

The Trend's Party Building Task

Party building is the central task before the emerging Marxist-Leninist trend in the U.S. communist movement.

Party building is the trend's central task because this trend has no historical significance apart from its struggle to mature into a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. And such a party will never develop spontaneously, but can only be forged through the conscious and organized activity of Marxist-Leninists. Stating that party building is our central task does not mean that actually founding the party is necessarily on our immediate horizon; it does mean that all of our work must be focused around the process of bringing the party into being. Only this focus can lend coherence to our efforts to prepare the conscious elements to play a leading role in the class struggle as that struggle gathers steam in the turbulent years ahead. Without taking up party building as the central task, the activity of Marxist-Leninists will be diffuse, and amount to nothing more than self-cultivation or historically insignificant attempts to push forward this or that particular struggle of the spontaneous movement.

More concretely, the centrality of the trend's party building task is captured in the formulation that the central task before U.S. Marxist-Leninists today is the rectification of the general line of the U.S. communist movement and the re-establishment of the party. This formulation propels the communist elements to build a broad rectification movement embracing all the major aspects of communist work: the struggle for revolutionary theory; the struggle to unite communists on the basis of political line; and the struggle to lead the proletariat in its assault on the bourgeoisie (communist intervention in the day-to-day class struggle).

The particularities of this rectification movement are framed by the specific conditions of this pre-party period. Without a doubt, the ultimate goal of all of our work as communists is to lead the working class to the successful seizure of power and construction of socialism. However, the entire thrust of Marxist-Leninist theory and historical experience demonstrates that this cannot be accomplished unless the conscious elements are united in a party based upon scientific theory as concretized in a leading political line. When unity on such an advanced line is absent (and the lack of a party is nothing more than the organizational expression of this phenomenon), communist attempts to lead the working class inherently face qualitative limitations. This is the situation faced by U.S. Marxist-Leninists today, and it means that the main stress in rectification work must be given to developing revolutionary theory and forging unity on political line - precisely to forge a party capable of leading the class struggle in an effective, revolutionary manner.

Based on this party building line, a broad rectification movement has indeed taken shape within the trend. This movement takes concrete form through such institutions as the Line of March journal, the forums, discussion groups, conferences, and study projects organized by Line of March, the Marxist-Leninist Education Project (MLEP), and forms for communist intervention in the spontaneous labor, anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and women's movements. The rectification movement has acquired a nationwide character, involving hundreds of Marxist-Leninists in cities throughout the country. The rectification center in the Editorial Board of Line of March has become the only party building center

capable of taking responsibility for all aspects of the trend's party building work, and the rectification movement has replaced the previously dominant fusion/OCIC network as the defining force in the trend's party building motion.

The rise of the rectification line and movement, however, has not eliminated party building line struggle from the life of the trend. Differences over party building line still exist, and the struggle over these differences persists within the trend. However, this struggle now takes place in a new context and on a more advanced basis than in the trend's earlier years. Increasingly, differences over party building line are more starkly revealed to be, at root, differences over whether or not party building is the central task of the trend. At bottom, those views advanced as alternatives to the rectification line constitute, in one or another manner, vacillation on placing party building squarely as the trend's central task.

Such vacillations fall into two general types. First, are those lines that deny the centrality of party building because they oppose the Leninist conception of the party itself. Some trend comrades argue this position explicitly. For others, such as the Theoretical Review, opposition to the Leninist character of the party is not explicit, but implicit. In TR's case, it has led TR to steadily abandon struggle within the trend, and instead to seek a rapprochement with various social-democratic and Trotskyist forces that share TR's idealist approach to Marxism, anti-Soviet ideological stance, and non-revolutionary politics. This political motion, most sharply evident in TR's abandonment of any responsibility for party building, represents at root the fundamental contradiction between TR's Althusserian Marxism and Marxism-Leninism.

The second type of vacillation on the centrality of party building is the set of views which broadly fall under the heading of the fusion party building perspective. The heart of this perspective - in all its variations - is that communists cannot take up the task of party building in earnest until the spontaneous movement has reached an advanced level of development and, in the process, solves the basic problems of line, unity, and composition that confront the communists. In this manner, all versions of the fusion line relegate the communist forces to permanently tailing the spontaneous movement, liquidate the decisive role of the conscious element in party building, and underestimate when they do not ignore altogether the crucial tasks of developing revolutionary theory and uniting communists on the basis of political line.

Of course, since the collapse of the main fusion formations, the OCIC and the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC), in the wake of the disastrous Campaign Against White Chauvinism, the fusion line has been largely discredited. In fact, it is no longer possible to seriously advance fusion as a party building strategy without a host of qualifications and apologies. In this context, some fusion forces have chosen to make their vacillation on party building explicit: they argue that building the mass movement, not party building, is our central task, and they abandon the party building movement for various individualized forms of mass work. Other fusionists retain lip service to the centrality of party building, but pursue a political course that prioritizes building the most primitive forms of local organization over theoretical work and line struggle among communists, and even above national forms for intervention work. Justifying this backward course with the incorrect summation that the OCIC failed because of ultra-leftism rather than because of the fusion line's rightist fetish on composition and downplaying of political line, these comrades, to the extent that they remain active in

party building at all, have moved steadily to the periphery of trend life.

Given this political landscape in the trend, the main form of party building line struggle today is not a struggle between different organized centers with differing but well-developed strategies for party building, as the struggle between rectification and fusion was some years ago. Rather, it is mainly a struggle with individual trend comrades, whether disoriented OCIC veterans or new forces encountering the trend for the first time, to become active in trend life and take up party building work. It is the struggle to consolidate those forces whose politics objectively fall within the boundaries of the trend to self-consciously embrace the trend's lines of demarcation and take part in the party building movement. It is the struggle to combat the still prevalent anti-theoretical, workerist, and ultra-democratic prejudices within the trend, and to establish advanced Leninist standards of rigorous theoretical work, principled line struggle, and a professional approach to communist work at the core of the trend's existence. In short, it is the struggle over whether or not party building is indeed the trend's central task, and whether or not each individual Marxist-Leninist is going to organize his or her work around that task.

On the outcome of this struggle rests the future of the trend. Important challenges lie before us in the struggle to re-unite the communist movement and to take increased responsibility for the actual motion of the class struggle. These challenges can only be fully met by a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. This party can only come into being if U.S. Marxist-Leninists consciously go about building it; in other words, if U.S. Marxist-Leninists embrace party building as our central task.

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References:

"The Theory and Practice of the Rectification Movement" in Line of March #3

"The Marxist-Leninist Theory of Fusion and Its Present Day Distortions" in Line of March #4

"Althusserian Marxism - A Beginning Critique" in Line of March #6 and #7

Pamphlets from Line of March Publications:

Developing the Subjective Factor, Rectification vs. Fusion, and The OCIC's Phony War Against White Chauvinism and the Demise of the Fusion Line

From the PWOC:

Party Building - Against Revisionism and Dogmatism