that right opportunism posed the chief threat to the communist movement, such as the BWC after its break with the RU, essentially grew out of a critique of syndicalism, and published influential criticisms of the CL's semi-Trotskyite leanings. We could cite other examples as well.

In the past dozen years, Marxist-Leninists have frequently fallen into critiques of "leftism" and sectarianism which are themselves flawed with "left" assumptions. One version has its ideological source more in anarchism proper, revealing certain Trotskyite tendencies. In reaction to the former's "dogmatism, "sectarianism," and

usually "left" liquidation of democratic struggles, a critique advances which draws more on anarcho-syndicalist sources. The syndicalism of this position, its downplay of revolutionary theory and its over-emphasis on agitational work in turn sparks a resurgence of the first tendency, obviously with important variations according to the course of the ideological struggle. In the past year or two both tendencies have gained renewed strength.

In order to break this cycle and build a new Communist Party, Marxist-Leninists must achieve an in-depth understanding of contemporary "Left-Wing" Communism. Only such an understanding will enable us to defeat "left" sectarianism without falling into a new form of "left" opportunism or, though less likely, social-democratic liberalism. Whether we recognize that the main two-line struggle **internal** to the communist movement has opposed petit-bourgeois revolutionism to Marxism-Leninism determines whether we build unity on a proletarian or bourgeois, semi-anarchist ideological basis. As a part of this work, the communist forces will have to review the history of struggle against ultra-leftism, its successes and failures.

That Marxist-Leninists cannot unify without breaking the stranglehold which "left" opportunism has on the movement does not mean that we believe "left" sectarianism can be totally wiped out in the absence of a Party, or even with one. On the contrary, unification will mark only the completion of a phase in the struggle against "leftism," permitting the deepening of our theoretical analysis of "left" opportunism. We do not advocate extending the struggle against ultra-leftism until all the groupist misleaders are isolated, since that point may never come as long as the interests of many separate organizations hinder the development of a Party spirit. The history of the formation of many Communist Parties, such as the Albanian, and some of the Third International European parties, demonstrates that incorrigible revisionist elements are most quickly identified and weeded out in the context of inner-Party struggle.

Our Tasks

The clearing away of the "chief obstacle" to decisive advances on our current tasks will not of itself produce "unity of action and will" on the nature of our tasks. The communist movement must connect the struggle against "left" opportunism to the struggle for unity on the basic character of communist work in this period. To clarify its responsibilities, it will need to overcome "left" subjectivism about the present pre-revolutionary period. Yet, identifying the main danger exactly depends on a sharper appreciation of what practical tasks

"Left-Wing" communism poses the main danger to. **Unity around their basic tasks in the present situation will provide a practical foundation for the organizational unification of the communist forces.** Moreover, the consistent, coordinated activity of a newly formed Party will rest on this kind of unity around the Party's daily work. For these reasons, we regard unity around the current tasks and activities of Marxist-Leninists as a precondition to unification.

We will not spell out our views on those tasks here. At this point, our intention is mainly to emphasize the importance of that discussion. We do not dream of unity around detailed explanations of our tasks within the labor, national revolutionary, women's emancipation and student movements. Unity around comprehensive analyses of that type probably lies out of reach for a movement suffering from misorganization on the scale of our own. Rather we look to an agreement on the basic features of the U.S. working class movement at this time: the virtually unchallenged hegemony of bourgeois ideology and bourgeois politics over the proletariat, reflected in a weak and nationally-divided labor movement; and the relative isolation of handfuls of communists from that movement. We have summarized our current tasks in this situation as the overcoming of the disorganization and isolation of the communist forces.

To organize their ranks and weld themselves to the working class, the Marxist-Leninists have to engage in definite activities. Unification requires a common view of the main form of activity appropriate to this period, and of the connection between this form of activity and others. As the earlier chapters argued, communists need to take propaganda as their chief form of activity both in order to settle the various internal questions which today divide them and in order to train the working class agitators, propagandists and organizers, which will allow the communists to pass to agitation as their main form of work. At the same time, we must establish an inseparable connection between agitation and propaganda, and between agitation and organizational work, even in the earliest phases of communist activity. All this work has a common aim-taking the first steps towards the workers' movement-and concentrates on the identification, training and merger with the vanguard of the working class, the proletarian Left.

Marxist-Leninist unity also needs agreement on where to concentrate our activities so that we can achieve the most significant results. For the most part, Marxist-Leninists already direct their energies towards the industrial proletariat, particularly the most socialized section in the largest workplaces. The communist movement should also recognize factory nuclei as the basic unit of a fully-formed Communist Party, but leave

open pending deeper investigation the question of what range of means to employ in reaching the politically active industrial workers (entering the workplaces; work in the national revolutionary movements; community work; penetrating the adult education schools, in the manner of the early St. Petersburg groups; etc.). The movement also needs to develop a shared orientation towards the organization of the masses (whether it should rely on initiating brand-new mass organizations and hope to attract the masses to them, or go into those organizations where the masses presently are found.) It must recognize that only ties with the organized masses are sound and stable ties. Finally communist unification demands unity on the practice of the mass line and the development of a communist style of work.

The Nature and Functioning of the Party

Routing "left" opportunism will eliminate the immediate roadblock to communist unity, and struggling for a common perspective on our current tasks will prepare the groundwork for it. But organizational unity can be had only with an identity of views on what it is we are uniting in, and maintained only with agreement on how the many inevitable differences will be resolved. To form a new Communist Party, the communist forces must also forge a high level of unity on the nature and functioning of the Marxist-Leninist Party.

To some it may seem gratuitous even to include such a point, much less give it high priority. After all, hardly a movement newspaper or journal appears without making profuse allusions to Lenin's, Stalin's or Mao's descriptions of the Party; the points of unity of some groups simply recopy the celebrated chapter from **Foundations of Leninism**. In our view, however, the present unity around the type of new Party we seek to build has a formalistic quality. It does not guide the practice of many communist groups; rather, their practice reveals a series of deviations on the question. If a man assures you he will treat his wife as an equal while beating his fiancée, you tend to doubt his word. Strongly worded pledges of allegiance to Leninist norms of Party behavior carry little weight in the midst of rampant sectarian intrigue. In other words, the conduct of communists today gives a fair measure of their conduct tomorrow. How they wage the struggle for a proletarian vanguard party reflects their conception of struggle within the Party, with certain differences. In reviewing four essential characteristics of a Marxist-Leninist party— that it act as the **advanced detachment** of the **working class**, that it operate under democratic-centralism, that it practice criticism and self-criticism in the spirit of unity, struggle, unity, and that it combine legal and illegal work—we will see that the

communist movement as a whole has yet to forge a solidarity of views on the Party, and that the present period affords us that opportunity.

Many comrades do not treat Lenin's description of the Party as an **integral conception**. Instead they reduce it to words in a phrase, with different tendencies seizing upon now this and now that aspect. Of late the dominant 'left' tendency has worshipped the words "advanced detachment," and downplayed the Party's class character, pretending that the presence of Marxist-Leninist ideologues from whatever social origin of itself guarantees the class nature of the Party. Self-flattery of this kind departs from materialism. A party based in a social class other than the proletariat and not led by a leadership at least in good part drawn from the proletariat, cannot orient itself along a consistently revolutionary course, and anyone who thinks otherwise plays at revolution.

"The distinction between the advanced detachment and the rest of the working class, between Party members and non-Party people, cannot disappear until classes disappear...**But the Party would cease to be a Party if this distinction developed into a gap**, if the Party turned in on itself and became divorced from the non-Party masses." (Stalin, **Foundations of Leninism**, p. 104-05; our emphasis)

And Lenin states unequivocally, "politics without the masses are adventurist politics." (CW **20**, p. 356) In reaction to this self-indulgent delusion, re-emerging anarcho-syndicalist and Rightist influences in the communist movement dismiss the struggle for the unity of Marxist-Leninists as "dogmatic" and advocate submerging ourselves in the working class masses, neglecting the Party's role as the advanced detachment.

Against these errors, the communist movement needs a common commitment to constructing the vanguard Party of the proletariat. In the struggle for unification, the various groups and individuals can and must demonstrate that commitment, not only through their practical work of winning over the vanguard, but also by encouraging the widest circles of the working class to participate in the edification of their leadership.

"It is necessary to combine the mobilization of the masses with Party-building and to stimulate the masses to take part in Party-building, for instance to provide them with the opportunity to criticize cadres and Party members and introduce worthy people whom we shall educate to admit into the Party, etc. In this way we make

the masses love and safeguard the Party." (Truong-Chinh, **Forward Along the Path Charted by K. Marx**, p. 101)

We regard party-formation as a necessary step towards building a true proletarian vanguard, towards elaborating a comprehensive revolutionary line, and towards forging an unshakeable unity of all revolutionary forces. Whether party-formation proves a decisive step in the accomplishment of these tasks or the baptism of another glorified sect depends on its practices of democratic centralism and criticism and self-criticism. We have argued that a new Party will necessarily begin with a rudimentary line on many problems and a fragile unity around a host of issues or it will not see the light of day. Its ability to maintain itself and advance in these circumstances demands iron discipline, broad democratic discussion of the inevitable major differences, and an ability to rectify the no less inevitable major mistakes. Lacking a firm unity on democratic centralism and criticism and self-criticism, party-formation becomes a factional ploy.

Mao defines democratic centralism as the system "in which the minority is subordinate to the majority, the lower level to the higher level, the part to the whole, and the entire membership to the Central Committee." (SW III, p. 44) That many communist organizations can conceive of these principles only in relation to their own groups testifies to their sectarianism. In fact, with the exception of the subordination of the entire membership to the Central Committee, all these rules apply to the communist movement during a pre-party period. In this sense, a group which declares itself the Marxist-Leninist Party against the opposition of the majority of the anti-revisionist forces has violated democratic centralism. The same charge fits those organizations which elevate their own group interests above those of the movement and class at large, who refuse to "think in terms of the whole," or subordinate their activity to the future "higher level" of the communist movement, the Marxist-Leninist Party. Despite all the fine talk on the "incompatibility of factions" with Marxist-Leninist organization, the practical conception guiding many of our present groups in their activity within the communist movement has a profoundly factional character. Factional activity in a pre-party period is as "incompatible" with avowed loyalties to a democratic-centralist Party as factionalism within the Party itself. To unify the communist forces, comrades must make good on their support for Marxist-Leninist organization in the immediate struggle.

Developing correct practices of criticism and self-criticism is equally urgent. Because their constituent elements lack precisely the experience at the national level, the ability to wage political struggle, and the

results of centralized theoretical discussion which only a Party can bring, Marxist-Leninist Parties generally come together around a relatively undeveloped political line. The lack of clarity naturally shields differing conceptions of a revolutionary line, and these differences, with the absence of experience on which to form seasoned judgments, increase the risks of deviations. Serious and sometimes disastrous errors of political line mark the early histories of many Marxist-Leninist Parties. Those errors do not mean that party-formation came prematurely. On the contrary, without party-formation, the separate communist forces could not have elaborated and tested any political line on a mass scale, and however harmful the errors, they did give the Parties the occasion to educate themselves on the basis of their own mistakes and suggest a correct way forward. But the inevitability of error makes the practice of criticism and self-criticism all the more necessary. Without it, a new Party will not recover from its first mistakes, and careerist leaderships will install themselves in positions of power.

The practice of criticism and self-criticism has largely become a tool of sectarian advancement in the present-day U.S. communist movement. Only inveterate optimists can believe that an era of merciless blows and unprincipled attacks, of posturing before posters of Lenin and Mao and saluting one's precocious strategic genius will end with the founding Congress. To the extent they restore the power of the "Marxist-Leninist weapon of criticism and self-criticism," the communist forces will advance towards a revolutionary Party. To the extent they fail in that task, they will remain mired in "left" sectarian rivalry.

Lastly, the communist forces need unity on combining legal and illegal work. The proliferation of communist parties, leagues and collectives has as one of its most grievous consequences the needless identification of hundreds and thousands of Marxist-Leninists and revolutionary-minded workers to the political police. Competition among groups and the unprincipled polarization of the movement results in the mutual exposure of each other's militants, usually justified as "ideological struggle before the masses," and usually practiced as gossip. Lenin well remarks on the primitive security apparatuses fashioned by separate groups in the early Russian Social-Democratic movement:

"The police, in almost every case, knew the principal leaders of the local movement, since they had already "gained a reputation" for themselves in their student days, and the police waited only for the right moment to make their raid." **(What Is To Be Done, CW 5, p. 442)**

In the face of the most sophisticated intelligence apparatus in the world, about all the individual communist organizations can manage at their best is secrecy from the rumor merchants who infest certain circles of our movement. And needless to say, inter-group squabbling and unprincipled disclosures of the identities of one's ideological opponents supplies the perfect atmosphere for the work of police agents. That "Lefts" justify the present disunity of our movement through appeals to the necessity for Bolshevik methods of legal and illegal work provides one of the many ironies of our current scene:

"Only fusion into a single party will enable us strictly to observe the principles of division of labor and economy of forces, which must be achieved in order to reduce the losses and build as reliable a bulwark as possible against the oppression of the autocratic government and against its frantic persecutions." (Lenin, **CW 4**, p. 222)

Phrase-mongering about the need for an illegal apparatus will not stand the new Party in good stead if its militants have been previously identified in the heyday of the sectarian wars. The communist forces must demonstrate their commitment to building a "bulwark" against bourgeois repression in the struggle for Marxist-Leninist unity.

Program and Political Line

Struggle over certain key features of political line is necessary for establishing the ideological foundations of the Party. To unify disparate organizational forces into a single political party, unity around our current tasks will not suffice; party-formation also requires consolidation around the program and political line carried out in the accomplishment of those tasks. To act as a single party, the party members must know what to support and what to oppose, what to demand and what to reject, or, as Mao says in another context, "what to praise and what to condemn." Otherwise the unity affirmed in the founding Congress will break down under the pressures of daily activity. A party with no ideas on how revolution is to be made, or at least on the first steps toward revolution, can hardly qualify as a revolutionary party.

As we have argued, however, the disorganization of the revolutionary forces and the current low level of the mass struggle sets limits to the degree of strategic and tactical clarity which the communist movement can achieve in the present period. Even the formation of the party will only alter the first factor. Consequently

some aspects of political line have more importance than others in any pre-party period. For example, the formation of the Communist Party of Albania depended upon a common "line of anti-fascist national liberation war," (**History of the PLA, p. 84**) as well as unity around the current tasks which the waging of that war posed.

"Their common political line brought the Shkodra Communist Group close to that of Korea and made possible the conclusion in August **1941**, of the agreement to collaborate in and organize together a number of anti-fascist operations...The Tirana demonstration was the touchstone for the unity of the Albanian communists. It showed the strength of this unity in the heat of battle against fascism as well as its importance in mobilizing the popular masses for the national-liberation movement...The struggle of the Albanian communists themselves created, at last, favorable conditions for founding their party. Among the ranks of the communist groups there had sprung up professional revolutionary cadres who had been able to rise above the disputes among the groups, had definitely embraced the line of an uncompromising war against the fascist invaders and traitors to the country, and had striven to unify the Albanian communist movement on this basis. It was these cadres who, through their tireless efforts, prepared the ideological and organizational framework of the Albanian Communist Party." (**Ibid., pp. 84-5**)

At the same time, as many documents of the PLA point out, the Albanian communists did not have unity around a comprehensive political line which dealt with many other questions. In the U.S., party-formation demands a fairly well-defined tactical approach towards democratic struggles, a common conception of their relationship to the struggle for socialism.

The relationship between democratic and socialist struggles has a tactical significance in the U.S., not a strategic one. No economic basis exists for a democratic strategic objective intermediate between the present social formation and proletarian dictatorship. With the exception of some areas in the Black Belt South and possibly some pockets in the Southwest, neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat faces any bourgeois-democratic tasks in the economy, (i.e., the capitalist penetration of agriculture, and the destruction of pre-capitalist modes of production). But the absence of a new democratic strategic objective does not lessen the importance of democratic questions in the U.S. On the contrary, various opportunist tactical lines on democratic struggles, particularly on the Afro-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican and other oppressed nationalities' struggles against national oppression and for full equality, lie at the very root of the historic

weakness of the U.S. Marxist movement. Despite the strategic importance which the bourgeois-democratic revolution had in Russia, "two tactics in the democratic revolution" separated revolutionaries from the social props of the bourgeoisie.

The U.S. communist movement is today divided over political line towards democratic struggles. This division principally opposes "left" economist approaches to rudimentary Marxist-Leninist lines. As we have said earlier, all deviations from Marxism take one or another economist form. The difference between "left" economists and Marxist-Leninists manifests itself in an acute way at the level of tactics. Speaking of a different struggle with Economism, Lenin declared "The old division into Economists and politicians was based mainly on a difference over questions of **tactics**." (CW, p. 385)

Differences over strategy have not had anywhere near the same importance in the U.S. communist movement as those around tactics. Though it may seem surprising in regard to classical descriptions of the dependence of tactics on strategy, this fact corresponds to our earlier discussion of the relationship between strategy and party-formation. In the absence of any force capable of drawing up a strategic plan and concentrating or dispersing forces in accordance with it, ideas on strategy have a largely abstract character and do not necessarily relate to the policy alternatives available in the real world. Dozens of groups, from the "Revolutionary Wing", ATM, MLOC, and the WC(M-L) to the Revolutionary Communist Party, the October League(M-L) and the **Guardian** newspaper all adhere to a strategy called the United Front Against Imperialism, and often formulate it in very similar terms. Yet these groups have completely different tactical orientations towards consistent democracy, for example, even among closely associated groups—for instance ATM's view of busing and the ERA as against those of PRRWO, even when the two organizations were closely aligned. Conversely, a number of groups believe the United Front Against Imperialism strategy for the U.S. is seriously flawed (the WVO, the CLP, the Commentator group, ourselves, and others), but that shared opposition to a given strategy does not translate into any unity at the tactical level. WVO, which opposes the UFAI, has more in common with the RCP, which supports it, in its tactical approach to democratic reforms, than WVO has with ourselves or the Commentator, or the RCP does with the **Guardian**.

This seemingly arbitrary relation between strategy and tactics extends to other strategic questions, such as the Afro-American national question. Recognition or non-recognition of the Black nation as analyzed by the Comintern and the CPUSA currently carries no consistent implications for a group's stand towards the struggles

of Black people for democratic rights. The line-up on the existence of the Black nation often widely differs from that on reforms like super-seniority, preferential hiring, busing, affirmative action, etc., or even on issues like support for the Republic of New Africa's and others' fight for land in the Black Belt territory. The Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee, for example, has published a lengthy document on Black liberation which on most substantive points agrees with that of **Red Papers 5** and **6**, and even supports "the general strategic orientation" found there, yet the PWOC and the RU/RCP diverge radically in their tactical approaches to the fight against white supremacy and national oppression. Both the I Wor Kuen and the WVO, on the other hand, uphold the Black nation position, yet the IWK's advocacy of consistent democracy in the working class has practically nothing in common with the WVO's "left" economism and instead probably shares a great deal with that of the PWOC. **These disparities suggest** that the determination of overall tactical line in the present period of the communist movement is influenced less by the strategy adopted in theory than by other factors.

The abandonment of the struggle for reforms and democratic rights in the U.S. means the abandonment of revolution pure and simple. Today, the working class lacks a political leadership, it lacks militant class organizations for its daily battles, and it finds itself in a non-revolutionary period. All of these factors accentuate the need for accumulating forces, transforming every class conflict into an occasion for class organization, and preparing the proletariat for ever broader revolutionary struggle. The daily fight for the proletariat's immediate interests presents the main road through which revolutionaries can raise the level of consciousness and organization of the working class masses at this time. Communists cannot educate the proletariat from outside this struggle, through a series of calls for boycotts, unadulterated Revolutionary demonstrations, and the rejection of "sham reforms."

"Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers." (Marx and Engels, **CM**)

And the **Manifesto** later stresses that the "ever-expanding union" emerges through the "enforcement" of the masses' immediate interests, not apart from it.

Owing to the historical development of capitalism and the specific characteristics of bourgeois rule, the struggle for consistent democracy has a particular importance in the U.S. The national oppression of the Afro-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Asian-American and Native American peoples, the corresponding lack of

democracy within the working class, and the materially-enforced white chauvinism of large sections of the white workers place democratic questions at the center of the proletariat's agenda. Unless the communist forces educate the working class to its role as the indefatigable champion of the most complete democracy, revolution will never happen. As Lenin said, "a proletariat not schooled in the struggle for democracy is incapable of performing an economic revolution." For their part, the revisionists fully grasp the importance of the struggle for democracy in the U.S., not as a "school" for proletarian revolution, but rather as a substitute for it. A "left" opportunist posture towards the daily battle for democratic rights cedes this critical arena to the revisionists and reformists, and it certainly renounces any claim to the title of "vanguard fighter for democracy." To paraphrase Stalin, a victory for the "Left" deviation in the developing Marxist-Leninist movement would mean the ideological strengthening of modern revisionism, which means the strengthening of capitalism.

The scattered communist forces do not have, and cannot get, the practical experience necessary to elaborate a full tactical line. The founding congress will not be in a position to forecast the forms and methods of struggle at every given moment. What the Marxist-Leninists must do is reach agreement on an overall tactical orientation on the relations between democratic and socialist struggles. This they can do even in a pre-party period, if they draw upon their own experiences and successfully prosecute the struggle against "left" opportunism. The preeminent practical significance of issues related to democratic rights and the fight against national oppression force the question upon the movement no matter how disorganized its forces. And unity around a general tactical line towards democratic struggle will represent a significant consolidation of the victory over "Left-Wing" Communism.

Communist unification in a Party or other organizational form also requires unity around the principles guiding the international policy of the working class, as well as a rudimentary line on world affairs. Without that unity, the Marxist-Leninists would have no basis on which to begin to educate the proletariat to its internationalist responsibilities in the current world situation, conduct anti-imperialist support work, or prepare the U.S. people to shoulder their tasks in the next world war.* Moreover, the lack of a common line would throw in doubt the strategic aim of working class activity: the dictatorship of the proletariat. Stated in these general terms, few if any U.S. communist groups disagree. In the main, the Marxist-Leninist forces do not tend to downplay the need for an international line, but rather to exaggerate its role in the struggle to unify the anti-revisionist camp on a principled basis. For the most part, the communist movement has failed to

subordinate the struggle for unity around an international line to the overall strategic task of "creating a communist nucleus and connecting it to the working masses."

The failure to place unity around international questions in a party-building perspective has effectively obscured the principles at stake in the current debate. Some partisans on both sides not only regard political line as key in the present period, but also consider international line as the decisive question within political line. Many take it for granted that international line has the privileged position in defining the revolutionary camp; that a higher level of unity around this question than any other is therefore necessary; and that secondary disagreements around international line are not like other disagreements, that they have an absolute character and cannot be subordinated to any other considerations. Partial differences or differences whose significance is basically unknown are regularly seized upon for sectarian advantage. (For a typical example, see the reviews by Martin Nicolaus and a writer for the RCP of each other's books on the USSR.) On one side, some demand complete and utter agreement with the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China, failing which one falls into "centrism"; on the other side, some demand sharp and preferably public differences with the Chinese comrades as proof of one's "anti-dogmatist" and "anti-flunkeyist" commitment. Neither side has initiated a serious ideological struggle over what importance political line on international questions should have at this point and at each succeeding point in the struggle for communist unification. Nor has struggle gone on over what type of unity around international questions is necessary at each point in the struggle, or over what range of disunity is possible within a single organization (acceptable majority and minority positions). In the absence of this kind of struggle, strict lines of demarcation around highly developed positions can serve sectarian ends, no matter how correct the positions themselves.

In our opinion, the level of unity necessary for communist unification has two major components. First, Marxist-Leninists need unity around the general principles underlying proletarian internationalism in the current epoch, the epoch of imperialism. As stated by Lenin in 1917, "The foreign policy of the proletariat is alliance with the revolutionaries of the advanced countries [today we would say all countries] and with all oppressed nations against all and any imperialists." The proletarian party stands with the world-wide struggle against imperialism, a struggle summed up for this period in the slogan, "countries want independence; nations want liberation; people want revolution."

But though the proletariat opposes any and all imperialists, colonialists, and domestic reactionaries, it does not consider them equal dangers at the same moment. Strategically, it dedicates all its energies to eliminating every vestige of capitalist exploitation and imperialist plunder from the face of the earth, but tactically it aims to unite the broadest possible front to defeat the greatest dangers of the moment. Making use of contradictions among its enemies, the international proletariat seeks to concentrate a superior force to destroy the enemy forces one by one. A rudimentary tactical line therefore requires more than agreement on general principles, it also involves an assessment of the balance of forces and main tendencies at the world level. At the center of this assessment today lies one's analysis of the nature of the USSR.

Every view of the international situation rests implicitly or explicitly upon an analysis of the USSR. These analyses fall into three general camps. The modern revisionists claim that the USSR is a socialist state, that its domestic and foreign policies are founded on proletarian internationalism and that they serve humanity's advance toward communism.

The second basic position views the USSR as a "deformed," "compromised," "degenerating" or "endangered" socialist state. It says that the leadership of the CPSU represents bourgeois or bureaucratic ideological influence within the proletarian party. At the same time, it contends that the "productive forces" in the USSR are socialized, and therefore the economy or material base of the USSR remains socialist. The contradiction between this revisionist or bureaucratic or otherwise counter-revolutionary "superstructure" and the socialist base impedes, endangers, has halted or reversed the progress of socialism.

Owing to the revisionist leadership of the CPSU, the Soviet Union today follows a generally non-revolutionary or even counter-revolutionary foreign policy according to this second view. But just as the revisionist leadership does not correspond to capitalist relations of production in the Soviet Union, so this non-revolutionary foreign policy does not correspond to any objective necessity of Soviet society. The second camp instead regards Soviet activity in the world as a policy of the ruling party, and whether or not that party pursues a counter-revolutionary policy can be influenced by changes or pressures from within and without the Soviet Union. These pressures can force the Soviet Union to take a progressive stand and substantially aid the world revolutionary forces. As for the long-term effect of revisionist leadership on the economy, some members of this second camp view it as negligible (according to groups like the CLP, the economy will proceed on its merry, socialist way no matter who holds party and state power), and some as an extremely distant danger. An entire

generation of revisionist rule has so far not succeeded in dismantling the socialist economy. Though the Trotskyite variant of the second thesis (the "deformed workers' state") has the longest history, a number of U.S. Marxist-Leninist groups today lean toward this second position. Internationally, however, no Marxist-Leninist parties to our knowledge have embraced this perspective.

The third position, shared by the CPC, the PLA, and a number of other Marxist-Leninist Parties, believes that the rise to power of revisionism means the rise to power of the bourgeoisie. Because of the contradictory nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat (in other words, of a society in transition to communism), the exercise of Party and state power by revisionism over any period of time necessarily entails the reversal of the socialist transformation of society, and the restoration of capitalist relations of production as the dominant relations of production. The restoration of capitalism in a country as powerful and centralized politically and economically as the Soviet Union means the emergence of imperialism or social-imperialism. Therefore, for this third camp, the counter-revolutionary role of the Soviet Union in world affairs is not a policy which can be pursued or dropped at the will of the CPSU, but rather the necessary outcome of its objective need to redivide the world with the other imperialists, particularly with the other superpower. The Soviet Union's contention for hegemony with the U.S. represents an imperialist drive for hegemony over the world, and not a defensive reaction to U.S. imperialism, cynical political calculation, or a "safeguard for world peace." And according to this third view, the contention between the U.S. and the USSR will lead inevitably to world war.

Communist unification will require basic agreement around this last analysis. Since the question of the USSR stands at the center of the world stage, a Marxist-Leninist Party or other organization cannot elaborate even a rudimentary international line without resolving the nature of the Soviet Union. Further, a view of the USSR involves at one and the same time a determination of the strategic objective of revolutionary struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat. In other words, it concerns not simply the character of a given state, but also the very aim of communist activity. In our view, the third position outlined above correctly characterizes the USSR as a social-imperialist country in which capitalism has been restored. The future Party's fulfillment of its internationalist obligations depends on taking up the general tactical line which this analysis of the USSR implies. The broadest possible united front against imperialism in today's conditions therefore means a united front against the two superpowers.

Basic agreement has never necessarily meant total agreement with the line of one or another fraternal Party. The Chinese and Albanian Parties, for example, share an agreement on the Marxist-Leninist principles underlying proletarian **internationalism** and basic agreement on the nature of the Soviet Union, but still have somewhat different tactical applications of these principles and this analysis. We doubt that the U.S. communist movement is in a position to elaborate a definitive position on which of these tactical applications best serves the international working class.

The Less Immediate

The areas we have discussed obviously leave many crucial problems aside. Some specific characteristics of the various national questions in the U.S. (particularly the Afro-American and Chicano national questions), the nature and potential of the women's emancipation movement, many tactical questions of international line, the character and history of the CPUSA and the possibility or no of united action with it, the trade union question, the full strategy for revolution, just to name a few, all require attention. Though crucial when considered over the past and future course of the U.S. revolution, these questions do not have the same importance **at this time** as the problems we have dealt with in this section, and they therefore do not demand the same thoroughgoing resolution the latter problems require. Building a profound unity around the less immediate questions will in most cases become crucial for the maintenance of communist unity in a new situation (just as new situations will arise in which a shallow understanding of ultra-leftism, say, will not pose a serious problem in relation to the orders of the day). But their full resolution does not present the same urgency for forging communist unity today.

In other words, we think that it is not necessary to achieve fully developed positions on a number of important questions prior to communist unification, and this for two basic reasons. First, the two-line struggle in our movement concentrates itself on a relatively few problems, and there the movement will have to establish the ideological foundations for unity. On the basis of that unity, the communist forces can settle for more rudimentary positions on other problems. For instance, the two-line struggle has focused in practice and in theory less on the specific characteristics of the Afro-American people than on the general line taken towards the fight for reforms and democratic rights in the era of imperialism, including towards consistent democracy, of which the right to self-determination constitutes a particular case. Establishing the ideological basis for unification depends more on the resolution of these issues than on the debate between ill-supported

and poorly-understood positions on all the specific revolutionary problems presented by the Black people's national homeland. Second, while the absence of a high level of unity around certain questions will hinder the carrying out of our current tasks, less developed unity on other questions will not. For example, overcoming our isolation from the working class does turn on the general line pursued towards reformist leaderships in the mass struggle, but whether or not we adhere to the United Front Against Imperialism as the road to revolution will not affect advances on our current tasks in anywhere near the same way.

Further, we do not think it possible to achieve fully-developed positions on many questions in the absence of communist unity. The forces and practice necessary to resolve them does not lie within the grasp of the communist forces in our present state of disorganization and isolation. Marxist-Leninists have to disabuse themselves of the Utopian expectation that a well-grounded unity will emerge around these kinds of issues. Some, like certain features of the woman question and the Black and Chicano national questions, depend on a combination of difficult theoretical work, prolonged investigation and practical experience. The resolution of others, such as the history of the CPUSA and some features of international line, rests mainly on large-scale theoretical efforts necessitating an advanced division of labor. A detailed guide to action on still others, such as the trade union question, is inconceivable without coordinated mass work within major sectors of the trade union movement. A splintered, polarized communist movement cannot begin to address them in anything approaching a comprehensive way. For this reason, we do not believe that a comprehensive unity around these points should stand as a prerequisite to the organizational consolidation of Marxist-Leninists at this time. In these areas, we lack for experience to sum up, we lack for theoretical and practical resources to solve problems, and we will better be able to organize the ideological and practical struggle around them after we have united.

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Through reference to historical experiences of party-building, the previous section has aimed at determining what kinds of problems need to be solved in order to form a Marxist-Leninist Party, and how unity can be built around them in the absence of one. We have also maintained that the communist movement cannot definitively resolve many critical revolutionary questions in a pre-party period. Finally, we have advanced some tentative conclusions on which questions fall into which camp.

Doubtless many comrades will dispute the criteria we have proposed for evaluating the importance of ideological and political differences in the struggle for communist unification. Many will also disagree with our choice of the "burning questions." We recognize the limitations of our argument. Our overriding concern lies with contributing to a broad ideological struggle over the preconditions to party-formation, a debate we consider essential to forging Marxist-Leninist unity.

Debate over the preconditions for party-formation can provide a central focus to, and help organize, the ideological struggle at this time. But ideological struggle, however focused, will not by itself end the "left" sectarian period. Other forms of struggle and other forms of organization are required. To defeat "left" sectarianism, we need to create a Marxist-Leninist trend dedicated to that end. To build such a trend, we will have to link the fight against "left" opportunism to the one force capable of carrying that struggle through to the end: the proletarian vanguard. The defeat of the main cause of disunity will usher in a new party-building period, characterized by a relative unity of views. Having decided the divisive internal questions, the Marxist-Leninist forces can then concentrate their energies on engaging in widespread practical work and combating the mass influence of reformist and revisionist currents in the workers' movement. Unity in a single organization can come in this new period; it cannot come as long as the "left" line has hegemony in the Marxist-Leninist movement.