

Proletarian Unity League

2, 3, Many Parties of a New Type? Against the Ultra-Left Line

Chapter 3: "Left" Opportunism in Party-Building Line E. A Caricature of the Struggle Against Modern Revisionism

The first requirement of any party-building line is that it take into account the real history of the communist movement and correctly identify the **present period** in the struggle for the Party. This is neither 1902, 1920, 1928, nor even 1963. From this analysis, the Marxist-Leninist forces can elaborate a strategy to advance party-formation in this period of strategic significance and adopt tactics conforming to their strategic perspective.

Many of the most influential forces in our movement have taken the opposite tack. As we showed in the previous chapter, they have drawn superficial comparisons between our communist movement in its present period and other communist movements which grew up in very different circumstances. Not only do they exaggerate both the strength of revisionism and the strength of the Marxist-Leninist movement, but they maintain that contradictions **within** the communist movement mirror those **between** the communist movement and the CPUSA. According to this **third thesis** of our "Lefts," these differences oppose Marxism-Leninism to right opportunism, take the form of consolidated trends, and have an antagonistic character.

The communist movement exists objectively. We can define its emergence as a distinct process both historically and according to a series of common political positions, a rough ideological unity, a particular class basis, a particular two-line struggle. If its ideological and political disunity has an objective existence, so too does its unity against revisionism and for revolution. Right conciliationism dismisses the first; "left" opportunism dismisses the second. Within our movement, the exaggeration of the struggle against real or imagined deviations which "conciliate," act as the "fig leaf" for or "tail" of revisionism has reached dangerous proportions. Elaborating a correct ideological and political line against various deviations is indeed serious business. Our present-day "centrist-chasers" are not engaged in it: "these people made a caricature of revolutionary Marxism, and a pastime of the struggle against 'Centrism.'" (Lenin, CW 32, p. 517)

Behind this practice lies a subjectivist definition of the communist movement a definition based on the ideological prejudices, desires, and sectarian

interests of petit-bourgeois revolutionism. This subjectivist bias shows up in two current descriptions of large sections of the communist movement--the supposed "revisionism" of the October League and the presumed existence of a consolidated "centrist trend"--and each rests upon an ahistorical conception of the development of the anti-revisionist forces.

If we want to see where the "left" deviation leads, a good place to start is the Workers Viewpoint Organization. The WVO has a knack for drawing systematic "left" opportunist conclusions from otherwise scattered "left" errors. And although WVO has earned itself a great deal of hostility among "Left-Wing" comrades, its "viewpoints" constitute a consistently developed, extreme expression of the far more persuasive ultra-left trend. In the pages of their newspaper we find,

"Modern revisionism is the main danger in the international communist movement. Who was its main international representative? Krushchov. But to talk about Krushchov revisionism without talking about how it manifests itself in the U.S. communist movement amounts to talking without saying anything...Klonsky revisionism is the Krushchov revisionism in our movement, the OL Klonskyism... The OL as representatives of the left spectrum of social-democracy in the U.S., manifests:

"The trend to get closer to join with social democrats, the whole treacherous line of action of the modern revisionists..." (**The PLA in Battle with Modern Revisionism**, p. 285) (**WV**, August 1976, pp. 5, 14)

The starting point for WVO's argument reveals the utterly "left" subjectivism of their position:

"To talk of freedom of criticism and of Bernsteinism as a condition for uniting the **Russian** Social-Democrats and not to explain how **Russian** Bernsteinism has manifested itself and what particular fruits it has born amounts to talking with the aim of saying nothing." (Lenin, **WITBD?**, CW 5, p. 360; as quoted in **WV**, **ibid.**)

As Lenin demonstrated in great detail, Bernsteinism constituted the German example of an international opportunist trend **within** the social-democracy of the Second International. Bernsteinism was not, for example, the German expression of an international opportunist trend within the **First** International (there the major two-line struggle occurred between Marx and a "left" anti-Marxist trend, anarchism) or within the Third International. And anyone would find it ridiculous to imply otherwise--after all, Bernsteinism represented the ideological expression of a particular stratum of the working class and the petit-bourgeoisie in a particular historical situation.

Krushchov emerged in the Soviet Union as the chief representative of the bourgeoisie **within** a Communist Party which exercised state power and had done so for almost forty years. Gus Hall heads up the modern revisionist party in the U.S. and represents U.S. Krushchovism. But to go on to equate Krushchov with even someone like Gus Hall means denying the specific class bases of different, if allied, revisionisms. It means confusing the craven agents of the bourgeoisie with the bourgeoisie itself:

"In a period of democratic revolution...there were also opportunists, revisionists, and chieftains of various opportunist lines inside the Party; they were agents of the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes in the Party, but for the bourgeoisie as a whole, they were merely its appendages. Since the landlord and comprador-capitalist classes held the reins of government at that time, the nucleus and the main force of the bourgeoisie, its headquarters and its chief political representatives were outside and not inside the Party...

"The principal contradiction in the entire historical period of socialism is the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. With the balance of class forces having undergone a change, the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie finds expression in the Party in an increasingly profound and acute way. Thus the capitalist-roaders emerge in the Party as the force at the core of the bourgeoisie as a whole and become the main danger in subverting the proletarian dictatorship and restoring capitalism." (Fang Kang, "Capitalist-Roaders Are the Bourgeoisie Inside the Party," **Peking Review** No. 25, 1976, pp. 7-8)

But the WVO goes even further. They look for a Krushchov in the present-day anti-revisionist movement. They refuse to analyze the objective historical processes which gave rise to Krushchov in the Soviet Union, to modern revisionist parties in countries like the U.S., and to anti-revisionist movements in both. Following this method, they do not admit that the U.S. communist movement constitutes a distinct historical event, one just as different from the communist movement of the 'forties and 'fifties as the Third International was from the Second. As a consequence, the nature of errors or deviations becomes completely obscured, and WVO finishes by equating error anywhere with error everywhere, "left" opportunism with the class ideology of the Soviet bourgeoisie. According to WVO's logic, Soviet Marxist-Leninists cannot criticize Krushchov without talking about the Krushchov within their developing, illegal communist movement. Finally, the WVO concludes by describing the October League, a minority section of a small, fragmented communist movement in a country where the monopoly bourgeoisie quite evidently rules, as "capitalist roaders still on the capitalist road."¹

As a further example of the fundamental misconceptions about the nature of the anti-revisionist movement, let us consider the argument that a "consolidated 'centrist' trend has emerged in our movement and is actively spreading the line of conciliation to revisionism and social-imperialism under the cloak of Marxism-Leninism." (Organizing Committee, **op. cit.**) The Organizing Committee goes on to list five characteristics of this trend:

"...this trend openly promotes the view that the Soviet Union is a socialist country and portrays Soviet aggression in the Third World as "proletarian internationalism..."

"**The Guardian** has been in the forefront of the calls for "united action" with the revisionists, and has viciously attacked the genuine Marxist-Leninists throughout the world and in the U.S. for making a principled break in theory and practice with the revisionists..."

"**The Guardian**, under the thinly-veiled disguise of "opening up discussion on China's foreign policy," has viciously slandered the proletarian dictatorship in China and the line and leadership of the CCP.

"This "centrist" trend has also been characterized by the worst forms of chauvinism--echoing the revisionist line that the national question in the U.S. has been resolved through the economic development of imperialism..."

"...it has been the "centrists" who have most actively upheld the "backwardness" of the movement as a cover for their own anti-party stand." (Ibid.)

The first question is not, does the **Guardian** make these errors, but rather what constitutes a "consolidated centrist trend," and does such a thing exist in today's anti-revisionist movement?

The OL/OC assumes that whatever stands somewhere between a Marxist-Leninist position and a modern revisionist position constitutes "centrism." But this assumption distorts the real meaning of "centrism."

"Centrism must not be regarded as a spatial concept: the Rights, say, sitting on one side, the "Lefts" on the other, and the Centrists in between. Centrism is a political concept. Its ideology is one of adaptation, of subordination of the interests of the proletariat to the interests of the petit-bourgeoisie **within one common party...**

"Centrism was a phenomenon that was natural in the Second International of the period before the war. There were Rights (the majority). Lefts

(without quotation marks), and Centrists, whose whole policy consisted in embellishing the opportunism of the Rights with Left phrases and subordinating the Lefts to the Rights.

“What, at that time, was the policy of the Lefts, of whom the Bolsheviks constituted the core? It was one of determinedly fighting the Centrists, of fighting for a split with the Rights...and of organizing a new, revolutionary International....Why was it possible that there could arise at that time such an alignment of forces within the Second International and such a policy of the Bolsheviks? ...Because the Second International was at that time the party of a **bloc** of proletarian and petit-bourgeois interests serving the interests of the petit-bourgeois social-pacifists, social-chauvinists... Because the Bolsheviks were obliged at that time to advocate the idea of a split, for otherwise the proletarians could not have organized their own monolithic Marxist party...They (the Social-Democrats) had one underlying class basis for the party. We (the Communists) have an entirely different underlying basis. (Stalin, **CW 11**, pp. 293-95)

In other words, centrism constitutes a form of revisionism, and advocates unity with revisionism both politically and organizationally. Merely taking a position mid-way between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism does not qualify as "centrism" in the strict sense of the term, even where this position leads practically to subordinating Marxist-Leninist politics to revisionist politics.

A Centrist Trend?

Like the WVO, then, the OL claims that the ideological and political struggle within the communist movement has led to the emergence of a consolidated right opportunist or revisionist **trend**. In support of this claim, however, they offer nothing more than a series of criticisms of the "centrism" of some isolated positions. To use the term **trend** demands more exact proof:

“We can call a **trend** only a definite sum of political ideas which have become well-defined in regard to all the most important questions of **both** the revolution...and the counter-revolution...As for small groups not representing any trend--there have been plenty during this period, just as there were plenty before. To confuse a trend with minor groups means condemning oneself to **intrigue** in Party politics. The emergence of unprincipled tiny groups, their ephemeral existence, their efforts to have "their say," their "relations" with each other as separate powers--all this is the basis of the **intrigues** taking place abroad...” (Lenin, **CW 17**, pp. 271-72)

Besides "a definite sum of political ideas," the existence of a trend further requires a definite social basis. A "consolidated 'centrist' trend" can only refer to an integral collection of centrist (revisionist) "political ideas which have become well-defined in regard to all the most important questions of **both** the revolution ...and the counter-revolution." Moreover, these centrist political ideas must represent the views of a definite social stratum-- liberal-leaning intellectuals, trade union reformers, and the like--who will have embraced these views as their own. In other words, these centrist political ideas must have transformed themselves into a material force.

The "left" line in the communist movement exists as such a force--as an ultra-left **trend**. This trend advances a consistently "left" opportunist line on all the most important questions of the revolution (party-building, strategy and tactics, the national questions, the woman question, etc.) and the counter-revolution (fascism, the restriction of democratic rights, modern revisionism, etc.).² It has a definite world outlook--the semi-anarchist version of bourgeois ideology--which corresponds to the **spontaneous** class instincts of definite social strata--radicalized students and intellectuals and revolutionary but unstable proletarian elements. Representatives of these forces have taken up this ideology as their own and spread it relatively widely among these strata, giving rise to the ultra-left, or petit-bourgeois revolutionist trend. Further, this trend has sought to consolidate its ideological influence in organizational form and organizationally is made up of all those groups in which one or another "shade" of the "left" line has gained an undisputed hegemony.

In reaction to the "left" trend, and owing to the influence of modern revisionism, Right errors have inevitably appeared in the communist movement. But historically, though some of the larger Marxist-Leninist organizations have deviated towards the Right, they have not managed to elaborate a consistently centrist or revisionist line. "Left" revisionism, not centrist revisionism, has claimed the POC, the PLP, and other early CP split-offs; and conciliationism towards "left" revisionism, not towards modern revisionism, has marked the RU/RCP, the OL, WVO, and other groups in or close to the "Revolutionary Wing" and, in a semi-Trotskyite form, the CLP. Isolated groups of students and revolutionary intellectuals have set forth relatively consistent centrist ideas in some cases. But they have not succeeded in merging these ideas with a definite social stratum, for reasons related to the strength of ultra-leftism and because the communist movement as it presently exists lacks the material connection with such a social stratum which would allow a centrist **trend** to emerge. By the same token, the lack of material connection with a definite social stratum--the best elements of the proletariat--has so far prevented a Marxist-Leninist **trend** from emerging.

In the final analysis, the ideological unity of the communist forces is a unity of opposites defined by the two-line struggle in the Marxist-Leninist movement. At the present time, this two-line struggle takes the form mainly of a fight between Marxism-Leninism and "left" opportunism. But the existence of two basic lines does not necessarily mean the existence of two definite trends. Outside the ultra-left trend, the communist movement consists largely of small groups who do not represent any **trend**, but who do represent in the main either a Marxist-Leninist line or a Rightist line, or an eclectic mixture of ultra-left and Rightist positions. To defeat the "left" trend, and create the theoretical and practical conditions for the formation of a Marxist-Leninist Party, the groups which mainly base themselves on proletarian ideology will have to establish roots among the working class vanguard and create an authentic Marxist-Leninist **trend**.

The above considerations lead to only one conclusion: that a "consolidated 'centrist' trend" has not emerged in the communist movement. The Marxist-Leninists do not divide into a clearly defined "centrist trend" and the OL's revolutionary trend, any more than they divide into the "revisionist" OL and that "irreversible historical trend," the WVO, or into the CLP and the "new left." Doubtless some true centrists have concealed themselves in the movement, just as there are doubtless some "left" revisionists among those who have unearthed the "centrist trend." But Marxist-Leninists will not isolate the true centrists by railing on about consolidated centrist trends. The Bay Area Communist Union puts the problem very well:

When our forces are small, our ability to play an effective independent role or influence the mass action is correspondingly small. Therefore, to make a principle of remaining separate with only our own forces, however, would assure the CP or other such opportunists of unopposed leadership of many mass activities and probably of a good section of the masses...The principle here is to expose the revisionists and maintain our political independence. The tactic is how best to do it.

"...more forces will almost certainly develop who are not solidly in the revisionist camp or the anti-revisionist camp and who are not convinced that working with the revisionists is impossible. So many on the Left are fond of substituting phrases and formulas for an analysis that they probably vacillate here between defining these forces as "centrists," who Lenin said should be isolated, or "middle forces," who we should win over. This kind of question cannot be approached in a static and ahistorical way. It may take years of experience and struggle to differentiate those who, in fact, can be won over, or who at least we can gain essential programmatic unity with, from the "centrists" who, while posing as either "unifiers" or "non-committed," are in essential unity with the line of the revisionists. (We have reservations about

even using the term "centrist..." "Centrists" never meant those who were merely unconvinced between the Marxist and revisionist forces...)" (**Beginning Analysis**, pp. 55-56)

If Marxist-Leninists denounce whole sections of the movement as "centrist trends," then they abandon many honest communists to the true centrists. Just as exaggerating the influence of revisionism will only strengthen revisionism, so conjuring up a "centrist trend" means strengthening as yet isolated centrist elements. Instead communists should pursue a determined united front policy towards those who hold one or another "centrist-like" perspective.

Footnotes

¹ Of course, given the hysterical, self-contradictory hodge-podge the WVO slaps together in the guise of a "theory," it is hard to take any particular analysis seriously. The WVO has proven itself quite capable of describing the OL alternately as right opportunist (a deviation within the communist movement), revisionist (a trend outside the communist movement), social-democratic (a trend separate from both revisionism and the communist movement), and capitalist roaders still on the capitalist road.

² While the "left" trend advances a consistently "left" line, the individual "left" groups themselves often adopt very inconsistent positions, within a general ultra-left framework. For example, consider the OL's "no unity of action with the revisionists." The OL/OC assumes that a Marxist-Leninist position on this issue exists; whoever has unity of action with the revisionists in some situations is therefore a "centrist." But what is the OL's consistent position? In April 1975, the Vice Chairperson and another CC member wrote that, "In the OL's view, making a thorough and complete break, including an organizational break with the revisionists, is not a 'momentary tactic' as Silber calls it, but a question of principle." By September of that same year, no united action with the revisionists had become the OL's "tactical line." (**The Call**) The difference is significant: if no unity of action is a tactic, then it is appropriate to some conditions and not to others. In that case the OL would have to explain why that tactic corresponds to our conditions, in which we face not the CPSU proposing "united action" around Vietnam, but a small revisionist party light-years from state power. The OL would also be forced to analyze international or U.S. experience over the last ten years on this matter, showing how this tactic, and not those proposed by Lenin towards the social-chauvinist parties of the Second International, advances Marxist-Leninist influence and

undermines revisionism. We pointed out these inconsistencies in our pamphlet, **On the October League's Call for a New Communist Party**, Feb. 1976. The OL/OC "responds" by lapsing into complete ambiguity. They identify "no united action with the revisionists" with "making a principled break in theory and practice with the revisionists." Does making a "principled break in theory and practice" mean revolutionizing one's theory and practice? If so, there can be no argument. But that's also no argument for or against a particular set of anti-revisionist tactics towards the revisionist.