

## II. The Revolutionary Party and its Characteristics

The communist conception of the vanguard party is modeled on the experience of the Bolsheviks and its generalization by the Comintern and Trotsky's Fourth International. The Comintern stressed that revolutionaries always have to take the concrete circumstances into account.

*„The organization of the party must be adapted to the conditions and the purpose of its activity. (...) There can be no one absolutely correct and unalterable form of organization for the communist parties. The conditions of the proletarian class struggle are subject to change in an unceasing process of transformation and the organization of the proletarian vanguard must always seek the appropriate forms which correspond to these changes. Similarly, the parties in the different countries must be adapted to the historically determined peculiarities of the country concerned.“*<sup>56</sup>

Obviously it makes a big difference if a revolutionary party has to work underground under illegal conditions or if it faces the conditions of a relatively stable bourgeois democracy; if it operates under a revolutionary, non-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary situation; if it has representatives in the trade union leadership or in parliament; if it is undertaking entry work inside a reformist party; if it is small or large; etc.

However, the need to take concrete circumstances into account does not alter the fact that communists must build the party or the pre-party organization on the basis of a number of principles. *“But this differentiation has definite limits. Despite all peculiarities there is a similarity in the conditions of the proletarian class struggle in the different countries and in the various phases of the proletarian revolution which is of fundamental importance for the international communist movement. It creates a common basis for the organization of communist parties in all countries.“*<sup>57</sup>

Below we will summarize the most important principles of the Bolshevik-Communists' conception of the vanguard party. These principles apply to the revolutionary party as well as the Bolshevik pre-party organization, albeit with some modifications as we will outline below. Hence, when we speak below about the principles of the party, if not stated otherwise, our intention always applies to the pre-party organization as well.

---

<sup>56</sup> Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 257

<sup>57</sup> Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 258

## Unity of Theory and Practice

The underlying method of the party's work is the Marxist principle of the *unity of theory and practice*. The one cannot exist without the other. Theory points to practice – otherwise it is only a lifeless dogma. And practice points to theory – otherwise it is blind activism without strategic direction.

In fact, theory would not exist without (past) practice. In other words, theory is generalized past practice, as Trotsky once pointed out:

*„To be guided by theory is to be guided by generalizations based on all the preceding practical experience of humanity in order to cope as successfully as possible with one or another practical problem of the present day. Thus, through theory we discover precisely the primacy of practice as a whole over particular aspects of practice.“*<sup>58</sup>

From this it follows that the character of the Marxist theory must be structured and conceptualized according to the needs of practice and, at the same time, practice must be directed by theory. Such a dialectic-materialist way of understanding the relationship between theory and practice is the only way to achieve a correct insight into the party's tasks.

Abram Deborin, the leading Marxist philosopher in the USSR in the 1920s before the Stalinist clampdown, formulated the relationship between theory and practice very well.

*„In order to reshape reality it is necessary that theory becomes reality, that it becomes a fertile force, in one word that theory becomes practice. Marxism is such a theory, distinct from all others, a philosophical Weltanschauung, which demands the conversion of theory into practice as well as of practice into theory. Marxism does not know a separation between theory and practice. The dialectical unity between theory and practice demands, that the theory is practical and the practice is explained by theory and becomes itself theory.“*<sup>59</sup>

Similarly did Ivan K. Luppol, another influential Soviet philosopher of the Deborin School, express the dialectic-materialist method in his book on Lenin's philosophy as *“the methodology of knowledge on the basis of action and the methodology of action on the basis of knowledge”*.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, the unity of theory and practice is essential for the whole modus operandi of the revolutionary party or pre-party organization in order to form a collective of working class militants who despise passive propagandism and who, at the same time, are ideologically hardened to find the correct orientation under the conditions of difficult struggles and numerous pressures of class enemies outside and inside the workers' movement. Leon Trotsky formulated this basic truth in a letter to the Spanish youth in 1932:

---

58 Leon Trotsky: *Philosophical Tendencies of Bureaucratism* (1928); in: Leon Trotsky: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1928-29), p. 396

59 Abram Deborin: *Lenin – der kämpfende Materialist*, 1924, S. 11

60 Iwan K. Luppol: *Lenin und die Philosophie. Zur Frage des Verhältnisses der Philosophie zur Revolution* (1928), S. 115

*„The strength of Marxism is in the unity of scientific theory with revolutionary struggle. On these two rails, the education of the communist youth should progress. The study of Marxism outside the revolutionary struggle can create bookworms but not revolutionaries. Participation in the revolutionary struggle without the study of Marxism is unavoidably full of danger, uncertainty, half-blindness. To study Marxism as a Marxist is possible only by participating in the life and struggle of the class; revolutionary theory is verified by practice, and practice is clarified by theory. Only the truths of Marxism that are conquered in struggle enter the mind and the blood.“*<sup>61</sup>

The old companion of Marx and Engels, Wilhelm Liebknecht, summarized the task of the revolutionary party very well in the formula: *„Study, Propagate, Organize“*.

## Devotion of the Party's Militants

Uniting theory and practice means first that the militants must not only *agree* with the goals of their party but also *fight* for them by all means the organization considers necessary. This means that it requires total dedication of its members:

*„The revolution demands complete devotion from a man.“*<sup>62</sup>

An organization, which lacks this fundamental requirement of complete dedication of its members to the revolutionary work, is lost for the cause of the proletarian liberation struggle. With such an organization, any agreement about a program or a theoretical analysis will be meaningless because it would constitute only an abstract sharing of views without any consequences for the practice. The party's members must be able to withstand all forms of pressure from political enemies and "socialist" rivals. It was no accident that the Bolsheviks were often called by others and called themselves *“hard as rock.”*<sup>63</sup> Hence a decisive criterion which differentiates a revolutionary-proletarian from a petty-bourgeois party is the attitude of its members towards the political and practical demands of the liberation struggle. Trotsky expressed this strongly in a speech on the foundation of the Fourth International:

*„Our party demands each of us, totally and completely. Let the philistines hunt their own individuality in empty space. For a revolutionary to give himself entirely to the party signifies finding himself. Yes, our party takes each one of us wholly. But in return it gives to every one of us the highest happiness: the consciousness that one participates in the building of a better future, that one carries on his shoulders a particle of the fate of mankind, and that one's life will not have been lived in vain. The fidelity to the cause of the toilers requires from us the highest devotion to our international party. The party,*

---

61 Leo Trotzki: An die spanische Jugend (1932), in: Revolution und Bürgerkrieg in Spanien, Band 1, pp. 164-165; in English language: Leon Trotsky: To the Spanish Youth

62 Leon Trotsky: Letter to a Friend in France (1939), in: Leon Trotsky: On France, Monad Press, New York 1979, S. 210

63 Lenin himself pointed this out: *„It will be a stubborn war. We knew how to work during the long years preceding the revolution. Not for nothing do they say we are as hard as rock.“* (V. I. Lenin: Political Notes (1908), in: LCW Vol. 13, p. 446)

of course, can also be mistaken. By common effort we will correct its mistakes. In its ranks can penetrate unworthy elements. By common effort we will eliminate them. New thousands who will enter its ranks tomorrow will probably be deprived of necessary education. By common effort we will elevate their revolutionary level. But we will never forget that our party is now the greatest lever of history. Separated from this lever, everyone of us is nothing. With this lever in hand, we are all.”<sup>64</sup>

On a different occasion he explained to a sympathizing lawyer who could not bring himself to commit completely to the revolution:

“I said to myself, after having observed them closely, that comrades who are capable of such initiative and such personal sacrifice are revolutionaries, or can become such, because it is in this way, Comrade Paz, that revolutionaries are formed. You can have revolutionaries both wise and ignorant, intelligent or mediocre. But you can't have revolutionaries who lack the willingness to smash obstacles, who lack devotion and the spirit of sacrifice. (...) I will not dwell upon the record of the Russian party in times of illegal work. The person who belonged to the movement belonged not only with his material means, but with his body and soul. He identified openly with the cause he served, and it was by such a process of education that we were able to create the fighters who became the many “axes” of the proletarian revolution.”<sup>65</sup>

Gerard Rosenthal, one of Trotsky's French collaborators, reported in his memoirs that Trotsky was irritated by the Western socialist's lack of revolutionary dedication:

„Trotsky's chief interest were the human qualities of a revolutionary. ‘We can lead and win the revolution only with people who dedicate themselves completely to the struggle. The Russian revolutionaries subordinated their private life consistently to the needs of the political struggle,’ Contacts with Western comrades disappointed him. ‘You cannot think about a revolution with people who put their jobs first, than their family and after all this the revolution.’”<sup>66</sup>

James P. Cannon, the historic leader of American Communism and later Trotskyism, summarized the Marxist approach well in a pamphlet which was published as a summary of the faction struggle against the petty-bourgeois inner-party opposition around Max Shachtman:

„Our conception of the party is radically different. For us the party must be a combat organisation which leads a determined struggle for power. The Bolshevik party which leads the struggle for power needs not only internal democracy. It also requires an imperious centralism and an iron discipline in action. It requires a proletarian composition conforming to its proletarian program. The Bolshevik party cannot be led by dilettantes whose real interests and real lives are in another and alien world. It requires an active professional leadership, composed of individuals democratically selected and democratically controlled, who devote their entire lives to the party, and who find in the

64 Leon Trotsky: On the Founding of the Fourth International (1938), in: Fourth International, Vol. 1, No. 5 (1940), pp. 141-142

65 Leon Trotsky: How Revolutionaries are formed (1929), in: Trotsky Writings, Bd. 1929, pp. 192-193

66 Quoted in Leo Trotzki 1879-1940. In den Augen von Zeitzeugen, p. 120 (Our translation)

*party and in its multiform activities in a proletarian environment, complete personal satisfaction. For the proletarian revolutionist the party is the concentrated expression of his life purpose, and he is bound to it for life and death. He preaches and practices party patriotism, because he knows that his socialist ideal cannot be realised without the party. In his eyes the crime of crimes is disloyalty or irresponsibility toward the party. The proletarian revolutionist is proud of his party. He defends it before the world on all occasions. The proletarian revolutionist is a disciplined man, since the party cannot exist as a combat organisation without discipline. When he finds himself in the minority, he loyally submits to the decision of the party and carries out its decisions, while he awaits new events to verify the disputes or new opportunities to discuss them again.”*<sup>67</sup>

This issue is of particular importance in the imperialist world, given the lack of revolutionary situations and traditions. Trotsky, who had the opportunity to compare the revolutionary workers' movement in Russia with their counterpart in the West, saw the lack of such revolutionary dedication as a central weakness of the Western socialist forces. On the occasion of the death of the old Bolshevik fighter Kote Tsintsadze Trotsky pointed this problem out:

*„The Communist parties in the West have not yet brought up fighters of Tsintsadze's type. This is their besetting weakness, determined by historical reasons but nonetheless a weakness. The Left Opposition in the Western countries is not an exception in this respect and it must well take note of it.”*<sup>68</sup>

If Trotsky was worried by the lack of revolutionary fighters in Western Europe in the 1920s, what would he say today when there are far fewer revolutionary situations than at Trotsky's time and hence far fewer opportunities to develop a generation of dedicated communist militants? In fact, the whole so-called left is full of activists who rarely forget to think about personal achievements and career. It is one of the most urgent tasks to create a new generation of communist fighters who are completely dedicated to revolutionary work.

This development has been strengthened by the substantial growth of the urban middle class in the imperialist countries and the orientation of most centrist organizations to those and related layers or those hoping to join them (university students, intellectuals, highly educated sectors of the working class, etc.). As a result, most centrist and reformist organizations in Europe and the USA – and in particular their leaderships – have an inferior class composition, i.e., they are dominated by people with a background in the progressive white and

---

67 James P. Cannon: *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (1940), Pathfinder Press, New York 1972, pp. 14-15

68 Leon Trotsky: *On the fresh grave of Kote Tsintsadze* (1930); in: *Writings 1930-31*, p. 123. See also Leon Trotsky: *What to Expect from the Sixth Congress* (1928), in: *Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1928-29), p. 155. Tsintsadze was an Old Bolshevik of Georgian origin, who participated – like Kamo – in numerous armed raids at the behest of the party. During the civil war he became the head of the Cheka in the Caucasus and supported Trotsky's Left Opposition from the beginning in 1923. He died in 1930 under the harsh conditions of exile to which the Stalin regime sentenced him. (See: Boris Souvarine: *Stalin - Anmerkungen zur Geschichte des Bolschewismus*, Verlag Bernard & Graefe, München 1980, pp. 111-114, 449 and 524.

middle class milieu. Such an orientation usually starts early, during the years of university study, when people who refuse to orient towards a professional carrier are considered as outcasts.

This “European type of revolutionary” has developed during the past decades among various university student movements which have constituted the main breeding ground for recruitment of centrist and reformist forces. Their class composition was not corrected by orienting their recruitment towards the lower strata of the working class and oppressed.

The result of this orientation is personified in such left-wing intellectuals as Tariq Ali, Henri Weber, André Gorz, and Robin Blackburn who for some time all combined a professional carrier and “Marxist” politics before entirely dropping out of activism. A revolutionary movement cannot be based on such rotten elements. It is one of the most urgent tasks to create a new generation of communist fighters who are completely dedicated to revolutionary work and who are repelled by those who claim to be “fighting the system from within” by ascending the carrier ladder.

## Program First

First and foremost, the party needs a firm understanding of its theoretical foundation and, based on this, a revolutionary program. Without a program it has no political compass, no political orientation. Lenin famously stated in 1902: *„Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.“*<sup>69</sup>

A program contains an analysis of the capitalist society in a given political epoch, a statement about the general socialist goals, an outline of the strategy for the proletariat to take power as well as of the most important tactics and demands. Hence a program must be what the Comintern and the Fourth International called a “*Transitional Program*”, i.e., a program which shows the road from the present situation to the seizure of power. In discussions with comrades-in-arms, Trotsky explained the importance of such a program:

*„Now, what is the party? In what does the cohesion consist? This cohesion is a common understanding of the events, of the tasks, and this common understanding - that is the program of the party. Just as modern workers more than the barbarian cannot work without tools so in the party the program is the instrument. Without the program every worker must improvise his tool, find improvised tools, and one contradicts another. Only when we have the vanguard organized upon the basis of common conceptions then we can act.“*<sup>70</sup>

Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, the first scientific socialist

69 V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 369. Lenin later repeated this principle again and again: *„Without a programme a party cannot be an integral political organism capable of pursuing its line whatever turn events may take.“* (V. I. Lenin: The Election Campaign and the Election Platform (1911); in: CW Vol. 17, p. 280)

70 Leon Trotsky: Discussions with Trotsky on the Transitional Program (1938), in: Fourth International, Vol. 7 No. 2 (1946), p.53

program, soon after they joined the *Communist League* in 1847. The Second International had important national programs like the Germans' "Erfurter Program" or the French program which was written by Marx. Similarly, the Russian Marxists adopted an elaborate program in 1903 and, when the circumstances changed in 1917, Lenin first wrote the so-called "*April Theses*" as a kind of alternative program for the revolutionary period before October 1917. In March 1919, the party officially changed its program and adapted it to the new circumstances. This program was also a guiding line for the Comintern and its programmatic resolutions from 1919 to 1922. However, soon after the Fourth World Congress in 1922 had decided to elaborate a program, the Comintern degenerated under the weight of the Stalinist bureaucracy and this project was first delayed and finally terminated and replaced by a centrist Stalinist program in 1928. It was up to Trotsky's Fourth International, to adopt in 1938 – after a series of resolutions and programmatic documents had been elaborated in the preceding years – a communist program based on the transitional method.

Only if communists base themselves on such a revolutionary theory and program, they will be able to develop concrete and flexible tactics.

*„Marxism is a method of historical analysis, of political orientation, and not a mass of decisions prepared in advance. Leninism is the application of this method in the conditions of an exceptional historical epoch. It is precisely this union of the peculiarities of the epoch and the method that determines that courageous, self-assured policy of brusque turns of which Lenin gave us the finest models, and which he illuminated theoretically and generalized on more than one occasion.“*<sup>71</sup>

It is a hallmark of centrism that it refuses to elaborate a program which summarizes its principles as well as their application in a given political conjuncture. As a result, all the major centrist tendencies (Morenoites, CWI, IMT, IST, etc.) exist for decades without a program. The late Tony Cliff, one of the heroes of Anglo-Saxon pragmatism under the disguise of "Trotskyism," liked to exculpate his tendency's hostility to elaborating a program by stating that "*it is better to have a gun instead of the blueprint of a gun.*" As a result, the SWP/IST never had either a gun or a blueprint of one. When they faced volatile situations of class struggle they repeatedly failed to take a principled revolutionary position, but rather capitulated to alien class forces (e.g., failing to defend semi-colonial countries like Argentina 1982, Iraq 1991 and 2003 or Afghanistan in 2001 against imperialist attacks; failing to agitate for a general strike during the crucial British miners' strike in 1984/85; failing to defend degenerated workers state against imperialism like Korea in 1950-53, etc.)

Sometimes centrists justify their refusal to elaborate a program for the present period by referring to Trotsky's program of 1938 as a sufficient basis. These "Marxists" don't understand that a program is the application of the doctrine of class struggle to a concrete political conjuncture resulting in a set of strategies and tactics to give the workers' vanguard a clear orientation. Hence, when the

---

71 Leon Trotsky: *The New Course* (1923), in: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), S. 96

relation of forces changes between the classes and a new political conjuncture opens – which usually is caused by decisive events in national or international politics – Marxists must adapt the program to the new conditions. Otherwise the program cannot function as a guide for action but is rather a lifeless, sectarian declaration of timeless dogmas.

As Trotsky warned – drawing the lessons of the failed German Revolution of 1923 – a party which does not keep in step with the developments of class struggle will lose its programmatic clarity and hence become, involuntarily, an instrument of non-proletarian class forces.

*„A revolutionary party is subjected to the pressure of other political forces. At every given stage of its development the party elaborates its own methods of counteracting and resisting this pressure. During a tactical turn and the resulting internal regroupments and frictions, the party’s power of resistance becomes weakened. From this the possibility always arises that the internal groupings in the party, which originate from the necessity of a turn in tactics, may develop far beyond the original controversial points of departure and serve as a support for various class tendencies. To put the case more plainly: the party that does not keep step with the historical tasks of its own class becomes, or runs the risk of becoming, the indirect tool of other classes.“*<sup>72</sup>

A pre-condition for the political health of a party is to fight against tendencies inside the organization which reflect non-proletarian class forces and which attack the party’s program and method. Naturally, in any healthy organization which does not insulate itself from the living class struggle there will be differences. Such differences can in one way or another express opportunist or sectarian tendencies which reflect the pressure of alien classes.<sup>73</sup> However the party and its leadership must not remain passive and indifferent to such developments. It must react pro-actively and try to convince those members who promote such deviations and at least make sure that they do not achieve a dominating influence inside the party. This is particularly important in the early phases of party building, where programmatic clarity represents one of the key weapons to win militants of the workers vanguard. Trotsky remarked on this:

*„The philistines will sneer over the fact that we, a tiny minority, are constantly occupied with internal demarcations. But that will not disturb us. Precisely because we are a tiny minority whose entire strength lies in ideological clarity, we must be especially implacable towards dubious friends on the right and on the left.“*<sup>74</sup>

Hence, Marxists reject the currently fashionable model of a “pluralist left party”

---

72 Leon Trotsky: The Lessons of October (1924); in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25), p. 204

73 As a side-note we remark that, even those passive sects who try to insulate themselves from the pressures of class struggle by abstaining from it, even those sects pay a high political prize for their isolation from the masses and sooner or later will nevertheless fall victim to alien class pressures since human beings don’t and can’t exist in isolation.

74 Leon Trotsky: The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition (1929); in: Writings 1929, p. 298



which rejects such programmatic clarity in order “to become bigger.” Such a rotten method was characteristic for the social democratic Second International and led to the dominating influence of the reformist wing and the party’s capitulation to the pressures of imperialism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks considered this one of the key lessons of their struggle and the Second International’s failure at the beginning of WWI in 1914.

*„Typical of the socialist parties of the epoch of the Second International was one that tolerated in its midst an opportunism built up in decades of the “peaceful” period, an opportunism that kept itself secret, adapting itself to the revolutionary workers, borrowing their Marxist terminology, and evading any clear cleavage of principles. This type has outlived itself.”*<sup>75</sup>

In another article Lenin stated: *„There is nothing more puerile, contemptible and harmful, than the idea current among revolutionary philistines, namely, that differences should be “forgotten” “in view” of the immediate common aim in the approaching revolution. People whom the experience of the 1905-14 decade has not taught the folly of this idea are hopeless from the revolutionary standpoint.”*<sup>76</sup>

Hence, the task of Marxists is not to unite as many workers as possible irrespective of their political views but to unite as many workers as possible around a revolutionary program.

*„In the school of Lenin we all learned that Bolsheviks must direct their efforts toward unity on the basis of a revolutionary and proletarian political line.”*<sup>77</sup>

## Propaganda and Agitation

In itself, elaborating a program alone is not a goal. It is rather insufficient if it not transmitted to the working class and its vanguard in order to educate and organize them in the ranks of the party. Hence one of the key activities of the revolutionary party is the systematic spreading of its goals and methods of struggle as they are outlined in Marxist theory and in its program. This is usually done by the means of propaganda and agitation in the organization’s paper, leaflets, public speeches, etc. Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, defined propaganda as “many ideas for a few” and agitation as “few ideas for many”. In other words, propaganda explains in detail the various aspects of the Marxist analysis, tactics, and necessary actions concerning a given issue. Agitation, on the other hand, focuses on one or a few important aspects of a given issue and outlines the conclusions of Marxists about them.

However, the underlying principle for the Marxists’ program as well as propaganda and agitation is “*Speak out what is!*” This means that Marxists must

---

75 V. I. Lenin: What Next? On the Tasks Confronting the Workers’ Parties with Regard to Opportunism and Social-Chauvinism (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, p. 110

76 V. I. Lenin: The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, p. 379

77 United Opposition: Declaration of the Eighty Four; in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27), p. 235

not hide the truth so as not to offend reformists or challenge the backward consciousness of the masses. Trotsky summarized this approach well when he wrote *"I believe that the Marxist, the revolutionary, policy in general is a very simple policy: 'Speak out what is! Don't lie! Tell the truth!' It is a very simple policy."*<sup>78</sup> Similarly Rosa Luxemburg stated in a speech at the Socialist Internationals' Copenhagen congress in 1904: *"Nothing is more revolutionary than recognizing and stating what is."*<sup>79</sup>

Naturally, tactical flexibility and pedagogic adaption are also very important in the revolutionaries' daily work. But this must not lead to softening, hiding, or even contradicting Marxist principles.

*„The misfortune lies precisely in the fact that the epigones of Bolshevik strategy extol maneuvers and flexibility to the young communist parties as the quintessence of this strategy, thereby tearing them away from their historical axis and principled foundation and turning them to unprincipled combinations which, only too often, resemble a squirrel whirling in its cage. It was not flexibility that served (nor should it serve today) as the basic trait of Bolshevism but rather granite hardness. It was precisely of this quality, for which its enemies and opponents reproached it, that Bolshevism was always justly proud. Not blissful "optimism" but intransigence, vigilance, revolutionary distrust, and the struggle for every hand's breadth of independence -- these are the essential traits of Bolshevism."*<sup>80</sup>

Hence, Marxists refuse the opportunistic maneuvers of various centrists who claim – in order to appease the labor bureaucrats – that the liberation struggle can win by non-violent means or who suggest that the reformist leaders could be convinced via pressure from below to take the road of consistent class struggle (e.g., CWI, IMT, IST, Morenoites).

It is the program and the attitude of socialists to it as a whole, as well as its central position, which determines the program's character. Denying, hiding, or distorting the programmatic conclusions disqualifies a socialist as a Marxist; failing to take a correct position on the important developments in world politics and class struggle equally disqualifies a socialist as a Marxist. Trotsky was absolutely unambiguous on this issue:

*„But thereby you admit that Brandler-Thalheimer are not revolutionists, because revolutionists are determined and recognizable by their attitude toward the basic issues of the world revolution."*<sup>81</sup>

The program is the basis of the party. But the character of the program must be

78 The Case of Leon Trotsky. Report of Hearings on the Charges Made Against Him in the Moscow Trials by the Preliminary Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made Against Trotsky in the Moscow Trials (1937), New York 1968, p. 384

79 Rosa Luxemburg: Rede über die sozialistische Taktik (beim Internationalen Sozialistenkongress vom 14. bis 20. August 1904 in Amsterdam); in: Gesammelte Werke Band 1.2, p. 446 (translation from German language by us)

80 Leon Trotsky: The Third International After Lenin. The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, pp. 140-141

81 Leon Trotsky: Once Again on Brandler-Thalheimer (1929); in: Trotsky Writings 1929, p. 155

such that it already contains the most important tactical conclusions. A party must always be in a position to explain to the workers on which side of the barricades they should stand in a given struggle and by which means they shall attempt to win.

A favorite argument of reformist and centrist bureaucrats against the Marxists is that it is “*untimely*” to propagate revolutionary tactics and that this would be “*too much ahead*” of the masses. This is a standard argument of those who Lenin characterized as “*Chvostists*” (“*Tailists*”) in the Russian social democratic movement. If socialists only repeat to the masses those insights and conclusions which they already know, why do the masses need them? Obviously, the masses were capable of achieving the necessary insights on their own. In that case, it would be better if these “*socialist*” organizations dissolve themselves. However the truth is that the vanguard and the masses always look for analysis and perspectives which, as they believe, correspond with their experience. If Marxists are not capable of helping the workers deepen their understanding, they will look for other political forces to offer them political explanations and alternatives. Only fools believe that the masses reject views and positions which are advanced relative to their current consciousness. In fact, this “*argument*” of the reformists and centrists is only a pretext for their opportunist adaption to the liberal bourgeoisie and labor bureaucracy.

Lenin – whose party demonstrated to the world that propagating revolutionary tactics will enable the party to win over first the vanguard and then the masses and lead them to victory – sharply rejected such opportunist positions:

*“For the present it is our task to jointly propagandise the correct tactics and leave it to events to indicate the tempo of the movement, and the modifications in the mainstream (according to nation, locality and trade). (...) As for declaring propaganda of revolution “inopportune”, this objection rests on a confusion of concepts usual among socialists in the Romance countries: they confuse the beginning of a revolution with open and direct propaganda for revolution. In Russia, nobody places the beginning of the 1905 Revolution before January 9, 1905, whereas revolutionary propaganda, in the very narrow sense of the word, the propaganda and the preparation of mass action, demonstrations, strikes, barricades, had been conducted for years prior to that. The old Iskra, for instance, began to propagandise the matter at the end of 1900, as Marx did in 1847, when nobody thought as yet of the beginning of a revolution in Europe.”*<sup>82</sup>

Systematically combining the program with tactics, propagating these tactics, and implementing them where possible constitute the only way the revolutionary party can influence and finally win over the vanguard and the masses. This is the only possible way to unite theory and practice.

---

<sup>82</sup> V. I. Lenin: Revolutionary Marxists at the International Socialist Conference, September 5- 8, 1915 (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, pp. 391-392

## Communist Work among the Masses

Since the task of the revolutionary party is to lead the working class to socialist revolution, its work must aim to first win over the vanguard and then the proletarian masses. The Comintern stressed the importance of work among the mass:

*"Successful leadership presupposes moreover the closest contact with the proletarian masses. Without such contact the leaders will not lead the masses but, at best, only follow them. These organic contacts are to be sought in the communist party organization through democratic centralism."*<sup>83</sup>

This can only be achieved if revolutionaries combine their propaganda and agitation with practical work among the masses. Such work can be manifold: organizing a strike, leading a demonstration, organizing practical support for unemployed or poor, working within trade unions and other popular mass organizations, giving practical support in daily matters to colleagues in places of work, schools or villages, running as candidates in parliamentary elections, entering a reformist mass party as a faction, etc. All these forms of mass work should be combined with a patient explanation of the party's communist goals.

Party militants must desire to be the best leaders, organizers, and activists in mass-based activities. Only in this way can they win the trust of the masses. They will often be obliged to apply the united front tactic, i.e., advancing the unity of the proletariat in the struggle for their rights by calling upon the official leaders of the workers movement and other popular organizations to mobilize their forces for a given struggle. The central aim is to fight shoulder to shoulder with the workers who, for now, still follow the non-revolutionary leaderships. At the same time, revolutionaries have to warn the masses of their likely betrayal by the official leadership in the course of the struggle and denounce them for their reformist policy.

Obviously the extent to which a Bolshevik organization can undertake work among the masses depends both on the current situation of the class struggle as well as on subjective forces. The smaller the organization, the more it has to select the areas and frequency of its work among the masses. Hence, to do exemplary mass work, pre-party communist organizations are forced to limit such activities. They must selectively focus their energy on this or that area and try to intervene only there.

However, as soon as the organization has clarified its fundamental programmatic goals – i.e., as soon as it has left the very initial stage of an *ideological current* – it should be on the lookout for possibilities of mass work.

Such selective mass work is indispensable for the pre-party organization for a number of reasons. First, its members, as well as the organization as a collective,

---

<sup>83</sup> Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 258

can only gain experience in the class struggle if they participate via such work. Second, the chief goal of the pre-party organization is to recruit members from among militant workers and the oppressed. This will be only possible if the pre-party organization fights alongside these vanguard militants instead of purely lecturing them from the outside.

Third, the Bolshevik-Communists can only demonstrate to the workers' vanguard the meaning of their program in practice if they intervene as activists in mass struggles.

Naturally, such exemplary mass work has to be performed – taking into account necessary modifications for security reasons given possible state repression – openly as communists. Otherwise there exists the danger that revolutionaries will split their work in propaganda (which has a communist character) and mass work (which has an economist character).

## **Class Composition and Orientation to the Non-Aristocratic Layers of the Working Class**

As already elaborated in Chapter I, the revolutionary party or a pre-party organization has to have a predominantly proletarian composition. Otherwise it cannot bring the class political consciousness to the working class, cannot act a strategist, organizer, and leader of the class struggle, and cannot lead it the victorious socialist revolution.

We also stated above that the proletariat is a homogenous but multi-layered class. We showed that, on the one hand, the imperialist bourgeoisie has succeeded in bribing a small but influential upper stratum – the labor aristocracy. On the other hand, the mass of the proletariat belongs to the lower strata which face additional forms of oppression (gender, age, national, religious, etc.). To this one has to add that the huge majority of the world proletariat in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – about ¾ - lives in the South, i.e., outside the old imperialist metropolises.

This means that the revolutionary Workers' International must primarily orient itself to the lower strata of the working class in the old imperialist countries and the proletariat of the countries in the South. These lower sectors, who we can call the "*mass-type*" of the working class in contrast with the aristocratic layer at the top, constitute the huge majority of the world proletariat.

In its resolution on the role of the Communist Party, the Comintern stated: "*The most important task of a genuine communist party is to keep always in closest touch with the broadest masses of the proletariat.*"<sup>84</sup>

In the same spirit did Trotsky explain the strategic orientation of Bolshevism: „*The strength and meaning of Bolshevism consists in the fact that it appeals to oppressed and exploited masses and not to the upper strata of the working class.*“<sup>85</sup>

---

84 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution (1920), p. 131

85 Leon Trotsky: Perspectives and Tasks in the East. Speech on the third anniversary of the

The Bolshevik-Communists adamantly reject the approach, so typical of reformists and centrists, of orienting not to the lower, mass-type majority of the working class but rather to the privileged upper layers. The petty-bourgeois left justifies this by referring to the upper layers' higher level of education and "culture." They completely forget, or pretend not to know, that this so called higher level of (bourgeois) education goes hand in hand with arrogant prejudices against the "backward" mass of the workers and peasants and privileges, which bind this layer to the bourgeois order.

Trotsky drew attention to this tendency of the reformists and centrists in the *Transitional Program*:

*„Opportunist organizations by their very nature concentrate their chief attention on the top layers of the working class and therefore ignore both the youth and the women workers. The decay of capitalism, however, deals its heaviest blows to the woman as a wage earner and as a housewife. The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class; consequently, among the women workers. Here they will find inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness and readiness to sacrifice.“*<sup>86</sup>

Naturally, the revolutionary party will willingly accept workers coming from the labor aristocracy – similar to intellectuals with bourgeois or petty-bourgeois background – as long as they have broken with the typical weaknesses of this layer.

However, the revolutionary party or the pre-party organization must always take care not to become dominated by petty-bourgeois intellectuals and labor aristocrats. If such a development takes place, the organization must find ways to counteract this and take steps towards improving its class composition. Otherwise, as Trotsky explained, the organization runs into danger of coming under too much influence from the political mood and prejudices of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals and the labor aristocracy:

*„But it must now be underlined that the more the party is petty-bourgeois in its composition, the more it is dependent upon the changes in the official public opinion. It is a supplementary argument for the necessity for a courageous and active re orientation toward the masses.“*<sup>87</sup>

This is the only possible application of the communists' method under the conditions of today's decaying capitalism.

In contrast to various centrists, the Bolshevik-Communists stress that the communist approach to party building as outlined above is not only valid for developed revolutionary parties but also for smaller pre-party organizations. This was the theory and practice of Trotsky and his comrades-in-arms when

---

Communist University for the Toilers of the East (21. April 1924); in: Leon Trotsky Speaks, Pathfinder 1972, p. 205

86 Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program (1938); in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, p. 218

87 Leon Trotsky: From a Scratch – To the Danger of Gangrene (1940); in: Leon Trotsky: In Defense of Marxism, New York 1990, p. 113

they were faced with building pre-party organizations in the late 1920s and 1930s. On numerous occasions, Trotsky insisted that the small groups of the Left Opposition must focus their orientation and recruitment on the workers and, in particular, on the lower strata. As he wrote in 1932:

*“When ten intellectuals, whether in Paris, Berlin, or New York, who have already been members of various organizations, address themselves to us with a request to be taken into our midst, I would offer the following advice: Put them through a series of tests on all the programmatic questions; wet them in the rain, dry them in the sun, and then after a new and careful examination accept maybe one or two.*

*The case is radically altered when ten workers connected with the masses turn to us. The difference in our attitude to a petty-bourgeois group and to the proletarian group does not require any explanation. But if a proletarian group functions in an area where there are workers of different races, and in spite of this remains composed solely of workers of a privileged nationality, then I am inclined to view them with suspicion. Are we not dealing perhaps with the labor aristocracy? Isn't the group infected with slaveholding prejudices, active or passive?*

*It is an entirely different matter when we are approached by a group of Negro workers. Here I am prepared to take it for granted in advance that we shall achieve agreement with them, even if such an agreement is not actual as yet. Because the Negro workers, by virtue of their whole position, do not and cannot strive to degrade anybody, oppress anybody, or deprive anybody of his rights. They do not seek privileges and cannot rise to the top except on the road of the international revolution.*

*We can and we must find a way to the consciousness of the Negro workers, the Chinese workers, the Indian workers, and all the oppressed in the human ocean of the colored races to whom belongs the decisive word in the development of mankind.”<sup>88</sup>*

---

88 Leon Trotsky: Closer to the Proletarians of the Colored Races (1932), in: Trotsky Writings, Bd. 1932, p. 112. See also the following excerpt from a Letter to the US-American Left Opposition written in 1929:

*“As far as I can judge, your official Communist Party inherited no few characteristics from the old socialist party. That became clear to me at the time when Pepper succeeded in dragging the American Communist Party into the scandalous adventure with the Party of LaFollette. This low-grade policy of parliamentary opportunism was disguised with “revolutionary” chatter to the effect that the social revolution will be achieved in the United States not by the proletariat but by the ruined farmers. When Pepper expounded this theory to me upon his return from the United States I thought that I had to do with a curious case of individual aberration. Only with some effort I realized that this is a whole system, and that the American Communist Party had been dragged into this system. Then it became clear to me that this small Party cannot develop without deep inner crises, which will guarantee it against Pepperism and other evil diseases. I cannot call them infantile diseases. On the contrary, these are senile diseases, diseases of bureaucratic sterility and revolutionary impotence.*

*That is why I suspect that the Communist Party has taken over many of the qualities of the socialist party, which in spite of its youth struck me with features of decrepitude. For the majority of those socialists – I have in view the governing strata – their socialism is a side-issue, a second-class occupation accommodated to their leisure hours. These gentlemen consecrate six days of the week to their liberal or commercial professions, rounding out their properties not without success, and on the seventh day they consent to occupy themselves with the saving of their souls. In a book of my memoirs (My Life, Ed.) I have tried to outline this type of socialistic Babbit. Evidently not a few of these gentlemen have succeeded in disguising themselves as Communists. These are not intellectual opponents, but class enemies. The Opposition must steer its course not on the petty-*

In a discussion Trotsky had during his visit in Copenhagen 1932, he advised comrades about their attitude towards a student or an academic, that „*the workers movement for its part must regard him with the greatest scepticism. (...) When he has worked with the workers movement this way (for three, four or five years), then the fact that he was an academician is forgotten, the social difference disappear.*“<sup>89</sup>

It is also important for the revolutionary party or the pre-party organization to orient itself towards the proletarian youth and young workers. The youth is usually less shaped with conservative prejudices and bourgeois ideologies and is more open to radically challenging the bourgeois order.

When we speak about the youth we mean, most primarily, proletarian youth as opposed to other popular strata, and not petty-bourgeois or bourgeois youth. This is important to emphasize given the fact that, when reformists and centrists today speak about the youth, they usually mean university students many of

*bourgeois Babbits, but on the proletarian Jimmie Higginses, for whom the idea of Communism, when they are once imbued with it, becomes the content of their whole life and activity. There is nothing more disgusting and dangerous in revolutionary activity than petty-bourgeois diletantism, conservative, egotistical, self-loving and incapable of sacrifice in the name of a great idea. The advanced workers must firmly adopt one simple but invariable rule: Those leaders or candidates for leadership who are, in peaceful, everyday times, incapable of sacrificing their time, their strength, their means, to the cause of Communism, will ofteneast of all in a revolutionary period become direct traitors, or turn up in the camp of those who wait to see on which side the victory lies. It elements of this kind stand at the head of the Party, they will indubitably ruin it when the great test comes. And no better, are those brainless bureaucrats who simply hire out to the Comintern as they would to a notary, and obediently adapt themselves to each new boss.*

*Of course, the Opposition – that is the Bolshevik-Leninist – may have their traveling companions, who, without giving themselves wholly to the revolution, offer this or that service to the cause of Communism. It would of course be wrong not to make use of them. They can make a significant contribution to the work. But traveling companions, even the most honest and serious, ought to make no pretence to leadership. The leaders must be bound in all their daily work with those they lead. Their work must proceed before the eyes of the mass, no matter how small that mass may be at the given moment. I wouldn't give a cent for a leadership which can be summoned by cable from Moscow, or anywhere else, without the masses ever noticing it. Such leadership means bankruptcy guaranteed in advance. We must steer our course on the young proletarian who desires to know and to struggle, and is capable of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. From such people we must attract and educate the genuine cadres of the Party and the proletariat.*

*Every member of the Opposition organization should be obliged to have under his guidance several young workers, boys from 14 to 15 up, to remain in continual contact with them, help them in their self-education, train them in the questions of scientific socialism, and systematically introduce them to the revolutionary politics of the proletarian vanguard. The Oppositionist who is himself inadequately prepared for such work should hand over the young proletarians recruited by him to more developed and experienced comrades. Those who are afraid of rough work we don't want. The calling of a revolutionary Bolshevik imposes obligations. The first of these obligations is to struggle for the proletarian youth, to clear a road to its most oppressed and neglected strata. They stand first under our banner.*

*The trade union bureaucrats, like the bureaucrats of false Communism, live in the atmosphere of aristocratic prejudices of the upper strata of the workers. It will be tragedy if the Oppositionists are infected even in the slightest degree with these qualities. We must not only reject and condemn these prejudices; we must burn them out of our consciousness to the last trace; we must find the road to the most deprived, to the darkest strata of the proletariat, beginning with the Negro, whom capitalist society has converted into Pariah and who must learn to see in us his revolutionary brothers. And this depends wholly upon our energy and devotion to the work.” (Leon Trotsky: A Letter to the American Trotskyists (1929), in: Trotsky Writings 1929, pp. 133-134)*

89 Leon Trotsky: On Students and Intellectuals (1932), in: Trotsky Writings, Bd. 1932, S. 333



whom come from petty-bourgeois or bourgeois background or at least aim to reach these strata. Trotsky made it absolutely clear that revolutionaries – even if they are still in the stage of a small pre-party organization – should orient in their youth work to proletarian youth and not students from better-off families. In criticizing a document about youth work, he wrote in 1934:

*“As the social basis for the organization the ‘working, unemployed, and student youth’ are cited. Again purely descriptive, not social. For us it is a question of the proletarian youth and those elements among the students that lean towards the proletariat. Working, unemployed, and student youth are for a Marxist in no way equal links in the social chain.”*<sup>90</sup>

The Bolsheviks were always aware of the importance of winning working class youth and young workers. Lenin attacked the Mensheviks in 1906 when they criticized the Bolsheviks for the young average age of their militants:

*„On the other hand, the composition of the politically guiding vanguard of every class, the proletariat included, also depends both on the position of this class and on the principal form of its struggle. Lenin complains, for example, that young workers predominate in our Party, that we have few married workers, and that they leave the Party. This complaint of a Russian opportunist reminds me of a passage in one of Engels’s works (I think it is in *The Housing Question, Zur Wohnungsfrage*). Retorting to some fatuous bourgeois professor, a German Cadet, Engels wrote: is it not natural that youth should predominate in our Party, the revolutionary party? We are the party of the future, and the future belongs to the youth. We are a party of innovators, and it is always the youth that most eagerly follows the innovators. We are a party that is waging a self-sacrificing struggle against the old rottenness, and youth is always the first to undertake a self-sacrificing struggle. No, let us leave it to the Cadets to collect the “tired” old men of thirty, revolutionaries who have “grown wise”, and renegades from Social-Democracy. We shall always be a party of the youth of the advanced class!”*<sup>91</sup>

Similarly Trotsky pointed out that the Bolsheviks, in contrast to the Mensheviks, always succeeded in attracting the proletarian youth and young workers.

*“Bolshevism when underground was always a party of young workers. The Mensheviks relied upon the more respectable skilled upper stratum of the working class, always prided themselves on it, and looked down upon the Bolsheviks. Subsequent events harshly showed them their mistake. At the decisive moment the youth carried with them the more mature stratum and even the old folks.”*<sup>92</sup>

When we look to the average age of the party militants, the difference between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks becomes obvious. In the previously mentioned study by David Lane about the Russian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks before 1907, from which we quoted above in Chapter I, the author gives a number of impressive figures. He shows that if one compares the middle cadre of both

---

90 Leon Trotsky: *Against Centrism at the Youth Conference* (1934), in: *Trotsky Writings, Supplements 1934-40*, p. 452

91 V. I. Lenin: *The Crisis of Menshevism* (1906), in: *LCW Vol. 11*, pp. 354-355

92 Leon Trotsky: *The Revolution Betrayed*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1972, p. 159

factions, 17% of the Bolsheviks were below the age of 19 (Mensheviks: 0%), 42% were between 20-24 years old (Mensheviks: 26%), 24% were between 25-29 years old (Mensheviks: 46%) and 17% were over 30 years old (Mensheviks: 29%).

If we look to the rank and file members of both factions, we get a similar clear difference: 22% of the Bolsheviks were below the age of 19 (Mensheviks: 5%), 37% were between 20-24 years old (Mensheviks: 30%), 16% were between 25-29 years old (Mensheviks: 30%) and 26% were over 30 years old (Mensheviks: 35%).

The author concludes: *“These two tables show that the Bolsheviks were younger than the Mensheviks at the lowest level of the party organization and more so among the ‘activists’ than among the ordinary members. This suggests that the Bolshevik organizational structures allowed the young to advance to positions of responsibility more easily than did the Mensheviks.”*<sup>93</sup>

These are important lessons for revolutionaries today. All stages of building a revolutionary party today are impossible without a strong orientation towards working class youth.

If the orientation towards young workers and youth was correct in Lenin’s time, it is ten times as correct today. As early as the 1930s, Trotsky explained that *“the old generation (of revolutionaries, Ed.) is completely consumed, used up.”*<sup>94</sup>

This is much truer today! The past decades of reformist and centrist dominance in the workers’ movement have demoralized whole layers of elder workers and socialist activists. The future revolutionary party and International can only be borne on the shoulders of fresh militant young workers and youth.

Naturally in building the pre-party organization, when its forces are small and its foundation weak, the composition of its membership will be more dependent on conjunctural situations, personal factors, coincidences, etc. Similarly, in cases where the reformists and centrists have a strong hold over entire vanguard sectors of the working class and the oppressed, it may be difficult in the beginning for the pre-party organization to recruit among these sectors. However, even if a pre-party organization faces such challenges it must elaborate a plan on how it can overcome this unfavourable situation and consistently follow up with the implementation of this plan.

From the revolutionary movement’s very beginnings, i.e., even within the pre-party organization, there should only be place for those intellectuals who are completely dedicated to the cause, who consistently fight against every form of careerism, who interact with proletarian activists without any aristocratic prejudices or airs, and who support the development of the latter as communist leaders.

---

93 David Lane: The Roots of Russian Communism, pp. 36-37

94 Leon Trotsky: Fusion with the Lovestonites? (1938), in: Writings Supplements 1934-40, S. 777

## Tactics in Building the Revolutionary Party

Naturally there are numerous approaches and tactics in building the revolutionary party nationally and internationally. Nevertheless, the experience of the revolutionary workers' movement has shown that there are a number of tactics which often play a key role in our work. Naturally, which tactics can be applied by revolutionaries depends very much on the current stage of organization building – its size and roots in the working class.

*Individual recruitment* will always play an important role in party-building, in particular in the early stages of party-building. The Bolshevik organization clarifies with a militant his or her agreement with its programmatic foundations as well with the practical tasks to be done. During the first period the new member will be a candidate, i.e., the only difference with full members being that he or she has only a symbolic vote. If the organization is convinced about the seriousness and dedication of the new comrade, he or she will become a full member.

*Formation of party-affiliated organizations:* In its desire to advance its work in specific areas, the party will usually create party-affiliated organizations (e.g., youth organizations, women's organizations, migrant organizations, trade union fractions, cultural organizations, etc.). Naturally the pre-party organization has to be more selective in choosing when and which party-affiliated organization it can build. However, even in these early stages, such organizations can be very useful tools in advancing this work. In contrast to the cadre party, these organizations have a rather loose character, the requirements for joining – both in terms of programmatic agreement as well as in practical dedication – are lower and the disciplinary requirements for members are less strict. The goal of these organizations is to enable the party or pre-party organization to draw closer militant layers of workers and youth and to allow such aspiring militants to gain experience in revolutionary work. The party will ask the best of these comrades to become members of the cadre organization. The affiliation of these organizations to the party must not lead to a mechanical relationship of subordination. Quite the contrary, all members of the party-affiliated organizations should be encouraged to put forward their ideas and contribute to the work. The Bolsheviks acquired very valuable experience with affiliated organizations grouped around the party.

*Recruitment via intervention in mass movements:* If communists are faced with a progressive mass movement it is incumbent that they intervene in an exemplary fashion and combine their practical intervention with systematic communist propaganda and agitation. Such intervention – even if it carried out by a small communist pre-party organization – can result in leaps in party building if the Bolshevik-Communists succeed in winning over entire layers of militants in the struggle. This was the experience of the US Trotskyists in the 1934 Minneapolis strikes, as well as of various radical left-wing groups in 1968. Similarly, the

party can make a huge step forward if it wins the majority in a trade union or another mass organization.

*Splits and Fusions:* When left-reformists or centrists are seriously questioning their old program and strategy, Bolshevik-Communists should be prepared to confer with them in order to win them over to the revolutionary program and methods. When there is agreement about the national and international programmatic and practical tasks of the present period, revolutionaries should work towards fusion with such forces. Obviously they must make sure that such a fusion is based on a solid political foundation, because otherwise the fusion will very quickly result in a damaging split. There are also situations where methodological differences inside the party or pre-party organization become irresolvable and damaging for advancing the party's goals. In such a situation a split is the lesser evil compared with the danger of long-term paralysis. As it is well-known, Lenin never hesitated to split with opponents if they became an obstacle for building the revolutionary party. Similarly, the Trotskyists had such experiences in the 1930s when they split with various sectarian and opportunists (e.g., the Greek Archeo-Marxists, the Nin group in Spain, Sneevliets party in the Netherlands, the Molinier group in France, etc.)

*Entryism:* In certain periods – in particular in times of significant turmoil – reformist and centrist organizations can undergo an internal crisis where they experience lively debates and members question the traditional program and strategy. In such periods it can be a useful tactic for revolutionaries to join such a party and work inside as a revolutionary faction. In such cases it is indispensable to argue openly for the revolutionary program and a radical new strategy. Such entry tactics can involve sections of the Bolshevik organization or even the entire organization. In the long run, because coexistence between revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries is impossible within the same party, such entry tactics are usually short-term projects. The French as well as the US American Trotskyists carried out successful and principled entryism projects in the 1930s.

## The Communists' Obligation to Work and Democratic Centralism

The unity of theory and practice in terms of activity of party members means that all members actively participate in the breadth of the organization's numerous tasks. The vanguard party rejects a division between active and passive members. The party has huge responsibilities and tasks and hence needs the participation of every member. As the female Bolshevik Elena Stasova liked to say, every task, even if it seems to be small, is important and strengthens the party work.<sup>95</sup> A member who is no longer in a position to fulfill his or her obligations as a party cadre (leaving aside cases of illness, personal difficulties, or other issues of a temporary nature) should become a sympathizer.

In order to achieve the best possible output of the members work, the party needs an effective division of labor. To achieve this, work must not be done spontaneously or according to individual wishes but must be organized according to collective needs and individual skills. For this, again, the party needs a plan which coordinates the numerous tasks and an organizing center which oversees the implementation of such plans. In other words, a party cannot work without firm discipline and supervision.

The Comintern summarized the Bolsheviks experience at their third congress in 1921 in an excellent document called *Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work*. The document stated:

*"Because the first condition for seriously carrying out this program is the integration of all members into ongoing daily work. The art of communist organization consists in making use of everything and everyone in the proletarian class struggle, distributing party work suitably among all party members and using the membership to continually draw ever wider masses of the proletariat into the revolutionary movement, while at the same time keeping the leadership of the entire movement firmly in hand, not by virtue of power but by virtue of authority, i.e., by virtue of energy, greater experience, greater versatility, greater ability.*

*Thus, in its effort to have only really active members, a communist party must demand of every member in its ranks that he devote his time and energy, insofar as they are at his own disposal under the given conditions, to his party and that he always give his best in its service.*

*Obviously, besides the requisite commitment to communism, membership in the Communist Party involves as a rule: formal admission, possibly first as a candidate, then as a member; regular payment of established dues; subscription to the party press, etc. Most important, however, is the participation of every member in daily party work.*

*In order to carry out daily party work, every party member should as a rule always be part of a smaller working group-a group, a committee, a commission, a board or a*

---

<sup>95</sup> See Alexandra Kollontai: Ich habe viele Leben gelebt... Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen. Dietz, Berlin 1987, p. 107

*collegium, a fraction or cell. Only in this way can party work be properly allocated, directed and carried out.”*<sup>96</sup>

On the basis of such a general obligation by all party members to work and the widespread division of labor, the party functions according to the principles of *Democratic Centralism*. This means, in summary, that where legal conditions allow inner-party democracy, the membership decides at conferences about the most important issues and elects on this basis a central leadership. The leading bodies have the task of organizing and advancing the party's work. The decisions of the leading bodies are binding for all members and must be implemented.

*“The communist party must be built on the basis of democratic centralism. The basic principles of democratic centralism are that the higher party bodies shall be elected by the lower, that all instructions of the higher bodies are categorically and necessarily binding on the lower; and that there shall be a strong party centre whose authority is universally and unquestioningly recognized for all leading party comrades in the period between congresses.”*<sup>97</sup>

Members have the right to voice criticism of the party's decisions internally. However, in order to implement the decisions most effectively, the party acts as a united body and discusses possible differences inside the organization and not publicly (except where the party decides to open such an internal debate to the public).

*“In their public appearances party members are obliged to act always as disciplined members of a militant organization. Should differences of opinion arise as to the correct method of action, these should as far as possible be settled beforehand within the party organization and then action must be consistent with this decision. In order that every party decision shall be carried out by all party organizations and members with the maximum energy, the widest circle of the party membership must whenever possible be drawn into the examination and decision of every question. Party organizations and committees also have the duty of deciding whether and to what extent and in what form questions shall be discussed by individual comrades in public (the press, lectures, pamphlets). But, even if the decisions of the organization or of the party leadership are in the opinion of other members mistaken, these comrades must in their public appearances never forget that the worst offence in regard to discipline and the worst mistake in regard to the struggle is to disturb or break the unity of the common front. It is the supreme duty of every party member to defend the communist party and above all the Communist International against all the enemies of communism. Whoever forgets this and publicly attacks the party or the International is to be treated as an enemy of the party.”*<sup>98</sup>

---

96 Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 259 (Emphasis in the original)

97 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution (1920), p. 134

98 Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 269 (Emphasis in the original)

The central task of the leadership is to direct the organization according to the decisions of the highest party organ, i.e., the conference of its membership. For this it must constitute a strong, united and authoritative center. However, where important differences exist inside the party, this should be also reflected in the composition of the broader leadership body. At the same time the smaller, executive body of the leadership should be as homogenous as possible in order to enable the most effective implementation of the decisions of the higher organs.

*“For the same reasons differences of opinion on tactical questions which are of a serious character should not be suppressed in the election of the central committee. On the contrary, their representation on the central committee by their best advocates should be facilitated. The smaller committee, however, should, whenever this is feasible, be like-minded in their views and they must be able, if they are to provide strong and confident leadership, to rely not only on their authority but also on a clear and numerically strong majority in the leadership as a whole.”*<sup>99</sup>

## **The Struggle against Bourgeois and Petty-Bourgeois Influences in the Working Class**

One of the chief tasks of the party or pre-party organization is the struggle against those forces which mislead the working class and its vanguard – the labor bureaucracy, reformists, centrists, official leadership of the oppressed, etc. The victory of the proletariat in its struggle for liberation against the capitalist exploiter class will be impossible to achieve if the revolutionary party does not first defeat the influence of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces inside the working class and among the oppressed.

Marxists have repeatedly emphasized that the ruling class has not successfully sustained its dominance because of its inner strength, but because of the support it receives from the labor bureaucracy. James P. Cannon once stated:

*“The strength of capitalism is not in itself and its own institutions; it survives only because it has bases of support in the organizations of the workers. As we see it now, in the light of what we have learned from the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, nine-tenths of the struggle for socialism is the struggle against bourgeois influence in the workers’ organizations, including the party.”*<sup>100</sup>

In contrast to those numerous post-modernist leftists who claim that Marxism is a broad, pluralist current which includes all who claim adherence to Marx’ teachings, the Bolshevik-Communists sharply differentiate between those who authentically work on the basis of the method elaborated by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky and those who systematically violate this method while

---

<sup>99</sup> Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 268

<sup>100</sup> James P. Cannon: E.V. Debs (1956); in: James P. Cannon: The First Ten Years of American Communism, Pathfinder Press, New York 1962, p. 270

claiming to be “Marxists.” Only the first can be considered as Marxist, while the latter are either reformists of the social democratic or Stalinist version or centrists, i.e., those who cover their adaption to the reformist labor bureaucracy with “radical” phrases and occasional zigzags.

*„The mark of centrism is opportunism. Under the influence of external circumstances (tradition, mass pressure, political competition), centrism is at certain times compelled to make a parade of radicalism. For this purpose it must overcome itself, violate its political nature. By spurring itself on with all its strength, it not infrequently lands at the extreme limit of formal radicalism. But hardly does the hour of serious danger strike than the true nature of centrism breaks out to the surface.“*<sup>101</sup>

Marxists, therefore, always sharply differentiate between the proletarian, Marxist line and the petty-bourgeois, reformist or centrist line. Trotsky made this clear when he explained the vast chasm which exists between the forces of the Fourth International and their centrist rivals like the Spanish POUM or the German SAP:

*„But it is clear in any case that the leadership of your party has absolutely not understood the fatal mistakes of the POUM, which flow from its centrist, non-revolutionary, non-Marxian character.“*<sup>102</sup>

*“We are separated not by nuances of tactic but by fundamental questions. It would be absurd and unworthy to shut one’s eyes to this after the experiences we have passed through. The differences between us and the SAP fall entirely into the framework of the contradictions between Marxism and centrism.“*<sup>103</sup>

In fact, reformism and centrism represent a bourgeois influence in the ranks of the workers’ movement. By formulating the worker’s mind, they (in many cases involuntarily) help the ruling class to continue its domination over the working class. As the Bolsheviks wrote in their program in 1919:

*„These conditions cannot be achieved unless a determined rupture is made on matters of principle, and a ruthless struggle is waged against the bourgeois distortion of socialism which has gained the upper hand among the leadership of the official Social-Democratic and Socialist Parties.*

*Such a distortion is, on the one hand, the opportunist and social-chauvinist trend which professes to be socialist in words, yet is chauvinist in practice, and covers up the defence of the rapacious interests of the fatherland, both in general and especially during the imperialist war of 1914-1918. This trend was created by the fact that in the progressive capitalist countries the bourgeoisie by robbing the colonial and weak nations were able, out of the surplus profits obtained by this robbery to place the upper strata of the proletariat in their countries in a privileged position, to bribe them, to secure for them*

---

101 Leo Trotzki: Der einzige Weg (1932), in: Leo Trotzki: Schriften über Deutschland, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt am Main 1971, p. 378; in English language: Leon Trotsky: Germany: The Only Road

102 Leon Trotsky: Centrism and the 4th International (1939); in: Leon Trotsky: On France, New York 1979, p. 214 (Emphasis in the original)

103 Leon Trotsky: Centrist Alchemy or Marxism? (1935); in: Writings 1934-35, p. 258 (Emphasis in the original)



*in peace time tolerable, petty-bourgeois conditions of life, and to take into its service the leaders of that stratum. Opportunists and social-chauvinists, being the servants of the bourgeoisie, are actually the direct class enemies of the proletariat, specially now, when, in alliance with the capitalists, they are suppressing by force of arms the revolutionary movement of the proletariat both in their own countries and in foreign countries.*

*On the other hand, the "centrist" movement is also a bourgeois distortion of socialism. That movement is also found in all capitalist countries. It vacillates between the social-chauvinists and the Communists, advocates union with the former, and strives to revive the bankrupt Second International. The only leader in the proletarian struggle for emancipation is the new, Third, Communist International, of which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is a detachment."*<sup>104</sup>

Numerous reformists and centrists condemn the Bolshevik-Communists' approach of openly attacking erroneous programs and deceptive leaderships as "sectarian." In contrast to them, we draw the lesson from the Bolsheviks' successful building of a party which could lead the working class to victory that such a clear demarcation of what is right and what is wrong is the imperative precondition for organizing the workers' vanguard on a solid communist program. Hence, the task of the revolutionary party is to fight politically against the reformist and centrist forces in order to push back and finally liquidate their influence.

Naturally, the struggle against the reformists and centrists does not preclude the application of the united front tactic. In fact, the united front tactic is important not only because it enables the broadest possible unity of workers in the class struggle but also because it helps the revolutionary party to break away workers influenced by reformists and centrists from these respective misleaderships by demonstrating the superiority of the communist program in practice.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks repeatedly explained that the revolutionary party can never defeat the bourgeoisie if it does not simultaneously fight against the reformist and centrist lackey inside the workers movement:

*„The ideological struggle waged by revolutionary Marxism against revisionism at the end of the nineteenth century is but the prelude to the great revolutionary battles of the proletariat, which is marching forward to the complete victory of its cause despite all the waverings and weaknesses of the petty bourgeoisie."*<sup>105</sup>

In his famous book on 'Left-Wing' Communism in which Lenin summarized the Bolsheviks' experience, he explained the importance of the ideological struggles against petty-bourgeois and bourgeois currents in order to prepare for the class battles.

*„The years of preparation for revolution (1903-05). The approach of a great storm was sensed everywhere. All classes were in a state of ferment and preparation. Abroad,*

---

104 Programm der Kommunistischen Partei Rußlands (Bolschewiki) (1919); in: Boris Meissner: Das Parteiprogramm der KPdSU 1906-1961, Köln 1962, S. 124; in English language: Program of the CPSU (Bolsheviks), adopted March 22, 1919 at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party

105 V. I. Lenin: Marxism and Revisionism (1908), in: LCW Vol. 15, p. 39

*the press of the political exiles discussed the theoretical aspects of all the fundamental problems of the revolution. Representatives of the three main classes, of the three principal political trends—the liberal-bourgeois, the petty-bourgeois-democratic (concealed behind “social-democratic” and “social-revolutionary” labels), and the proletarian-revolutionary—anticipated and prepared the impending open class struggle by waging a most bitter struggle on issues of programme and tactics. All the issues on which the masses waged an armed struggle in 1905-07 and 1917-20 can (and should) be studied, in their embryonic form, in the press of the period. Among these three main trends there were, of course, a host of intermediate, transitional or half-hearted forms. It would be more correct to say that those political and ideological trends which were genuinely of a class nature crystallised in the struggle of press organs, parties, factions and groups; the classes were forging the requisite political and ideological weapons for the impending battles.”*<sup>106</sup>

Later, the Communist International generalized from this experience in a document adopted at the second congress:

*“For two decades in Russia, and for some years in Germany, the communist party has been fighting not only the bourgeoisie, but also those ‘socialists’ who transmit bourgeois influences to the proletariat; it took into its ranks the staunchest, most farsighted, and most advanced fighters of the working class. Only if there is such a disciplined organization of the working class elite is it possible to surmount all the difficulties confronting the workers’ dictatorship on the morrow of victory.”*<sup>107</sup>

*„In the columns of the press, at popular meetings, in the trade unions and cooperatives, wherever the adherents of the Communist International have an entry, it is necessary to denounce, systematically and unrelentingly, not only the bourgeoisie, but also their assistants, the reformists of all shades.”*<sup>108</sup>

Trotsky fully shared the lessons of the Bolsheviks and the Communist International as he documented in the founding program of the Fourth International:

*“The Fourth International declares uncompromising war on the bureaucracies of the Second, Third, Amsterdam and Anarcho-syndicalist Internationals, as on their centrist satellites; on reformism without reforms; democracy in alliance with the GPU; pacifism without peace; anarchism in the service of the bourgeoisie; on “revolutionists” who live in deathly fear of revolution. All of these organizations are not pledges for the future, but decayed survivals of the past. The epoch of wars and revolutions will raze them to the ground.”*<sup>109</sup>

---

106 V.I. Lenin: ‘Left-Wing’ Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, pp. 26-27

107 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, p. 133

108 Communist International: Conditions of Admission to the Communist International, in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Selected and Edited by Jane Degras, Vol. I 1919-1922, pp. 168-169

109 Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program (1938); in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, pp. 147-

## Building the Party in the National and International Realms Must be a Simultaneous Process

From its beginning, a truly revolutionary party or pre-party organization must be an *international formation*. This principle is rooted in the nature of capitalism and of the working class which are both international in nature. Only as an international organisation we can develop a truly internationalist outlook, internalise international experience and work as internationalist revolutionaries. If a group exists for too long as a national organisation, it runs into the serious danger of developing a nation-centered experience and perspective.

Furthermore, the international character of the party corresponds to the nature of the revolutionary program and activity. Just as the revolutionary program can only live, breathe, and develop in an organization of revolutionary militants, so can the international program as well as proletarian internationalism and solidarity only exist in an international organization. Without it, national centeredness and finally nationalist deviations are unavoidable.

Trotsky once rightly remarked: "*Marxist policies 'in one country' are as impossible as the construction of a socialist society 'in one country'.*"<sup>110</sup>

Such a conception is true for both a party and a pre-party organization, as Trotsky explained in numerous articles and letters:

*„From its very first steps the Opposition must therefore act as an international faction – as did the Communists in the days of the publication of the **Communist Manifesto**, or in the Zimmerwald Left at the beginning of the war. In all these cases the groups were for the most part small numerically or it was a matter of isolated individuals; but they nevertheless acted as an international organization. In the epoch of imperialism such a position is a hundred times more imperative than in the days of Marx.*

*Those who believe that the International Left will someday take shape as a simple sum of national groups, and that therefore the international unification can be postponed indefinitely until the national groups "grow strong," attribute only a secondary importance to the international factor and by this very reason take the path of national opportunism.*

*It is undeniable that each country has greatest peculiarities of its own; but in our epoch these peculiarities can be assayed and exploited in a revolutionary way only from an internationalist point of view. On the other hand, only an international organization can be the bearer of an international ideology.*

*Can anyone seriously believe that isolated Oppositional national groups, divided among themselves and left to their own resources, are capable of finding the correct road by themselves? No, this is a certain path to national degeneration, sectarianism, and ruin. The tasks facing the International Opposition are enormously difficult. Only by being indissolubly tied together, only by working out answers jointly to all current problems, only by creating their international platform, only by mutually verifying each one of*

*their steps, that is, only by uniting in a single international body, will the national groups of the Opposition be able to carry out their historic task.”*<sup>111</sup>

Like many centrists today, various groups in the 1930s found “reasons” to declare the foundation of an international organization “premature.” In replying to such criticism by the Italian-centred Bordigists, Trotsky wrote in 1930:

*“Your conception of internationalism appears to me erroneous. In the final analysis, you take the International as a sum of national sections or as a product of the mutual influence of national sections. This is, at least, a one-sided, undialectical and, therefore, wrong conception of the International. If the Communist Left throughout the world consisted of only five individuals, they would have nonetheless been obliged to build an international organization simultaneously with the building of one or more national organizations.*

*It is wrong to view a national organization as the foundation and the international as a roof. The interrelation here is of an entirely different type. Marx and Engels started the communist movement in 1847 with an international document and with the creation of an international organization. The same thing was repeated in the creation of the First International. The very same path was followed by the Zimmerwald Left in preparation for the Third International. Today this road is dictated far more imperiously than in the days of Marx. It is, of course, possible in the epoch of imperialism for a revolutionary proletarian tendency to arise in one or another country, but it cannot thrive and develop in one isolated country; on the very next day after its formation it must seek for or create international ties, an international platform, an international organization. Because a guarantee of the correctness of the national policy can be found only along this road. A tendency which remains shut-in nationally over a stretch of years, condemns itself irrevocably to degeneration.*

*You refuse to answer the question as to the character of your differences with the International Opposition on the grounds that an international principled document is lacking. I consider such an approach to the question as purely formal, lifeless, not political and not revolutionary. A platform or program is something that comes as a result of extensive experiences from joint activities on the basis of a certain number of common ideas and methods. Your 1925 platform did not come into being on the very first day of your existence as a faction. The Russian Opposition created a platform in the fifth year of its struggle; and although this platform appeared two and a half years after yours did, it has also become outdated in many respects.”*<sup>112</sup>

In another document, in which Trotsky attacked the Germany-centred Socialist Workers Party (SAP) in 1935, he wrote:

*„However, wherein does the “profound problem” involved in this question lie? Observe, objectively the new International is necessary, but subjectively it is impossible. In simpler terms, without the new International the proletariat will be crushed, but the masses do not understand this as yet. And what else is the task of the Marxists if not*

---

111 Leon Trotsky: An Open Letter to All Members of the Leninbund (1930); in: Writings 1930, pp. 91-92

112 Leon Trotsky: To the Editorial Board of Prometeo (1930); in: Writings 1930, pp. 285-286

to raise the subjective factor to the level of the objective and to bring the consciousness of the masses closer to the understanding of the historical necessity – in simpler terms, to explain to the masses their own interests, which they do not yet understand? The “profound problem” of the centrists is profound cowardice in the face of a great and undeferrable task. The leaders of the SAP do not understand the importance of class-conscious revolutionary activity in history.”<sup>113</sup>

In the same spirit, Trotsky wrote to the French Piverists in 1939:

„Without as yet having doctrine, revolutionary tradition, clear program, masses, you did not fear to proclaim a new party. By what right? Obviously you believe that your ideas give you the right to win the masses, isn't that so? Why then do you refuse to apply the same criterion to the International? Solely because you do not know how to raise yourself up to the international point of view. A national party (even if it is in the form of an initiating organization) is a vital necessity for you, but an international party looks like a luxury, and that can wait. That's bad, Guérin, very bad!”<sup>114</sup>

In applying the principles of the party, authentic Marxists refuse to make a qualitative difference between national and international party-building. Hence, an international party or pre-party organization must be built on the basis of *international democratic centralism*, i.e., with an international homogenous programmatic line, discipline, and leadership. Against the centrist distortions, there must be no concessions to backward national-centeredness – neither in program nor in party-building.

Building an international organization is always a central task – for the pre-party organization no less than for the party. A smaller pre-party organization is no less influenced by its material conditions than a party. National centeredness is disastrous for revolutionaries irrespective of their numbers. The laws of materialism – “*being determines consciousness*” – holds true in all circumstances! Hence, a small national organization which refuses to simultaneously expand internationally will eventually be corroded by national centeredness and loses its revolutionary character if it does not energetically correct its orientation and turn towards internationalism in practical, organizational terms.

---

113 Leon Trotsky: *Centrist Alchemy Or Marxism?* (1935); in: *Writings 1934/35*, pp. 262-263

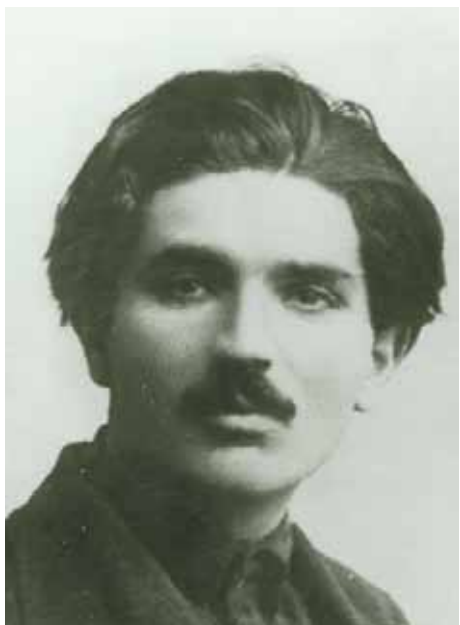
114 Leon Trotsky: *Centrism and the Fourth International* (1939); in: *Leon Trotsky: On France*, New York 1979, p. 223



Bolshevik Women who played a key role in leading the Revolutionary Party and the Russian Revolution: Evgenia Bosh (top left), Ludmila Stal (top right), Konkordiia Samoilova (below left) and Elena Stasova (talking with Lenin, below right).



Leaders of the Bolshevik Party at the time of Lenin: Gregory Zinoviev (top left) and Nikolai Bukharin (top right), Founder of Marxism in Russia: Grigoriy Pechanov (below left); Leading Marxist Philosopher in the USSR in the 1920s: Abram Deborin (below right).



Leader of the Trotskyist Movement: Christian Rakovsky (talking with Trotsky, top left), Karl Radek (top right), Ter-Vaganian (below left) and Leon Sedov (below right).