

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

The previous five chapters come down to this: forging the unity of the Marxist-Leninists and welding them to the working class requires putting an end to the "left" sectarian period. In this last chapter, we will examine some of the forms of ideological, political, and organizational struggle necessary to achieve this objective.

The current divisions in the communist movement do not result from the corrosive and centrifugal effects of "left" opportunism alone. They also reflect ideological and political disarray over what lies between the present disorganization and unity in a single Party or central pre-party form. Opinions range from the view that very little need be

accomplished before a Party can be formed to those views which exhaustively enumerate the entire range of pre-revolutionary tasks and demand their completion before any Party sees the light of day. This disarray extends to the conduct of the ideological struggle among Marxist-Leninists.

Although the progress of the U.S. communist movement demands the unification of our poorly-trained, badly-organized forces into a disciplined, well-equipped fighting battalion, division weakens our ranks and dissipates our energies. Rather than concentrating attention on one or two key issues, and marshalling forces accordingly, the ideological struggle ranges over the entire spectrum of questions confronting the U.S. and international revolutionary movements. Since no one group or even collection of groups has the theoretical or political resources to wage struggle on this all-encompassing scale, discussion takes on an episodic and shallow character, extensive and speculative precisely where it needs to be intensive and well-documented, sloganizing or exhorting when it needs to persuade and organize.

To overcome this disorganization, we have to centralize the ideological struggle. Centralizing the ideological struggle means more than developing common vehicles for debate; more importantly, it entails giving the discussion a common focus. Our several "Left-Wing Communist" parties believe their party programs have organized the ideological struggle; other forces concentrate on political line; still others emphasize joint work on the future Party Program, the "**Iskra** Principle," or even forms of activity or organization. In our view, ideological struggle over the preconditions for party-formation provides this focus. It gives us a context for the unfolding of a determined struggle against "left" opportunism. Generally recognized preconditions to the formation of a party will act as a barricade to further voluntarist party-building adventures, and bring out the "left" sectarian features of many current party-building lines. Most importantly, ideological struggle over the preconditions for party-formation can produce the rudiments of a guiding line for the communist movement.

Without an overall view of the preconditions for party-formation, sections

of the communist movement take on tasks which cannot be accomplished given our present forces and level of organization, or give the wrong emphasis to other tasks, while leaving immediate problems in the lurch. This haphazardness indicates an absence of "Party spirit." It shows that the communist movement has not grasped firmly the construction of a vanguard Party as its **central strategic task**, which the resolution of all other tasks is both dependent on and subordinate to. We can change this situation only when we have determined which tasks necessarily precede the formation of a united Marxist-Leninist Party, and which tasks do not.

A task is central or principal where the resolution of all other tasks is both dependent upon and subordinate to its resolution. Every step of a real movement lends a particular content to Leninist phrases like "settling accounts," "lines of demarcation," and "shades of difference." The needs of a given period will demand a "settling of accounts" with a trend which up until then had served the common cause, despite the shades of difference or even clear lines of demarcation which existed previously between it and a more Marxist-Leninist

position. The needs of a given period will also demand that certain differences be relegated to a secondary place or even left in suspense.

(1) In the first instance, **the U.S. communist movement must set about drawing a "firm line of demarcation" between those issues which it must resolve in order to unify, and those issues whose thoroughgoing resolution can and should await unification.** In our view, this line is essential for "settling accounts" with those deviations which threaten to divert the Marxist-Leninists away from the earliest possible formation of a single, unified Communist Party.

We cannot build a vanguard Communist Party, nor prepare the proletariat for full-scale revolutionary battles, without distinguishing at every point between those tasks which the actual development of subjective and objective conditions has posed and those whose solution depends upon conditions which do not presently exist. In the present period, Marxist-Leninists must evaluate each of the many burning questions in a Party spirit, asking if division on this issue prevents organizational unity. Where it does, we need to determine how that issue might be resolved theoretically and politically

such that organizational unity can take place. Issues which remain "open" (i.e., they cannot be **settled** one way or another in the near future, given the present level of organization or a lack of practical revolutionary experience) cannot serve as barriers to communist unity. In other words, to build a Party, the communist movement needs unity on what is necessary in order to unify; how it is possible to reach unity around those questions; and what organization of the movement will be necessary to achieve that unity.

The present ideological struggle does not have this directed character; it does not put politics, **communist unity** politics, in command. Ideological struggle in any pre-party period should aim at determining how substantial differences are, and whether they can find a place in the same Party. The absence of such an approach marks the "left" sectarian period. Armed with an utterly abstract conception of every "shade of difference," frantically "drawing strict lines of demarcation," "left" sectarians treat every question as a matter of principle, give equal weight to any and all revolutionary problems, and in practice settle none of them. No revolutionary organization can form or

maintain itself in the face of such obstinate, splittist tactics.

In acting as if differences cannot be resolved in a Party, the "left" sectarians assume that Parties are brittle things, that an error committed or not immediately recognized is an error persisted in and consolidated. This assumption betrays their own intentions, like the thief crying "Stop, thief!" Where "left" opportunists usurp the leadership of a Party and attempt to implement their views on inner-Party struggle, disintegration and demoralization will result. But the history of the international communist movement, a history which includes many Parties born with contradictory, incomplete, or incorrect orientations, does not bear out the view that communist Parties cannot rectify their mistakes, even grave mistakes persevered in over a long period of time. Here again the "left" communist perspective derives from an anarchist source, which itself merely parodies standard bourgeois opinion. Anarchists habitually rail against the "stupid," "mechanical" discipline of Leninist Parties, and, despite the historical evidence to the contrary, maintain that Leninists can never reorient themselves in the light of new theoretical or political developments. When

consistently implemented, the "left" line will result in something like the anarchist "movement" itself, or its twin, the Trotskyite "movement."(2)

To sum up: the current situation has placed the defeat of "left" sectarianism before the communist movement as our **immediate task**. The communist movement can focus the ideological struggle against "left" sectarianism by launching a broad, democratic, organized discussion on the preconditions for party-formation. By democratic we mean not only that every communist organization and individual should have their say, but also that we should enlist where possible the already constituted parties in this debate as well, allowing them to argue what conditions permit the formation of a single leadership for the proletariat, and how they fulfilled those conditions. By organized we mean that every group and individual should struggle to make it a concerted effort, and fight to centralize the discussion, summing up results achieved and directing energies along the most fruitful paths. This discussion should concentrate on identifying the key roadblocks to communist unity in the

confidence that a single Party can dispose of the other obstacles to a fully functioning vanguard Party far more quickly than the present separate organizations can. In so doing, the debate should differentiate between what the communist forces must and can accomplish short of organizational unity, and what we must accomplish one day but cannot in our present circumstances.

Footnotes

1. Unless one accepts such a view, the history of, say, Lenin's alliances with Legal Marxism against the Narodniks, with developing Mensheviks against the Economists, etc., become unintelligible mistakes in judgment or else the effects of an opportunist pragmatism.
2. We use the term "movement" guardedly, since neither ideology has proven capable of sustaining either a mass movement or an effective organization. Instead, each lives at the margins of the workers' movement, sniping at and disrupting the real leadership of the proletariat,

perpetually "ready" for that magical moment when the earth splits apart, the proletarian vanguard collapses, and the True Critics ascend to leadership.