

May 7, 1980

Comrades of the OCIC:

You are receiving a copy of a bibliography developed by a number of forces in the OCIC. This bibliography presents a list of readings which we think are essential in order to correctly orient ourselves on the question of federationism and party building. Only one of the readings included in our bibliography appears in the one distributed by the SC. We took the time to produce and circulate this bibliography in order to contribute to the positive growth of the OCIC and particularly to the rectification of some serious weaknesses in the SC bibliography on this question.

In our view, it is vitally important that all OC members play an active role in the struggle for its development. All of us must ensure that the OC becomes a positive force in our movement which will organize the ideological struggle and pursue theoretical work within and without the OCIC so as to advance the political cohesion of the tendency as a whole. In this way, a national center for ideological struggle can have real value.

In light of this, we will be developing a paper to present at the Western Regional Conference scheduled for July on the question of federationism and party building. This paper will both evaluate in general the question of federationism and in particular the manner in which the question is presently being pursued by the SC and the OC as a whole.

We hope comrades will find our bibliography helpful. We encourage criticisms and comments.

In unity and struggle,

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The Russian Party Building Experience:
A Guide For The "Struggle Against Federationism"

Introduction

The bibliography on federationism distributed by the OCIC Steering Committee has a number of interesting features. The most important of these is its partial character. The one-sided character of the bibliography is revealed as soon as we note that it is composed of readings from the history of the various communist parties which treat federationism and the struggle against it only in the period after the various parties had already been established.

The materials from Russian and US communist history cited concern the effort of national, democratic centralist parties with developed party programs and political lines to break down local circles and local democratic centralist forms. While these experiences may have some limited value for party building today, it is clearly dogmatic and mechanical to simply present these documents by themselves, without any effort to distinguish the qualitatively different conditions under which they were written from the conditions which the present party building movement is faced.

This error is made even more serious when we see that the bibliography entirely ignores the texts from the Russian party history which do correspond in some sense to our own situation, particularly the texts from the period of the Russian Organizing Committee (OC). This was a period when Russian Communists were attempting to pass from a period of theoretical and political unclarity characterized by numerous local circles to a period of a national communist organization guided by advanced theory and a political program. An examination of the texts Lenin wrote to facilitate this process can provide us with the beginnings of a correct orientation toward the SC's "campaign against federationism".

I. The Struggle For Unity Among Russian Social Democrats (1899-1900)

The SC bibliography cites Russian works starting in 1903, with the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party, after the party had already been established and its theoretical-political line concretized in a party program. A correct and relevant understanding of Bolshevik history and its lessons for today, however, requires that we go back before 1903. In 1899, Russian communism consisted of a number of weak and isolated local circles. At this time Lenin posed the question: How can we begin to forge the party, and on what basis--theoretically, politically, and organizationally? His answer was elaborated in the following readings:

- 1) Lenin, "Our Programme", Collected Works, Vol. 4, pgs.210-214.

In this article Lenin discusses the "crisis of Marxism" in his own day and the vital importance of theory, of revolutionary theory, for communist unity. And not simply theory

borrowed from others, but the independent elaboration of theory in the conditions of each country which alone can unite all revolutionaries. "There can be no strong socialist party without a revolutionary theory which unites all socialists..."

- 2) Lenin, "Our Immediate Task", Collected Works,
Vol. 4, pgs. 215-220.

In this article, Lenin is targeting the unification of the Russian Social Democrats as the immediate and most urgent task. However, Lenin clearly states this is the key task because "Local Social Democratic activity has attained a fairly high level in our country" and the theoretical solution to questions facing the revolutionary struggle had been articulated, although not widely disseminated. Thus the need for a national organ. Such were the "pre-conditions" Lenin elaborated as the basis to combat localism.

- 3) Lenin, "A Draft Programme of Our Party", Collected Works.
Vol. 4, pgs. 229-231.

This article represents a continuation of Lenin's work on party program begun in 1895-6. The initial part of this article presents Lenin's views on the essential role of political line and a program for building communist unity. Only the organized discussion of "all views and shades of opinion" on political questions can establish the basis for communist unification and the overcoming of local circles. And Lenin notes, the existence of real differences is not an argument in favor of putting off political questions, but an argument in favor of taking them up. Politics, not organization, in command.

- 4) Lenin, "Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra",
Collected Works, Vol. 4, pgs. 351-356.

This is an extremely important article. Here Lenin lays out the principal feature of Russian Social Democracy at the time: its multiplicity of small circles and the need to build anew the party (which had largely fallen apart after the first congress). In answer to the question, How to build the party?, Lenin argues against the view that meetings and organizational forms are sufficient. "Unity cannot be devreed...it must be fought for." This means that ideological unity as embodied in a political line and program is a precondition for organizational unity. And the best method of achieving ideological unity is to have an open and all embracing discussion of fundamental questions of principle. Once again, Lenin asserts the primacy of ideological unity and theoretical clarity over organizational unity which only conceals political differences.

II. The Experience of the Russian Organizing Committee (1902-1903)

The 1902-03 period was dominated by Lenin's effort to combat economism and to create the political and organizational theory of Bolshevism. After the collapse of the Russian party shortly after the first congress, Lenin was instrumental in preparing for the formation of an Organizing Committee, including work on a party program which would establish the political basis for organizational consolidation of the Russian Social Democrats.

- 1) Lenin, "Report of the Iskra Editorial Board to the Meeting (Conference) of the RSDLP Committees", Collected Works, Vol. 6, pgs. 97-106.

In this article, Lenin discusses the formation of the Russian OC. He again insists on the importance of theoretical and political unity in party building, and touches on the question of haste in the preparation of conferences with agendas which do not allow time for adequate preparation. This should strike a familiar cord with OC members.

- 2) Lenin, "Announcement of the Formation of an Organizing Committee", Collected Works, Vol. 6, pgs. 307-311.

Lenin states in the announcement of the Russian OC that unity must be based on principle, developed "systematically and gradually". It cannot be decreed by mere resolutions. Once again this speaks to the haste with which the present OC SC is pressing organizational unity over political clarification.

III. The Struggle to Consolidate the RSDLP (1904)

The second congress of the RSDLP was marked by sharp struggle between Bolshevism and its opponents, a struggle which continued and even intensified after the congress. Lenin was called upon to defend his conception of communist unity and the relation between politics and organization.

- 1) Lenin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", Collected Works, Vol. 7, pgs. 203-416.

This is a very long and somewhat obscure document. For our purposes here, perhaps, the most important section is "Q. The New Iskra", in particular the discussion of 386-91. Here Lenin enunciates the relation between organization and politics in party building.

As long as we had no unity on the fundamental questions of programme and tactics, we bluntly admitted that we were living in a period of disunity and separate circles, we bluntly declared that before we could unite, lines of demarcation must be drawn; we did not even talk of the forms of joint organization...(388)

Appendix: The Party in State Power: Some Problems

The question of the relationship between theory and politics, and between politics and organization is not only a problem for the pre-party period. These issues remain and must constantly be sturggled around as long as the party itself exists. Since the 1930s the dominant solution to these problems was furnished by the experience of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshheviks). A critical examination of how the CPSU(B) dealt with theory, politics, and organization in this period can provide us with many valuable lessons for our current struggles.

- 1) Charles Bettelheim, "The Bolsehvik Ideological Formation and Its Transformation", in Class Struggles in the USSR: Second Period: 1924-1930, pgs. 500-589