

IV. Lessons for the Future

Our work of 25 years in building a Bolshevik organization nationally and internationally has provided us with rich experience. Below we summarize the most important lessons.

Centrality of the Bolshevik Organization – Nationally and Internationally

Looking back on 25 years of Bolshevik party building we can say unequivocally – despite the setbacks we have experienced in addition to our successes – that a democratically and centrally organized tendency is indispensable to defend the revolutionary program and to educate new layers of communist militants. In contrast, petty-bourgeois intellectuals and their post-modernist circles all come and go and leave behind some “theories” which nobody remembers after a year. Various amorphous “pluralist” groupings like the “*Anti-Capitalist Network*” or the “*International Socialist Network*” in Britain are just a few of the most recent examples of this.

Similarly, we have seen how indispensable it is for revolutionaries to avoid national isolation and to regularly collaborate and convene with comrades around the world who belong to the same organization. While this does not guarantee avoiding mistakes, if a group complacently accepts its national isolation it is doomed to degenerate politically. To prevent this, the RCIT invests a great deal of effort in producing international propaganda in various languages, including books in English.

The Unity of Theory and Practice Must Be Implemented in all Areas of Party Work

The strictest implementation of the unity of theory and practice must be followed in all areas of party work. Naturally this doctrine has to be applied according to the concrete circumstances. The program must never be presented as a set of purely general principles, but these principles have to be combined with tactics and slogans for the struggle. This has enabled us to present the program as a concrete action program and thus explain to militants what the practical conclusions of the communist principles are in the present period. Similarly, the principle of the unity of theory and practice allows us to combine propaganda with exemplary mass work. By this we can demonstrate our program in action to a wider vanguard and reach new layers of militants.

In addition, this also assures us that we haven’t attracted phrase mongers but rather militants who are willing to fight for our program. Related to this is also

our approach that organizational work of the party or pre-party organization is no less important than its propaganda or theoretical work. In the LFI we were faced with a widespread dilettantish attitude on the tasks of party building which could not be corrected despite intensive effort by various comrades. A revolutionary organization must have a serious approach to the organizational side of party-building as it was personified in leading Bolsheviks like Nadezhda Krupskaja, Yelena Stasova, Jakow Sverdlow or Leonid Krasin. Hence we appraise comrades with organizational and technical skills as no less important than those who are good propagandists or theoreticians.

Related to this is an understanding that, in order to build a communist pre-party organization in its initial stages, it is not sufficient to have individual comrades with these or those talents. One needs a collective of militants who combine the necessary skills – an understanding of the Marxist theory, capable propagandists as well as agitators and disciplined organizers – and together form a homogenous team. This does not come automatically or by adopting resolutions, but requires conscious planning and supervision during periods of training and selection. And this is not a onetime event, but rather a process which has to be continually repeated to renew and expand such a collective of militants.

Furthermore, we not only proclaimed the goal of building a workers' organization but have also – after long internal struggles in the LFI – succeeded in accomplishing this with the founding and development of the RCIT. Despite petty-bourgeois skepticism, we have proved in deeds that it is desirable, possible, and necessary to build communist pre-party organizations as well as leaderships with a predominately proletarian class composition.

Another form of implementing the unity of theory and practice is the ability of the revolutionary organization to avoid tendencies of routinism and to react quickly and in a determined manner to sudden events of the class struggle. Such an application of Lenin's policy of "*brusque turns*" has repeatedly played an important role in the history of our tendency. It has enabled us to repeatedly play an initiating and leading role in organizing mass actions like a number of student strikes and other protests.

All this shows the central importance of the leadership in a revolutionary party as well as in a pre-party organization. The leadership – which usually comprises the most experienced and dedicated comrades – bears a central role in quickly understanding new developments in the class struggle, in opportunities for party building as well as difficulties and potential dangers for the organization. Such a leadership must not consist one-sidedly of only comrades with theoretical and literary skills, but also of those who are key in organizational tasks and mass work.

Finally the unity of theory and practice is also indispensable in judging the development of organizations and militants. When we view a centrist group which is in a process of change, we judge them not only by their programmatic

declarations (as important as they are) but we also look carefully what is their class composition, what are their activities, what is the outlook of its activists. The same is true in the assessment of individual militants.

Such an assessment also has to take into account the specific national conditions and the character of the period in which revolutionaries are operating. An overemphasis of propaganda is always wrong. It is, however, less of a problem under counter-revolutionary conditions where comrades have to swim strongly against the current. Overemphasis on agitation and lack of propaganda and theoretical education is also always a problem. But it is less of a problem during upswings of class struggle than during reactionary cycles.

The Centrality of the Revolutionary Program

We have often stated that without a correct program the party has no political compass. We always rejected those centrists who claimed that it was “*impossible to elaborate a revolutionary program*” without having first built “*a sizeable party*” or “*experienced a successful revolution.*” With such arguments, Marx and Engels could not have written the *Communist Manifesto* and the Russian Marxists could not have elaborated a party program in 1903. Just as the working class needs a revolutionary party at all times, a revolutionary organization must always possess a political compass at every possible political conjuncture. It needs this regardless of whether it is numerically weak or strong. Refusing to elaborate a revolutionary program assures a road leading towards political confusion and degeneration. A communist program lays an indispensable foundation for building and further developing revolutionary continuity.

Revolutionaries have to learn from the experience of the workers’ movement as well as from their own personal experience. As we have stated in the RCIT Program: “*The programme of us Bolshevik-Communists is the codification, the summary and generalisation of the lessons of past class struggles and the successful and failed attempts at building a world revolutionary party.*”¹⁹⁷

Indeed, without our programmatic achievements in the past decades our tendency could not have survived as a revolutionary force. Our program pointed us in the right direction during such historic events like the collapse of Stalinism, the imperialist “*wars on terror,*” or the workers’ struggles and uprisings of the oppressed. Without the program we would have ended up like the centrists who were rather driven by the varying sentiments of bourgeois public opinion, the labor bureaucracy, and the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. This results in an unprincipled zigzag-policy which reflects both the incomplete radicalization of workers or youth (i.e., those with roots among the masses) as well as capitulation to non-proletarian forces. In addition, our serious approach to the program has enabled us to further develop it wherever it had weaknesses and to struggle against deviations inside our tendency.

197 RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, p. 5

Further Development of Program and Theory

Understanding the necessity of a revolutionary program must go hand in hand with the desire to continually develop further the program and theory of Marxism. This is necessarily an ongoing task given the permanent progression of the objective reality and the class struggle. In the RCIT Program we wrote:

*“Does this mean that our programme is “the last word”? Of course not. There is no “last word” because the world never stands still. Just as society continually develops, the workers and oppressed always gather new experiences, so a programme, by its very nature, must continue to evolve. It must reflect and include new developments, new experiences and new lessons. If this does not occur, it degenerates into a lifeless dogma. (...) As previously stated, we consider our programme not as a “last word.” Many experiences of the revolutionary movements worldwide could not sufficiently be reflected therein due to our limited presence in a few countries as the RCIT is currently a small international organisation with activists in Asia, Europe and North America. We are, therefore, fully aware of the limitations of our programme.”*¹⁹⁸

Similarly Lenin insisted on such an approach to Marxist theory:

*„We do not regard Marx’s theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life. We think that an independent elaboration of Marx’s theory is especially essential for Russian socialists; for this theory provides only general guiding principles, which, in particular, are applied in England differently than in France, in France differently than in Germany, and in Germany differently than in Russia. We shall therefore gladly afford space in our paper for articles on theoretical questions and we invite all comrades openly to discuss controversial points.“*¹⁹⁹

We therefore don’t see our accomplishment of elaborating a revolutionary program as reasons for complacency. We have seen that joint discussions and collaboration with revolutionaries in other countries has helped us to advance our understanding. This will obviously continue to be so in the future.

In addition, we have recognized various areas of theoretical work in which we had weaknesses in the course of our movement’s history. Consequently, we have already corrected several past weaknesses or blind spots (e.g., on migrants, the Black question, the national question, distortions of Lenin’s understanding of the labor aristocracy, party building theory, the workers’ government slogan, on the mandatory military service, on semi-colonial European countries and their accession to the EU, etc.)

However, more theoretical and research work has to be done. To name just a few examples we need to deepen our analysis of the labor aristocracy or the program for women liberation in the semi-colonial world. Another important task for Marxists is the further development of Marxist philosophy drawing on

¹⁹⁸ RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, Vienna 2012, pp. 4-5

¹⁹⁹ V. I. Lenin: Our Program (1899), in: LCW Vol. 4, pp. 211-212

the elaboration of dialectical materialism in the USSR in the 1920s by the Deborin School and rejecting the various revisionist deviations like structuralism or the Frankfurter School.

Importance of Exemplary Mass Work

Our experience has strongly emphasized the importance of exemplary mass work even for a small communist pre-party organization. Without such work, a small group is doomed to become a passive-propagandist sect even if it has the best program in the world. Such work helped us gain important experience and to recruit new militants tested in the class struggle.

At the same time, we saw groups both inside and outside the LFI which were not willing or capable of undertaking mass work and which degenerated into sects. A group cannot retain an internal healthy communist and militant spirit over a longer period if it does not regularly undertake regularly work among the popular masses as communists. Of course communists must make sure that such mass work is combined with communist propaganda and agitation and fighting under the open banner of the Bolshevik organization in order to recruit new militants. Naturally one might be forced to make exceptions in cases where serious dangers exist for the communist militants, thereby endangering the party's work in this area. Similarly, communists will alter the emphasis between propaganda, theory and education on one side and agitation and mass work on the other, according to the character of the period. For example, during a counter-revolutionary phase the weight will be more on the side of the propaganda, theoretical, and educational tasks.

Another important aspect in choosing the areas for exemplary mass work is the criterion of how to make such a choice. It is not relevant for us which areas of work the petty-bourgeois left has chosen. For us, the main criterion is which subjects and which struggles are important for the lower and middle strata of the working class and the oppressed, since it is these layers which we primarily want to attract to our ranks.

Splits and Fusions

During our history, we have experienced a number of splits and fusions. If methodical differences become irresolvable and lead to endless paralysis, usually a split is preferable. Taking the experience of the Austrian section we can sum up the balance sheet and see that each time we suffered a split we ultimately emerged not only politically more mature and resolute but also – two or three years after the split – numerically stronger than we were before it. Similarly we can say that if we would not have split with the LFI majority, we would have programmatically and organizationally degenerated and declined.

Toleration of systematic deviations from authentic Marxism by hoping that such

inner-party problems can automatically be resolved is a method which leads to certain degeneration. This was an important lesson which the *Left Opposition* drew in 1927:

*“The workers who constituted the immense majority of the socialist parties of the West before the imperialist war were undoubtedly opposed to an opportunist deviation. But they did not overcome in time the opportunistic mistakes of their leaders, which were not at first very great. They underestimated the significance of these mistakes. They did not understand that the first serious historical disturbance after that prolonged period of peaceful development which had given birth to so powerful a workers bureaucracy and aristocracy, would compel not only the opportunists but the centrists also to capitulate to the bourgeoisie, leaving the masses at that critical moment disarmed. If you can reproach the revolutionary Marxists, who were the left wing in the Second International before the war, with anything, it is not that they exaggerated the danger of opportunism when they called it a national-liberal labour policy, but that they relied too much upon the working-class composition of the socialist parties of those days. They relied upon the revolutionary instincts of the proletariat and upon the sharpening of class contradictions. They underestimated the real danger and mobilized the revolutionary rank and file against it with insufficient energy. We are not going to repeat that mistake.”*²⁰⁰

Naturally, there is no reason for communists to light-mindedly seek a split. But neither should they be afraid if differences prove too deep and irreconcilable. Building a party is impossible without splits. This is why Engels once remarked:

*„Incidentally, old man Hegel said long ago: A party proves itself victorious by splitting and being able to stand the split. The movement of the proletariat necessarily passes through different stages of development; at every stage part of the people get stuck and do not participate in the further advance; and this in itself is sufficient to explain why the ‘solidarity of the proletariat’, in fact, everywhere takes the form of different party groupings, which carry on life-and-death feuds with one another, as the Christian sects in the Roman Empire did amidst the worst persecutions.”*²⁰¹

An important instrument of reducing the danger of splits is the ability of the leadership to anticipate possible problems in the party’s work and to intervene quickly in order to minimize the possible damage. In addition, such a sensitive and flexible attitude of the leadership helped us repeatedly to support comrades who faced this or that problem in his or her development in overcoming it without unnecessary tensions or conflicts.

On the other hand, we also have had a number of positive experiences with fusing with organization coming from different political backgrounds. We consider agreement about the program for the revolutionary struggle in the present historic period as well as about the strategic tasks and methods in party building as essential for fusion. In contrast to various sects, we don’t see

²⁰⁰ Leon Trotsky: Platform of the Joint Opposition (1927)

²⁰¹ Friedrich Engels: Letter to August Bebel, 20. June 1873. in: MECW 44, p. 514

agreement about past historical events having no direct relevance for the present period as a necessary precondition for fusion. One could say that a consistent revolutionary line must lead to agreements to past as well as present events. To this we reply, yes this is true, but a revolutionary party, as well as a pre-party organization, will unavoidably have comrades and groups among its ranks that are not “consistent.” Life is full of contradictions, and revolutionaries would be foolish and sectarian to preclude the possibility of joining forces and working with others with whom deep methodologically agreement might eventually emerge. When fusing their forces in August 1917, the Bolsheviks never demanded from Trotsky’s *Mezhraionka*, to renounce their incorrect approach towards the question of unity within the Russian Social Democracy. Neither did Trotsky demand from Sneevliet and his *Revolutionary Socialist Party*, who opposed the Left Opposition’s orientation to reform the Communist International before 1933, to undertake such self-criticism when they joined the Fourth International forces in 1934/35. The same holds true for Trotsky’s approach to the *Block of Four* tactic which included the SAP led by Jakob Walcher who supported Brandler’s erroneous approach to the failed German revolution in autumn 1923.

This method of party-building helps us attract groups and individual militants who have different political origins and traditions than the initial cadre of the RCIT. It has enabled us to gain different experiences both in our four initial sections as well by winning over new groups. Today, nowhere outside the US section do former LFI members constitute even a sizeable minority of our membership.

Building the Communist Pre-Party Organization in the Working Class

We have seen that, in the long run, the class composition of a revolutionary organization has tremendous consequences for its political destiny. Naturally, it is possible that a small group starts with a proletarian-poor class composition and has mainly intellectuals and labor aristocrats in its ranks. This is not a tragedy ... as long as the comrades are aware of this problem and take measures to systematically try to improve their class composition.

If it fails in this task, its comrades will invariably cultivate bad habits and it will become more and more difficult to recruit workers and proletarian youth. Similarly, we have seen during our struggle inside the LFI how strong comrades come under the influence of passing fads of the progressive petty-bourgeois intelligentsia (post-modernist skepticism, attraction to pluralist left unity projects, lack of dedication, difficulties in talking with and winning over workers and proletarian youth, etc.)

Any revolutionary organization which seriously wants to build itself up as a mass-group of members of the working class and oppressed – and not of the intelligentsia and labor aristocracy – must from the beginning put strong

emphasis on orienting its members to work opposite the popular masses. It must fight against all forms of aristocratic prejudices and test whether its members are willing and able to learn to work among the proletarian masses.

According to our experience, it is equally important that a revolutionary organization actively promotes the cadre development of members from the lower strata of the working class and the oppressed. Furthermore it must consciously select dedicated members and help them to develop into leaders. It is a crucial test for the success or failure of a revolutionary organization as a proletarian combat organization whether it has succeeded to develop a number of cadres from the lower layers of the working class and oppressed so that they represent a significant share of its leaders. All in all it should desire to have a primarily proletarian composition of its leadership.

Comrades coming from non-proletarian backgrounds, who are prepared to break with their class affiliation with its privileges, relative wealth, and chances for a career; who dedicate all their time to the organization as full-time party workers, or consciously take on a proletarian job within the lower strata of our class; who view with hostility middle-class careerists; and who humbly do their best to assist working class comrades develop as cadres – these kinds of dedicated communists will always be welcome among our ranks, regardless of their original class background.

Struggle against Left-Reformism and Centrism

A Bolshevik organization can only fight for the revolutionary program if it is determined to fight against those who distort the ideas of Marxism. The struggle for ideas does not take place in a vacuum but reflects the struggle between classes. Hence, it can only take place as a struggle between groups of people (parties, unions, institutions, etc.). Marxists fight against those who reject Marxism's revolutionary conclusions in the name of "Marxism." They take up this struggle because these left-reformist and centrist forces can only confuse the vanguard.

Discussions and collaborations with such groups are useful if they – or sectors of them – are in a process of questioning and breaking away from their centrist roots. Equally it can be necessary to pay tactical attention to left-reformist and centrist groups where they represent radicalized new layers of the working class and the oppressed.

Outside of such situations it is wrong to orientate to this petty-bourgeois left milieu. A revolutionary organization usually should orient to winning over new workers and youth who are joining the class struggle and are looking for an alternative. These layers are fresh forces in the class struggle and are free (or more free) from distorted Marxist ideas.

In one of our documents on the perspectives of the world situation we noted with regard to the issue of orientation of party-building:

“It is because of its orientation to the labor bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeoisie intelligentsia that the bulk of the centrist and left-reformist milieu is increasingly poisoned by pessimism, skepticism, moaning about the lack of “left unity”, hysterical renunciation of the “Leninist hyper-centralism” and the “vanguard party” concept as well as praising of liquidationism. Authentic revolutionaries however orientate towards the new, militant layers from the working class and the oppressed who are looking for a program and a strategy to fight against exploitation and oppression. This is where our optimism and firmness stems from. Those who wish to develop in a revolutionary direction must break from an orientation towards the centrist and left-reformist swamp and look for rooting themselves in the healthy, militant proletarian milieu.

This does not mean that revolutionaries should ignore the reformist parties or the centrist groups. The policy of the united front tactic remains in full force as well as the need for a hard struggle to remove these revisionists’ influence in the workers vanguard. But in the first line the RCIT orientates towards new militants and initiatives from the ranks of the workers and the oppressed. From these layers only, new promising forces and a new dynamic will come. And such developments might affect healthier elements from the ranks of left-reformism and centrism and help them to break with the revisionists’ rotten method.

Revolutionaries have to understand in depth that not only has capitalism entered a new historic period of massive instability and sharp turns, but the international workers’ movement has done so too. No stone is left unturned. Those forces, who don’t understand the character of the period and its corresponding tasks, are doomed to degenerate more and more and get pushed to the right. For those forces, however, who are coming closer to an understanding of the sharply antagonistic nature of the present period, who are willing to join the masses in their struggles – in particular the lower strata of the working class and the oppressed – without arrogantly sneering about their “backward consciousness” and who are at the same time determined to fight intransigently for the revolutionary program and who ruthlessly attack the reformist and centrist traitors – those forces can revolve themselves and play a healthy and utterly positive role in the struggle to build the new World Party of Socialist Revolution. Being aware of the limitations of historic analogies, one has to see that to a certain degree the present period bears similarities to the years after the outbreak of World War I in 1914. In this period the workers’ movement went through sharp crises, splits and transformations. In this period the rottenness of the centrist majority of the Second International – which already existed before 1914 but was less obvious – came to full light. The orientation and tactics of Lenin and his supporters are highly instructive for the Bolshevik-Communists today.”²⁰²

Such are a number of lessons which we in the RCIT have drawn from our experience. Since we live and act in ongoing history, we are certain that the next

²⁰² RCIT: The World Situation and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Communists (March 2013). Theses of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, March 2013, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 8, p. 42, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-march-2013/>

years will bring us even more experiences. In order to utilize the opportunities ahead, we will continue to work on the basis of our Marxist program and tested methods of party building. We call upon revolutionaries around the world to join us in the struggle for the most important goal as long as the capitalist exploiter system continues to exist: the building of revolutionary parties and the Fifth Workers' International!

The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto

Programme of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

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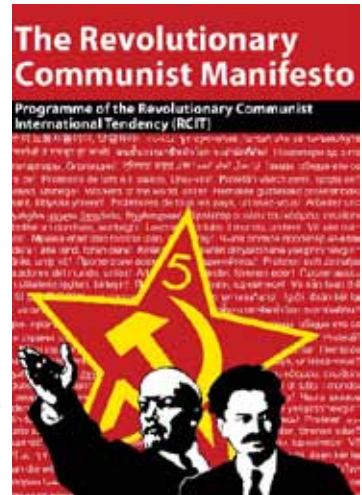
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The Great Robbery of the South

***Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation
of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital***

***Consequences for the Marxist Theory
of Imperialism***



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency*

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Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?

*The Road from
Revolution to the
Restoration of Capitalism*



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Look for details of the books at www.cuba-sold-out.net

Russia as a Great Imperialist Power

By Michael Pröbsting, March 2014

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V. Summary

A few months ago, our movement commemorated its 25th anniversary. In the summer of 1989 our predecessor organization, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) was founded as a democratic-centralist international tendency based on an elaborated program. The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) continues the revolutionary tradition of the LRCI. Below we give an overview of our history, an evaluation of its achievements as well as mistakes, and a summary of the lessons for the struggles ahead. This book summarizes our theoretical and practical experience of the past 25 years.

In Chapter I we outline a summary of the Bolshevik-Communists' theoretical conception of the role of the revolutionary party and its relation to the working class. In Chapter II we elaborate on the essential characteristics of revolutionary party respective of the pre-party organization. In Chapter III we deal with the history of our movement – the RCIT and its predecessor organization. Finally, in Chapter IV we outline the main lessons of our 25 years of organized struggle for building a Bolshevik party and their meaning for our future work.



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