



Volume 2, Number 1  
Fall / Winter 1977

# the COMMUNIST

*Theoretical Journal of the Central Committee  
Of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*

- **On the Origins of World War 2**
- **Against Sweezy's Political Economy**  
Reformist and Revolutionary  
Views of Capitalist Crisis, Part 2
- **Marxism, Nationalism and the  
Task of Party Building**  
History and Lessons of the  
National Liaison Committee

**\$2**

**Published and Distributed by  
RCP Publications  
P.O. Box 3486 Merchandise Mart  
Chicago Illinois 60654**





# **the COMMUNIST**

*Theoretical Journal of the Central Committee  
Of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*

**Volume 2, Number 1  
Fall/Winter 1977**

Published and Distributed by  
RCP Publications  
P.O. Box 3486 Merchandise Mart  
Chicago Illinois 60654  
Bulk Rates Available  
Please Prepay all orders to RCP Publications

© RCP Publications

November 1977

## Contents

On the Origins of World War 2 by John B. Tyler.....	3
Against Sweezy's Political Economy: Reformist and Revolutionary Views of Capitalist Crisis, Part 2 by M.F.Z. ....	71
Marxism, Nationalism and the Task of Party Building: History and Lessons of the National Liaison Committee by D.B. ....	123

## On the Origins of World War 2

**John B. Tyler**

*Editor's Note: This is the second of three articles dealing with the origins, nature and effects of World War 2 and the role of communists in relation to it. The first article, entitled "On the Character of World War 2," appeared in the October, 1976, issue (Vol. 1, No. 1).*

The world situation today is moving inexorably and at an increasingly rapid pace in the direction of a new world war, as the two superpowers, the U.S. and the USSR, square off to become the unchallenged king of the imperialist dungheap. As pointed out in the previous article in this series, dealing correctly with such a war is a task of great importance and opportunity for communists the world over.

The same holds true for the period leading up to such a war. First, the proletariat can by its actions create serious difficulties for the bourgeoisie in its drive to war. Second, since short of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat cannot prevent it from plunging into war to defend its interests, the ability of the working class to advance toward its revolutionary goal during a war depends greatly on the *exposures, education and struggle* carried out and led by communists and the correctness of policy they develop in the prewar period.

Just as in the case of war itself, communists should, in undertaking these tasks, take advantage of the historical experience already gained by the working class through bitter struggle and sacrifice. There is rich experience to be gained in tracing the origins of the Second World War.

The 1930s were a period in which the rivalry of different imperialist powers drove them headlong towards war and world war, as the leading imperialist powers formed blocs on the basis of their share and position in the division of the world. An important new factor since the First World War was the presence on the world scene of the proletariat in power—the Soviet Union. The USSR was completely different from the various imperialist Great Powers. Not governed by the laws of capitalism, it was not driven to seize and hold a colonial empire and had no interest in waging war against any other country, except in self defense. At the same time, with a sixth of the world's land area, a large population, and vast and growing economic and military capabilities, the Soviet Union was a force the imperialist states had to reckon

with.

In a very different situation were the Communist Parties in countries where the working class did not yet hold state power. They had their own necessity to consider, and in exercising and expanding their freedom in the situations in which they found themselves had different constraints than the communists in the Soviet Union. There are many lessons, both positive and negative, for Marxist-Leninists in today's world to learn from studying how the Communist Parties of the 1930s analyzed the international situation and the question of war, and how they developed policies around which to mobilize the masses.

It must be remembered, of course, that revolution is not made by analogy, and what Marxist-Leninists seek in history is not some magic formula instantly applicable to the present situation. Rather, they seek to evaluate and assimilate what is correct in the theory that has been crystallized out of the practice by communists who have gone before and to learn themselves how to use the science of dialectical and historical materialism to understand a complex situation and lead the working class in making revolution and ultimately achieving communism.

There are a number of obvious similarities between the world situation in the 1930s and that of today. It is most dangerous, however, to recognize only the similarities. Understanding the differences—the fact that two imperialist superpowers, one with a socialist cover, are the only nations capable of vying for the position of number one exploiter of the world's people; the existence of the numerous politically independent countries of the Third World with varying degrees of contradiction with imperialism; the working class base of the Soviet Union's fifth column, the revisionist CPs of the world; the differences between the role in the world of the People's Republic of China and that played by the Soviet Union in the 1930s; and so on—this is just as key in using the past to serve the present. Concrete analysis of concrete conditions must be our watchword.

#### IMPERIALISM AND "PEACE" AFTER WORLD WAR I

When the Red Army won complete victory in the Civil War in the Soviet Union and drove the last invading troops of foreign nations—more than a dozen in all—from its boundaries, the world found itself at peace. Coming out of the first imperialist world war, it was an imperialist peace.

Attempts were made, especially by the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, to portray it as a just peace, a peace that would last because it was based on the highest moral principles like the right of nations to determine their own destiny. In reality, however, appeals to the post-war peace conference by representatives of

the peoples of China, India, Africa, Ireland, Indochina and other areas suffering under colonial or semi-colonial domination were ignored.

What actually took place was the bickering of the victors over which spoils would fall to whom. As for the losers, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismantled entirely. A number of new nations were set up in Eastern Europe, in which the various Great Powers moved to establish some degree of dominance—France in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, Britain in Hungary, and Italy in Austria, to cite a few examples. Most of the Ottoman Empire's Mideast possessions were split between France and Britain. Germany was divested of its African colonies entirely, with the lion's share falling to Britain. The country itself was left prostrate by the victorious Allies, stripped of valuable territory like the industrial Saarland, permitted only a token military establishment and ordered to pay "reparations" which would have bankrupted the country for generations.

This is not to say that all the "peace" talk by the rulers of the various imperialist nations, victorious and defeated, large and small, was just a pack of lies designed solely to dupe the masses. This was certainly one of the most overriding purposes, for by the war's end almost every country had seen growing rebellion in the armed forces and the general population against its hardships and its senselessness, from the viewpoint of any but the imperialists.

But the questions of peace and theories for the abolition of war did preoccupy the rulers of the various countries which had taken part in the war. The victorious powers enjoyed the international status quo and their newly expanded and consolidated empires. The vanquished were as yet in no position to challenge them. What is more, World War I had been the most destructive in history, and while the masses had borne the weight of the fighting and suffered the most, the bourgeoisie in most countries had lost a lot. Millions had died either in uniform or as civilians—workers and peasants, whose labor was the source of their wealth, and others who helped keep their system running. Of course, some deaths among the masses were to be expected, but even from the viewpoint of the rich *too* many had died this time. Billions of dollars had been spent, productive capacity crippled, whole economies left in shambles. New and dreadful weapons had been used, like aerial bombing and poison gas. Fed by a burning hatred of war, currents of revolution ran stronger and deeper through the masses, typified by the creation of Communist Parties which rejected the treacherous tradition of the Social Democrats who had backed their own rulers in the war. And, of course, there was the Soviet Union, where the working class had seized the opportunity provided by the war to wrest state power from the

ruling class and which stood as a beacon to revolutionary workers everywhere.

Only Japan and the United States, both far removed from the center of the conflict, had really come out ahead. The former did little actual fighting, but established itself as a Great Power, especially in the Western Pacific. The U.S. ruling class was the biggest victor. Sitting out the first three years of war, it seized the opportunity to do business with combatant nations to the extent that by the war's end the U.S. had changed from a debtor nation to the world's biggest creditor, with France and Britain, to whom it had previously been deep in the hole, now the U.S.'s main debtors. As a result the center of international finance capital shifted decisively from the City in London to Wall Street in New York.

Worried capitalists the world over sincerely and genuinely wanted peace at that time, but only their kind of peace, a robber's peace. The Versailles Treaty, the terms of which were mentioned above, officially ended the war (although peace pacts with lesser of the Central Powers like Hungary and Turkey were not wound up until 1925) and at the same time by the crushing terms it imposed on Germany, the arbitrary boundaries it drew in Europe, and its affirmation of colonialism it laid a firm foundation for a new one.

The terms of the treaty also established the League of Nations to act as arbitrator of international conflicts and to take action against violators of peace. Hailed then and today as the first real international organization of independent states devoted to peace, it was a league of victorious imperialists designed to keep themselves on top—on top of their colonial holdings to which it reaffirmed their “legal rights” and on top of their defeated enemies like Germany, which was not even permitted to join the League until 1926. And since there was no way the League could keep the rich on top of the Soviet Union, it at least acted as somewhat of a quarantine to keep this frightening new power isolated as a pariah on the outside of the international political arena.

Still sensing their efforts had not resolved the questions of peace, the Great Powers took on military affairs up front in the first great international disarmament parlay which resulted in the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922. Supposedly the first step toward a general network of arrangements limiting military might, this agreement had at its heart the “5:5:3 ratio” which determined that the U.S. and Great Britain would have naval parity in capital ships (that is, excluding destroyers, submarines, light cruisers, etc.) and Japan would be permitted a fleet 60% the size of theirs. Additionally, Italy and France could each have one 35% that of the U.S. or Britain. Germany, of course, was forbidden to build large warships at all.

This was significant for a number of reasons. It underlined the shift of power in the imperialist world. Previously British naval policy had always been to maintain a fleet larger than those of the two next strongest seagoing powers combined. Political economic and military reality had now put this out of the question. The pact also underlined the increasingly dominant role of Japan in Asia, for its fleet, while smaller than the others, was exclusively a Pacific fleet, while the U.S. and Britain needed worldwide navies to guard their more far-flung empires. The Washington Naval Treaty also set the pattern for imperialist arms limitation talks from that time on: it did not really limit much of anything, but rather juggled the interests of different imperialist powers to prevent a costly and as yet unnecessary arms race, was full of loopholes, served as window dressing for the masses who hated imperialist war, and was followed by a decade of generally unsuccessful negotiations to get followup agreements covering other fields of military and armament issues like land armies, air power and chemical warfare.

Throughout the '20s, the capitalists made repeated attempts to reinforce the “structure of peace” they had built. The most important of these was the Locarno Pact signed at the end of 1925. This was actually a series of treaties among France, Belgium, Britain, Italy and Germany with Poland and Czechoslovakia playing a secondary role. Its purpose was to insure the borders of Europe, particularly those Germany shared with the states on its western borders, with a system of guarantees against aggression whereby everybody was required to pile on the violator. As part of the deal Germany was to be admitted to the League. This agreement was, like its predecessors, aimed in part at the Soviet Union. As a signer of the Locarno Agreement and a League member, Germany could be dragged into an Anglo-French attack on the USSR. Britain was also foreshadowing its strategy in the '30s, pushing for war between Germany and the USSR, by its refusal to provide full guarantees for Germany's eastern boundaries.

Thus by 1925, the efforts of the various imperialist powers had produced in the name of peace, among others, a peace treaty, an international organization, an arms limitation agreement and a broad anti-aggression pact. These show both how greatly concerned with the question of peace the rulers of these countries acted and how totally that concern was based on their particular class interests and in particular the maintenance of their imperialist empires. But no matter how real the objections to war the lords of capital may have at any given time, it can't stop the operation of the laws of their system or change the fact that their class interests sooner or later will require, will demand, war.

Even during the period of relative stabilization of the world capitalist system which took place during the 1920's, contradic-

tions between the various imperialist states were growing sharper. For example France and Britain clashed repeatedly on the diplomatic front with the main bone of contention being Germany. The French bourgeoisie was out to bleed and crush Germany, a traditional enemy and rival for dominance in continental Europe, while the British aimed at giving the German ruling class some leeway to rebuild to provide a counterweight to France and deny it continental hegemony. Japanese and U.S. imperialists each viewed themselves as the rightful overlord of East Asia which naturally led to rivalry.

One of the sharpest contradictions was between the two most powerful imperialists in the world, the United States and Britain. There was a strong trend in the U.S. bourgeoisie toward isolationism, reflecting among other things a rejection of close ties with European capitalist rivals, the U.S.'s geographical distance from the main hotbeds of war and contention, and the fact that U.S. imperialism was focused in Latin America and the Pacific. The relative political stability of the world permitted U.S. capital to expand its economic interests even in Europe, especially Germany, and elsewhere while still staying out of the League and involving itself little in world politics. Despite their wartime alliance, "common heritage," and economic ties, the U.S. and Britain actually considered each other potential military adversaries, a point made graphically by the contingency plan drawn up in the 1920's by the U.S. armed forces for the invasion of the British Dominion of Canada, which was exposed in the bourgeois press recently.

Contradictions like this, between the big imperialist gainers from the First World War, were not the ones that would give birth to the next one. While such powers certainly clashed with each other over preserving their far-reaching colonial and economic empires, they were not driven with the same immediacy to expand as were the "have-not" imperialists who had been cut out of the postwar division of the world, or received only table scraps. For such "have-nots," survival as imperialists mandated the acquisition of an empire and, running headlong into the "have's" staked-out claims, this clash of interests was far more likely to give rise to war. On September 19, 1931 came the first eruption. It was a qualitative step in the process of development toward the Second World War.

### *THE WORLD SITUATION DEVELOPS TOWARD WAR*

On that day, troops of the Imperial Japanese Army stationed on Chinese territory as guards on the South Manchurian Railroad claimed to have discovered attempted sabotage and opened an offensive. Within four days, Japan had occupied the key city of

Shenyang (Mukden) and thousands of square miles of Manchuria. Japan's diplomats responded to other imperialist powers with interests in China and to discussion of sanctions against Japan in the League of Nations by assuring all and sundry that no occupation of territory was intended. With this smokescreen of polite denials, the Japanese "police action" continued to expand as Chiang Kai-Shek's central Kuomintang (KMT) government carried out an openly capitulationist policy of refusing to fight the invaders. By Spring of 1932 all of Manchuria had been seized from the warlord government which had run the province under nominal KMT rule and thousands of civilians killed in the first massive use of bombing raids in war. The Japanese imperialists proceeded to set up a puppet regime, the "independent Republic of Manchukuo," with the last heir of the Manchu dynasty, Henry Pu Yi, as "president."

Japan, despite its alliance with the victors of World War 1, was definitely a newcomer to the imperialist banquet table. Ruling a small island nation with limited resources, its capitalists, to compete on a world scale, were driven to carve out an empire. Until this invasion they controlled only Korea and Taiwan. North China was the logical starting place. Almost all the other real estate in the area, except for the Soviet Union which posed its own hazards, was held outright by various imperialist powers. But China had been staked out as an open zone, nominally independent but instead subject to half a dozen imperialist powers, among them Japan. The Japanese ruling class decided to stake an exclusive claim and took Manchuria as its first step.

It was a gamble that paid off well—for a while. The League of Nations was proved to be a joke. It did not even pass a decisive resolution on the question until early 1933, at which point Japan quit in protest. Despite a sudden interest in cooperating with the League by the U.S. ruling class, whose ox the invasion had gored, no effective sanctions were ever taken. One reason for the lack of strong British and U.S. response was the hope that the seizure would bring Japan into armed conflict with the Soviet Union.

The occupation of Manchuria opened a new chapter in post-World War 1 history. The division of the world no longer adequately reflected the relative strengths of the different imperialist powers, and a new redivision was under way by the only method possible—war. And all the various paper, diplomatic and organizational expressions of the desire of many imperialists for "peace" had proved totally ineffective to stop it.

This trend toward realignment and war continued to develop as the capitalist world was wracked by a crushing depression, which began in the U.S. and spread world-wide all the faster, spurred on by a tariff war which crippled international commerce. In Germany the shaky economic recovery of the late '20s, which had been fueled by massive loans and investments by U.S. banks



and monopolies, collapsed. Unemployment reached mammoth proportions and the growth of revolutionary sentiment among the masses kept pace. Facing a brutal crisis and the threat of proletarian revolution, and having been represented by a series of ineffective social-democratic and right-wing governments, key sections of the German bourgeoisie moved to get rid of bourgeois democracy. They united on backing the largest of the nationalist and fascist groups in the country, the demagogic National Socialist German Workers Party, the Nazis, which some capitalists had been bankrolling since the beginning of the '20s. This group had a big following among the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie in particular, with its nationalist and pseudo-revolutionary posturing and attacks on the capitalists and their economic crisis. Head Nazi Adolph Hitler was appointed German chancellor on January 30, 1933, and within a month the Nazis had taken effective control of the German government and set out to destroy the Communist Party, the trade unions and then all of the traditional parliamentary parties of the bourgeoisie. All this met quiet, and surprisingly often public, approval from the capitalists of other nations.

But with the proletariat overwhelmingly broken and leaderless, the new German government turned its attention to the international situation. The policy of the Nazi Party was the policy of an expanding "have not" country with a vengeance. Hitler's writings before taking power were not mere racist rantings. He had summed up that Germany could gain a place in the sun only by force of arms, only by wresting an empire to plunder. His program called first for uniting all German peoples in a single greater Germany which would become the dominant power on the continent, then conquer large sections of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, regain its old African and Pacific colonies and seize more.

Evidence that the German ruling class would be following this strategy was not slow in coming. At one of the first international meetings the new German government took part in, the World Economic Conference in London, its delegation submitted a memorandum demanding large sections of the White Russian and Ukrainian Republics of the USSR for German occupation and called for the attending powers to make a joint general declaration of war on the Soviet Union to get them!

Nor were the Nazis just talking. The German bourgeoisie's first target for expansion became Austria, a German-speaking country. By 1934 it was ruled by a fascist government headed by Dollfuss, who was affiliated with the Heimwehr, an Italian-backed fascist paramilitary outfit. A rival group, the German-backed Austrian Nazis, assassinated Dollfuss on July 25 and the German government was prepared to complete the putsch by an-

nexing Austria. Hitler's "brother" fascist leader, Benito Mussolini of Italy, had no intention of lightly sacrificing the Italian bourgeoisie's predominance in Austria and mobilized the Italian army at the Brenner Pass on the Austrian border. The German bourgeoisie backed off. This incident showed not only Germany's expansionist plans, but introduced to the world one of the fascists' most valuable tactics, the fifth column—organized groups of fascists inside independent countries whose first loyalties lay with their foreign mentors.

The main effect of this setback was to underline to the German capitalists their need to smash the constraints of the Versailles treaty and build up a modern military machine. The Nazis had taken up this task as soon as they controlled the government. In 1933-4 31%, in 1934-5 45% and 1935-6 fully 60% of German state expenditures went to armaments. All society was geared toward the coming war—as an official educational periodical editorialized, "Logarithms find their most beautiful application in the science of ballistics [artillery fire—J.B.T.]. In geography the world war can come into its own limitless rights. History is full to overflowing with instances of war politics... Physics problems can best be explained by the aid of a motor or a tank."<sup>1</sup> In March of 1935, Hitler formalized these developments by announcing that Germany no longer considered itself bound by the Versailles Treaty and was introducing conscription to raise a large scale army. The handwriting was on the wall—a new world war was on the way.

#### *THE EARLY YEARS OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY*

From its formation, the Soviet Union as the world's first socialist state incurred the lasting hatred and active hostility of the imperialist giants, for whom it stood as a towering symbol of their eventual doom at the hands of their own workers. With the failure of their armed intervention in the Russian Civil War, they moved to isolate and boycott the new proletarian state.

From the beginning, the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik) summed up that the imperialists' "peace" could only lead to a new war. Their response was two-sided.

On the one hand, they took advantage of the contradictions in the imperialist camp. They broke the blockade by establishing in April 1922 friendly relations with Germany which the victorious powers were also attempting to isolate, although for different reasons. This was possible because the Soviets, in keeping with their principled opposition to the Versailles Treaty, renounced all reparations and other claims coming from the Czarist and bourgeois government's participation in the imperialist war. In return the German government broke the imperialist front by renouncing all

debts owed by the Czarist government and claims for German property nationalized in the Russian revolution. Close political and economic ties between the two countries continued through the 1920s.

This was a good example of what the Soviet Union was striving for in the field of international relations, agreements based on equality and mutual benefit. After this opening wedge, country after country could no longer maintain the fiction that the USSR did not exist—especially in the face of the mounting demands of the working class of those countries for recognizing the USSR. By the end of the 1920s the United States was the only Great Power which did not maintain diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

Even as the Soviet leadership used contradictions in the imperialist camp to break the blockade and win diplomatic recognition, they took all other possible steps to avoid getting into war and to delay the outbreak of war on a world scale. As the world's first and only socialist country it had an obligation to try to avoid attack or being drawn into a war which might destroy it—and failing that, to enter the war on conditions most favorable to its survival. By defending its own existence, the USSR assured the working class of the continued existence of a fortress upholding its interests and a beacon showing the possibility of, and the road forward to, socialism and communism. Even postponing the onset of war could permit the USSR to strengthen itself politically, economically and militarily against the day it might be caught up in a new world war.

This was in itself a contribution to the task of working for the victory of revolution, socialism and communism on a world scale. But the internationalist duties of the proletariat in power do not stop at self-preservation. They also include giving political and material aid to the struggling working class and oppressed nations in countries still under imperialist rule. However, steps which could prevent a particular war or put off the outbreak of widespread interimperialist war, which the laws of capitalism dictated would sooner or later take place, were themselves in the material interests of the working people of the world. A delay in the outbreak of war meant far more than delaying the onset of the horror and hardship war would hold for those forced to fight in it and the masses as a whole. It meant giving the working class time, precious time, to develop its revolutionary struggle, consciousness and organization. Even if the working class were unable to seize power in one or more new countries in this time, and in doing so perhaps change the entire relationship of forces in the world, it could use the time gained to strengthen its forces so as to be in the best possible position at the outbreak of war, to turn imperialist war into civil war and make revolution.

The desire for peace between countries by the Soviet Union and the international proletariat thus came from a motivation diametrically opposed to those imperialists who desired it to maintain the status quo—the desire for revolutionary change in the world!

To carry out its tasks, the USSR developed the Red Army and a popular militia to make the point to would-be predators that the Soviet Union was no stray lamb ready to be devoured. But at the same time, the Soviet Union's earliest diplomatic offensive aimed at securing friendly relations with all her neighbors, like Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. All these agreements were on the basis of equality and included guarantees that neither party would carry on aggression against the other or permit any third country to use its territory as a base for an attack on the other. Such bilateral treaties of friendship remained the general pattern of Soviet diplomacy until the early 1930s. It was openly intended to counter the Locarno Pact and the League, combinations of imperialist powers, with a program aimed at abolishing the system of political alliances and groups which helped fuel the development of war.

Although not a member of the League of Nations, both because the capitalist Great Powers wished to exclude it and because it could not agree to support the Versailles Treaty on which the League was based, the USSR did take part in several international peace and disarmament conferences. It answered the various mealy-mouthed and self-serving schemes offered up by imperialist diplomats with its own proposal—complete disarmament under international inspection with the cooperation of legislative bodies and trade unions in insuring implementation. This proposal for the disbanding of armed forces, destruction of weaponry and supplies, dismantling of fortresses and bases and prohibition of military training was a bombshell. While the imperialist powers indignantly refused to consider it or even a partial plan calling for proportional reduction, the masses of people around the world greeted it with genuine enthusiasm. This proposal not only stripped away the lies of the bourgeois media about “the menace of Soviet aggression,” but helped expose the capitalist system itself as the real source of war in the world.

Later, when concrete situations arose which threatened to drag the USSR into war, Stalin and the other Soviet leaders took all possible steps to prevent it. After Japan's seizure of Manchuria, the Chinese Eastern Railway through the area, which had been built by the Czarist government and run as a joint Chinese-Soviet enterprise by treaty since 1925, was the scene of repeated Japanese provocations. Rather than be drawn into armed clashes, the Soviet government entered patient negotiations with Japan and finally agreed to sell its interest in the line to them. At the same time, they made it clear that any moves against the soil of the Soviet Union or its close ally, the Mongolian People's Republic, would be

met with the full force of Soviet might.

With the rise in the first half of the 1930s of Japan and Germany (and to a lesser extent Italy) as aggressive powers out to redi- vide the world and directly threatening the USSR, Soviet policy had to be adapted to meet the changed situation. Those contra- dictions in the imperialist world which were most likely to give rise to a new war were coming to the fore. Furthermore, the imp- erialist rivals of these up and coming bandits had high hopes that the latter could be steered into war with the Soviet Union. Let's let the Communists and the fascists fight it out, they crowed, the more damage they do to each other, the better off it leaves us.

### *Collective Security*

Soviet efforts to maintain security and peace were intensified. This meant a change in policy. The previous Soviet approach of signing bilateral treaties with individual countries was no longer effective in the changing situation. From the end of 1933 the leaders of the USSR began a drive for "collective security." Col- lective security meant the establishment of a network of regional agreements against aggression which would guarantee a common front in defense of any country attacked by an aggressor. The Soviet Union argued that "peace is indivisible"—any act of aggres- sion not blocked would inevitably lead to more of the same and any small local war could trigger a chain reaction leading to a new world war.

The most important early result of this collective security policy was the pacts of mutual support against aggression which were ne- gotiated with France and Czechoslovakia in 1934 and signed in 1935. These were planned as part of an "Eastern Locarno Pact," a network of international agreements to include Germany, Po- land and other Eastern European powers which would guarantee the borders of Eastern Europe and commit the participants to come to the aid of any nation attacked. France's inclusion was to create a link with the original Locarno pact aimed at securing Western European boundaries. Thus, Germany (and the other European powers as well) would be constrained from attacking neighboring states and the "outlet to the East" built into the original Locarno pact plugged. Germany refused as did Poland and other Eastern European countries, with the tacit backing of the British bourgeoisie.

This shows some of the great difficulties the proletariat in power faces in carrying out the tasks of preserving its independence and power and working to forestall the outbreak of war to aid the working class and masses in capitalist countries. In doing this the Soviets had to pay particular attention to Germany, which posed the greatest direct threat to the USSR and the activities of which

were the most likely to trigger a new imperialist war. While gear- ing the economy and military work toward preparations for the inevitable war, the leaders of the CPSU(B) realized that only by isolating and constraining Germany to the maximum could any kind of restraint be placed on its expansionist drives. To do this would require a certain degree of common action with all of Ger- many's major imperialist rivals, especially those in Europe.

Here the strength and weakness, the freedom and necessity, the opportunities and dangers in the international arena facing the working class in power are clearly revealed. Since its first Five Year Plan, begun in 1929 and finished a year ahead of schedule in 1932, had made the USSR a modern industrial country at the same time as the Great Depression sent production plummeting throughout the capitalist world, the Soviet Union was unquestion- ably a Great Power—although not an imperialist one. As such, it could enter the arena of international politics with enough muscle to start motion around its plans.

Yet its efforts by their very nature had to be in the realm of ne- gotiations and diplomacy, where bourgeoisies made and broke "sacred agreements" with monotonous regularity. Various capital- ist powers, unable to overcome the anarchy of their own system even when the survival of their nation was at stake, shifted their policy to advance the most immediate and narrow interests or oc- casionally to try and implement the most idealist schemes. The Soviet Union, fully aware of difficulties, correctly chose to enter the League of Nations in 1934, summing up that the new situa- tion required an effort to make the League as much of a force for peace as possible by struggling to apply its antiwar and anti- aggression clauses. Even the Soviet Union's best efforts would finally prove insufficient to give the League any substantial value in the fight to restrict aggression and delay the onset of war.

And the steps the Soviet Union did take toward implementing collective security involved big concessions. With the failure to establish an all-around "Eastern Locarno Pact," the Soviet Union was left with reciprocal agreements committing it to come to the aid of France and Czechoslovakia in the event of aggression against either of them. While these were aimed at and important in put- ting the damper on the German bourgeoisie and winning them was a genuine if limited victory, they also put the Soviet Union in a position where honoring its obligations could conceivably have drawn it into an interimperialist war.

Likewise, part of the agreement with France required a state- ment from the Soviet Foreign Ministry that "Stalin understands and fully approves the national defence policy carried out by France in order to maintain its armed forces at a level that will en- sure its security." While the Soviet Union in the '20s had by its criticism of the Versailles Treaty implicitly endorsed Germany's

right to rearm, this statement said the danger posed by one imperialist power to another and to the Soviet Union was so great as to justify overall support by a socialist state for the military policy of an imperialist power.

Lenin had addressed this problem in May, 1918, when he wrote of a proposal by the Allies that the Soviets reenter the war against Germany, "Although we do not in general reject military agreements with one of the imperialist coalitions against the other in those cases in which such an agreement could, without undermining the basis of Soviet power, strengthen its position and paralyze the attacks of any imperialist power, we cannot at the present moment enter into a military agreement with the Anglo-French coalition."<sup>2</sup> Such a course contains many pitfalls and is not to be entered upon lightly. It places the socialist state in a position of mutual dependence on an ally which by its very nature as a monopoly capitalist class is unreliable, treacherous, aggressive and, in the final analysis, implacably hostile to the proletarian dictatorship and everything it represents. The first article in this series gave some examples of how this phenomenon worked during World War 2 itself—the refusal of the Allied powers to honor their pledge to open a second front in Northern Europe until 1944, the firebombing of Dresden and the A-bomb attack on Hiroshima as maneuvers aimed at the Soviet Union, and so on. In the absence of the compelling necessity of an ongoing war, the dangers posed by such an alliance are of course far more serious. At this time, these dangers included not only treachery by the imperialist power the agreement was concluded with and the possibility of the socialist country getting dragged into an interimperialist war, but also the danger that opportunist or wavering elements in CPs around the world would use the agreement as an excuse to sacrifice the class struggle, which did in fact happen. At the same time, the dangers of isolation and being made the victim of an attack by one or more imperialist Great Powers demanded that an important part of Soviet strategy be making use of contradictions in the enemy camp and making necessary concessions to do so, without sacrificing basic interests.

### *THE COMMUNIST PARTIES AND THE WAR DANGER TO 1935*

The changing world situation did not only affect the Soviet Union, but had important implications for the working class in capitalist and colonial countries alike around the world. From its formation in 1919, the Communist International (Comintern or CI), the worldwide organization which gave leadership to its members, the individual Communist Parties, analyzed that World War 1 would be "the war to end all wars" only if capitalism itself was overthrown on a world scale. Otherwise the laws of the system would surely give rise to a new interimperialist war.

At the same time through the 1920s and the early years of the depression, international contradictions and the development towards war were not so sharp or complex as to require big adjustments in the line and strategy of the various Parties. In the capitalist countries, the question of war and war preparations came up principally as one issue around which communists directed fire at their own bourgeoisie and demonstrated the need to overthrow the capitalist system.

The CPs conducted exposure and when possible led mass struggle against the military and arms policies of the capitalists. At the same time, they paid particular attention to fighting pacifism, a strong tendency among the intelligentsia and sections of the working class under the leadership of social democracy. The social democrats expressed a prissy horror of war which was due in large part to their shameful collapse into a chorus of national chauvinist support for "our side" during World War 1, and their consequent loss of influence among disgusted, revolutionary-minded workers, who turned to genuine communism in large numbers.

In Austria, for example, the leaders of the numerous and powerful social-democrats even justified refusal to fight fascism before it was entrenched and moved to crush the workers movement and the social-democratic party itself: "There is no reason for us to feel ashamed of this mistake! We made it because we wanted to spare the country and the working class the disaster of a bloody civil war,"<sup>3</sup> thus consigning the proletariat to certain defeat.

In countries where the communists had been elected to parliamentary seats from proletarian districts, they seized every opportunity to expose and denounce the ruling classes' military machine and to vote against war credits. One inspiring instance of this took place in Uruguay in 1923. The small and recently formed Communist Party had succeeded in getting one deputy elected to Congress. When the Ministry of Defense proposed a law requiring compulsory military service, he led a fight against it. The Party helped organize "anti-militarist committees" among the masses and in a powerful wave of struggle the proposal was defeated!\*

With revolutionary struggles and uprisings occurring through-

\*Opposition to compulsory military service is, of course, not a Marxist-Leninist principle, but a question of tactics based on the particular situation. In fact, the overall stand of communists toward the question of workers in the bourgeois army is quite different. As Lenin pointed out in 1916 in "The War Programme of the Proletarian Revolution," "The women of an oppressed class that is truly revolutionary . . . will say to their sons: 'You will soon be a man. You will be given a gun. Take it and learn the military art. The proletarians need this knowledge not to shoot your brothers the workers of other countries, as they are doing in the present war, and as you are being told to do by the traitors to Socialism, but to fight the bourgeoisie of your own country, to put an end to exploitation, poverty and war, not by means of good intentions, but by vanquishing the bourgeoisie and by disarming it.'" (*Lenin on War and Peace*, Peking, 1966, p. 67)

out Europe and elsewhere in the early '20s and big strikes in the '30s, the ruling class also did its part in making clear the nature of the armed forces as oppressors rather than "protectors" of the masses.

A great deal of education and exposure was done around the Versailles Treaty, to the extent that there was a tendency to place more blame on the treaty itself than the imperialist system which spawned it as the cause of a new world war. At the same time more could have been done to build actual political *struggle* against the Treaty, especially in France and Germany. The government of the former was the leading force in insisting its unjust and oppressive conditions be carried out to the letter, while the masses in the latter fiercely resented the theft of the Saar and other territories, military occupation by the victors, the enormous reparations and the fact that all the blame for the war was placed on Germany. This could be united with, while paying special attention to target the German ruling class as the main enemy of the German workers. The Nazis from the beginning made opposition to the Treaty a center of their agitation, using it to whip up national chauvinism. The emphasis they placed on the issue and the consistency with which they worked around it helped give their line on the question deeper influence among the masses than that of the CP.

An important factor in the class struggle in all the countries which had been involved in World War 1 was veterans. In several countries, veterans became the hard core of fascist paramilitary organizations, but there was excellent communist work done among this group as well. In the U.S., for instance, the Communist Party united with and helped lead veterans in their struggle for an early distribution of the cash bonus they had been promised at the war's end, a struggle which finally brought the vets into pitched battle in the Summer of 1932 with the Army they once served in. This struggle helped drive home to veterans the truth of what the communists had been saying about how for the rich soldiers were nothing but cannon fodder, to be cast aside (if they survived) when their purpose had been served.

As the world situation shifted and the motion towards war became more pronounced, the tasks of the Communist Parties changed and became more complex and challenging.

The first Party to be faced sharply with new conditions of this type was the Chinese Communist Party, when the Japanese invaded China and seized Manchuria in 1931. At this time the Chinese Communist Party was under the leadership of the "left" dogmatist line of Wang Ming. This line had failed all along to integrate Marxist-Leninist theory with the concrete reality of the Chinese revolution and was totally unable to grasp the changed situation and the possibility and necessity of creating a broader united front aimed against Japanese imperialism. The Chinese Soviet

Government centered in the red base area of Kiangsi in southern China declared war on Japan in April of 1932. The declaration remained a formality for two reasons. On a practical level, the soviets the CCP had built in the countryside were hundreds of miles away from the nearest Japanese. More significantly, the line of the "left" dogmatists was that "in order to wage war actively against Japanese imperialism, it is necessary first of all to destroy the reactionary rule of the Kuomintang."<sup>4</sup>

During this period, the Red Army under the overall command of Mao Tsetung and Chu Teh was able to win over large sections of the KMT armed forces and on occasion united with KMT generals who wanted to fight Japan. However, the dogmatist trend continued to dominate the Party's work. Mao Tsetung speaking to Edgar Snow (in *Red Star Over China*) cited the failure to unite with a short-lived People's Revolutionary Government set up in Fukien in 1933 by the KMT 19th Route Army and anti-Chiang KMT and other bourgeois forces. Mao put this as a mistake on a par with the disastrous attempt to defeat Chiang Kai-shek's fifth encirclement campaign with positional warfare instead of mobile and guerrilla methods of fighting. (This campaign incidentally was planned by Generals von Falkenhausen and von Seeckt and other German officers sent by the Hitler government as part of a bid to win Chiang Kai-shek away from U.S. and British control.)

It was the crushing defeat of the Kiangsi Soviet as a result of this erroneous policy that led to rectification and the correct line. Beginning in October, 1934, the Red Army broke through the "ring of steel" in which it was encircled and began the famous Long March. In January of 1935, an enlarged meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CCP was held in the just-captured town of Tsunyi. This meeting established Mao Tsetung as the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, rejected the "left" line on military affairs and confirmed Mao's line of leading the Red Army to northern China, where they could go into combat against the Japanese invaders, now the main imperialist enemy of China, and place themselves in the leadership of the masses of China's people who wanted to smash the aggressors and liberate their country.

Around the world, the seizure of Manchuria brought to the fore the spirit of proletarian internationalism, as the Communist Parties led demonstrations in support of the Chinese people against Japanese imperialism and made it, along with support of the Soviet Union, one of the major international issues raised on May Day every year.

In Japan, the Communist Party faced incredible hardships, including extensive infiltration by agents and laws banning it, which resulted in over 25,000 members, a good percentage of the total, being arrested from 1931 to 1933 alone. Nevertheless, it

carried out a heroic struggle against the invasion, fighting it in the Party's press and through demonstrations. Communists in the military published illegal papers like *The Soldier's Friend* which advised men to refuse to go to the front and fight and *The High Mast*, at the Kure naval yard, which called for defense of the Soviet Union, "Liberation of Korea and Formosa!" and "Independence for China!" This agitation and propaganda sparked small rebellions in the military like the one during a Japanese assault on Shanghai in 1932, but it did not immediately cause massive unrest, especially given Japan's cheap victories in Manchuria, thanks to the KMT's capitulation. Its effects continued to spread however and it helped set the stage for later developments, like the rallying of many Japanese prisoners of Chinese Communist-led troops to the banner of revolution and Japanese desertions to Red forces in the late '30s and up to the end of the war in 1945.

As in China, problems of "left" dogmatism had very serious results for the communists of Europe in the early 1930s. Here, too, sectarianism was a big problem, taking such forms as the tendency to reject work among other classes and strata than the proletariat, sections of the population where fascist organizations were concentrating their efforts, and the raising of revolutionary sounding slogans like the French "Soviets Partout!" (Build Soviets Everywhere!), which were not appropriate to the situation. As a result the real opportunities presented by the Great Depression of the early '30s were not fully grasped—in the 1932 elections the French CP lost 30% of the votes it had won four years earlier!

A key factor in these left errors was the "main blow" theory, according to which communists and the proletariat should at all times direct their fire primarily not at their main enemy, the bourgeoisie, but at the social democrats who served to prettify and prop up the bourgeoisie's rule.

This main blow policy contributed greatly to a misunderstanding and underestimation of what fascism was. In Italy the bourgeoisie had turned to Mussolini and his *fascisti* in 1922, and the Communist Party, after three or four years of toleration in semi-legality, was crippled and driven deep underground by the government's attacks. Despite this experience, the communists in Germany did not sufficiently regard the Nazi Party as a deadly threat to the working class or substantially different from other bourgeois parties. Rather the CP directed its "main blow" at the leadership and even, at some points, at the members of the Social Democratic Party, which held the allegiance of the majority of German workers and served to keep them from challenging the rule of capital. Furthermore, the weak bourgeois democratic governments of the late '20s and early '30s, like that headed by Bruning, were freely and erroneously categorized as "fascist," an error repeated by communists in France, Belgium and other countries.

In this light, the prospect of the Nazis running the government was not viewed by the CP's leaders with great alarm. While they opposed the Nazis as well as the Social Democrats in their election campaigns, unemployed organizing and so on, they also felt that any Nazi government would be a short-lived preliminary to the working class seizing power—"After Hitler, us!" Even after the new fascist government had illegalized the CP, killed or jailed thousands of its leaders and activists, ripped the trade unions, wiped out most democratic rights and begun entrenching its reign of terror, the *Communist International*, theoretical organ of the CI, in its May 1933 issue, insisted it was not a defeat and claimed, "the establishment of an open Fascist Dictatorship, by destroying all the democratic illusions among the masses and liberating them from the influence of social-democracy, accelerates the rate of Germany's development towards proletarian revolution."

This error was primarily characterized by a totally inadequate understanding of the internal character and the role of fascism and the difference between bourgeois democracy and open terrorist bourgeois rule, a subject which lies outside the scope of this article. Along with this error, however, came a failure to understand the relationship between fascism and the international situation. The political difficulties which led the "have-not" imperialists of Italy and Germany to opt for the fascist form of bourgeois dictatorship were largely the result of their persistent economic crises. These were caused not only by the general crumbling of the world capitalist system but particularly by the lack of foreign empires to plunder for raw materials and profits and to export their crises to. The solution they adopted to try and deal with their internal problems, fascism, was better suited, as well, than bourgeois democracy for a power preparing to elbow its way to the empire it had been denied and needed for its survival and growth. The crushing of mass movements and organizations which would oppose war preparations and aggression, the thunderous chorus of national chauvinist propaganda from the government-controlled media to mold public opinion, the state's ability to reorganize to some extent capitalist production and build a powerful military machine quickly, the militarization and discipline imposed on the masses in society as a whole, factors like these made fascism a useful form of rule in a period of war preparations and planning.

By the second half of 1933 the extent of the diasaster which had befallen the German working class and its Party, which had been the largest in Europe, excluding the USSR of course, was beginning to sink in. It fell to the Communist Party of France to take the most important of the first steps in what was to become a change in strategy for Parties around the world. On February 6, 1934, French fascists spearheaded by the *Croix de Feu* (cross of fire) and similar organizations led a massive demonstration in an

attempt to topple the government and create the conditions for a fascist putsch to seize power. They were also operating in the government through far-right politicians sympathetic to the *Croix de Feu* and its ilk.

The Communist leadership summed up that there was not a revolutionary situation, that the Party was not then in a position to lead the working class to power and, learning from the experience of Germany, that it was important to block the rise to power of the fascists. The Party itself held militant demonstrations on the 9th in which the government gunned down 10 workers, but, far more important, it joined with the leaders of the Socialist Party and the main trade union federations in calling a massive general strike on February 12, expressing the working class' determination to stop any further moves toward fascism cold in their tracks. This was the first major act of cooperation between the communists and social democrats in over five years and it had an electric effect on the French working class and a paralyzing one on the bourgeoisie. The Communist Party continued to push for united action with the social democrats, simultaneously carrying out much struggle over how to proceed from that point forward.

With the danger of fascism real and immediate and the social democrats holding the leadership of a large section of the French working class and masses, it was clearly necessary to break with the Party's previous policy aiming the "main blow" at them. But while united action could interfere with the fascists' drive for power, perhaps wrest some gains from the bourgeoisie, and give the CP a better opportunity to win over broader sections of the class, it did not change the fact that the social democratic leaders, with a very few exceptions, were still social props of bourgeois rule and intent on betraying the revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat.

All this emphatically put on the agenda a number of obviously critical questions about the nature and danger of fascism, its relation to bourgeois democracy, how it could be fought and in unity with what forces.

### *THE SEVENTH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL*

These were the questions addressed at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, which took place in July and August of 1935. The first Comintern Congress since 1928, it had to deal with a number of significant changes in the world situation since that time: the international economic crisis the Sixth World Congress of 1928 had predicted, the victory of fascism in Germany and the establishment of semi-fascist bourgeois dictatorships in several European countries like Hungary and Romania,

and the increasing danger of war to shatter the existing imperialist division of the world and of world war as the inevitable result of such efforts.

The Congress had to address itself to the rectification of many of the "left" errors of dogmatism, sectarianism and idealism its member Parties had made during the previous period.

What the Congress arrived at was the policy generally known as the United Front Against Fascism, which was put forward in a lengthy speech by Georgi Dimitrov, a Comintern leader from Bulgaria and hero of the Reichstag Fire trial. The principal focus of the speech, and the policy, was on the tasks of the Communist Parties within their respective countries, but since it was inextricably tied both at the Congress and in practice later to questions of line on and tactics appropriate to the question of war, a short summary is necessary here.

Dimitrov argued that fascism was a danger of great severity and immediacy in most capitalist states. He discussed the class struggle in terms of the danger of and struggle against fascism in countries such as the United States and Britain, where the bourgeoisie actually felt little need to resort to the fascist form of dictatorship. He also put forward the definition of fascism adopted by the Comintern earlier, at the 13th Plenum of the Executive Committee in late 1933, "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital." While this definition correctly identifies fascist rule as a particularly savage form of bourgeois dictatorship, it leaves open the possibility that there exist some identifiable less (or "least") reactionary, chauvinistic and imperialist sections of monopoly capital who can be united with against the "most reactionary" ones.

The way proposed by Dimitrov and adopted by the Congress for fighting fascism, whether already in power or as a movement seeking power, was the creation of a united front of the working class to serve as the core of a broader popular front. The purpose of these fronts was to unite all possible classes and forces in the fight to defend democratic rights and "democracy," and the livelihood of the masses. The proposed "united front of the working class" was not a strategic united front in the sense of a *strategic* realignment of class forces for the purpose of making revolution. It was seen as an alliance between the leadership of working class-based parties, of trade union centers and other workers' organizations to make possible unity of action among their members.

The people's front\* was a broader (and generally more informal) alliance of various strata and the political parties and other

\*The terms "people's front" and "popular front" were used interchangeably and to a great extent "united front" was also applied to this broader tactical alliance during the Congress and the following period.

organizations representing them. Here Dimitrov opened the door—although not all the way—to the participation of the bourgeoisie in this front, pointing out that in organizations whose membership is a majority peasants or urban petty bourgeois, “control is in the hands of . . . the agents of big capital.” But nevertheless, to win the masses adhering to them, “under certain circumstances we can and must try to draw these parties and organizations or certain sections of them to the side of the anti-fascist People’s Front, despite their bourgeois leadership.”<sup>5</sup>

This broad tactical alliance could even take the form of a “government of the popular front” in which Communists could participate in the electoral coalition to form it and even as members of the cabinet. Such a government would have to have a program of “struggle against fascism and reaction.”<sup>6</sup>

This approach to the question of fighting fascism, by its tendency to overestimate the danger of fascism in many countries, ignoring the laws of uneven development, and to treat it as different from bourgeois rule in general, by its tendency to elevate tactics to the level of strategy, left dangerous openings for class collaboration and revisionism. In one sense it represented a flip from the “main blow” against social-democracy line it was trying to correct to one of directing the main blow strictly against fascism, instead of the bourgeoisie in general. In countries where fascism had not been put in power (and especially where there was not an imminent danger), this would likely result in letting the capitalists *as a class* and their system off the hook.

Dimitrov in his speech did make it clear that the goal of the Parties was still the seizure of power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The connection between the united front against fascism and this goal, however, was not dealt with deeply. Mainly it was portrayed as a question of the working class and its Party requiring “preparation” for the seizure of state power, with a strong emphasis on the importance of the fight for bourgeois democratic rights as preparation for the fight for proletarian democracy. The possibility was raised of the popular front governments becoming one of the most important forms of transition to the proletarian revolution, of training the masses through their own experience in the need for revolution. Dimitrov emphasized, however, that such a government could not bring salvation and only by socialist revolution could the working class overthrow the class rule of the exploiters.

Dimitrov’s speech also put forward, without much explication, a recommendation that in the colonial and semicolonial countries a strategy of an anti-imperialist united front be adopted. This was a most important break with the previous “left” policies which had been mandated for these countries, policies which were characterized, for example, by sectarian attitudes toward the national

bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie and even the peasantry.\* This united front against imperialism was further addressed in a speech by Wang Ming, whose “left” line had caused so much damage in China until it was defeated under the leadership of Mao Tsetung. Wang Ming was in the midst of an equally dangerous swing to an openly rightist position.

This could be seen most clearly in the section of his speech dealing with India. The Indian Communist Party had previously tried to unite other classes and parties around such “left” slogans as “the establishment of an Indian Workers’ and Peasants’ Soviet Government.” Now, Wang Ming proposed, they should limit the platform they proposed to a series of domestic reforms—freeing political prisoners, against “burdensome taxes” and wage cuts, “for the establishment of democratic liberties,”<sup>7</sup> etc. The absence in this program of any demand for political independence or the defeat of the British colonial rulers, unquestionably a mass sentiment among the broadest sections of the Indian people, laid the basis for a line of collaborating with British imperialism, especially since it was a potential opponent of the up-and-coming imperialist countries. The Indian CP avoided this error in the main over the next few years, partly because it was illegal, but Wang Ming was to peddle a similar set of shoddy wares inside the Chinese Party.

The Congress paid a good deal of attention to the international situation. The main speech on the subject was given by Palmiro Togliatti (under the alias Ercoli), a Comintern leader who would later become the father of the revisionist degeneration of the Communist Party of Italy. He began by analyzing the growing rivalry of the imperialist powers and pointed out how this was ending the period of imperialist “peace” and stability which had followed World War 1: “At the present time all that is left of the Versailles system is the postwar frontiers in Europe and the partition of the colonies and the colonial mandates. That is to say, nothing remains except that which can be abolished only by the direct use of arms, only by means of violence and war.”<sup>8</sup> While the speech correctly identified imperialists who had been cut out of the division of the spoils, like Germany’s rulers, as those whose actions were most likely to trigger war, it tended to make this an absolute law and raise aggression as a characteristic which distinguished them from other imperialist powers.

One of the most significant ways this line came out was in Dimitrov’s speech where he raised the slogan, “Fascism is unbridled chauvinism and predatory war,”<sup>9</sup> which was later shortened to

\* The 7th World Congress also paid tribute to the contributions of the Chinese Communist Party by voting to add Mao Tsetung to the Executive Committee, the leading body of the CI.



"Fascism is war."<sup>10</sup>

Another speaker, Marty of France, put forward the reciprocal argument, "War necessarily means military dictatorship over the whole country."<sup>11</sup> This portrayal of the *close relationship* between these two social phenomena with common roots in the crisis of capitalism as one of *identity* was both undialectical and non-materialist. The experience of World War 1 had showed (as World War 2 would again) that at least some capitalist countries could carry on a war without eliminating bourgeois democracy, although it was sure to be restricted to some extent "in the national interest," and Italy had had a fascist regime for 13 years, from 1922 to 1935, before it entered into any military adventures. This mistaken view on the identity of war and fascism contributed to the problems which grew in large sections of the international communist movement in the following years.

Based on the analysis of the growing war danger, Togliatti called for the united front against fascism to be applied on an international level "to concentrate our fire against German fascism, as the principal instigator of war and the mortal enemy of the Soviet Union and the proletarian revolution."<sup>12</sup> In other parts of the published Congress proceedings Japan, Italy and Poland were also considered part of the target.\*

This international front was seen as having at its center the Soviet Union and closely allied with it the forces of the international working class and including all other forces, such as bourgeois pacifists, who supported peace. In this last category were the rulers of those bourgeois states interested in peace because they had benefited from the post-World War 1 division of the world and had no immediate interests in seeing it changed.

In keeping with this, the decisions of the Congress proclaimed that in connection with the preparations of the imperialists for a new world war, "the concentration of forces against the chief instigators of war at any given moment (at the present time—against fascist Germany, and against Poland and Japan which are in league with it) constitutes the most important tactical task of the Communist Parties." In the same context, "the *central slogan* of the Communist Parties must be: struggle for peace."<sup>13</sup> (emphasis in original)

This decision and the line behind it, as practice was to show,

\*Oddly, the resolutions of the 7th World Congress which basically followed the line of Togliatti's speech and called the German fascists "the chief instigators of war," cited as the "main contradiction in the camp of the imperialists . . . the Anglo-American antagonism." (p. 588) It is true that a bitter, bloody Latin American border war between British-backed Paraguay and U.S.-backed Bolivia lasted for three years in the early '30s, but it was not instigated by the two. Certainly the contradictions which found expression in the Japanese invasion of China and German rearmament were more significant in 1935 than the rivalry between British and U.S. imperialism.

could not help but lead to the subordination of the class struggle in the different countries to speculation on the international situation. In essence it became a "stages" theory, wherein peace and its preservation were considered so important and necessary to the working class and its struggle for revolution that that struggle itself tends to be negated. (This was similar and closely related to difficulties in implementing the united front against fascism with its emphasis on the importance of bourgeois democracy and uniting with *all* forces opposing fascism within a given country.)

The problem with approaches like this is that, in the final analysis, proletarian revolution is, and can only be, made country by country, and there is and can be no single strategy or set of tactics universally applicable to reaching that goal. Only by uniting the basic theory of Marxism-Leninism, the science of revolution, with the particular reality of a given country can the proletariat seize power.

There *are* times when the struggle of the working class and masses of a given nation against its own bourgeoisie must be temporarily relegated to second place. In most countries World War 2 after the invasion of the Soviet Union was such a time, because of the change it made in the character of the war, as summed up in the preceding article in this series.

The prewar years of the 1930s were not such a time. The leaders of the Soviet Union were correct in working to utilize every possible contradiction in the imperialist camp, but the working class in countries where it was not in power was not in a position to do this in the same way, and, of course, its main task was making revolution.

As Mao Tsetung was to say about compromises made after World War 2 between the Soviet Union and the U.S., Britain and France:

"Such compromise does not require the people in the countries of the capitalist world to follow suit and make compromises at home. The people in those countries will continue to wage different struggles in accordance with their different conditions."<sup>14</sup>

The principle Mao formulates, through referring to different circumstances, is applicable to the period before the war as well.

Besides (and again closely related to) the line of "concentration of forces against the chief instigators of war at any given moment," this mistaken tendency to subordinate the class struggle to the international situation also arose in another guise, that of defending the Soviet Union. Togliatti proposed the Congress resolution on war include the statement (which was adopted in roughly the same form) that in the event of a counterrevolution-

ary war against the USSR, "the Communists must call upon all the working people to help by every means and at any price to bring about the victory of the Red Army against the imperialist armies."<sup>15</sup>

Certainly the outbreak of any war against the Soviet Union called for immediate analysis and adjustment of a given Party's policy, but defense of the USSR was not its ultimate duty. Certainly the class conscious workers would want and have to make the greatest sacrifices in this cause and in most cases it would indeed become the principal task around which other tasks had to be unfolded. But it would, for instance, have been wrong in a country with a rapidly developing revolutionary situation to turn away from that opportunity—even if the bourgeoisie was trading or allied with the USSR. As for non-war situations like the period following the Congress, the internationalist duties of the proletariat of the capitalist world, like those of the workers in power in the Soviet Union, included both defending the USSR and working for revolution in countries still under bourgeois rule. But the latter was and had to be overall the principal task of those Parties in capitalist and colonial countries. To reverse the relationship was, again, to sacrifice the class struggle.

All these points are naturally clearer in hindsight, with the practice of communists in the late '30s to sum up and help base our judgement on. At the time of the Seventh World Congress, the Comintern leaders were certainly aware of some of the dangers in what they were proposing. Togliatti spoke directly to this point:

"For us it is absolutely indisputable that there is a complete identity of aim between the peace policy of the Soviet Union and the policy of the working class and the Communist Parties of the capitalist countries . . . We not only defend the Soviet Union in general. We defend concretely its whole policy and each of its acts. But this identity of aim by no means signifies that at every given moment there must be complete coincidence in all acts and on all questions between the tactics of the proletariat and Communist Parties that are still struggling for power and the concrete tactical measures of the Soviet proletariat and the CPSU(B), which already have the power in their hands in the Soviet Union."<sup>16</sup>

In its resolutions the Congress was emphatic that Parties were not to give up the struggle against the war preparations of their own rulers:

"The Communist Parties of all capitalist countries must fight: against military expenditures (war budgets), for

the recall of military forces from the colonies and mandated territories, against militarization measures taken by capitalist governments, especially the militarization of the youth, women and the unemployed, against emergency decrees restricting bourgeois-democratic liberties with the aim of preparing for war; against restricting the rights of workers employed in war industry plants; against subsidizing the war industry and against trading in or transporting arms. The struggle against war preparation measures can be conducted only in closest connection with the defense of the economic interests and political rights of the workers and other employees, the laboring peasants and urban lower middle class."<sup>17</sup>

But already at the Congress, difficulties in implementing this directive simultaneously with the one to concentrate fire on Germany were becoming clear. Togliatti's speech was given later in the Congress than those of two leaders of the French Party. Both had enthusiastically cited their Party's response to Stalin's statement of "understanding and approval" toward French military policy, which response was the reprinting of the Soviet communique on big posters under the banner headline, "Stalin Is Right."

Togliatti in effect had to speak on behalf of the French communists to make clear to the Congress the position their Party was—or should have been—taking. In the section of his speech dealing with the possibility of different tactical measures being appropriate for the working class in and out of power, he said, that

"in addressing themselves to the bourgeoisie . . . they could and had to say to them: 'Gentlemen, you have signed a pact, a limited pact, with the working class of the Soviet Union which has the power in its hands, but you have not signed any pact with the working class of our country, with us. We have no guarantee that you will not utilize your army, which continues to be a class army, against the working class of our country and against the colonial peoples, our allies in the struggle against imperialism. We have no guarantee at all that you will not continue to make the poor, and not the rich, pay all the necessary expenses for the organization of this army. We cannot control the manner in which your class government and your reactionary and fascist General Staff will spend the money that you take away from the poor in order to pay for the organization of the army. We have not even any guarantee that, when the decisive moment arrives, you will remain loyal to the

pact you are signing today.

“ ‘For all these reasons, gentlemen, we can neither vote for your military budget nor give up the struggle against your government. But please note that this does not mean that we have no interest in the pact which you have concluded with the Soviet Union or that we are indifferent to the manner in which you put it into effect. We know that in your ranks there are people who are opposed to this pact, that there exists a section of the bourgeoisie who would like to tear it up. We will staunchly defend the pact, because it is an instrument in the struggle for peace and for the defense of the Soviet Union. We shall vote for the pact in Parliament and shall expose any attempt to pursue a policy different from or in contradiction to the obligations ensuing from the pact.’ ”<sup>18</sup>

This was good as far as it went. It was, at one and the same time, a position proclaiming support for the Soviet Union's diplomatic efforts to defend itself and forestall the outbreak of war and a statement that despite this support there would be no “truce” in the class war in France.

It did not, on the other hand, go far enough. It did not sufficiently differentiate between the interests of the Soviet Union and those of the French bourgeoisie in forming a temporary bloc against the possibility of aggressive action by Germany. The fact that the French ruling class did not have the same immediate and desperate drive to expand as did Germany's did not make it one iota less *imperialist*. Its opposition to Germany had no progressive aspects except as it coincided with the efforts of the Soviet Union to preserve peace. Not to make this distinction sharply was, in effect, to tell the masses of French people, or let them believe, that they had a common interest with their own bourgeoisie against that bourgeoisie's most hated rivals, and thus in “national defense.”

Furthermore, Togliatti's discussion was the most dialectical explanation in the major speeches at the Congress. The French communists, as pointed out above, were already tending to subordinate the class struggle to the international united front against fascism—and even more so to the domestic. The last section of this article will trace the manner in which this tendency, in France and elsewhere, grew more severe, hindering the struggle for revolution and leaving the proletariat ill-equipped to handle the actual outbreak of an imperialist war.

There are two other significant points which came up in discussion at the Congress. The Dutch and other communists raised the question of what policy should be followed in the event of a relatively small and weak state, like the Netherlands, being attacked

by one of the imperialist Great Powers even if it was itself an imperialist and colonialist country. The Congress resolutions summed up that,

“if any weak state is attacked by one or more big imperialist powers which want to destroy its national independence and national unity or to dismember it, . . . a war conducted by the national bourgeoisie of such a country to repel this attack *may* assume the character of a war of liberation, in which the working class and the Communists of that country must intervene.”<sup>19</sup> (emphasis added)

As a general guideline, this is correct. Lenin addressed this problem a number of times during World War 1, suggesting, for instance, in “Socialism and War” that, *outside the context of the imperialist war*, a struggle by Belgium to regain its liberation from German occupation would be just.<sup>20</sup>

At this time, the possibility of German or Italian invasion of neighboring capitalist countries was hardly in the realm of fantasy, as the German-Italian standoff over Austria the year before had showed. At the same time the Congress' position would have been of far more value had it been made clear that it was incorrect to speculate that the form the future struggle in these countries would take was a national war of resistance to occupation. Insufficient attention was paid to the significant possibility that the bulk of the ruling class of such a small nation would capitulate without much resistance to an overpowering invasion or, even more probable, that such an invasion would be taking place in the context of an all-out interimperialist war, like World War 1, which would create a very different situation.<sup>21</sup> Further it was not emphasized that any war which broke out between, say, Germany and Britain without the involvement of the USSR could not be other than an imperialist war.

While the likelihood of the outbreak of interimperialist war was thus downplayed, because of the emphasis on the struggle for peace, and on the difference between the “aggressor” imperialists and those with a stake in “peace,” the Congress did overall uphold the Leninist line on what stand to take in such a war. Were it to break out, the tasks of communists in all the combatant countries would be to work for the defeat of their own bourgeoisie while entering the army to gain military training and be in the best possible position to “transform the imperialist war into a civil war.”<sup>22</sup>

#### *THE WORLD SITUATION AND THE USSR ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR 2*

In the second half of the decade, there were three major forces

confronting one another sharply on the world scene. One was the rising imperialist powers, Germany, Italy and Japan, which developed closer political ties with one another as all three pushed their campaigns to redivide the imperialist world in their favor. The second was the major "have" imperialist powers, headed by Britain, which increasingly followed a policy of "appeasing" their expansive rivals, primarily in order to get them involved in war with the Soviet Union. The USSR itself was the third force, which simultaneously had to maneuver to avoid being caught in the trap laid by the imperialists and at the same time to try and delay the onset of war.

This section of the article will deal not only with objective developments in the imperialist world but with the response of the Soviet Union to them, since it was so inextricably tied to everything that happened in this time period. Soviet policy was basically a continuation of its efforts from 1933 on to win the established imperialist kingpins challenged by the rise of the German, Italian and Japanese newcomers to a policy of collective security. The main components of this were agreements aimed at containing expansion bids by these powers and strong joint steps against acts of aggression or which threatened peace, through the League of Nations if possible.

In early 1935, the French bourgeoisie, represented by Foreign Minister Laval, was looking to tighten up its ties with Italy, trying to drive a wedge between Italy and Germany as part of the same policy of isolating Germany which led it to negotiate the Franco-Soviet Pact. The conflict between Germany and Austria seemed to present an opportunity to do this, although relations between the two self-proclaimed fascist powers were already improving as they shared common interests in opposition to the Versailles Treaty, the League and the existing division of the world. In desperation, the French bourgeoisie, to solidify the bloc it was trying to build, was willing to give Italy a free hand in the colonial venture Mussolini was planning in Africa.

### *Ethiopia*

This was the conquest of Ethiopia (also known as Abyssinia at the time), a feudal kingdom which was one of two independent nations on the continent. Italy held two colonies, Eritrea and Italian Somalia on the coast of the African Horn. For the Italian bourgeoisie, control of Ethiopia meant not only control of its large suspected mineral resources, but linking up the other two colonies into one of the largest single colonies in Africa. Although Ethiopia was formally protected by treaties with Britain, France and Italy itself, guaranteeing territorial integrity and independence, it was no one's colony and none of the imperialist Great Powers showed

more than mild alarm as Italy opened a diplomatic and propaganda offensive against it.

On October 2, 1935 the Italian Army invaded. The Ethiopian people waged a heroic struggle. Its ill-trained army, some units armed only with spears, fought desperately against the invaders, losing battle after battle but retreating to fight again and stall the Italian advance. Savage bombing attacks and poison gas hit not only military targets but the general population.

The League of Nations, spurred in part by the presence of the Soviet Union, passed a resolution condemning Italy's invasion. To back this up, the League voted overwhelmingly to impose a set of economic sanctions, though they were weak-kneed, on Italy—forbidding sale of war materiel to and all imports from the aggressor. Many countries just ignored the sanctions and continued trade. The U.S. called a boycott on "both belligerents" which helped Italy since it was far better equipped than Ethiopia. The British and French, while honoring the sanctions, were worried that Italian losses and the tying down of its troops would create a situation of turmoil in Eastern Europe from which Germany or the USSR might benefit. They tried to negotiate a "truce" which would immediately cede a substantial part of the invaded country to Italy. The masses of people, especially in England, erupted in outrage at this conniving at and prettifying of aggression and the plan was dropped.

But Britain could have stopped the war in short order, simply by closing off the Suez Canal, which it controlled, to Italian shipping. It did not, fearing problems in Eastern Europe, the rise of revolutionary struggle in Italy itself and that closer ties between Mussolini and Hitler would result. In sharp contrast was the principled position of the Soviet Union, which had no relations with Ethiopia and a decade of friendly diplomatic ties with Italy, not to mention a growing trade. Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders not only sent aid to Ethiopia and voted for and implemented all sanctions on Italy, it also stopped shipping oil to Italy although the imperialists in the League chose not to consider it as a "war material."

Unfazed by the limp-wristed sanctions, Italy withdrew from the League, joining Germany and Japan on the outside, and pushed on, finalizing its conquest on May 9, 1936. Two months later the League voted to drop even the formality of sanctions.

While this was going on Germany had taken its next step. Since Versailles and under the terms of the Locarno Pact as well, the Rhineland area of Germany which bordered on France had been a demilitarized zone. On March 7, 1936, the Germany Army marched in and reoccupied it. At the same time, Hitler announced a variety of peace proposals which were designed to cause confusion and promote lengthy diplomatic discussion and thus to avoid

any retaliatory moves.

The Soviet Union pointed to the conquest of Ethiopia and the remilitarization of the Rhineland to underline the importance of its policy of collective security. Its Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov, called on the League of Nations to help build this:

“We should make it our concern to have all continents and, for a start, at least all Europe covered with a system of regional pacts, on the strength of which groups of States would undertake to protect particular sectors from aggression.”

These pacts were designed to strengthen the anti-aggression clauses in the League covenant and be linked with one another through the League, or otherwise they would become “nothing but pre-war groups of alliances.”<sup>23</sup> But despite Soviet efforts the various imperialist Great Powers would not follow this course.

#### *German-Italian Intervention in Spain*

In the absence of any restraints posing a real threat, Germany and Italy took another long step which pointed toward world war—this time jointly, in Spain. In early 1936, a cabinet supported by a popular front of the type called for at the 7th World Congress of the Comintern had been elected to head the Spanish government. Backed by the socialists and the small Communist Party, it was composed mostly of bourgeois politicians who simultaneously made concessions to the masses and attempted to defuse their struggles. For large sections of the Spanish ruling class, which was made up not only of capitalists but feudal landlords, monarchist elements, and high ranking figures from the state, military and Catholic bureaucracies, this approach was too dangerous and too generous.

On July 18, 1936, General Franco and other officers based in Spain's North African colonies led a revolt to overthrow the Republic, supported by these elements. The reactionary uprising would have been crushed at birth, had it not been for the backing of Italy and Germany, which had cooperated in the conspiracy. The troops commanded by the main rebellious generals reached Spain itself in Italian and German airplanes and warships to support coordinated insurrections there made by other officers, government officials and the fascist *Falange* organization. Without the main force from Africa, these smaller risings would have been isolated and cleaned up one by one and the bulk of the Army of Africa would have been stranded because when Navy officers had tried to turn their ships over to the rebellion, the sailors rose up,

killed the traitors and declared for the Republic.

From its start, the other capitalist Great Powers refused to throw their backing to the democratically elected (and emphatically non-Communist) government of Spain, with which they had friendly relations, against the German and Italian supported attack.

In fact, as the revolt settled into a full-scale civil war by the Fall, the British government proposed and won French backing for a policy of “non-intervention,” by terms of which no arms or other military material would be permitted to be shipped to either side in Spain. Germany, Italy and Portugal, which was also aiding Franco, all expressed interest in taking part in the arrangement. Although from the beginning it had supported the Spanish Republic and masses against the attack, the Soviet Union agreed to set aside its right to deal with the Spanish government and take part. The French ruling class placed particular pressure on the USSR to do this, threatening Franco-Soviet ties to make their point, another example of the difficulties that arise in the course of making use of contradictions in the imperialist camp.

While an international commission was established, met and talked and talked to determine how the embargo on which everyone had agreed would be enforced, Germany and Italy continued to pump military supplies and aid to Franco's forces. The Spanish and Soviet delegates repeatedly documented these violations in the commission meetings but no action was taken. Thus, beginning in October the Soviet Union recommenced arms shipments to the Spanish government.

The USSR and Mexico, however, were the only countries willing to ship large quantities of war materiel to the Republic. Although millions of dollars worth, including tanks and fighter planes, were shipped along with some military and training personnel, the USSR, in part due to geographical distance and the absence of a cooperative neighboring country like Portugal to unload in an transship through, was unable to match the extent of the aid provided by Italy and Germany.

The Italian government put up the larger stake on Franco—including trained troops numbering over 50,000. Germany was more sparing, particularly of personnel—its main unit was the 6,000 man Condor Legion, a combined air attack group including fighters, bombers and ground support and defense units. It was the Condor Legion which carried out the notorious terror bombing raid on the Basque village of Guernica, killing 1654 men, women and children. German arms carried a heavy price, too. In late 1938 when Franco desperately needed supplies to launch a new offensive, Germany would not consider delivery until Franco had agreed to 40% participation by German capital in Spanish iron mines and to the repayment of debts in iron ore. Italy and Ger-

many both used the Spanish Civil War as a school and testing ground for military tactics, like the saturation terror bombing of Guernica, as preparation for the future wars both by now anticipated being more directly involved in.

Despite Franco's powerful allies, the Spanish people, with support from the masses, if not governments, the world over, continued their heroic fight. For three years they delivered severe setbacks to domestic reaction and its imperialist backers before finally meeting defeat (more on international support and the internal aspects of the Spanish Civil War in the following section).

### *Japan's Invasion of China Continues*

The dialectical motion toward war was continuing to develop. In March, 1937 obviously encouraged by the successes of its opposite numbers in Europe, Japan launched an invasion from colonized Manchuria south into the heartland of China without bothering to declare war. While Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang government were now part, in fact nominally at the head, of an anti-Japanese national front with the Chinese Communist Party, this had not given them appreciably more backbone (more on this in the next section). First Peking, then Shanghai, Nanking, Hankow, and by the Fall of 1938 Canton fell, leaving all China's ports, the overwhelming majority of its manufacturing capacity and much of its most productive agricultural areas under Japanese occupation.

The Soviet Union was again first and foremost among countries coming to the aid of the victims of aggression. On August 21, 1937 a Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed and in the first half of the next year the USSR gave the Chinese government a \$100 million loan. Since Chiang Kai-shek was constrained by the united front, anti-Japanese popular opinion and the defensive position of his government, the Soviets were able to deliver these loans in the form of weapons, including fliers to pilot the planes it provided, with some confidence they would be used against Japan or at least not in a campaign against the CCP and the liberated areas under its control.

Even the KMT's delegate to the League of Nations paid tribute to the role of the Soviet Union, saying, "Except for one state . . . the members of the League of Nations have done very little to support China in its struggle against aggression, in the interests of international law and order."<sup>24</sup>

During this period the Soviet Union also repeatedly smashed small-scale Japanese probes against its territory and that of the Mongolian People's Republic, convincing the Japanese bourgeoisie and general staff that those military leaders pushing for war with the USSR were nuts.

### *Appeasement*

But the center of interimperialist conflict was unquestionably Europe and the diplomatic situation was growing more unfavorable to the Soviet Union and the masses of people. Germany concluded a formal alliance with Japan in November, 1936 which Italy joined the next year. This agreement bore the name the Anti-Comintern Pact and was billed as the world's vanguard against the red menace. In keeping with this, Germany commenced making demands in an easterly direction, calling for all "racial Germans" to be reunited with the fatherland—meaning Austria, the Sudetenland section of Czechoslovakia and the Danzig corridor in Poland.

This was a shrewd move on Hitler's part as it played right into the main tendency in viewing the international situation in the British ruling class, which was a policy known as appeasement. In essence, this policy consisted of a further development of the British approach to Germany since the time of the Locarno Treaty—keep tight constraints on Germany's western borders and permit its ruling class more freedom to the east. The idea was that this would bring German interests into direct conflict with those of the Soviet proletarian state and give Hitler an opportunity to make good on his well-publicized designs on the Ukraine and the Caucasus and on his equally well-publicized hatred of "Bolshevism." The ensuing war would so weaken both enemies as to secure for the British ruling class its continued position of dominance in the world, even if shared with the U.S., and perhaps even the opportunity to mold the future of both combatants in the direction of its choosing.

There were, of course, those in British finance capital and politics who supported the appeasement policies at least in large part for other reasons—politically sympathies with Hitler; pacifist sentiments; misunderstanding the economic and political forces driving the fascist government of Germany to war and the consequent assumption that, given concessions like a few colonies in Africa and all the German speaking areas of Europe, the Nazi government would settle down and become a force for stability in Europe; interests in investment or trade with Germany which an antagonistic policy would menace; and so on. These tendencies were fed, and spread among the masses, by the fact that the main reasoning behind appeasement could hardly be expressed publicly at a time when the masses had proved their readiness to respond with angry protest when the rulers winked at acts of aggression like the invasion of Ethiopia.

Instead the policy was justified precisely in terms of rectifying the inequities of Versailles, the justness and reasonableness of many of Germany's demands, the horrors of modern war and Ger-

man might, the desirability of peace, the efficacy of negotiations and the like. Thus, while not the central thrust of the policy, the manner in which it was carried out did help spread the line of "peace at any price" in the media and among the masses, especially sections of the petty bourgeoisie. In fact, this public opinion then had a certain reflex effect in pushing British foreign policy and leading political figures toward the line used to rationalize it.

In practice, one of the most direct forms this policy took was a series of talks between various diplomats and Hitler to try and develop the basis for official treaty negotiations. While these made for generally civil relations between the two countries, a number of stumbling blocks prevented the negotiations from getting underway. One of the main ones was Britain's total disinclination to return to Germany all those colonies she had taken over at the end of World War 1. Even here Britain was willing to make certain concessions. In conversation with Hitler, the British Ambassador said that the European colonies in Central Africa could be redistributed and "Germany would be considered in this redistribution, and would therefore have a colonial possession under her sovereignty."<sup>25</sup>

Even as the appeasement policy was becoming more dominant, with its principal spokesman Neville Chamberlain becoming Prime Minister in 1937, a countervailing tendency was growing. Although some Labor Party politicians supported it, this trend was centered among a group of dissidents from the ruling Conservative Party. Sharing the general ruling class hatred and fear of socialism and the Soviet Union, they nevertheless saw Germany as a greater immediate danger to the British Empire and were willing to deal with the more distant devil to strike at the one closer to home. Winston Churchill, who was the main figure in this group, spoke frequently with Soviet diplomats, encouraging them to pursue the policy of collective security and pledging to continue his efforts to win the British ruling class to it.\*

With the failure of its attempt to bring Italy into its anti-German bloc and the rearming of the Rhine, the French bourgeoisie now moved toward reliance on the British ruling class as it had before World War 1. Both the bourgeoisie and its "socialist" servants in the Popular Front government feared closer ties with the

\*Churchill made it eminently clear that at heart he was a reactionary and a die-hard anti-communist and that even for the Soviet Union, unity with him could only be tactical and undertaken with extreme care. A good example of his stand came when, after originally supporting the embargo of the Spanish Republic, he moved to back the Republic in 1938. As he explained to a journalist, "Franco has all the right on his side because he loves his country. Also Franco is defending Europe from the communist danger—if you wish to put it in those terms. But I, I am English, and I prefer the triumph of the wrong cause. I prefer that the other side wins, because Franco could be an upset or a threat to British interests, and the others no." (quoted in Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, New York, Harper Colophon, 1963, p. 531n.)

Soviet Union. Among other things, it would strengthen the already growing prestige and influence of the French Communist Party among the workers and other strata and might put France in the position of having to send support to the Spanish Republic.

The growing French dependency on Britain meant there was little danger of such developments. In fact, the Franco-Soviet Pact, while still in effect, was increasingly regarded by the French government as lapsed in practice. Along with this came a growth of appeasement sentiment. In France, where the CP and the working class movement were both stronger than in Britain, so was pro-fascist sentiment in the ruling circles, even though the French fascist groups had suffered severe setbacks. For example, one prominent member of the French Academy, the cream of the country's bourgeois intelligentsia, proclaimed, "I feel closer to Hitler and his men, infinitely closer than to the Communists."<sup>26</sup> The bland confidence of the French General Staff that its Maginot line of forts and bunkers was impregnable and France permanently safe from German attack also helped fuel appeasement sentiment.

As for the other capitalist Great Power, the United States, some relatively small sections of the ruling class openly supported Hitler, like Henry Ford who had given the Nazis economic backing well before they took power. The main trend in the U.S. ruling class was similar to appeasement and had the same effect. It was isolationism, a long-standing position despite the growing stake of U.S. capital in Europe and Asia. For instance, although not a part of the Non-Intervention Commission, the Roosevelt government pushed through Congress an Embargo Act forbidding shipment of war materiel to either side in Spain, winning Franco's grateful comment that the president was a "true gentleman." To Japan the U.S. acted more like philanthropists—as the Japanese Army threw itself against Chiang Kai-shek, who was closely leashed to U.S. and British imperialism, U.S. corporations were stepping up shipments of scrap steel, chemicals and other supplies the Japanese war machine would have stalled without. (This is not to say, of course, that the firms involved weren't raking in cash hand over fist—this was, like normal capitalist philanthropies, highly profitable to those who ran it.)

### *USSR Steps Up Preparation*

This period was obviously one of great difficulties for the leadership of the USSR as they continued trying to isolate the up-and-coming imperialists by uniting with their better established rivals. Seeing the handwriting on the wall, they also stepped up preparations against the likelihood of war. The obvious and numerous needs of well financed domestic fascists and Nazi agents in various European countries large and small indicated to Soviet leaders the

danger of the same thing in their own country, so they undertook a vast purge of the Communist Party and the Red Army. The principal target was members of the Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites, who were working for Germany and Japan as the only route to power in the USSR open to them. Their chief and guru, Leon Trotsky, had admitted as early as 1931 that his chance depended on "when an opportunity is presented from the outside—perhaps a war or a new European intervention when the weakness of the government would act as a stimulus."<sup>27</sup> Trotsky was in Mexico, working to coordinate these plots to sabotage socialism and Soviet foreign policy. He and his followers wrote frequently for reactionary and pro-German publications like the American magazines *Liberty* and *American Mercury*, turning out articles claiming the Soviet economy was in a state of collapse, its armed forces worthless, its people on the verge of rebellion, etc. This played right into the hands of publicists for appeasement everywhere, who used these fabrications to paint the USSR as a weak and unreliable ally and at the same time as easy pickings for Germany.

In these purges mistakes and excesses were unquestionably committed, based on errors in Marxist-Leninist theory and analysis. Stalin and the Soviet leadership failed to understand that class struggle continues under socialism even after the basic transformation of ownership and the differences between contradictions among the people and those between the people and the class enemy. As a result there was a tendency to blame all erroneous lines and other problems on the activities of foreign agents, not understanding how they *primarily* developed as a result of class struggle and other contradictions in the building of socialism.\*

Despite the errors that were made, the purge succeeded in exposing and cleaning out Trotskyites, foreign agents and other elements conspiring against socialism so well that the Soviet Union was the only country in Europe which had no significant fifth column ready to perform the bidding of the Nazi invaders.

Meanwhile Soviet military preparations were growing even faster than the leaps in the economy as a whole during the second Five Year Plan, from 1933 to 1937. Between 1933 and 1939 Soviet arms expenditures increased 27 times over! While part of this went in the form of aid to Spain and China, the bulk was devoted to building the Red Army into a great defensive bulwark. Unlike the armed forces of the other Great Powers, the Soviet Union's were mainly defensive in character. For example, its Navy was oriented toward coastal defense, with relatively few capital ships.

\*In the course of summing up the experience of the socialist revolution in China and the capitalist restoration in the USSR, Mao Tsetung analyzed the danger of capitalist restoration and the means to prevent it—continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

### *Germany Moves on Austria, Czechoslovakia*

The next major victim of the policy of appeasement was Austria. Recognizing that Italy would have to take a back seat to Germany in their alliance, Mussolini gave his OK to the Nazis to make their move. The Germans made a series of rapid fire demands on the Austrian government, which the fascist Chancellor von Schuschnigg conceded to almost as fast as they were made. But, realizing Hitler's plan, he quickly proposed a plebiscite on whether or not Austria should join into a Greater Germany. Germany's rulers were enraged, knowing that they would lose such a vote, and dispensed with diplomatic niceties. German troops rolled into Austria unchallenged on March 12, 1938 and announced its annexation.

The Austrian bourgeoisie provided virtually no resistance to the invasion. A few had left the country earlier. Austrian Nazis assured the others, even ones who hadn't supported their movement, that annexation would not result in any loss of their property or position, that they would just become lesser frogs in the larger pond of the Third Reich. The forces of the working class, which might have organized and led opposition to the German onslaught, had been broken and fragmented by the terror imposed by the Austrian bourgeoisie's fascists after the betrayal of the working class by the capitalists' valets in the leadership of the social democrats.

Victory in Austria set the stage for Hitler's move on Czechoslovakia, where the German bourgeoisie had built and financed a large Nazi movement called the Homeland Front among the 3,000,000 ethnic Germans in the Sudetenland area. Czechoslovakia had built strong defenses against Germany, but now there were German troops in Austria along Czechoslovakia's ill-defended southern border. In April, right after its Austrian victory, the German military commenced planning for the invasion of Czechoslovakia and a propaganda offensive was launched alleging atrocities against the Sudeten Germans.

In this planning, the German ruling class was counting on the appeasement policies of its imperialist rivals. Hitler wrote in the original plan for Czechoslovakia, "I shall only decide on action if I am absolutely convinced, as in the case of the occupation of the demilitarized zone [the Rhineland—JBT] and our entry into Austria, that France will not intervene, and that as a result Britain will likewise do nothing."<sup>28</sup> This is a sharp demonstration that the efforts to build collective security being pursued by the Soviet Union, could have, if implemented, indeed erected barriers to German expansion and aggression.

But Hitler had not misjudged his opposite numbers. By Fall, it was clear that Germany was prepared to take every step to press its demands that the Sudeten be ceded. British Prime Minister



Chamberlain made a surprise trip to Germany to meet with Hitler on September 15 and in the name of peace promised him most of west and northwest Czechoslovakia, then returned home to implement this betrayal and win French support.

The British applied intense pressure to the French government to ignore its commitment to defend Czechoslovakia. The two countries issued a joint ultimatum to the Czech government to surrender the territory. The Czechoslovakian masses reacted with fury and the bourgeoisie officially rejected the ultimatum on September 20. The Communist Party in Czechoslovakia organized resistance to the Great Powers' betrayal, including helping build a general strike on September 22. The army was mobilized. Germany's rulers, a week from readiness according to their secret invasion schedule, stalled by angrily making harsher demands.

Throughout this period the Soviet Union made every effort to keep its treaty commitments to Czechoslovakia. First and foremost, Soviet diplomats struggled with the French government to honor their agreements to Czechoslovakia and to help the Soviets honor theirs by negotiating passage for Red Army units through Rumania or Poland, nations over whose rulers the French ruling class had a good deal of influence. The French, however, refused to break with the British and their appeasement policies.

When the Czech government asked the USSR directly in the midst of the crisis if it would honor its treaty obligations, the reply was, "Yes, at once and effectively." And if France did not, would the Soviet government still keep its pledge? "Yes, in every respect." The USSR proceeded to move 30 infantry divisions to its western frontier. Hundreds of bombers, fighters and transport planes were concentrated in forward military districts.

This move by the Soviet Union was in the main correct not merely because it honored the obligations it had undertaken under the Czech-Soviet Treaty and the League Covenant, but because of the objective situation at the time. The Czechoslovak Army was modern, well equipped and fully mobilized and with Soviet help stood an excellent chance of defeating any German aggression. While the Soviet Union's willingness to act carried the danger of involvement in the war with Germany the British appeasers in particular were trying to instigate, at the same time Czechoslovakia was clearly the best and probably last chance of erecting a barrier to German expansion short of a world war. Certainly if Czechoslovakia defended itself with Soviet help the pressure of the masses of the world's people for support would have been enormous. If this policy had been successful in bottling for a time German expansion, it would have greatly heightened sharp contradictions in a German economy by now overwhelmingly geared for war, a German ruling class split over Hitler's bold policies, and German society with the masses suffering, uneasy and constantly bombarded

with agitation about the "fatherland's invincibility."

Throughout Europe, the tension was extreme and to the masses of people war seemed imminent. But on September 29, Hitler and Chamberlain were joined by Mussolini and French Premier Daladier at a conference in Germany—at Munich. Chamberlain and Daladier agreed to Hitler's terms. Germany would annex 20% of Czechoslovakia, a quarter of its population, its main defenses and half its heavy industry, in return for a pledge to respect the borders of what was left of Czechoslovakia. The British and French told the Czechoslovakian government it had no choice but to give in. Under this pressure, the Czech government spurned the Soviet Union's offer of help. On October 1, 1938 the Wehrmacht (the German Army) rolled into the territory assigned it in the agreement.

Czechoslovakia, like Austria before it, graphically emphasized one of the real problems faced by the Soviet Union in its efforts to build collective security. The bourgeoisies of smaller capitalist countries could not necessarily be relied on to resist aggression from one of the Great Powers, even if guaranteed outside support by a nation as powerful as the USSR.

Neville Chamberlain returned home to Britain with a self-awarded halo, proclaiming that Munich meant peace and quoting Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, "... out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."

The Soviet newspaper *Isvetia* responded by pointing out that the very next lines in the play are "The purpose you undertake is dangerous; the friends you have named uncertain; the time itself unsorted; and your whole plot too light for the counterpoise of so great an opposition."

The warning went unheeded. France and Britain were now openly committed to the path of pushing Germany towards war with the Soviet Union. The French Foreign Ministry prepared to denounce the Franco-Soviet Treaty. Newspapers and diplomatic pouches alike in the capitalist world were full of speculations about "an independent Russian Ukraine under German tutelage."

Hitler was able to take a hint, although he didn't take it where the French and British wanted him to. On March 15, 1939, within six months of his pledge to respect Czechoslovakia's diminished boundaries, Hitler sent the troops in again and slept that night in the palace of the old Bohemian Royal Family. The Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia were annexed to Germany and an "independent" puppet state of Slovakia set up in the rest, which had fully as much independence as did Japan's Manchukuo. Among the other things the German ruling class gained without a fight as a result of Munich and the follow-up invasion were 500 tanks, 1500 planes and 25 arms plants including the Skoda and Bren works, two of the largest and most modern in Europe.

Further, it was the capitulation policy of France and Britain at Munich which had convinced the Nazis not only that they could safely seize the rest of Czechoslovakia, but also that they could finalize their deal with Franco and give the Rebel Army in Spain the military aid mentioned previously with no danger of their imperialist rivals going to bat for the Republic. Franco was thus able to launch an all-out offensive against Republican territory which finally won victory in the last days of March 1939. At this time Franco showed his gratitude by joining the "Anti-Comintern Pact." Although the Spanish people had finally been defeated by reactionaries backed to the hilt by Germany and Italy, they had not fought in vain. The Italian Army had been hurt—6000 dead, many times that number wounded and untold tons of equipment destroyed—and hurt badly enough that it was unable to rebuild fully before the actual outbreak of World War 2.

As the tens of thousands of Italian troops returned home, Mussolini pointed at an atlas open to a map of Spain and told his foreign minister with a mixture of relief and bravado, "It has been open in this way for nearly three years and that is enough. But I know already that I must open it at another page." Italy did indeed invade another country only a week later, April 7, but now Mussolini was taking smaller bites—the target was Albania, then a small kingdom already dominated by Italy. But as shown in the previous article, this was a mouthful which Italy and its German ally were soon to find stuck hard in their throats.

By this point the British ruling class was increasingly alarmed at the results of its government's appeasement policy. A large and increasingly powerful German state loomed over Europe, allied with Spain and Italy and with a number of Eastern European countries like Hungary more or less in its camp as well. Chamberlain, who had been made a chump by Hitler's promises to him at Munich, made a speech in the immediate aftermath of the final fall of Czechoslovakia in which he ventured to ask, "Is this, in fact, a step in the direction of an attempt to dominate the world by force?"

The Soviet Union was willing to walk the extra mile in a final effort to bring all possible forces to bear on the fascist powers but at the same time they issued a stern warning to the bourgeoisies of the non-fascist imperialist countries. The warning was given by Stalin himself at the 18th Party Congress of the CPSU(B) in March of 1939, the first congress in five years.

In the first part of his report to the Congress on the work of the Central Committee, he analyzed developments in the world situation since 1934, starting with the growth of a bloc of states out to redivide the world. The speech continued the Soviet tendency, also current in the Comintern, to portray the imperialist powers as falling into two categories, "aggressor states" and "nonaggressor

democratic states." This summed up certain current characteristics but tended to raise them as absolutes, without sufficiently identifying both types as imperialist and inevitably bound to defend and expand their interests by means of war when they could no longer do so by peaceful forms of politics.

At the same time, Stalin denounced the policy of appeasement and "non-intervention" and exposed how it was an effort at "egging the Germans on to march farther east, promising them easy pickings, and prompting them: 'Just start war on the Bolsheviks, and everything will be all right.'" He further condemned efforts to "incense the Soviet Union against Germany, to poison the atmosphere and to provoke a conflict with Germany without any visible grounds." He predicted in a materialist fashion the probable consequences of these schemes:

"Far be it from me to moralize on the policy of non-intervention, to talk of treason, treachery and so on. It would be naive to preach morals to people who recognize no human morality. Politics is politics, as the old, case-hardened bourgeois diplomats say. It must be remarked, however, that the big and dangerous political game started by the supporters of the policy of non-intervention may end in a serious fiasco for them."

Finally Stalin issued a clear warning to the French, British and American bourgeoisies in the course of laying out "the tasks of the Party in the sphere of foreign policy":

"1. To continue the policy of peace and of strengthening business relations with all countries;

"2. To be cautious and not allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them;

"3. To strengthen the might of our Red Army and Red Navy to the utmost;

"4. To strengthen the international bonds of friendship with the working people of all countries, who are interested in peace and friendship among nations."<sup>29</sup>

The warning contained in the second point was underlined on May 3, when Maxim Litvinov, who had done a brilliant job on the diplomatic front in fighting for collective security, was replaced as People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs by V. M. Molotov, a Politburo member. This was a clear message that the Soviet Union was considering a change of policy. Still the Soviet Union continued to propose conferences to lead to a Franco-Soviet-Brit-

ain Pact including a military agreement designating the responsibilities of each party should war break out. The British stalled and stalled, while continuing to conduct secret negotiations with Germany.

It was finally agreed that a pact should be signed and a joint French and British military mission was dispatched to Moscow—by boat instead of airplane. When it finally arrived, it turned out the delegation was made up of low-ranking officers and not empowered to negotiate or sign any agreement. Obviously, France and Britain were unwilling to pursue seriously a policy of collective security, which was the only possible way of forestalling the war which was about to erupt.

For the leaders of the USSR, the time had come to dump the idea of collective security. The main task was now to prevent the German-Soviet war the British and French bourgeoisies were so eagerly trying to provoke. Taking advantage of the same divisions in the imperialist world it had used earlier, but from a different angle, the Soviet Union answered feelers that the German ruling class, equally disinclined (though of course from different principles) to play sucker for France and Britain, had put out. During August of 1939 the two countries negotiated a nonaggression pact with Germany as detailed in the article in *The Communist*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

With war just over the horizon, this pact determined that the war when it broke out would be an interimperialist one between the blocs headed by Germany and Britain. With this move, the Soviet Union outflanked the moves by Britain and France to send the entire weight of Nazi Germany against the USSR and bought valuable time to step up preparations against the possibility of being dragged into the conflict later.

#### *THE COMMUNIST PARTIES AFTER THE SEVENTH WORLD CONGRESS*

The response of communists to the developing situation during the late 1930s was characterized among other things by an impressive show of proletarian internationalism. For example, even before the Italian invasion of Abyssinia began, when its offensive was still in the realm of propaganda and diplomacy, committees to defend the Ethiopian people were established in many countries. The Italian invasion saw mass demonstrations and big educational campaigns. These were particularly effective in Black communities in the United States, where strong feelings of common oppression and solidarity were developed. By and large, the social-democratic parties in Europe refused to do anything other than issue resolutions in support of the virtually meaningless League of Nations sanctions, which weakened the effect of many of the activi-

ties. Nevertheless, dock workers and seamen in various ports were in some cases able to “hot cargo” (refuse to handle) goods bound for Italy, and Italian embassies were put under virtual siege by demonstrators.

The same kind of support continued on an even more extensive scale for China. In addition to other political and educational campaigns, millions of dollars were collected worldwide to send medical supplies and other aid to the communist-led guerrilla forces in north China, which Chiang Kai-shek naturally did not bother to supply.

As part of this aid campaign, the Communist Parties of Canada and the United States sponsored the trip to work in China of Dr. Norman Bethune, whose spirit Mao Tsetung characterized as “the spirit of internationalism, the spirit of communism.”

The greatest effort of all, however, was that on behalf of Spain. There were worldwide demonstrations of support and demanding the embargo against the Republic be dropped. The proletariat also worked to break the embargo by collecting millions of dollars in aid for Spain and whenever possible set up its own embargo against the aggressors. For instance in the first week of December, 1937 ships carrying goods to Germany were “hot cargoed” in Southampton, England and Marseilles, France, while workers in Glasgow held a strike against being ordered to handle such ships. Even in Nazi Germany coal miners in the Ruhr and seamen in Hamburg held work stoppages against materials destined for Franco. (During this same period dockers on the U.S. West Coast gave the same treatment to war materiel bound for Japan, while in Fremantle, Australia, they refused to refuel Japanese vessels.)

But towering even above these efforts were the International Brigades. First formed in late 1936, these were military units of the Spanish Republican Army made up of foreign volunteers from the world over. German and Italian workers dared the concentration camps to slip out of their countries and join others who were already in the Brigades. There were also battalions which were principally French and Belgian, Polish, Hungarian, Yugoslav and Albanian, Bulgarian, American and Canadian, and British and Irish in composition, with fighters from over 40 nations taking part. Although communists were the chief organizers of the International Brigades, they were very broad, drawing socialists, trade unionists and various supporters of Spain with openly bourgeois politics—or no explicit political affiliations at all. Over 40,000 men fought with the Brigades over the course of the war, although there never numbered more than 18,000 soldiers at any one time.

The earliest formed Brigades went into battle with less than a month of training on November 7, 1936, when Franco's troops were penetrating into Madrid, trying to deal a death blow to the Republic by seizing the country's capital. Their heroism and the

inspiration this show of international support gave the population of the city helped turn the tide of battle and after three weeks of fighting, Madrid was saved. The International Brigades continued to play an incalculably valuable role in training Spanish troops and in battle after battle continuing to fight after suffering losses that would have destroyed normal military units in a bourgeois army. Of 10,000 Frenchmen who fought in Spain over 3000 were killed, 1600 of 3300 Americans died, of 2500 British volunteers 500 were killed and 1200 wounded. Not professional soldiers, but workers, students, unemployed and others, they had come hundreds and thousands of miles to put their lives on the line in the struggle against reaction, fascism and aggression.

It is important to look past this, however, at the other and considerable effects the changes in the international situation and the changes in policy discussed at the 7th World Congress had on the work of individual Communist Parties around the world.

#### *Within the Fascist Countries*

Within the fascist countries, the creation of the united front was obviously a task undertaken under the most difficult conditions. In Italy, Germany and even Japan (where the Party had been far weaker than the other two) communists were able to make contact with the remnants of social-democratic, trade union, religious, bourgeois democratic, intellectual and artistic and other illegal or dissident parties and groups. Further, they penetrated the fascist mass workers', women's, youth, sports, etc. organizations, the only legal forms which the people were permitted to join, to agitate and, when possible, use these outfits to carry on the struggle against their creators and masters.

The unity struck with other forces was focussed on and largely limited to the struggle for a bourgeois democratic republic. Unfortunately, the communists in general confined themselves completely within these limits. Rather than educating the proletariat and all other possible forces to the need for the overthrow not only of fascism and to the impending war, they restricted agitation and propaganda to questions of bourgeois democracy. Germany was a country where the decade preceding the Nazi accession to power had been characterized by a period of the worst inflation in history, massive unemployment, political instability, victimization by the victor powers of World War 1, and widespread crime, decadence and degeneracy. While the masses hated the horrors of fascist rule, return to the old way was not necessarily a banner they would flock to either.

The slogan of a democratic republic was not in itself wrong to raise, and provided a good tactical basis for unity with forces which wanted to overthrow fascist rule. But communists who

put it forward in this light, as a question within the strategic struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, were denounced as sectarian. Walter Ulbricht, later to become the chieftain of the East German revisionist "Socialist Unity Party," said of such a position in 1937, "But I am of the opinion that the first thing we must really do after the overthrow of Hitler is to set up a democratic republic, that there is no other way, except through the achievement of this strategic aim, of furthering our demand for a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>30</sup> Here is, despite the revolutionary trappings, a strategy for two stage revolution in an advanced capitalist country which consigns the question of struggling for a proletarian seizure of power (or even "demanding" such a struggle, whatever that means) to a later, distant historical stage. By permitting the proletariat's historical goal to drop out of sight, this line in fact weakened the ability of the proletariat to fight to advance its own interests to the maximum in the course of struggle, even if that meant in a given situation that nothing more than the establishment of a bourgeois democratic republic was possible.

Further, while it was correct to unite with various forces on a program short of the dictatorship of the proletariat—overthrowing the Nazis and establishing a republic whose character and future would be the subject of struggle—and even make certain concessions, it was hardly necessary for the communists to discontinue direct agitation and propaganda for socialism and communism as the ultimate goal of the struggle or the exposure of the capitalist system as the spawning ground of fascism. The fact was that only communists had the discipline and determination, characteristic of the class they represent, to carry on extensive illegal work in those repressive societies. Communists worked in the army and in society as a whole against war and militarization. Economic hardship and the redoubling of exploitation on the job through speed-up, extended work week and ruthless labor discipline were used by agitators and organizers not only to foment discontent with the regime in general, but also to show how its drive to war meant nothing but suffering for the masses. In Italy and Germany communists in war plants also organized sabotage during the Spanish Civil War, so that sometimes one of the frequent dud shells fired into Republican ranks was found to contain a note of solidarity with the Spanish workers.

#### *France and Spain*

Of the other imperialist Great Powers, it was France in which the communists were strongest. There the common front with the leaders of the Socialists which began in 1934 was deepened and expanded by the CP. In the 1936 general elections a parlia-

mentary majority was won by a Popular Front slate composed of the Communists, the Socialists and the Radical Party, a large bourgeois party headed by skillful politicians and with a following in the petty bourgeoisie, but without as much of an organized mass base as the other two. The result was the formation of a People's Front government with Leon Blum, a right wing socialist, as Premier. The Communist Party, to keep its independent action and freedom of criticism within the coalition, refused to take any cabinet seats.

The most immediate result of the election was a tremendous wave of struggle on the part of the French working class. They had voted for this government which advertised itself as theirs, and they took action to see that its promises were kept. Immediately an enormous wave of strikes and sitdowns swept the nation, taking on the proportions of a spontaneous general strike. 1000 establishments were occupied and 12,000 struck; more than 2,000,000 workers were out! In panic, the government passed the most extensive social legislation of any bourgeois state in the world at the time—the right to unionize was guaranteed (within a year membership in the main trade union federation went from one million to five), across the board wage increases and a minimum wage were set, the 40-hour week and paid holidays were mandated by law. Similar but less extensive concessions were wrested by the peasantry and the urban petty-bourgeoisie.

After this eruption, the government regrouped and its future efforts were to organize, coordinate and control the situation for the bourgeoisie. Blum spoke to the French bourgeoisie to reassure them he was a bulwark against the proletariat coming to power: "I am not Kerensky; after I go Lenin will not assume the heritage."<sup>31</sup> A net of labor legislation was expanded around the unions to tie them to company-oriented collective bargaining procedures and limit their freedom of action. To help the bourgeoisie stabilize and control the economy, moves were taken to nationalize the Bank of France. The same thing happened in the munitions industry, a move which to an extent cut the ground out from under the Communist Party by turning any criticism they made of militarism a criticism of the government they supported.

One of the biggest questions which confronted the Communist Party and the Popular Front government right from its inception was Spain. The French government had friendly relations with Spain, and Blum's party was a fraternal organization of the Spanish social democrats, a leading force in the Republican government. Nonetheless, the French bourgeoisie dictated "neutrality" and non-intervention, and Blum obeyed. The Popular Front government thus took part in the slow strangulation of the Spanish people's struggle organized by Britain.

The French Communists protested and organized mass meetings, demonstrations and even a general strike in September, 1936, demanding the government change its policies, but their strategic commitment to the Popular Front would not permit them to break with it despite its open service to the bourgeoisie. Here again some of the problems in such an approach stand out. In essence, it is or becomes a strategy but not a strategy for revolution. It seemed like it was benefitting the Party—after it had been stagnated by the sectarian and dogmatic errors of the early '30s, membership increased eight times over from 1936 to 1937 to over 300,000. A vast influx of new forces, mainly workers, most honest and revolutionary-minded but with precious little understanding of socialism, political line or Marxist-Leninist theory, contributed to the ease with which some leaders of the Party made concessions to maintain the Popular Front and the Party's new respectability and power.

The Party adopted the mantle of nationalism with a vengeance, putting forth slogans like, "Long live free, strong and happy France, faithful to its mission of progress, liberty and peace!" The deadends into which this whole approach to the class struggle and the international situation led were graphically demonstrated in a letter some aircraft workers wrote the government in 1938, which was praised in the Party's press. The workers complained that little had changed since the plant had been nationalized the year before and offered a plan which would employ 3000 workers and produce several dozen fighter planes a month. They volunteered to work extra hours in the interests of the country's defense and an hour a day for free, to make planes for Spain. This last was an admirable sentiment, but the reason given was because the Republic's fight was defending the peace and safety of France!

Perhaps the most obvious and disgraceful sign of how serious were the deviations the French CP had made from Marxism-Leninism was its betrayal of its duty to the masses in the French colonial empire, some of whom, notably the Indo-Chinese and the Algerians, were waging organized and heroic national liberation struggles. But as early as 1936, in his report to the French Party Congress, General Secretary Maurice Thorez mentioned the colonies only once, in passing, and then only to note that they were oppressed and their people did not have the full rights of French citizens!

This is the opposite of the internationalism demonstrated in support of Ethiopia, Spain and China, and shows that such support was not sufficiently built on a firm basis of proletarian politics. Had it been, communists could hardly have failed in their Leninist duty to support in every way the freedom struggle in "their own" colonies.

The French Popular Front government continued to move to the right at the bidding of the bourgeoisie, essentially shelving the Franco-Soviet Mutual Defense agreement and replacing Blum with Daladier, an ordinary bourgeois politician without even the social democrats' pretence of being a leader of the working class. The Communist Party still did not break with the Popular Front government. Rather than sharp criticism and repudiation of the social democrats, they pursued the idea of merging the two parties in the name of working class unity.

In fact, absolutely subordinating the class struggle to the problems presented by the international situation, its leaders began to call for a "government of the National Front," which would expand the Popular Front to include other major bourgeois parties, particularly with a large following among Catholic workers, peasants and shopkeepers. The main differences between these parties and the Socialists and Radicals were two—their domestic programs were more reactionary and less inclined to grant concessions to the workers, and they were less influenced by the pacifist currents of the CP's Popular Front partners and more in favor of developing France's preparedness for war.

The leaders of the CP were unsuccessful in their efforts at creating the National Front. It is, however, a graphic example of their line, which left the French proletariat and its Party more or less unprepared for the outbreak of an *imperialist* world war, in which the working class had no stake. Further, by its policy of electoral lesser evilism, it spent three years training the workers to seek to advance their interests primarily within the limits of the shell game of bourgeois politics. The class collaborationist errors which tainted this approach were carried into the war (as discussed in the previous article) and the post-war period (which will be dealt with in the final part of this series).

The Spanish experience, despite certain similarities with that of the French CP, is worth study because of the entirely different situation in which the popular front strategy was applied. In 1936, Spain had been a republic for only six years and was one of the most backward capitalist countries in Europe with a relatively weak and undeveloped monopoly capitalist class; strong feudal survivals, especially in class relations in the countryside; and a great many democratic tasks left to accomplish.

The trigger for the Spanish Civil War was the election in early 1936 of a People's Front government which was like that elected in France later in the year, with the inclusion of autonomist parties from Catalonia and the Basque provinces. The Spanish Communist Party was quite weak at this time, winning only 16 seats of the total vote of 278 for the People's Front ticket and 467 in the whole Cortes (parliament). In part this was due to the

fact that Spain's social-democratic party was a "leftist" one, upholding class struggle and even, sporadically, revolution, and that large sections of the revolutionary minded workers were following anarchists.

The start of the new government was not as explosive as it had been in France, but workers and others were mobilizing to make sure it came through on the campaign promises. Worried, a section of the ruling class backed by the Church unleashed the generals, with the fascist *Falange* as a backup force, in what was planned as a speedy coup. The result was the long civil war.

The reactionary rebellion was met with a spontaneous eruption of very intense class struggle. Fascist leaders were killed. Catholic churches, centers of reaction and symbols of feudal oppression, were burned to the ground; land was seized in the countryside by poor peasants. In Andalusia, where anarchist influence was strong, an attempt was even made to abolish all private property! Most importantly, the masses demanded arms from the Republic to fight the uprising.

In the meantime, the generals were carrying out a bloodbath, which made it eminently clear that the masses' actions were fully justified. Working class leaders, union members, Masons, government officials who stayed loyal to the government, whole villages where Franco's armies met resistance were put to the sword.

At this point the Spanish CP summed up the situation—despite the calls of anarchists and some left social democrats, there was no immediate basis for a proletarian revolution to seize and hold power successfully. Objectively it was true that the ruling class could no longer rule in the old way, but large sections of the working class were not conscious of the need for proletarian dictatorship; even among the advanced workers, the influence of the Communist Party was too limited for it to be able to defeat erroneous lines and act as the class's general staff in an insurrection. Furthermore, the potential allies of the working class at this stage, which included large sections of the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia and even portions of the ruling class, could be united at this point only around a program of defeating Franco and defending the Republic. The Party summed up that the task of the hour, the best and only way to uphold the interests of the working class, was fighting to preserve the Republic against the revolt and the vicious open dictatorship it sought to install.

On this basis, the CP extended its participation in the Popular Front by taking a couple of cabinet posts that were offered it and entered the Republican government. The Party then set about organizing the defense of the Republic.

To do this it was necessary to channel the energy and anger of the masses in directions less "revolutionary" in form than those

which had been developed in the earliest days of the civil war. Independent militia units, electing their own officers and carrying out their own strategy, had to be welded into a single nationwide army with a centralized command structure. Self-appointed committees of control which had kept order in place of the police had to be superseded by a more organized state apparatus. Rationing and production had to be organized.

Without the organization and discipline, the determination and heroism of the Communist Party, the Republic would have fallen in the first year. It was communist agitators who in the first days of the war raised the battle cry, "It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees. *No pasaran!*" (They shall not pass!) When Madrid was under siege, the government and the leaders of all the other parties retreated to Valencia, while the Communists remained and organized the functioning and defense of the city.

The other self-avowed "revolutionary" forces proved incapable of functioning well in the Civil War, a task less complex than actively organizing the revolution they occasionally called for. The anarchists were, true to their ideology, basically undisciplined and individualistic. Many of their leaders under the press of the real world had to drop a portion of their idealistic politics and support and participate in the government, rather than working to abolish it just because it was a government. This step away from traditional anarchist principles, dubbed "the discipline of indiscipline," made slow headway and got some of its advocates shot by "uncontrollables" in their own ranks. In April, 1937, anarchist battalions in the North helped speed the collapse of the Basque provinces by pulling out of the line of combat to force political changes they wanted.

Worse still were the actions in Barcelona of some anarchists and members of the Workers Party of Marxist Unity (POUM), a Trotskyite party which Trotsky himself disavowed, evidently because it had actually gained some influence among the masses. On May 3, 1937 these elements, riddled with Franco *agents provocateurs*, started an insurrection. For three days they fought to overthrow the Republican government of the city in the name of "the spirit of July 19," the explosion of struggle which had followed Franco's reactionary revolt. Although as a small number of "ultra-leftists" acting against the interests of the masses, they were defeated and the POUM later broken up, their "revolutionary" adventure had aided the enemy by diverting men and supplies from the front and causing division, confusion and defeatist tendencies.

The relationship of the Communist Party to the Republic was a difficult one. To criticize the Republic too much or break with it would play into Franco's hands just as the "ultra-leftists" did. It was correct, for instance, to support the 13 point war aims program the Republic put forward in 1938, even though one point

was encouragement of capitalist properties without large trusts, because overall they represented a program for an independent republic in which the rights of the workers and masses to organize and struggle for their interests were upheld. The communists occasionally said that what was being built was "a new type of democratic republic" but did not really carry out their independent role and fulfill their obligation to point to a future past victory in the Civil War.

The fact is the CP tended to be simply the best Republican Party, the arm of the Republic most responsible to the people, nothing more. A clear example of this is the merged youth group of the Socialist and Communist Parties which was definitely under CP leadership. Although it was named the United Socialist Youth and popularly known as the Socialist-Communist Youth, its content belied its label. "We are not Marxist Youth. We fight for a democratic, parliamentary republic,"<sup>32</sup> said the head of the group, Santiago Carrillo (who could use his remarks with much greater accuracy about the revisionist CP of Spain he heads today).

Because of this outlook the CP failed to unite sufficiently with the new forms and gains the masses had developed in the first days of the Civil War. While it was correct to subordinate committees of control, factory councils and the like to the central government, the CP tended to cut them off entirely rather than using them as forms to mobilize and educate the masses, as schools in running all of society. Some CP leaders even argued that agricultural collectivization would have to wait until the country was fully industrialized.

Perhaps even more serious than this was the fact the Spanish repeated the French error of sacrificing the struggle against colonialism for the sake of "national unity." Just how grave an error this was was borne out in practice. The hard core of Franco's army was made up of troops from Spain's colony, Spanish Morocco. The effect of a Republican declaration of independence for Morocco on these troops might have been shattering, stripping away any interests they had in Franco's war by linking their struggle inextricably with that of the Republic. But the CP did not even fight for the Republican government to adopt such a principled policy.

One result of the CP's narrow focus was that it was not able to win the bulk of the active working class away from the left social democrats and especially the anarchists. While the CP grew far larger during the war and developed close ties with the rank and file of the other working class based parties, it needed more.

This was particularly true in the last year and a half of the Civil War when the People's Front government was constantly undermined by defeatism and secret efforts by individuals to negotiate a truce with Franco. The CP's remarkable organizing abilities

gave it a great deal of influence and put it in a position where it could criticize and struggle against these trends, but a stronger organized mass base, especially in the working class, would have strengthened its hand in the struggle within the coalition of forces making up the Republic.

There is no way of being sure that correcting any or all of these errors would have prevented the defeat of the Spanish people in the Civil War, but there is no question that each and every one of them helped contribute to that defeat and to problems that continued to plague the Spanish Communist Party and fed its degeneration into total revisionism during the 1960s.

### *China*

In contrast with the Spanish experience during this period stand the tremendous advances made by the Chinese Communist Party. The situation was similar in certain respects, particularly in that both faced combat with invading forces from the expanding "have not" imperialist powers and the possibility of uniting with certain sections of their own ruling class. On the other hand, Spain although weak and underdeveloped and having strong feudal remnants, was an independent capitalist power and not a semicolonial country dominated by imperialists, nor did Italy and Germany intend outright occupation and colonization as did Japan in China. There, unity with a substantial portion of the bourgeoisie was a possibility and necessity during the whole period of the seizure of power, which was not the case in Spain.

By the time of the 7th World Congress, the Chinese Communist Party had already begun the shift toward a united front against invading Japanese imperialism as mentioned previously. In August 1935, even as this Congress was in session, the Central Committee of the CCP issued a statement saying,

"If the Kuomintang troops cease their attacks on the Red Army and if any units carry out resistance to Japan, then the Red Army, regardless of any old feuds or present conflicts or differences on domestic issues, will not only immediately cease its hostile actions against these units, but willingly work closely with them to save the nation."<sup>33</sup>

In early December, 1935, the Central Committee of the Party now established in the North met and adopted the strategy of the united front, as laid out by Mao Tsetung. He explained the decision called for uniting not only with student youth and the urban petty bourgeoisie "who had already started a broad anti-Japanese movement" (which CP activists were working to build), but also the national bourgeoisie which, despite vacillations, had objective

class interests, like survival, in opposing Japan. Further Mao said that even the comprador bourgeois class was not united because China was a semicolonial country with a number of imperialist powers preying on it.

"When the struggle is directed against Japanese imperialism, then the running dogs of the United States or Britain, obeying the varying tones of their masters' commands, may engage in veiled or even open strife with the Japanese imperialists and their running dogs . . . We must turn to good account all such fights, rifts and contradictions in the enemy camp and turn them against our present main enemy."<sup>34</sup>

In this and other writings Mao Tsetung began fleshing out the theory of new democracy, according to which the united front was the form the struggle against imperialism and feudalism would take.

"From being the ruled the people, led by the proletariat, will become the rulers. Thereupon, the nature of Chinese society will change and the old, semi-colonial and semi-feudal society will change into a new democratic society."<sup>35</sup>

Mao made two important points about this—one, the proletariat must lead it and not subordinate itself to the national bourgeoisie; and two, the proletariat's struggle was not at an end with the victory of new democracy, which would be a transitory form, but continued, in a new stage, for socialism and ultimately communism.

To carry out the line of utilizing contradictions among the enemy ranks the CCP in May of 1936 stopped calling for the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek. But Chiang was not forced to answer the call for a united front until December 1936, when he was on a visit to the headquarters of the KMT's anti-Red military campaign at Sian, because the troops had arranged a de facto truce with the Red Army. He was arrested by Marshal Chang Hsueh-liang, one of many generals who had been won by the CP to a policy of opposing Japan. Chou En-lai and other top communist representatives came to Sian to negotiate. Although they had every right to demand Chiang's execution for treachery, for slaughtering communists and the masses and for other crimes, they instead fought to keep him alive, as killing him would have destroyed the chance to create the broadest possible united front against Japan. To achieve his release, Chiang publicly agreed to a truce with the communists and a united front.

From that point on the CP continued to fight for the united



front, first for internal peace in China and then for a democratic regime and the end of one-party KMT rule, as steps at that time to ensure that the maximum possible forces would be united against Japan. Especially after the war entered a new stage with Japan's invasion of the area south of Manchuria, the CP had to combat capitulationist sentiments in the ranks of the Kuomintang. The Party issued a statement declaring, "A war of resistance by the whole nation is the only way out,"<sup>36</sup> and calling for the closest cooperation between the CP and KMT.

Yet despite the pressing necessity for and the accomplishment of the united front, the CP did not at any point sacrifice its independence of action, of views or of organization. While referring favorably to statements by "Mr." (as opposed to such self-awarded titles as Generalissimo) Chiang Kai-shek when he upheld the united front agreement, the CP did not drop its demands for reforms in government. Instead, the Ten Point National Salvation Program the Party proposed in August 1937 after the Japanese invasion contained only two points dealing directly with the conduct of the fighting—the other eight called for political and social reforms to help the masses and unite them in the struggle.

The main liberated area was now made a "special administrative district" of the Republic of China, but its government remained the same. Likewise the Communists maintained the integrity and command of their armed forces, despite the angry and continued insistence of the Chiang clique that they be, at the very least, put under KMT generals and preferably broken up and merged into Chiang's army altogether. Further, the Chinese CP kept up constant, although seldom hostile, criticism of the government for its failures, making the main target lagging in the national war against Japan, and secondarily attacks on the communists and other patriotic forces.

Despite the nature of the conflict, Mao Tsetung fought to make sure the revolutionary goal was kept in mind and constantly referred to the question of transition to socialism. For instance, he answered questions about the future of the revolution at the Party's National Conference in May 1937, saying that the CP was fighting for socialism and "if we lose sight of the goal, we cease to be Communists." (He followed this by warning, "But equally we cease to be Communists if we relax our efforts of today.") The new democratic revolution must be victorious as a prerequisite for the transition to the socialist revolution. Throughout, the proletariat must struggle for leadership with that section in the bourgeoisie it is allied with. "A bloodless transition is what we would like and we should strive for it, but what will happen will depend on the strength of the masses."<sup>37</sup>

One of the most important ways Mao armed cadres and members of the CCP was by constantly analyzing problems in class

terms, like his analysis above of how sections of the comprador bourgeoisie might be united with to an extent because of the interests of the imperialists they were subservient to. The question of the united front was never posed simply in terms of reactionaries and progressives or peace- and democracy-loving elements vs. fascist ones. Within the united front the unity was always described in the context of the different class interests which made it possible. The class interests of the national bourgeoisie on the one hand and the proletariat and the poor and middle peasants were in contradiction and the national struggle didn't fundamentally change this, though it made unity possible.

Furthermore, the CP in its practice as well as in its agitation and propaganda, always pointed out the prospect of a better life to the masses. Having liberated zones of course made this possible in a way it was not in European countries like France or even Spain.

"While the CCP modified its program from the period of the Civil War, for instance ending the confiscation of the land of non-collaborating landlords in order to extend the united front as far as possible, they still made it clear there was no going back to the way things had been before. This they proved in practice with the development of steps like the rent reduction movement in the countryside which maintained the forward momentum of the earlier period under the new conditions."<sup>38</sup>

By its principled positions, its independent stand and its revolutionary practice, the Communist Party was able to take big steps toward insuring that the proletariat was actually the leading class in the united front. Mao Tsetung and other Party leaders understood this couldn't just be proclaimed—the fact was that the KMT was more powerful and had a wider presence throughout the country than the communists did, in addition to controlling the central government. But more and more patriots from all classes and strata were coming to see that the Chinese Communist Party was in fact in the forefront of the anti-Japanese struggle and more were willing to accept its leadership in that battle. Thus the CP took the opportunity presented by the anti-imperialist united front to expand its influence and membership without sacrificing its politics or ideology.

It is important to note also that the correct line of the Chinese Communist Party was hammered out in bitter struggle against opportunist positions. As Mao Tsetung later pointed out, "In a united front, 'all unity and no struggle' and 'all struggle and no unity' are both wrong policies."<sup>39</sup> In this case, the greatest danger was clearly the former and it had a powerful advocate in Wang Ming, the former "left" sectarian, who returned to China in the

Fall of 1937 to argue for a policy of "everything through the united front," building a united "government of national defense," merging the Red Army completely into the KMT. The struggle erupted immediately with Mao cutting at the capitulationists in such articles as "The Situation and Tasks in the Anti-Japanese War After the Fall of Shanghai and Taiyuan."<sup>40</sup> This battle took place on many fronts. Under Wang Ming's leadership, a current developed in progressive literary circles throughout China, calling for "a literature of national defense." Lu Hsun, the famous writer, denounced this concept as treachery to the Chinese people and counterposed the slogan "a literature for the revolutionary masses in resistance to Japan." Mao did not finally defeat Wang Ming's offensive until the Central Committee's sixth plenum in October 1938, when Mao's line was overwhelmingly approved by the top leaders of the Party (the whole struggle was not summed up fully until the Party's Seventh Congress in 1945).

An idea of what Wang Ming's line might have resulted in can be seen in the "application" of the united front against imperialism in another semicolonial country, Cuba. Heavily influenced by revisionist currents in the U.S. Party, the Cuban CP in 1938 won legality by renouncing violence and pledging to pursue its ends within the framework of a capitalist regime. At the 1939 Party Congress, Party leader Blas Roca not only neglected to attack U.S. imperialism, which dominated the country, but called "for defense of our country from Nazi-fascist invasion." While it is questionable, to say the least, that Hitler's failure to invade Cuba can be attributed to Roca's efforts, there can be no question whatsoever that those efforts did severe damage to the liberation struggle of the Cuban people and to the very militant Cuban working class and its Party. Fortunately the communists of most colonial and semicolonial countries did not emulate the Cuban Party, but most were in fact adversely affected to one extent or another by lines of "all unity and no struggle" and the related tendency to capitulate to imperialists which had interests opposed to Germany, Italy and Japan.

### *The U.S.*

Although it was neither as large nor influential as the French, Spanish or Chinese Parties, there are certain points to be drawn from a look at the CPUSA in this period. The Party's efforts at implementing the Popular Front policy were among the most disgraceful in the world. Earl Browder, the Party's General Secretary, had his feet firmly on the road that would shortly head him to liquidate the Party itself.

The CP, for example, decided in 1937 that the "left wing" of the Democratic Party should be "drawn into" the People's Front.

This included, although it was never stated explicitly, the trail boss who was trying to herd American capitalism through the wilderness of its worst crisis ever, Franklin D. Roosevelt. This could only amount to tying the CP to the apron strings of the world's largest bourgeois party. In addition, Browder too undertook to drape himself in the national flag. He came up with the repulsive opportunist slogan, "Communism Is 20th Century Americanism!," trying to replace Marx and Lenin with Washington and Lincoln as the forebears of the CPUSA.

This was not a process which took place overnight, of course. The degeneration of the CP's line on war can be traced through this period. In 1936, well after the 7th World Congress, the American League Against War and Fascism, a group based largely among the intelligentsia in which the CP had a good deal of influence, published a five cent pamphlet called "National Defense." The entire pamphlet is an attack on U.S. militarism and the government's policy of stepping up war preparations. It laid out clearly the motives that would lead the U.S. imperialists to participate in another war:

"If America goes to war again, it will not be to defend this nation against foreign invasion of our borders. We will go to war to defend our foreign markets and investments, or to acquire economic control over new colonial areas."

It exposed with specific facts how the capitalists profit from war contracts, how military equipment was being sold to the very powers the government was supposedly arming against, and how the army was being prepared as well for a war on the American people to quell their struggle against their rulers to better their conditions.

The pamphlet ends with the League's program. The first two points are mass struggle against the production, deployment and sale of armaments and "to expose at every point the extensive preparations for war carried on by the government of the United States." The program goes on to call for, among other things, support for the struggle of people resisting colonial control, imperialist aggression and fascist regimes and support of international efforts for disarmament and "postponing, restricting, or shortening war."<sup>41</sup>

Despite the generally correct approach of this pamphlet, it also contained weaknesses, the kind of weaknesses Browder would later develop into a full-blown line in direct contradiction to the thrust of the words just quoted. The pamphlet was already tainted by the CP's "Americanism" line. It took as its kickoff point the fact that the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution cites one rea-

son for its existence as the need to "provide for the common defense." Throughout, the question of defense of the continental U.S. against foreign invasion, a prospect the pamphlet correctly ridicules as highly unlikely, is considered at least implicitly to be automatically just and correct, without considering the question in the context of what kind of war—and without making the point that in and of itself the question of "defense" of the U.S., an imperialist country, could only be a smokescreen and never the essential *content* of a war the U.S. ruling class would wage, even if fighting did take place on U.S. territory.

During 1937 and 1938, the communists continued to oppose U.S. military budgets and preparations, but the basis on which this was done subtly shifted. Now the argument was that the U.S. could best be defended, like peace in general, not by military means but by joining with the Soviet Union in a collective security policy. From this, the next step away from Marxist-Leninist class analysis was even easier. Browder took it in a report on "Social and National Security" delivered to the National Committee of the CP in December 1938. He laid out a new line on the government's post-Munich expansion of the armed forces:

"Prior to the Munich Pact, we declared that a correct peace policy by the United States, which would organize the overwhelmingly preponderant peace forces of the world, could quickly halt and remove the menace of fascist aggression without the necessity of a big armaments program for our country . . . We can no longer dismiss the armaments question with the old answer. We cannot deny the possibility, even the probability, that only American arms can preserve the Americas from conquest by the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo alliance . . . An unarmed people stands today as helpless victims for fascist conquest."<sup>42</sup>

From opposition to U.S. imperialism to covering for its crimes in three years!

#### *Other Countries and the Comintern*

As the example of France shows, this policy of collaborating with the bourgeoisie was not unique. In fact by mid-1939 the policies of the Communist Parties of the Netherlands, Belgium and other small European countries called for support for national defense and even armaments programs. While their size, location and the experience of Austria and Czechoslovakia certainly made this position more understandable than in an imperialist Great Power like the U.S., it is still not a policy based on a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the class forces involved, internally and ex-

ternally, or carried out with advancing toward the revolutionary goal of the proletariat as the foremost consideration. Even where the threat of invasion outside the context of a general war was real, to simply assume that this was the form events would take was subjective and foolish. In these countries the main contradiction remained with the bourgeoisie, and while a German attack would change this, the war once it broke out might be an inter-imperialist war in which the workers had no interest but to turn it into a civil war. Likewise the heavy reliance on the bourgeois army, in calls for its strengthening and its "democratization," missed the boat. Why not demand and fight for the formation of a vast voluntary popular militia with elected officers which would both train and arm the broad masses so they could best defend their interests, if necessary, against a foreign invasion—not to mention domestic exploiters and oppressors?

The Parties in these countries could have learned something from the experience of the Czechoslovakian CP. From 1937 on it was the strongest and clearest voice in the country warning of the danger of a German invasion and the most active in organizing among the Sudeten Germans to counter the Nazi-bankrolled Homeland Front. But by and large they dropped the struggle against the bourgeoisie. By May 1938, the CP's Central Committee issued a resolution "approving and supporting all measures for the safety, unity and independence of the Republic" and announcing its members would be "in the first ranks of the defenders of the Republic."<sup>43</sup> As the crisis intensified the "measures" the bourgeois government took wound up including an order, on September 16, to confiscate privately owned firearms, a move prompted by fear of a fascist revolt in the Sudetenland, but the exact *opposite* of what the masses needed.

The CP fought desperately, and correctly, for the government to not buckle under to German pressures, but did not pay sufficient attention at all to independently organizing the masses and the working class politically and militarily to defend their class interests, which would include opposing German aggression. With regard to the German threat, this would have served two purposes—first, winning the masses to such a policy and putting additional pressure on the bourgeoisie to carry it out, and second, developing the ability to carry out armed action against an invasion or at least being in a better position to launch an underground struggle against occupying forces.

When the Czechoslovakian ruling class did collapse under Anglo-French pressure, CP delegates in the rump government could only denounce those who had led the country to the dishonor of capitulation—until December, when under heavy pressure from Germany, the Party was outlawed and its members driven underground.

The similarity of these errors in the various countries point to weaknesses in the general line of the Comintern. The problems in the line on the international situation put forward at the 7th World Congress were not rectified, but grew deeper. A greater emphasis was placed on the role of the Communist Parties and the working class in the capitalist countries in fending off the outbreak of war and defending the USSR and on the possibility of stopping a new war. In September 1937 Dimitrov wrote, "The international labor movement has sufficient force and means at its disposal to bring about the cessation of the intervention of German and Italian fascism in Spain, the onslaught of Japanese militarism in China and to secure international peace."<sup>44</sup> Only by making revolution in several imperialist countries could the working class have created a situation where these tasks could be accomplished. To suggest, as the CI did, that united action or even merger with the social democrats would turn the trick was misleading at best.

This went hand in hand with the continuing tendency to treat bourgeois democracy and fascism as if they were not both forms of the state and the dictatorship of the monopoly capitalist class, and the "have" and "have not" imperialists as if they were not both governed by the same laws. As an editorial in the July 1939 *Communist International* proclaimed:

"Today there are states like Germany, Italy and Japan whose imperialism is not simply a continuation of 1914 but which has assumed the frightful character of a destroyer of all freedom, culture and human dignity. If it could attain victory, this fascist imperialism would bring about the decline of humanity into barbarism . . . and it alone is to blame for the inability of the nations to continue to live in peace and for the fact that, day in and day out, the world war is knocking at the gate."<sup>45</sup>

Such faulty and subjective analysis from the Comintern helped encourage the kinds of errors made by the individual Parties cited above. The kind of conclusions drawn from this line at this time can be seen in a comment made by D. M. Manuilsky, a Comintern leader from the USSR, in his report to the 1939 Eighteenth Party Congress of the CPSU(B) on the work of the Soviet delegation to the CI. He asked the rhetorical question, "What do the working people want?" One part of his answer was, "As to the countries under fascist dictatorship—Germany, Japan and Italy—the working people of the whole world want the governments of these countries to be defeated in war."<sup>46</sup> In the case of Japan, of course, calling for its defeat by China was perfectly correct. The call for war on the other two powers, although *not* the central thrust of the re-

port, was wrong. The workers of the world neither wished that the Soviet Union be unsuccessful in its effort through collective security to avoid being isolated and attacked, nor wished for the outbreak of interimperialist war in the hope that it would result in a defeat for the Italian, Japanese and German bourgeoisies. Overall for the working class in the capitalist countries the position laid out by Mao Tsetung only a few months before was correct: "The one war they want to fight is the civil war for which they are preparing."<sup>47</sup>

This is not to say that in the event of a war breaking out, the proletariat does not have an immediate responsibility to analyze it in class terms and to decide on an appropriate policy—whether it be revolutionary defeatism or participation—based on the concrete conditions. But the question that must be answered to determine that policy is—what course of action will most surely move the struggle of the working class close to the destruction of class society and the creation of a new world, free of oppression and exploitation—which, again, must be based in class analysis as the general method as well as concrete and dialectical analysis of the balance of class forces within the country and internationally.

The errors of this prewar period were to bear bitter fruit, first at the outbreak of the interimperialist war in September of 1939, an event with which most Communist Parties were ill prepared to deal, and then after the character of the war changed with the invasion of the USSR, when the errors reasserted themselves. The previous article in this series deals with the role of Parties during the war at some length.

## CONCLUSION

During the 1930s the world was headed toward a new world war. This war danger was born phoenix-like out of the ashes of World War 1, "the war to end all wars." Contradictions developed rapidly between two sets of imperialist powers, one which had profited richly from the division of the world at the end of the war, most importantly Britain, France and the U.S., and one made up of "newcomers to the imperialist banquet table" who had been largely cut out of the spoils, particularly Japan, Germany and Italy.

In the face of this situation, the Soviet Union developed a foreign policy based on taking advantage of these contradictions to protect itself against imperialist attack, to postpone the onset of war and to put itself in the most favorable situation if the USSR was dragged into a world war. This was important not only to avoid the possibility of the world's first socialist state getting dragged into an interimperialist war, but also to create more favor-

able conditions for the masses in countries where the proletariat did not yet hold power to advance their struggle so that when war did break out they would be in the best possible position to turn the situation to their advantage.

This approach was successful in moving the USSR into the arena of world politics and enabling it to maneuver to avoid isolation or attack by the imperialist Great Powers. During most of the 1930s the specific form it took was the policy of collective security, trying to persuade countries threatened by the immediately expansive "have not" imperialists and those Great Powers interested in the preservation of the *status quo* in the world to unite with it to counter the expansion of the other bloc. This was a policy which involved significant concessions to imperialist powers and held very real dangers for the Soviet Union and for the working class where it did not yet hold power. The Soviet Union's collective security policy did prevent the formation of one solid imperialist bloc aimed at the land of socialism, defeated British efforts to instigate a German-Soviet war, and helped expose the nature and plans of the imperialists, particularly those in the fascist countries, and win support from the people of the world.

It was not, however, successful in the goal of blocking the aggressive moves of the fascist powers and forestalling the outbreak of war. Some of the smaller bourgeoisies would not stand up to the aggressors, even when offered Soviet aid as in the case of Czechoslovakia. And when a section of the ruling class in Spain did enter a common front with the masses of people, the reactionaries and the fascist powers which backed them were badly hurt but not defeated. As for the "have" Great Powers, the leaders of the USSR were able to win France to a certain degree of cooperation. It was not sufficient, however, to force them to break with the British capitalist class which was playing its own deadly game of appeasement, attempting to throw tidbits to Germany, urging it eastward toward war with the Soviet Union.

These efforts also, however, created the conditions for making use of the contradictions in the enemy camp in an entirely different manner. The danger of an immediate two front war which collective security had posed to the German ruling class forced it to make overtures to the Soviet Union. This resulted in the signing on August 23, 1939 of the non-aggression pact between the USSR and Germany. It was the ability to sum up the changing situation from a dialectical materialist standpoint that permitted the USSR to adjust its policy at the appropriate time and thus escape the first two years of the Second World War.

For the individual Communist Parties the key event in this period was the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International. This marked a turn away from dogmatist and "left"

sectarian errors like those which had left the German Communist Party drastically unprepared to deal with the onslaught of fascism, but in doing so it opened the door to serious revisionist errors, a door through which too many communist leaders walked.

The Seventh World Congress also marked a new approach to the increasingly complex and volatile world situation. In putting this into practice, two closely related errors were made despite some cautions raised at the Congress. The contradictions in the imperialist camp which gave rise to two distinct groups of powers were lifted out of the arena of classes; instead they came to be defined simply as "aggressor" and "non-aggressor" states, which tended to cover the thoroughly imperialist—moribund, vicious, exploitative, predatory—nature of the "non-aggressors."

Hand in hand with this went a tendency to misjudge the role of a working class out of power and its Party with regard to the international situation. Rather than using the opportunities it presented to advance the struggle for revolution, as was done so brilliantly in China, communists too often subordinated the class struggle in their own countries in order to take onto themselves tasks which could only be undertaken by the proletariat in power. For instance another of the answers Manuilsky gave at the 18th Soviet Party Congress to the question "What do working people want" was, "They are fighting for the formation of a front of nations, a front of international resistance to the bloc of fascist aggressors."<sup>48</sup> (emphasis in original) This was a job even the USSR, one of the most powerful states in the world, could not accomplish in the '30s as it turned out. While it was absolutely correct for individual Communist Parties to uphold and aid the Soviet Union's general foreign policy, for them to make it the basis of their strategy and struggle even in their own country was to sacrifice the struggle against their own bourgeoisie's war preparations for no purpose—in short, to be dragged toward the swamp of class collaboration and social chauvinism.

These errors on the international situation helped feed and serve as a cover for similar tendencies in the united front against fascism strategy. "Democracy," like "Peace" and "Defense of the USSR," was elevated to a goal of the proletariat's historic struggle, rather than seen and portrayed as a condition favorable for carrying on that struggle to its real goal—socialism and communism.

Even in the colonial and semicolonial countries, where unity with a section of the bourgeoisie was called for and the united front against imperialism strategy called for at the 7th World Congress was a correct approach, similar right errors arose. The success of the Chinese Communist Party was based on keeping in mind the revolutionary goal and basing its strategy and tactics on applying Marxism-Leninism—dialectical materialism

and class analysis—to the actual situation in the country and the world.

Of all the lessons we can learn from this entire period, faced as we are today by a situation in which the threat of a new inter-imperialist war looms ever more visibly on the horizon, this one is by far the most important.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>R. Palme Dutt, Britain in the World Front, New York, 1943, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>Lenin, "Theses on the Present Political Situation," Collected Works, Vol. 27, p. 361.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in R. P. Dutt, Fascism and Social Revolution, 2nd Ed., New York, 1935, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Van Slyke, Enemies and Friends, Stanford, 1967, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup>This and all other quotes from the Congress are from the Abridged Stenographer Report of Proceedings, published in English by the Foreign Language Publishing House in Moscow, 1939. Much of this material, some unabridged, is also available in a pamphlet series published by Workers' Library Publishers in New York in 1935-36, p. 150.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, p. 174.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid*, p. 393.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, p. 491.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, p. 456.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, p. 402.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*, p. 591.

<sup>14</sup>Mao Tsetung, "Some Points in Appraisal of the Present International Situation," Selected Works, Vol. 4, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup>Proceedings, op. cit., p. 448.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, p. 427.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, p. 592.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 430-31.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*, p. 593.

<sup>20</sup>Lenin on War and Peace, Peking, FLP, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup>For more on this see John B. Tyler, "On the Character of World War 2," The Communist, Vol. 1, no. 1, p. 106.

<sup>22</sup>Proceedings, op. cit., p. 446, also p. 594 and others.

<sup>23</sup>From a collection of Litvinov's speeches, Against Aggression, published in New York in 1939, p. 44.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in the Communist International, June 1938.

<sup>25</sup>From a document in the German Foreign Ministry archives, one of many captured by the Red Army in 1945 and reprinted by the USSR in 1948 under the title, Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War, Vol. 1, p. 61.

<sup>26</sup>Dutt, Britain in the World Front, p. 90.

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Arthur Upham Pope's book, Maxim Litvinoff, New York, 1943, p. 261.

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Paul E. Zinner, Communist Strategy and Tactics in Czechoslovakia, 1918-48, New York, 1973.

<sup>29</sup>All quotes from Stalin's report from a collection of reports to the 18th Party Congress, The Land of Socialism Today and Tomorrow, Moscow, FLP, 1939, pp. 9-18.

<sup>30</sup>A. I. Sobelov et al., Outline History of the Communist International, Moscow, 1971, p. 423.

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in William Z. Foster, History of the Three Internationals, New York, 1955, p. 401.

<sup>32</sup>Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, New York, 1963, p. 366.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted in a footnote in Mao Tsetung, Selected Works, Vol. 1, p. 277.

<sup>34</sup>Both quotes from Mao Tsetung, "On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism," Selected Works, Vol. 1, pp. 154-57.

<sup>35</sup>Mao Tsetung, "On Contradiction," Selected Works, Vol. 1, p. 334.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted by Mao Tsetung in "Policies, Measures and Perspectives for Resisting the Japanese Invasion," Selected Works, Vol. 2, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup>Mao Tsetung, "Win the Masses in Their Millions for the Anti-Japanese National United Front," Selected Works, Vol. 1, p. 290.

<sup>38</sup>John B. Tyler, "On the Character of World War 2," The Communist, Vol. 1, no. 1, p. 106.

<sup>39</sup>Mao Tsetung, "Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art," Selected Works, Vol. 3, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup>Mao Tsetung, Selected Works, Vol. 2, pp. 61-74.

<sup>41</sup>John Franklin, "National Defense," New York, 1936.

<sup>42</sup>From a collection of Browder's speeches and articles, Fighting for Peace, New York, 1939, pp. 206-7.

<sup>43</sup>Zinner, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup>Communist International, p. 641.

<sup>45</sup>"25 Years Ago and Today," p. 732.

<sup>46</sup>The Land of Socialism Today and Tomorrow, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

<sup>47</sup>Mao Tsetung, "Problems of War and Strategy," *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 220.

<sup>48</sup>The Land of Socialism Today and Tomorrow, op. cit., p. 94.

## Against Sweezy's Political Economy Reformist and Revolutionary Views of Capitalist Crisis "Part 2"

**M.F.Z.**

*This is the second of a two part series on this subject. The first article appeared in Vol. 1, Number 2 (May 1, 1977)*

For a considerable period of time the development and application of Marxist political economy in the imperialist countries has been held back by the influence of bourgeois theories. In part this is due to the relative stability that has characterized the imperialist countries since after World War 2, with the U.S. until recently uncontested kingpin of all imperialist countries. But it is also due to the influence of revisionism in the Marxist movements in these countries and to the absence of a strong core of people grounding their work in Marxist-Leninist principles and producing concrete analysis in this field based on these principles.

As a result of all this, bourgeois economics has dominated the analysis of even progressive and revolutionary-minded people in the United States in particular. Attempts to grasp and enrich Marxist theory spontaneously come under enormous pressure to conform to bourgeois methods of analysis and bourgeois categories. Hence much of the recent trend toward Marxist analysis in academic and political circles fails to make a break with bourgeois economics and so falls into a confusing mixture of Marxist phraseology, masking to a greater or lesser degree some reformist or even plainly reactionary bourgeois theory of economics.

Much of the confusion about Marxist political economy in the United States stems from the work of Paul Sweezy, who has had a significant direct and indirect influence on the current generation of intellectuals coming to Marxism. *Monthly Review*, a monthly magazine edited by Sweezy and others, is an influential source of analysis of international developments and domestic economic questions. His books, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*<sup>1</sup> and *Monopoly Capital*<sup>2</sup> (written with Paul Baran), are extremely popular introductions to Marxist analysis, often preferred to Marx's writings because they are "easier to read" or "more up to date." But in fact Sweezy's theories achieved much prominence because they reflected the petty bourgeois outlook

many people came into the revolutionary movement with, and in fact built up a theoretical justification for many of the widespread prejudices of the time—especially the view that the working class was no longer the most revolutionary force in a country like the United States.

As will be shown in greater detail in this article, the basis of Sweezy's line on political economy is that the development of imperialism brings such a break with earlier capitalist organization that one can no longer say that the law of value governs the operations of monopoly capitalist economy. In his search for some other theoretical basis to explain the motion of imperialist economies, Sweezy necessarily and quite openly embraces bourgeois economic theory. His theory of economic crisis and stagnation is a theory of underconsumption barely distinguishable from the work of John M. Keynes, main architect of bourgeois economic theory since the 1930s. Just as the theory of crisis based on wage increases and the "profit squeeze," analyzed in the first article of this series,<sup>3</sup> rests on distribution rather than production, so the underconsumption theory removes the source of crisis from the basic relations of capitalist exploitation and the fundamental contradiction between the power of social production and the limits imposed on it by profit seeking private appropriation.

Lacking an anchor in the understanding of the material foundation of capitalist economies, Sweezy goes adrift in his analysis of the role of the state, presenting it as something dominated by the bourgeoisie but failing to see the relationship between government economic policy and the underlying conditions of production. Instead, he presents the state as an essentially external force shaping economic events principally by influencing (or failing to influence) the distribution of income and the level of demand for products in the market. And, to round out his political views, still without reference to the basic relations of exploitation in production, Sweezy ignores the political, revolutionary role of the working class in transforming society. Instead, he looks to the struggles of the Third World, or the power of example provided by socialist countries to the people of still-capitalist ones, as the principal source of revolutionary change in the United States.

Sweezy is not the first person to fall into these errors, and there are today many "new Marxists" who also confound Marxist terminology with bourgeois analysis. This article focuses on Sweezy as a significant representative of several erroneous theses in the "new Marxism." Different particular formulations of the same basic points often lead to disagreement and even polemic among Sweezy and others who share the same basic starting point, but at bottom much of the "new Marxism," and all of Sweezy, must be distinguished from scientific Marxism on four central points: 1) on the question of imperialism and the impact of mo-

monopoly capitalism on the law of value; 2) Sweezy's concept of the "rising surplus" and the substitution of surplus for surplus value; 3) questions related to crisis, stagnation and underconsumption; 4) Sweezy's confusion concerning the state and its relation to the economy.

Underlying all these problems is the fact that Sweezy departs from the law of value and the basic starting point of Marxist political economy—commodity production and the exploitation of wage labor, from which arise all the economic and political consequences of the capitalist system.

The first section of this article deals with these basic points of political economy. The second section addresses some questions of method and stand which underlie the errors in Sweezy's political economy. A final section looks at some of the political implications of Sweezy's approach.

With the recent rise of Marxism-Leninism and its spreading influence in the United States again, it is especially necessary to address the postwar heritage of confusion in political economy,\* show its historical links to bourgeois political economy since the time of Marx himself, and thus strengthen the basis for the serious investigation and application of Marxist political economy which is necessary to gain a scientific understanding of developments and help guide the working class in making socialist revolution and ultimately achieving communism.

## I. Sweezy's Political Economy

### (IA) MONOPOLY AND THE LAWS OF ACCUMULATION

Imperialism, "the monopoly stage of capitalism" as Lenin characterized it, develops out of the earlier stage of capitalism. It is of course true that imperialism, monopoly capitalism, is not identical with earlier capitalism. In fact it is qualitatively different in many regards, as Lenin pointed out.<sup>4</sup> Not the least of the differences is the fact that the era of imperialism is the era of decaying capitalism, the era of world war, the era of proletarian revolution, rather than the era of robust development of capitalism.

\*Over the years there have also been several positive contributions to a Marxist criticism of Sweezy. Particularly worthy of note are the following:

Albert Prago, "Sweezy's Theory of Capitalist Development," published in *New Foundations*, Spring 1948;

Paul Mattick, "Marxism and Monopoly Capital," in *PL Magazine*, June 1966; and the writings of Charles Bettelheim, published as a written debate between himself and Sweezy in *On the Transition to Socialism*, Monthly Review Press, 1972.

More recently, some Marxist criticisms have been published in Europe, which the author has not yet had an opportunity to study.



For Sweezy and many others, the advent of monopoly capitalism calls into question the relevance of Marx's theoretical work as a guide to analyzing modern society. While acknowledging the tremendous *political* contributions Lenin made to the practice of revolution, Sweezy says:

"It remains true that neither Lenin nor any of his followers attempted to explore the consequences of the predominance of monopoly for the working principles and 'laws of motion' of the underlying capitalist economy. There Marx's *Capital* continued to reign supreme."<sup>5</sup>

For reasons to be discussed shortly, Sweezy is saying that the fundamental "laws of motion" of the economy are changed because of the presence of widespread monopoly, which requires a fresh approach to economic theory. It is true that imperialism changes the way the basic laws of capitalism play themselves out. For example, in the era of imperialism the drive for profit leads to the dominance of the export of capital over the international trade in commodities, and this fact is extremely important in analyzing imperialism, especially imperialist wars. But this change in the *manifestation* of the laws of motion of capitalism in no way indicates a change in the basic laws themselves.

In fact, Lenin did explore and analyze the workings of the monopoly capitalist system, *precisely* on the basis of Marxism and by insisting that *Capital* continue to "reign supreme." Lenin was able to demonstrate in his book, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (which remains for Marxists to this day the touchstone for analyzing monopoly capitalism), that "monopolist capital has intensified all the contradictions of capitalism . . . This intensification of contradictions constitutes the most powerful driving force of the transitional period of history, which began from the time of the final victory of world finance capital."<sup>6</sup>

Lenin did not seek to replace *Capital* precisely because monopoly capitalism remained capitalism and shared with the early period of "free competition" the very *essential features* (or working principles and laws of motion) which Sweezy seeks to discard. As Lenin expressed it, "Imperialism emerged as the development and *direct continuation* of the fundamental characteristics of capitalism in general."<sup>7</sup> (emphasis added)

Lenin paid a great deal of attention to these laws and principles as they operate in imperialism. It was this that allowed him consistently to identify the bourgeoisie and capitalism itself as the enemy of the working class and masses of people, and consistently to aim the struggles of the masses against their real enemy through all the complicated twists and turns and new developments of the time. And it is precisely by starting from Marx and Lenin, by go-

ing to the essential features and laws of capitalism and applying them to the changing concrete conditions of advanced monopoly capitalist society in the United States, that we will make a contribution to revolution, and in so doing deepen and enrich our scientific understanding of political economy.

It is essential to understand that the same fundamental laws drive both early and highly developed capitalist society, however different the *results* of the operations of these laws may be. A dialectical understanding of capitalism indicates that the same basic system is at one historical time progressive, and at another time reactionary. This closes the door to the reactionary, petty bourgeois theory that monopoly capitalism is a fundamentally different system from early capitalism, a reactionary system which has somehow overthrown and displaced progress, and which can be defeated by re-establishing the old order.

Sweezy confuses important qualitative changes in capitalism as it moves into imperialism with a qualitative change in the very nature of the system itself. Setting out to extend Marxism into the new era, but without allowing *Capital* to "reign supreme," Sweezy proposes the following course and line of reasoning:

"Since market relations are *essentially* price relations, the study of monopoly capitalism, like that of competitive capitalism, must *begin* with the workings of the price mechanism"<sup>8</sup> (emphasis added).

"The appropriate general price theory for an economy dominated by such corporations is the traditional monopoly price theory of classical and neoclassical economics."<sup>9</sup>

Sweezy is saying that the "appropriate" theoretical framework for analyzing imperialism is—the bourgeois theory of price. Quite a remarkable conclusion for someone who is trying to deepen and extend Marxism.

### (III) IS PRICE FUNDAMENTAL?

There are two basic and interrelated errors in Sweezy's line and method of analysis expressed above. He proposes to begin by discarding the "price mechanism" and implies that Marx's analysis of capitalism began here. But analyzing prices, while important to understanding the workings of capitalism, is *not* where Marx began and prices are certainly not the "essence of market relations." Marx began his presentation of *Capital* with an analysis of the commodity and value and in fact conducts the entire discussion with only incidental reference to prices, market relations and competition. By proceeding from price instead of *value* (the amount

of socially necessary labor time involved in making a given commodity), Sweezy is unable ever to get beyond the superficial appearance of the commodity.

Sweezy's error leads to his second and more fundamental error—basing his entire analysis of monopoly capitalism on circulation and exchange, where values confront each other disguised as prices. Sweezy has fallen prey to what Marx called "commodity fetishism" which he described as follows:

"There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things . . . This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the product of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities . . . [This fetishism] has its origin . . . in the peculiar social character of the labor that produces them."<sup>10</sup>

Because Sweezy eliminates the concept of value\* he is not only incapable of analyzing circulation and exchange correctly, he is trapped hopelessly in the realm of circulation, utterly incapable of understanding the actual relations between men that come out in the sphere of *production*, and which determine the entire character of capitalist society, and the analysis of which are the essence of Marx's political economy. Marx's analysis of the commodity and value enabled him to *leave* the sphere of circulation and reveal the essence of capitalism, the exploitation of the working class in the sphere of production. As Marx put it:

"Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labor-power, we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere [circulation], where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face 'No admittance except on business.' Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced. We shall at last force the secret of profit making."<sup>11</sup>

In beginning with price as the *essence* of market relations, Sweezy confuses the surface, the result or appearance, with the heart of the matter, the real essence of market relations *and* price. It is true that commodities are produced for exchange, and that there is no capitalist production without markets and prices; in short that production and circulation are inseparably linked. But

\*Although Sweezy systematically departs from the theory of value, he occasionally gives lip service to what he calls the "qualitative" theory of value. This is addressed on page 109 of this article.

capitalist production and circulation stand in contradiction with one another, a unity of opposites, and it is production which is the dominant aspect. It is the conditions of production, and especially the production of surplus value, which overall dominates circulation, prices, markets, and all aspects of capitalist society.\* This point will be elaborated further in the criticism of Sweezy's theory of underconsumption.

### *Imperialism Intensifies Contradictions*

Sweezy claims that monopoly capitalism, or imperialism, has changed the essential laws of motion of capitalism, rather than recognizing (as Lenin did) that imperialism changes only the way in which these laws manifest themselves while greatly intensifying all of the contradictions of capitalism. Sweezy isolates what he sees as a central weakness of Marxism, "the Marxian analysis of capitalism still rests in the final analysis on the assumption of a competitive economy."<sup>12</sup> In setting himself the task of going "beyond" Marx and Lenin, he says this is a weakness which can at least in principle be remedied.

Sweezy explains what he means by competition when he writes:

"Competition of a dangerous kind [i.e., dangerous to the

\*Sweezy's analysis also makes it impossible to understand socialism and communism correctly. A typical example of the errors which flow from seeing price as the "essence of market relations" and seeing circulation, not production, as the basis of the economy, is found in the work of another current theorist and supporter of Sweezy, Howard Sherman, professor of economics at the University of California at Riverside. In an article entitled "The Economics of Pure Communism," (*Soviet Studies*), he proposes a path to communism based on the gradual and successive reduction of prices until all prices are reduced to zero and distribution is carried out according to the communist principle of need, rather than the socialist principle of work resulting in income necessary to purchase commodities (from each according to his ability, to each according to his work). According to Sherman the basis on which prices would be reduced is the steady advance in productivity under socialist organization, which greatly reduces the labor time required for production of any item, coupled with the end of profit-inspired artificial stimulation of wants and individual competitiveness which drive people to consume needlessly.

This view of the path to communism focussed as it is on the elimination of price, misses the heart of the matter. There will be no prices and no commodities in communist society. But Sherman's conception of the process amounts to the theory of productive forces—the central task of socialist society is to advance productivity and quantitatively reduce price until the qualitative leap occurs from prices greater than zero (socialism) to no price at all (communism). Sherman's focus on the surface phenomenon of price, leading him to construct a path specifically aimed at eliminating it (the surface manifestation) rather than addressing the real *essence* of capitalism and markets in general, drives him into this theory of productive forces and in effect to the abandonment of achieving communism by concentrating on advancing the socialist *relations* of production in dialectical unity with the development of the productive forces, and thereby laying the basis for the destruction of prices, markets and all vestiges of commodity production. This is another example of what can happen when circulation is made to replace production as the essence of capitalist relations.

bourgeoisie—MFZ] is generally effectively abolished when something on the order of three-quarters to four-fifths of a given industry is in the hands of a few large companies . . .”<sup>13</sup>

What Sweezy is referring to above is *price* competition, and since, for him, “price is the essence of market relations,” hence the absence of price competition of a dangerous kind leads him to the belief that Marx’s *Capital* is no longer relevant—in fact, it is not just incomplete, but basically flawed for modern purposes because *Capital* is based on competitive capitalism, which no longer exists. The errors involved in both Sweezy’s presentation of the facts and his reasoning require some elaboration. He seems to be saying that the essential feature of competition, at least “dangerous” competition, depends upon the number of capitalists in a given market.

First of all, competition “of a dangerous kind”—including price competition—continues to exist under imperialism. As Lenin put it,

“ . . . monopolies, which have grown out of free competition, do not eliminate the latter, but exist over and alongside of it, and thereby give rise to a number of very acute, intense antagonisms, frictions and conflicts.”<sup>14</sup>

Take, for example, the auto industry. By Sweezy’s logic (four companies controlling 76% of the market) competition—at least of a dangerous kind—should have ceased to exist. But one of these companies, American Motors, is currently on the verge of going under. A few years back, Chrysler was in very serious trouble. Furthermore, the use of rebates on auto sales was precisely an example of price competition, as was the widespread (and very dangerous to the U.S. auto giants) introduction of cheaper imported cars from Japan and Europe which forced the U.S. companies to introduce whole new lines of cars at reduced prices.

Similar examples of widespread competition including over prices (steel, for example) abound, not only of competition between different U.S. firms, but between capitalists of different countries (a point that is virtually missing from *Monopoly Capital*).

It is certainly true that monopoly does modify prices—direct and indirect efforts of the capitalists to maintain a particular price are commonplace. It is also true that price competition, on the whole, does not play the same central role in the conflict between different capitalist concerns that it did in the period Marx was analyzing. But only to Sweezy, who constructs his whole theory on the pedestal of price, does this mean that *Cap-*

*tal* must be discarded, or that competition is no longer built into the capitalist system.

Sweezy is forced to acknowledge the obvious fact that competition still exists under monopoly, but again he does so in a revealing way. He says:

“The abandonment of price competition does not mean the end of all competition: it takes new forms and rages on with ever increasing intensity. Most of these new forms of competition come under the heading of what we call the sales effort . . .”<sup>15</sup>

He goes on to say:

“In an economic system in which competition is fierce and relentless and in which the fewness of the rivals rules out price cutting, advertising becomes to an ever increasing extent the principal weapon of the competitive struggle.”<sup>16</sup>

First it must be stressed that the competition Sweezy is talking about is certainly not of a “dangerous” kind. Sweezy doesn’t even try, for instance, to come up with an example of a major capitalist concern going under because it hired the wrong Madison Avenue firm! In *Monopoly Capital*, competition is presented as essentially a matter of persuading a gullible public to purchase unneeded goods. To Sweezy, the quintessence of monopoly capitalism must have been shown by the man who made a small fortune selling pet rocks. But alas, the pet rock craze collapsed because the masses were able to sense what Sweezy fails to understand—that a rock has no value!

The point Lenin made in the quote cited earlier that “the monopolies, which have grown out of free competition, do not eliminate the latter, but exist over it and alongside of it” is totally missing in Sweezy.

Sweezy has a one-sided and metaphysical view of monopoly, separating out monopoly from competition and seeing only the opposition between the two, but not the unity. For Sweezy, price competition is the essential form of competition, because for him price is the essence of market relations. And because he only looks at the form of competition, he is limited to some quantitative descriptive measure of the presence or absence of price competition. Sweezy chooses the bourgeois category and measure of the number of firms dominating sales in the market. Depending on the numbers, there is either competition or there is not. (The fact that Sweezy allows competition to exist—even to intensify in other forms [e.g., advertising] is unimportant to

Sweezy for this part of his analysis because, for him the absence of price competition is enough to refute *Capital*.) Sweezy cannot deal with the fact that monopoly and competition in capitalist society themselves constitute a unity of opposites, and that this in no way eliminates price competition from imperialism, although the constant and growing antagonism between monopoly and competition certainly influences the behavior of prices in monopoly capitalism.

Such a one-sided approach to monopoly has a long history in bourgeois political economy. Marx sharply criticized the French socialist economist Proudhon for just this error:

“M. Proudhon talks of nothing but modern monopoly engendered by competition. But we all know that competition was engendered by feudal monopoly. Thus competition was originally the opposite of monopoly and not monopoly the opposite of competition. So that modern monopoly is not a simple antithesis, it is on the contrary the true synthesis . . .

“Modern monopoly, which is the negation of feudal monopoly, insofar as it implies the system of competition, and the negation of competition insofar as it is monopoly.

“Thus modern monopoly, bourgeois monopoly, is synthetic monopoly, the negation of the negation, the unity of opposites.

“. . . competition and monopoly devour each other . . .

“The synthesis is of such a character that monopoly can only maintain itself by continually entering into the struggle of competition.”<sup>17</sup>

Marx here analyzes capitalist monopoly in a dialectical way, and from the point of view of historical materialism. The development of capitalist monopoly is rooted in and is a negation of capitalist competition which, in turn, is a negation of feudal monopoly. This consistent approach of dialectical historical materialism also provides the basis for understanding the essence of capitalist competition, as opposed to the various forms it may take.

### *Capital and Competition*

Sweezy's inability to correctly understand competition stems from his inability to understand the essence of capital itself, that it is command over living labor and can only reproduce and expand itself by exploiting ever more surplus value from the labor of the working class. Only by understanding the nature of capital is it possible to understand the essence of capitalist competition

regardless of what form it might take.

Marx is very plain on this point.

“Conceptually, *competition* is nothing other than the inner *nature of capital*, its essential character, appearing in and realized as the reciprocal interaction of many capitals with one another . . .”<sup>18</sup> (emphasis in original)

What Marx is addressing here is essential to unraveling Sweezy's confusion over monopoly and competition. The inner tendency of each and every capital is to strive for limitless surplus value. Because capital comes into being and can only exist as many competing capitals, this inner tendency *appears* to the capitalists and to classical bourgeois political economy (here Marx is referring specifically to Ricardo) as “a compulsion exercised over it by an *alien capital*.”<sup>19</sup> Sweezy can see only the appearance of competition and not the essential character of capital itself; so that when this appearance changes, when monopoly modifies (Sweezy would hold eliminates) price competition, Sweezy finds no external compulsion and hence, no competition.

Monopoly changes the form of the reciprocal interaction of capitals but it does not and cannot change the fact that this reciprocal interaction must take place. There has never been a time when capital was not divided among larger or smaller numbers of different capitalists and it is not possible to conceive of a time when this would not be the case in one form or another—it is even the case in the highly developed state capitalist USSR today. In this constant interaction between capitals, the inner essence of capital appears as and is realized as competition.

Let us return for a moment to Sweezy's favorite example of monopoly—the auto industry. Not only are the various capitals (in this case the auto companies) interacting with each other, they are also interacting with a myriad of other capitals. They must, for example, purchase raw materials from steel companies, glass companies, etc., and this interaction constantly comes out as *competition*. They, like all the other huge corporations and blocs of finance, are engaged in a life or death struggle (competition) over the division of the total surplus value expropriated by the capitalist class as a whole. Indeed, the development of imperialism means, that to a far greater degree than under free enterprise, each capital interacts with *every* other capital, each competing to appropriate privately as much of the surplus value produced socially by the entire working class as possible.

Furthermore, what is the relation between the auto giants, or for that matter different monopoly corporations in any one industry? Sweezy would have us believe that it is almost exclusively in the realm of advertising men, design engineers, salesmen, etc.

But once again his inability to understand the inner nature of capital itself makes him unable to see how that inner nature is realized in competition. As Marx pointed out:

“Capital is not a thing, but rather a definite social production relation, belonging to a definite historical formation of society, which is manifested in a thing and lends this thing a specific social character.”<sup>20</sup>

The productive relation Marx is referring to is the relation of wage labor to capital, the exploitation of labor in the course of production. And it is precisely this social production relation that appears in and is realized as competition.

When capitalists compete with each other, either in the “free competition” period or under monopoly capitalism, each seeks to squeeze more and more surplus value out of “his” workers. The ways the capitalists seek to do this—intensification of labor through speedup, lengthening the working day, holding down wages, and so forth—are a continual feature of life in capitalist industry. Competition—basically competition in exploitation—is an essential part of capital, and will be abolished, not by monopoly and the presence of only a few buyers and sellers in the market, but only through the abolition of capital itself.

Of course the capitalists compete with each other for a greater share of the market, whether through price cutting or through sales effort or some other means. Again, production and circulation are not unrelated—each requires the other in order to continue. But they are not the same, and they are not equal. Production again is primary, for the simple reason that without the production of surplus value, which occurs only in production, no amount of circulation or sales effort could possibly realize any profit. And while this need not be true of any particular capital, that is, a particular capital may be employed in a way which creates no surplus value at all but still brings a money profit to its owner (for example, merchant capital engaged only in trade), it is certainly true for capital taken as a whole. In fact, unproductive capital is dependent on productive capital for its own ability to make profit. It is exactly there, in capital itself, that competition resides.

To sum up this point, competition exists as something related to but different from the forms it takes, i.e. it is not the same thing as its appearance. Competition is necessarily and permanently related to exploitation of labor and the production of surplus value. The advent of imperialism can change the *form* and outward result of competition, but not its essence, because monopoly capitalism is still capitalism—based on capital itself as a social relation.

Imperialism does not and cannot change the basic laws governing capitalism. Because Sweezy approaches his analysis with an idealist and metaphysical method, he confuses the outward appearance with the thing itself, and ignores the essence of competition altogether, holding his analysis at the most superficial level, even going so far as to ascribe to Marx himself this method when Sweezy asserts that even in the study of competitive capitalism, which he attributes to Marx, one “must begin with the workings of the price mechanism.” These fundamental errors lie at the heart of Sweezy’s entire analysis, as will become more apparent as additional problems are addressed in this article. Sweezy’s misunderstanding of some of the most basic elements of Marxist method and economics accounts for his “belief” in Marxism existing together with a complete and total departure from Marxism.

Lenin, on the other hand, was able to analyze qualitatively new conditions in a revolutionary manner while making genuine contributions to the wealth of scientific political economy exactly because he did not confuse form with essence. He sought truth from facts by analyzing actual events on the basis of Marx’s most fundamental insights. It was exactly because Lenin actually based himself on Marx that he could see that imperialism is “the direct continuation of the fundamental characteristics of capital in general” resulting in a qualitative change within the framework of capitalism, and on that *basis* could recognize in the new situation the unprecedented revolutionary significance it held.

On the basis of Marxism, Lenin led the first successful proletarian revolution, while polemicalizing in the sharpest manner against a host of so-called Marxist theoreticians of the Second International, each of whom outdid the other in complaining about Lenin’s “dogmatism” and “sectarianism,” and in coming up with reasons why imperialism had qualitatively changed capitalism *in such a way* as to render Marx and the absolute necessity of proletarian revolution “obsolete.” Sweezy clearly follows in the tradition of the Second International. To understand that is to have a better appreciation of Stalin’s evaluation of Lenin:

“The whole truth about Leninism is that Leninism not only restored Marxism, but also took a step forward, developing Marxism further under the new conditions of capitalism and of the class struggle of the proletariat.

“What, then, in the last analysis, is Leninism?”

“Leninism is Marxism of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution.”<sup>21</sup>

To be a Marxist in the era of imperialism, one must be a Leninist.

*(IB) SWEETZY'S CONCEPT OF "SURPLUS"*

For Marx, the production of surplus value and accumulation of capital it makes possible are the driving mechanisms of capitalist society. Analyzing monopoly capitalism, Sweezy introduces an entirely new concept, which is central to his entire approach. In place of surplus value, he proposes "surplus," and a new law that monopoly capital is characterized by a "rising surplus," from which flows all of its problems.

"The economic surplus, in the briefest possible definition, is the difference between what a society produces and the costs of producing it."<sup>22</sup> This definition is set in terms of prices and costs, not in terms of value at all. Anticipating questions about the switch from surplus *value*, Baran and Sweezy note that:

"we prefer the concept 'surplus' to the traditional Marxian 'surplus value' since the latter is probably identified in the minds of most people familiar with Marxian economic theory as equal to the sum of profits + interest + rent. It is true that Marx demonstrates—in scattered passages of *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value*—that surplus value also comprises other items such as revenue of state and church . . . In general, however, he treated these as secondary factors and excluded them from his basic theoretical schema. It is our contention that under monopoly capitalism this procedure is no longer justified, and we hope that a *change in terminology* will help to effect the needed *shift in theoretical position*"<sup>23</sup> (emphasis added).

Dealing in terms of prices and costs, Sweezy points out that monopoly corporations can and do keep prices above the levels which would obtain if there were open market competition of the kind known in early capitalism. He also correctly points out that reduction of costs of production is in the interest of monopoly capital just as much as "competitive" capital. From this he draws the conclusion that with costs declining, but prices held high, profit margins will tend to increase and this in turn

"impl[ies] aggregate profits which rise not only absolutely but as a share of national product. If we provisionally equate aggregate profits with society's economic surplus [they note that other elements must also be added in to get the true surplus—MFZ] we can formulate as a law of monopoly capitalism that the surplus tends to rise both absolutely and relatively as the system develops."<sup>24</sup>

Baran and Sweezy go on:

"This law immediately invites comparison, as it should, with the classical-Marxian law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit. Without entering into an analysis of the different versions of the latter, we can say that they all presuppose a competitive system. By substituting the law of rising surplus for the law of falling profit, we are therefore not rejecting or revising a time-honored theorem of political economy: we are simply [!] taking into account the undoubted fact that the structure of the capitalist economy has undergone a fundamental change since that theorem was formulated. What is most essential about the structural change from competitive to monopoly capitalism finds its theoretical expression in this substitution."<sup>25</sup>

We will deal later with Sweezy's ideas on the rate of profit. Concerning the concept of the surplus, we find that the change from surplus value and the development of the category "surplus" is exactly the outcome of Sweezy's belief that monopoly capitalism is governed by different basic laws than early capitalism, and that value theory is no longer appropriate. This is the "shift in theoretical position" referred to earlier, a definitive and open break with Marxism, for which a "change in terminology" is required.

Sweezy is quite correct to see that modern capitalism has a tremendous capacity to produce surplus. Every society since the latter stages of primitive communalism has produced a surplus *product*, i.e. more products, use-values, than are required to sustain the laboring population—sustained, that is, at the level of the working masses in that society. But in capitalist society this surplus takes the form of surplus *value*, and only incidentally surplus things. This surplus value is based on the fact that labor power is a commodity in capitalist society, from which surplus is extracted by an exploiting bourgeoisie.

The fact that the surplus takes the form first of surplus value and finally of money capital which can and must be reintroduced to further advance production in the quest for still greater *value* (not things) is what accounts for the tremendous increase in social productivity of labor. This goes together with the unprecedented power of the laboring people, now organized as a proletariat with only labor power to sell, to produce surplus.

Capitalist society by its very nature transforms its surplus things into the most flexible form, money, which must and also can be reintroduced to expand production. The expansive power of capitalist society, which Sweezy observes, cannot be explained adequately by him because he turns away from the only theoretical

framework in which one can analyze the different forms of surplus—the labor theory of value.

Sweezy throws out value theory as an anachronistic theory unsuited to the basic “principles and laws of motion” of imperialism. How is he to explain what he sees in society, in particular the “rising surplus”? Why, through the strength of the monopoly bourgeoisie, whose market power is such that they can keep prices high. Having thrown out value theory, Sweezy proceeds to ignore the productive power of the working class and ascribe mystical power to the monopoly capitalists. An altogether fitting conclusion to a bourgeois theory.

### *Rising Surplus and Falling Rate of Profit*

The contradiction Sweezy feels obliged to explain, between rising surplus and a falling rate of profit, in fact presents no problem at all when the whole problem is stated correctly. Is it possible for the *rate* of profit to fall while the *mass* of surplus value rises? Not only is it possible, it happens all the time, since both are the common effects of accumulation and the increased social productivity of labor:

“The law of the progressive falling of the rate of profit . . . does not rule out in any way that the absolute mass of exploited labor set in motion by the social capital, and consequently the absolute mass of the surplus-labor it appropriates, may grow.”<sup>26</sup>

There is nothing strange or inexplicable about the fact that surplus rises in imperialism. It requires no theoretical breakthrough, and certainly no theoretical revolution (more precisely, counter-revolution) to explain it and reconcile the fact with the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (more on this later).

We will conclude this discussion with a final observation about Marx’s derivation of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Sweezy thinks that the changing forms in which the surplus appears (profit, interest, revenue of state and church, etc.) requires a change in analysis. While it is true that the form in which the surplus appears, reflecting the productive or unproductive uses to which the surplus value is put, has important implications for the course of accumulation, it is absolutely false to see in the shifting forms surplus assumes any change in the social *origin* of surplus value. In fact, Marx pointed to the significance of this in his derivation of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall:

“We intentionally present this law before going on to the division of profit into different independent categories.

The fact that this analysis is made independently of the division of profit into different parts, which fall to the share of different categories of people, shows from the outset that this law is, *in its entirety*, independent of this division, and just as independent of the mutual relations of the resultant categories of profit. The profit to which we are here referring is but another name for surplus value itself, which is presented only in its relation to *total capital* rather than to variable capital, from which it arises.”<sup>27</sup> (emphasis added)

First, the “problem” Sweezy poses, the changing composition of the categories of surplus, in no way touches the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, although negating value relations certainly does. Further, Marx is again clear that this basic analysis is made with regard to *total capital*, and so is independent also of the number of units of capital into which the total is divided, i.e. it is independent of the numerical measure of competition Sweezy clings to, and which was reviewed in the last section. Competition is an *enforcer* of the laws of capital, but the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, just as competition itself, is the result of capital as a whole, independent of its particular division, and operates throughout the life of capital.

### *(IC) CRISIS, STAGNATION AND UNDERCONSUMPTION*

Sweezy’s treatment of these subjects presents a welter of theoretical confusion. Here there is space to deal only with the most important points.

In general, Sweezy considers crisis and stagnation to be different phenomena. This is also the general Marxist view. Crisis is usually taken to mean the more or less regular, periodic collapse of capitalist production, coming at the end of a period of rapid economic expansion. Crisis is accompanied by rapid increases in unemployment, reduced levels of production (or at least sharply lower advances in production compared with the “boom” period). In short, crisis theory generally refers to business cycles.

Stagnation refers to unusually long and continuous stretches of depressed economic activity, during which no major cyclical recovery intervenes.

Underconsumption is a theory, with several particular and competing variations differing in some respects, but all sharing certain basic methodological and conceptual common ground. Some underconsumption theories are presented as an explanation of crisis, some as an explanation of stagnation, while some formulations, like Sweezy’s, attempt to explain both crises and stagnation from the same underlying proposed mechanism of underconsumption.

Sweezy's main interest is in stagnation, although he does not ignore crisis. His formulation of underconsumption theory is mainly aimed at explaining stagnation. As will be seen, Sweezy also tries to explain capitalist crises with underconsumption theory, but his effort there is more eclectic, drawing heavily on the factor-share/profit-squeeze argument analyzed in detail in the first article of this series.

The plan here is to discuss Sweezy's theory of capitalist crisis first, comparing it with Marx's theory of crisis. Then Sweezy's theory of underconsumption will be investigated, followed by a discussion of stagnation.

### *Tendency of Rate of Profit to Fall*

Sweezy recognizes that profit is a key indicator and regulator of capitalist activity, so he says that the "... causation of crises must run in terms of the forces operating on the rate of profit."<sup>28</sup> But, as shown above, Sweezy dismisses Marx's own explanation of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, at least for monopoly capitalism, substituting instead the law of rising surplus. At best, according to Sweezy, the "time-honored theorem" belonged to the distant past. But in Sweezy's own major exposition of Marxist theory, published by him in 1942, Sweezy challenges Marx's formulation even in the context of the early capitalist society Marx was analyzing. Sweezy's challenge is revealing, setting the stage as it does for his own explanation of falling profits, not only "updated" but completely divorced from value theory in general, at any stage of capitalist development.

Before entering into Sweezy's view more fully, it will be helpful to summarize in the briefest way Marx's explanation for the falling tendency of the rate of profit. It should be remembered that the actual working out of the interaction between the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the counteracting tendencies is, at any moment, an extremely complex phenomenon, in which the basic contradictions of capital manifest themselves in varied forms. The following summary is not intended to do anything more than show the general approach taken by Marx. Furthermore, the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is not by itself a theory of capitalist crisis, although it is absolutely central to Marxist crisis theory. The following summary should therefore not be taken as a summary of Marxist crisis theory.<sup>29</sup>

For Marx, the rate of profit is the relation between the mass of surplus value, "s," and the total capital advanced to engage the production of that surplus value, "c+v," constant and variable capital. The rate of profit is the ratio "s/(c+v)." Surplus value originates from the exploitation of living labor, not from the use of machinery, materials, or other constant capital. Only the applica-

tion of variable capital, which hires living labor, can result in surplus value, since living labor applied in production is the only source of value and surplus value. The relation between the capital exchanged for living labor (labor power), "v," and the surplus value which this labor power creates, is called the rate of surplus value, or rate of exploitation, and is measured by the ratio "s/v."

Since the rate of profit, "s/(c+v)," relates the surplus to the entire capital and not just to the variable capital, it is not enough to know the rate of exploitation to know the rate of profit. We must also know what part of the total capital is laid out as variable capital to hire living labor, and what part goes to purchase constant capital. The relation between these two magnitudes of value, "c/v," is called by Marx the organic composition of capital.\* If the organic composition of capital rises, i.e. if a larger proportion of total capital is laid out as constant capital and a smaller proportion laid out as variable capital, and if the rate of surplus value (or rate of exploitation) remains the same, the rate of profit must fall.

Marx analyzes at great length the factors which influence the organic composition of capital, and he concludes that the organic composition of capital rises regularly as a result of the necessary steps in capital accumulation.<sup>30</sup> From this he concludes that the rate of profit tends to fall—*tends* to fall because the same advances in accumulation and productivity of labor which are associated with the rising organic composition of capital also push up the rate of exploitation, "s/v" (by cheapening the elements of workers' consumption), which to a certain degree and for a certain time may push up the rate of profit and counteract its tendency to fall.

Now let us see what Sweezy does with this. First, he agrees that the organic composition of capital in fact does rise, characterizing Marx's explanation as "indisputable trends"<sup>31</sup> and acknowledging that "a rising organic composition of capital goes hand in hand with increasing labor productivity."<sup>32</sup>

But Sweezy is not satisfied. Recalling that increases in productivity also increases the rate of exploitation, and seeking to hoist Marx on his own petard, Sweezy says:

"We have Marx's own word for it that higher productivity is invariably accompanied by a higher rate of surplus value. In the general case, therefore, we ought to assume that the increasing organic composition of capital proceeds *pari passu* [with equal pace or progress—MFZ] with a rising rate of surplus value.

\*We shall see later in this article that Sweezy rejects this formulation of Marx's, and the reasons for it.



"If both the organic composition of capital and the rate of surplus value are assumed variable, as we [not Marx??—MFZ] think they should be, then the direction in which the rate of profit will change becomes indeterminate."<sup>33</sup>

In other words, since in the real world everything varies and changes, and in opposing directions, we don't know what the overall direction of change will be.

Now, Marx was no fool, and so Sweezy will have to do better than this to dispose of him. When Marx first explains the rising organic composition of capital, it is in the course of formulating "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation."<sup>34</sup> Marx shows that the drive for profit forces each capitalist to improve the efficiency of production, and that the principal means for accomplishing this is the introduction of machinery to increase the productivity of labor. This has a two-fold effect. It raises the organic composition of capital by providing more machinery per worker\* and by allowing each worker to process more material inputs in a given time, and it also has the effect of throwing workers out of work, adding to the reserve army of unemployed. For Marx, the accumulation of capital also brings the accumulation of the reserve army of the proletariat, the unemployed.

With this basic understanding, Marx explicitly deals with the so-called "indeterminate" movement in the rate of profit. He points out:

"In relation to employed labor-power the development of the productivity again reveals itself in two ways: First, in the increase of surplus-labor, i.e., the reduction of the necessary labor-time required for the reproduction of the labor-power. Secondly, in the decrease of the quantity of labor power (the number of laborers) generally employed to set in motion a given capital. ". . . the compensation of the reduced number of laborers by intensifying the degree of exploitation has certain insurmountable limits. It may, for this reason, well check the fall in the rate of profit, but cannot prevent it altogether."<sup>35</sup>

The rate of exploitation may rise. It does rise. Marx doesn't need Sweezy to point this out. But at the same time and out of the same conditions, the number of workers employed falls, *relative to the capital advanced*, and perhaps even absolutely, as the accu-

\* Marx draws an important distinction between the technical composition of capital, the amount of machinery and materials per worker, and the organic composition of capital, which expresses the relation in value terms. See Capital, Vol. 1, pp. 612-613.

mulation process throws people out of work. The fact that fewer workers are employed for a given outlay of capital is the dominant aspect, not the fact that each remaining worker is subject to a higher degree of exploitation—because of what Marx refers to as "insurmountable limits" to the latter. Therefore, the higher rate of exploitation inflicted on each *remaining* worker is more than compensated for by the simple fact that there are fewer workers to exploit, *for a given outlay of capital*. The increase in rate of exploitation can therefore not "prevent," but can only temporarily "check," the tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

Sweezy registers nothing of this argument, even though it is there in plain type. Thinking he has bested Marx on a fundamental point, he becomes conciliatory and makes excuses for Marx, by way of excusing himself from paying attention.

"It should be remembered in this connection that the chapter on 'Unraveling the Internal Contradictions of the Law' [from which the previous quote from Marx was taken—MFZ] has, perhaps to a greater degree than most of Volume III, the character of preliminary notes jotted down by Marx . . . so that definitive judgements are probably out of the question."<sup>36</sup>

From where, then, shall we draw judgment? Sweezy locates and presents his theory of crisis and falling profit in a remarkable fashion.

"We should be on sounder grounds to search for causes of the falling tendency of the rate of profit in the process of capital accumulation with its inherent tendency to raise the demand for labor power and hence the level of wages . . ."<sup>37</sup>

"The chain of causation runs from the rate of accumulation to the volume of employment, from the volume of employment to the level of wages, from the level of wages to the rate of profit . . . [the fall in profit] chokes off accumulation and precipitates a crisis, the crisis turns into depression, and finally, the depression recreates the conditions favorable to an acceleration in the rate of accumulation."<sup>38</sup>

This is the identical formulation which is presented by J. Crotty and R. Boddy, the subject of the first of these two articles.<sup>39</sup> Rather than repeat the arguments of that article, it is enough to refer readers to it and go on, noting only that Sweezy too falls into Ricardian formulations which emphasize circulation instead of production, a consequence of ignoring the law of value.

Sweezy wants to appear to be faithful to Marx. He says,

"the arguments . . . have been concerned with the theoretical foundations of the falling tendency of the rate of profit. There has been no thought of denying the existence or fundamental importance of such a tendency."<sup>40</sup>

It is ironic that Sweezy should use for his text for his "improved" explanation of the fall in the rate of profit the very chapter in Volume I which Marx uses to show why his own explanation is satisfactory and needs no "improvement." The explanation of the relation between accumulation, employment and wages is part of the material which makes the point that accumulation throws people out of work.

Sweezy is certainly not the first or most recent radical or "socialist" who has thrown out Marx's "theoretical foundations" while feigning to retain the conclusions, and not the first or last to take the cheap shot that Volume III is "scattered notes." Those notes, never edited by Marx, turn out to be a better guide than all of Sweezy's polished writings.

Sweezy brings to mind Engels' response to those critics 90 years ago who complained about the "scattered notes" of Volume III, insisting on new editing:

"For the people who cannot or do not want to read, who, even in Volume I, took more trouble to understand it wrongly than was necessary to understand it correctly—for such people it is altogether useless to put oneself out in any way. But for those who are interested in a real understanding, the original text itself was precisely the most important thing."<sup>41</sup>

To sum up the argument so far, Sweezy recognizes that the key to understanding crisis is in profits. But Sweezy, trying to present his argument in Marxist terms, rejects Marx's own explanation of the falling rate of profit, essentially because Sweezy does not understand why the tendencies counteracting the fall in the rate of profit, particularly the rise in the rate of exploitation, cannot consistently overcome the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

Sweezy's representation of the Marxist tendency of the rate of profit to fall is identical to that put forward by Ricardo and, more recently in the pages of *Monthly Review*, by Boddy and Crotty. Sweezy's rendition of Marx on this point is an out and out bourgeois theory of political economy and profit.

Sweezy is aware of this, at least to some degree. As he puts it:

"It should be noted that the conception of the business cycle which emerges from Marx's analysis of capital accumulation [as rendered by Sweezy—MFZ] is one which is,

in principle at least, acceptable to non-Marxian political economy."<sup>42</sup>

Sweezy then backs away from his own creation, calling it "one-sided" and incomplete. But for Sweezy, this is a judgment on Marx's own theory, which Sweezy believes himself to be representing as best as it is possible to represent it. To Sweezy, the most significant weakness in Marx's (but really his own) profit-squeeze theory is that "in the language of current [bourgeois—MFZ] theory it assumes that the crisis is not the result but the cause of a shortage of effective demand" and that "to drop this assumption is to open up a new range of possibilities."<sup>43</sup>

In other words, Sweezy finds a problem with his own formulation, which he however thinks is Marxist, or at least the best possible interpretation which can be put on Marx's own writings. The real underlying problem with Sweezy's—not Marx's—analysis is that his theory is based in distribution and not production. The problem Sweezy finds is that the formulation suggests that the crisis happens first, and then in turn causes a shortage of demand in the market as workers are laid off, wages are driven down, and in general the income of the mass of consumers falls.

#### *Underconsumption Theory*

Sweezy calls this sequence of events an "assumption." He wants to drop that "assumption" and argue the reverse sequence of events, namely that a shortage of demand appears in the market first and in turn causes crisis. This is the stage for the underconsumption theory of crisis and/or stagnation. As Sweezy explains it, still relating crisis to the rate of profit:

"Now, if we drop the assumption that all commodities sell at their equilibrium values, another possible source of a fall in profitability emerges. Capitalists may suffer from an inability to sell commodities at their values."<sup>44</sup>

Or, if the capitalists cannot sell their commodities at value, but are forced because of too small a demand to cut prices below value generally in society, then the capitalists will not realize as money profit the full surplus value contained in the commodity, and so the (realized) rate of profit will fall, and then crisis will set in. The capitalist crisis, according to underconsumption theory, is therefore "caused" by a shortage of demand. It is not, as Sweezy says Marx "assumed," the other way around.

First, it should be noted that this "explanation" of crisis is exactly opposed to Sweezy's first attempt at a Marxist explanation,

which was based on the profit-squeeze argument. In that scenario, the crisis is brought on by a *rising* share of income going to labor. Here, with underconsumption, the crisis is brought on because workers do not have *enough* income (i.e. there is a shortage of demand) in relation to capital. Having given up value theory and rejected Marx's own theory of crisis, Sweezy can only go from pillar to post, being troubled by "one-sidedness" only to arrive at another theory which is diametrically opposed to the first, and equally one-sided. Yet the two theories, profit-squeeze and underconsumption, have one basic feature in common, which unites them and causes advocates of one version to sometimes present the other, opposite version. Both theories are based on the conditions of distribution, and neither proceed from Marx's value theory.

This unity is but two opposite erroneous views stemming from the same basic error, failure to look into production and the conditions of exploitation of labor. Underlying this is Sweezy's consistently metaphysical method which doesn't penetrate into the internal workings of capital in production to find the heart of the contradiction but remains at the outer manifestations, in circulation, to explain the forces at work.

The fact that Sweezy prefers the underconsumption version of the error rather than the factor share version is consistent with his reluctance to enter into concrete political struggle, preferring instead the calmer waters of left Keynesian pump priming and stimulation of aggregate demand through government intervention with massive expenditures. It is consistent with his overall dismissal of the U.S. working class as a force for change, let alone revolution, or even as a force at all. (These features of Sweezy are treated in Section III.) At least Boddy, Crotty and many other advocates of the profit squeeze version present the working class as a vital and significant force, as an active agent going up against the bourgeoisie, and at least they try to relate to the concrete struggles of the working class, however much their fundamentally bourgeois analysis of political economy keeps them from seeing how to move that struggle ahead, and even sabotages the struggle at points.

Sweezy's presentation of underconsumption as the cause of crisis or stagnation is one in a long history of similar attempts, following in the path of the French utopian socialist Sismondi, who died before Marx began his investigations of political economy, and continuing through the work of Karl Kautsky, one of the chief revisionist theoreticians of the Second International, and many others into contemporary political economy. Although Sweezy makes the argument with some new technical features, the heart of the case was addressed in some pretty sharp commentary by Marx on the point:

"It is sheer tautology to say that crises are caused by the scarcity of effective consumption, or of effective consumers. The capitalist system does not know any other modes of consumption than effective ones . . . That commodities are unsaleable means only that no effective purchasers have been found for them, i.e., consumers . . . But if one were to attempt to give this tautology the semblance of a profounder justification by saying that the working-class receives too small a portion of its own product and the evil would be remedied as soon as it receives a larger share of it and its wages increase in consequence, one could only remark that crises are always prepared by precisely a period in which wages rise generally and the working-class actually gets a larger share of that part of the annual product which is intended for consumption."<sup>45</sup>

Sweezy has an answer to this, being aware of the differences and even total opposition in his two "explanations" of crisis.

"The two types of crises present divergent problems. In the one case [profit squeeze—MFZ] we have to do with movements in the rate of surplus value and the composition of capital, *with the value system remaining intact*; in the other case we have to do with as yet unspecified forces tending to create a general shortage in effective demand for commodities . . ." <sup>46</sup> (emphasis added).

So, again, Sweezy resorts to the claim that in some cases the value system remains "intact," while in other cases value theory is not intact, and so does not bear directly on the problem, and "as yet unspecified forces" must be found to explain the phenomenon in question.

Essentially, Sweezy is arguing here that the mechanism of crisis changes with the development of imperialism. During early capitalism, when Sweezy believes value theory was "intact," crisis resulted from profit-squeeze brought on by rising wages, as analyzed earlier. But now, in the era of monopoly capital, the law of value is no longer "intact," and so another theory, underconsumption, must be brought into play to explain modern crisis, and stagnation. In fact, much of Sweezy's *Theory of Capitalist Development*, and virtually all of *Monopoly Capital*, are devoted to identifying and explaining the "as yet unspecified forces" needed to produce a theory of underconsumption.

Sweezy is correct to say that the theory of underconsumption is not based on Marx's value theory. But still, there is a contradiction between production and consumption in capitalism, there

are times when, in general, commodities cannot be sold at their values, or even be sold at all, times when there is a general glut of commodities for which there is no adequate purchasing power in the market to realize the surplus value contained in the commodities. These times are during crises, and are bound up intimately with the causes of crisis. In short, underconsumptionists are concerned to explain things which actually happen. The problem, as is often the case, is that they cannot go from the perceptual level of a general glut of commodities to the underlying cause and present a rational, scientific explanation, despite the Marxist phraseology often attached to the theory of underconsumption.

### *A Contradiction Rooted in Capitalist Production*

As was seen above, Marx very sharply rejected underconsumption as a cause of crisis. Still, many underconsumptionists try to reconcile the theory with Marx himself by pointing out that Marx said:

“The ultimate reason for all real crises always remains poverty and the restricted consumption of the masses as opposed to the drive of capitalist production to develop the productive forces as though only the absolute consuming power of society constituted their limit.”<sup>47</sup>

This statement Sweezy calls “Marx’s most clear-cut statement in favor of underconsumption theory of crises.”<sup>48</sup>

But Marx is not saying here that the ultimate reason for crises is restricted consumption, as the underconsumptionists believe. Marx is saying that the reason is restricted consumption *as opposed to the drive of capitalist production to develop the productive forces*. The key phrase is “as opposed to.” Crisis contains a contradiction between capitalist production, which tends to expand, and consumption, which tends to be narrow. All that Marx is doing in the above quote is stating *this contradiction*, which is absolutely correct. But he does not say in that quote which aspect of the contradiction is dominant. Just because he puts restricted consumption first in the expression is no reason to conclude its primacy. Marx was extremely clear in many places that in fact it is production that is dominant over consumption. The conditions of production determine overall the conditions of consumption and circulation in general, although Marx always recognized that consumption and circulation have a reciprocal, dialectical relation to production, so that they influence, but do not dominate, it.

In discussing the relation between production and the market, Marx drives home the point that capitalist production is not gear-

ed to demand or the scope of the market, but is geared only to profit. An individual capitalist may try to tailor production to what he perceives as the demand for his product and under monopoly capitalism certain estimates of the whole market are made but overall the anarchy of capitalist production constantly disrupts these calculations and forces production to be carried on in disharmony with the market. Production is for exchange, and only incidentally for use; or, in the contradiction contained in every commodity between exchange value and use value, it is exchange value which is the dominant aspect. Because of this, production expands in disharmony with the market, and the overproduction of capital, in the form of commodities, must result.

“Since the aim of capital is not to minister to certain wants, but to produce profit, and since it accomplishes this purpose by methods which adapt the mass of production to the scale of production, not vice-versa, a rift must continually ensue between the limited dimensions of consumption under capitalism and a production which forever tends to exceed this immanent barrier. Furthermore, capital consists of commodities, and therefore overproduction of capital implies overproduction of commodities.”<sup>49</sup>

Marx is saying here that the mass, or level, of production tends to be pushed to the limit of the possibilities of the scale, or capacity, of production. As capital is accumulated, the scale of production increases, and production itself increases. But this does not go on without limit as a continuous growth. The advances in production run up against a barrier of restricted consumption, a barrier which itself is the result of the conditions of production. The glut of commodities arises from and is the outward sign of the over-production of capital. And,

“Overproduction of capital, not of individual commodities—although overproduction of capital always includes overproduction of commodities—is therefore simply over-accumulation of capital.”<sup>50</sup>

In other words, the glut of commodities is an outward sign of the fact that the accumulation of capital has proceeded to a point where it cannot proceed further because the conditions of profitability are removed. The reasons for the fall in profitability will be gone into again shortly. Here, the point is that crisis results from the overproduction of capital, the overaccumulation of capital. This is a very different thing from underconsumption.

Marx summed up the contradiction between consumption and

production in relation to crisis in this way:

“The contradiction, to put it in a very general way, consists in that the capitalist mode of production involves a tendency towards absolute development of the productive forces, regardless of the value and surplus value it contains, and regardless of the social conditions under which capitalist production takes place . . .”<sup>51</sup>

Although Sweezy holds to the theory of underconsumption, he sometimes talks of crises of overproduction. In his opinion, “Properly understood . . . ‘underconsumption’ and ‘overproduction’ are opposite sides of the same coin.”<sup>52</sup> This is a commonly held view, in which the two theories are made equivalent. Essentially, this view says, “What difference does it make if we speak of too much supply (overproduction) or too little demand (underconsumption)? Both expressions convey the same situation—too many commodities on the market for the available demand.”

The trouble with this formulation is that it treats commodities on the market simply as products, as things, whereas, as Marx points out, overproduction is talking about *capital*, the essence and not the form of the commodities on the market. As soon as the discussion is placed in terms of value and capital, and the theory of crisis proceeds from a materialist exploration of the contradiction in the accumulation of capital, there is no possible reconciliation of the two theories.

Lenin also criticized underconsumption theories of crisis, which Kautsky and others at the time also presented to escape the theory of value with all its revolutionary implications. Lenin said that Marxist crisis theory looks for the cause of crisis “in the condition of production,” in circulation and distribution. Lenin continued:

“The question arises: Does the second theory [the Marxist theory—MFZ] deny the fact of the contradiction between production and consumption? Of course not. It fully recognizes this fact but it gives it its due and subordinate place . . . it teaches that this fact cannot explain the crises which arise through a much more profound and fundamental contradiction inherent in the modern economic system . . .”<sup>53</sup>

Engels summed up the entire point when he indicated that crisis ultimately arises from the contradiction contained in the commodity itself, the contradiction between exchange value and use value, in which exchange value is dominant. As Engels said:

“The value form of products therefore already contains

in embryo the whole capitalist form of production, the antagonism between capitalists and wage-workers, the industrial reserve army and crises.”<sup>54</sup>

#### “Normal Stagnation” Covers “No Crisis” Theory

Even though Sweezy first presented underconsumption as a theory of crisis (business cycles), the main use to which he and others put it is as a theory of stagnation, prolonged inability of capital to accumulate, coupled with high rates of unemployment and much unused industrial capacity.

Here is how Sweezy presents the basis of stagnation:

“Twist and turn as one will, there is no way to avoid the conclusion that monopoly capitalism is a self-contradictory system. It tends to generate ever more surplus, yet it fails to provide the consumption and investment outlets required for the absorption of a rising surplus and hence for the smooth working of the system. Since *surplus which cannot be absorbed will not be produced*, it follows that the *normal* state of the monopoly capitalist economy is stagnation”<sup>55</sup> (first emphasis added).

In other words, because there are too few “outlets,” too small a market, for the products society is capable of producing, production is curtailed, investment is held back, and we see the resultant unemployment and unused capacity continuing for extended periods. In short, the “normal” state of affairs is that production is geared down to the market, the market controls production.

This is precisely the bourgeois theory of production, in which capitalists refer to the market for “signals” emanating from potential buyers, and having determined as well as possible the extent of the market and the nature of the products demanded by the buying public, produce accordingly. Such a theory is presented in every bourgeois economics text.

For Sweezy, the fundamental conflict in capitalism is between production and the market, between producers and consumers, between the capitalists and the people, or between the capitalists and the working class as consumers, not as workers. Because Sweezy raises capitalist circulation above capitalist production, he must ignore the fundamental contradiction of society, between the capitalists and the workers as workers, arising from the exploitative nature of capitalist relations of production.

But suppose we try to express in value terms the problem of inability to sell. As an underconsumptionist using value terms would say: “The surplus value arising in production cannot be realized in circulation, the capitalist cannot therefore realize a profit,

and so crisis follows." Or as Sweezy once put it,

"If the decline in profitability which is immediately responsible for the outbreak of a crisis results from the capitalists' inability to realize the full value of the commodities which they produce, we shall speak of a 'realization crisis.'"<sup>56</sup>

Such a formulation of the problem, which is a common expression of the underconsumptionist theory of crisis, is also incorrect because it locates the origin of crisis in circulation rather than in production. It too says that distribution of income and circulation dominate production, rather than giving these aspects of the economy their "due and subordinate place" to production, as Lenin put it.

It is true that there comes a time, periodically, when on a large scale products cannot be sold and the surplus value in them cannot be realized. But the fact that the surplus value cannot be realized is itself a *consequence* of the falling rate of profit. In particular, it arises from the fact that less variable capital is advanced in relation to the total capital advanced. It is this element of the *production* process which *results in* a distribution of income which ultimately limits the market for the product. Sweezy is wrong to say that Marxist crisis theory "assumes that the crisis is not the result but the cause of a shortage in effective demand." What Marx conclusively demonstrated by following the law of value—that crises result from overproduction of capital not underconsumption of the masses—need not be "assumed." And the "range of possibilities" opened up by dropping this "assumption" are indeed limitless, since there are any number of ways to be wrong, but only one way to get to the heart of the matter. From this example we can get a deeper understanding of why Marx attached such importance to the law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit to understanding political economy.

For Sweezy, the "normal" status of imperialism is stagnation. He even says:

"Left to itself—that is to say, in the absence of counteracting forces which are no part of what may be called the 'elementary logic' of the system—monopoly capitalism would sink deeper and deeper into a bog of chronic depression."<sup>57</sup>

What Sweezy is saying here, in essence, is that there is *always* a crisis except that external forces are able to buoy up an inherently sinking economy—the net effect being that there is *no crisis at all*. Lenin also addressed the stagnation under monopoly capitalism

but once again in a diametrically opposite way from Sweezy. He wrote:

"As we have seen, the deepest economic foundation of imperialism is monopoly. This is capitalist monopoly, i.e., monopoly which has grown out of capitalism and exists in the general environment of capitalism, commodity production and competition, in permanent and insoluble contradiction to this general environment. Nevertheless, like all monopoly, it inevitably engenders a tendency to stagnation and decay. Since monopoly prices are established, even temporarily, the motive cause of technical and, consequently, of all progress, disappears to a certain extent . . . Certainly, monopoly under capitalism can never completely, and for a very long period of time, eliminate competition in the world market (and this, by the way, is one of the reasons why the theory of ultraimperialism is so absurd). Certainly, the possibility of reducing costs of production and increasing profits by introducing technical improvements operates in the direction of change. But the *tendency* to stagnation and decay, which is characteristic of monopoly, continues to operate, and in certain branches of industry, in certain countries, for certain periods of time, it gains the upper hand."<sup>58</sup>

Lenin's point in addressing the question of stagnation is certainly not to imply that the imperialist system somehow just erodes peacefully, gradually and without cataclysmic crisis. In fact, Lenin pointed out that imperialism, subject to the same basic laws as capitalism in its stage of free competition, is subject to expansion as well as crisis, and he warns: "It would be a mistake to believe that this tendency precludes the possibility of the rapid growth of capitalism."<sup>59</sup>

While stagnation is a constant tendency of monopoly capitalism, a new development in contrast to capitalism's stage of "free competition," it is not the overall general feature, nor is the tendency toward stagnation the main reason Lenin correctly refers to imperialism as "moribund capitalism." Monopoly capitalism, he points out, leads to "most comprehensive socialization of production." It is precisely this immense socialization of production that, on the one hand, makes possible a rapid growth of the productive forces and at the same time stand all the more starkly in contradiction to the fact that

"appropriation remains private. The social means of production remain the private property of a few. The general framework of formally recognized free competition remains, but

the yoke of a few monopolists on the rest of the population becomes a hundred times heavier, more burdensome and intolerable."<sup>60</sup>

It is in this sense that Lenin referred to imperialism as "moribund capitalism" whose relations of production hamper and choke the very forces of production it has brought into being and leads necessarily to crises, wars and proletarian revolution.

While this is not the time or place to offer a full exposition of what has been the workings of the U.S. economic system since World War 2, it is important to touch on its main features to shed light on Sweezy's fallacies.

The period from the end of World War 2 through the sixties can certainly not be characterized fundamentally as a protracted period of stagnation. To do so flies in the face of facts. To call that period stagnation counteracted by external forces makes a mockery of the concept of crisis and genuine stagnation and leads to the political conclusion that capitalism does not inevitably lead to tremendous misery and suffering for the great majority and therefore its overthrow must be sought in something other than the contradictions within the system itself—a position Sweezy adopts, as we will see later. The postwar period must be seen as primarily a period of expansion, although not of the vigorous breakneck type that was characteristic of capitalism in its youth which it will never again recover. Because of the destruction and reorganization of capital in World War 2 and the internationally dominant position of the U.S. coming off it, the U.S. imperialists in this period were largely able to counteract a general tendency toward overproduction under imperialism and the falling rate of profit—through export of capital, dictating international monetary policy, extracting superprofits from the Third World, and generally loading their burdens onto others.

But even during this period of relative expansion, the U.S. capitalist economy was subject to periodic crises of overproduction, which both laid the basis for further growth following each of the postwar recessions *and* for the deeper, protracted crisis of today.

Marx describes the process of the resolution of crisis ("its elementary logic," to use Sweezy's words) this way:

"How is this conflict settled and the conditions restored which correspond to the 'sound' operation of capitalist production? The mode of settlement is already indicated in the very emergence of the conflict whose settlement is under discussion. It implies the withdrawal and even the partial destruction of capital . . ."<sup>61</sup>

And Marx continues:

"The ensuing stagnation of production would have prepared—within capitalistic limits—a subsequent expansion of production."<sup>62</sup>

The crisis is resolved through the continuation of the "elementary logic" of capitalism: dialectical logic, where things turn into their opposites, not bourgeois, metaphysical logic where everything has a fixed character and moves in a straight line until it is influenced by external "forces."

Since the crisis arises through the overproduction of capital, it is resolved by the "withdrawal and even partial destruction of capital." This takes many forms, including the writing off of bad debts which cannot be repaid by capitalists to the banks, the closing down of production, which "withdraws" an amount of capital from circulation, the bankruptcy of companies, etc. And one of the ways in which capital is destroyed is in the course of selling commodities at reduced prices, which cannot realize for the capitalist the amount of surplus value contained in them. In this way, capital which has been produced is destroyed in circulation. So we can see that the "realization crisis" is not the cause of crisis, and it is not even simply a result of crisis, it is a result of crisis which helps to secure the conditions of expansion.

### *The Current Downward Spiral*

As was pointed out in the last article, crises are not simple repetitions. Each recovery "pave[s] the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and diminish[es] the means whereby crises are prevented."<sup>63</sup> This means that as capitalism develops, crises tend to become more severe and to last longer, while recoveries come less frequently and tend to be weaker. So it is not surprising to experience long periods of depression, or of stagnation, and in fact the U.S. economy has had a great depression, and is now entering a long period of decline and stagnation. But this is not at all the stagnation which Sweezy and those who think like him have in mind. The current crisis, like all major crises of the imperialist system, is extremely complex, drawing together international as well as domestic developments, political as well as economic affairs. But underlying this crisis in all its complexity is overproduction, where "diminished means" are present to lead to recovery.

But even so, it would still be incorrect to consider the present crisis as "unrelieved, chronic depression." Periods of expansion, such as we have experienced in the past two years, are an inherent

part of the general downward movement, which is why it is correct to characterize the period as the beginning of a "downward spiral" in the economy.

The conditions which enabled the economy to pull out of and mitigate the effects of previous cyclical crises (chief among these being U.S. imperialism's position internationally) have been greatly diminished, leading to the situation of today where even during upturns in the business cycle unemployment remains at very high levels, a large degree of plant capacity remains unutilized, etc. This situation must lead to a qualitative leap in the situation sooner or later—either a massive economic collapse and/or an interimperialist war to redivide the world.

As the crisis unfolds, the fundamental contradiction in capitalist society will stand out ever more starkly. But only with a Marxist understanding of the cause of crisis will it be able to clearly point to capitalist production itself as the source of crisis, and so direct the mass resistance crisis engenders on a genuinely revolutionary course.

As has been shown, advanced capitalism is prone to long periods of economic depression or stagnation because of the accumulated effects of past crises and recoveries which overall through time result in "diminished means" by which any particular crisis can be resolved and conditions of expansion restored. But advanced capitalism is also imperialism, and the features of monopoly capitalism themselves also tend to contribute to stagnation.

Lenin addressed this point, especially in his treatment of parasitism and decay as specific features of imperialism, as in the quote cited earlier. Again, it must be remembered that Lenin is not at all saying that monopoly capitalism is subject to different laws compared with earlier capitalism, as Sweezy believes. Rather, the point is that the same basic laws manifest themselves in a tendency to stagnation in imperialism.

But Sweezy analyzes stagnation outside of the law of value, and so cannot see anything within the workings of the capitalist economy which would relieve stagnation. He puts the point this way:

"If the depressive effects of growing monopoly had operated unchecked, the U.S. economy would have entered a period of stagnation long before the end of the nineteenth century. . . . What, then, are the powerful external stimuli which offset these depressive effects . . . ?"<sup>64</sup>

The most important of these external "forces" have been

technological advances (especially transportation and related industries, like petroleum products), war and population growth.<sup>65</sup> Except for war, which he significantly counts as an event external to the accumulation of capital, the other major stimulants, says Sweezy, cannot be expected to play as significant a role in the future as they have in the past,<sup>66</sup> and the new technology of war has even made it less of a stimulant against stagnation.<sup>67</sup>

According to Sweezy, it was the wearing out of these traditional external stimuli that brought on the extensive and prolonged stagnation of the 1930's. As a *substitute* for these outworn and exhausted stimuli, the government had to step in with massive deficit spending,<sup>68</sup> a step which was later rationalized for the bourgeoisie by the British lord, banker and economist, John M. Keynes. And so, Sweezy exclaims, "the question for monopoly capitalism is not whether to stimulate demand. It must, on pain of death."<sup>69</sup>

Such an approach leads him to a typically incorrect understanding of World War 2.

"Beginning with the period of active preparations for the Second World War and right down to the present, warfare expenditures have clearly been the dominant and, on the whole, *sufficient* counteracting force preventing the world capitalist system from returning to a state of chronic depression . . ."<sup>70</sup> (emphasis added).

Again, we see the substitution of market conditions of demand for an analysis of capital itself. The huge war expenditures have had a significant stimulating effect on demand, and on the economy, but they have not at all been uniformly beneficial for the economy and accumulation. The central point here is that the main effects of WW 2 which laid the basis for continued expansion had to do with the tremendous physical destruction of capital, especially in Europe and Japan, and the reorganization of capital in the United States before and during the war, when thousands of capitals (firms) were liquidated and when the government financed billions of dollars worth of capital construction in defense plants, which were turned over practically for free to private business after the war. This destruction and reorganization of capital (which included many other components than those mentioned above) lay the *basis* for economic expansion, and it was in that fundamental condition that war expenditures and deficit spending could have a stimulating effect.

Still, there is nothing automatic that war sets the basis for



accumulation. In particular, it is essential to *win* the war.\* All the deficit spending and capital reorganization from 1941 to 1945 would not have led to the phenomenal growth of the U.S. economy had the U.S. lost the war. And if war drags on too long, that in itself can be an extremely disruptive thing for the economy, as was the case with U.S. aggression in Viet Nam and Indochina. War is no money making gambol, but instead a desperate gamble with high stakes.

Further, the government expenditures, deficits and general economic expansion of the U.S. economy after WW 2 have over time led to a fundamental shift in the basic condition of the economy, leading to the present crisis, whose underlying cause is still overproduction of capital. In this basic condition, large deficits and massive war expenditures do not have the same stimulative effect. They continue to stimulate, but overall they intensify the crisis.

Nothing can be correctly analyzed outside of time and place, including Keynesian policies of deficit spending. Sweezy the metaphysician sees deficits having a positive effect at one point in time, and then "reasons" that they will have the same effect at all times. But Keynesian policies also contain contradictory aspects, which work themselves out under the general, pervasive influence of the fundamental contradiction of capitalist society, social production and private appropriation.

This fundamental contradiction gives rise to crises of overproduction, and in the context of those developments, deficit spending finds its place. At all times contradictory in its influence on the economy, sometimes the aspect of deficit spending leading to recovery dominates the aspect conditioning crisis, as was the case in the years following WW 2. Sometimes, as now, the aspect intensifying crisis dominates the still-present, but much weaker, influence towards recovery. During the 1930's the Federal government ran very large deficits in relation to the size of the economy, but they were "insufficient" to secure recovery. This was not simply a matter of the magnitudes involved, but fundamentally a question of where the economy was in the process of restoring the conditions "which correspond to the 'sound' operation of capitalist production," as Marx put it.

But Sweezy knows nothing of this. Having looked into

\*The economic growth in Japan and Germany in the years after their defeat in World War 2, in marked contrast to the crises in Germany after World War 1, was due to specific conditions in the imperialist camp headed by the U.S. These imperialists, while politically and economically subordinated to the U.S., nonetheless took part as lesser partners in the rise of the "American Century."

the matter, and having read Lord Keynes, he concludes that

"by instituting and continuing a sufficient rate of state consumption out of newly created purchasing power [i.e., creating money—MFZ], it would seem that the state is in a position to bring the economy to a level of full employment *and hold it there*" (emphasis added).

Therefore,

"the tendency to underconsumption. . . becomes merely a tendency to chronic depression which may be counteracted by a new force, the deliberate action of the state."<sup>71</sup>

#### *Sweezy and the State*

Since the state plays such a central role for Sweezy, he devotes a great deal of attention to it. Aside from working out at some length the impact of government expenditures on the level of economic activity, following pretty much along the lines of Keynesian analysis, Sweezy addresses the state as an institution in capitalist society, noting that the "state is the guarantor of a given set of property relations" and that "the state is an instrument of class domination."<sup>72</sup> This becomes the only basis of his difference with bourgeois analysis. For he actually says:

"Generally speaking their [the bourgeoisie's—MFZ] logical consistency cannot be challenged, either on their own ground or on the basis of Marxian analysis of the reproduction process. The critique of Keynesian theories of liberal capitalist reform starts, therefore, not from their economic logic but rather from their faulty (usually implicit) assumptions about the relationship, or perhaps one should say lack of relationship, between economics and political action. The Keynesians tear the economic system out of its social context."<sup>73</sup>

So much for Marxist political economy.

First Sweezy tells us that the analysis of monopoly capitalist industry is best conducted with bourgeois classical and neo-classical price theory, which is in fact what he uses. Now we learn that the overall economy can be logically and unassailably (unassailable even with Marxism) analyzed with bourgeois Keynesianism, which is in fact what Sweezy uses. Sweezy sometimes uses Marxist terminology, but the plain fact is that Sweezy's economics is bourgeois economics.

And this is perfectly "logical" to Sweezy. He removes

the state from the fundamental contradiction of capitalism and presents it as an external force. For Sweezy, the limit of state intervention is not the contradictions of production but the limited will of the bourgeoisie. He asks the question:

“Why must we assume that unemployment, insecurity, sharper class and international conflicts are in prospect for capitalism? Why not, on the contrary, a ‘managed’ capitalist society, maintaining economic prosperity through government action and perhaps even gradually evolving into a full fledged socialist order?”<sup>74</sup>

To Sweezy, the *only* reason is that the capitalists won't let it happen. They will use their control of the state to guarantee their profits. “We must continue to assume that monopoly capital will, if it has the choice, decide for imperialist expansion as against internal reforms.”<sup>75</sup>

The relation between the state and the economy was dealt with in the last article,<sup>76</sup> and need not be gone into again here. It need only be added here that Sweezy has also turned upside down the connection between imperialist expansion and “reform,” posing them as opposing *choices* of the bourgeoisie. Lenin points out that “imperialist expansion” is a necessity, a law of capitalism in its imperialist stage, and he also stresses that bourgeois reform is closely linked to imperialist superprofits, and that in fact it is the strength of imperialism and the temporary reforms it is capable of granting which provides the material basis for opportunism in the workers movement.<sup>77</sup> This is a materialist and dialectical understanding of the relation between the economy and the state, the base and the superstructure, which eludes Sweezy altogether.

This break between politics and economics shows up also in the treatment of the labor process and accumulation presented by *Monthly Review* and its followers. Sweezy personally has not paid much attention to the problem, but Harry Braverman and many others present the essence of labor-management relations as *political* domination of the working class by the capitalists, rather than the economic exploitation of living labor in the course of production.<sup>78</sup> To them, the most significant aspect of the labor process is its hierarchical nature and division according to task, sex, race, or nationality, deliberately and necessarily fostered by the bourgeoisie to keep labor subordinate to capital, and to divide the working class organizationally and politically.

It is true that working class revolution must aim at smashing the political power of the bourgeoisie, but to them the *ultimate source* of bourgeois power is *political*, whether exercised

within the plant and the production process, or at the level of the government. This ignores the true ultimate power of capital itself, which necessarily and by its nature dominates living labor, continually sucks more surplus value from it, and enslaves the working class by affording no other means by which to survive than to be repeatedly and ever more intensively exploited. As Marx put a related point:

“The capitalist is merely capital personified and functions in the process of production solely as the agent of capital.”<sup>79</sup>

With the power of capital, the capitalist class dominates society and political relations develop which reflect and enforce the fundamental class and property relations already contained in capital. To miss this point necessarily leads the political struggle of the working class in the wrong direction, since the basic laws of capital and commodity production need never be challenged.

## II. Sweezy's Stand and Method

We have already seen many examples of Sweezy's metaphysical method. We have seen how his systematic departure from Marx's value theory leads him to openly bourgeois analysis. Yet Sweezy, and many others who think as he does, continue to present themselves as Marxists, who believe that Marxism maintains a fundamental validity in characterizing capitalist society even in the era of imperialism. A brief look at Sweezy's method of arriving at such contradictory conclusions is in order.

Sweezy divides Marx's value theory into two contradictory aspects, the “qualitative” and the “quantitative” “value problem.” He defines the qualitative value problem to be the “specific, historically conditioned, relation between producers.”<sup>80</sup> The quantitative value problem

“is nothing more nor less than the investigation of the laws which govern the allocation of the labor force to different spheres of production in a society of commodity producers . . . [which he presents as the proper formulation of] . . . discovering the laws which regulate the relative proportions in which commodities exchange for one another.”<sup>81</sup>

In other words, for Sweezy, there are two problems. First is the problem of class relations and the relations of production. This he calls the qualitative value problem. Second, there is the problem of prices and the level of production, the

specific allocation of resources, especially labor, in the economy—in short, the problem of understanding the market appearances. For Sweezy, Marx's value theory successfully addresses both these problems in *the period of early capitalism*. But as has already been seen, Sweezy believes that in the era of monopoly capital, the law of value no longer holds. By this, Sweezy means only the *quantitative* aspect,

“Quantitative value relations are disturbed by monopoly; qualitative value relations are not. In other words, the existence of monopoly does not in itself alter the basic social relations of commodity production.”<sup>82</sup>

For Sweezy, exploitation is a qualitative condition of the working class which has no definable quantitative counterpart in the real world, at least in the era of imperialism. In other words, for Sweezy, the qualitative condition of the working class, i.e., the basic relations of production and their contradiction with the forces of production, becomes a fact *external to his method* of analyzing the quantitative aspects of the material world—prices, crises, etc. It is this metaphysical break between quality and quantity which allows Sweezy to throw out value theory for all *practical* purposes, while continuing to uphold Marxism and the labor theory of value as a metaphor, a general statement about the position of the working class in society, but in no sense as a guide to living reality.

In this regard, Sweezy joins Professor Joan Robinson,<sup>83</sup> an influential progressive British economist and colleague of Keynes, who also has sympathy with Marx and with the working class, but who also can find nothing “useful” about the categories “value” and “surplus value” when it comes to analyzing the real world. Robinson, like Sweezy, and so many others, is a “left-Keynesian” seeking to do good for the workers, although Robinson is more forthright than Sweezy about her break with Marxism.

Behind Sweezy's methodological errors and persistent misreading of Marx is his basic *stand*—the stand of a bourgeois democrat. What else lies behind this observation of Sweezy's, presented in the course of explaining the implications of monopoly pricing and the end of the law of value in its “quantitative” aspect:

“With commodities being priced not according to their costs of production but to yield the maximum possible profit, the principle of *quid pro quo* [exchange of equal values—the operation of bourgeois right—MFZ] turns into the opposite of a promoter of rational economic organization and instead becomes a formula for main-

aining scarcity in the midst of potential plenty.”<sup>84</sup>

Oh, for the days of competitive capitalism, when the law of value really did operate to regulate exchange, when *quid pro quo* ruled society and provided the basis for rational economic organization! It's only the monopolies which have mucked things up and made for irrationality. This is what Sweezy is saying here, although he certainly wouldn't think of himself as a defender of capitalism.

Long ago, Marx addressed Proudhon, and concluded that:

“he does what all good bourgeois do . . . They all want competition without the lethal effects of competition. They all want the impossible, namely, the conditions of bourgeois existence without the necessary consequences of those conditions.”<sup>85</sup>

This observation is equally true of Sweezy.

#### *Left Keynesiansim*

Or consider Sweezy's most recent evaluation of Keynes and Keynesian economic theory, published early this year. It is worth quoting at length.

“[Keynes] tackles what he sees to be the basic faults and diseases of capitalism. In addition to the problems associated with recurrent business cycles, he points to a general failure to provide full employment even in times of prosperity, ‘arbitrary and inequitable distribution of wealth and income,’ wars . . .

“In effect what he saw was a need for the dissolution of finance capital leaving only industrial capital to operate with a minimal profit rate . . . all that would be needed for the smooth functioning of the economy was government control over total investment and profits; individual capitalists could be relied upon to make the decisions about what and how much needs to be produced.

“ . . . He certainly had no illusion that the simple manipulation of taxes, interest rates, and government spending would suffice to achieve and maintain full employment, and at the same time abolish poverty and eradicate the forces that lead to wars and international trade rivalries. *His illusions were of an entirely different kind.* He ignored, and in fact denied, the power exercised by the capitalist class to defend its ownership rights and its freedom to seek ever larger profits . . .

“ . . . [bourgeois economists] ignored not only Keynes'

attempt at a diagnosis of the ills of capitalism, but even his illusions about capitalism reforming itself to compete with socialism. Instead they chose to accept some of Keynes' technical innovations, which were soon integrated into the established orthodox economics—resulting in what has [been] aptly called by Joan Robinson 'bastard Keynesianism.'

"The net result was an updated version of bourgeois economics . . ." <sup>86</sup> (emphasis added).

Here Sweezy is saying that the real Keynes, unlike the "bastard" Keynes constructed by bourgeois theorists, really had a more profound understanding of the problems of capitalism, and proposed to solve them by radical measures to redistribute income and wealth in a more equal fashion, and by measures to do away with the power of finance capital to weigh upon production through its demands for interest payments. Government control of investment and profits, together with the manipulation of taxes and government expenditures, could in fact secure and maintain full employment, without disturbing the right of the individual capitalist to make basic decisions about production and to earn a low rate of profit.

The problem was not in the full-blown version of Keynesian economics, according to Sweezy. We have already seen above that he finds it logically consistent and unassailable, even with Marxist analysis. Keynes' real illusion was in not understanding the political power of the bourgeoisie, a point we have analyzed already. But that's not all. That power, applied through the medium of bourgeois economists, was able to bastardize Keynes, distort his theory, pick and choose the parts convenient for the bourgeoisie, so that the *net result* of Keynes' work is another version of bourgeois theory. But what of the *gross contents*, before the bourgeoisie so powerfully "netted out" the good parts? Wasn't that also bourgeois theory? Yet Sweezy hankers after it as though it represented a genuine and significant break with capitalism, in which full employment and an equal distribution of income and wealth would carry the day, without denying the ability of the individual capitalist to operate and make decisions. Isn't this exactly another example of "wanting the conditions of bourgeois existence without the necessary consequences of those conditions"?

Sweezy's orientation and method are understandable, considering the tremendous and pervasive influence of bourgeois thinking in capitalist society. In particular this is a problem for people, like Sweezy, who have formal training in bourgeois economics. And Sweezy's analysis bears many similarities to those of the man Sweezy studied under at Harvard in the 1930s, Joseph Schumpeter. Schumpeter, one of the great modern bourgeois economists, also

had much respect for Marx, especially as a social historian, but he also rejected Marxist economics in favor of a theory which based economic growth and business cycles mainly on the ebb and flow of technical advances determined externally to the accumulation process itself. Sweezy's own conception of "external stimuli" counteracting stagnation comes directly from Schumpeter.

Sweezy's attraction to Marx, conditioned by the basic stand and method he brought with him, led him to rely heavily on certain "interpreters" of Marx, notably Hilferding and Bukharin. Although, for a time, Bukharin made contributions to the progress of the Russian revolution, Lenin criticized his theoretical work many times, pointing out its metaphysical nature. At one point Lenin said:

"It is very doubtful whether his [Bukharin's—MFZ] theoretical views can be classed as fully Marxist, for there is something scholastic in him (he has never studied, and, I think, never fully understood dialectics)." <sup>87</sup>

It is not easy to overcome the influence of the bourgeoisie in addressing political economy and Marxism, just as in all aspects of revolutionary activity. What is necessary is a conscious comparison and contrast between Marxist and bourgeois categories and methods of analysis, and a deliberate rejection and criticism of bourgeois approaches. Fundamentally, this involves starting from the revolutionary essence of Marxist science, and proceeding from there.

An example of Sweezy's failure to do just this is his seemingly inoffensive change in the definition of the organic composition of capital. For Sweezy, it becomes convenient to define it as " $c/(c+v)$ ," <sup>88</sup> the ratio of constant to total capital, instead of " $c/v$ " as Marx did. Yet this change guts the essence of the concept, which reflects the relation between dead and living labor to Marx, but only a convenient mathematical formulation to Sweezy. This revision of Marx forgets that

"Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production." <sup>89</sup>

But Sweezy downplays the social relations of production, which for him are irrelevant to the concrete analysis of actual society. He is, just as Marx characterized Proudhon,

"from head to foot the philosopher and economist of the petty bourgeoisie. In an advanced society the petty bourgeois is necessarily from his very position a socialist on the one side and an economist on the other; that is to

say, he is dazed by the magnificence of the big bourgeoisie and has sympathy for the sufferings of the people. He is at once both bourgeois and a man of the people . . . A petty bourgeois of this type glorifies *contradiction* because contradiction is the basis of his existence. He is himself nothing but social contradiction in action. He must justify in theory what he is in practice . . .”<sup>90</sup>

### III. Sweezy's Political Conclusions

Let us briefly conclude by seeing where Sweezy's stand, method and analysis of political economy lead him in evaluating the political prospects for revolution. Sweezy is forever stuck on the surface of things without an understanding of the underlying laws which govern social development, so he was particularly susceptible for sinking into obvious bourgeois fantasies in the mid-1960s, when the economy was booming. He wrote then that

“The answer of traditional Marxian orthodoxy—that the industrial proletariat must eventually rise in revolution against its capitalist oppressors—no longer carries conviction. Industrial workers are a diminishing minority of the American working class, and their organized cores in the basic industries have to a large extent been integrated into the system as consumers and ideologically conditioned members of the society. They are not, as the industrial workers were in Marx's day, the system's special victims . . .”<sup>91</sup>

Sweezy here propagates all the essential bourgeois myths about the working class: it's a diminishing minority, it's been bought off, workers are “consumers” and thoroughly indoctrinated, especially the better organized workers. There's nothing “special” about their status in society. They're just plain folks, or in the language of the new left and the anti-communist “socialist” movement, the working class is simply another part of “the people.”

It is certainly true that the workers in the U.S., especially unionized workers, have made a significant improvement in their standard of living, especially in the years following World War 2. Bourgeois influence is very strong among American workers, and the fruits of U.S. imperialism have provided the basis for creating a significant labor aristocracy in the United States.<sup>92</sup> But for all but a small minority these must be temporary phenomena, the result of the temporary hegemony of U.S. imperialism. But Sweezy, still stuck on the surface dealing only with the forms of activity, looks at the bourgeoisification of the U.S. working class in the 1960s and again discards Marxism, which for him “no longer car-

ries conviction.” He goes on to make up new laws of revolution, discussed below, just at the time when U.S. imperialism was taking a major turn down, just at the time when the working class was again beginning to be driven into motion in a big way.

In Sweezy's view there are “special victims” of imperialism. The peoples of the Third World, suffering under the economic, political and military subjugation of U.S. imperialism are special victims. And, in the United States, the special victims are

“the unemployed and unemployable, the migrant farm workers, the inhabitants of the big city ghettos, the school dropouts, the aged subsisting on meager pensions—in a word, the outsiders, those who because of their limited command over purchasing power are unable to avail themselves of the gratifications, such as they are, of consumption”<sup>93</sup> (emphasis added).

Again, the metaphysical mind at work. The “outsiders,” they are the problem for capitalism. And people are “in” or “out” on the basis of their ability to consume, not on the basis of their relation to production.

But Sweezy points out that these outsiders are too diffuse, too poorly organized, too subject to the bribe of temporary reform to constitute a real base for change. And so we reach the astounding conclusion that

“if we confine attention to the inner dynamics of advanced monopoly capitalism, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the prospect of effective revolutionary action to overthrow the system is slim . . .”

But the problems will persist and grow worse, so

“the logical outcome would be the spread of increasingly severe psychic disorders leading to the impairment of and eventual breakdown of the system's ability to function even on its own terms.”<sup>94</sup>

So, we are all rats in a maze that has no solution, no exit. And as any rat runner knows, this can only lead in the end to the rats going batso, falling on their backs and flailing their legs in the air, refusing all sustenance until they die. A fitting conclusion to the nightmare of the petty bourgeoisie, but hardly the truth of the matter.

It is an end too horrible for Sweezy to let stand. Help must arise from somewhere. The Third World revolution to the rescue.

"The highest form of resistance is revolutionary war aimed at withdrawal from the world capitalist system and the initiation of social and economic reconstruction on a socialist basis."<sup>95</sup>

And how will all this end for us? In "the world revolution."

"As the world revolution spreads and as socialist countries show by their example that it is possible to use man's mastery over the forces of nature to build a rational society satisfying the human needs of human beings, more and more Americans are bound to *question* the necessity of what they now take for granted. And once that happens on a mass scale, the *most powerful* supports of the present irrational system will crumble and the problem of creating anew will impose itself as a sheer necessity"<sup>96</sup> (emphasis added).

All that is necessary is to *question*, certainly on a mass scale, and the beast will go down, deprived of the fundamental ideological and political glue which is the "most powerful" force in society. Stark idealism. And again metaphysics, the resort to external factors as the lever of change.

And what kind of revolution is this world revolution of which we are some day to be a part? It is a revolution of "the people," in which the working class has no special stake or role. It is a *democratic* revolution, a bourgeois revolution, not a proletarian revolution. Seeing no need to pay attention to the role of the working class, and being unable to penetrate surface forms to go to the essence of society, Sweezy can continue to think that Cuba is a socialist country, while the essence of modern Soviet society can completely elude him. Not being able to penetrate to the essence of a society, its mode of production and in particular the relations of production which overall characterize it, Sweezy can only look at these "revolutionary" societies, especially Cuba and the USSR, and be confused. They do not appear to be like capitalist countries, the USA in particular. Yet they do not match up with Sweezy's ideal of what a socialist society should be. And so he has to conclude that they are neither fish nor fowl, but a new social formation which is not capitalist, but not socialist quite either.<sup>97</sup>

Sweezy's "world revolution" will not be very quickly to the rescue, unfortunately.

"[It] will not happen in five years or ten, perhaps not in the present century: few great historical dramas run their course in so short a time . . .

"In the meantime, what we in the United States need is historical perspective, courage to face the facts, and faith in mankind and its future. Having these, we can recognize our *moral obligation* to devote ourselves to fighting against an evil and destructive system which maims, oppresses, and dishonors those who live under it, and which threatens devastation and death to millions of others around the globe"<sup>98</sup> (emphasis added).

While we are waiting for the world revolution to make the masses "question" the system, those of us in the know already can recognize our moral obligation to do something to fight against the evils of the system. We have in Sweezy one trademark of the petty bourgeoisie after the next.

Lenin's remarks on utopian socialism apply to Sweezy's political economy:

"[It] could not explain the essence of wage slaves under capitalism, nor discover the laws of the latter's development, nor point to the *social force* which is capable of becoming the creator of a new society"<sup>99</sup> (emphasis in original).

But recent events have caught Sweezy short. The economic crisis and the rising workers movement, spontaneous and increasingly conscious, if still at the beginning stages of development in this period, have forced themselves onto the attention of every "left" analyst. And so Sweezy has observed that "the working class in this richest country in the world is quite literally facing a struggle for survival."<sup>100</sup> At the same time that the Party of the working class was being formed, Sweezy wrote of the "radicals and revolutionaries":

"It would be foolish to imagine that they are in a position to give leadership and guidance to the coming struggles. If they are to earn the right to lead, they first must show that they understand both what is happening and the implications of what is happening. If and when they have achieved this understanding, they can begin to play a crucially important though initially modest role in the working class movement: that of interpreter and teacher . . . And above all they can hold high the banner of revolutionary socialism."<sup>101</sup>

But, as Marx pointed out, "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."<sup>102</sup> And that revolutionary change can only come about by

taking every abuse and instance of misery thrown up by the capitalist system and showing that it is capitalist productive relations themselves which are at the root. On that basis it is possible to interpret and to teach in the course of struggle against these abuses and misery, and to aim the struggles of the masses squarely against the bourgeoisie and the whole imperialist system. That is the only real meaning of holding high the banner of revolutionary socialism.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Paul M. Sweezy, Theory of Capitalist Development (TCD), 1942; Monthly Review Press, 1968.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, Monopoly Capital (MC), Monthly Review Press, 1966.

<sup>3</sup>MFZ, "Reformist and Revolutionary Views of Capitalist Crisis," The Communist, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1977.

<sup>4</sup>V. I. Lenin, Imperialism—The Highest Stage of Capitalism, FLP edition, Peking.

<sup>5</sup>MC, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Lenin, Imperialism, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>8</sup>MC, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>10</sup>Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, International Publishers, p. 72.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>12</sup>MC, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>TCD, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup>Lenin, Imperialism, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup>MC, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 115-116.

<sup>17</sup>Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, Progress Publishers, pp. 131-132.

<sup>18</sup>Marx, Grundrisse, Pelican Edition, p. 414.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>20</sup>Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, p. 814.

<sup>21</sup>Stalin, Foundations of Leninism, FLP, Peking, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup>MC, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 71-72.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>26</sup>Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, p. 216. For further discussion of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, see Capital, Vol. 3, Chapters 13-15, and MFZ, op. cit., pp. 67-72.

<sup>27</sup>Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, p. 214.

<sup>28</sup>TCD, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup>For a fuller treatment of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and crisis theory, see the material cited in note 29 above, and the references contained in them.

<sup>30</sup>Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, Chapter 25, and Vol. 3, Chapters 15 and 13.

<sup>31</sup>TCD, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>34</sup>Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, Chapter 25.

<sup>35</sup>Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, p. 247.

<sup>36</sup>TCD, p. 148.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>39</sup>MFZ, op. cit. See also Ray Boddy and James Crotty, "Class Conflict, Keynesian Policies, and the Business Cycle," Monthly Review, Vol. 26, No. 5, October 1974.

<sup>40</sup>TCD, p. 106.

<sup>41</sup>Engels, "Supplement to Capital, Vol. 3," in Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, p. 889.

<sup>42</sup>TCD, p. 154.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>45</sup>Marx, Capital, Vol. 2, pp. 410-411.

<sup>46</sup>TCD, p. 146.

47 Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, International, p. 484.

48 TCD, p. 177.

49 Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, p. 258.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 251.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

52 TCD, p. 183.

53 Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 195 (Russian Edition); quoted in Political Economy, Banner Press, Chicago, 1976, p. 363.

54 Engels, Anti-Duhring, FLP, Peking, 1976, pp. 403-404. For more on this see Owen Natha, "Commodities, Capitalism, Class Divisions—and Their Abolition with the Achievement of Communism" The Communist, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1976

55 MC, p. 108.

56 TCD, p. 156.

57 MC, p. 108.

58 Lenin, Imperialism, p. 110.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

61 Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, p. 253.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 255.

63 Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto, FLP, Peking, 38.

64 MC, p. 219.

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*, Chapter 8, "On the History of Monopoly Capitalism."

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Ibid.*

69 MC, p. 111.

70 Paul Sweezy, "Modern Capitalism," Monthly Review, Vol. 23, No. 2, June 1971, p. 6.

71 TCD, p. 230.

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 242 and 243.

73 *Ibid.*, pp. 348-349.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 350.

76 MFZ, op. cit., pp. 59-63.

77 Lenin, Imperialism.

78 See, for example, Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital, Monthly Review Press, 1976.

79 Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, p. 819.

80 TCD, p. 25.

81 *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

83 Joan Robinson, Essays in Marxian Economics.

84 MC, p. 337.

85 Marx, Poverty of Philosophy, p. 164.

86 Sweezy, "Keynesianism: Illusions and Delusions," Monthly Review, Vol. 28, No. 11, April 1977, pp. 5-7.

87 Quoted in J. Stalin, "The Right Deviation in the CPSU(B)," Collected Works, Vol. 12, p. 73.

88 TCD, p. 66.

89 Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, p. 95.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

91 MC, p. 363.

92 See The Communist, Vol. 1, No. 1, "Preliminary Remarks on Bourgeois Democracy and the U.S. Working Class" for a fuller treatment of this subject.

93 MC., pp. 363-364.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 364.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 365.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 367. See also TCD, pp. 352-363.

97 See How Capitalism Has Been Restored in the Soviet Union and What This Means for the World Struggle, first published by the Revolutionary Union and adopted by the Revolutionary Communist Party, October 1975; and Cuba: The Evaporation of a Myth, RCP Publications, 1976.



98 MC, p. 367.

99 Lenin, "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism."

100 Sweezy, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 26, No. 11, April 1975, p. 12.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

102 Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, Thesis No. 11.

# Marxism, Nationalism and The Task of Party Building

## History and Lessons of the National Liaison Committee

**D. B.**

*The following article was written by a former leader of the Black Workers Congress (BWC) and the Revolutionary Workers Congress (RWC), the most significant of the organizations that survived a series of splits within the BWC, and the only one of the offshoots of the BWC to make any real attempt to actually apply Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought to concrete struggle and on this basis to link up with and help build the mass movement. In recent months, summing up the lessons, both positive and negative, of their past experience and reaching agreement with the line of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), many members of the RWC have, in accordance with the Constitution of the RCP, joined its ranks. (In the course of this the RWC itself dissolved.) The author was a member of the National Liaison Committee, whose history is summarized below—Ed.*

### INTRODUCTION

The degeneration and disintegration in late 1973 and after of the Black Workers Congress and another organization with which it was closely allied, the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (PRRWO) was the result of a retreat by these organizations away from Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought and into nationalism and other forms of bourgeois ideology which were closely linked to this nationalist outlook—though all of this was put forth in the guise of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought. This turn toward opportunism resulted in a split between the BWC and the PRRWO on the one hand and the Revolutionary Union (RU) on the other, and caused the breakup of the National Liaison Committee (NLC) which had been built by these three organizations and served for over a year in 1972-73 as a vehicle for building toward the single Party of the U.S. working class and carrying out joint mass work with that goal in mind (for a time, another organization involved in the NLC was I Wor Kuen,

about which more shortly).

Over the past several years a good deal has been said and written about the National Liaison Committee, most of it inaccurate gossip and subjective summation by people and groups who were not involved in it and/or whose ideological and political line prevents them from making a scientific analysis. For this reason, and most of all because the real history of the NLC and the line struggles which led to its breakup hold valuable lessons for the revolutionary movement today, it is important to sum up the actual development of the Liaison Committee and the forces and struggles within it.

### BACKGROUND OF NLC

In the summer of 1972, a major advance was made by Marxist-Leninist forces in the U.S., particularly towards the creation of a multinational revolutionary communist Party. This was represented by the formation of the National Liaison Committee, marked by the coming together of the Black Workers Congress, organized in 1970, the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, originally (1969-72) the Young Lords Party (YLP), and the Revolutionary Union, formed in 1968.

The BWC and PRRWO had their roots in the left wing or radical elements of the struggle of the oppressed nationalities. The makeup of these organizations was primarily students, revolutionary intellectuals and youth turned political activists. There were some workers, including from basic industry, particularly in the case of the BWC which had developed in part out of the thrust of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, a Detroit-centered organization which had built political organization among Black workers in the late '60s.

The League was particularly noted for its development of the Revolutionary Union Movements—the most noted of these groups being Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). The League greatly influenced and inspired the radical wing of the Black liberation movement and the entire revolutionary movement in those years, particularly in the wake of the degeneration of the Black Panther Party. For a time the League had a direct organizational relationship with the BWC until 1972, when a split occurred between the two groups.

To a large degree the BWC was composed of former “movement activists” from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), revolutionary intellectuals from the League, students who were turning towards Marxism-Leninism, and a smaller number of workers out of the Black workers caucus movement of the late '60s. Among the principal strengths of the early BWC—and this was perhaps even more the case for the YLP-PRRWO—

were these attempts to link up with the actual mass struggle of the people.

However, particularly in the early years of BWC (and the same is true of PRRWO) there was a tendency to downplay or deny altogether the revolutionary role and potential of white workers and to hold that Black people and “third world people” in the U.S. could make revolution in this country, in alliance with other liberation movements around the world but without the rest of the working class—or at least without white workers as a group. This was characteristic of the movement of the oppressed nationalities and the revolutionary movement generally in those times which BWC and PRRWO shared to a large extent.

The BWC in particular tried to unite with and develop the growing Black workers struggle—attempting to organize “RUM”-type (Revolutionary Union Movement) organizations from Los Angeles to New York, from Birmingham to Buffalo, from Detroit to New Orleans. BWC also played an active role in prison struggles through the Harriet Tubman prison movement which it led.

At the time of the Attica uprising in 1971 the BWC in coordination with the Harriet Tubman prison movement held significant mass demonstrations rallying masses in the Black communities in support of the prisoners' demands.

In Detroit the BWC linked the Attica struggle with the stop and kill policy of the police under the name of STRESS, and organized a demonstration of 10,000 Black people in that city. In Buffalo it organized the largest demonstration in the history of the Black community there, bringing out over 4000 Black people. It built struggle against the war in Vietnam, and organized a Black Workers Freedom Convention which was attended by nearly 500 Black and other “third world” workers.

PRRWO was composed of students, a very large number of unemployed youth and a small number of workers. PRRWO had evolved out of the YLP; a major influence in the development of the YLP was the Black Panther Party—hence YLP's early heavy emphasis on the “lumpenproletariat as the vanguard.”

### ROOTS IN MASS MOVEMENTS

YLP-PRRWO had strong ties, even significant influence, among the Puerto Rican masses, especially in New York City, based on its leadership in the mass struggle. In the early years of YLP, even with its “lumpen vanguard” line, it had organized the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement, an organization of health workers which developed out of the struggle against proposed layoffs and cutbacks in services in the city hospitals of New York. Later they led the takeover of a large church in Spanish Harlem, turning it into a center where masses in the community received

necessities and education in the basically revolutionary principles of the YLP. Hundreds of people were mobilized in this struggle.

The Lords set up health and breakfast programs in the church. They led numerous struggles against police brutality, bad housing and welfare, and played an important role in raising the issue of independence for Puerto Rico.

The RU was a multinational organization, and had been so almost from the start. It was true that, when the RU was first formed in the San Francisco Bay Area, it was composed almost entirely of white youth of student origin, most of whom had been active in building support for the struggle of the oppressed nationalities, the antiwar movement, the student movement, community organizing or all of these. A small number of veteran communists who had left the CPUSA after its revisionist betrayal played an important role in the RU's formation. It was also true that the birth of the RU occurred primarily as a result of the struggles of the oppressed nationalities in this country.

The RU began directing its main activity to the working class and its members began rooting themselves in industrial work—an orientation and line that was greatly strengthened by an ideological struggle in the RU in late 1970-early 1971 against infantile adventurism and terrorism.

As the RU's work developed it made ties with a number of white and oppressed nationalities workers who, as they became revolutionary oriented, joined the ranks of the RU.

The RU had significant influence on the antiwar movement and the youth and student movement generally, helping to develop it in a more consistently anti-imperialist direction. The RU did much to spread Marxism-Leninism among revolutionary-minded people, making many contributions in this regard through developing political line and carrying on ideological struggle over important questions facing the movement—the working class as the leading and decisive class in making revolution in U.S. society, the united front strategy, the correct line on the Black national question, the women question, the nature of the Soviet Union and others.

From its beginning the RU carried on hard-hitting polemics against erroneous trends in the movement, playing a big part in exposing many incorrect lines which still had popular currency and summing up scientifically a number of opportunist lines that were hated, but not deeply understood by many people. It took on anarchism and revisionism as well as Trotskyism and upheld and explained Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought and its basic application to the U.S. in opposition to these bourgeois lines within the movement.

In particular the RU struck hammer blows at the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), especially as the struggle against its line was

coming to a head within Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1969. At that time PLP claimed to uphold Mao Tsetung and China but actually promoted Trotskyism—denouncing the Vietnamese people for not fighting immediately for socialism; attacking the Black liberation struggle in the U.S. because it was nationalist not socialist and, PLP claimed, “all nationalism is reactionary”; denouncing the student movement as useless since it did not make its main focus linking up with workers in economic struggles, etc. The RU showed how PL's line was in fact a perversion of and objectively an attack on Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought. This inspired many revolutionaries among the youth and students in particular to take up Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought and provided a revolutionary alternative not only to PLP's Trotskyism but also to the two main tendencies within the student movement opposed to PLP at that time—the adventurism of the Weathermen and the even less justifiable stereotyped, stagnant and reformist “Marxism” and petty promoterism of forces clustered around Mike Klonsky (now head of the Communist Party—Marxist-Leninist).

The RU upheld the Black Panther Party (BPP) when it was a leading revolutionary force, building support and defense for it, especially with the growing violent attacks by the state on the Panthers. At the same time, while not engaging in open polemics against the BPP or incorrect aspects of its line, the RU carried on principled ideological struggle with the Panthers and popularized the understanding that the working class and working class ideology are the leading force in the revolutionary movement.

The RU not only carried on ideological struggle about the revolutionary role of the working class but initiated communist work in the working class itself, linking up with strikes and spreading revolutionary ideas in connection with workers struggles. All this had a big impact on the revolutionary movement and represented an important step in merging communism with the workers movement.

For a time I Wor Kuen (IWK), an Asian organization, was a part of the NLC—until it discovered it could no longer dodge ideological struggle and the carrying out of common work particularly among the industrial proletariat. IWK then fled like a vampire from a cross.

IWK's development was quite the opposite of BWC, PRRWO and RU. It suffices to say IWK did not develop out of any particular mass struggle nor did it play any real role in linking up with mass struggle. Where it did join it more often than not played a backward role. IWK used as its principal cover—or more to the point, its capital—the fact that they were members of oppressed nationalities, and when it became fashionable to call themselves Marxist-Leninist they did so, only, however, to oppose Marxism-

common work—but the life of the NLC was also characterized by sharp but mainly productive ideological struggle as well as common study. The early meetings of the NLC focused particularly on deepening and further clarifying the understanding of the need for a multinational communist Party. Today this struggle might seem superficial to some, but it must be kept in mind that both the BWC and PRRWO had only recently broken with the line of a party for each nationality and began to grasp there was a single working class in the U.S. (IWK in essence remained wedded to these earlier positions even while stating formal agreement. This line manifested itself particularly in IWK's reluctance to do work among workers, especially the industrial proletariat, and their constant retreat to work exclusively in Chinatown—and not much of that, to be frank.)

Further, at the time of the YLP-PRRWO Congress there had also been struggle around the role of multinational organization in the pre-Party period. Some members of PRRWO argued for the need for an all white communist organization among white people.

The struggle over this question was closely linked with discussion and debate over the relationship between the national and class struggles and over what were the necessary steps towards a new Party. The RU put forward that the key to creating such a united general staff was active participation in the class struggle and the carrying out of theoretical work and ideological struggle in that context.

This discussion on the Party itself was followed by a period in which the question of line for work in the workers movement was the focus of discussion. This had two aspects: struggle against the IWK line which amounted to opposing the concentration of work in the working class—and actually opposed the line that the working class is the main and leading force in socialist revolution; and the achievement of greater clarity and unity on the part of the other groups around the need to build workers organizations intermediate between the Party and the trade unions, to rely on the rank and file not trade union leaders but not to abandon the unions to these hacks or promote dual-unionism, ripping the advanced away from the rest of the class, etc.

Towards the middle of the period of the NLC's existence the Black national question was taken up as a major issue of discussion. This discussion occupied a center spot for several meetings, with PRRWO, then BWC reaching unity around the basic position put forward by the RU. Once this struggle began—and it was clear that the RU, PRRWO and BWC were moving toward unity, IWK split.

This was followed by a discussion on the initial Party-building proposal (more on this later). An enlarged meeting discussion of

the full proposal was then held, which was in fact the last meeting of the NLC.

### GUARDIAN FORUMS

But ideological struggle was not simply limited to the confines of the NLC. It was conducted throughout what was then the new communist movement. The forums sponsored by the *Guardian* newspaper in 1973 were a case in point.

These forums covered major questions, from Party building to the national question. While the *Guardian* had its intention of using these forums to set itself up as the rallying center of the new communist movement, overall these forums were positive. They focused the attention of many revolutionary-minded people on Marxism-Leninism and how to apply it to some of the burning questions facing the revolutionary movement, and through the role of the RU, BWC and PRRWO a basically correct line was put forward and popularized through these forums in opposition to various opportunist lines.

This, too, was just one example of the fact that the purpose served by the unity of these three organizations was not, as some had slandered, to secretly go off and form the Party, but rather to take concrete steps toward building it through common work and ideological struggle and to be in a stronger position to unite all who could be united around a correct line to form the Party when more of a basis had been laid to take that step.

The three organizations joined in the NLC because they shared basic unity around some major questions—as opposed, for example, to the opportunist lines represented by the October League (OL) and the Communist League (CL). Part of their contribution to laying the basis for the Party was to be to build this unity from a lower to a higher level within the NLC. This was a serious approach to political line and unity, as opposed to trying to opportunistically use the level of unity achieved as a kind of capital, by advertising it publicly. The point was not to proclaim “here's the center of the movement, here's the core of the Party” but to actually build political unity through work and struggle.

This approach was again clearly evidenced later by the RU Party proposal, which—taking into account both the unity and differences among the three groups—put forward that the development of things had reached the point where the leap to the Party was required and that differences could only be resolved in the context of moving toward the Party. The proposal called exactly for these three organizations to go out broadly to involve many others in the actual struggle over the Programme for the Party and to unite all who could be united in this process. (More on the RU's Party proposal later.)

Beyond these *Guardian* forums there was particularly sharp struggle throughout this period against the right opportunist lines of the October League and the *Guardian* on the one hand and the dogmatism of groups like the Communist League on the other.

It should also be stated frankly that throughout the existence of the NLC there were certain tendencies by PRRWO towards dogmatism and sectarianism and in the case of BWC a certain tendency during a large portion of the life of the NLC toward reluctance to involve themselves in mass struggle, following a July '72 organizational conference of the BWC, which planned a three month program of cadre training and clarifying the political line of the BWC as virtually the sole task. This was followed by a series of internal struggles in the BWC, and very little real mass work was done.

### ATTITUDE TOWARD PARTY BUILDING

A major aspect of the NLC right from its inception was Party building. The NLC came into existence based on the recognition that the formation of the NLC was a step towards bringing the Party into being. It was also understood by all organizations in the NLC that the next big step which the NLC would play a role in facilitating was the formation of the Party itself. The NLC was seen as the cornerstone of the new Party. This was roughly summed up in what became the unofficial slogan of the NLC: "the subordination of each organization in the Liaison Committee to what was coming into being" (the multinational communist Party).

While there was the tendency to downplay the importance of building toward the Party, the truth is quite contrary to the dogmatist invention that the RU in particular and the NLC in general placed Party building on the back burner until one day the RU decided to get the jump on the opportunists and issued a Party building proposal.

The real story and real line differences with the dogmatists, however, are quite another matter. These dogmatists argued that Party building is always the central task when you don't have a Party, and therefore the principal task must be given to the study of theory and to ideological struggle within the communist movement against opportunism and for a correct line. The RU, since its formation and later in the NLC, stressed the importance of forming the Party as soon as possible. It did not, however, take the position that Party building was the central task for the entire period until the Party was formed. Such a position reduces the question to meaningless generality and phrase-mongering; it avoids the concrete conditions and the necessary steps which had to be taken to lay the basis for the Party.

During the period prior to the formation of the RCP, the period Marxist-Leninists were faced with was characterized by the fact that on the one hand there existed no vanguard Party, but on the other hand there were tremendous mass movements involving large numbers of people, from various classes, strata and groups. It was these struggles that brought forward many forces who, inspired especially by the Cultural Revolution in China, took up the study of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought. The question posed by these developments was how to bring into being a real vanguard, able to act as a single staff.

The correct road was to begin the process of linking of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought with the mass movement, and in particular to begin the process of merging communism with the practical struggles of the working class. In this way the RU was able to deepen its theoretical understanding, to conduct ideological struggle within the context of carrying out practical work as the main task. To the dogmatists a correct line is simply the working out of an idea in one's head; they are blind to the basic principle that the correct line must be developed on the basis of and returned to practice—yes, theory must be developed to guide and must be tested in the "funky mass movement" (as leaders of the BWC who later completely degenerated into dogmatism would refer to the mass struggle).

As it was stated in the *Communist*, Volume 1, No. 2, in the article "WVO: Undaunted Dogma from Puffed-Up Charlatans," "Studying theory and carrying out ideological struggle, though very important, was not then the key link to resolving these questions—applying Marxism-Leninism to the actual struggles and summing this up was the key link" (p. 78).

The attitude of the NLC towards the question of Party building was summed up perhaps in the most straightforward and frank way by the RU representative at the YLP-PRRWO Congress shortly before the formation of the NLC: "Ideological struggle to resolve differences between these various groups is extremely important; but in order for this to be meaningful, it must go on in the context of actual struggle around common areas of work . . ."

### NLC—A SIGNIFICANT BREAK WITH NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

As stated earlier, the NLC was indeed a big step forward; it represented a significant break, at least to a large degree, with some of the major ideological and political weaknesses of the movement of the late '60s and early '70s, which were rooted in the nationalism and the tailing after the bourgeois nationalism of the oppressed nationalities, and which held sway among a significant section of the new communist forces. These lines took many

forms in the developing communist movement, such as each nationality working for revolution exclusively from its own "national tent" and exclusively among its own "national sector" of the proletariat.

Perhaps this is brought out most sharply in the early practice of the BWC (1970-72) which refused as a matter of principle to even give leaflets, or sell its paper to white workers at the plant gates. Black or "third world" workers as the vanguard, the denial of the revolutionary potential of white workers, the idea of forming separate communist parties for each nationality, of working separately (perhaps in alliance on programs, tactics and joint struggles)—such was the baggage that, in sometimes "updated form," was carried over from the movement of the '60s.

But right from the start the NLC reflected the ideological and political growth of the new communist movement—or at least of a very important section of it. This was reflected most clearly by the BWC representative at the YLP-PRRWO Congress: "Our organization has come to realize that the fundamental problem inside the U.S. is between capital and labor and that the solution to this problem is proletarian revolution. We recognize that the working class in this country is multinational and that to accomplish the task of proletarian revolution requires a proletarian party that represents and leads the whole class." This was in 1972.

To bring out more vividly how this position represented significant forward motion, a good example in contrast is the line put forward by the League in 1970 and later taken as part of the guiding line of BWC and many others throughout the developing revolutionary and communist movement up to that time. In an interview in the *Leviathan*, Volume 2, June 1970, a representative of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers stated boldly: "Whites in America don't act like workers. They don't act like a proletariat. They act like racists. And that is why I think that blacks have to continue to have black organization independent of whites. In terms of the future it depends on whether or not whites can make the transition of giving up, you know, the privileges that they have." This political conclusion was reflected in the early platform of the BWC: "... we hold firm to the position that the working class of blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Asians, and other Third World people are the vanguard force in the United States . . ." (from the "Constitution for the Black Workers Congress," 1971, p. 1).

The critical point here is not merely to recount what group held what line back when. While this is important, the central point is that the line of "Bundism," of adapting socialism to nationalism, ran throughout the history of the revolutionary movement in the U.S. in the '60s and early '70s and the development of what was then the new communist movement (and it is alive

and well in many so-called communist organizations or "parties" today).

One of the earlier forms this line took was that Black people and other oppressed nationalities in the U.S. (perhaps in alliance with the peoples of the Third World) could and would make revolution alone in this country, or with a small number of white supporters mainly from the petty bourgeoisie. The situation of the oppressed nationalities in the U.S. was seen as being essentially the same as the peoples of the colonial and semicolonial world of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the task of the revolution seen as similar—national liberation.

James Forman, onetime Executive Secretary of SNCC and later the central figure in the BWC from 1970-72, set forth this position most clearly in his speech, "Liberation Will Come from a Black Thing" (1967): "To view our history as one of resistance is to recognize more clearly the colonial relationship that we have with the United States." In the same speech he goes on to say, "The serious conditions in which we find ourselves as a people demand that we begin talking more of the colonized and the colonies."

In another speech, entitled "Total Control as the Only Solution to the Economic Problems of Black People" (1969), Forman further elaborates on the implication of this line: "We say that there must be a revolutionary black vanguard and that white people in this country must be willing to accept black leadership, for that is the only protection that Black people have to protect ourselves from racism rising again in this country.

"Racism in the U.S. is so pervasive in the mentality of whites that only an armed, well-disciplined, black-controlled government can insure the stamping out of racism in this country. . . . We say . . . think in terms of total control of the U.S. Prepare ourselves to seize state powers. Do not hedge, for time is short and all around the world, the forces of liberation are directing their attack against the U.S. It is a powerful country, but that power is not greater than that of Black people. We work the chief industries in this country and we could cripple the economy while the brothers fought guerrilla warfare in the streets."

#### PROGRESSIVE ROLE OF BLACK NATIONALISM

This line, however, in the period in which it developed and held sway, represented a big step over the militant reformism of the early and mid-'60s. It represented a break with the line of passive resistance. It looked for the solution of the liberation of Black people and other oppressed nationalities outside the bounds of the system. It placed the struggle of the oppressed nationalities in the context of worldwide struggle against imperialism,

particularly the fight being waged by the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

On the other hand this line was a far cry from a scientific analysis of the actual condition and requirements even of Black liberation—it was not a line which showed the actual relationship between Black liberation and revolution in the U.S., which could only mean proletarian revolution. While it was a real advance in that period, in the end this notion of liberation or revolution proved to be illusory.

As Mao points out in *On Practice*, “If a man wants to succeed in his work, that is, to achieve the anticipated results, he must bring his ideas into correspondence with the laws of the objective external world; if they do not correspond, he will fail in his practice. After he fails, he draws his lessons, corrects his ideas to make them correspond to the laws of the external world . . .” (*Selected Readings*, p. 67).

In the face of the fact that such a line could not lead to further advances, some forces began to seriously take up the study of Marxism-Leninism and see that revolution in a capitalist country like the U.S. means proletarian revolution. This new understanding, however, was often still combined with the baggage of the earlier period, producing an erroneous political current, the line that the proletariat will make revolution, but Black and other oppressed nationality workers are the only real proletariat.

This went hand and glove with the infamous “white skin privileges” line. According to this reactionary position the white worker has been bribed off, has sold out through a “gentleman’s agreement” between the ruling class and the masses of white workers through the “labor lieutenants” of the capitalist class. The white workers have supposedly agreed not to make trouble as long as they have privileges denied Blacks; hence the cornerstone of the white workers becoming revolutionary is for them to repudiate their privileges. The implication of this runs counter in every possible way to the approach of the proletariat to inequality—“an injury to one is an injury to all,” not “injuries must be suffered equally by all.”

When all is said and done this position lets the bourgeoisie dead off the hook, and ends up holding hands with the Kerner Report, reducing the fight against national oppression to the subjective attitude of white people and particularly white workers.

Yes, white workers do have some petty privileges denied Black people and other oppressed minorities but these petty privileges as compared to a lifetime of exploitation and oppression are exactly that—mere crumbs. Nor is the source of the oppression of Black people these crumbs, or anyone’s attitude. Black people suffer dual oppression in the real world by a real monster—U.S. monopoly capitalism which fosters and promotes racism and

chauvinism.

As this white skin privilege line, too, ran up against a wall, showing itself to be a mortal sin against objective reality, some of these forces studied Marxism-Leninism more deeply, summed up this development and grasped more firmly, that “the question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat at the moment considers as its aim. The question is what the proletariat is, and what, consequent on that being, it will be compelled to do” (from the *Holy Family*, Marx). In a word, many began to understand more fully that the proletariat is an objective social class, defined fundamentally by its relationship to the means of production and that in the U.S. the proletariat is multinational.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT

In order to understand why these earlier incorrect lines were able to flourish on the one hand and on the other hand the significance of the development of the NLC and later the struggle waged by the RU against these incorrect lines and particularly the retreat of BWC and PRRWO back to nationalism, it is necessary to review the development of the revolutionary mass movement and what was then the new communist movement.

In the late '50s the Black people’s struggle for civil rights erupted and later developed into the modern Black liberation movement shaking the country at its very foundations. This movement produced many revolutionary-minded people and gave tremendous inspiration and encouragement to millions of other people in the country—and around the world—who were fighting back against the same imperialist ruling class, especially other oppressed nationalities, the youth, students, women and sections of the working class in the U.S.

This occurred at a time when U.S. imperialism still sat alone atop the imperialist pile, when there was a lull in the workers movement and, due to the revisionist betrayal of the CPUSA, the working class was without its general staff, its vanguard Party. The workers struggle, while often breaking out, was mainly on the trade union level, and not marked by a high degree of class consciousness or political struggle against the ruling class and its various forms of oppression of the people.

It was in this context, with the upsurge of Black people, other oppressed nationalities and students and youth generally, that many people began to see there was something more at stake than a particular injustice or a struggle they were involved in, that there was something more fundamentally wrong with society, and that the problem couldn’t be solved without getting to the root of it.

Many activists began to look at the experience of other coun-

tries where revolutionary struggle was being waged. Some began to see there was only one ideology which enabled people to consistently and thoroughly stand up to imperialism, one ideology which, when grasped by the masses enabled them to change the material conditions they faced in a thoroughgoing way—Marxism-Leninism. In a word, many began to see the need for revolutionary theory—though, of course, this did not mean that even the most advanced forces in the U.S. at the time grasped this theory and applied it in a consistent, scientific way.

The rapid development of the Black struggle was accompanied by the development and growth of Black revolutionary organization that did much to change the political map of the U.S. Revolutionary ideas and the conscious study of Marxism-Leninism spread among a large section of Black people; this was also a major force in turning large sections of other oppressed nationalities and white youth to the study and practice of Marxism-Leninism.

### *BLACK PANTHER PARTY*

The group that by far had the most profound effect in turning many heads towards revolutionary struggle and Marxism-Leninism was the Black Panther Party. The BPP's ideology was, to be sure, eclectic—reflected most sharply in their characterization of the “brother on the block” (i.e. unemployed youth in particular) as the leading social force in making revolution and picking up the gun (“offing the pigs”) as the principal content of revolutionary work in the U.S.

It was, however, the BPP that placed the issue of revolution on the table in a way that it had never been done before since the betrayal by the CPUSA. It was the BPP that most clearly stated that the contradiction between the masses of American people and the system of imperialism could only be resolved through revolutionary struggle. The BPP however, exactly because it did not understand the role of the working class and the way in which Black workers, in particular, could act as a kind of link between the Black liberation struggle and the overall workers movement, could not grasp the correct relationship between Black liberation and the revolutionary struggle as a whole in the U.S.

Still it was the BPP at that time that most forcefully (if not thoroughly) raised the banner of Marxism-Leninism, and delivered telling criticism against those in the Black liberation movement such as the cultural nationalists, Pan Africanists and Black petty bourgeois reformists who all sang in single chorus, Marxism-Leninism is a “honky thing” and has no relevance to Black people.

The raising of the banner of Marxism-Leninism by the Black Panther Party also administered a positive shock to those white youth and students who sought to create a new revolutionary ideo-

logy—New Leftism—claiming Marxism-Leninism was nothing but the obsolete dogma of the “old left.”

As was said earlier, while the BPP placed these things squarely on the table, the BPP itself remained in the final analysis within the walls of petty-bourgeois revolutionism and petty-bourgeois nationalism—its nationalism being characterized by such things as its advocacy of the line of a Black vanguard. Ultimately this inability of the BPP to make a leap beyond this outlook meant that the BPP was turned into its opposite, ceased to play a revolutionary role and degenerated.

### *UPSURGE OF BLACK WORKERS*

Another important development which began to take place beginning around 1968 was the insurgent movement of Black workers which swept the country particularly in the basic industries. Black rank and file groups sprang up to combat the oppressive conditions of factory life and the racist sellout policies of the union misleadership. This movement reached its highest political expression with the development of the Revolutionary Union Movement based principally in the auto plants of Detroit and referred to earlier.

In 1969 the development of the RUM resulted in the formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, also Detroit based. The General Policy Statement and Labor Program of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers laid out quite explicitly where the League was coming from—“The League of Revolutionary Black Workers is dedicated to waging a relentless struggle against racism, capitalism and imperialism. We are struggling for the liberation of black people in the confines of the United States as well as playing a major revolutionary role in the liberation of all oppressed people in the world” (p. 1). This showed both the strengths and weaknesses of the League.

The League represented a significant advance for the Black liberation movement and the overall workers movement. In addition to sparking struggle in the working class—even, despite narrow nationalist lines, among white workers—the development of the Revolutionary Union Movement and the League acted as sort of a revolutionary kick in the pants to turn toward the working class some forces in the revolutionary movement who had felt the industrial proletariat, Black workers as well (if not as much) as whites, had been bought off; that it either actually benefits from imperialism, or is so bribed by the imperialists that at best it will fall in line at the rear of the revolutionary ranks somewhere far down the road to revolution.

However, while the League began to turn some activists in the revolutionary movement towards the working class, both in the



case of the League itself as well as many revolutionaries who began to turn towards the working class, they summed up only half of reality—that Black and other oppressed nationalities workers were not bought off.

The communist forces which arose in this overall period were marked by both its positive factors—the great inspiration of the revolutionary national movements—and on the other hand its negative aspect—the revolutionary movement that had very little roots in the workers movement generally and among white workers in particular. Further, since these young communist forces had been cut off from the historical experience of class struggle as summed up by the leaders of the international communist movement, there was a strong basis for bourgeois ideology within the new communist movement, with regard to the national question mainly taking the form in those times of narrow nationalism and tailing after bourgeois nationalism of the oppressed nationalities.

#### *BUILDUP OF THE BLACK PETTY BOURGEOISIE*

Another thing influencing this development was the fact that in the face of the storm of Black rebellion the ruling class panicked, responding with the stick and the carrot as well. Under the guise of economic development and Black capitalism, the government pumped millions of dollars into Black enterprises. Black capital went from \$500 million in 1965 to \$1.6 billion in 1973. Poverty programs were set up in virtually every ghetto in the country, while some professional jobs opened to Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, etc. In addition, in several major cities which had become in the main Black, a number of Black faces replaced white faces as mayors, police chiefs and a whole host of bureaucrats. The essence of all this was to build up the petty bourgeois and bourgeois forces among the oppressed nationalities in an effort to put a brake on the struggle and divert it away from its revolutionary thrust—co-opt it.

This was coupled with somewhat of a tactical shift by the ruling class in the sphere of ideology and public opinion. While maintaining and even stepping up its chauvinist poison propaganda about the inferiority of the oppressed nationalities and pointing to them as the cause of their own oppression—and problems in society in general—the ruling class especially through its so-called liberal wing put tremendous effort into promoting and spreading bourgeois nationalism among the oppressed nationalities.

This took the form of pointing to white people and especially white workers as the real enemy of Black people and the source of their oppression. This bourgeois line was not walled off from the revolutionary movement, including the new communist forces, but in fact in some quarters it was picked up and promoted in

more subtle forms and sometimes not so subtle forms.

Particularly with this backdrop, the NLC was an extremely positive development and was, as noted earlier, a testament to the ideological and political growth and developing influence of communists of all nationalities in the mass movement.

In the case of BWC and PRRWO what characterized these groups then and for much of the period of the NLC was their general forward direction toward Marxism-Leninism, towards taking the stand of the working class and away from nationalism and Bundism (adapting socialism to nationalism). This positive aspect of their development was not without its negative side, however, a tendency towards nationalism and Bundism in new forms.

For example, the YLP resolution at the Congress of 1972 (in which YLP became PRRWO), while stressing the necessity of building a single multinational party, also stated that in the United States, before that Party could be built, Marxist-Leninist organizations had to develop among Afro-Americans, Chicanos, Asians, Native Americans (meaning separate organizations for each nationality) to analyze their work and experiences with the proletariat of their nationality to create a base for a multinational proletarian Party in the future.

It was exactly this Bundist thinking that led PRRWO to push virtually as a “matter of principle” for the inclusion of IWK in the NLC, as there was clearly no ideological or political basis for IWK’s inclusion—no Marxist-Leninist basis, that is—outside of the faint possibility they might in the course of the NLC reverse their course. All the other groups held at least basic unity around the fact that the multinational proletariat was the main and leading force and needed a single vanguard representing it as one class. For IWK it was quite another matter, however. At the YLP-PRRWO Congress, IWK called not for unity of the multinational proletariat but for a common front of the oppressed nationalities. “The present stage in the American revolution calls for unity among Black, Brown and Asian people in the U.S.” Further IWK upheld the reactionary line of “white skin privileges” and spoke almost entirely of basing themselves not among the industrial proletariat but on “community work.”

BWC, which knew nothing of IWK at the time, went along with PRRWO’s proposal to include IWK for the same Bundist reason that had prompted PRRWO to make the proposal in the first place.

The RU struggled against IWK’s inclusion, based on IWK’s line and practice, but felt in the end that the general forward motion of such a committee was more important than making the issue of IWK a splitting matter.

This tendency towards nationalism was also present in the BWC which, for example, defined the scope of its task as being

“to sink deep roots among the Black sector of the proletariat” (July 8 Conference Report, 1972). However, the principal aspect of both PRRWO and BWC and their motion at that time was away from this baggage.

During this period, the matter of building the unity of the proletariat became much more than a declaration of intent. The three organizations attempted to build multinational organizations in the workplace, took up the task of working to build the struggles of the unemployed of all nationalities through the Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee, and built multinational coalitions such as the November 4th Coalition. BWC, while still attempting to build all-Black forms of mass organizations, also undertook the building of a multinational coalition around police brutality against Black people in Atlanta.

### BACK TO NATIONALISM

However towards the end of the existence of the NLC, and shortly before the discussion of the Party building proposal, the retreat back to nationalism began to manifest itself sharply. As opposed to moving forward in the direction of the need for the organizational unity of all proletarians and particularly the formation of the single vanguard of the working class, BWC and PRRWO began a steady backtrack, that was later to take leaps and bounds backwards.

This drift first began to manifest itself in PRRWO and BWC's attempt to create more sophisticated justification for separate communist organizations based on nationality, for splitting the workers' cause, organization and movement along national lines.

Towards the end of the NLC period, PRRWO set for itself, as its central task, the building of national forms of mass organizations around the democratic rights of the Puerto Rican national minority based on three principles: 1) the right to speak their language, 2) to struggle for bilingual programs that really teach Puerto Rican people's history and culture, 3) the right to mobilize freely and agitate for the national liberation struggle of Puerto Rico.

These things should have been taken up by PRRWO but PRRWO should not have restricted its activity nor certainly its outlook to taking up these questions, nor should these questions have been seen as the sole responsibility and province of Puerto Rican communists.

BWC for its part put forth its central task as “the raising of the proletarian banner in the Black liberation struggle and to build the leadership of Black workers in the struggle of the entire multinational working class and the anti-imperialist struggle of all the people in the U.S.”

BWC began to rigidly stress that in order to build a lasting multinational proletarian Party, a Black communist organization must raise the proletarian banner in the Black nation and defeat bourgeois nationalism. The essence of this line was a retreat back to “sole representation” with the bottom line that the Black masses generally and the Black workers in particular could not be won right then to the line of a communist Party with a correct line and correct methods of work because it had white people in it. Hence a Black communist organization must first wipe out bourgeois nationalism—quite a feat!—in order to prepare the way. The “leading role of Black workers” line was also showing its head.

In general, however, these lines were just emerging in what became an overall backward turn and they still represented mainly seeds of differences which could possibly be resolved through struggle in the course of moving to the Party.

### THE PARTY PROPOSAL

As pointed out earlier, some have claimed the Party proposal put forth by the RU in late 1973 was simply an opportunist maneuver of the RU to turn itself and its clique (meaning BWC and PRRWO) into the Party; it was an attempt to build a Party behind closed doors, they say.

The essence of the proposal was ~~far~~ different. At the heart of the proposal was the matter of ideological and political line, the Party programme. A draft or several drafts would be circulated publicly among all organizations, collectives and individuals with the objective of “uniting all who can be united” to form the Party. The adoption of the final programme and the selection of leadership of the Party were to be accomplished from the bottom up as opposed to top down, taking place at the founding congress. The members of all the organizations and other forces would be represented on a proportional basis (one delegate for so many members), guided by the principle all communists are equal regardless of nationality or the size of the group they had belonged to. The delegates would vote as individuals, not in blocs.

Further, in order to unite all who could be united, there would be teams set up—“flying squads”—with the task of contacting and struggling with independent collectives, organizations and individuals that were not marred by a consolidated opportunist line such as OL and CL—unless, of course, they repudiated this line. The flying squads were to go throughout the country.

It was proposed by the RU that the National Liaison Committee be expanded to include representatives from other forces that would be unifying around the building of the new Party. It was felt that if the three organizations took up this task, working together they could unite many forces.

BWC and PRRWO opposed this with Bundism, claiming that these collectives and individual Marxist-Leninists would be mainly “white petty bourgeois.” This completely overlooked the fact that there did exist at that time various Black and other oppressed nationality collectives as well as a number of people from the oppressed nationalities who were beginning to break with nationalism and turn towards Marxism. The RU further pointed out to BWC and PRRWO that while class origins are important the critical and decisive question is ideological and political line.

#### *NLC ENDS, PARTY BUILDING CONTINUES*

Although BWC and PRRWO rejected the Party proposal and broke up the Liaison Committee, the RU and others did carry out the line of “uniting all who can be united” to form the Party, contacting many forces throughout the country, discussing the need to form the Party in the immediate period ahead, the importance of building such a Party, and on what ideological and political basis it could be built, etc. The RU conducted extensive polemics against all major opportunist trends, and held Party building forums, drawing in some places many hundreds of people.

Even after BWC and PRRWO broke off the Liaison Committee, and initiated public polemics, the RU’s approach was that, while things were clearly on a downhill road for the BWC and PRRWO, the RU still called on these forces to unite on the basis of Marxism-Leninism to build the Party.

The RU stated at that time (as expressed in “Marxism vs. Bundism,” page 61, *Red Papers 6*): “We would like to remind the BWC and PRRWO of the high spirit of unity that marked the original formation of the liaison. This was based not on an absolute agreement on every political question, but on the commitment to subordinate the interest of our particular organizations to the overall and general interest of the proletariat and to ‘what was coming into being’—the Party. This was not an organizational question of abolishing the democratic centralism of the separate organizations, but an ideological question of putting our priority on working together to build the mass movement and build toward the Party.

“For our part, the RU has always recognized that organizational unity and merger would have to be based on developing closer and closer political unity. But we have always felt sure that this would be achieved so long as we all upheld the spirit of serving the people with which the liaison was formed. It was in this same spirit that we made our party proposal to the liaison committee. And we are convinced that by reviving and upholding this original spirit, principled unity can be achieved through struggle and we can move forward together to ‘what is coming into being’—the Party and the revolution.”

But because of their opportunist lines the BWC and PRRWO were bent on creating a breakup of the Liaison Committee. They were not interested in reviving the original spirit of the Liaison Committee; instead they were intent on reviving nationalism in the guise of Marxism.

#### *A LEAP FORWARD*

It is by no means surprising that all-out struggle would break out with the issuing of the Party building proposal by the RU in late 1973, for the formation of the Party required a leap.

The Party proposal in many ways represented the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. Why? Because in order to build a single unifying center—a Party—to develop a battle plan, a Party programme to guide the Party, in order to lead the class, to merge the national and class struggle, required a break with the petty bourgeois baggage of the past movement.

The whole of the communist movement was confronted with the necessity to make this leap—and in the case of BWC and PRRWO as for many others, it meant breaking with the most sacred of sacred possessions, the supreme sacred cow, narrow nationalism and the raising of the national question above every other—above and apart from the scientific class stand of the proletariat and the class struggle.

Further it was not as if the struggle just simply jumped out of the sky. As the objective conditions were changing, including the fact that the struggle of the whole class was beginning to grow, the mass movement had come up against the absence of a genuine vanguard to lead the struggle and build the united front under proletarian leadership to overthrow capital. The consciousness of the need to unite, along with the growing awareness that the whole system is rotten, was developing among all sections of the working class and masses.

What was required was to move the mass struggle to a higher level, showing the masses how to build unity, how to identify the enemy and how to fight him. This demanded an end to the scattered circles, activity working at cross purposes, and duplicating efforts. This situation called for uniting all who could be united around a correct line and programme to form a single general staff.

Thus, while BWC and PRRWO played a very progressive role at one stage in the development of the new communist forces, as the objective conditions made it impossible to continue on the old basis, BWC and PRRWO, like many others, were confronted with either moving forward on a qualitatively new basis or falling backward.

Unfortunately, BWC and PRRWO took the latter course, re-

treating into nationalism and then dogmatism combined with nationalism as their guiding ideology. For these reasons BWC and PRRWO were no longer able to contribute to building the Party and the revolutionary movement in general, but set themselves on an opposite course, resulting in further splits and degeneration on the part of these organizations.

### A RETREAT

In many ways it was as Stalin had pointed out regarding the development of the working class movement in Russia and the Bund: "Even before 1897 the Social-Democratic [Marxist] groups active among the Jewish workers set themselves the aim of creating a 'special Jewish workers' organization. They founded such an organization in 1897 by uniting to form the Bund. That was at a time when Russian Social-Democracy as an integral body virtually did not exist. The Bund steadily grew and spread, and stood out more and more vividly against the background of the bleak days of Russian Social-Democracy. . . . Then came the 1900s. A mass labor movement came into being. Polish Social-Democracy grew and drew the Jewish workers into the mass struggle. Russian Social-Democracy grew and attracted the 'Bund' workers" (Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," Vol. 2, p. 346, emphasis in original).

While the situation in the U.S. in 1973-74 was not exactly the same, nor is it correct to analyze history by parallel, the critical point is however the same, and the general lesson does hold true. To continue on the old basis when the objective and subjective condition demand a leap forward is to go backward.

One specific thing that kept BWC and PRRWO from making a leap forward was a tendency that had existed in both organizations, although it had not all along been the principal aspect. This was not summing up on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, looking for the essence of problems on the basis of ideological and political line, but instead adopting get-rich-quick schemes, hoping to develop enthusiasm into a substitute for a correct line and hard and patient work.

A good example of this came up towards the last meeting of the NLC. BWC and PRRWO had incorrectly summed up that the more they had taken up Marxism-Leninism the more isolated from the masses of the oppressed nationalities they had become—though this was not put forward in quite so straight up and blatant a way. Of course, taking up Marxism-Leninism does not enable one to have quick success or that automatically at any given time you have broad support among the masses. But it provides a basis of applying mass line to unite with the needs of the people in the practical struggle, while being able to point beyond that to

the general and long-term interests of the working class and masses of people, and to persevere through the twists and turns of struggle, to keep sight of the long-range goal, and guide the mass movement toward that goal.

But looking for get-rich-quick schemes BWC and PRRWO failed to grasp this. This began to take sharp focus in the BWC with the consolidation of the line put forward by the RU on the Black national question—that Black people in the U.S. are a nation with their historical homeland in the Black Belt but today are dispersed from that homeland and concentrated mainly as workers in the urban areas of the North and South—that the Black national question in the U.S. is no longer in essence a peasant question but a proletarian question and that the Black nation in the U.S. existed under new and different conditions (more on this question later).

BWC felt now it was set to go to recreate the BPP or the League of Revolutionary Black Workers—on a higher basis, of course. However, it is not so simple a matter to recreate the past because both objectively and subjectively the conditions do not exist. Again this line itself was rooted in the case of both BWC and PRRWO in nationalism, namely that once communists of the oppressed nationalities take hold of Marxism-Leninism they could really get this thing going. When this petty bourgeois scheme fell short, when there was no instant mass base that fell into line behind BWC and PRRWO, it was concluded that groups like the BPP, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and Young Lords Party were able to get a base among the masses of oppressed nationalities because they were both revolutionary nationalist and Marxist-Leninist. This was the wrong conclusion, rather than summing up correctly that these groups, while progressive and even revolutionary and while raising the banner of Marxism-Leninism for a time, did not make a complete rupture with nationalism and were essentially revolutionary nationalist and not Marxist-Leninist.

The point is not that such groups automatically failed because they were not from the start thoroughgoing Marxist-Leninists. Such an analysis is metaphysics, not dialectics. The point is that for such groups—and this was directly relevant for BWC and PRRWO in early 1974—continuing to advance would have required making a qualitative leap, to grasp and apply Marxism-Leninism more thoroughly, and definitely not to go backward into bourgeois nationalism.

### COMBINING MARXISM AND NATIONALISM

However, failing to draw the appropriate lessons from this, BWC and PRRWO began to take their weakness in ideology and raise it to a matter of principle. So the next get-rich-quick scheme

consisted in first combining two into one—Marxism and nationalism.

This was followed by another erroneous position. To recreate the movement of the late '60s, it was felt it was necessary to have an upsurge. So BWC and PRRWO set about to invent such an upsurge, or create it out of subjective desire to see it. BWC and PRRWO refused to face objective reality, denying that the movement of the oppressed nationalities had grown through a flow reaching a high tide in the mid and late '60s—and then began to ebb in the early '70s.

In their view there was no flow and ebb but just one continuous upward movement in a straight line, and to say that the struggle had ebbed was “racist,” was to say the oppressed nationalities were “bogged down.” Further this overall line reflected BWC and PRRWO’s retreat from a correct summing up of the movement of the oppressed nationalities in the '60s, which was sharply underlined in the September 1977 *Revolution*. “Similarly, the powerful Black liberation struggle which reached its high tide in the '60s also suffered from the lack of class conscious working class leadership within it. . . . As in the antiwar movement, the lack of a strong working class ‘pole’ within the Black liberation struggle made it easier for wrong and harmful tendencies to arise and more difficult to combat them. . . . And without the working class being in a position to clearly point a direction forward for the struggle, many were easily taken in by various schemes promoted by the capitalist enemy to direct the struggle from the real target—themselves.”

### MARXISM VS. BUNDISM

This brings us right down to the heart of the matter which divided RU on the one hand and BWC and PRRWO on the other, *Marxism vs. Bundism*. At the outset of the struggle there were two questions around which the three organizations were divided into two camps: First, is the slogan “Black Workers Take the Lead” a correct slogan for the working class movement or for the Black liberation struggle in particular? And second, the issue of revolutionary nationalism—is revolutionary nationalism the same thing as Marxism-Leninism, is there an equal sign between them? That today a Black Marxist-Leninist must be a revolutionary nationalist meant that ideologically they are the same thing.

The issues raised in this struggle were very important in the development of the correct line and program on how to wage the fight against national oppression as part of the overall class struggle and how to bring about the merger of the national and class struggle.

To understand the actual development of this struggle it is im-

portant to grasp that while the RU essentially held a proletarian line, for the RU, too, it was a matter of motion and development and one dividing into two in this matter as well. The RU had also held many of these incorrect lines, or aspects of them.

This is most evident, for instance, in a pamphlet on a strike by workers at Temple University in Philadelphia, published by the Revolutionary Union in 1972. This pamphlet called Black workers “the most advanced section” of the working class—in essence the “Black Workers Take the Lead” line. In fact the pamphlet was entitled “Black Workers Lead Strike to Victory.”

### STRUGGLE OVER “BLACK WORKERS TAKE THE LEAD”

It was in fact through the course of trying to apply such positions that the RU began to sum up that these policies were in contradiction to a correct line and to the general development of the RU’s work, that they were not aiding the revolutionary struggle, not aiding the building of the unity of the working class, not aiding the development of the struggle of the working class as a whole or the Black people and other oppressed nationalities but in fact were holding it back.

In one plant, for example, the RU was putting forward the need for a Black shop steward. In opposition to this, many workers raised questions and objections. One Black worker pointed out, “What’s important is that we have somebody good to represent us, to fight against discrimination in the plant and to fight around all the questions the workers here face. It’s not the question of what nationality somebody is that’s important, but what stand they take and what they fight for that’s important.”

One white comrade under the influence of this incorrect line failed to do anything about a blatant act of discrimination against a Black worker in the shop, because he was white and “couldn’t give leadership to the national struggle.” In another case a Black comrade influenced by this line went into coalitions and committees of Black people, including many petty bourgeois Blacks, trying to push “Black Workers Take the Lead” down their throats and was unable to unite people broadly. In yet another case where there had been some police shootings of several members of the Nation of Islam (now the World Community of Islam in the West), the Bundist line advocated doing nothing—white comrades shouldn’t take this up, and Black comrades cannot do anything because they are connected with whites (see *Red Papers 6*, “National Bulletin 13,” by the RU).

It became clear that these erroneous positions prevented communists from getting involved in applying a correct line in important struggles. Under the cover of upholding the national struggle this line led communists to stand aloof from struggle on this front,

and in the working class as a whole it meant maintaining divisions.

On the basis of this experience and the need to sum it up, a sharp struggle broke out with the RU, with a small handful, led by the RU representative to the NLC, taking a reactionary stand of upholding all that was wrong and reactionary in these positions. This representative carried this struggle into the NLC and more generally colluded with leaders of the BWC and PRRWO to oppose and attack the RU in its move to sum up and correct its errors and the line that led to them.

The RU as a whole overwhelmingly rejected this line, while BWC, PRRWO and a few within the RU (who soon split from it) went on to seek profound justifications for it. This led to the struggle between the organizations, which immediately was felt most sharply on the NLC level.

### *NLC BECOMES A NATIONALIST CAUCUS*

In fact it was the NLC that became one of the chief headquarters of bourgeois nationalism. In the later stages of the NLC it more resembled a "third world caucus" than communists coming together to hammer out serious matters of line and to sum up and give guidance to practical work.

In a real sense, however, it was the RU representative who took the lead in consolidating many of these incorrect lines—though to be sure there already existed fertile soil for this development in BWC and PRRWO.

This relates to the fact that in the way the RU approached the NLC involved a concession to nationalist tendencies in BWC and PRRWO. This was manifested in the RU's decision to have as its representative to the NLC a Black member of its leadership in place of the leading RU comrade who had represented it at the YLP/PRRWO Conference in 1972 when the NLC was first formed. The erroneous thinking behind this decision was the idea that having a Black to deal with would "soften" things for BWC and PRRWO in relating to a multinational organization. The full consequences of this error were felt later when the RU representative on the NLC used it as a base for pushing a reactionary nationalist line.

In the later days of the NLC the question of Black leadership of the American revolution was stressed, as a matter of principle, and became a major rallying cry. The line was put forward that since there is a Black nation therefore before a Party can be formed there must be a Black communist organization to have a significant base in the Black proletariat and deal a major defeat to the Black bourgeoisie's hold on the Black masses.

Then there was the position that revolutionary nationalism is Marxist-Leninism for a communist of an oppressed nationality.

The BWC had never previously held such a position, and PRRWO while holding this line back in the days of the YLP had never put it forward in recent years and had in fact moved away from it. In fact it was promoted by the RU representative on the NLC, representing to a large degree, especially on this question, his own views and not the RU's. This was followed by the "caucus" (NLC) demanding an all-Black meeting to sum up the Black liberation movement as opposed to a meeting of those with the most extensive experience and most of all those with the best grasp of Marxism-Leninism, including its application to this question, to sum up the Black liberation movement. In fact the spectre of Black nationalism was rising to such a degree that PRRWO, which also had Black members, had to ask in a subtle way, couldn't Puerto Ricans attend such a meeting?

To keep this line from going so far as to cause a split between Blacks and Puerto Ricans, the banner of Black and Puerto Rican unity became a big rallying cry—with the bottom line that Puerto Ricans are really just like Blacks. They can "party," "get down," etc.—in a word, they are *basic* brothers and sisters. But in the end this Black and Puerto Rican unity would also deteriorate, showing itself as only a mere opportunist marriage of convenience.

Following BWC and PRRWO's break with the RU and later with the CL, their unity soon broke up. The only basis for real and lasting unity among people of different nationalities is a correct ideological and political line representing the outlook and interests of the working class.

### *BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM RUNS AMUCK*

Towards the last days of the NLC some of the nationalism was nothing but a straight up, unrefined, mask torn off and coming out naked "my nationality first and only." Chicanos were attacked outright by the RU representative who created a distinction between Chicanos and Mexican-Americans, claiming the former are part of the oppressor (white) nation, that they are descendants of the original holders of Spanish land grants in the Southwest, that given they are white (according to some bourgeois legal classifications) unlike the "dark-skinned Mexican-Americans," they do not really suffer national oppression. Hawaiians were referred to by the RU representative as "pineapples," Chinese Americans as nothing but petty bourgeois, and Japanese as white people.

While hardly anyone from BWC and PRRWO united with this blatant national chauvinism, the basic line of nationalism was united with by all. During this period and increasingly as BWC and PRRWO sank deeper into nationalism and dogmatism and the polemics between them and the RU sharpened, BWC and PRRWO members could be seen wearing red, black and green (the so-called

“national colors” of Blacks) caps, scarves, buttons, etc. and some were even referring to the white masses as “honkies” and white communists as “white boys,” longing for the day when we get “our state” and be rid of these racists (more on this later).

### A CLARION CALL

The line of “Black Workers Take the Lead” was in essence a throwback, in more sophisticated form of course, to the position that said Black and other oppressed nationalities are the only real workers. The line of “Black Workers Take the Lead” as put forth by BWC had both a political as well as organizational content. Firstly, BWC and PRRWO seized on a correct aspect—that the Afro-American people’s struggle had been a “*clarion call* to all the exploited and oppressed people of the United States to fight against the barbarous rule of the monopoly capitalist class” (as powerfully stated by Mao Tsetung in 1968, emphasis added). Further the struggle of Black workers in particular had been a *spark* in the struggle of the industrial proletariat as a whole. But they seized on this correct aspect only to twist it into its opposite—combining two into one by confusing a struggle that had played an advanced role with the question of the conscious leadership of the working class and the masses generally.

The political aim of this erroneous line was first to proceed as if Black workers are automatically or spontaneously class conscious, as though Black workers are more advanced in their political consciousness than other oppressed nationality workers or white workers. This denies the correct understanding and method of leadership, as summarized by Mao in writing on the mass line: “The masses in any given place are generally composed of three parts, the relatively active, the intermediate and the relatively backward. The leaders must therefore be skilled in uniting the small number of active elements around the leadership and must rely on them to raise the level of the intermediate elements and to win over the backward elements” (“Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership,” *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 118). But exactly because in the U.S. there is a single multinational proletariat the advanced section will not be simply workers of a given nationality but is made up of workers of all nationalities.

This brings us to the second point that was erroneous with “Black Workers Take the Lead”—it brings to the fore and emphasizes not the common cause of the proletarians of all nationalities, but instead places stress on the distinctions within the class by nationality. To be sure the common interest of proletarians of different nationalities includes the struggle against all national oppression—this was a point which, contrary to the demagogy of BWC and PRRWO at the time, the RU emphasized, but BWC and

PRRWO were bent on raising the national divisions within the class to a principle.

Going hand and hand with “Black Workers Take the Lead” was the exaggeration of oppressor nation privileges, and running throughout this argument was just plain old nationalism, which had been posed against multinational unity in the '60s.

This line was really no different than that pushed by the notorious bourgeois nationalist and anti-working class advocate James Boggs, who wrote, “Yet American radicals have sought to propagate the concept of ‘Black and White, unite and fight’ as if black and white had a common issue and grievance, systematically evading the fact that every immigrant who walked off the gangplank into this country did so on the backs of indigenous blacks and had the opportunity to advance precisely because the indigenous blacks were being systematically deprived of the opportunity to advance by both capitalist and workers (*meaning of course the white worker*)” (from “Black Power—A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come,” *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 54, emphasis added).

### CORRECT VIEW OF PETTY PRIVILEGES

But, as stressed before, in speaking of the privileges white workers have, it is a matter of dividing one into two. On the one hand there are privileges often held by members of the oppressor nation, i.e. to get promoted to a skilled job, a little better housing and schools, etc. On the other hand there is the common exploitation and oppression, the common interest with the workers of all nationalities. By far it is this latter aspect which is principal.

George Jackson pointed out that in many prisons the guards allow white prisoners to smoke in nonsmoking areas, while Black prisoners are treated more strictly. In this sense white prisoners enjoy petty privileges denied Black prisoners. But the fact is that all the prisoners are in prison and this is fundamental, while the guards and ultimately the prison officials let some of them have these petty concessions exactly because they are afraid of all the prisoners uniting in common struggle. Jackson pointed out that the correct demand was not that whites should be denied the right to smoke there, but that Blacks should have it, too.

It is also a fact that although national oppression hits the oppressed nationalities sharpest, and most directly, even in the short run there is no *real* gain for white workers. Take the matter of the banks’ red lining of neighborhoods: while many Blacks and people of other oppressed nationalities are forced to pay exorbitant prices for old housing, often buying through FHA just to get bad housing, and find themselves unable to pay FHA which forecloses, then the house is abandoned and the neighborhood deter-

iorates, which means the white workers there are forced to sell homes often at ridiculously low prices. The fundamental point to all this is the material basis of unity of workers of different nationalities exists exactly because of the exploitation and oppression common to all these workers, which is far greater and more fundamental than national divisions.

One last point with regard to BWC and PRRWO raising national distinctions above the common cause of workers of all nationalities is the erroneous view that white chauvinism is inherent in the white worker. This is clearly not the class view which points to the source chauvinism comes from and is promoted by at every turn—the ruling class.

On the other hand “Black Workers Take the Lead” is also incorrect for the Black liberation movement because to raise such a slogan is to proceed as if Black people in the U.S. made up a separate country, apart from the rest of the U.S. It is to talk about Black workers as though they are a separate working class apart from the multinational proletariat. Again the reality is that it will be the workers of all nationalities led by their vanguard Party that will take the lead in the fight against all oppression, of which national oppression is a critical part.

Even in struggles in which mainly Black people are involved, “Black Workers Take the Lead” can have a sectarian effect, where it is necessary to unite with other classes and strata. Proletarian leadership is not declared—it is won through carrying out consistent communist work guided by a correct line and winning people to that line in the course of repeated struggles.

#### *A SPECIAL ROLE FOR BWC AND PRRWO*

“Black Workers Take the Lead” also had an organizational platform. It demanded a special role for Black Marxist-Leninists within the communist movement. It insisted that Black Marxist-Leninists must play the leading role—consistent with the general error of “Black Workers Take the Lead”; this says that Black communists are the chief instrument through which Black workers will play the leading role.

This line could only lead BWC and PRRWO away from Marxist-Leninist ideology, away from building the vanguard Party. Because this position emphasizes national distinctions above the common cause of the proletariat, it liquidates the leading role of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the need for a vanguard Party to represent the whole class. In the end it essentially means advocating separate vanguards for each nationality—whether that is presented in the form of actually separate parties or separate factions by nationality within one Party, with Blacks as the leading faction in principle.

This platform actively stands opposed to complete equality between nationalities and between communists and makes nationality, not ideological and political line, decisive. How was this concretely done? On the one hand by reducing the question of being in a multinational Party with no “guarantee” of “third world leadership” to simply “taking orders from whites”—so the central issue becomes whether there is a white or Black chairman, etc.

The flip side of this coin, which was implied in so many words, was that the most effective way to fight white chauvinism, for the RU in particular, was to accept Black leadership. As whites had never been accustomed to taking orders from Blacks or having decisions made for them by Blacks, the roles must be reversed so as to confront white chauvinism straight up—so the bottom line went. This was the acid test for RU—to declare themselves once and for all against white chauvinism by accepting Black leadership as a principle. And while nobody dared to say it that openly or crudely, this was very much the question.

#### *CORRECT VIEW OF PARTICULAR TASKS*

The real issue however is not nationality but a question first and foremost of ideological and political line. Raising nationality to the first place squarely avoids the matter of first importance—line.

This does not deny the correct understanding of the particular tasks of communists of the oppressed nationalities, practically and ideologically. There is a necessary division of labor among communists, particularly with regards to the fight against national oppression. White comrades have a special responsibility of combating national chauvinism and winning support for the struggle of the oppressed nationalities among white workers and white people generally. Comrades of the oppressed nationalities have a particular role in the struggles of people of their own nationality, especially as it arises in the communities, against national oppression, and in combating bourgeois nationalism.

But, first of all, this division of labor can never be raised to a principle—communists of any nationality must always represent and strive to give leadership to the whole working class and the overall mass movement.

In this regard the RU laid out most sharply the correct position—which was later developed further by the RCP—on how to merge the national and class struggle. It is worth quoting this at length here:

“... We have to work at it ‘from two sides.’ On the one side, we have to help unite the greatest numbers of the oppressed nationalities, in the fight against national oppression. We do not say to the oppressed nationalities, ‘do not wage a fight against your oppression, wait for the working class to become fully conscious



and take leadership of that struggle.' This would only guarantee that the national movements would be under bourgeois leadership, and it would also hold back the development of class consciousness and class unity of the proletariat. As communists we must involve ourselves in every possible struggle against national oppression, work to direct it against the imperialist enemy, to unite it with other anti-imperialist movements and raise the *class consciousness* of the struggling masses. . . .

"From the other side, we must work to develop the workers movement as a class conscious movement, into a political force that fights against all forms of oppression, recognizing especially the crucial importance of the fight against national oppression" (from "Build the Leading Role of the Working Class, Merge the National and Class Struggles—National Bulletin 13," *Red Papers* 6, by the RU, p. 16, emphasis in original).

### REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM

Another matter of debate was BWC and PRRWO's insistence that an oppressed nationality Marxist-Leninist was both a Marxist-Leninist and a revolutionary nationalist—that an oppressed nationality Marxist-Leninist was both for his nationality *first* and above all as well as for his class first and above all.

BWC now ran, "Revolutionary nationalism of Black people and all oppressed peoples, is a reflection of the nationalism of the working masses. In the world today, this sort of nationalism doesn't have to make any sort of 'leap' to a higher form of 'consciousness, class consciousness,' because the national aspirations of the oppressed Black masses are in themselves revolutionary, and the national question is a class question" (from "Criticism of 'National Bulletin 13' and the Right Line in the RU," by the BWC, reprinted in *Red Papers* 6, p. 28, emphasis in original).

If what BWC was trying to get at was that communists are the most consistent fighters against national oppression, and that the working class in liberating itself will liberate all mankind, it was just a matter of a confused formulation, that perhaps could have been quite easily cleared up. But as the statement of BWC indicates, it was much more than mere confusion.

Revolutionary nationalism as put forth by BWC and PRRWO—equating it with Marxism-Leninism—was nothing but combining two into one—nationalism with Marxism-Leninism. On the one hand this watered down Marxism-Leninism with nationalism and from the other side could not lead to unity with progressive nationalists because it tries to have it both ways and so pleases nobody and provides no principled basis for unity over program combined with struggle over ideology. In essence it was adapting the internationalist policy of the proletariat to nationalism.

Nationalism, no matter how progressive or revolutionary, in the final analysis ends up saying my nationality first. On the other hand revolutionary nationalism does have a revolutionary aspect, namely the fight against the imperialist system. However revolutionary nationalism is itself a question of *motion*, and in the final analysis, again, either it must take a qualitative leap to the stand of the proletariat or go backward to bourgeois nationalism.

Revolutionary nationalism as put forth by BWC and PRRWO came down, on the bottom line, to safeguarding the interests of Black people and other oppressed people, from being victims of "white man's socialism." So something more than Marxism-Leninism was needed—a little bit of nationalism, hence revolutionary nationalism, the highest expression of communism for *Black people and other oppressed people*.

### MOST CONSISTENT FIGHTER AGAINST OPPRESSION

It is thought by some that the more nationalist one is the *more consistently* one fights against national oppression. But the fact of the matter is, because nationalism as an ideology is the ideology of the petty bourgeois and bourgeois class not the proletariat, it cannot guide you to wage any consistent battle against the source of all oppression of the masses, including national oppression—the bourgeoisie and the capitalist system.

The proletariat, exactly because of its objective position and role in society, is the most consistent fighter against all oppression, including national oppression. And in the world today it is only the ideology of the working class with its goal of socialism and communism that is toppling the old order in a thoroughgoing manner. As for nationalism, while in the world today and among the oppressed nationalities in the U.S. it has played a progressive role in spurring resistance to the imperialists, nationalism, even of the most progressive form, will waver and vacillate in the face of the enemy.

Only Marxism-Leninism, with its illumination of the ultimate goal of socialism and communism, the most radical rupture known to mankind, stands staunch.

When all was said and done BWC and PRRWO were stepping over a quarter (Marxism-Leninism) to pick up a nickel (revolutionary nationalism). And with revolutionary nationalism it is a matter of finally making a radical rupture. While people can advance and move forward more and more in a revolutionary direction, only by making the radical rupture with bourgeois ideology can they advance to Marxism-Leninism, the stand of the working class.

And the *ideology* of the working class cannot be reconciled with any other ideology. As Lenin pointed out, "Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even the 'most just,' 'purest,'

most refined and civilized brand. In place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity" ("Critical Demands on the National Question," *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 34).

In the concrete struggle, however, Marxist-Leninists support revolutionary nationalism while opposing reactionary nationalism. Communists, while putting forward their independent line, Marxism-Leninism, the stand of the single proletariat and not the stand of any particular nationality, unite with the progressive aspect of revolutionary nationalism and lead it forward. However, if they fail to put forward an independent line, communists will not be able to move revolutionary nationalists forward and in fact communists will be dragged back to nationalism themselves as BWC and PRRWO took to doing.

### THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN—SECTARIANISM

On the other side of the coin BWC and PRRWO equated revolutionary nationalism with Marxism-Leninism. With the posture of representing the working class, they echoed the words of Huey Newton more than five years after him: "To be a revolutionary nationalist you must be of necessity a socialist."

BWC and PRRWO even made a play on the words of Malcolm X, "If you love Black nationalism you love revolution [they inserted socialist revolution] and if you love revolution then you love Black nationalism" (*Message to the Grassroots*).

It is wrong to equate these as being one and the same, and this is all the more immediately harmful in the U.S. where we have a single stage proletarian revolution. Since it is true that one cannot remain revolutionary *in the final analysis* unless you become a Marxist-Leninist, and because proletarian revolution is necessary to eliminate the oppression of Black people, there is a strong objective basis for many revolutionary nationalists to become Marxist-Leninists. But, once again, that means making a qualitative leap to the stand of the working class.

By equating revolutionary nationalism with Marxism-Leninism in the practical work one ends up isolating communists from many honest members of the oppressed nationalities who genuinely stand for the liberation of their people but are not Marxist-Leninists or for socialism.

Through the course of patient work communists can unite with the progressive aspects of revolutionary nationalism and lead it forward, but a communist must never compromise the stand of his class first and above all, as say opposed to his people first and above all. When all is said and done this is the watershed between Marxism-Leninism and nationalism even of the most refined and progressive sort.

This ability to unite with revolutionary nationalists politically flows directly out of the fact that communists take the stand of their class which, as pointed out earlier, makes them the most consistent revolutionaries, the most consistent fighters against all oppression, including national oppression.

### SCIENTIFIC VIEW OF NATIONAL OPPRESSION

Sometimes it is raised that Marxism-Leninism, while good for analyzing the class struggle does not deal with "racism"—meaning the matter of national oppression. But quite the opposite is the truth—Marxism-Leninism provides the basis for analyzing every problem, but from the point of view of the working class, whose ideology is the only thoroughly scientific world view and whose interests lie in finally eliminating every form of exploitation and oppression.

Marxism-Leninism poses the most thorough solution to national oppression, placing the fight against it in a revolutionary context as opposed to the reformist illusion that the oppression of Black people can be solved within the framework of capitalism, such as the election of Black mayors, Black capitalism, etc., or petty bourgeois utopian, escapist schemes such as back to Africa, "get your mind together," cultural nationalism, etc.

The starting point for Marxist-Leninists regarding national oppression is the understanding that it is rooted in the productive relations of society, that it cannot be solved within the framework of capitalism but only with its overthrow. Since national oppression is a product of a system based on class exploitation it is only natural that the working class, which has the historic mission of wiping out all forms of exploitation, should be the most consistent fighter against national oppression in any shape or form.

What is really the issue, is not that Marxism-Leninism does not "deal with racism," but the fact that different classes have their own conceptions of the national question, representing different class interests and therefore posing different solutions.

Communists, however, by putting forward their independent line, subordinating everything to proletarian revolution, socialism and ultimately communism, can in the practical struggle unite with nationalists to the degree they objectively oppose imperialism and fight against its oppression of people. This cannot be done by adapting socialism to nationalism as BWC and PRRWO took to doing. During this period BWC, for example, found itself unable to move revolutionary nationalists forward to Marxism-Leninism, and on the other hand could not unite with them in the practical struggle because BWC wound up bickering with them over who were the real genuine nationalists—with these na-

tionalists attacking BWC for being sham nationalists.

### 1974 BLACK LIBERATION CONFERENCE

This came out most sharply at the time of the Black Liberation Conference organized by BWC and PRRWO on February 4, 1977, which had initially been planned to discuss the way ahead for the Black liberation movement and possibly to build some kind of mass organization.

Instead the conference became a platform for BWC and PRRWO to put forth in particular the dogmatist line on Party building, which they had then taken up—one-sidedly stressing study of Marxism-Leninism to the complete negation of practice—and in general a nationalist, Bundist line.

Members of the Republic of New Africa (RNA) at the conference attacked BWC and PRRWO for prostituting the concept of “nation time” (meaning their general attempt to pose as nationalists). RNA stated “nation time” speaks to the very special kind of nationalism that is most emphatically nationalist first, as it is based on an earnest need for a *land base*.

They went on to say, “We understand from *past statements* of the sponsoring organization, that the workers (Black, White, Yellow, etc.) will lead the struggle in Babylon. An ideology of nation time speaks to Black people leading the struggle for nation time. It does not isolate vague categories of Black people basically because we realize that almost all Blacks in this country are ex-slaves, i.e. workers” (emphasis ours).

In the course of the workshops on national liberation at this conference, BWC and PRRWO’s dilemma came out most sharply when the RNA demanded from BWC and PRRWO—do you or don’t you support our programme of building the Black nation on a separate land base? BWC and PRRWO really couldn’t answer.

Their combining nationalism with socialism made it impossible to put forth a Marxist-Leninist line—that is, on the one hand explaining the need to move forward to socialism and communism, and at the same time stressing the need to unite all who can be united against the imperialist ruling class. On the question of a separate Black state, that would have meant pointing out the need to support the right of self-determination but saying straight up that under present and foreseeable conditions we don’t advocate separation—a role especially important for *Black* communists. At the same time, while being consistent in this position, it would have been correct to point out to people who hold the RNA position that even the realistic possibility of separation requires the overthrow of imperialism. But BWC and PRRWO could not do this because they were attempting to combine and reconcile nationalism and Marxism.

### NOT A COLONIAL STRUGGLE

Another important aspect of promoting revolutionary nationalism as the ideology of Black communists was to equate the Black liberation struggle in the U.S. with that of a semicolonial or colonial country—claiming that revolutionary nationalism is applied internationalism. This was supposedly a takeoff on Mao’s statement about China during the War of Resistance against Japan, “Can a communist, who is an internationalist, at the same time be a patriot? We hold that he is, not only can be but must be . . . in wars of national liberation patriotism is applied internationalism.”

The fact of the matter is that the Black nation in the U.S. is not a colony nor will the struggle for Black people’s emancipation take the form of a war of national liberation. When Mao wrote *The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War*, the situation in China was one where it was necessary first to achieve national liberation—liberate the country from the domination of imperialism and its feudal and bourgeois accomplices—and then proceed to the stage of socialist revolution. The struggle between the Chinese proletariat and the Chinese bourgeoisie, between the socialist road and the capitalist road, could only come to the fore after this anti-imperialist, anti-feudal new democratic revolution had been completed.

As Mao pointed out during this first period and within that the War of Resistance against Japanese imperialism in particular, everything must be subordinated to the interests of resistance. This meant that the class struggle itself must be subordinated to the national liberation struggle at that point. Mao summed this up: “We do not deny the class struggle, we adjust it.”

This is not the case for the Black liberation struggle in the U.S., that it must first achieve national liberation before the question of the proletariat vs. the bourgeoisie can come to the fore. In fact, the most basic and the most important class struggle Black workers are involved in is not the struggle against the Black bourgeoisie for leadership of the Black liberation struggle, but the struggle, together with other workers of all nationalities, against the imperialist ruling class in this country. It is only through the overthrow of the U.S. bourgeoisie by the proletariat—the whole working class of the U.S.—that the Black masses can win liberation.

It is not a matter of subordinating class struggle to the national struggle but of developing the struggle against national oppression as part of the overall class struggle.

### RESURRECT 1928-30 COMINTERN POSITION

This leads us to BWC and PRRWO’s mad dash into dogmatism.

Unable to get over with raggedy nationalist lines in the crude form described, BWC and PRRWO had to find a more sophisticated cover for nationalism. So the next step was to resurrect the 1928 and 1930 resolution of the Communist International on the Negro national question, clinging to this most religiously, attempting to pose the reality of some 50 years ago as today's reality, under the guise of upholding Marxism-Leninism.

The general description of the Comintern resolution was correct in those times—that the Black masses “live in compact masses in the South, most of them being peasants and agricultural laborers in a state of semi-serfdom [referring here to the system of sharecropping] settled in the ‘Black Belt’ and constituting the majority of the population, whereas the Negroes in the Northern states are for the most part industrial workers of the lowest categories who have recently come to the various industrial centers from the South (having often fled from there).”

Further the Comintern pointed out that 86 per cent of all Black people lived in the South and “74 per cent live in the rural districts and are dependent almost exclusively upon agriculture for a livelihood.”

In this light it explicitly pointed why self-determination—i.e., the right to political secession—was the highest expression of the Black liberation struggle at that time: “Owing to the peculiar situation in the Black Belt (the fact that the majority of resident Negro population are farmers and agricultural laborers and that the capitalist economic as well as political class rule there is not only a special kind, but to a great extent still has pre-capitalist and semi-colonial features), the right of self-determination of the Negroes as the main slogan of the Communist Party in the Black Belt is appropriate.”

It was estimated also that it would be possible, through revolutionary struggle, for Black people in the Black Belt area of the South to break away from imperialist rule in that region and establish a Black Republic even before the overthrow of the imperialist ruling class throughout the country.

The essence of all this is “Today (1930) this landed property in the hands of white American exploiters constitutes the most important material basis of the entire system of national oppression and serfdom of Negroes in the Black Belt . . . These are the main forms of present Negro slavery in the Black Belt and no breaking of the chains of this slavery is possible without confiscating all the landed property of the white masters. Without this revolutionary measure, without agrarian revolution, the right of self-determination of the Negro population would be only a utopia . . .” (1930 Resolution)

### DOGMATISM TO COVER FOR NATIONALISM

While as stated before this position was essentially correct at that time, it is no longer essentially correct today. BWC and PRRWO used the 1928 and '30 resolution as a cover to promote their bourgeois nationalism and separatism.

In turning the wheel of history backward some 40 years, BWC and PRRWO were reducing the essential thrust of the Black liberation struggle today to agrarian revolution—land to the tiller (40 acres and a mule, or 400 acres and a tractor). They saw proletarian revolution as a means to achieve self-determination—the highest goal of Black people in BWC and PRRWO's view.

Proletarian revolution was kind of a necessary evil. Since Black people couldn't make revolution in the U.S. alone, they needed the struggle of the proletariat to achieve self-determination. This position, of course, may be quite natural and understandable for a revolutionary nationalist, but for a Marxist-Leninist it is unforgivable. But this shows what really was guiding BWC and PRRWO.

And while claiming to uphold the Black liberation struggle this position really cuts the real revolutionary thrust out of the Black liberation movement as essentially a proletarian question today. In fact, the stand of representing the proletariat in its historic struggle to achieve socialism and ultimately communism and liberate all mankind was essentially out of the picture.

### RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION

As BWC and PRRWO moved more into dogmatism, the debate centered directly around the question of the essential thrust of the Black liberation struggle today; interconnected with this was the question of the present material basis of the national oppression of Black people and the Marxist-Leninist approach to the matter of self-determination in multinational states.

The issues of debate were not, as BWC and PRRWO claimed, to uphold the right of self-determination or not to uphold it. Rather it was to take the stand of the proletariat on the Black national question or a bourgeois nationalist view, placing the national question above the class question, advocating separation, fragmentation and the formation of smaller states.

Firstly the RU had always upheld the right of self-determination going all the way back to the publication of *Red Papers 2* written in 1969—although at that time its understanding of the question was still primitive and tended to downplay the fact that the historical homeland of Black people in the U.S. was the Black Belt. Still the RU was correct all along in insisting that secession in the Black Belt is not at the heart of the Black liberation struggle today.

In *Red Papers 5* the RU's stand was laid out most clearly, indicating that the Black Belt was the historic homeland of Black people and the area where a separate state would have to be set up, if that were a necessary step.

BWC and PRRWO, after first uniting with the RU position, then reversed themselves and fell back on the dogma that the essential thrust of the Black people's struggle is an agrarian revolution, "land to the tiller," and that it is liberating the Black Belt South area.

The RU insisted that significant changes had taken place since 1930—such as the fact that the average Black person is not a sharecropper in the rural South but an industrial worker concentrated in the urban areas both North and South.

Further, the RU pointed out that today the majority of Blacks have been dispersed from their historic homeland through a combination of economic compulsion and terrorism of the state and "private" fascist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. The fact of the matter is that the white population presently outnumbers Black people in the Black Belt.

The reconstitution of large numbers of Black people in the Black Belt in order to exercise self-determination, which is what would be involved, could only be done after proletarian revolution throughout the whole country (unless one would consider the ruling class making a "South African solution," forcing Black people into some kind of "Bantustans" in the Black Belt).

The RU did not advocate separatism under the present and foreseeable condition nor the reconstitution of Black people in the Black Belt to wage a war of national liberation.

The RU also drew a clear distinction between the historical and the present day material basis of the oppression of Black people. The oppression of Black people is due in part of course to the whole history of slavery, followed by the period of semi-feudal exploitation as sharecroppers.

But the present material basis is essentially the superexploitation of Black people as wage workers in industry and capitalist agriculture. This is reenforced in the superstructure. It is reflected in the political, economic and social oppression which affects all classes of Black people. But in the face of all the evidence and analysis presented, which they could not refute, BWC and PRRWO continued to insist that the present material basis was still semi-feudal survivals.

#### DON'T FAVOR SEPARATION

It is necessary to stress several points regarding this matter of self-determination. First, there is a difference between upholding the right of self-determination and being in favor of the actual

exercising of the right. Here again BWC combined two into one.

As Lenin pointed out, "The social democrats [communists] will always combat every attempt to influence national self-determination from without by violence and injustice. However, our unreserved recognition of the freedom of self-determination does not in any way commit us to supporting every demand for self-determination" ("National Question and Our Programme," *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 452).

Lenin goes on to point out what this actually means, "After all recognizing the *right* of all citizens to form free association does not at all commit us . . . to *supporting* the formation of any new association; nor does it prevent us from opposing and campaigning against the formation of a given association as an inexpedient and unwise step. We even recognize the *right* of the Jesuits to carry on agitation freely but, we fight (not by police methods of course) against an alliance between the Jesuits and the proletarians" (*ibid.*, p. 453).

In a word, the proletarian stand on self-determination is not the same as the bourgeois nationalist demand for separation. For bourgeois nationalists the national question is an isolated and self-contained question or as BWC put it, self-determination is an "absolute right." For Marxist-Leninists, however, the national question is part of a bigger question—proletarian revolution—and is in that sense subordinated to the interest of the working class to achieve and exercise its overall dictatorship and advance to communism as the ultimate goal.

In a multinational state where there is the direct possibility of a single proletarian revolution throughout the entire state, the right of self-determination is a negative demand. That is, while communists uphold the right of self-determination because it is a genuine right, it is not because communists want to see a separate state created but to create the condition for proletarian unity against the bourgeoisie.

The dialectics of the situation are that by upholding the right of self-determination for Black people the basis of voluntary union of proletarians of all nationalities as well as opposing the forcible oppression of the Black nation by the imperialist ruling class.

Further, under the conditions of all other things being equal—meaning of course the equality of nations, the right of self-determination being a key aspect of equality between nations—the needs of the Black masses would be better met in a larger single socialist state, for it allows for the fuller development of the productive forces and of the struggle against the bourgeoisie. As Lenin has pointed out, "Other conditions being equal, the class-conscious proletariat will always stand for a larger state." (For more on this see the article, "Living Socialism and Dead Dogma-

tism," in *The Communist*, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1, 1977.)

The attempt by BWC and PRRWO to cling to an essentially correct but now outdated analysis of the past could only lead in one direction—"cutting the toes to fit the shoes" (as Mao put it) and into distortions and demagogy of the highest order—to completely depart from Marxism-Leninism and therefore from the real interests and struggles of the masses of Black people and the whole working class.

### *INTO THE ARMS OF CL*

This dogmatist and nationalist line led BWC dead into the arms of one of the most notorious anti-communist outfits posing as Marxist-Leninists to discredit Marxism-Leninism—the Communist League, which for many years was a chief representative of dogmatism and sectarianism which existed within the U.S. communist forces at that time.

In late 1974 CL changed its name to Communist Labor Party (CLP) and became more openly rightist. However, in the time from its inception in 1968 to its name change in '74, it held a consistent and consolidated line that party building must in principle be separated from the mass movement. And while it was formed at a time marked by the high tide of the Black liberation movement, CL stood aloof. This was not only because of its erroneous line on party building but because the actual character of the Black people's struggle does not conform to CL's line: that the heart of the so-called "Negro National Colonial question" lies in the fight of the white and Black members of the "Negro Nation" in the Black Belt South for independence. CL also held the infamous line that the basic industrial proletariat was the social base for fascism in this country.

In 1974 BWC and PRRWO joined with CL, in its National Continuations Committee, a supposed organizing committee to build a new party. In reality it was only CL and a very few forces directly under its wing and for a time BWC and PRRWO.

### *SCURRYING FROM CL'S RIDICULOUS LINE*

However as CL's founding party congress moved nearer and nearer, its line got so ridiculous, particularly at the point when CL began stating openly that capitalism had not been fully restored in the Soviet Union, that BWC's leadership, fearing its own political Watergate, quickly turned around and drew up a full polemic touching on all major questions, denouncing CL as thoroughgoing revisionists.

This move to attack CL and leave its National Continuations Committee—which some BWC leaders had called the road of Le-

nin and Stalin to the party today—was propelled not by Marxist-Leninist conviction, but by the fact CL would give BWC and PRRWO no special place within its party.

Further the BWC leadership in particular felt that for their own personal interests more might be gained by cutting CL loose and charting an independent course. BWC then declared it had led the fight to expose CL's line. As BWC had got wind that CL's latest move to run its line on the Soviet Union would be bad publicity, BWC quickly ran to write a 123 page polemic against CL. A member of PRRWO happened to be in Detroit before BWC had a meeting with CL, and this PRRWO leader quickly summed up that affiliation with CL was bad for business and joined in with BWC in denouncing CL.

However, after the CL episode, BWC's only self-criticism was that it had not investigated more of CL's line than its position on party building. BWC still said that CL still deserved credit for raising the question of party building.

### *A PERVERSE NEGATION OF THE NEGATION*

In understanding the road that BWC and PRRWO followed, taking refuge in nationalism, it is critical to understand that nationalism rooted in dogmatism was a kind of a perverse and backward negation of a negation for these groups.

As noted before, during the early period of the contemporary revolutionary movement there was the line that treated the struggle of the oppressed nationalities in the U.S. as similar to that of a colonial country. This line held that the oppressed nationalities would make revolution by themselves or with a few petty bourgeois white supporters, i.e. John Brown. "Black Communists Are Revolutionary Nationalists" was another attempt at such analysis in a bit more sophisticated way. The dogmatist line summarized earlier (insisting on upholding the Comintern Resolutions of 1928 and '30) was an attempt to superimpose the situation of a colony, as in Africa, Asia and Latin America, onto the U.S. situation, using a still more sophisticated line.

Further as BWC and PRRWO first came to Marxism it was off the high tide of the struggle of the mass movement, especially of the oppressed nationalities, and they fancied themselves as the ones who could get out there and do it—really build the people's struggles. Their attitude toward groups like the RU was that they were a bunch of "white boys" who had read theory—and some of it was pretty good—but "they don't and can't link up with the people's struggle like we can."

Later in the turn to dogmatism what arose was nothing but the bourgeois line of Booker T. Washington in a Marxist-Leninist guise: the way to get ahead is to get an education and show them

we are more educated—know more theory in this case—than they are (twice as good) and until we get this education we'll always be led around by the white folks.

While the study of theory in its own right is of utmost importance, it cannot be approached from this kind of bourgeois outlook if any good is to come out of it. Nor can the study of theory be approached one-sidedly—completely divorced from the question of how to apply it to actual mass struggle.

This bourgeois (nationalist) line goes hand and hand with the line that when the CP went revisionist it simply sold out the Black people's struggle—and even that the *reason* it went revisionist is that it sold out Black people. The fact of the matter is that the betrayal by the CPUSA meant the all-around betrayal of the working class and the American people's struggle generally, including, as an important part, the Black people's struggle.

#### OL SNIFFS AFTER BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM

A word must be said here regarding the role of the October League (OL)—now Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist)—in this major struggle which represented a major watershed break with bourgeois ideology and a significant advance in basing the struggle on the stand of the proletariat and no other class. Rather than go against the tide of bourgeois nationalism, OL outdid BWC and PRRWO in tailing after bourgeois nationalism ideologically and tailing bourgeois nationalists and reformists among Black people, like Hosea Williams and Maynard Jackson in Atlanta, Jesse Jackson and others around the country. OL sucked up to a whole array of nationalist forces, even some who left BWC because they feared it was going multinational. Virtually every nationalist slander that came out against RU found its way into the pages of the *Call*—the OL's main organ for rumor mongering. And BWC, while supposedly criticizing RU "rightism," had a kind word or comradely criticism for the then unabashedly rightist OL.

Instead of dealing with the decisive questions of ideological and political line raised in the struggle between the RU and BWC/PRRWO, OL joined with BWC and PRRWO in reducing these important questions of line to a matter of bourgeois psychology—guilt, blame, etc. which lets the ruling class dead off the hook and sets the proletariat off the track.

As the RU pointed out at the time, the issues that were being debated were certainly not who is more "messed up," the communists of the oppressed nationalities or the white communists, as BWC and PRRWO, with OL chiming in, tried to pose the matter.

The question was one of ideological and political line. And it was no accident that the OL would line up where it did. For the

OL leadership had itself resurrected the "Black Belt Is Key" line in recent years (and had through flips from "left" to openly rightist lines rigidly held to party building as the central task all along).

Earlier in Students for a Democratic Society and right after it split in 1969, it was some of these same OL leaders who tried to forge the "leading" Marxist-Leninist circle by linking up with forces putting forward the strategy of "white skin privilege," in something called the Revolutionary Youth Movement-2 (RYM2).

At each point the role of those who head the OL (CP-ML) has been to unite all who can be united against whatever represents the road forward.

So much for OL—CP (ML). Back to BWC and PRRWO. Because these groups never scientifically summed up the line that led them to link up with CL in the first place, they continued in their dogmatism and nationalism, taking on the worst Trotskyite features, turning inward, splitting and dividing and further dividing, while many honest rank and file members of BWC and PRRWO got demoralized and took a "rain check" on trying to make revolution.

#### RWC DEVELOPMENT

On the other hand, one of the groups which emerged out of the splits within the BWC, the Revolutionary Workers Congress, did, on the basis of taking part in mass struggle and applying Marxism-Leninism to sum up previous experience, begin to get back on the right track. In particular, over the last year, it played an important role in the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC). Recently many members of the RWC came to see more clearly the essence of the errors that shipwrecked the BWC and to recognize that while there was the problem of knowledge and ignorance back then, the main problem was the consolidation of an opportunist line on BWC and PRRWO's part, in opposition to the proletarian line which was put forth by the RU.

On this basis the RU went on to play the major role in the formation of the Revolutionary Communist Party, the Party of the U.S. working class, armed with a correct line.

#### IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL LINE DECISIVE

The struggle between the BWC and PRRWO on the one hand and RU on the other was in fact a struggle between Marxism and incorrect lines rooted in nationalism; it was a struggle over burning questions of the class struggle, matters which had to be resolved on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, in order to build on the advances that had been made and make a leap forward. This struggle and its outcome demonstrate once again the truth that ideo-

logical and political line determines everything.

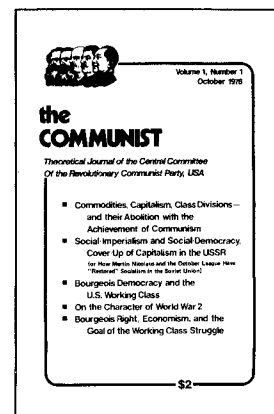
The line of BWC and PRRWO which was rooted in nationalism could only lead to degeneration. On the other hand, the Revolutionary Communist Party, in whose formation the RU played the major part in 1975, has continued to advance, bearing out the correctness of its line.

In closing, one argument that sometimes comes up is that yes, BWC and PRRWO fell into nationalism but it was caused by RU's "white chauvinism." This is bourgeois logic pure and simple, not Marxist dialectics, and liquidates the all important question of ideology.

The heart of the matter is that bourgeois nationalism, chauvinism, etc. are deviations in the direction of bourgeois ideology—none of them is proletarian ideology and there is no basis for opposing one form of bourgeois ideology with another; bourgeois ideology can only be opposed with proletarian ideology. And, most fundamentally, the fact is that the RU's line was not "chauvinism" but proletarian internationalism—it was the bourgeois nationalism of BWC and PRRWO (and others) that led these groups to brand this internationalism "chauvinism." This, as has been said, was clearly shown in the direction that was taken by BWC and PRRWO on the one hand and the RU (and the RCP) on the other.

For many of us, it is clear how this struggle contributed to the development of a true vanguard of the working class, the Revolutionary Communist Party. And this understanding will help contribute to the continuing task of building the Party, in close connection with carrying out what is stated in the Party *Programme* on its central task: "The central task of the Revolutionary Communist Party today, as the Party of the U.S. working class, is to build the struggle, class consciousness and revolutionary unity of the working class and develop its leadership of a broad united front against the U.S. imperialists, in the context of the worldwide united front against imperialism aimed at the rulers of the two superpowers. As this is developed, together with the development of a revolutionary situation, the question of mobilizing the masses for the armed insurrection will then come to the fore as the immediate question."

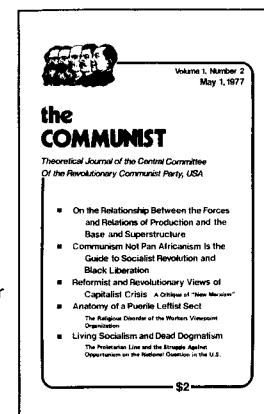
## back issues:



VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1:  
Commodities, Capitalism, Class Divisions—and their Abolition with the Achievement of Communism; Social-Imperialism and Social-Democracy, Cover-Up of Capitalism in the USSR (or How Martin Nicolaus and the October League Have "Restored" Socialism in the Soviet Union); Bourgeois Democracy and the U.S. Working Class; On the Character of World War 2; and Bourgeois Right, Economism, and the Goal of the Working Class Struggle.

### VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2:

On the Relationship Between the Forces and Relations of Production and the Base and Superstructure; Communism Not Pan Africanism Is the Guide to Socialist Revolution and Black Liberation; Reformist and Revolutionary Views of Capitalist Crisis: A Critique of "New Marxism"; Anatomy of a Puerile Leftist Sect: The Religious Disorder of the Workers Viewpoint Organization; and Living Socialism and Dead Dogmatism: The Proletarian Line and the Struggle Against Opportunism on the National Question in the U.S.



—still available

## subscriptions:

Subscriptions to *The Communist* are \$8 for four issues.

Send orders, prepaid, to: RCP Publications  
PO Box 3486  
Merchandise Mart  
Chicago, IL 60654





Volume 2, Number 1  
Fall / Winter 1977

# the COMMUNIST

*Theoretical Journal of the Central Committee  
Of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*

- **On the Origins of World War 2**
- **Against Sweezy's Political Economy**  
Reformist and Revolutionary  
Views of Capitalist Crisis, Part 2
- **Marxism, Nationalism and the  
Task of Party Building**  
History and Lessons of the  
National Liaison Committee

**\$2**

the  
COMMUNIST

Volume 2, Number 1

RCP

Published and Distributed by  
RCP Publications  
P.O. Box 3486 Merchandise Mart  
Chicago Illinois 60654

