



## ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK (4)

# Lenin outlined basic principles of communist organization

*This is the fourth in a series of Call articles summing up the main lessons of One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, written by V.I. Lenin in 1904. All the member groups of the Organizing Committee for a Marxist-Leninist Party are now studying this book. Readers are invited to send in their comments, questions and articles based on their own study.*

*Pages cited in this study are from the Progress Publishers edition, which is available from The Call for \$1.50 each. See also Lenin's Collected Works, Vol. 7, p. 203.*

*This section of the study focuses on Section I, pp. 55-77, "Paragraph 1 of the Rules."*

The main struggle that unfolded at the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party in 1903 centered around what kind of organization the party was to be and which class interests it would serve. The congress had been called to restore organizational unity in the party and put an end to a period of small circles and internal disunity. Without a single strong center, Lenin argued, without unity of will and action, the party would be unable to bring the most class conscious fighters into its ranks and lead the working class to victory.

The debate over Paragraph 1 of the rules, between the majority (Bolsheviks) led by Lenin and the opportunist minority (Mensheviks) led by Martov, hit at this central question. Lenin maintained that the party should be as "organized as possible," admitting into its ranks only "such elements as allow at least a minimum of organization."

Martov, in opposition, proposed that individuals be allowed to "proclaim themselves" party members. This would have opened the door to an array of intellectuals and professors who, in fact, would not have submitted to party discipline.

It is in this section of *One Step Forward*—which refutes the Menshevik line on party

membership—that Lenin outlined the basic principles of communist organization. These are the very principles which guide our work today in building a new party.

Stressing the objective differences in degrees of consciousness and activity among the workers, Lenin explained that the party "must not be confused" with the entire working class. The party must be a vanguard organization, like the general staff of an army, made up of the most far-sighted, active and class-conscious fighters.

To fail to make this distinction between the party and the class, as the opportunist Martov did, was to negate the leadership role of the party and downgrade communist tasks. The vanguard's constant duty, Lenin emphasized, was to raise the consciousness of the masses and to carry out revolutionary education, continually training new leaders and preparing the masses for revolutionary struggle.

Lenin further pointed out that Martov's right opportunist line, by confusing the party with the class and letting "every striker" be a party member, would weaken the trade unions. The trade unions had to be built as the broadest possible organization of workers who could be united in struggle. Through communist work in the unions, Lenin said, the party can exert influence over the broad masses and can win them to follow and support the party's leadership. The broader the unions, Lenin stressed, "the broader will be our influence over them."

As the Marxist-Leninists in this country unite in order to build a new vanguard party, opportunists like the Menshevik Martov have come forward to oppose the unity trend and the efforts of the Organizing Committee.

These modern-day Mensheviks, like MLOC and Workers' Viewpoint, have cooked up party-building schemes which reflect their fear and contempt for proletarian organization and discipline. MLOC's

call for "joint program-writing," for example, is an open invitation to intellectuals to "proclaim themselves" members, just as in Martov's Paragraph 1. Similarly, Workers' Viewpoint has insisted that the party be built "on the ideological plane," liquidating the difficult and necessary task of forging concrete organizational unity.

Both these opportunist groups insist on the obvious truth that political line is decisive in building organization, but, like Martov, they use this as the pretext for liquidating the crucial organizational tasks of party building in this period.

The opposition raised by today's anti-party bloc stems from their petty-bourgeois class outlook. Like the Mensheviks against whom Lenin argued, these intellectuals seek to defend the interests of their own class, the petty-bourgeoisie, which is characterized "by individualism and incapacity for discipline and organization."

The party-building schemes of the anti-party bloc would lead to a flabby, unstable and anarchistic party, a Menshevik party. Only a centralized and organized vanguard, made up of the most conscious working-class fighters of all nationalities, can successfully lead the fight for socialism.

### Questions:

1. What does Lenin mean when he describes a communist party as being the "sum of organizations"? How does this contrast with the Mensheviks?
2. How do Lenin's organizational policies embody the view of the party as the vanguard or "advanced detachment" of the working class?
3. Martov and the opportunists argued that Lenin's organizational policies would cut the party off from the masses. What is the correct relationship of the party to the masses and to mass organizations, especially the trade unions?