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# Glossary

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**POLITICAL LINE** A general *political line* is the strategic and tactical orientation of struggle for socialist revolution, the basis of Leninist political practice. A general political line of the overall programmatic orientation which guides all the various practices of a communist organization. It is not merely the sum total of many specific political lines, but the essential and organic strategic conception of how to organize and prepare the masses for the seizure of state power in the specific *conjuncture* (q.v.) in which the organization finds itself. A general political line is given political-ideological specificity in a party program.

Such a general line, embodied in a party program and a tactical plan of work, would enable our movement to define itself by what it is for, not just what it is against. Such a general line would be the basis for unifying and directing all communist activity, building the party, and fusing communism with the workers' movement.

The exact features of such a general line for our movement cannot be predetermined: they must be forged in theoretical and political struggle. Three of the key requirements for the production of a truly scientific general political line are: (1) Knowledge of the character of the capitalist *social formation* (q.v.) and its central contradictions; (2) Knowledge of the general conditions under which these contradictions will and will not create a revolutionary situation; and (3) Knowledge of the role of communists in the development of these contradictions.

Political line is determined by an understanding of the general and particular social practices of society, grasped and transformed by theoretical practice and returned to the party in the form of a strategy and tactics to guide communist activity in each specific conjuncture.

The correctness of a political line is not determined like a religious tenet where the opposing views are labeled 'good' and 'evil' or in terms of black and white. Further, a political line is not set in stone without the ability to change based upon the testing and verification of its own practice, or without the ability to change based upon the continuing investigation of the movement of the social forces ushering in a new conjuncture. And lastly, a political line, by its very nature as a social intervention, can neither be perceived as completely correct nor as ever completely sufficient and adequate. Possessing a political line is not a protection from error.

Based upon this criteria, we can clearly see the political nature of a political line; it is *not* just the result of theoretical production, while on the other hand, it can not simply be reduced to politics. A political line is the result of the conjunction of a number of elements, the most important of which are theoretical production and previous political practice and struggle. Their combination enables us to break with the mechanical, metaphysical, empiricist and abstract formulations—shopping list programs—that have so plagued the communist movement. The full development (relatively speaking) of a political line can only flower when

all contending lines are debated openly, and where the best elements of each are fused into a coherent strategy on the basis of Marxist-Leninist principles, a scientific analysis of the conjuncture, and the political practice of the communist movement. The most important aspect of the struggle over contending political lines, previous to their adoption, is not a process whereby one line 'wins' and another 'loses', but rather the synthesis of the positive aspects of each so as to facilitate the advancement and development of the working class and its allies in the *class struggle* (q.v.); it is in this climate that a correct political line will blossom. [Sources: *Theoretical Review* Editorial Board, "An Introduction to Theoretical Practice," *TR* No. 4, p. 4; Communist Formation, "The Distinguishing Features of Leninist Practice," *TR* No. 4, p. 16; *Theoretical Review* Editorial Board, "Defining the Central Task for Party Building," *TR* No. 5, p. 2; Tucson M-L Collective, "Primacy of Theory and Political Line," *TR* No. 7, pp. 4-6; Harry Eastmarsh, "China's Great Leap Backward—A Review," *TR* No. 9, p. 29; Tucson and Boston *Theoretical Review* Boards, "The Party Building Line of the National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs," *TR* No. 11, pp. 4 & 39; Paul Costello, "Leninist Politics and the Struggle Against Economism," *TR* No. 15, p. 3.]

**POLITICAL PRACTICE** Communist *political practice* is organized on the basis of the scientific theory of Marxism-Leninism (historical materialism). It seeks to transform raw materials (social relations) into a determinate product (new social relations), and ultimately transform these social relations by revolution. It is predicated on the central role of *class struggle* (q.v.) in social activity and the struggle for working class hegemony; it requires an exact knowledge of the state and the balance of class and social contradictions in each *conjuncture* (q.v.).

Communist political practice requires that once the multiplicity of contradictions of a particular *social formation* (q.v.) are understood in their specific conjunctural articulation, and the possibilities for class struggle and communist activity ascertained, then the varied class interests of social groups can be understood, and the direction of a revolutionary working class strategy can be developed. This political practice entails a conscious intervention at all levels of the social formation in the unfolding of social contradictions. The goal is to attempt to determine the direction of development of the social formation, to predict the possibilities which are presented by each conjuncture, and to act upon them: that is, to understand them concretely and throw all the forces which can be mobilized behind the alternative most favorable to the working class and its allies and their future struggles.

Political practice has two main aspects, internal and external. Internal: the organizational consolidation and development of communist cadre. External: the intervention of communists, guided by *Marxist-Leninist theory* (q.v.) in the economic, political and ideological struggles of the working class and popular masses. Although the two aspects are linked together by a common general *political line* (q.v.), they are nonetheless distinct aspects of our political work.

The *internal aspect* of communist work embodied a number of elements: the first is the construction,

development, and consolidation of a communist organization to go beyond individual efforts. This development can only be assured by the study and practice of democratic centralism, criticism/self-criticism, unity-struggle-unity, "going against the tide," and other principles of organizational cohesion. The existence of a communist organizational form presupposes a high level of political and theoretical unity and an advanced level of communist consciousness, without which no communist organization could long exist. Therefore, cadre development must be a major element in the internal development of any communist organization. Cadre development primarily means that a careful and critical examination of the history, theory and politics embodied in Marxism-Leninism must be undertaken. Cadre development means breaking with the past practice of assigning cadre to nothing more than routine political work. It means training cadre as leaders, organizers, teachers, militants, and 'diplomats' to enable them, within the collective process, to intervene as communists in society. The process of cadre development opens to view the fact of 'uneven development' of cadre within communist organizations. The reasons are many and varied, including the effects of racial, sexual, and class oppression all of which demand that efforts be made to address such contradictions. Only by the full development of all cadre can a communist organization develop. Concomitant with organizational and cadre development is the advancement and development of theoretical and historical analysis necessary to develop political lines on the issue of communist practice and class struggle.

The hierarchical relation of these elements within internal political practice cannot be arbitrarily established; rather, the hierarchy of elements will be determined by the conjuncture. This means that the combination of elements will vary according to the characteristics of each, depending on, for example, the level of previous organization, the level of theoretical and practical experience, the level of cadre development, etc.

The *external aspect* of communist practice is first and foremost the struggle to win the working class and oppressed people to communism by fusing (q.v. *fusion*) communism with their organic movements for liberation. This process is a long term struggle which must build trust and confidence within the working class itself, and also with communist militants.

In the present period three priorities assert themselves in external political practice: building the mass struggles, recruitment, and cadre development. External political practice means the intervention of communists in mass activities through sustained contact with organizations and with those people who participate in them. This involvement in mass work serves a number of functions. First, participation should help to build these struggles, and give them a more conscious and militant character. Second, it enables contact with organizers and participants in mass organizations, who by their political practice may demonstrate their qualifications for recruitment to a communist organization. Third, mass organizations are the terrain in which communists practice their politics through the intervention of a political line. Fourth, mass organizations, trade unions, etc., are the areas in which political lines must be tested, rectified, and re-tested. Fifth, participation in mass organizations can serve to consolidate

ongoing political work, and develop solidarity among cadre based on common work. Sixth, it can help develop cadre and leadership on the basis of all-sided political practice. Finally, participation in mass struggles enables the fullest utilization of the variety of skills and experience that cadre possess which can serve to broaden the basis of intervention of communist politics.

Common to both aspects of political practice is ideological struggle. The form and content of this struggle is different in each aspect owing to their different nature, objectives, and fields of struggle. Because the dominant ideology not only shapes society as a whole, but also influences, and to varying degrees, shapes the lives of those who work within communist organizations; the struggles against racism and sexism, are not something we just carry on outside of communist organizations as external political practice. Rather, the struggles against racism and sexism must be an integral part of internal political practice. Ideological struggle should take up the fight against other non-communist notions and practices (i.e., individualism, competitiveness, elitism, etc.) as well. However, we must be very careful how such struggles are carried on within *any* organizational form. For example, those struggles must be handled differently in a communist organization, where people have dedicated their lives to struggling against oppression and have agreed to adhere to the principles of criticism/self-criticism and democratic centralism, than in a mass organization of workers. Further, differing styles of work apply when dealing with contradictions among the people than with enemies of the people. Finally, each of these struggles is rendered ineffective in any organization if there is no prior framework within which to situate these struggles in relationship to the structural occurrence of special oppression in society as a whole.

Finally, there is a need to disseminate Marxist-Leninist ideology to act as a catalyst to develop revolutionary class consciousness. On the one hand, we have the spontaneous movement of the masses for liberation that appears in a number of different forms and struggles in reaction to exploitation and oppression. This may take form in labor unions, the struggle for national liberation, the struggle for equality for women, etc. Since these struggles arise within a specific social formation that is dominated by an ideology that benefits capitalism, they can also reflect that domination by posing the issue and its solution entirely within a capitalist *problematic* (q.v.).

On the other hand, Marxist-Leninist theory is a revolutionary theory, which enables the working class to understand its oppression and provides direction for its liberation. The function of the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideology is the combining, or fusing, of the revolutionary theory of Marxism with those spontaneous movements. Further, this dissemination must provide leadership and direction to the masses, but not be so advanced as to separate itself from the masses. On the other hand, this dissemination of Marxist ideology must be sufficiently in tune with the needs, wants, desires, and demands of the masses; yet be sufficiently advanced so that it does not liquidate its revolutionary character and tail after the existing ideology.

To catalyze and disseminate class consciousness the communist movement must constantly intervene in ideological struggle. This is a continuing process which must

be evaluated, tested, and reformulated at every conjuncture to insure that Marxist-Leninist ideology is not reduced to a sterile formula, unrelated to the lives of the masses, and to insure against the incorporation of ideas hostile to it. The dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideology must constantly refer back to the theory and science of Marxism-Leninism to insure the proper direction and orientation in ideological struggle. Thus, the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideology is a constant process incorporating both the *internal* and *external* aspects of communist *political practice*. And this process is one which is in constant movement between its formulation internally, its testing externally, its rectification internally, and finally referred back to external political practice in a relatively more advanced form. [Sources: Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, pp. 167 & 253; "Toward a Genuine . . ." p. 22; *Theoretical Review* Editorial Board, "The Critique of Eurocommunism and the Party Building Movement," *TR* No. 6, p. 6; Tucson M-L Collective, "Primacy of Theory and Political Line," *TR* No. 7, p. 7; Paul Costello, "Leninist Politics and the Struggle Against Economism," *TR* No. 15, p. 8; Boston Political Collective (ML), "Points of Unity," *TR* No. 16, pp. 3-10; Mao Zedong, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People"; Neil Eriksen, "Theoretical Aspects of Political Practice," *TR* No. 8, p. 3.]

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<sup>11</sup>The question at issue here were debated by Paul Sweezy and Bernard Chavance in *Monthly Review* 29(1), May 1977, 1-19. Goldfield and Rothenberg fail to mention this debate although it helps clarify some of the theoretical problems they raise in regard to state capitalism. See also a subsequent response by Chavance, "Remarques sur la reponse de Paul Sweezy," *Les Temps Modernes*, Oct. 1977, 534-539.

<sup>12</sup>Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (NLB, London, 1975), 137.

<sup>13</sup>Chavance, *op cit.*, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup>A good discussion of this complex but crucial point will be found in Ben Fine and Laurence Harris, *Reading Capital* (Macmillan, London, 1979); see also Ben Fine and Laurence Harris, "Controversial Issues in Marxist Economic Theory," *Socialist Register 1976* (Merlin Press, London, 1976).

<sup>15</sup>A guide through the minefield of the *Grundrisse* is Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'*, (Pluto Press, London, 1977). It must, however, be used with care.

<sup>16</sup>*Economic Calculation and Forms of Property*, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup>This formulation is a summary of a well-known passage from Volume III of *Capital*. It will be found on pp. 791-92 of the 1971 Progress Publishers edition.

<sup>18</sup>For a detailed analysis explaining why surplus-value is an abstraction that cannot be "seen," see Ira Gerstein, "Production Circulation and Value: the Significance of the 'Transformation Problem' in Marx's Critique of Political Economy," *Economy and Society* 5(3), August 1976, 243-291.

<sup>19</sup>Goldfield and Rothenberg do not recognize the significance of the form taken by the surplus product in determining the nature of the social formation, so it may be unfair to hold them to this formulation. In fact, I think that the question is still open in regard to the Soviet Union, at least in the sense that the work necessary to prove it is still to be done; *Economic Calculation and Forms of Property* is the most advanced discussion I have seen. In any event, it is one thing to say that capitalist categories are present in

socialism; it is another to say that the form of the surplus product is one of these categories.

<sup>20</sup>The formulation is sloppy. Presumably Goldfield and Rothenberg mean maximization of *profit*, not maximization of *surplus value*.

<sup>22</sup>In Poland, where the level of working class struggle is much higher than in the Soviet Union, strikes are generally national in form and are directed against the political authority and aspects of the plan.

<sup>23</sup>*New York Times*, 8/8/80.

<sup>24</sup>Phillip Grossman, "The Soviet Government's Role in Allocating Industrial Labor," in Arcadius Kahan and Blair Ruble, *Industrial Labor in the USSR* (Pergamon Press, NY, 1979). This volume, which is not cited by Goldfield and Rothenberg, contains a wealth of useful material on the Soviet working class.

<sup>25</sup>The difference between stratification and class is elaborated in James Stolzman and Herbert Gamberg, "Marxist Class Analysis Versus Stratification Analysis as General Approaches to Social Inequality," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, XVIII, 1973-1974, 105-125.

<sup>26</sup>Murray Yanowitch, *Social and Economic Inequality in the Soviet Union* (M. E. Sharpe, White Plains, 1977); Mervyn Mathews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1972); Mervyn Mathews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1978). This last reference is the best examination of the life of the Soviet elite I have seen. Goldfield and Rothenberg do not cite it. Of course, all of these works are marred by the fact that they are studies of stratification, not class. On the other hand, the mere fact that academic sociological techniques designed to study Western capitalist societies are so easily transferred to the study of the Soviet Union is a significant point.

<sup>27</sup>Murray Yanowitch, *op. cit.*, 9, 10.

<sup>28</sup>The point is made by Poulantzas, *op. cit.*, p. 49; a good discussion of Marx's use of abstraction is found in Derek Sayer, *Marx's Method* (Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, 1979).

<sup>29</sup>It is not at all clear what Engels had in mind by saying the economy is "ultimately determining." The best discussion of this is Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," *For Marx* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1969), 87-129, where a distinction is made between the "dominant" element and "determination in the last instance." In any event, Engels' statement does not allow for the economic reductionism of Goldfield and Rothenberg's text.

<sup>30</sup>A detailed discussion of the reasons why politics takes precedence over economics in the construction of socialism is found in the Proletarian Unity League's book, *On the "Progressive Role" of the Soviet Union and Other Dogmas* (United Labor Press, P.O. Box 1744, Manhattanville Station, New York, NY 10027; \$1.50), 46-48.

<sup>31</sup>Goldfield seems to be aware that the Variants are not exactly the same thing as theories of capitalist restoration when he writes: "Those who hold the Political Variant, as well as certain proponents of the Economic Variant, assert that the Soviet Union is state capitalist. (*The Organizer*, Oct. 1980; my emphasis.) There is no further mention of those proponents of the Economic Variant who hold to the state capitalism thesis, however.

<sup>32</sup>See, for example, Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism," *New Left Review* 127, May-June 1981, 66-95.

<sup>33</sup>This point is made quite forcefully by the Boston Study Group; see above, note 8.

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