

Road to Revolution 4.5

Smash Reformism -- Fight for Communism

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Communists have struggled for many years over how to win the fight for communism. Since Marx first called for a society "from each according to ability, to each according to need" this vision has inspired hundreds of millions. It has been the driving force in history. But it has also raised the problem: how do we win? The effort to build a revolutionary movement capable of creating communism while still working under the powerful grip of capitalism is clearly no small or simple task.

Despite false starts and setbacks, we remain convinced the working class will realize its revolutionary potential. Worldwide, communism is closer today than we recognize. This is in part because of the resounding failure of capitalism. More importantly, it's because of the unrelenting drive of communists to lead and to learn, to evaluate and correct ourselves.

Communism is what is new and developing. It has the disadvantage of being part unknown, not yet fully discovered. On the other hand, there is much experience to draw on. The process of discovering the new and discarding the old gives communism its richness, its vitality.

Marx and Engels studied the French Revolution and took the movement to the left by showing that only workers' dictatorship could bring about true equality. They used the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 to draw conclusions about smashing the bourgeois state.

In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin broke with economism and the concept of bour-

geois parties. The Bolshevik revolution proved that workers could seize and hold political power. The tremendous contribution of the Stalin leadership was a resolute fight to establish the proletarian dictatorship. The Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) highlighted the struggle against revisionism.

Our own history, like that of our predecessors, has been a series of qualitative moves to the left. Our Party was born out of the breakdown of the old communist movement. We have been compelled to explain the failure of socialism and the subsequent restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and China. We have broken with nationalism. We have rejected the separation of state and Party. This struggle to expose and overcome revisionism (the eradication of the fundamentals of Marxism) has been our guiding principle. Every one of our breaks represents yet another halting step towards communism.

Most recently, in 1982 we published *Road to Revolution 4* (RR4). We described socialism as an aspect of opportunism within the communist movement. We concluded that the cardinal error of communists, including ourselves, had been the fight to establish socialism as a stage, the prelude to the communist stage of society. We declared socialism to be fundamentally flawed, inevitably a failure.

Our evaluation has been confirmed by the collapse of the old international communist movement, which has abandoned even the pretense of building a communist society. RR4 enabled our Party to survive the avalanche of anti-communism triggered

by the death of the old movement. We even grew modestly within the U.S. and in other areas of the world.

The imperialists boast that Marxism-Leninism is dead. But we can state proudly that our Party kept the Red Flag flying after the revisionists threw it in the mud. Communism lives!

It is capitalism that is dying. In its death throes, in its fight to survive, capitalism increasingly oppresses the working class. No worker is spared from the rulers' intensified exploitation and oppression.

The working class is increasingly unable to "live in the old way." The capitalists can no longer "rule in the old way." Lenin defined these as two of the conditions necessary for revolution. The third -- the need of the capitalists to mobilize the masses, as in imperialist war -- is rapidly developing. But to make a revolution under these conditions, Lenin added, there must be a strong communist Party with ties to the working class.

It is therefore now more vital than ever to place communist ideas at the head of our "long march."

Put RR4 Into Practice

The adoption of RR4 was a major departure from the past. However, we failed to appreciate its full significance. While our line changed dramatically, our practice remained more same than different. We weren't critical enough of our own efforts. We continued to make the opportunist error of blending the long-term goal of communism with the short-term practice of militant reform of capitalism. We too, have kept stages in the fight for communism.

RR4 posed the need for a mass communist Party. We specifically pointed to the necessity of many millions of workers to be committed communists *before* the seizure of power. Even though some of our critics sneer at this idea, we continue in our commitment to a Party of millions before revolution. Those who seek shortcuts to communism will themselves be caught

short. History has proved there are no shortcuts.

No movement has yet been built primarily around making communist ideas mass ideas. The principal slogan of the Russian Revolution, for example, was "bread, land, and peace." Even after RR4, we failed to understand the relationship between the Party's line before, during, and after revolution. We continued to make some of the same mistakes as our predecessors.

To avoid repeating their mistakes, we must not only see the results of their errors and our own, but analyze the reasons.

Opposite Sides of a Contradiction

The wrong theory of how to win communism comes in part from misunderstanding reform and revolution under capitalism. In the past, communists (including ourselves) described the relationship between reform and revolution in one of two ways:

- 1) Reform and revolution are parallel, but unconnected, separate struggles.
- 2) Reform struggles become more militant and more politicized, and transform into revolution.

These views are both wrong.

Reform and revolution are a contradiction, a "unity and conflict of opposites." Reform and revolution are united because they are both parts of the workers' struggle against capitalism. But reforms are to improve capitalism; revolution is to destroy it. Therefore reform and revolution are mainly in conflict.

The two outlooks are in constant struggle. The unity is temporary and relative, the conflict is permanent and absolute. Reform and revolution interpenetrate and fight to finish off each other. While both aspects exist in every class struggle, it is our job as communists to strengthen, deepen and develop the revolutionary side. Communism will not develop spontaneously. It takes communists putting forward the full range of communist ideas to build the Party, making new communists.

As Lenin said, "Reformism is bourgeois

deception of the workers, who, despite individual improvements, will always remain wage-slaves, as long as there is the domination of capital." Reform movements exist to limit the aspirations of the working class to the crumbs they can get with the bosses in power. The essence of communist revolution is the workers' destruction of the capitalists. This is absolutely incompatible with reform. Therefore, the communist role in every class struggle is to attack reformism by counterposing it to the Party and communism.

For years, the communist movement had a "three lines" formulation: mass line, vanguard line and independent line. This could be described as reform, militant reform and revolution. RR4 made a decisive break, calling for only one line: a mass line of communist revolution. However, our practice, even after RR4, has been to have at least two lines: militant reform and communism. Whenever there is more than one, something has to be primary. As in the old communist movement, our practice has made reform primary over revolution. But the answer is not simply to make a revolutionary line primary over reform (as we said in 1976). The working class needs only one line--communism.

Our Practice

Our practice has been uneven.

On the issue of war, we have been consistently revolutionary. For many years, we have stated that inter-imperialist rivalry must lead to war, even a probable nuclear World War III. We reaffirmed that estimate at our recent Central Committee meeting. Our line has been to prepare workers for the opportunity to make communist revolution: *"Turn the Guns Around."* We've opposed pacifism. We've attacked peace movements from within and without. We've warned of illusions that the imperialists would not go to war against each other because of the ferocity of weapons of mass destruction. We've opposed and attacked any call to reform imperialism.

Similarly, we've said there is no reform for fascism. We've pointed out that fascism is capitalism in decline, in distress. It is not solely the policy of this or that capitalist, but is demanded by the profit system. Our line is not, "Bring back the liberals and bourgeois democracy." It is, *"Smash fascism with communist revolution."*

Thirty years ago, we mistakenly believed in "good" and "bad" nationalism. RR3 (1971) finally put that one to rest. This was a major contribution to rebuilding the world communist movement. Our line is, *"One world, one class, one Party."* In response to nationalism and to anti-immigrant racism we say, *"Smash all borders."* We don't say, "Smash some borders." We don't say, "Some of the workers of the world, unite." Our class has learned from bitter experience that there is no halfway or reform solution to nationalism and racism. Our internationalist call is for all of the workers of the world to unite under the leadership of one Party, the Progressive Labor Party.

While we have steadily moved in the direction of rejecting all compromise with capitalism, our practice has maintained the illusion of "good" and "bad" social reform. There are no capitalist solutions to racism, fascism, or war. There are no "good" borders or bosses. There is no "good" nationalism. And there are no "good" reforms.

In its desperate twilight, capitalism grows increasingly reckless and oppressive. As it inevitably shows its fascist and warmongering face, there are fewer illusions about reform. The racist brutality of fascism and the mass murder of imperialist war affect every worker. This universal intensified oppression and mass murder call out--and will increasingly cry out -- for revolutionary action. They lay the basis for the communist solution: build the Party.

Communism stands in stark contrast to the bosses' cruel system. Without exception, no matter what the struggle, the only concern of communists must be to build PLP and to build it around the ideas of

communism.

What Are Communist Ideas?

We have raised aspects of communist ideology in many battles over the years. We did good work in showing how racism leads to more profits for the bosses. We demonstrated that dividing the workers on race lines enables the bosses to rip-off one group of workers while robbing all workers. We raised the idea of multi-racial unity as critical to a fight against the bosses. Although not enough, we exposed and attacked the capitalist myth that race is a biological category. This was good, but still incomplete.

Anti-racism is not the sole property of communists. Most workers oppose racism based on liberal, reformist ideology. Communists have something profound to bring to the anti-racist fight. We don't just oppose racist ideology and injustice. We unmask the heart of racism: the super-exploitation of particular sections of the working class, which set workers in competition with each other. We attack the source for capitalism's racist super-exploitation: the drive for maximum profits. We explain that just as racism began with capitalism, it will end with a communist, classless, raceless society. If we don't make that communist idea the cornerstone of our anti-racist work, we are not doing our job.

Similarly, we have attacked sexist ideology and we have fought in struggles demanding "Equal pay for equal work." But there can be no equality under the wage system. We have the responsibility of pointing to capitalism (not men) as the source of sexist inequality, for example the unequal burden of work in the home. We must explain that sexism can only be wiped out with communist revolution and the abolition of wage labor.

About three years ago we correctly pointed out the accelerated decline of capitalism and sharpening attacks on the working class. We launched a drive against capitalist-created racist unemployment. We

started off this campaign with the good slogan, "*A system that can't provide jobs must be destroyed.*" But this campaign, which started off with a modest communist bang, ended with the reform whimper of "Six hours work for eight hours pay." We put out a pamphlet entitled "Jobs and Communism." Jobs was number one and communism number two, not just in the title, but in the content of the pamphlet. This reflected our mistaken belief that the reform fight for jobs would help the fight for communism.

We hardly raised the idea that work is a human need, which only communism can fulfill, that under capitalism workers are wage slaves forced to sell their labor power. We often ignored surplus value. When we did raise this vital issue, we usually failed to point out that it means a fight to the death between two opposing classes. The leap from "a system that can't provide jobs must be destroyed" to "6 for 8" was a step backward. It told our base, "Sure, we believe in communism. But what we really want today is to survive and make life better under capitalism."

By making the reform struggle primary we obliterated the communist idea of "eliminating the wage system." We were unsure that we could make communist ideas into mass ideas. ***We have generally made the mistake of thinking that mass ideas can only be reform ideas.*** We feel if we don't organize primarily around reform ideas we will become isolated from the working class. This is a serious mistake--especially now. Communist ideas can be mass ideas. Communist ideas are the order of the day!

In re-dedicating ourselves to the line of RR4, we should get out of the business of building mass organizations led by us. In the past we created WAM (Workers Action Movement), InCAR and recently SOC as stepping stones to the Party. Our thinking has been that we needed a reform program or vanguard line (for example 6 for 8, fight racism) to unite with more advanced

workers. Then we could struggle with and train these workers in our line and practice. What actually happens is that these organizations are political crutches. We gravitate to their reform demands because we and the people these organizations attract think they are easier.

For the past few years, we have struggled to move the Party more directly into the mass organizations, especially the unions. Our intent was to bring the fight for communism into "the enemy's camp." But our comrades spent the bulk of their time and efforts figuring out how to function within the official union structure, building SOC around 6 for 8 in a more "creative way," organizing 150,000 garment workers into a pro-capitalist union, and generally not building the Party. The worst part is, these comrades were doing what the Party leadership asked them to do.

In both cases, InCAR and in the enemy camp, we equated Party building with our ability to lead and influence the reform struggle and champion the fight for a shorter work week. While we led many people in various reform campaigns, we were not creating a mass base for communist ideology. We still had not fully grasped the fundamentally antagonistic contradiction between reform and revolution. In fact, we had two lines, and tried to build both reform and revolution. This proved self-defeating.

Workers Doubt Reformists -- Don't Prop Them Up

In the U.S., traditional mass organizations such as unions and the NAACP have shrunk. The dwindling of the mass organizations reflects the cynicism of the masses about the reform movement. Workers see the handwriting on the wall: reformers can't deliver on their own program! This era of capitalism's decline would require huge struggles to wrest even the most minor pro-working class reforms from the bosses. The last thing workers need is to spend their energy on another reform movement.

Yet such a movement is exactly what we have been trying to build.

Lenin once mistakenly called on communists to support bourgeois politicians "as a rope supports a hanging man." We rejected this opportunist formulation a long time ago, but we have been doing much the same thing with reformist organizations.

We have made the error of proposing that the reform movement just needs better (communist) leaders, better demands, or better results. This is wrong! Workers don't need a movement for jobs or multi-racial unity or for a \$10 or even \$20 an hour minimum wage. They need a vigorous communist Party embedded in the working class and explaining communism. Only through such a Party can workers express their anger against capitalism by fighting for communism.

Within our Party we have discussed schools and education. What line should we be pushing in struggles against budget cuts? Let's be clear. There can be no good schools under capitalism. Capitalist values such as individualism and competition are the hallmarks of capitalist education. You cannot reform these schools to make them good.

Of late, there has been some talk about the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Some of the rulers are getting nervous about how the gap may get workers angry enough to doubt and question the capitalist system. With glaring inequality coming to the fore, we can make egalitarianism a mass question.

What better place to raise this than in the schools? Let's ask how come we have such an uneven society, and what can we do about it. We believe in developing each individual's potential. The bosses pit one against the other. They celebrate competition. We raise the idea that collectivity leads to the flowering of the group as well as the fulfillment of the individual. Of course an egalitarian society can only be achieved under communism. And this

question can also be raised in unions, shops, communities, and the armed forces. As the bosses squeeze the workers harder and harder every aspect of communist theory can come to the front.

We haven't done such a bad job on the question of state power. We have consistently shown the state serving the capitalist class. But we do not raise the need for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. One reason is that we fear fighting for the concept of dictatorship. "Democracy" sounds so much better -- until we remind ourselves that it's just a bosses' dictatorship.

We need to live in a workers' dictatorship: a society in which the labor of the working class enhances only the workers. In a workers' dictatorship, there will be no profits for the bosses. There will be no bosses at all. Even though the Party will be made up of millions of workers, it will still be a minority Party. Only by shaping society through working-class state power will virtually all workers be won to communism.

This is nothing new for our Party. But how many times in the past year have we raised this concept in our mass organizations either orally or in leaflets? Why shouldn't we more vigorously raise the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only way to destroy the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, with its forced sale of our labor power for the bosses' profits?

Communists in the Class Struggle

Should we be in mass organizations? Should we participate in reform struggles, even lead them? Yes. But we are not in unions to build them. We are not there to be the best reformers. We are in reform organizations to smash them and their ideological hold on workers. This will reflect itself in the growth of the Party and its influence.

We should compare our work in the enemy's mass organizations to working for the boss. This is also a contradiction. Comrades work in factories, hospitals, and offices to survive and to recruit their fellow

workers to the Party. But try putting that on your employment application. The boss hires us to create surplus value. Communist workers, like all workers, create profit for the boss. Making profits for the boss is part of the contradiction of working within capitalism to destroy capitalism.

Similarly, students must do course work in order to stay in school. In that sense, communist students live the contradiction of being dedicated to destroying the system while studying ideas that maintain capitalism. Our responsibility is to go to work and school to build the Party to destroy capitalist work and school.

We have often evaluated winning or losing based on whether a particular reform was achieved. This is a reformist error. Our line has been and continues to be that winning can only be evaluated with one yardstick, the growth of the Party. Did our Party recruit new members in the midst of the struggle? Did we sell more copies of *Challenge* and other Party literature? Did we build more study groups? Winning for us can only mean that Party grows in communist influence and in numbers during any particular reform struggle. We have said this before, but our practice of "two lines" has consistently undermined our theory.

We don't have all the answers about how to do this. How could we, when we are just beginning to depart from all of our past practice? More answers will become clear as we collectively wage internal struggle and gain more experience for our line in the class war. As Mao said, "Struggle, fail; struggle, fail; struggle, WIN!" Recognizing that reform and revolution are in contradiction is a good beginning in understanding our relationship to all class struggles.

Reform Demands Versus Revolutionary Struggle

Class struggles usually take the form of making demands on the capitalists. But the content of these struggles is rarely limited to these demands. Workers are motivated

at least as much by their hatred of oppression and inequality as they are by the particular issue that sparked the struggle. For example, many black workers and youth demanded "Free OJ." But this was also a way to express their anger at the racism they encounter in their own daily lives. While many celebrated the "not guilty" verdict, few argued from this that, "the system works."

Our task is to separate the struggle from the demands. That means getting to the heart of the matter, the essence of the particular struggle.

A "reform struggle" is a contradiction. The logic of demanding more from capitalism is reformism. It builds capitalist formations and ties the working class ideologically to the profit system. The logic of the struggle, in contrast, is the revolutionary fight to smash capitalism, which can never meet the aspirations of the workers for equality and power. When communists are immersed in this struggle we have the opportunity to expose the class dictatorship of the bosses, attack the apologist-leaders of the reform movement, and advocate revolutionary communism in a mass way from many vantage points. The struggle becomes primary, reform secondary. As reformism is smashed, the movement for communism advances.

Often when we raise communist politics in the heat of a particular battle, our friends exert pressure on us to "tone things down," or "leave out the communist part." They want us to focus on winning the demand. It is the wisdom of the masses that they understand the contradiction between reform and revolution. All too often we try to convince the workers that they're wrong. We should acknowledge their wisdom and take the offensive in fighting for our outlook. The fact is, they are right. Fighting to win workers to a lifetime of revolutionary communist struggle will come at the expense of the reform struggle. Focusing primarily on the reform struggle is always done at the expense of building the Party.

Sharpening the ideological struggle will inevitably intensify the political struggle. To the extent we charge each picket line, demonstration and strike with communist politics, we will make our presence more fiercely contested by the rulers. They are acutely aware of their strategic weakness, the thin ideological hold they have on the workers. Therefore, they will fight like hell to divorce communists from the masses. Communism and the Party will become more of a mass issue amongst the workers.

This does not make our job easier, but it is how we will win. This approach demands closer ties with our base, a more collective appeal to our base, deeper understanding of dialectical materialism, and so on. In short, more struggle, but principled struggle. The Party will be strengthened and grow as a result.

Through our battles workers come to understand that only by building a new class dictatorship can the workers ever secure their aspirations. No economic demand in and of itself can ever do this. We fight to win workers to the outlook that building the Party is in the interest of the whole working class. When the Party grows, it's a victory for every worker. Reformist leaders are right when they accuse us of only being interested in building our Party. We are proud of this fact.

Every worker can be a communist. The Party is the working class's general staff, but it is more. The Party is the key to political development, as well as key to successful armed struggle. The Party embodies the new communist society in its ideas, its functioning, its being. Building the Party today is the link to the success of communist power after the revolution. Building the Party today must become a mass issue amongst the workers.

What To Do

We can't build our Party on the cheap. There is no easy way. We have to stick to our strategy for Party-building: agitation,

base building and class struggle. Agitation should begin with aggressive sales of our newspaper *Challenge*, as well as *RR4*, *Jailbreak* and other Party literature. This is the necessary first step in the process of winning workers into the Party. Workers who are not reading Party literature are barely in touch with the Party. They may know an individual comrade, but that is not the same as knowing the Party. Distributing the literature, particularly *Challenge*, is the beginning of a communist relationship, not a way to enhance one

Developing that relationship is the process of base building. This is the passage into the Party and, subsequently, the political development of communists in the Party. We build a base for the Party as the means of achieving communist society. Our goal is not merely dozens of friendships. Nor do we seek friendships with the goal of simply making life better, or making life under capitalism tolerable. We recognize that the contradiction between reform and revolution enters into personal relations.

We struggle for commitment to the Party. We build communist relations. The struggle over communism is the main aspect of our friendships. Spending time with fellow workers and students, sharing common class concerns in friendship is part of this process. But the key to the process is the inevitable sharp struggle over our communist ideas. The unity of our friendship over time will allow us to overcome the reluctance, resistance and objections workers have to joining and building the Party. These relationships multiplied by hundreds, then thousands, then hundreds of thousands, will create the trend of millions towards communism.

Communist participation in class struggle is the third leg of Party-building. Our role in every struggle is to bring out some aspect of communist consciousness and use this to win new PL recruits.

For instance, take the recent strike of 32b-32j building workers in New York.

Comrades decided the main communist ideas to raise were the built-in inequality of the wage system -- (Two Tier - No Tier!) and that workers don't need bosses to run society. We distributed PL leaflets explaining these ideas, and we sold *C-D*. We supported the strike. We brought other workers and students to picket lines to raise the Party. As described in *Challenge*, we also led mass demonstrations of strikers and chained a door to the World Trade Center. These actions created new friendships, a base with several strikers who now are within range of recruitment to the Party. If anything, our main weakness during this strike was not calling aggressively for strikers to join the Party. We have participated in strikes like this before. But this time we were not diverted by reformist questions such as how to win the demands or how to formulate better demands. We did not hide the Party and communism behind InCAR or SOC, "multi-racial unity" and "6 for 8."

We must also build communist class struggle. Mass sale of *Challenge* and mass **May Day** demonstrations are examples of the direct advocacy of communism. Another campaign we should initiate, especially in the U.S. during this election year is, "*No to the Bosses Dictatorship -- Fight for the Worker's Dictatorship.*" We should oppose electoral politics in unions and other organizations. We should produce mass literature explaining communist centralism as the process for workers to make decisions. We should organize workers to participate in a PL demonstration at the Democratic Party convention in August and in other PL demonstrations in November. Joining PLP is the answer to the bosses' dictatorship.

This coming summer there may well be more rebellions of black and latin workers and youth throughout the U.S. In the past, our reformist blindfold has led us to participate in these rebellions with the main line of "fight for jobs" or "indict killer cops." This summer, we should call on youth to leave the bosses' gangs to join the Party. We

should call on workers to support anti-racist rebels by joining the Party. We should call on all workers to take these rebellions many steps further by building the Party's fight for communism.

More Struggle Ahead

This document has just scratched the surface of what communists--and only communists-- have to offer the working class. It has taken our Party many a year to learn that fighting for communism is the only way to go. The size of our Party and influence of our movement are important. However, the correct line is far more important. There's no doubt that in time our line of fight for communism will reflect the fighting will of the masses.

In 1851, Karl Marx wrote, "*We say to the workers: 'You will have to go through fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and international wars, not only in order to change existing conditions, but also in order to change yourselves and fit yourselves for the exercise of political power.'*" Marx, the activist and theoretician, realized the road to communist revolution was neither absolutely known or unknown. PLP's own march along the road to revolution has taken us through the process of many changes. Each has been a struggle to equip our Party for the seizure of power and the building of communist society. As the road to communism draws closer, the path gets clearer.