

Theoretical Journal of the PCR-RCP

ARSENAL

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on the partisan
war machine

Foreword

This year marks two anniversaries: the 150 year anniversary of the founding of Canada and the 100 year anniversary of the October Revolution. Both are significant for the re-initiation of Arsenal—the theoretical journal of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Canada [PCR-RCP] — though for drastically different reasons.

The first anniversary, which the Canadian state will be celebrating from January to December, represents the founding of a blood-drenched capitalist state after just over three hundred years of colonial settlement and plunder. In 1534 rising European powers made contact with the Indigenous nations that composed the social fabric of the regions that would eventually be enclosed in the borders of the entity we now call Canada. After numerous vicious and genocidal policies enacted alongside the clash between colonial powers, not to mention the important and heroic resistance of the original nations, the settler-state of Canada was established in 1867. Since the PCR-RCP has maintained, since its own foundation, that any revolutionary movement worthy of the name “revolutionary” must reject the colonial entity of “Canada”, this anniversary is significant insofar as it represents a mythology that we reject. Doubtless this year will witness claims about Canada’s supposed “greatness” that either dismiss/downplay its history of “blood and fire” or, due to the rise of fascism, celebrate colonial might. Our entire existence, and the theoretical understanding that guides the essays comprising this journal, is premised on the rejection of the Canadian myth: from our beginning we have understood the ways in which Canadian nationalism has crept into the communist movement;

Canadian left nationalism is synonymous with revisionism.

Thus, it is the second anniversary that we celebrate—an anniversary that those canonizing Canada’s 150 years will likely reject and belittle. Whereas 150 years ago the managers of colonial rule consolidated their predatory hegemony, 100 years ago on the other side of the world our ideological ancestors succeeded in launching the first successful communist seizure of state power. In the face of the armed might of the reactionary state, the Bolsheviks led by Lenin not only declared victory but consolidated this victory into the first example of modern socialism, a dictatorship of the exploited and oppressed rather than a dictatorship of exploiters and oppressors. Unlike the anniversary of Canada’s founding, we believe that the anniversary of the October Revolution is worth celebrating. But we can expect that the Canadian ruling class, excited to peddle the ideology of Canada’s “greatness” during this anniversary year, will also expend time and energy, along with their counterparts south of the border and throughout the imperialist camp, rehashing old cold war propaganda about the Russian Revolution so as to confirm its failure as pre-ordained: revolutions are “monsters that eat their young”, capitalism is the “best of the worst”, everything outside of the capitalist world order is “totalitarian”, and the so-called “end of history” is a fact of nature. . . This is the real totalitarian world view and one that we should roundly reject.

It is in this context that we are relaunching our theoretical journal, Arsenal. Over a decade has passed since the original run of Arsenal, a series of magazines the initial Organizing Committees of the PCR-RCP published in the lead up to the drafting of the party programme. Since that time, while we have grown as an organization and engaged in various and important practical labour, aside from a few notable exceptions we have not produced any new theoretical work for popular consumption. Since

we uphold Lenin’s statement that guided the October Revolution (without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement) it is necessary to redress this theoretical absence.

But, since we are not merely “Marxist-Leninist” because we also uphold another revolutionary sequence—the one conceptualized under the term “Maoism”—we understand the business of organizing and preparing for a revolution in a way that is different from, though inspired by, the Bolsheviks in 1917. The “party of the new type” that we aim to build in Canada, the project towards which all our energy has been dedicated, is not simply a “Leninist” party but a Maoist party. Hence we figured that it would be appropriate to reintroduce our theoretical journal according to this theme: the Maoist party of the new type. At the very least the following articles will acquaint the curious reader with the way we see ourselves as an organization and what makes us different from others who also celebrate the legacy of the October Revolution.

We sincerely hope that the following articles will be helpful in thinking through the task of making revolution in this social context, a task that necessarily requires a rejection of this year’s celebration of Canadian Confederacy.

— *the Editors*

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Building a Maoist Party of a New Type

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One of the central insights of Maoism is that it centres around revolutionary subjectivity and intention over mechanistic determinism, and in that spirit it is important to develop a self-conscious understanding of our work, how we do it and why. How we conceive of ourselves, as a Party, is an important aspect of this. Like every part of our work, our conception of the Party is transformed in light of the insights offered by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, such that we can conceive of a Maoist Party of a New Type, which is the subject of this editorial.

When we talk about “the Maoist Party of a new type” we’re talking about an elaboration upon the “Party of a new type” described by Lenin and later so named by Stalin. What we propose is in continuity-rupture with that conception, with some new elements introduced and some others expanded upon in light of the experience of the world proletariat in making revolution since those conceptions were put forward.

There are points in history where our established ideas appear inadequate, where maintaining the revolutionary essence of Marxism requires that we re-examine our assumptions in order to make a break with those that don’t work anymore and to carry on a continuity with those that do. Revisionism does not always present itself as an active departure from an established revolutionary communism, sometimes it is the continuation of

an old conception which, though revolutionary in its time, has grown outdated in light of the experience of the world proletariat. Failure to integrate the insights of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism into our conception of the Party would be an error of this kind.

Role of the Party in the Mass Line

The emergence of MLM as a new stage in the development of revolutionary theory allows us to clarify, systematize, and consciously apply strategies which before were carried out in an untheorized way or not at all. This is the case in the application of the mass line. The role of the Party here is to distill and systematize the most advanced of the disparate and unsystematized ideas of the masses into campaigns, slogans, watchwords and organizations. Once so distilled these are deployed by the Party, brought “to the masses” where they are tested in practice, this practice serving as data for the development of new, more refined and more universal insights. In this process, Party’s role is to intentionally metabolize the data—perceptual knowledge—it gathers through social investigation and through practice into theory—conceptual knowledge—which can guide the proletariat’s practice in struggle for its emancipation. This is a process that all people carry out, all the time in their daily lives, the difference being that we do it systematically, deliberately, collectively, and that we bring to bear a body of knowledge and indirect experience—theory—which does not arise spontaneously from the immediate struggles of the people. What’s more is that we do it with a definite goal in mind: advancing the interests of the proletariat in the class struggle. In our epistemology, we’re partisans of the proletariat.

We recognize that the initiative of the people is the decisive factor in this process. The Party and its cadre have to be there to agitate for communist solutions to the problems confronting

the masses and to serve as an organizational structure around which to consolidate the forces gathered in practice, but it is the activity of the people that will win the day and in large part the Party's success in this process of intellectual metabolism is a measure of how effectively their results can mobilize the masses.

Implications of Two-Line Struggle for the Party

The Party itself needs to be a site of struggle between the two lines of “Marxism”, its bourgeois iteration, which eviscerates Marxism of its revolutionary character, and the genuine proletarian revolutionary communism. There is a temptation, in upholding democratic centralism, to “ape the line internally”—that is, to treat it as a member's duty to uphold the existing decisions of the Party in internal debates concerning those decisions. Such an internal culture stifles the creative development of theoretical innovations which we will inevitably need in the face of unforeseen challenges on the road to communism. Worse, it provides cover for bourgeois elements in the Party, who will be able to rely on an obedient, monolithic membership to uphold their moves to put the Party on the capitalist road and to let these moves go unchallenged within the Party itself.

This may seem like a fundamental aspect of democratic centralism and by no means a specifically “Maoist” development of the theory of the party, but it has the character of a development for two reasons. First, in contrast to the norms that developed in the Comintern in the 1930s onward, which emphasized the “centralism” of “democratic centralism” over the “democracy” and which valued lock-step discipline in political line over debate and innovation. This norm helped revisionism to consolidate itself rapidly in the international communist movement with Khrushchev's adoption of the “three peacefuls”—peaceful com-

petition between social systems, peaceful coexistence among social systems, and peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism. Second is in its systematic conception, best exemplified by Mao's theory of Two-Line struggle, where through an intentional process of debate, criticism and self-criticism, disagreements can be worked out and elaborated into a bourgeois line and the proletarian line.

Knowing in a given situation which is which cannot always be so easy. As Lenin described, the forces of revolution and reaction do not simply line up opposite one another, declare their allegiances to either revolution or reaction, and fight it out. The method of two-line struggle helps these distinctions to be worked out in a deliberate, systematic way. From there, it is the duty of proletarian revolutionaries in the Party to defeat the bourgeois line, not to keep the peace inside the Party in the name of a false "unity". Within the Party, we should strive to be partisans of the proletariat.

This defeat, though, must first and foremost be political in nature and not organizational. It is not enough for people with the correct line to maintain their hold on positions of organizational leadership and in this way to exclude, marginalize or expel those with the incorrect line. It must be illustrated, to the membership and the masses, that the bourgeois line will take the proletariat off the path toward communism. This is not to say we shouldn't strive to ensure those in leadership are selected from among those with the correct political line or that nobody should ever be expelled for upholding a bourgeois line and refusing to rectify, but that the bureaucratic approach to handling a contradiction like this will, in the long run, reinforce an internal culture within the party which is fertile ground for the establishment of a revisionist leadership.

The Party as potential headquarters of reaction It is possible, of course, that the bourgeois line may be upheld not just by

some rogue faction within the Party which can be dealt with handily by a few polemics, but by the leadership itself. As a matter of fact, as Marxist-Leninist-Maoists, we expect there to be a tendency toward this situation under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and when the bourgeois political perspective—and with it a nascent bourgeoisie—begins coalescing around the leadership of the Party, the Party itself can become the “headquarters of reaction”.

One of the insights of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is that this tendency does not come exclusively, or even primarily, from outside socialist society by way of imperialist propaganda or infiltration, but rather from the contradictions inherent to socialist society itself. Though the base structure of a society may be socialist in character, with its relations of production transformed to varying degrees and its means of production under the control of the proletariat, the superstructure—in particular the culture—of that society will not become socialist overnight. The superstructure not only lags behind the base, but exists in dialectical interpenetration with it, itself influencing the base’s development. A bourgeois (or even feudal) cultural outlook, even in a socialist society, will lead people to relate to one another according to bourgeois or feudal values, which if left unchecked over time, will begin to reproduce bourgeois social relations. This extends to the internal life of the Party and to the relationship between the Party and the people. We know therefore that it will be necessary for proletarian society (which marches toward communism) to struggle against and defeat bourgeois society (which marches toward capitalism) in every sphere of social life, and that this struggle will continue well after the dictatorship of the proletariat is established. That is to say, the class struggle will continue under socialism, and as partisans of the proletariat, our task will be to uphold and strengthen the proletarian camp in this struggle. We know that this will be a

political struggle first and foremost, and not a struggle solely against ‘bourgeois interlopers’ or ‘outside agitators’.

The solution to this, mobilizing the masses in Cultural Revolution, is one of the world-historic insights of MLM. The Party, here, needs to agitate among the masses and compel them into action, and to prepare the people for this eventual necessity starting now.

Knowing that the Party itself can become the headquarters of the bourgeoisie forces us to rethink our understanding of the Party. For one, it negates the very possibility of the “good soldier”, because if the task of every cadre includes an internal struggle against the emergence of a reactionary leadership, this “good” behavior—characterized by an uncritical obedience to orders coming from the centre—paves the way for the bourgeois line to be implemented without a struggle down the road. This “good” behaviour, which could conceivably be acceptable if the Party were always and forever the categorical representative of the proletarian line, in fact becomes bad.

More than this, a culture marked by such uncritical obedience itself serves to engender a particular relationship of the leadership to the membership, and further of the Party to the people. It reproduces bourgeois culture and society by crystalizing a permanent stratification of those who lead and those who are led and reifies that stratification elevating it from a temporary pragmatic necessity to a permanent intrinsic good. This cultural remnant of bourgeois society, which continues on under the dictatorship of the proletariat, can serve to distort and obstruct the development of socialism, paving the way for the capitalist roaders, and so we will have to struggle against it both during and even before the dictatorship of the proletariat is established. A Party in which the proletarian line is in command will embrace this struggle.

Implications for the internal life of the Party

The Maoist Party includes a unity of opposites in its internal life. On top of discipline, unity and centralization it builds a spirit of rebellion, a practice of criticism and an organizational commitment to democracy. After all, we know that we will someday be continuing the class struggle under socialism and mobilizing the masses to smash the remnants of bourgeois society, which may well exist inside the socialist state or even the Party itself!

Without being built on a foundation of discipline, unity and centralization, these latter characteristics are little more than invitations to disorganization, eclecticism and individualism, but without them, those foundations run the risk of developing into dogmatism, monolithic obedience to central authority, and stagnation. They each become valuable when, and only when, they exist in tandem with one another.

We don't conceive of the Party's perspectives, its programme or any of its propaganda as being imbued with any special quality of "correctness" simply by virtue of having been produced by a self-styled vanguard party and our task simply being to convince the people that they're correct. We do our best to arrive at correct conclusions—conclusions which will move us closer to communism—using the best theory, experience, and analysis available to us, but these are always just attempts at correctness. Whether we're correct or not is borne out in practice, with reality being the ultimate arbiter. This means we have to employ a spirit of experimentation and a penchant for creativity in our work. It also means we should build on what knowledge we have accumulated in practice, learning from our failures as much as from our successes.

Party sections do not exist simply to report to the Centre, who

then churns out directives back to the sections. One of the roles of the Leadership, of the Centre, in this conception of the party is to allow sections the latitude to experiment and to encourage such experimentation. Different initiatives may be more appropriate in some contexts than others because of the particularities of one or another locality, so it's functionally expedient to give this space, but this advantage is actually secondary to the real reason sections need this space for experimentation. The Party is not infallible, and the Leadership is not infallible. Implementing this idea in practice means allowing sections to exercise initiative. This helps develop cadre capable of working through the problems we'll face in our work and also models our understanding of the relationship of the Party to the masses: one which recognizes the decisive importance of the latter's initiative.

The role of the Leadership does not end there, though. Left simply at this, experimentation by local sections would result in a narrowness of perspective, fragmented practice, and the confinement of correct practices to the sections that originated them. Given this latitude for experimentation, the Party's Centre has a role in generalizing the correct practices developed by the sections. This means encouraging, or sometimes directing, sections to adopt those practices which have been demonstrably successful and to abandon those practices which are demonstrably unsuccessful. Just as the Leadership is not infallible, neither is any level of the Party's organization, and one of the advantages of having a central leadership is the ability to take a broad perspective of the Party's work apply the lessons learned from that broad perspective to local problems.

The Party must take care to avoid the lionization of its leaders, which elevates them above the status of mere mortals and culminates in the personification of the leadership in a single person. In situations like this, it is all too easy for this leader to adopt the incorrect line and, with an enthusiastically

deferent membership behind them, take the whole Party down that incorrect line. A collective leadership, one which is well understood to involve a multiplicity of perspectives united around a solid programmatic foundation and a proletarian partisanship, is much better suited to the complex and nuances challenges that will face the people in their struggle for communism.

Role of the Party in light of PPW

The strategy of Protracted People's War forces us to develop our conception of the Party, its relationship to the masses, its role and its methods of propaganda.

We cannot simply wait for the occurrence of a cataclysmic “revolutionary situation”, a crisis of the current order of such magnitude that our classic propaganda can be sufficient to win over a sturdy plurality of the population to our perspectives and mobilize that bloc for the hasty smashing of the bourgeois state and the establishment of the proletarian one. We need to engage the enemy in a comprehensive, protracted conflict which encompasses the struggles for political, economic, cultural, and military power.

The task of the Party must extend beyond the “classic propaganda”—publishing ideological material, raising slogans and watchwords, issuing communiqués. These are important aspects of our work, make no mistake, but they are inadequate on their own given the necessity of a prolonged military engagement between the revolutionary forces and those of the bourgeois state. Confrontation here is itself an act of propaganda. Just as the revolutionary process needs to be comprehensive, so too does the Party's propaganda.

What this “comprehensive propaganda” requires is the practical verification of the Party and its programme—their implementation in practice. Of course, we cannot simply content

ourselves to the legal means of propaganda and struggle against the capitalist class and its state as if such legality would protect us from repression were we to threaten the existing social order. In order to protect the masses and their revolutionary movement, to say nothing of establishing dual power or even the defeat of the bourgeois state and the conquest of political power by the proletariat, a People's Army needs to be organized.

Organizing and fielding a People's Army means more than simply gathering together the individuals who will be soldiers in this army, setting up a command structure, and beginning the armed struggle. A People's Army needs to be supported militarily and politically by a substantial section of the people. They need to be armed, fed, sheltered, educated and directed—and if these are left to the army itself to provide based solely on their military endeavours, it would be a recipe for adventurism, banditry, and failure. The Party, as Mao prescribed, must be in command of the gun and not the other way around. The Party here must lead the People's Army, keeping it focused on its political tasks rather than simply its pragmatic, military goals. The concept of the militarized party is explored in more detail in this issue and so we will not dwell on it here.

Role of the Party in a Settler-Colonial Context

In a settler-colonial country like Canada, the relationship of the Party, and the proletariat as a whole to “the nation” is very different than in past socialist revolutions, which have mostly taken place in pre-capitalist and semi-feudal, semi-colonial countries. Whereas previously communists have sought, as laid out in *The Communist Manifesto* for the working class to “constitute itself the nation... though not in the bourgeois sense of the word,” this cannot be our goal when the existence of the Canadian

national formation subjects the First Nations, Metis and Inuit to national oppression by the mere fact of its existence. As part and parcel to its revolutionary overthrow of the Canadian bourgeoisie, the working class in Canada must, in a very real sense, abolish Canada. To approach this otherwise would be to pursue a new Canadian state which is proletarian- colonialist—and therefore not proletarian, but rather social- colonial. This has historically been the perspective of the communist movement in Canada, a perspective we've broken with.

There can be no question, then, of putting forward the proletarian line as an identity of “the national interest”, or worse of presenting the proletarian party as the representative of “the whole nation”. The latter is of course true in any fully developed bourgeois capitalist society, though it's doubly so when casting the Canadian nation-state into the dustbin of history is one of the immediate tasks of the proletarian revolution.

Conclusion

If the “Maoist Party of a New Type” could be summarized in a few words, it would be one where politics are put in command. Not strategic advantage, not productive capacity. Politics, the struggle for power.

The Maoist Party of a New Type, then needs to be made up first and foremost of partisans of the proletariat—people struggle for the proletarians to win, and to hold onto, power— and not of partisans of the Party. The degree to which the interests of the proletariat line up with the Party's political line depends on how successful these partisans are in waging struggle, and in enlisting the people in that struggle.

Long live the proletarian partisans and long live the proletarian Party!

A Theory in Search of a Theory: on the post-Maoist drift

Tomas M.

The central orthodoxy of the mainstream left in the imperialist countries is that any organized movement that takes it cue, in whatever sense, from the theory of the revolutionary party described most famously by Lenin (i.e. the concept of party of the avant garde, or the vanguard party) is a relic. This central orthodoxy, then, concerns the very meaning of orthodoxy. Hence, we have a rhetoric of terminology where “orthodox Marxist-Leninist” is used, as a singular dismissive term, to code every variant of this approach to organizational practice as synonymous with thoughtless, religious faith. In doing so, this anti-Leninism is largely incapable of recognizing heterogeneity; it cannot recognize that the “vanguardism” of a Trotskyist sect, such as the Spartacist League, is different than the “vanguardism” of a revisionist electoral party, such as the Communist Party of Canada, both of which are different from anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism, and all of which may possess significant differences within their own particular tendencies.

Although some organizations that adhere to a version of the theory of the party may indeed be quite orthodox in their understanding of reality and Marxist categories, or at least extremely dogmatic and sectarian in the way they practice their politics, the claim that this approach is “orthodox” merely because it seems older than the fashion of rejecting it, is not the best argument. The most obvious problem with the anti-Leninist discourse is

that the term “orthodox Marxist-Leninist” is quite ironic: it is a discourse that is based, first and foremost, on a dogmatic dismissal of the concept of the party inherited from the end of the Cold War and the supposed “triumph” of Capitalism. It is orthodox because it is fashionable, and has been in fashion for quite some time, and itself is guilty of making quasi-religious claims about reality. There is a mindless repetition of the term “orthodox Marxism-Leninism” to code all conceptions of party organizing, despite the fact that some conceptions might be heterodox or that the concept of the party, and the way in which it developed through revolution, was never completely orthodox. There is also the fact that this rejection of party-type organizations predates the time of so-called “orthodox Marxism-Leninism” and isn’t as new as today’s fad would like us to believe. Thus, the claims about how the language of the Leninist tradition is stale, that it is an “orthodoxy” 60-70 years out of date, and that everyone who talks about a revolutionary party now will immediately belong to a past that can teach us nothing except to avoid its conception of organization, are more rhetorical than substantial. They rely on an appeal to the failure of actually existing socialism and the common sense belief that any political ideology that declares some form of continuity to the Leninist tradition is old-fashioned.

My above comments about this contemporary orthodoxy is not intended, though, to motivate an analysis that is focused on the continued relevance of the concept of the revolutionary party but simply to contextualize my following discussion of Maoism and post-Maoism. For though I intend to focus on the phenomenon of “post-Maoism” and its relationship to Maoism (how it grew out of particular tendencies in the so-called Maoist camp, what it should mean for those of us who value the Maoist theoretical tradition) this context of anti-Leninist orthodoxy, the context of the first world anti-capitalist left, is important to

recognize: it explains the motivation behind post-Maoism, which is primarily a first world phenomenon, a phenomenon that could only develop in the crucible of anti-vanguard orthodoxy.

Upon defining oneself or one's organization as "Maoist" in this context of anti-party common sense, one immediately encounters a knee-jerk critique that follows the aforementioned rhetorical complaints: Maoism is called "orthodox Marxist-Leninist"; appeals to a party from a Maoist framework are dismissed as being six or seven decades out-of-date. These critiques are often made without a reasonable understanding of contemporary Maoism. For one thing, by simply dismissing Maoism as another Leninism (or worse, a "peasant Stalinism") these critiques have rarely bothered to examine how Maoism understands the party in terms of organization and strategy, and how this might differ from other variants of Leninism. Nor do such dismissals seem to be aware that what we now call Maoism may be the result of a series of historical reconceptualizations—the most contemporary of these, where Marxism-Leninism-Maoism was said to replace Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, happening in the late 1980s and early 1990s—rather than something that happened in the 1960s-1980s. Most often, such dismissals of Maoism are under the assumption that "Maoism" is merely the guiding ideology of the Chinese Revolution from its beginning, simply because it was led by Mao Zedong—and even in these cases the split between China and the Soviet Union that launched the anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninist movement is barely investigated. There are, of course, reasons to ignore these nuances: an orthodox Marxism-Leninism is hard to proclaim when there were historical debates about what counted as Marxism-Leninism, the very category of orthodoxy was challenged from multiple angles, and contemporary Maoism emerges, still trying to find its legs, in the context of multiple arguments about the meaning of the party. Better to simply rely on the orthodoxy that a revolutionary party is

outmoded—an orthodoxy that stretches back to anarchist and left communist traditions that either predated or were contemporary with Lenin—than imagine that the concept might not be entirely homogenous and orthodox.

The strength of this contemporary orthodoxy is such that it has now succeeded in convincing organizations and individuals who used to place themselves within the Maoist camp. Hence, post-Maoism. In an effort to prove that their Maoist past does not mean that they are behind the times, the multiple post-Maoist positions are united in their use of categories learned through a general Maoist experience to make the claim that Maoism, being “orthodox” and thus outmoded, needs to be replaced by a better theory of organization. Even those post-Maoist tendencies that eventually fall back on actually orthodox patterns of organization and strategy, such as the US Revolutionary Communist Party [RCP-USA], share this characteristic with other post-Maoist tendencies: the assumption that the application of categories gleaned from past struggle are outdated because they are imposed, in an a priori manner, upon the masses and a complex struggle that has evolved in the past three or four decades. For example, Lenny Wolff, defending the RCP-USA’s current direction, indicates that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism might be an apriorism, “which means imposing categories on the world, rather than drawing these concepts from the world itself, in a complex interplay between practice and theory.”¹

As a side comment, this claim about apriorism is a simplistic understanding of what has normally been understood, in the philosophical tradition, as a priori knowledge. That which is a priori is that which precedes embedded, socially lived knowledge. It does not mean, as Wolff and the RCP-USA would have it,

¹Lenny Wolff, *Re-envisioning Revolution and Communism: What IS Bob Avakian’s New Synthesis* (http://revcom.us/a/130/New_Synthesis_Speech_PT-2-en.html).

knowledge that is priorly received because of historical experience; it means knowledge that precedes material existence—that is either part of some preexisting ontological order (i.e. Plato’s theory of forms where the material world participates in an ideal world of pre-existent concepts), or some biodeterminist genetic coding.

If we were to call all pre-received knowledge and theoretical categories a priori, and thus an imposition of categories upon the world, we would have to dispense with most of science and demand that every scientist begin by re-examining all scientific categories and theorems whenever they enter their labs—meaning, we would have to demand that science loses itself in a closed loop of reflection since the establishment of any category would mean, for the following scientist, an “apriorism” that would blinker their endeavours.

Most importantly, however, this fear of imposing pre-received categories upon the world, rather than drawing these categories from the world itself (which, it must be noted, meets its limit once we ask how categories drawn from the world will not be impositions a couple days later, when the world has rotated and things are a bit different), is something of a cherry-picking exercise. Those who argue that the concept of the revolutionary party is “orthodox” must explain why they can dismiss this aspect of the Marxist history as orthodox without dismissing the aspects they like, such as class struggle. Post-Maoism as a whole must deal with the fact that its methodology of claiming that Maoism is outmoded and orthodox is usually based on the invocation of concepts gleaned from Maoism (i.e. the theory of the mass-line) which should, according to this very same logic, be treated as an imposition. And even that particular variant of post-Maoism represented by the RCP-USA must explain why it can call the Marxism-Leninism-Maoism it does not like an apriorism when the RCP-USA still functions according to categories that appear,

at least to most of its critics, as stale and orthodox approaches to reality.²

The problematic of post-Maoism, then, is less of a rarified “deviation” from Maoism that concerns only Maoists, and more of a uniquely Maoist articulation of the orthodox zeit-geist. If Maoists are nothing more than “orthodox Marxist-Leninists” simply because they believe that the establishment of some version of a revolutionary party is necessary to build a revolutionary movement, then those who locate their politics in the Maoist tradition but who accept this rhetorical claim about “orthodoxy” must find a way to keep the valuable contributions of this tradition—because this is the language they have come to understand—and rely on these contributions to renounce the tradition as a whole. In the final analysis, post-Maoism is only sometimes an adaption to a movementist orthodoxy; more accurately, it is an auto-cannibalism where those who are part of a general Maoist tradition use Maoist categories to devour themselves.

²I believe, to be clear, that there is a way to explain how and why some categories are dogmatic and imposed, in an orthodox manner, upon concrete circumstances. The point, here, is not to argue that all pre-received categories should be accepted as correct, only to indicate, as I will demonstrate in this essay, that the multiple tendencies of post-Maoism, not to mention the movementist milieu that birthed post-Maoism, has no coherent method for explaining what is and what is not “orthodox” or “apriorism”. The only way to make sense of categories that are being imposed upon a concrete situation so as to deform it—without lapsing into an irrational rejection of universalism, science as a whole, and a position where no theory can be established without automatically being an imposition, regardless of the cherry-picking that pretends to claim otherwise—is to grasp how revolutionary categories emerge, the basis on how and why they should be accepted, and that structural, total whole that all species of post-Maoism, as well as “anti-orthodox” Marxism or just movementism in general, functions to deny. I locate this understanding in the contemporary development of Maoism, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to explain my reasoning in rigorous detail.

1: Post-Maoism, broadly understood

The main difficulty in engaging with the phenomenon of post-Maoism is that it is more a nebulous ideological drift than a coherent theoretical tendency. That is, various organizations and individuals that shared some past fidelity to Maoism, broadly understood, are demonstrating, in different ways, what we can call “post-Maoism”—a label applied by the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist [MLM] camp. The Communist (Maoist) Party of Afghanistan [CmPA] has characterized this “lost road of post-MLM” as a position that holds that: i) “the time for Marxism, Leninism and Maoism is over;” ii) a “new theoretical framework,” a ruptural development from Maoism, is required.³

Therefore, post-Maoism is the broad theoretical position wherein formerly Maoist organizations and individuals have decided that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is no longer relevant for their concrete conditions, that a rupture from MLM is required so as to make communism relevant again, and that a new theoretical framework needs to be developed. Some organizations—such as the RCP-USA and the Communist Party of Iran (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) [CPI(MLM)]—have argued that this new theoretical framework can be found in the RCP-USA’s so-called “new synthesis”, whereas other organizations—such as the Kasama Project—argue that this new theoretical framework needs to be discovered through a re-initiation of social investigation and a vague process of left regroupment. Both approaches, however, are united in the assumption that MLM is inadequate, that the development of post-Maoism is necessary, which is why, despite their differences, they are part of the same phenomenon.

The reason why this tendency is more of an ideological drift,

³CmPA, *The Communist Party of Iran (MLM) has fallen into the lost road of “post-MLM”* ([http://www.sholajawid.org/english/main_english/CPI\(MLM\)fallen_post_MLM.html](http://www.sholajawid.org/english/main_english/CPI(MLM)fallen_post_MLM.html)).

or derive, than a coherent theoretical position is that, while it is the case that groups such as the RCP-USA have claimed that their “new synthesis” is indeed the vaunted new theoretical framework of a post-MLM communism, on the whole post-Maoism is defined by a theory in search of theoretical credibility. The “new synthesis” lacks credibility insofar as it is neither new nor a significant synthesis in the manner of the moments of Marxism, Leninism, or Maoism;⁴ those other post-Maoist organizations and individuals, less arrogant than the RCP-USA, have simply stated that a theoretical rupture is required and that some other new synthesis needs to be found. On the whole the identity of this derive is based on the desire of organizations and individuals that once professed fidelity to some form of Maoism to either supersede or replace MLM—and to do so using concepts inherited from the Maoist tradition—because it is antiquated and can no longer address the concrete conditions of the current conjuncture.

Hence, a theory in search of a theory. Some are basically this search has resulted in a new synthesis and hope other searchers will recognize that this is the case. Others are in favour of prolonging this search in the hope that their process of investigation will find the holy grail of a new communist formula that will

⁴It is not my intention, here, to waste time arguing why this is the case. Rather, I would urge readers to consider the fact that, despite the RCP-USA’s delusional beliefs about its world historical importance, this “new synthesis” has mattered very little to international struggle, nor has it provided very much in the way of creative development. This has been argued, and very adequately, in the following documents: Bob Avakian’s “New Synthesis”: A Critique, a 5-part series published on now defunct The Workers Dreadnought blog (<https://theworkersdreadnought.wordpress.com>); A Response to the RCP-USA’s May 1st 2012 Letter from the Communist (Maoist) Party of Afghanistan (http://www.sholajawid.org/english/main_english/A_response_to_the_tcp_USA_sh28.html); and Against Avakianism, an essay from Comrade Ajith first published in July 2013 in No. 4 of the Naxalbari journal (<http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-ML-Naxalbari/Naxalbari-Magazine/Naxalbari-04.pdf>).

solve what MLM could not.

At this point, however, it is worth recognizing something that is correct in this post-Maoist derive. Although I plan to critique the assumptions behind post-Maoism I believe, in order to avoid dogmatism, we need to be careful so as to avoid the simplistic charges of “revisionism” or “eclecticism” that, though not always incorrect, often detract from rigorous investigation. That is, we must accept that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is open to the future, that there can indeed be some “post-Maoist” stage that ruptures from Maoism in the way that Maoism ruptured from Leninism: if we were to assume, as Maoists, that there could be no development beyond Maoism we would be dogmatists. We must also recognize that MLM is merely a short-hand for revolutionary communism, a use of names in order to explain molar theoretical developments, and that sometimes these names might, when they are used as dogmatic formula, obscure or diminish the creative development of theory. In terms of the latter problem, we are stuck with the unfortunate reality of having to define our understanding of communism according to labels that are based on individuals (who may not have always, as individuals, been the best representatives of the theories that adopt their names) so as to delineate ourselves from others whose style of communism is derived from another tendency. In terms of the former problematic, we need to ask how and why the science of revolution develops, what would make a post-Maoism even possible—my argument is that this rupture, where MLM is antiquated and a new stage is necessitated, is entirely impossible at this conjuncture.

Furthermore, I hold that those who claim that a post-Maoist theoretical framework is necessary have provided no significant reasons as to why this is the case because of a failure to understand the significance of the theoretical constellation of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. That is, those who call for a post-Maoist

rupture have been unable to demonstrate how and why MLM has reached its limits and are often arguing for this rupture within the very limits they hope to supersede. Indeed, as we shall see, very Maoist reasons are usually mobilized to justify post-Maoism: we are informed that a proper understanding of the mass-line demands that we concentrate on a process to discover why Maoism is irrelevant, MLM is “imposed from outside” and is not derived initially from the masses; a party of the new type, if it is to avoid the errors that accrued under the “Stalinist” understanding of Marxism-Leninism, must be open to creatively breaking from theoretical dogma, MLM being part of this dogma; to openly assert MLM is simply to “wave the red flag” and impose alien dogma upon masses who are “not ready,” and may even be unwilling, to accept this shorthand for communist ideology.

Most importantly, it is worth noting that post-Maoism is a phenomenon that primarily emerges in the imperialist metropolises, amongst organizations and individuals who once proclaimed themselves Maoist, in an effort to address the short-comings of revolutionary development in this context.⁵ Rather than recognizing that the pace of development in these spaces might be the result of the power of the labour aristocracy (and thus imperialist super-exploitation), a history of anti-communist ideology, and the hegemony of economism, those who gravitate towards post-Maoism might actually be in search of a reason to avoid revolutionary clarity. Often they will ascribe the errors of the past period of anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninism (that also went by the name “Maoism”) to the contemporary movement, certain that we have not overcome these errors because we still use these

⁵This is not to imply that all revolutionary movements in the peripheries are Maoist, only that it is hard to find an example where they are post-Maoist. Rather, it is more common to find the endorsement of theoretical positions that are alternatives to Maoism (Trotskyism, Hoxhaism, old school Marxism-Leninism, some form of anarchism, etc.) than former Maoists trying to think of new ways to be post-Maoist.

“antiquated” names and terms, argue for the existence of a revolutionary party, and base our theory on these grand historical moments. In the meantime they provide no alternative but an appeal to an unending process of social investigation, a theory in search of theory, or a new synthesis that is a pitiful echo of the theoretical moments it is attempting to synthesize. These are the questions that lurk behind this essay: what does post-Maoism mean for revolutionaries struggling in the imperialist metropolises? The answer I hope to force is not very much.

2: Post-Maoism as compared to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism

If we are to argue that post-Maoism is a theoretical “lost road” then we need to also argue why Maoism is still relevant. More significantly, we need to spend some time engaging with the theory that is supposed to be superseded, that is supposedly irrelevant: we cannot understand post-Maoism without first identifying Maoism. What we’re calling post-Maoism is not the abandonment of Maoist concepts

altogether, but an attempt to rupture from Marxism-Leninism-Maoism while recognizing the historical validity of Maoism—just as Maoism rearticulates the significance of Leninism despite having ruptured from (but retaining continuity with) Marxism-Leninism. If it can be demonstrated, however, that there is no conceivable reason for theoretical rupture—that the demands for this rupture have not indicated a new theory that mobilizes new concepts, new weapons in the class war, that could not otherwise be mobilized already by MLM—or that contemporary post-Maoism is more pre-Maoist than post-Maoist (but with Maoish clothing), then this phenomenon does not possess

theoretical significance in a world historical sense.⁶

My point in this section is not to write a thorough description of Maoist ideology, which would be the business of an entire book, but to describe its general contours.⁷ I hope to demonstrate that these contours are not thoroughly grasped by all varieties of post-Maoism, despite their history in the Maoist milieu, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed below.

Following the Communist Party of Peru [PCP] and the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement [RIM], those organizations responsible for first theorizing Maoism as a stage of revolutionary science rather than a name for anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism, I argue that Maoism, like Leninism, possesses universal aspects that are applicable, in different ways, in every particular social context. These interrelated aspects are: i) the theory of the mass-line (from the masses to the masses); ii) the theory of cultural revolution, that class struggle continues under socialism and even within communist parties; iii) that People's War is the strategy of making revolution.⁸

⁶This is not to say, however, that post-Maoism cannot provide us with useful concepts and interventions, only that the general tendency to demand a supersession of Maoism is erroneous because it lacks any logical basis.

⁷The PCR-RCP has already, in its programme and various documents, explained what it means by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in more detail. Other MLM programmes provide similar elaboration, and other individual Maoists have provided longer definitions of the concept.

⁸The last point is somewhat controversial, and there has been some semantic arguments surrounding the distinction between People's War [PM and Protracted People's War [PPM. We argue that there is no distinction between PW and PPW, and that those who often make this distinction are simply dressing up the theory of Insurrection in the costume of PW, because how else would a PW, in any situation, not be protracted? The RIM statement, Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism!, unfortunately feeds into this semantic confusion by claiming, on the one hand, that PW is "universally applicable in all countries," but on the other hand claiming that it takes the form of PPW in countries dominated by imperialism (http://www.bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1995-20/11_mlm_20_eng.htm). It defines the latter as "surrounding the cities from the countryside," but does not explain: a) why this

The above definition might be pithy, following the way in which the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement quickly breezed through the theorization of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, but I am not trying to write an entire book on the significance of this theory, only to note how it should be identified—and simple identifications are necessarily pithy. In order to make these aforementioned aspects less pithy, then, I want to argue that these are not simply separate concepts but are united by the Maoist party of the new type. That is, while there was recognition of some of these aspects as significant before MLM was theorized, they were recognized within a practice that was still Marxist-Leninist rather than Marxist-Leninist-Maoist. As Ajith argues:

Stalin's concept of the monolithic party was prominent among his mechanical errors. This was the model followed by the international communist movement... An outlook of worshipping the party as a power that could not be questioned and was always correct was strengthened [in the communist movement]. The influence of mechanical thinking, which denied internal contradictions and class struggle in socialism, was evident... It was not grasped as a

particularity makes it more “protracted” than a PW carried out in imperialist country, or proving that this is a distinction made in Mao's theorization of PW; b) what a PW would look like in imperialist countries if it is supposedly part of a new strategy that is different from insurrection. Which is why some Maoist organizations engaged in PWs in the global peripheries would indeed argue that PPW applies to their contexts, but insurrection applies to the imperialist metropolises. If this is indeed the case then, contrary to the PCP and the RIM, one of Maoism's universal aspects is not PW. We argue, however, that it is for reasons we have articulated elsewhere. More importantly, it is worth recognizing that those Maoist organizations engaged in PWs that argue this strategy is not universal for the imperialist metropolises are pursuing PWs in their own context and that this, despite what they say about imperialist countries, demonstrates Maoism in practice.

space of active contradictions, as an organic entity which must continually renew its leadership position and relevance in society by grappling with external and internal contradictions.⁹

The theory of the mass-line, cultural revolution, and People's War, then, are also about how a revolutionary organization will grow or stagnate. The Maoist party must renew itself in the masses and be open to criticism; the Maoist party must always struggle within itself, avoid commandism, and develop a prefiguration of collective, other-centred consciousness so as to prepare cadre and mass members, as well as the revolutionary masses as a whole (if and when it expands its sphere of influence), for the class struggle under socialism; the Maoist party must be prepared to wage war against capitalism in more than just words, it cannot wait for the magic moment of insurrection and betray the masses by allowing them to be crushed by a wellorganized state, it must comprehensively wage struggle in all areas of social existence. Rather than explain this in more detail, which is not the purpose of this essay, I simply want to point out that the possibilities opened up by the universal aspects of Maoism have still not been exhausted because: a) they explain why a revolutionary organization stagnates, just as Leninism explains why disparate and spontaneous organizing doesn't work; b) they

⁹Ajith, *On the Maoist Parry* (<http://thenaxalbariblogspot.ca/2013/05/on-maoist-party.html>). We should not assume, however, that this concept of the party was inherited just from Stalin. Orthodox Trotskyists possess this monolithic understanding of the revolutionary party and democratic centralism, which is why their critiques about "Stalinist" bureaucratism are quite ironic—these people would also, because of their mechanical party existence, make perfect bureaucrats. In any case, if Trotskyists demonstrate this same understanding of the party then the Maoist conception of the party is more than a break from Stalin, but a break from what Stalin (and, in another way, Trotsky) was faithfully attempting to uphold: the party model inherited from Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution that proved itself incapable of properly dealing with the class struggle that emerged under socialism.

have unlocked a rich theoretical terrain that has barely been explored.

Moreover, despite all the talk about “the party of the new type” in the past “New Communist Movement” [NCM], where groups that called themselves “Maoist” functioned as the organizational norm, the above understanding of the party is not what was articulated in practice or even in the literature of some of the most prominent “Maoist” organizations. Instead, these words were merely used to dress up top-down, monolithic parties with fancy language; most of the major “Mao Zedong Thought” organizations in that period, predating the contemporary conceptualization of MLM, pursued a party organizational life that resembled Stalin’s notion of the Leninist “party as general staff of the proletariat.” Here it is interesting to note, then, that some of the significant post-Maoist organizations (i.e. RCP-USA, Kasama) come from a context where this kind of monolithism was practiced and called “Maoism”—I will discuss this in more detail in the following section.

More significant than my simplistic definition of MLM, though, is why we ought to treat these general theoretical aspects as universal—again, as applicable in every context though mediated by particular social realities. When we are speaking of concepts that are universally applicable we are using the language of science. Although it might be the case that some readers reject the possibility that there can be such a thing as revolutionary science, believing instead that this label only applies to what popularly claims the term (i.e. biology, chemistry, physics, etc.), it is also the case that Marxism as a whole—whatever its tendency—is a theory that originated according to the assumption that it was a science of history/society and thus, because it claims the motive force of history/society is class struggle, of revolution. To quote from one of our supporters:

Science is that which speaks to material conditions

without mystification; science provides a natural explanation of natural phenomena. [...] Because the historical/social explanation of historical/social phenomena is the very mechanism of class struggle... [the historical materialist] scientific hypothesis is that which is capable of demystifying the whole of history and myriad societies, a way in which to gauge every social struggle capable of producing historical change. [...] A scientific understanding of struggle... teaches us about the theoretical terrain of struggle that has been presented by history, through humanity's past endeavours, and is still open to the future. Which social struggles established due to marginal, but universalizable successes? Which successive struggles learned from these past establishments of truth and went a little further before also meeting failure? How, then, do we apply what has been scientifically proven in these circumstances so as to go even further?¹⁰

Hence, the moment we talk of significant Marxist theoretical developments, or the need to overcome certain periodizations of Marxism, we are making use of scientific categories. To reject that Maoism can use the language of science, then, is to reject that Marxism as a whole should do away with this language. If this is the case, however, then we would need to ask on what basis can any theory make the claim that something beyond Maoism is required. That is, what justifies this demand if not an appeal to the dialectic of universal-particular where post-Maoists claim that Maoism is no longer universally applicable due to particular circumstances? Furthermore, on what basis can a

¹⁰J. Moufawad-Paul, *The Communist Necessity* (Montral: Kersplebedeb, 2014), 43-44.

Marxism of any type be accepted if we are not to grant that its law of motion, class struggle, is essentially a scientific assessment? While I agree that there needs to be more theoretical engagement and interrogation with the concept of science and its relation to Marxism as a whole (particularly since it has led to historical abuses that, due to a mechanical application of Marxist formulas, conflated science with dogmatism), I think it is important to recognize that without an appeal to revolutionary science any attempts to claim that a new theoretical development, post-Maoism, is a necessity (which in itself is scientific terminology) is logically groundless.

Furthermore, the development of revolutionary science has (despite claims to the contrary) fulfilled the “falsifiability” qualification by being tested in the crucible of history through world historical revolutions. We accept the universal concepts that developed first with Marxism, then with Leninism, and most recently with Maoism because they emerged from concrete assessments of the only three communist world historical revolutions (the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution—world historical because they each changed the entire world, though not always immediately, in a significant way that the others had not), and each of these revolutions applied the universal lessons that were systematized from the previous revolutions in ways that proved their correctness through the experiment of class revolution.

Leninism remained an open theory, wherein a lot of philosophical intervention and conceptual experimentation was possible, from its first formulations following the Bolshevik Revolution right up to its final systematization, in the course of the polemical exchange between China and Russia, in the anti-revisionist document *Long Live Leninism*. The global anti-revisionist movement unleashed by this exchange, that declared itself faithful to this document, erroneously called itself Maoist but the truth was

that it was simply engaged in the last confines of a theoretical moment that was nearing its limits, that was approaching a new theoretical rupture that would actually be Maoism. Now Maoism, gleaned from an assessment of the world historical revolution of China, is an open theory that is far from reaching its closure because it still requires the revolutionary developments, the next world historical revolution, that will demonstrate its own limits. It is a theoretical development of Marxism that was gleaned from revolutionary struggle, universal because it is based on what we know was missing (and what we also know wasn't missing) from past struggles, that requires far more theoretical and philosophical engagement in order to be fully operationalized.

Leninism possessed its Gramscis, Lukacses, Althussers, and others—all called forth because of a truth process that was understood to possess universal aspects, concepts that required further exploration so as to be thoroughly understood. We have barely begun to investigate the salience of the claims derived from the experience of the Chinese Revolution, how Marxism-Leninism-Maoism can be comprehensively synthesized, and yet some who claim to have been part of this tradition are demanding that we abandon this investigation and necessitate a further rupture. On what basis is this demand made? Not on a world historical revolution that has falsified this theory, not on the existence of even an intellectual tradition that has explored this theory in the same way that Leninism was explored. Hence, the reasons for a post-Maoist theoretical rupture lack justification. Nor have those who argue for this rupture significantly explained how and why they are providing anything that is more helpful in class struggle than what Maoism has already articulated and that still needs to be worked out.

3: Pre-Maoists demand Post-Maoism

Those organizations and individuals demanding post-Maoism are most probably, at least at this conjuncture, missing the point. In this section I will briefly examine the background of the most significant post-Maoist organizational tendencies and how this background might make their post-Maoism not as post as they imagine. After this detour, and in the following section, I will discuss one of the main justifications for post-Maoism: the mass-line and mass work. In order to fully appreciate how this justification might be off-target, then, it is worth looking at the way in which MLM was understood by those organizations that have most strongly championed post-MLM.

Interestingly enough, the most significant post-Maoist tendencies have emerged from organizations that were, at best, Marxist-Leninist “with Chinese characteristics”. That is, both the RCP-USA and the Kasama Project (which came out of the RCP-USA) appear to mainly derive their understanding of Maoism not from the development of MLM that was inherited from the PCP or the RIM but from a period of anti-revisionist struggle where Maoism was a label for a fidelity to a Marxism-Leninism that identified itself with China instead of the revisionist Soviet Union. If they once identified with MLM it was only because of their association with the RIM and not because of any internal theoretical development on their part. Whereas other members of the former RIM developed their Maoist identity based on the assumption that Maoism was a new stage of revolutionary science, the RCP-USA treated the RIM as a project in which it could exercise its hegemony on the international level—hence the *Conquer the World* document¹¹ that was rejected by other groups in the RIM because they recognized it as an instance of

¹¹Bob Avakian, *Conquer the World: the proletariat must and will* (http://revcom.us/bob_avakian/conquerworld/).

American exceptionalism/chauvinism and a “slide to liquidationism.”¹² Interestingly enough, the Kasama Project, that emerged from and against the RCP-USA, still upholds Conquer the World. Both of these post-Maoist parties agree with a post-Maoism that pre-existed a rejection of MLM because they never embraced MLM to begin with.

Thus, post-Maoism is often a confirmation of a rejection of MLM from the get-go: Conquer the World was a document that was never MLM even when the RCP-USA was forced (because of the PCP and the RIM) to use this terminology because it argued that Leninism was a “bridge” for upholding Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and that “Maoism without Leninism is nationalism.” (There is no point, because it would be extremely tangential, in addressing the “crypto-Trotskyist” elements of this document where it implied that the RCP-USA should determine the international struggle.) If my previous explanation of MLM is pithy, then the Maoism in this document is pathetic... And yet it is still accepted as a significant document by some US post-Maoists, which demonstrates that these organizations were never interested in engaging with Maoism as Maoism, that is Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

Point being, the loudest exemplars of post-Maoism are not properly post-MLM because they don't get appear to get MLM to begin with, to know precisely what they are being post-of. At best, they were the “Maoist” movements that pre-existed, but did not develop alongside with, contemporary Maoism. Most importantly, they cannot offer solutions to the problems raised by MLM or reasons to break from its strategic and organizational demands. Nor do they possess the practical basis on which to justify solutions/reasons: there is no world historical revolution that generates revolutionary evidence.

¹²Ajith, *Against Avakianism* (<http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-ML-Naxalbari/Naxalbari-Magazine/Naxalbari-04.pdf>), 22.

To claim that Mao's version of Marxism-Leninism was better than Khrushchev's does not amount to a development in theory; it simply means a militant protectionism of the category of Marxism-Leninism. The majority of the New Communist Movement was caught in this problematic; the fact that many of them are now moving to the post-Maoist camp, then, should not be surprising. If the possibility of Maoism as a post-Leninist category was denied from the outset, then an alternate trajectory was already in operation. If such a trajectory managed to pick up some of the theories that would form Maoism in the process (the mass-line, the cultural revolution) then so much the better—these became justifications, despite the fact that they were exercises in “apriorism” or theoretical orthodoxy, for their amelioration in post-Maoism.

4: Imposition from the Outside?

Perhaps the most damning charge levelled by those who gravitate towards post-Maoism is the claim that, as mentioned in the introduction, Maoism no longer speaks to the concrete reality of the proletariat, that mass work reveals it is an ideology imported from outside, and hence a new theoretical framework is necessitated by this apparent disconnection. The most arrogant examples of post-Maoism, such as the RCP-USA's new synthesis, attempt to systematize this charge of providing the basis of a post-Maoist theory that can supposedly speak to the concrete reality of the proletariat better than the entire history of revolutionary theory after Marx and Engels. The more sober examples, such as the Kasama Project's attempt to reconceptualize a new communist beginning, are content to theorize a search for a new holy grail of organizational theory.

Aside from the already noted claim that these charges rely on appeals to Maoist logic (i.e. the mass-line), and thus provide

no justification as to how they have superseded the boundaries of Maoism, it is important to note that they are simply rearticulations of older charges made against Marxism-Leninism. The claim that communism is an “alien ideology imported from outside” is not new, it is precisely what the more spontaneist and workerist currents of communism have been claiming for a very long time: all attempts to found a communist party are treated as wrong because they supposedly reject the proletariat’s essential ability to “self-organize.” If this is actually the assessment of those who gravitate to a post-Maoist position then so be it. . . . But, according to the same logic, they would also have to reject appeals to the mass-line since this is also a theory that is imported from the so-called outside. Far better not to demand a return to mass work, a justification of the failures of MLM according to its own theory of the mass-line, and just wait for the masses to make revolution by themselves. This is where post-Maoism dovetails with pre-Leninism, demonstrating that it is not as post as it imagined.

But those of us who care about the history of Maoist struggle should reject this inside/outside binary from the get-go.

First of all, the significance of MLM is not located in an academic conceptualization but in struggles that have been informed, as aforementioned, by world historical revolutions: to claim that this is an alien importation is to deny the significance of these struggles, to claim that they taught us nothing. That is, to claim that a theoretical development that has been discovered through mass revolutions is irrelevant, and is imposed on the masses, is to deny that the masses were involved in its development. The Maoist turn in Marxist theory is not something imagined in academic contexts divorced from the masses; it is a theory that was realized, codified, systematized by mass struggle—the end result, as aforementioned, of two multiple world historical revolutions.

Secondly, if such a theory is indeed an alien importation foisted upon the masses, despite its history, then we need to ask by what standard can any theory be recognized as legitimate? If we believe that no theory systematized by a revolutionary movement is useful for other possible revolutionary movements due to the fact that every particular social context is singularly different in its social context—that all systematized revolutionary theories, due to the ways in which they are systematized under the names of people who happened to represent the most concrete analysis of a concrete situation (i.e. Marx, Lenin, Mao) are imposed from outside—then the only alternative is to assume that there will be a spontaneous invention of mass revolutionary theory with a spontaneous movement. Such a position was indeed the position of the Italian autonomists (the Operaismo, or workerist, movement) and, to a much more impoverished extent, Hal Draper’s conception of “socialism from below.” This is a position that advocates a rejection of systematization, hoping that revolutionary theory will be invented spontaneously in the process of struggle, ignoring the fact that certain elements of the masses might possess an advanced consciousness that communicates to a history of struggle, that will be mobilized by the revolutionary lessons learned from past struggles. According to such a view, we are doomed to reinvent the wheel of revolutionary theory over and over, forbidden from learning from previous struggles, because rupture is more important than continuity.

The less arrogant variants of post-Maoism (that is, the variants that do not automatically assert a “new synthesis”) rely on quasi-Maoist conceptions of the mass-line to justify veiled autonomist and spontaneist conceptions of theoretical development: we must do more social investigation so as to justify Maoism, despite the fact that the basis of this theory has already been proved by world historical struggle; we must not impose a theoretical line because it might be seen as sectarian, despite the

fact that we live in a world where anything principled is falsely conceived as “sectarian”; we must wait for a process to develop into a party, and anything is a violation of the mass-line, despite the fact that this theory of the mass-line was itself won from revolutionary struggle.

While it is correct to recognize that this inside/outside problematic is worthy of philosophical investigation—and it has been investigated by Gramsci, Althusser, and others—the fact that post-Maoism relies on Maoist categories to justify a rejection of Maoism should tell us that there is nothing worthwhile in this proposed theoretical development. If Maoism no longer speaks to the reality of the proletariat, then it should follow that no communist intervention in proletarian reality is worthwhile, that we should wait until they craft their own spontaneous theory. We should not even bother with mass work since to do so would be to foist the alien ideology of the mass-line upon the masses—to even conceptualize masses or classes is an act of totalizing intervention.

Interestingly enough, individual and academic post-Maoists (such as Alain Badiou and Jacques Ranciere), have made the assessment, in different ways, that the Maoist conceptualization of concrete reality is insufficient. Such an assessment, however, is based on very individualistic definitions about what is required for revolution: Badiou conceptualizes a new ontology of struggle, freed from (but in some ways indebted to) Maoist constraints; Ranciere, perhaps rightfully opposed to Badiou-style ontologization, rejects everything but spontaneous self-organization, and particularly any attempt to say what the proletariat is. Both of these positions, though, are based on individualistic assessments of what is to be done, an attempt to overstep the Maoist paradigm (without even properly understanding how this paradigm was established through struggle, or what it properly means). And we should wonder why such assessments, made by

individuals who have divorced themselves from struggle, matter more than the assessments made by those organizations that have developed the conception of Maoism.

Those post-Maoist organizations that also attempt a rejection of Maoism are united in this regard: they declare that social reality must be reinterpreted through a different theoretical lens—and that all Maoist analyses of this reality are either imposed from outside or antiquated—while attempting to provide a meaning for this social reality learned from Maoist categories. One response to this problematic is to assert a supposedly new theoretical framework; another response is to claim that a new theoretical framework, though required, is in the process of development. The former response is a substitution for Maoism (a new synthesis that is neither new nor a synthesis), the latter attempt is justification for theoretical abdication—where we must wait until a theory, built from the very theoretical tools that we claim to reject (i.e. the mass-line, derived from Maoism, building a post-Maoism), invents itself.

If all of this seems pretty nebulous, and a vague speculation on post-Maoism, it is because, as I indicated in the introduction, the phenomenon of post-Maoism (or, rather, phenomena because of the various tendencies) is itself vague, nebulous, and speculative. When individuals and organizations that formerly claimed some sort of fidelity to Maoism declare the need to go beyond Maoism, but are clear that this need is not driven by the desire to reject important elements of Maoism's theory and history, they cannot adequately articulate why this going beyond is demanded, or what this post-Maoist theory will look like, except in boring, vague, or speculative terms.

First, there is the unremarkable type of post-Maoism: the assertion of a theory that, while pretending to be new, is just a rearticulation of an already existing Marxist theory and thus not actually post-Maoist—sometimes it might even be pre-Maoist.

The RCP-USA's "new synthesis" is an example of this banal tendency, and it is worth noting that its only justification is the supposed genius of Bob Avakian and the delusional assumption that the RCP-USA is the leading force of world revolution. The fact that this organization began to degenerate right when Avakian became its primary leader, because it had never really functioned as a Maoist organization, should make us wonder how and why it possesses the historical vocation to declare a new stage to revolutionary science.

Secondly, there is the vague type of post-Maoism: the assertion that, through the proper use of the mass-line and social investigation, a process of communist regroupment will lead to a revolutionary organization with a new theory. Groups such as the Kasama Project are symptomatic of this tendency; the vagueness is that this is potentially a process without end—the future new theory has failed to manifest, despite the occasional use of other post-Maoist concepts (i.e. of Badiou's ontology), and the Kasama Project has been saying pretty much the same thing from its founding documents to date. Moreover, in its use of Maoist conceptions to justify its post-Maoist regroupment process, this vague tendency can never really articulate how it is really overstepping Maoism, what such an overstepping will ever look like, or what is the theoretical basis for initiating this process beyond appeals to theoretical rupture.

Thirdly, there is the speculative type of post-Maoism: this is the realm of individual academics, the speculation that Maoism doesn't work, and that it's time to return to interpreting the world so as to guide our attempts at changing the world. Badiou's ontology is a good example of this approach but, despite the fact that we can always glean useful concepts and theoretical tools from communist philosophers, its speculative detachment from the concrete doesn't seem to provide a useful alternative, as a whole, to what Maoism already possesses. Furthermore, we

must again ask on what basis can these ontological post-Maoist interventions justify their necessity. Individual contemplation and investigation does not seem to be a valid basis for revolutionary theory; an ontological system that claims to overstep Maoism and that functions generally as a speculative exercise is something that cannot really be tested.

All post-Maoism must find itself within the wasteland of conjecture, searching for a theory that can only manifest with another revolutionary movement—but what movement will spontaneously emerge without revolutionary theory? Moreover, to assert that Maoism is no longer relevant is to claim that the questions it has raised, that the universal demands it has mobilized, have already been superseded by struggle. The fact that most post-Maoists rely on the theory of the mass-line to demand post-Maoism might demonstrate that Maoism has not been superseded, particularly since the mass-line, and its relation to the party, still needs to be fully explored and creatively articulated by Maoists.

In some ways the whole post-Maoism problematic is a result of the lack of clarity around the meaning of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, as well as the fact that our use of the names of revolutionaries to explain our theoretical positions can often result in distortions. After all, it would be far easier to just call our theory “revolutionary communism” than Maoism—and if there were not other communist tendencies then we would not have to use these names to explain how and why we’re different. Truthfully, if a tendency that labels itself post-Maoist ends up producing the same theoretical conceptions as one that labels itself Maoist then in some ways there is no point in fighting over labels.

Indeed, the entire distinction between Maoism and Mao Zedong Thought has been labeled, by some, as little more than a problem of semantics. Joma Sison, for example, has argued that there is no real difference between these terms— most probably

because the Communist Party of the Philippines understood, from early on, that there was universal applicability in the Chinese experience of world revolution.¹³ For the CPP, then, these labels meant the same thing. Even still, semantics do matter because semantics are about meaning (what is signified) whereas syntax is about the surface level

of representation and appearance (the signifier).¹⁴ Hence, a semantic distinction is important: the distinction between Maoism and Mao Zedong Thought is a distinction between a theoretical development and an additional body of thought about Marxism-Leninism. The fact that Mao Zedong Thought primarily concerned the anti-revisionist upholding of Marxism-Leninism, and was always focused on the “proper” meaning of Marxism-Leninism—and that this was how the “Maoism” of the Mao Zedong Thought variety was conceived for most of the world involved in the New Communist Movement—should tell us that the distinction between Maoism and Mao Zedong Thought does matter.

But the phenomenon of post-Maoism, unlike the supposed semantic problem of Maoism, is not a confusion of labels. Even when post-Maoists do complain about labels (i.e. complaints about how the masses are alienated by terms such as “Maoism”), this is no different than the common practice of communists of all tendencies complaining that the general language of communism (class struggle, revolution, proletariat, the word communism itself, etc.) should be abandoned. The problem is that the

¹³Joma Sison, *The Communist Party of the Philippines on Maoism, New Democratic Revolution, China and the Current World* (<http://josemariasison.org/the-communist-party-of-the-philippines-on-maoism-new-democratic-revolution-china-the-current-world/>).

¹⁴The philosopher John Searle makes this distinction in order to argue that consciousness is that which can apply semantic depth to syntax [understand what is signified by letters arranged in particular patterns, or sounds spoken in particular ways], and so language and concepts require semantic depth.

impetus behind post-Maoism is the search for a new and better theory when it is unclear why such a search should even matter. Although it is definitely the case that the truth process of revolutionary science is not closed, and that the Maoist stage is not the final stage of communist theory, there is currently no basis for asserting a successive stage according to the foundation of historical materialism. Nor have the questions raised by Maoism, the organizational and philosophical demands it has necessitated, been fully explored—they are far from reaching their theoretical limits.

What I find most troublesome, though, is the desire to reject Marxism-Leninism-Maoism for obviously Maoist reasons: the claim that an organization's mass work, because of its

MLM, is not sufficient, that MLM is in defiance of the mass-line—a judgment that is made on the basis of the very thing that was called insufficient. In the organizational context, such judgments are often extremely subjective: individuals choose to leave because they feel that a Maoist organization hasn't made the inroads in the masses they want to see immediately, that they have a better assessment of a concrete situation than a party programme that emerged as a result of concepts hard won from generations of struggle, and that they can somehow produce their own concrete analysis of a concrete situation without being part of collective life.

We do not believe that our party programme is a closed document, that it is the final word on the Canadian social formation, but we do believe that if it is to change (and it will change because society changes) then it can only do so when more of the masses gravitate towards our orbit. Not because some individuals who feel they have an authentic understanding of the masses, or some new organizations starting a new social investigation process, declare that it is incorrect. Our programme, after all, emerged from a process of social investigation, from

the organizational life of past revolutionary projects, where the concepts of world revolution were connected to the past struggles and periods in our social formation; it was not imagined out of the blue, it was not imposed upon the masses from on high, it was not a speculative thought experiment.

We would argue that all attempts to come up with a new theory that is more relevant than ours, if such attempts are themselves the result of social investigation, will produce something that looks very much like our programme. Perhaps there will be a few significant differences, but we would also argue that, because our programme is a living document, it makes no sense to reinvent the metaphorical wheel so as to add the odd spoke or hubcap. Rather, we would hope that those who have critiques of our assessments and styles of work would struggle with us so that our theory and practice also develops: we are not perfect, and no theory or organization is perfect, but we do believe that Maoism—and our particular application of Maoism—is valuable. The value of post-Maoism in making revolution, though, cannot be proven because of its aforementioned banality, vagueness, and speculative nature. If all of the energy spent in searching for a theory beyond Maoism could instead be spent on developing the questions and concepts mobilized by Maoism—if all concerns about mass work and social investigation that prevent people from working with us could instead be mobilized in practice alongside us—then think of the exciting developments in theory and practice we could unleash.

Communist Methods of Mass Work

John D.

This article is an attempt to synthesize, on an abstract and universal level, nearly nine years of experience engaging in various types of mass work. As we enter into a new phase of our work—one marked by rapid expansion of the party organization, and the further development of our mass and intermediate organizations—the question of the mass-line and communist methods of mass work carries even greater importance. Without correctly conceptualizing our tasks, and engaging the masses in a correct manner, we will not be able to build revolution in Canada. There is no way around this.

What then is mass work? Mass work is, as the name implies, any sort of political work that engages the masses. It can mean work through the party, either as party campaigns, contingents in demonstrations, publishing analyses, debating, and so on. It can mean the creation of mass and intermediate organizations around specific issues or demographics. It can mean the involvement of party supporters in campaigns or organizations initiated outside the party. In short, any political activity that interacts with the masses can be considered mass work. There are, however, some types of mass work that work better in certain situations: this article will attempt to address this.

Some comrades create an artificial distinction between “party building” work and “mass work”. This incorrect approach tends to take two forms. The first is to de-emphasize party building, and only emphasize work among the masses. These comrades tend to view Maoism or revolutionary communism as a hin-

drance when engaging with the masses, and hide their politics, exposing themselves politically to only a chosen few. This tendency expresses itself in an anti-party manner. The second, which we have been guilty of at times, is to de-emphasize the importance of work among the masses, and instead emphasize only the importance of so-called party work, chiefly classical forms of propaganda. This type of practice becomes effectively sloganeering. Sloganeering is an idealist approach to organizing; there is no engagement with the material world, the needs of the masses. While it is correct to say that ideas themselves can become material forces, organization is key to the qualitative transformation between ideas and matter: the mass-line is the means by which organization happens. By focusing exclusively on propaganda work, we isolate ourselves and do not give the masses a reason to involve themselves in the revolutionary movement. In effect, without the masses we become nothing more than a sect or a cult. This article attempts to bridge this false dichotomy, showing the importance of each approach when taken together.

Closely related to the above issue is a second one, namely: does the party form mass organizations, or do mass organizations form the party? Again, this is something of a false dichotomy, but not to the same extent as the question above. Unless we adopt a spontaneist view of revolution, it seems obvious that the party initiates mass organizations. A robust network of revolutionary mass organizations can only emerge under the leadership of a party with a correct political line and practice; to expect the party to emerge spontaneously out of a conglomeration of mass organizations is to put the task of party-building off into the indefinite future. This being said, the party is itself built and strengthened through interaction with the mass organizations under its leadership: in this sense, once the party is formed, there is a dialectical interplay between the party and mass orga-

nizations, each building the other. However, for this process to be set in motion, a party is necessary. This article will unravel this issue in greater depth, and explore what we conceive to be the proper relationship between party and mass organization.

The article will proceed as follows: after exploring the reason to engage in mass work, a basic conception of the mass-line will be presented. The article will then proceed away from the abstract and toward a more concrete discussion of organization, reform and revolution, communist conduct, communist leadership, and finally, the connection between the mass-line and the revolutionary strategy of protracted people's war. The goal of this article is both to present our conception of the mass-line publicly, but also to aid the perspectives and efforts of organizers in the struggle for total human liberation, for communism.

Why do we engage in mass work?

Mass work primarily has five functions. First, mass work is the means by which the masses can be organized for revolution. In this sense mass work—the organization of the masses—is key to advancing the revolutionary movement. We should see in our mass work, and in our mass organizations, the embryo of the institutions of socialism. As such, mass work creates the subjective conditions for revolution in Canada, and is an integral part of the strategy of protracted people's war [PPW]. Simply put, if the masses are not organized there can be no revolution.

Second, mass work grounds us ideologically and practically in the masses, allowing us to evaluate our own political line against the political line(s) of the advanced sections of the masses. Our line should resonate with the masses if applied properly; if it doesn't, the balance of forces notwithstanding, then either our line or our methods are incorrect. Mass work, combined with a healthy attitude toward criticism and self-criticism, allows us to

evaluate our political line and methods of work.

Third, at the risk of sounding callous, mass organizations and mass work serve as great recruiting pools for the party. Where better to meet, build, and test potential communists than in the midst of the class struggle itself? The party should endeavour to attract to itself the most advanced sections of the masses; those with the leadership and political attitudes necessary to advance the class struggle in Canada. Mass work gives us the ability to find these people, and give them a reason to care about what we do and the political line we put forward.

Fourth, mass work allows us to directly ameliorate the conditions of the masses. This will be dealt with in detail later when reformism is discussed. But principally, by taking on specific demands or campaigns and by winning victories, we can directly improve the conditions of the masses. In turn, this gives the masses a material reason to take us seriously (not in the sense of being taken seriously in the context of bourgeois ideological hegemony, but in the sense of giving the masses a real material reason to consider our political line). While our ability to improve the conditions of the masses is limited by the increasing crises that capitalism will be experiencing as it enters its death-throes, as well as waning Canadian imperialism in light of renewed inter-imperialist conflict, there still may be specific struggles in which we can intervene and win.

Fifth, mass work allows us to create a sense of “community” in the work that we do. Capitalism is alienating and atomizing; increasingly, and especially as a result of secularization, the working class finds itself without any organization or community (church groups, neighbourhood associations, sporting clubs, political parties, unions, etc.). Indeed, bourgeois commentators have noted the “crisis of Canadian politics,” namely declining rates of membership in bourgeois political parties. The result of this atomization is observable even within the left: loneliness,

burn-out, expressions of mental-illness, lack of feeling supported, and lack of feelings of solidarity between people in the revolutionary left. Certain types of mass work, by focusing on building community, can alleviate some of the effects of atomization.

While this may seem to be the most intangible reason to engage in mass work, the creation of community is absolutely necessary for the success and vibrancy of the revolutionary movement.

These are the five “whys”, so to speak, for engaging in mass work. They are: 1) to organize the masses for revolution; 2) to keep us grounded in the masses; 3) recruitment; 4) amelioration of the conditions of the masses; and 5) to create a sense of community within the revolutionary movement.

What is the Mass-Line?¹

The mass-line is the basic method of communist organizing; it has been used, consciously or unconsciously, by all successful communist movements. Maoism, basing itself on the experience of the socialist experiments of the 20th century, represents the first codification of the mass-line. Mao was able to draw out the mass-line as a universal organizing method from the particulars of its implementation.

The mass-line consists of two basic principles. The first principle is “From the masses, to the masses.” As revolutionary communists, we adhere to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as our ideological orientation, which is to say we have a certain idea about how the world is run and a certain idea of how the world should be run. The masses do not, largely, share these ideas; they have a myriad of weird, wonderful, and contradictory ideas,

¹Much of this section is either synthesized or expanded from parts of our document *It is Right To Rebel: Maoist Manual for Serving the Masses* (<http://www.per-rcp.ca/en/archives/1304>).

some of which are good and useful, and some of which are not. However, this isn't to say that the masses do not know what they want. In fact, any ten-minute conversation with a worker will tell you that they not only have a series of very real and legitimate grievances, but also have a decent idea as to how the world could be better organized. How do we bridge the gap between our Maoist understanding of the world and the masses' eclectic and often incorrect understanding of the world? How do we bridge the gap between our proposed solutions—socialism and communism—and the very real grievances of the masses?

The mass-line stipulates that we need to “meet the masses where they are at.” It is the job of communists to go to the masses and listen to their issues. We then take their grievances, concentrate them, and synthesize them with our revolutionary ideology to form a concrete and coherent program or campaign, while maintaining and preserving the original good ideas of the masses. This concentrated synthesis is then taken back to the masses and the process is repeated in a constant reiterative process between the party and the masses. Through this process we raise the political level of the masses, while keeping ourselves grounded in them.

It is worth briefly discussing political consciousness. Some comrades understand political consciousness as existing on a continuum with reactionary ideas on one end, and revolutionary ideas on the other end. Thus, they understand the development of revolutionary political consciousness to simply be an accumulation of other correct ideas, step-by-step, oft-times within the framework of bourgeois politics or liberalism. It becomes very easy to justify economism with this understanding: the masses simply have to agree with higher wages, anti-imperialism, and so on and they will suddenly become revolutionaries. What these comrades do not understand is that revolutionary consciousness grows out of a rupture with bourgeois politics: it does not exist

on a continuum with reactionary ideas, but itself constitutes an entirely new continuum of political consciousness and activity. As such, bourgeois ideas must be consciously broken with, not simply accumulated. To tie this into reforms, it is not enough to get the masses involved in fighting for a number of reforms: there must also be an ideological rupture from bourgeois ideology on the part of the masses. Only then is revolutionary consciousness achieved.

The second principle of the mass-line is “unite the advanced, bring up the intermediate, and win over the backwards.” In order to effectively do this, we have to look more concretely at the ideas of the masses. Broadly speaking, we can say that the ideas of the masses fall into three categories:

1) the advanced, those closest to MLM, or those with generally revolutionary, progressive, and democratic ideas who are also willing to be active around them; 2) the intermediate, or those that have some advanced and some backwards ideas; and 3) the backwards, those that generally have reactionary, regressive, or undemocratic ideas. When organizing the masses, the mass-line approach is to unite the advanced, bring up the intermediate, and to win over the backwards where possible, or to isolate the backwards where winning the backwards over is not possible.²

When engaging in any sort of mass-line practice, one must be flexible. This is to say, that while it is helpful in any given situation to categorize the ideas of the masses according to the categories of advanced, intermediate, and backwards, these categories are in reality fluid. As a struggle progresses, the ideas that constitute any of these categories can change: what constitutes the advanced today may constitute the backwards

²To be clear, when we speak of these categories we are not necessarily basing them on the level of “militancy” in economic struggle. For instance, someone can have little instance in trade union affairs but could be part of the front lines of struggles against racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, etc. in their workplace and thus could still be considered “advanced”.

tomorrow. Likewise, people are processes, and over time any person can improve or worsen their own ideas. Any organizer should be able to flexibly adapt their own practice to changing circumstances; the mass-line is not a dogma, it is intended to help and not hinder mass work. It is only through a creative application of the mass-line that mass work can move forward.

The mass-line, when put into practice, is a continuous process. To get a little less abstract, we can generally identify a series of steps that encapsulate any mass-line practice. 1) First, any organizer has to begin with social investigation: figuring out what the issues or grievances of the masses are at all levels (economic, social, political, etc.), and then figuring out how the masses can be broken down into various sections. This can take the form of surveys, reactions to lived experiences, and so on and so forth. Coming out of this

process a point of political intervention should be identifiable, with a basic plan of action following soon after. 2) Once these questions have been answered (not in full because one is only able to truly know the world through struggling to change it), one must gather all those forces which are capable and willing to struggle and fight for the campaign that has been initiated. This can take the form of meetings, a campaign call-out, etc... this is the means by which the advanced are united. 3) Following the gathering of forces, it's incumbent on organizers to put people into action, to intervene in the world in a political way. Through the process of going to people and engaging in politics with them, one can sharpen their political awareness; this is the process of "bringing up the intermediate". In turn, this also serves as further social investigation for the organizers, where we are able to learn from the masses. 4) After initiating any sort of political action, there will inevitably be some sort of reaction to the work that one is engaging in. An organizer should use this as an opportunity to see what results have been obtained through the

political action, and re-evaluate the initial plan. Maybe there is a victory, maybe there isn't, but either way there needs to be some form of accounting for and systematizing the effort that one has engaged in. 5) Every struggle that isn't the final struggle against capitalism will inevitably die down at some point. It's the job of organizers to consolidate the gains made during the campaign, either in the form of ensuring the reform is successfully implemented or, more importantly, organizing new people that have been brought into political life through the work that has been initiated. At the end of the day, winning or losing the specific reform is not what's important: advancing the class struggle by increasing the level of struggle among the masses and increasing the skills and capacities of revolutionary organizers is decisive. Consolidation should serve this end. In order for consolidation to happen, formal organizations are necessary; there needs to be something for people to be consolidated into. 6) Once new forces are consolidated, a new round of investigation should begin, and the cycle begins anew.

Mass-line is not simply a set of static principles, but when applied, is a radically democratic and vibrant way of organizing.

What the Mass-Line isn't

No discussion of the mass-line would be complete without looking at what the mass-line isn't, or, that is to say, types of practices that invoke the concept of mass-line as a justification for various sorts of opportunism.

The mass-line is not tailism. Tailism is a method of practice by which revolutionaries only allow themselves to follow the most advanced ideas of the masses, never moving beyond these ideas nor putting forward any revolutionary politics; revolutionaries tail the masses. Some use the mass-line as a means of excusing this type of practice, saying that the mass-line means that we

have to go to the masses and meet the masses where they are at politically—to learn from them. While this is true, it is only half of the mass-line: revolutionaries are also supposed to raise the political level of the masses in the process of struggle, and this can only be done if revolutionaries openly put forward a revolutionary political program. The mass-line is intended to raise the level of the masses and connect them with revolutionary struggle, not serve as an excuse for revolutionaries to hide their politics.

The mass-line is not economism. Economism can be characterized as a type of practice in which economic demands are raised to a primary place of importance, while political demands are sidelined or ignored. Fighting for increased minimum wage without simultaneously and openly connecting that struggle with a fight for an end to the wage system and capitalism is an example of economism. While the mass-line is concerned with specific demands and grievances of the masses, it does not stop there: it is a means by which revolutionaries can connect these specific demands with the broader revolutionary struggle, and pull the masses into that struggle. One should not confuse specific tactics or demands with broader strategies.

The mass-line is not bureaucratism. This should be fairly obvious but it is not. In many of our organizing experiences, we have seen otherwise democratic structures misused by power-hungry bureaucrats, even when the stakes are relatively low. This is especially common within unions, of both the student and worker variety. There are some people who, without saying it openly but through their actions, conceive of the mass-line not as a radically democratic way of connecting the masses with revolutionaries, but as a means by which the masses can be controlled. Revolutionaries should use the mass-line to awaken the potential of the masses to govern themselves; the organizations formed in the process of struggle should form the basis of

socialism.

The mass-line is not commandism. The mass-line is necessary because revolutionaries hold a different set of ideas from the masses about how the world operates and how it should operate; we are Maoists, the masses are not. An organizer must be conscious of this difference. If, for instance, we insist that the masses become Maoists for us to work with them, we will very quickly find ourselves isolated. Commandism is the practice of standing ahead of the masses politically and commanding them to “catch-up”. To act in a commandist manner is to forget about the “from the masses” aspect of the mass-line, and to act as though the masses have nothing to teach us. It is a self-isolating practice, but one that is practiced by much of the left in the imperialist countries. While the mass-line involves raising the political level of the masses, this is done through struggle, not through sloganeering or demanding that the masses politicize.

Finally, the mass-line is not mass fetishism. There is a tendency, predominately but not exclusively among white male communists in the first world, to fetishize the masses. Everything that the masses do, according to these comrades, is somehow sacred and shouldn't be questioned. This phenomenon is closely linked to workerism, or the extension of “identity politics” to class: to be a worker is considered another aspect of one's identity. This approach is usually rooted in a romanticized view of the masses and class struggle, and is often found within people that have very little connection to the masses or class struggle. Revolutionaries can and must criticize backwards practices found within the masses, practices like, but not limited to: racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. The mass-line is a means by which these incorrect ideas can be systematically abolished, not encouraged simply because the masses hold them.

The question of organization

Up until now, this article has dealt with fairly abstract questions, sometimes using concrete examples, but focusing on universal principles. Now we will begin to concretely examine types of organizations, struggles, and methods of work.

Before examining concrete types of organization, it is perhaps worth looking at the question of organization more broadly. The question of organization has typified the disagreements between the communist and anarchist camps, with the former falling on the side of organization and the latter generally falling on the side of varying levels of disorganization. Some Trotskyist sects will focus on the necessity of seizing leadership in various bourgeois or labour-aristocratic organizations, anarchists will critique any type of organization other than the lowest level of “voluntary” association as being undemocratic and bureaucratic, but communist methods of organization are not explored. Why is organization (in the abstract) necessary? Why are organizations necessary? What do communist organizations look like? What do mass organizations look like? What is the relationship between these different types of organization? How should communists relate to non-communist organizations?

To situate these questions concretely, let's examine the current political context in Canada. With the anti-globalization movement of the 1990s, the broad left in the imperialist countries faced a rebirth or revitalization of sorts after the glaring defeats of the 1980s, the fall of the USSR, and the so-called “end of history”. This left, of course, largely was not interested in the launch of the Protracted People's War in Peru, or the ongoing PPWs in the Philippines and India but sought to chart its own path against “dated” Leninist methods and models. The “new-new left” gained theoretical coherency in what can be referred to as movementism. To a certain extent the attacks on the World

Trade Centre in September of 2001 had a chilling effect on the development of the movementist left, but with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the anti-globalization movement developed into a broad anti-war movement, with some of the largest demonstrations in history occurring in opposition to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The movementist left continued to develop more-or-less along these same movement, anti-globalization, and anti-war lines, exemplified by the social forums, until the financial crisis of 2008. The 2008 crisis not only opened space on the level of discourse for critiques of capitalism (it became clear that the “end of history” hadn’t arrived and that capitalism wasn’t working), but also provided a material basis for the radicalization of the working class in the imperialist countries. 2008 was pivotal insofar as it marked a turning point: struggles after 2008 became more consolidated, radical, and ideologically coherent than they had been in the preceding years, albeit still maintaining the same organizational forms of the anti-globalization movement.

More recently we have felt the legacy of the 2008 financial crisis in the series of mass movements that have swept across Canada and the rest of the world. In 2011 the Occupy movement burst onto the political scene, and resulted in occupations in nearly all major and mid-sized cities across North America. Occupy was one of the first truly mass movements to arise in North America in the 21st century (the immigrant rights movement and the anti-war movement are also mass movements of the 21 century). It was also important insofar as it very directly called into question capitalism, and put forward the notion of class and class interests into the mainstream, though in the economic form of the “1%” versus the “99%”. This was followed in 2012 with the so-called Maple Spring, which was far more radical and long-lasting than anyone could have anticipated: indeed, it resulted in the very fabric of Quebec society being questioned by large numbers of people. In 2013 Idle

No More swept across Canada and, for the first time in memory in some locations, notably the Prairies, we saw the mobilization of large numbers of First Nations people against the effects (though notably not the system) of Canadian colonialism. These movements largely ignored the existing left, though certainly copied organizational structures and ideological orientations from the movementist milieu.

What is movementism? We include in the movementist milieu most anarchists, trade union activists, social democrats, revisionist communists, and even some self-styled anti-revisionists. In the context of talking about organization, a unifying feature of the movementists is a mistrust of organization and a belief in the transformative power of spontaneous gatherings. Even where revolution is desired, or talked about on an abstract level, no tactical or strategic discussion of how to build revolution occurs. Instead, there is a belief that a convergence of various movements, small affinity groups, and individuals will somehow result in qualitative leap in the left's capacity, and a social transformation will follow. This was the "strategy" put forward by the overly-triumphalist sections of the movementist left during the Occupy movement. It was the "strategy" advanced by movementists in Quebec during the Maple Spring. And yet, in each instance, these mass movements ultimately failed, retreated, and capitalism remained unchanged.³

The experience of the mass movements of the last 10 years show that movementist or spontaneist approaches to social change are a dead end. The lack of organization among the mainstream left resulted in there being no force capable of seizing on the opportunities these mass uprisings occasioned, notably by applying the mass-line and transforming the uprisings into revolutionary movements. This experience, more than anything else, highlights the need for organization: there must be an organization that can coordinate action among revolutionary forces

to intervene in struggles and movements, and that can coordinate and qualitatively transform mass uprisings into revolutionary movements. Organization will allow for the development of revolutionary movements: disorganization will allow for another Occupy.

So what type of organization is necessary? An organization that is able to coordinate the actions of its members toward a common goal. An organization that can serve as a place where the various struggles ongoing in society can be brought together and linked; where they can be politically centralized under a conscious political leadership. An organization that can consciously learn from past mistakes and synthesize experiences in order to move forward. An organization that is composed of the advanced section of the masses. An organization with a coherent structure and ideology, with a plan of action to make revolution. These characteristics describe a vanguard organization, or the party. As Maoists, we all agree on the necessity of the party; we are supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party. Why bring this up? It is worthwhile to situate and conceptualize the role of the vanguard party as we consider the role of mass organizations. We can therefore say that one type of communist organization is the highly organized vanguard party, and that the experience of mass movements from the last 10 years underlines the necessity of the vanguard party to the revolutionary process.

While a centralized, ideologically coherent vanguard party made up of the advanced sections of the masses is necessary, the masses as a whole will not be able to participate as members in such an organization. This is for a number of reasons: maybe they are not communists, maybe they don't have time to commit to a party, maybe they have other time commitments, and so on and so forth. However, even those people that aren't communists need to be involved in the revolutionary process: the success or failure of revolution and of socialism will depend on the direct

involvement of the masses as a whole. How do we as communists handle the apparent contradiction between the necessity of the involvement of the masses in the revolutionary process, and the existence of a centralized vanguard party?

Another type of organization is necessary. Here we have what we can call “mass organizations”, or those organizations that exist for the masses. Mass organizations must be democratic. They can be organized around specific issues or around specific demographic groups. They can be ad-hoc, or created with permanence in mind. Mass organizations should generally have a revolutionary leadership—that is to say, they should be consciously involved in the revolutionary movement. Mass organizations should target a certain political level within the masses: i.e. either the advanced, intermediate, or backwards. They should have the lowest possible basis of unity necessary to achieve the political goal that they set for themselves. Mass organizations should be all-encompassing; we should strive to organize the entirety of the masses into various mass organizations. Mass organizations should form the basis for the institutions that will exist under socialism. Mass organizations are another means by which the advanced are united, and the intermediate (and sometimes even backwards) are brought up.

It is worth noting that “mass organization” is not synonymous with “mass movement”. While mass organizations may be capable of launching mass movements, which will themselves involve different levels of organization, mass organizations put the question and necessity of organization at the centre of their work. Mass organizations are decidedly anti-movementist in this respect.

What about those individuals that are more politically advanced than the mass organizations, but are not yet willing or able to join the Party? Here we insert another type of organization, which can be called an “intermediate organization”.

Intermediate organizations have a higher level of political unity than a mass organization generally does, for instance they may be consciously anti-capitalist. However, intermediate organizations generally do not require agreement on a unified revolutionary strategy. In our current Canadian context intermediate organizations are especially important: while there are a number of parties that have set themselves the task of becoming the vanguard of the Canadian proletariat, no party (including our Party) has yet achieved this. As such, there is not a vanguard organization to which new communists will “naturally” flock. An intermediate organization allows new communists to get involved in political work with a lower level of commitment than party membership would entail, but still under the political leadership of the party. Intermediate organizations are themselves transitory; as the class struggle develops and a singular vanguard emerges, the utility of intermediate organizations decreases. Similarly, as the political level of the masses is raised, intermediate organizations should be subsumed into mass organizations.

What should be the relationship between the party, mass organizations, and intermediate organizations? First and foremost, the party must exercise political leadership over the mass organizations and transitional organizations within its fold. While mass organizations and intermediate organizations may be initiated by the party, they must themselves be autonomous organizations and internally democratic. Party members and supporters must be involved in mass organizations and intermediate organizations, but they must not act in a commandist way inside of these organizations: commandism here could be seizing leadership positions and pushing a political line ahead of the political level of the organization’s membership. In turn, the party must incorporate the perspectives advanced by mass and intermediate organizations, and synthesize the correct perspectives into its own political line. In short, there must be a constant dialogue

between party and mass organization, with neither overstepping the other in terms of importance: a revolution is impossible without the masses or without the leadership of the vanguard.

What about mass organizations, potential mass organizations, or campaigns that have not been initiated by the party? Generally speaking, restricting ourselves to be only involved in organizations and campaigns we have started is the incorrect approach: it is self-isolating. Applying the mass-line correctly means going to the entire masses, not just those directly organized by the Party. There are plenty of good initiatives launched by the masses that are worth engaging with. These various campaigns and organizations should be appraised on a case-by-case basis, with some of the following criteria being used to make the decision: Can involvement in this campaign raise the political level of the masses? Can it lead to the accumulation of revolutionary forces, either through recruitment into the party, mass organization, or intermediate organization, or through connections to other sections of the masses? Can it be co-opted by the bourgeoisie? Do we have the capacity to involve ourselves in this struggle? While not exhaustive, new initiatives originating outside the party should be evaluated using these concerns. What is most important is that the political line of the party should not be hidden when intervening in these other struggles: there is no way to raise the political level of the masses without being open politically with them.

In this context we need to avoid the temptation of falling into a “rent-a-crowd” practice where we move from rally to rally, committee to committee, panel discussion to panel discussion, and in and out of multiple struggles while doing very little. If we fall into such a practice then we should not be seen as a constituent part of the masses; the rent-a-ground practice should not factor into a decision to involve ourselves with a particular initiative. This practice leads a lack of political focus and a

commitment to incorrect ideas while simultaneously avoiding the accountability of political leadership.

In almost every location except for perhaps the largest cities, there is a group of “leftists” that are involved in nearly every cause. These folks have a practice that involves moving from rally to rally, sitting on committees, holding panel discussions, supporting picket lines: in short, doing very little. These people have been pejoratively referred to as the “rent-a-crowd”. It is necessary to point out that these people do not constitute the masses; when deciding to be involved in an initiative or not, the rent-a-crowd should not factor into the decision. Indeed, these people largely have other political commitments, are committed to incorrect ideas, and it is generally impossible to have political leadership over them.

They are best ignored when possible (their own irrelevancy makes this easy), and defeated politically when ignoring them is not possible. The institutional form of the relationship between the party, mass organization, and intermediate organization is the united front. The united front serves to bring these various struggles, campaigns, movements, and organizations together in a direct way, literally placing them in dialogue with one another for the purpose of adopting common tactics. The party should attempt to make its political line hegemonic within the united front, but must do this in a political rather than bureaucratic manner. Not all coalitions are united fronts, and indeed, if a coalition or united front stops serving the task of building revolution, revolutionary organizations should have no problem abandoning that specific manifestation of a united front. Building a revolutionary united front is an important milestone for revolution in this country.

Reform VS Revolution?

Having dealt with the mass-line in the abstract, and then concrete types of organization, there is still a glaring hole in the discussion of communist methods of mass work: namely, what mass work can and should look like. How should we decide what types of demands to put forward, or campaigns to initiate? How do we connect tactical decisions with our broader strategic orientation? Why even bother with specific demands or reforms? How do we avoid lapsing into economism?

Revolutionaries need to speak to the masses where they are at in ways that directly influence their day-to-day lives, i.e. on the concrete level of their daily experiences, which at this historical conjuncture largely takes the form of specific reforms or campaigns. In turn, winning specific reforms allows the masses to see that victory is possible, combating the crisis of confidence that afflicts the working class after nearly 40 years of defeats. We have to become less uncomfortable with specific demands, and engage in an actual mass-line practice of consciously synthesizing those demands with our revolutionary program.

It may seem on the surface that what is being proposed is a retreat into economism—that we should focus instead on specific reforms rather than revolution. How do we fight for reforms and meeting the masses where they are at without lapsing into economism?

The answer to this apparent contradiction is a political answer. All reforms have a political content indicated by the class that they serve. For instance, access to clean drinking water is apolitical in an abstract sense: we must drink water to survive. However, the means by which clean drinking water is accessed, who has access to it and who doesn't, how clean drinking water is achieved, and so on and so forth are political questions. For the fight for any specific reform to not lapse into economism, the

struggle must focus itself beyond the specific reform, and put itself in the service of the broader revolutionary movement. It is only by consciously connecting the struggle for a reform to the broader revolutionary struggle, and subordinating the immediate reform to the revolutionary process in an open way, that the struggle for immediate reforms does not lapse into economism. Also, if a reform is won, it must be made clear that the state has not provided the reform, but rather that the reform was wrested from the state through struggle. Economism is combated on a subjective political level by consciously and openly advancing revolutionary politics in the midst of a struggle for specific reforms. Thus, insofar as revolutionary politics are concerned, the dichotomy between reform and revolution is a false dichotomy; the fight for specific reforms, done in a revolutionary manner, is part of the broader revolutionary process.

As with any type of struggle, the question of victory looms large in any discussion of specific tactics. Generally speaking, victory in a struggle is what should be sought after. Not winning a struggle can have a demoralizing effect on its participants. However, the victory of any individual struggle is less important than the advancement of the class struggle as a whole. Struggles should not be undertaken solely with the criteria of whether or not the struggle will be successful; if a struggle will likely lose but will still advance the class struggle, it should be undertaken. What is important is the consolidation process of mass-line practice that was outlined earlier. Struggle, as will be discussed below, is the means of developing cadre capable of leading the masses to revolution. As such, training and developing new leaders can be reason enough for struggle. If, for instance, a strike is lost but the workers involved have gained experience and developed new leaders capable of leading workers elsewhere, the struggle should be seen as a victory in light of the broader class struggle.

Reforms are not the only type of mass practice that can be engaged in within the framework of the mass-line. Two other types of initiative come to mind when looking at specific mass-line tactics. First, we have what can be called “serve the people programs”, a type of practice where communists provide a specific good or service for the masses as a means of building connections with them and organizing them. Perhaps the most famous examples in North America are those programs run by the Black Panther Party, such as their free breakfast program, their free clinics, and their direct actions that replaced state functions in the communities in which they were strongest (adding stop-signs to busy roads, for instance). As with the struggle for specific reforms, what is most important is that these serve the people initiatives are consciously tied back to the party and revolutionary politics in an open manner; revolutionary politics are what make serve the people programs distinct from charity, on a subjective level. The point of a serve the people program is not to provide a service, but rather to use that service to connect with, organize, and politicize the masses.

The second type of initiative would be the defense of the masses in the form of a specific action rather than a protracted campaign. These actions involve the most advanced section of the masses and can often result in concrete organizational gains. Furthermore, the party can come to be seen as defending the interests of the masses, which makes future organizational efforts around specific campaigns easier.

With this in mind, how should one decide what type of reform, campaign, action, etc. to engage in? Social investigation of a given situation—which can take the form of synthesizing lived experiences, or more formally doing survey campaigns—should reveal the needs and desires of the masses in any given context. These contradictions—contradictions insofar as there is an antagonistic contradiction between the demands of the masses

on one side and the reality of capitalism on the other—should be broken open in order to mobilize and organize the masses. A struggle should be undertaken with the sole criteria of whether or not it advances the class struggle, whether or not through exploiting the contradictions inherent in capitalist society the struggle organizes the largest number of people around a correct political line and practice. Some communists pontificate over whether or not communists should start struggles or just engage in those that organically arise as the contradictions of capitalism play themselves out: this is a non-issue that is largely dependent on the context. If struggles are ongoing and there is space for communist politics within them, communists should involve themselves in those struggles; if struggles don't exist, communists should start them as a means of organizing the masses.

Some comrades take an erroneous view that all communists need to be involved in every struggle that exists. This often manifests itself as an insistence that every protest is necessary to attend. While it is correct that eventually communists will need to be involved in every struggle within society, not every communist will be capable of involving themselves in every struggle. This mistaken approach can be called “hyper-activism”. Hyper-activism is incorrect insofar as it does not allow communists to “dig-in” to the masses; to find a section of the masses to really organize, and really lead.

Finally, it is worth briefly talking about the concept of militancy. Militancy means, simply put, the willingness to struggle and be confrontational. It can sometimes mean reactionaries, but this is not the most important aspect of militancy. Importantly, though, the militancy of a tactic is not the criteria on which a tactic should be evaluated: all tactics should be evaluated based on whether or not they will help advance the class struggle by transforming the objective conditions they are used against. Militancy is sometimes necessary, and is sometimes not neces-

sary: it is one approach among many. Specific tactics, insofar as the mass-line is being employed, should primarily be aimed at organizing and engaging the largest possible section of the masses around a correct political and organizational line. There are some comrades who are perhaps too influenced by adrenaline who forget this fact, and in over-emphasizing the importance of militancy in every situation, act in a commandist fashion vis--vis the masses. To be clear, this is not to say that we should not engage in militant actions when the masses are themselves engaging in such actions. As communists we should seek to become the best defenders of the masses in all circumstances.

Communist conduct

The question of how communists should conduct themselves, both among the masses and inside the party may seem to be a banal question, but effective mass work without proper conduct is impossible. Insofar as all conduct is concerned, but chiefly toward the masses, communists must conduct themselves humbly and without arrogance. Often communists approach the masses as though communists know everything and simply have to teach the masses the correct ideas. One thinks, for instance, of the myriad rallies that we have all surely attended in which presenters spout off a list of facts and some platitudes that the audience largely knows and agrees with but that passers-by are unconvinced of. Instead, to properly apply the mass-line, one must realize that one can both teach the masses the correct political ideas (raising their consciousness), but also communists have much to learn from the masses in terms of understanding concretely how society operates. It is only by approaching the masses in a humble and open manner that we can effectively organize the masses.

Communists must constantly combat sectarianism. Oft-times it is easy to substitute the health or success of an or-

ganization for the success of the class as a whole, seeing the advancement of an organization as the advancement of the class struggle. Sometimes it is true that a single organization is necessary for the advancement of the class struggle (as in the case of legitimate vanguard organizations), but many other times it is not. As a result, communists will often look out for their own organization above the interests of the masses: this can manifest itself in various ways, such as not correcting mistaken practices within an organization, covering for mistakes (often very serious ones, such as the SWP's handling of rape internal to their party), or attacking other organizations in an unprincipled manner. In turn, communists should be open, where possible, to working with other organizations and certainly should be open to working on the initiatives that are brought forward by the masses: sectarians frown on all initiatives not started by the party or its mass organizations, and communists must combat this trend. Communists always struggle for the broadest possible unity, and see struggle against other comrades or tendencies as a means of building unity, not defeating others.

Communists must be principled. In the work that communists do, they should hold to their politics and practice. Communists should be dependable. They should struggle against lapses into various opportunisms, including right opportunism (giving up principles for immediate gains) and left opportunism (posing as more "radical" for the sake of being more radical). It is only by being principled that communists can win the respect of the masses.

Communists should endeavour to be "good people". Communists should not steal from the masses. Communists should be honest, and not engage in subterfuge or intrigue; political problems should be brought into the open, and open political struggle should be demanded. Communists should generally be pleasant. Communists should put the masses above themselves,

and have a spirit of self-sacrifice in terms of how they work with and approach the masses. Communists should combat all forms of oppression. Communists should engage in criticism and self-criticism as a means of correcting mistakes; in turn, communists should not back- down from attacking unjust criticism and should support those subjected to unjust criticism. Communists should, where possible, defend the interests of the masses when they are attacked. Communists should build one another up and support one another, rather than tear each other down. Communists should complete tasks that they set for themselves.

In terms of organizational discipline, communists should strive to adhere to the principles of democratic centralism. Communists should uphold publicly and carry out decisions that are reached by the organization. By opting to join the party, communists give the party a monopoly on their political activity; a communist should be willing to struggle where needed, and should centralize their political activity into the party, intermediate, and mass organizations. Pride of place should not be given to one's own opinions when they run counter to the democratic will of the organization; this is an anti-democratic approach. Communists should respect elected leadership within the party and mass organizations, even when they personally disagree with the choice made by the organization. In turn, internally there must be freedom of discussion, critique, and debate, and a fully democratic practice. But at the end of the day, communists must be disciplined.

On the flip side, failure to uphold high standards of conduct within an organization and among the masses will lead to an organization's downfall. The masses will be distrustful of those people and organizations that attempt to change the world without gaining their trust. Constant infighting, which arises either due to subterfuge and intrigue internal to an organization, or due to a stagnation of mass work, further hampers an organization's

ability to act. In turn, not holding oneself or one's organization to high standards is a sign of individualism, or placing the individual (often times oneself) above the interests of the collective or the interests of the revolutionary process and struggle. This is not to say that individuals should not take the time to properly care for and maintain themselves; sometimes life allows for different levels of activity within the revolutionary movement. But insofar as one's political work is concerned, individualism (the act of putting the individual before the collective or organization) must be combated at every opportunity in order for struggles to be successful.

Communist leadership

There have been frequent references in this document to the concept of political leadership, as opposed to bureaucratic leadership. The necessity of the party to lead the masses in a political rather than bureaucratic way has been emphasized. What then does communist leadership, i.e. the means by which the party leads the masses in a political manner, look like?

While our experiences here are limited insofar as our mass practice is limited, we can at the very least conceptualize what bureaucratic and political leadership looks like. Ultimately, all political organizations have political leadership of the masses as a goal. However, some organizations misunderstand the means by which political leadership is achieved. Bureaucratic leadership upholds the primacy of holding positions in organizations and institutions; bureaucratic leadership is the assumption that power comes from holding positions, and that holding positions is indicative of political leadership. Those that focus on bureaucratic leadership confuse control over an apparatus with leadership over the members of an organization. As such, the primary task for those engaged in a process of bureaucratic leadership is to win

these institutional positions; their practice is largely electoral. We can recall trade union bureaucrats, student union bureaucrats, etc., many of whom will self-identify as revolutionary or radical, but hide their politics at every opportunity in order to win elections. They then assume that simply holding a position somehow transforms the class character of an organization and the political outlook of its membership: one thinks of the tragedy in which most unions support the NDP, but most union members vote Conservative. An ironic feature of bureaucratic leadership is that as the political difference between leaders and members increases, the members of an organization are less likely to be involved, thus simultaneously entrenching the bureaucracy while lessening their influence over the membership, effectively defeating the proclaimed purpose of holding positions in the first place.

Does this mean that communists should refrain from running for or holding positions in bureaucratic structures or institutions? Of course not: this makes about as much sense as irrational anti-economism. Rather, the holding of positions should not be the primary goal of communist political action, nor should it be confused with actual political leadership. Indeed, political leadership and bureaucratic leadership can and should go hand-in-hand when done properly (i.e. those that have political leadership should hold positions in an organization), but one must not be substituted for the other. If communists seek to hold positions, they should be open about their politics through the election or selection process: the holding of a position in an organization should be seen as part of mass-line practice and should be on the basis of politics rather than simply practice (i.e. we should avoid situations where communists are chosen not because the masses agree with their politics, but because they're the best or only person for the position). Finally, communists must evaluate whether or not holding the position advances the class struggle,

and must be willing to give up positions if the class struggle is not advanced through their possession.

What then is political leadership? Political leadership is fairly straightforward: it is the ability to influence the political outlook and action of the masses through non-bureaucratic methods. As the mass-line is applied properly and the party grows in influence, it is increasingly seen as the sole legitimate defender of the interests of the masses. As such, the masses now have a reason to take the party seriously, and will change their political outlook based on the political positions of the vanguard, regardless of whether or not communists hold institutional positions above the masses. Political leadership is unobtrusive in the sense that the masses must come to their own conclusions, rather than being bureaucratically managed or ordered to certain political positions. Political leadership is, as the name implies, political: it is the ability to influence the politics of the masses. Communist leadership is necessarily political leadership.

Communist leadership is predominately concerned with the question of solving contradictions. Inevitably over the course of struggle, contradictions within the communist movement will arise. These may take the form of personality conflicts, or may represent competing political lines: in either case, the job of communist leadership is to see the contradictions through to a resolution that advances the class struggle. In turn, communist leadership must be able to pick out the contradictions within capitalist society and resolve them in the interests of the working class and the class struggle.

The building of mass leadership is another aspect of communist leadership. Recall that mass organizations should form the core of the institutions of socialism. As such, these organizations need a strong leadership that is able to grow these organizations and see them through to the task of socialist construction. This leadership does not need to be communist, but it must

use communist leadership methods; that is to say, must exercise political leadership over the mass organization. Furthermore, the continued existence of mass organizations over time is dependent on the development of new leadership to lead new sections of the masses as organizations expand, or to replace existing leaders as they move on from organizations, are deposed, etc. As such, communist leadership must be concerned with building the leadership capacity of the masses: a leadership that isn't able to reproduce itself is a leadership that ceases to exist.

Before moving on, it is necessary to touch on questions of marginalization and identity. There are a number of groups within society that for one reason or another are oppressed: these include women, LGBTQ people, racialized people, aboriginals, people with disabilities, and so on and so forth (this list is not exhaustive). Even in the most democratic organizations, it is all too easy to sit back and not combat these other forms of oppression. As a result, it tends to be easier for white, straight, cis-gendered men to take and hold leadership positions. In turn, white, straight, cis-gendered men are seen as natural leaders and have an easier time exercising their authority within organizations. The result is that many organizations wind up being "boy's clubs" that are unable to speak to the needs of the majority of the proletariat insofar as the organization's perspectives are limited by the social position and privilege of their leadership. As such, to ensure the viability of all organizations, there needs to be a constant struggle against these forms of oppression: people from oppressed groups should be encouraged to take leadership positions, special emphasis should be put on preparing people from oppressed groups to take leadership positions, and all communists should struggle against oppressive practices as they arise within organizations of any type. This is not to say that politics should be pushed aside in favour of identity, but rather that other forms of oppression need to be

taken into account when considering the question of leadership.

In summary, communist leadership is: political leadership as opposed to bureaucratic leadership, concerned with solving contradictions, building mass leadership, and consciously fighting against oppression.

Dual Power, the Mass-Line, and PPW

Until now the question of mass work and the mass-line has only vaguely been situated within the strategy of PPW. It may seem unclear how fighting around specific issues, for specific reforms, or in other ways previously highlighted can transform the struggle in a qualitative manner to a higher stage, namely the launching of PPW. Below is a sketch of how such a transformation could occur: inevitably the actual progression of events will be different, but it is important to consciously connect the mass-line and PPW.

As our mass work becomes more successful and our party and mass organizations grow, we will inevitably come under increased state repression. The defense of revolutionary mass organizations will become a necessary part of our mass work, ensuring that it can continue. This defense may result in violent confrontation with the state. The forceful defense of mass organizations and their activities against state repression can constitute the opening stages of the strategic defensive in an urban setting. In turn, insofar as mass organizations constitute the embryo of what will become the institutions of socialism, the ability to defend mass organizations is the basis for the establishment of dual power. As capacity to defend mass organizations grows, so too does dual power; this is the basis for establishing liberated zones and the transition from the strategic defensive to the strategic equilibrium. Of course that transition will also involve a consolidated military strategy, but that is outside the scope of this document.

The armed defense of mass movements and mass organizations also serves a propagandistic purpose, insofar as it can serve to popularize among the masses the necessity of using violence as a tool of social transformation. The masses will see that the state will violently repress their efforts to change society; in turn they will see that only violence is capable of resisting the state in this respect.

Note that this is not to argue for a spontanaeist approach to the defense of mass organizations, which is to say that in the moment of their repression, the masses will spontaneously come to be able to defend their institutions. The organization of such a force is a necessary political task if such defense is possible. However we should also be wary of lapsing into adventurism on this front; the ability to effectively organize around any military strategy has as a precondition mass support, which means the growth in scale and quality of our mass organizations and mass work., at least to the extent that the mass movement will provide a solid base for such activity.

The conception advanced in this article is formed from the collective experiences of building a revolutionary party in an imperialist country, largely over the ten years of the PCR-RCP's existence, but with some insight stretching back even before. This being said, in the present period our work is still at a basic level, and as such, our perspectives will be as well. The understanding of the mass-line and methods of mass work advanced above should serve to properly align our practice in the years to come, in order for us to deepen and develop our future perspectives. We have a lot of work to do: let's get to it.

Defining a Strategy of Revolution: a key issue for every revolutionary movement

Nathalie Moreau

This is a transcript of a conference that our late comrade Nathalie Moreau presented at the 8th International Convention of the Platypus Affiliated Society, held on March 2012 in Chicago. Bringing together students and intellectuals, Platypus' officially stated objective was to "reconstitute a Marxian Left." Our comrade was invited to lead a workshop on the PCR-RCP and its understanding of People's War. She presented clearly and vividly on the main lines of demarcation that characterize our Party. The transcript includes the question and answer period that followed her presentation.

Nathalie Moreau passed away on September 5, 2016 from ovarian cancer. By publishing this document, we also wish to pay her tribute and celebrate the exemplary and invaluable role she played for nearly 30 years in organizing and building the Maoist movement in Canada.

—*the Editors*

The way we developed as an organization was different from other Marxist-Leninist or Maoist groups. How we arrived at the conclusion of creating a party in 2007 was unique because, at the

beginning, founding a party was not necessarily our intention. In 1986 there was a group called Action Socialiste that consisted of young radicals and students from a Montreal university. The general political context in 1986 was not necessarily favourable for that kind of group to exist or emerge. Actually we were at a moment where the existing Marxist-Leninist groups, mostly in Quebec (where there were two important and significant groups, the Workers Communist Party and En Lutte!), had just collapsed a few years earlier in the midst of the return of the capitalist road in China that brought a major crisis in the movement—not only in Quebec but throughout the world. The members of Action Socialiste were not coming from these Marxist-Leninist movements and history; they were just young radicals not necessarily familiar with Marxist ideology—although they knew about it, of course—and were acting according to a different model.

The model was of course radicalism, and the perspective was to radicalize the struggles and make them more anti-capitalist while maintaining the independence of the student movement from the state. At that time in Quebec, the Parti Quebecois was in power and it possessed a corporatist approach of trying to co-opt the student movement so as to make it part of the bourgeois nationalist movement. The radicals of Action Socialiste were very critical of that co-optation; they were already questioning the essence of that state. So already there was that defiance of putting the state at the same level of capitalism and understanding how it played a role in capitalism.

Action Socialiste lasted from 1986 to 2000. While there is a question about the role of the left in the 2000s^[1] interestingly 2000 really marked, for us, the first step towards a different strategy of development. In 2000 we transformed into the Organizing Committee [OC] of the

possible changing role of the left in the 2000s.

Revolutionary Communist Party, bringing a new perspective that there was a necessity to create a party: not any kind of party, but a revolutionary communist party. This was a way for us to distinguish ourselves from the former communist party experience. We knew about the RCP-USA but our organization was not related to their experience and was something very different. In 2007 the OC organized a congress and transformed into the PCR-RCP. We can say that this was something that was against the current: the dominant tendency we have observed over the last ten years has seen the idea of the party as not being the way of achieving revolution—there was a confusion about the goal, there was a major confusion about the strategy of reaching that goal—and in that respect we think the creation of a new revolutionary communist party was one step towards trying to address those issues, and trying to make those social movements we have seen growing over the years to go through a new step of organization.

Learning Maoism

At the very beginning Action Socialiste was mainly an organization that was ultra-activist in the different mass struggles. It was active in the very important struggle for the right to abortion at the end of the 1980s in Quebec, and the women's movement in general, as much as it was active in the student movement. It was also active in the worker's movement when former members of the collapsed Marxist-Leninist groups individually rallied to Action Socialiste. We had developed a very consistent practice and experience in those movements; we were really good at organizing demonstrations, bringing people to be there, and agitating with certain watchwords. But as time passed where did it lead us—was there a political development for moving towards revolution and socialism? We eventually came to see

that the direction in which we were moving was not good.

When we learned about what was happening in Peru, the People's War that was happening there at the time, it became for us a very important political experience that we needed to grasp and understand because we were faced with a real attempt to make revolution, one of the first practical experiences of trying to make a revolution for a long time. For us it was important that we learn about this event and that is how we grew closer to Maoism and understanding the Chinese experience as well as what was happening in Peru. That was the moment we became Maoist.

We were adopting Maoism not only in terms of a winning strategy for revolution (and for us People's War as a strategy is clearly the most promising avenue to which we should look if we want to make revolution in a capitalist country today), there was also this idea of revolution after the revolution, the necessity to continue the process because otherwise the capitalist road is never very far. There was also a "Maoist attitude", or how to develop unity: what is the process between different organizations and movements to be able to progress towards political unity—and we were very bad with that in the first years of our organization, we ended up with splits and people leaving the organization because we didn't know how to practice Maoism properly, understanding it only in political terms. This is a learning process; it is not something you know how to do as a young organization, and unfortunately you lose people.

So this was another aspect of Maoism that we tried to grasp: how to do correct political struggle. Not only among ourselves as an organization but also with anarchists and other groups that we were working with in the struggle pretty frequently. Thus we recognized, at the end of the 1990s, that the anarchist movement had been able to clearly break with the revisionism demonstrated by most of the communist parties that had fallen

into the bourgeois legal framework and only understood the work of communists as being routine. The positive addition coming from the anarchist movement was certainly to show that we need to break with legality and that understanding that the struggle is always within the parameters of what the bourgeoisie imposes. At the same time, however, we also understood the limits of refusing to organize in a more long-term and strategic mode and thus the limits of anarchism as a strategy to move towards revolution. It's because of Maoism that we have been able to understand what anarchism brought to the movement and be able make a good discussion with anarchists and a good political struggle with them. The reality, then, is that today we can work on several struggles with anarchists in a united front despite having our disagreements; this doesn't prevent us from having a mutual respect in the way that we are working. We learned to make a distinction between unity in the struggle and unity in a long-term political project.

At the end of the 1990s we produced a programme where we clearly stated what we were struggling for and decided to struggle for creating a party, leading to several discussions around the idea of the party because many of the conceptions we have about "the party" are mechanical. Since many people understand this concept according to the framework of a bourgeois party, for us it was important to bring back the idea that a proletarian party—a revolutionary party—is something necessarily different. Not only in terms of how it organizes itself but also in terms of what it brings to the masses, and the nature of the link between the party and the masses. There were big discussions about whether it was the time to create such a party (we're not enough people!) and all these examples of a mechanical understanding of what it takes to create a party. So actually the focus we had was rather to see it as a kind of ideological and political offensive in the general political struggle against the bourgeoisie:

to reaffirm for the proletariat, for the most exploited masses, the need to gather together and organize. Our position was if we create a party then its existence will bring people into its ranks. . . because if you don't have a party, why would people join it? I believe that our position, here, was correct and that it was a good decision to create a party because it brought a visibility to Maoism in Canada. It brought a revolutionary, organized perspective in Canada for moving revolution forward. Not as a vague and confused idea that will happen in the very late future, but rather a perspective about how to pursue that goal from Day One, starting with nothing, and accumulate and be able to work for revolution in a capitalist country like Canada.

Expanding into English Canada: the 2nd CRC

We were mainly Quebec based for most of our early existence. We had a few contacts in the rest of Canada but there was that language barrier that was pretty significant; it's okay to bring your own newspaper and propaganda elsewhere, and we were desperately working to have bilingual material, but it was not happening. We decided to organize a second Revolutionary Congress in Toronto where we called for people to manifest themselves and be visible so we could have that big change and have that discussion to see if they shared the same perspective. We produced a document called *The Proletarian Movement We Need*¹ as away of relaunching this discussion about the nature of the class struggle in Canada: what does that mean and how we can make that more lively—what kind of organizations and struggles we need because, yes, there is the party but there are also the masses that are in movement, that are struggling, and

¹http://www.per-rcp.ca/old/pdf/CRC2010_EN.pdf

how do we make the link with them.

This Revolutionary Congress happened in 2010 and we were bringing the perspective of creating, wherever there were revolutionaries, proletarian revolutionary action committees. It was not necessarily about being part of the party but it was, at least, creating a committee to unite revolutionary forces and to start the discussion around the struggle and different political campaigns we proposed. We proposed the creation of Proletarian Revolutionary Action Committees[PRAC] and to gather around an electoral boycott campaign because the federal elections would happen soon after this congress and we wanted to push this political line. We were arguing that, in the new class struggle in Canada, the statement we needed to make in front of the bourgeoisie—and in front of that famous legal bourgeois framework where everyone thinks that by voting they are exercising democracy—we were saying let's take the opportunity to bring this idea of what is the democracy we want to have.

The launching of this boycott campaign was very shocking for a lot of the usual left groups; they were surprised that we were actively calling for people not to vote. But we were asking whether we were really for that kind of bourgeois democracy—do we think this is the way to become closer to revolution or should we break from it and be open about our break? This campaign, which was adopted at the 2010 congress, has been pretty successful in bringing a totally different discussion to the left: we clearly demarcated a line between those who talk about revolution, but who only understand their politics within bourgeois legality, and those who were willing to break with this convention. It was both an ideological and political struggle because, since a large portion of the masses are not involved in the ideological discussion, we need to be present in their day-to-day struggles.

The other element adopted at the 2010 congress was to

create—and to invite as many people as possible to participate—a bilingual and nationwide communist newspaper so that we could organize with people who were not members of the PCR-RCP.² That was a major step that happened because of our initiative to create that congress in Toronto.

And there was also this necessity of discussing and supporting the People's War experiences that were happening and being developed in the rest of the world (in India, for example, and in Nepal at that time) so as to understand the dangers that they were facing but also the positive developments that they allowed. There was thus a necessity to link our own struggle with what was happening globally. Moreover, there was a call to support the struggles of the Indigenous nations in Canada: this is a reality that will be at

the forefront of political life in Canada in the years to come because of the way that Canadian settler-colonial industries are moving aggressively into the mining sector; the Canadian companies have been very aggressive in this area—not only in Canada but in the rest of the world—so it is very important to focus on the way they develop since, in Canada and elsewhere, most of the areas where this industry is focused is on Indigenous territory. Hence, in the years to come, it will be crucial to connect with the Indigenous nations and with their struggles if we want to be consistent with a strategy of making revolution in Canada. Such a strategy will only succeed if we are also successful in connecting with the Indigenous peoples.

²This was the *Partisan* that initially was produced every two weeks in English and French and distributed, for free, in those areas that people involved in its editorial team (both members and non-members of the PCR-RCP) were active. Since the time that this talk was given, the *Partisan* has transformed into an ad hoc newsletter/newspaper that is being produced by different mass organizations in different cities with content unique to the work of these regions.

The necessity of strategy

Finally, we have been working on the necessity of defining a strategy of revolution. For us, this is the key issue of revolutionary movements in every capitalist country today: trying to solve the problem of how to make revolution. We have been working for years to put forward the idea of why we think People's War is universal, why we think it is not reducible to military issues but is primarily about a political strategy, although there is the aspect of armed struggle that is important. We hope that our efforts in this area will eventually bring an important discussion (certainly in Canada and hopefully at the international level as well, specifically amongst those revolutionary movements that are within capitalist countries) about how we can break from the old conceptions of revolution. . . . That there's going to be a "big night", and from one day to another there's going to be a revolution—that's not true, it's not going to happen that way. . . . So how do we build from today, from almost zero, to having a movement that will be in a position to overthrow capitalism? Such a perspective seems totally "crazy" but it is a question that needs to be solved because revolution needs to happen.

Of course, this theory of strategy needs to be grounded in the historical experience of the proletariat and its revolutionary movements that have happened over a hundred years. We cannot ignore this experience—we cannot erase this history and start from nothing—because we have things to learn from it, both good and bad, but we need to integrate it with our practice. In this context, I think back on the experience that began with Action Socialiste where it took us over twenty years of experience, practice, and mistakes to conclude that a revolutionary party and a revolutionary strategy were necessities. And the questions of organization and strategy need to be at the heart of the left movement today, because when we see what happened with

movements such as Occupy—although there are very positive things we can learn such experiences in terms of an experience of another type of democracy, of how things could work in another society—we see the limit of the spontaneous movement and how it reaches a point where you cannot, within the framework of capitalism, stay in a park for one hundred years. Hence we need to accumulate each new experience and, again, integrate them with what we have to do in the future.

Final Questions

Q: At the latter part of the talk you tried to draw lessons from the past. It was interesting to me that you presented a latter day introduction of Maoism although in Quebec there was a strong experience of the New Communist Movement [NCM] in the 1970s that you didn't seem to draw upon. So I wondered what lessons were drawn from the NCM because it seems like the unity conferences of En Lutte! possess some similarity—or maybe they don't—there is a way in which you described the NCM falling apart was, externally, the trauma of China. You also had this thing about the Maoist sensibility as a way of creating unity which seems, in some ways, to be an advance over the NCM which was in many ways exclusionary; the story of your work with the anarchists in Montreal seems to be a different kind of thing that the NCM would have attempted in the 1970s. I would like to hear you talk a little more about that. It strikes me that the PCR-RCP is a very unique group in Canada: it came out during the boycott election where, with the spectre of Harper, every left group got into the election and it didn't matter if you were an anarchist or whatever—and there was a line, a way you distinguished yourself. So I want to hear about the way you understand that, more clearly, stretching back to the NCM in the seventies—what was learned and how you're consciously moving beyond that past.

What were the lessons we learned from the NCM movement of the 1970s and 1980s? Certainly to learn why they collapsed! Although there was a political crisis on the national level, there was also the nationalist movement in Quebec that was very strong. The class struggle in Quebec in the 1970s was active and large, and that brought the PQ, which was a nationalist bourgeois party, into power, which had negative effects on the far left in Quebec since they were unable to demarcate themselves from the PQ's nationalism: some of the left, then, ended up joining the bourgeois nationalist movement. There was also a lot of economism in the NCM at that time: they were very good at organizing in the unions and the traditional working class sectors, but they did not necessarily bring a communist perspective to where they organized. Those parties were composed mainly of petty-bourgeois members, and they really believed that the revolution would happen soon because of the strength of the class struggle although, at the same time, they had no idea how this revolution would happen and they never asked themselves this question. The development of the social movement had a bad effect on these organizations, and because they were partly dogmatic people didn't continue with them.

Q: I'm a little confused by what you mean by People's War because it seems to be used in many different ways. It seems common for Maoists to call for People's War... The image that I have is some kind of guerrilla struggle, but sometimes I don't understand what is meant. (...)]When you say People's War in Canada or North America, either you're describing some kind of militant political struggle—you know, building a radical political movement—but then I wonder why you use the term People's War, or you're describing something that is more militarized—like urban guerrilla warfare...

When we refer to People's War certainly we do refer to the experience of the People's War and revolution in China. So

first we need to study that people's war that happened in an oppressed country at the time, and of course the anti-imperialist component was a principle aspect in that context. Our first hypothesis in developing the strategy of People's War in the context of capitalist countries is that in most oppressed countries the military struggle is the principal aspect from the very beginning whereas in capitalist countries the military struggle is not the principal aspect at the beginning but, instead, the ideological and political struggle that will bring us to the military aspect. But we also do not oppose the military to the ideological/political; the experience of illegality needs to happen immediately so as to break from the bourgeois framework. Most groups make a clear-cut distinction between the armed struggle being very distant and the political struggle being immediate, but we do not think that you can pass from the political to the military on a single day so we need to grasp the dialectic of these aspects. Mao was not only theorizing a military strategy because, if you read his military writings you will realize that it is not primarily about the military aspect but that it is about how to understand the political landscape.

Q: Can you speak a little more about the concept of People's War? One of the problems with the concept of "the people" is that it is an abstraction and that it leaves out what it abstracts from what makes up "the people" exactly—what their class, ideological, national basis is. And what I think happens with a lot of people's wars is that they can fizzle out or can end up having effects that were originally not intended because they leave aside concepts of unity about what makes up the people. So can you talk a little bit about how you see a revolutionary party orientating itself towards a people's war, how it is that you can assert ideological leadership to overcome the obstacles that a people's war presents.

I think the first thing that needs to be done, in any country if you are revolutionary, is to make a class analysis of the country

in which you are living. So in Canada this is something that we are in the process of doing—what are the different classes, what is the bourgeoisie exactly? Contrary to the Occupy Movement that had that slogan of 1% versus the 99%, the bourgeoisie is gathering around itself far more than 1% of the population. In this class analysis, then, we need to understand what are the strata that are the most willing to fight against capitalism—these are those we should focus on as a first step, to form the nucleus of the struggle and movement. Certainly we should consider now that there is a very important strata of the upper working class—the union and bureaucratic strata of this working class—that unfortunately today is now an ally of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. Now this strata acts, in many ways, as if they are investors in companies and, because of this, they have been able to integrate, within the working class, a very strong ideology about being part of capitalism and having its “own share of the pie”.

Therefore, we need to have a clear understanding of the class portrait of Canada. We can say that the core of the proletariat—the most exploited people—are the immigrants and the natives. These are certainly the people who represent maybe 60% of the population who are today the potential for revolution; these are the ones we should focus on unifying first. Historically we were pretty active in the union movements but, at some point, we realized that these movements were not necessarily the place where we should be; such an understanding brought a real proletarianization to our organization because we used to be students but now the main composition of our party—and it brings other difficulties—consists of a population of young, poor, exploited people who are not necessarily petty-bourgeois at all, so they have unstable conditions of life, and this is a challenge when you are doing politics to have them to be able to be active politically because they are very often stuck in their own difficulties. At the

same time, however, this change in our composition brought us a new quality of will for revolution and radicalism, and we need to keep that aspect. So I think it's correct to first make that class analysis and be sure to concentrate on those 60% and be aware that it is not the time to convince the upper petty-bourgeoisie of the necessity of the revolution. We need first to gain this core mass of people who won't be opportunistic and fall into those dangers that any movement will encounter, because there will always be this danger and you cannot protect yourself from it—but you can create conditions to make it harder for opportunism to win within a party or organization.

Certainly there is a class perspective in what we understand as People's War; the core of the revolution will be those 60% of people in Canada—these are the ones we need to win over, politically and ideologically, if we want the mass movement and its mobilization to be able to make revolution. You cannot make a revolution if you do not have the majority with you, even if it is small. But if you want to launch the armed struggle aspect of the war, if you don't have a majority to begin with then forget it. So a people's war is not adventurism—it's not about launching military and armed struggles when you are marginalized—which is why we need to look at the experience of far left urban guerrilla movements in capitalist countries. This experience is significant because there were positive aspects but we also need to address those negative aspects so that we do not repeat their mistakes.

People's War and Militarization of the Revolutionary Party: the case of the Communist Party of Peru

Michel T.

Communist parties that adhere and conform their action according to revolutionary strategy—that is to say, those whose ultimate goal involves the violent overthrow of one class by another—are necessarily faced with the challenge of assuming the preparation and the organization of this confrontation. This requires the development of specific conceptions responding to the various questions raised by this responsibility: the development of the capacities of the revolutionary forces; the relationship between the organization which embodies and carries the political leadership of the revolution (the Party) and the activity of the forces that support and materialize this confrontation at all stages of development; the relationship between the conscious and specific activity of the organized revolutionary forces and the broader revolutionary action from the masses facing the state apparatus; etc.

In taking charge of all these challenges, ranging from the development of a general and specific conceptions to their translation into practical activity, necessarily leads the vanguard party to changes in its mode of organization; it also requires that the party constantly re-assess how it apprehends and resolves the

various contradictions that invariably appear within that process. Ultimately, it is the very conception of what is a vanguard party—its role, its organization, its relationship to the masses, etc.—that is expected to be adapted and reshaped.

In this regard, the experience of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP), an organization that led a powerful People’s War in the 1980s and 1990s (and from whom some activists are still pursuing some political and military activity), contains important lessons that the international Marxist-Leninist-Maoist movement has insufficiently studied and absorbed to date. Since the downturn of the Peruvian revolution following the arrest of almost all of the Party leaders between 1992 and 1999—a decline that became obvious at the turn of the century—very few elements from the discussions and assessments that may have taken place among the PCP activists and organizations were made available outside the ranks of the Party, apart from speculations filtered through the police, courts, or “senderologists” related the Peruvian state apparatus.

This article doesn’t intend to present such an assessment, which remains mainly the prerogative of the Peruvian revolutionaries and which in any case would be far beyond our capabilities, but more modestly to recall what was the “Party conception” of the PCP and to provide some clues as to how and to what extent their approach served the development of the people’s war. But first, let us briefly recall the significance of the People’s War in Peru in the context of the late 1970s and 1980s.

A clash of thunder against revisionism and capitulation

On May 17, 1980, after years of ideological, political and military preparations, the Communist Party of Peru, led by Abimael Guzman (better known as “Chairman Gonzalo”), initiated the

People's War. On the eve of the general election, a group of fighters seized the ballot boxes in the village of Chuschi in the province of Ayacucho and set them to fire, signalling the beginning of a movement that would shake the reactionary order that prevailed in that country and instil fear in the big imperialist powers.

Thirty years later, after the movement initiated by the PCP experienced a serious setback and the bourgeois media are no longer paying the same attention to them as they did in the 1990s, it is fashionable in the institutional "leftist" milieu to despise that which is still introduced under the name of "Shining Path",^[1] Peruvian reaction and US imperialism, however, understood the strength and vitality of the Party and the movement it initiated, as evidenced by this hook from an article published in March 1992 in *The New York Times* summarizing the then opinion of the best informed government circles about Peru:

[1] "Shining Path" is the name that the bourgeoisie and the imperialists assigned to the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) led by Abimael Guzman. The PCP has its origins in the anti-revisionist struggle within the old Peruvian Communist Party, founded in 1928 by Jose Carlos Mariategui. In the early 1970s, many groups and organizations, newly formed, were reclaiming the revolutionary heritage of the old party from the Mariategui era. The group led by Guzman was then publishing a newspaper called *Bandera Roja* ("The Red Flag"), whose header was displaying this motto: "On the Shining Path of Mariategui." This is what brought the bourgeoisie—including intelligence services—to refer to Guzman's Party as "Shining Path", as a way to distinguish it from other organizations also using the same acronym ("PCP"). It is fair to say that Guzman's PCP has emerged as the most consistent heir of Mariategui's revolutionary heritage.

In Congress, the State Department, the Organization of American States and private research and human

rights organizations, the sense is growing that the astonishing momentum being shown by the Shining Path rebellion in Peru is the toughest post-cold war policy test on the horizon for the Western Hemisphere.¹

An interesting report published two years before by the RAND Corporation (a research center created after the Second World War dedicated to “public welfare and security of the United States” and controlled by the State Department) evoked in these terms the impact of the first ten years of People’s War and the challenge it posed to the Peruvian State and Western interests:

Sendero’s effect on Peruvian society has been synergistic. [...] The cost of the guerrilla campaign in economic losses alone is estimated to be in the neighborhood of \$10 billion. [...] Sendero has not only contributed to the country’s political and economic disintegration, this decline has provided the Shining Path with new backers, new issues, and a climate of discontent. [...] If, as I have suggested, the movement’s political network is far more extensive than the number of its attacks might indicate, Sendero is likely already to have the necessary organizational base to embrace those who would be pushed into its arms by an officially sponsored program of counterterror.²

¹Barbara Crossette, “In Peru’s Shining Path, U.S. Sees Road to Ruin”, *The New York Times*, March 22, 1992 (<<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/22/weekinreview/the-world-in-peru-s-shining-path-us-sees-road-to-ruin.html>>).

²Gordon H. McCormick, *The Shining Path and the Future of Peru*, The RAND Corporation, March 1990 (<https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2005/R3781.pdf>).

In a subsequent report dealing more specifically with the urban activity of the PCP, the same researcher added that contrary to the impression which was apparent from the first years of People's War when the actions of the guerrillas took place mainly in the rural sector, the PCP had managed to establish "an enduring base of popular support" in the capital, "backed by a developed, grass roots organization" capable of mobilizing "elements of the city's base of organized labor."³

This unusual development—that of a people's war in progress, initiated and led by a Maoist Party openly advocating Communism—was occurring in a context where the bourgeoisie and the imperialists were proclaiming and celebrating the "end of history". Remember that after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the victory of the capitalist roaders in China, the New Communist Movement that had emerged in the wake of the great struggle waged by Mao and the Chinese Communist Party against revisionism and the abandonment of the revolution by the Soviet leaders—a movement which the PCP was part of—was facing a deep crisis and had virtually disappeared. Meanwhile, the revisionists who were still representing, though falsely, what some have called "actually existing socialism" were entering a terminal phase that would lead to the implosion of the USSR in 1991.

In this difficult context, the battle started by the PCP strongly and dramatically reaffirmed the legitimacy of revolution and especially the relevance and validity of the communist project and its ideology. Thus, as we have written elsewhere: "For nearly 20 years, the People's War led by the PCP has been a beacon and a reference for thousands of oppressed people aspiring

³Gordon H. McCormick, *From the Sierra to the Cities: The Urban Campaign of the Shining Path*, The RAND Corporation, 1992 (<http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2005/R4150.pdf>).

to the revolution.”⁴

Here in Canada, the Peruvian People’s War positively influenced the revolutionary nucleus that had begun the protracted struggle to rebuild a vanguard party dedicated to the revolution. In the summer of 1992, the 4th Congress of the Groupe Action Socialiste adopted a resolution in support of the PCP, which marked the beginning of a broad campaign of propaganda and mobilization in support of the People’s War:

Today, while we must still., open the path for building revolutionary communist parties in the main imperialist countries; while there is a need to clearly explain, learning from past experiences, what is the path of revolution and how a Communist International is essential to fully assume the development and victory of the world revolution; while right opportunism remains omnipotent in the organizations that claim to lead the workers and peasants to power: the progresses of the People’s War in Peru and of the revolution led by the PCP are of paramount importance both for communists around the world, who are raising their heads after having faced important defeats, and for the oppressed masses of the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe [...] The experience of the revolution in Peru is particularly instructive as to the practical inconsistency and historical inability of reformism and opportunism to deliver to the working class and the poor peasantry the fruits of their struggles, though lengthy and costly in human lives. [...] In Canada, we need to get out of the current fog and embrace a revolutionary perspective that can

⁴E.S., “*El Diario Internacional* et Luis Arce Borja: Le parcours tordu d’un ‘compagnon de route’”, *Arsenal*, No. 6, November 2005 (<http://www.per-rcp.ca/fr/2256>). [Our translation]

challenge capitalism and Canadian imperialism. Supporting the PCP can help us reach this revolutionary path and show to workers its superiority over class collaboration, reformism and opportunism, which have handcuffed them for so long.⁵

This solidarity work and the process of studying the revolutionary process that was unfolding in Peru contributed to the following discussions in which Action Socialiste adopted Maoism and pushed aside the right opportunist current that was trying to impose a reformist and electoralist line.⁶

The impact of the Peruvian People's War was also felt around the world among the forces that were fighting to put in the foreground the struggle for communism and revolution. The Nepalese revolutionaries, in particular, never made any secret of the fact that the Peruvian experience influenced conception, preparation, and deployment of the People's War they launched in February 1996:

Grasping the fundamental principles of Marxism-LeninismMaoism, our Party, the (Unity Centre), is set on the preparations for protracted People's War based on the strategy of encircling the city from the countryside to accomplish the New Democratic revolution for effectuating changes in the semi-feudal & semi-colonial condition of Nepal. In this context it is self-evident that the experiences of the PCP have been and will remain specially significant for us.⁷

⁵“Nous appuyons le Parti communiste du Proul: rsolution du 4e congrs du groupe Action socialiste”, *Socialisme Maintenant!*, No. 51, September 1992. [Our translation]

⁶For a brief overview of the debate that spanned the predecessor of the PCR-RCP, see “Action Socialiste (1986-2000): An Unforgettable Experience” available at <http://www.per-rcp.ca/en/archives/1275>.

⁷“Letter of CPN (Unity Centre) to the Communist Party of Peru on the

We should particularly recall that the PCP was the first to assert Maoism as the new systematization of the revolutionary science of the proletariat. The struggle they waged on that question within the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM)⁸, and more broadly in the international communist movement, has led many parties and organizations to turn to and uphold Maoism, relying on it to develop their online policies and practice.

Eventually, as mentioned above, following the arrest of Abimael Guzman in 1992 and of most members of the PCP central leadership in the years that followed (not to mention the deployment of the bloody counter-insurrectionary war waged by the Peruvian State with the support of US imperialism against sectors of the masses where the PCP experienced its best support) what the PCP leader originally called “only a bend in the road”⁹ has proven much more than that.

The victory—a relative one like any victory—won by the Peruvian State certainly requires that a comprehensive assessment be made of this remarkable experience. The fact that such

capture of Corn. Gonzalo”, *The Worker*, No. 1, February 1993 (<http://bannedthought.net/Nepal/Worker/Worker-01/index.htm>).

⁸Founded in 1984, the RIM initially gathered some 20 Marxist-Leninist parties and organizations that were committed to defend the political and theoretical contributions made by Mao Zedong and the Chinese revolution, especially the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The PCP joined it in 1986 and greatly influenced its evolution. However, it was not until 1993 that the RIM officially decided to uphold Maoism, with the adoption of the “Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism!” resolution. The RIM disappeared around 2007-2008 as a result of the consolidation of a revisionist line within the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the post-MLM drift from the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP, USA), which was in fact controlling the RIM leadership.

⁹See this transcript of the famous September 24, 1992 speech from Abimael Guzman, two weeks after his arrest, when his captors showed him in a cage like a circus animal in front of vociferous Peruvian and foreign journalists: http://bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1992-18/win_New_Victories.htm.

assessment has not yet been produced by the Maoists of Peru nor the international Maoist movement cannot erase or diminish the crucial contributions of the process that unfolded in the 1980s and early 1990s.

People's War and militarization of the Party

The preparation and the launching of a People's War openly assumed that the experience of Peru, especially in the context of the late 1970s and early 1980s, would inevitably have an impact on the organization and functioning of the Party and eventually on the conception of what a vanguard party dedicated to revolution is. A series of texts collected in a booklet published in 1980 by the PCP Central Committee¹⁰ recount the line struggle that the Party passed through before the initiation of the armed struggle.

Dated March 1980, the one entitled *C'omenzamos a Derrumbar los Muros y a Desplegar la Aurora* ("We Begin to Topple the Walls and Unfold a New Dawn") openly evokes the resistance—in some cases the opposition from some leaders before launching the armed struggle—and the existence of a process of "cleansing" through which the party ranks have passed. The document also reports on the unanimous decision of the Central Committee "to develop the militarization of the Party through actions."

On the occasion of its first military school, held a few weeks after the above document, the PCP reiterated that it was "a

¹⁰Comite Central, Partido Comunista del Peru, *Por la Nueva Bandera*, Ediciones Bandera Roja, 1980. The original Spanish versions of PCP documents are easily found on several websites. English or French language versions are also widely accessible, although they are not necessarily official translations approved by the Party. When relying on existing translations, we compared them to the original Spanish versions to make sure of their conformity.

Party of a new type” whose purpose was “to seize power for the working class and the people.” According to the report presented at this meeting, the decision to engage in armed struggle created a new contradiction in the party, between “the old versus the new”:

The development of the Party through armed struggle is the new, and the old is our accomplishments up to now, including the good ones. Even the best of our achievements have aged [.. J. There is only one new thing, to develop the Party through armed struggle. Today, this is our contradiction.¹¹

Under the slogan of “Forging the First Company in Deeds,” Party activists were asked to constitute the first armed detachments, which carried out the actions included in the initiation plan. The increase in the number and intensity of guerrilla actions, the accumulation of experience and the rising capacities of these detachments, eventually enabled the creation of a separate military apparatus. In early 1985, the PCP Central Committee publicly reported the existence of a suitably constituted People’s Guerrilla Army “of thousands of fighters.”¹² The PCP was therefore implementing the orientation upheld twenty years earlier by the faction led by Abimael Guzman that, in the 1960s, had already proposed to “fight for building the three magic weapons of the revolution: the party, armed forces and united front.”¹³

Hence the PCP’s conceptions were and remained quite consistent with those of Mao Zedong; they never upheld the conception

¹¹Comit Central Ampliado, Partido Comunista del Per, *Somos los Iniciadores*, Ediciones Bandera Roja, 1980.

¹²Comite Central, Partido Comunista del Peril, *No Votar! Sino Generalizar la Guerra de Guerrillas para Con quistar el Poder para el Pueblo!*, Ediciones Bandera Roja, 1980.

¹³*Desarrollar la Guerra Popular Sirviendo a la Revolucion Mundial*, 1986.

of a “Fighting Communist Party” that organizations supportive of the armed struggle in Europe upheld and applied in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴ According to the PCP, the

People’s Army had to be a separate apparatus from the Party, although closely placed under its leadership. That said, the fact remains that at the time of the outbreak of the People’s War in 1980, the first guerrilla actions were carried out in practice by Party activists; it is from these actions and from these first detachments that the military apparatus was eventually constituted. This apparatus then came to exist by itself and generate its own recruitment of fighters coming from the masses, and not necessarily from the Party. It appears therefore that the PCP never confused the militarization of the Party with some organizational merger of political and military activities, and even less a merger of the Party with the military apparatus. In a document published in 1986, they rather gave this definition of what they mean by the militarization of the Party:

Concretely [...] we understand the militarization of the Party as the ensemble of the transformations, changes and adjustments necessary to lead People’s War as the principal form of struggle giving rise to the new state and the joint dictatorship that will transform society and replace the rule of imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and semi-feudalism with a New Democratic People’s Republic..¹⁵

Thus, the militarization of the Party is the implementation

¹⁴This was the case of of the “Cellules Communistes Combattantes” from Belgium, which were mainly active from 1983 to 1985. In 1990, the “Collectif des Prisonnier(e)s des CCC” explained their approach in a document setting out their differences with the Communist Party of Spain (Reconstituted): “Sur le Parti Combattant—Une Divergence avec les Camarades Espagnols”. This document is available at <http://cellulescommunistescombattantes.be/pdf/surlepc.pdf>.

¹⁵*Desarrollar la Guerra Popular Sirviendo a la Revolucion Mon dial, op. cit.*

of all that is necessary to lead the People's War. It has both an objective and a subjective component. The militarization of the Party is primarily the inevitable effect produced on the reality and the life of the Party by the deployment of the military activity—of moments or events of armed confrontation with the class enemy and the institutions of the bourgeois state, if only on a limited scale. This new reality necessarily imposes “transformations, changes and adjustments” to the Party organization (including issues like safety, clandestinity, internal discipline, etc.), to its political activities (its relationships with the masses, the leadership it

exerts on the mass organizations, its ability to relay and defend the actions of the guerrillas), and as to how it intends to politically and ideologically educate and train its activists and deploy them in political and mass work. But the militarization of the Party also—perhaps mostly—involves consciously taking charge and totally assuming all of these transformations, changes, and adjustments; this requires anticipating and implementing them so that the Party controls and masters those changes. Ultimately, this is what Maoists mean when we say that “the Communist Party must control the gun.” This does not strictly mean the organizational submission of the Army to the Party in a purely decisional sense, the setting up of an accountability system or the involvement of Party committees in the military; it also implies that the Party does not let itself be led by the vagaries of military action.

This relationship between the Party and the Army was eventually clarified and synthesized by the PCP in what they called the concentric construction of the three instruments of the revolution, that is “the organic fulfillment of the militarization of the Party.” This concentric construction was described by the PCP described as: “Taking the Party as the axis of everything, build the Army around it and with these instruments, with the

masses in People's War, build the new State based on both."¹⁶

Clearly, the PCP supported the setting up of three separate apparatuses, two of which—the Army and the New State—were to be revolving around the Party, being literally “driven” by it. According to this conception, the activity of Party militants was to be deployed towards the Army and the building of the New State. Embodied in the construction of this New State, mass work was to be developed “in and for the People's War.” The concentric construction of the three instruments of the revolution required that activists would become able to assume various responsibilities so that they were “forged both as Communists, first and foremost, but also as fighters and administrators.”

In the documents where it refers to the concept of “militarization of the Party,” the PCP always emphasizes the importance of systematically developing the two-line struggle within the Party. This struggle is even presented as an imperative task of the leadership, “because it is only through it that the Party and the organizations for the People's War could develop.” This is far from the monolithic conception of the Party that the concept of “militarization” may seem to induce, at first glance, at least for some.

Eight years after the initiation of the armed struggle, the PCP concluded that “it [was] the militarization of the Party which has enabled us to initiate and develop the People's War.” The spectacular growth of the People's War throughout the 1980s and until the mid-1990s seems to prove them right. But what about the period that followed, after the arrest of Abimael Guzman and other leaders of the Party, which was marked by a steady decline in guerrilla activity and in the influence of the Party?

¹⁶*Línea de construcción de los tres instrumentos de la revolución*, 1988.

The reasons behind the “bend in the road”

As mentioned above, the bend in the road evoked by the PCP Chairman in 1992 finally proved to be a real setback—if not a complete defeat. As far as we know, none of the groups that continue in one way or another to act on behalf of the PCP or to support “Gonzalo Thought” have publicly circulated any assessment on what happened and the reasons for this decline.

Some pointed to the precipitate transition from strategic defensive to strategic equilibrium officially announced by the PCP shortly before the arrest of Guzman. Did the Party over-evaluate its capacities and those of the two other instruments under its leadership? Did they correctly assess the balance of forces that actually existed? The unfolding of a mass movement such as a People’s War is not only dependent on the watchwords and decisions its leadership could put forward; it is more complicated than to simply hold or pull the strap while riding a horse. On each side, the forces set in motion by the People’s War act and thus produce new dynamics and there may come a time when a new situation arises—or is imposed by the enemy—without all the conditions ideally required to deal with such a situation in place. So it may be that the transition to strategic equilibrium was both inevitable and precipitated in Peru.

Following the April 5, 1992 autogolpe (“self-coup”) led by President Alberto Fujimori with the assistance of the armed forces and the active support of US imperialism, the regime launched massive counter-revolutionary operations on an unprecedented scale and was no longer hesitating to resort to terror and mass killings. In such context, making a “strategic retreat” and focusing on the consolidation and management of its base areas was not necessarily an option for the PCP, whose forces would still have been forced to face the deployment of the counter-

insurgency and engage in high level confrontations, not only in urban areas but also in the countryside, where the regime had already begun to implement a strategy of a “war of the masses against the masses.”

Controlling the progress of the People’s War during the strategic defensive stage and the passage to strategic equilibrium when conditions for such passage arise represents a major strategic challenge for any revolutionary movement, as we have seen in Peru but also a dozen years later in Nepal, where the People’s War encountered a similar problem (and where the “strategic retreat” decided by the leadership of the Maoist Party failed to preserve the gains of the revolution, no more than in Peru).

Nevertheless, the transfer of the Party’s center of gravity from the countryside to the cities—even only ONE city—seems to have not served the interests of the PCP; the spotting and later arrest of Guzman and the majority of the Party leadership while they were living all together in the same building in Lima was a real victory for the regime.

Some would argue that the “militaristic” conception of the PCP had something to do with the decline they faced after the 1992 arrests: this author doesn’t agree with that opinion. One should just look at the RAND Corporation reports cited above (or watch the documentary entitled “The People of the Shining Path” made by liberal journalists and broadcasted at the same period by the British Channel Four TV station¹⁷) to find that the People’s War as the main form of struggle for the conquest of power was commanded by political goals and was anchored in the heart of the mass struggles.

The continuation and even the intensification of the guerrilla actions in the year (and even the three years) that followed the arrest of Guzman and other PCP leaders also showed the capabilities and the qualities of that Party, which allowed a large

¹⁷ Available on YouTube : <https://youtu.be/-HnH-MguE1U>

room for autonomy and initiative of its grassroots organizations, who were able to persist in the implementation of the Party plan despite the decapitation of its leadership.

The stroke of genius executed in Autumn 1993 by the main political adviser of Fujimori and then chief of its intelligence service, Vladimiro Montesinos, was in obtaining and releasing a letter bearing the signature of Abimael Guzman calling for the cessation of armed struggle. This ended up producing the deleterious effect desired by the regime, especially after the arrest of other Party leaders like Margie Clavo in 1995 and Oscar Ramirez (“Feliciano”) in 1999, who had both denounced the letter as a “hoax” but publicly changed their minds after allegedly being scolded by Guzman himself.

In this regard, the conception of the PCP on *jefatura*—to be distinguished from the militarization of the Party—seems to have played a more important role in the dispersion of the organization’s activists and the erosion of its influence. It must be said that this conception, which postulated the infallibility of the single leader who embodies the revolution, is widely shared among Latin American leftists. In the ranks of the PCP, it took the form of this commitment solemnly reiterated by Party members: “We who follow Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, Gonzalo Thought, subject ourselves to President Gonzalo and embody Gonzalo Thought.”¹⁸ Therefore when it became clear that Guzman was most probably the author of peace letters, many aligned themselves to the letters’ point of view while those wishing to continue on the path of People’s War have not been able to find by themselves the way to renew the political perspectives of the Party and provide it a new leadership capable of retaking the initiative.

However, the defeat of the Peruvian People’s War does not diminish the importance and the quality of its contributions—

¹⁸*Línea de construcción de los tres instrumentos de la revolución op. cit.*

including those made by its main leader. Behind the contempt that some people show towards the PCP, one can see the rejection of any revolutionary struggle for the conquest of power. Those “leftists” who are well integrated into bourgeois society and whose political horizon stops where bourgeois law defines its limits have little interest in a movement like the one the PCP initiated and that unfolded during nearly two decades, which essentially mobilized the disinherited masses but failed to arouse the attention of sponsored commentators of social movements in the academic milieu.

Those for whom the revolution—that is the violent overthrow of one class by another—embodies the movement that will emancipate the exploited and oppressed worldwide still defend, enhance and support the revolutionary experience of the Communist Party of Peru and salute its heroic fighters.

Until there is further investigation and more direct knowledge from this entire experience, especially in regards to the conception developed by the PCP towards the militarization of the Party, we must nevertheless see this conception as a positive manifestation of a valid and serious effort to build a comprehensive revolutionary party, capable of assuming and supporting all forms of struggle for the conquest of power. Building such a Party remains a responsibility and an urgent task for each and every revolutionary, wherever they are.

“A Communist Party’s central task is the seizure of Power for the proletariat and the people. Once constituted, and basing itself on the concrete conditions, the Party must strive to carry out the seizure of Power, which it can only do through People’s War.”

(Abimael Guzman, July 1988)

Multipartyism in Light of Class Struggle

Ben Gould

The following text is intended as a contribution to the elaboration of the proletarian point of view on the question of multipartyism. In this context we will take very seriously Marx's claim that the proletariat cannot simply use the state machine that it inherits from the capitalist society but must "break it". Nowadays, breaking the state machinery cannot be reduced to the mere transformation of the state apparatus in order to remove from it the elements that are judged the most reactionary; it also involves breaking the political apparatus that is itself constituted by parliamentarism. However, even before thinking of breaking down this complex mechanism that maintains bourgeois society, it will be necessary for the proletariat to have already begun to develop within this society the new forms of democracy which are necessary to replace the political system of leadership put in place by the bourgeoisie. And, in order to highlight these new forms of democracy, a return to the historical experience of the proletariat will prove necessary, since it is through the historical experience of socialism that we find the most complete examples of proletarian democracy. Having said that, we do not pretend to have completely settled the subject; our objective is to primarily introduce the problem of multipartyism and to advance our reflection.

Democracy, multipartyism and class power

Very schematically, democracy is the political system in which power is in principle held or controlled by the people (by virtue of the principle of sovereignty), without there being any formal distinctions due to birth, wealth, etc. (by virtue of the principle of equality). As a general rule, democracies are indirect or representative, with power exercised through designated representatives that are determined by elections through universal suffrage. This is why, in the capitalist countries, it is considered that regular elections (which make it possible to limit in time the mandate of representatives under the principle of alternation) ensure the maintenance of democracy. Let us note, however, that the elections, political alternation, and consequently the multiparty system, are only some of the elements that shape democracy. Indeed, to these above elements we can add: the separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches; democratic rights (freedom of expression, association, etc.); the rule of majority; judicial independence; etc.

Among all of these above elements, multipartyism (i.e. two or more political parties vying for governmental power in an electoral process) is often presented as a determinant of democracy and the antithesis of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is a concept that was constructed by bourgeois political science so as to expressly designate a particular mode of government, more often than not associated with a state of exception, in opposition to the supposed “natural” form of democracy where various parties compete for political power in elections. Totalitarianism is a concept developed during the Cold War to delimit the self-proclaimed “democratic” camp of the capitalist countries from that of the “totalitarian” people’s democracies. Indeed, following Hannah Arendt, the term “totalitarianism” refers to a political system in which a single party holds all the powers and does not

tolerate any opposition (monopartyism), requiring the gathering of all members of society in one single block behind the state. In the classification of political regimes made by bourgeois political science, single-party regimes are classified as dictatorships or totalitarian regimes. In some cases, the single party may be a pre-eminent authority within the state and sometimes even merge with or substitute for the government (a “party-state”).

What history seems to demonstrate is that the opposition of “democracy” (defined as multipartyism) to “totalitarianism” (defined as monopartyism) is a political orientation largely determined by the political needs of the capitalist states and not those of the exploited masses. To give an example: the experience of the socialist countries reveals that the fundamental element in the extension of democracy was the participation of the masses in exercising power and not the multi-party system, and that, conversely, the more the masses were dismissed from power the more the proletarian democracy took a restrictive character. One of Stalin’s mistakes was his failure to provide the working class with adequate means to monitor and control the functioning of the socialist state. The result of this mistake has been that the majority of the working class has been deprived—more or less dependent on the circumstances, voluntarily or unwillingly—of its full role in leading society, which in turn fostered the growth of bureaucracy and the multiplication of privileges among party and state officials. Ultimately, the proletarian dictatorship was weakened and made vulnerable to open capitalist restoration. Indeed, without the participation of the masses along with the degeneration of a relatively small number of leaders and the elimination of those who maintained a revolutionary line, the proletarian dictatorship is vulnerable to a rapid seizure of power from the top of society. Mao has shown without a shadow of doubt that the capitalist restoration as it occurred in the USSR flowed above all from the class struggle under socialism and the

decisive action of the bourgeoisie. That being said, it is legitimate to think that the limitation of revolutionary democracy in a socialist society in transition to communism does not place the proletariat in the best position to successfully struggle against the bourgeoisie.

If bourgeois political science tends to exaggerate the distinction between democracy and totalitarianism it is because its function is to ensure the domination of the bourgeois point of view, in particular by the elaboration of theories aimed at camouflaging the class content of democracy thus leading to the conception of bourgeois democracy as a free structure that floats freely above class interests. In particular, the bourgeois point of view tends to hide the fact that the bourgeois democratic system and institutions reflect the relations between the different fractions of the bourgeoisie and are therefore adapted to the practical conditions of the existence of the bourgeois class and cannot therefore be extended to the proletariat. Moreover, the functioning of bourgeois democracy follows the laws of the capitalist market—that is, the proliferation of parties is the reflection of the proliferation of goods on the markets, whereas individual participants are conceived as consumers. At the same time, though, it should not be forgotten that in the advanced capitalist countries, multipartyism conceals the essential fact that all parties present in Parliament are integrated into the dominant system and participate in the interests of the bourgeoisie in organizing and maintaining capitalist exploitation.

Although democracy is never neutral and that, in capitalist society, it is always in service to bourgeois interests, nothing in the historical experience of the proletariat obliges us to be unilaterally in favour of or against the multiparty system. Therefore, in principle, it is possible for the revolutionary forces to participate in the multi-party system if one of the following conditions is attained: a) capitalism has been overthrown and socialism has

become the dominant system in which multipartyism takes place, each party being firmly committed to defend the general interests of the revolutionary proletariat and to struggle to abolish definitively the exploitation and consequently the social classes; b) a new democratic regime, guided by the long-term interests of the proletariat, is put in place where, under the leadership of the proletariat, different social forces are united in order to establish the material conditions for improving the general conditions of the people and ensuring the transition to socialism.

However, the problem of multipartyism cannot be solved so easily. One of the fundamental postulates of revolutionary Marxism is that every social class is represented by one and only one political party, whose specific function is to organize the conquest or maintenance of the political hegemony of the class to which it belongs and is attached. Obviously, this postulate raises the problem of how to reconcile this conception of the classed party with the fact that in most contemporary societies there are a large number of political organizations that seem to clash with one another in order to place themselves in a position to govern. To this first difficulty it is possible to add a number of problems such as: i) how to explain why the members of the same class are divided into several parties and do not regroup in a single party; ii) to explain how (and under what conditions) several parties, which apparently seem to be encamped upon irreconcilable positions, nevertheless come to regroup; iii) to explain what is the function of this class party within the state. In the following section we will return to these problems.

How, then, can we explain that we can affirm that each class is organized around a single party when in fact there is an important pluralism in political formations? In reality, this contradiction is only apparent. That some are still mystified by this appearance is explained more often than not by a lack of perspicacity in political analysis. Indeed, serious political

analysis should lead us to distinguish two types of change: i) the change that results from the fundamental political evolution of a society, that is to say that which is inscribed in duration and which applies to the whole mode of production (for example, the transition from feudalism to capitalism); ii) cyclical changes, that is, those changes which punctuate the existence of the mode of production (for example, a period of crisis or a period of war). In a social system, only the important periods of crisis (that is, the historical periods in which the economic, political, social and cultural foundations of society are undermined) make it possible to detect immediately the fundamental political tendencies that operate in a given society without having to wait until the evolution of the mode of production is completed.

One cannot deny what the analysis of the important periods of crisis in a social system tends to demonstrate, namely a strong tendency for political parties to regroup.

Thus, parties, which nevertheless appear perfectly independent of one another, come to form a united bloc when the fundamental interests of capital are threatened. In a sense, the bloc that is formed is the true core of the bourgeoisie. One can even say that this bloc is the most intransigent nucleus of the ruling class, where one may find the main political leaders of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, a great deal of care must be taken to distinguish the party of the bourgeoisie, which under capitalism represents above all the interests of capital, and the parties which represent the different political factions. These fractions are born from the political and social conjuncture and, in turn and depending upon the circumstances, may be called to dominate the fundamental bloc. Conversely, these party fractions tend to disappear as soon as the conjuncture that gave birth to them has evolved sufficiently.

It is reasonable to ask why does the bourgeoisie maintain this political pluralism? Indeed, why count on several parties

to maintain its domination when only one would suffice? One reason is given by Marx, who notes that a party that represents a social class can only reflect its contradictions. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx gives the example of the opposition which prevailed between the different monarchist factions before their unification in the “Party of Order” so as to face the workers’ threat (a real threat that would be transformed into a full blown insurrection against the bourgeois order in June 1848). What Marx highlights is that the very existence of these fractions originated in the division within the ruling class between two fractions of capital, namely the landed aristocracy and the financial-industrial bourgeoisie. Let us emphasize that this explains why parties born in particular conjunctures may last a certain time, even if the material conditions have otherwise changed. A second reason that can be invoked is the appearance of universal suffrage. Indeed, the extension of voting rights will force the bourgeois parties to regroup around them forces taken from other classes in order to become dominant in the bourgeois bloc. Historically, these groupings have taken (and will take in the future) multiple forms: “sacred union”, “national unity government”, and so on. This explains why today these parties can claim to their improbable merging as social conservatism, pragmatic liberalism, social democracy (in the contemporary sense of the word), responsible governing, etc.

One might think that the bourgeois political system succeeds in maintaining itself through the multi-party system, but that would be a mistake. In fact there is a strong tendency to confuse the idea of multipartyism with the concept of political pluralism. A single party with an interior democratic life can operate on the basis of a plurality of ideas while, conversely, several parties that share essential and similar views on the most important issues can coexist. If we come back to the concrete experience, we see that things are presented and articulated in a rather specific way,

at least enough to allow us to draw partial conclusions. Indeed, during the peaceful periods, the bourgeois political system takes the following form: i) opposition between fractions of the ruling class to obtain its hegemony—this opposition takes the form of the electoral and parliamentary struggle; ii) integration of the system of political alliances around each of these fractions, which is built on partial reforms aimed at winning targeted groups in the population (thus ensuring the reproduction of society). But during major crisis, the articulation of this domination mechanism tends to change, notably through: i) a unification of the different fractions of the ruling class; ii) a substantial change in the political alliances around these fractions, in particular by a major purification in these alliances, the rejection of the forces coming from the other classes and whose interests are the furthest from those of the bourgeoisie—conversely, a tightening aimed at bringing together elements coming from the other classes which have previously been won over to the maintenance of the bourgeois political system (in particular through economic advantages, progress in the social hierarchy, etc.); and finally, iii) by the marked repressive use of the state apparatus.

The passage from one form to the other marks in fact the transition from the moment when the mode of production functions regularly to the moment when it is experiencing major failures: we can speak of revolutionary periods, of course, but also of recession periods. How can we then identify these periods of qualitative change? Quite simply by studying the dysfunctions of bourgeois society: when we are witnessing the multiplication of parliamentary parties, when a permanent state of crisis in the parliamentary system arises, notably because of the difficulty experienced by the bourgeoisie in bringing about a new political leadership. At the level of the overall dynamic, the crisis of the bourgeois political system means the temporary impossibility for all the parliamentary parties to obtain a majority in order to

govern or remain in power. At the level of the parties themselves, this leads to a period of flotation at the level of their political leadership. From the bourgeois point of view, it is a situation that cannot last forever and for which a solution must be quickly put in place at the risk of plunging society into crisis.

It is interesting to note that despite the multiplication of parties, the bourgeoisie still retains control of the state apparatus. Thus, political pluralism is tolerated insofar as it is channelled into parliamentary life and does not spill over into the state machine: that is to say that pluralism exists only under the control of the state. Indeed, since the multiplicity of ideologies is the rule in the popular classes, the bourgeoisie will tend to tolerate a form of pluralism to ensure its domination over them, even guaranteeing pluralism precisely because it allows avoiding the formation and crystallization of a certain class consciousness. So it is not just any pluralism that is tolerated, but a by-product of bourgeois political ideology. In fact, it is a question of legitimizing the political power of the bourgeoisie, thanks to a series of ideas, concepts and practices; for example, by codifying the rules of the electoral and parliamentary game. This conception of plurality, and by the very same fact of democracy, is subsequently amplified by the mass media, but also by the proletarian and popular organizations that are subservient to capitalism. By mastering the state apparatus, the ruling class can give free rein to the formation of multiple organizations.

To this rather ideological pluralism, the bourgeoisie adds political pluralism. As we have seen above, it is only in times of crisis that the "struggle" of the parties gives way to class unity. If the crisis is not too acute, the unification of the various fractions will take place without too much difficulty, since this division of forces is only of a reformist character and concerns only partial questions. For example, in Canada, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party have essentially the same

policy, while opposing each other on secondary ideological issues. In a sense, we can say that it is a simple division of labour within the bourgeoisie. Thus, beyond diversity, there is a real homogeneity that is based on very concrete material interests and is reinforced by a common economic, political, and social culture.

When unity is not easily achieved, often because of the gravity of the crisis and the exacerbation of the contradictions between the fractions of the bourgeoisie, the ruling class will impose such unity by other means, notably by the direct intervention of the state and the adoption of emergency legislation, which is called to become permanent. These solutions consolidate or restore the dictatorship of the ruling class. Failing to maintain its ascendancy over social forces, the intervention of the state allows the bourgeoisie to unify its own fractions.

For the proletariat, things are different. First of all, this class does not control the state and therefore cannot use it against the class enemy or force its own unification. Secondly, the interest of the proletariat is not to participate in the capitalist system but rather to abolish it. Consequently, proletarian parties will seek, as their main characteristic, to challenge the power of the bourgeoisie. However, the proletariat is far from homogeneous and its heterogeneity is accentuated when it has to make alliances with other social groups, for example the peasantry. Thus, the history of the exploited is that of a perpetual attempt to achieve unity and hegemony. By this very fact, the proletarian party's primary problem must be to maintain its independence from the ruling class.

From what has just been established we can conclude two things: i) the state represents the coercive and punitive force of a class; ii) political parties represent the spontaneous adhesion of members of a class to a conception of the world that serves the interests of a particular social class. In this sense, political

(and ideological) leadership is the primary function of parties. If the class expresses itself through a party, it is up to the party to give it an effective unity—an ideological and political one. Since the state and the parties participate in the class struggle, it is necessary to understand that the latter constitutes a sum of privileged moments to determine the reality of the relations between classes, in particular a constitution that makes it possible to unveil the respective strategy of the opposing forces (the articulation between classes, parties, the state, etc.). What is new with Marxism is that for the first time in history there is an articulation of a coherent strategy of the party, the state, and the decisive participation of the masses through the classed political party, but also through mass organizations. It is in this way that the tension that we have identified within the multiparty system is resolved and the fact that each class is represented by a single party. It remains for us to return to the real historical experience in order to validate what has just been said and dispel certain misunderstandings.

Since the emergence of the revolutionary workers' movement as an independent force, the struggles for the extension of democracy and for socialism have been closely linked. However, it is easy to see that this link has often been misunderstood by the revolutionary forces, especially when it came time to articulate in practice these two terms. In particular, it is necessary to underline the error committed by those who sought to merge the democratic tasks and those errors that stem from the construction of socialism.

If the struggles for the extension of democracy and those for socialism are closely linked, it is because the struggle for democratic rights under capitalism has historically contributed to the strengthening of the proletarian movement and has participated in the improvement of the conditions under which this movement can carry out its struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

On the other hand, once the working class has overthrown the bourgeoisie and seized power—that is, once it has begun the transition to socialism—it will be possible for it to considerably extend workers' rights.

In fact, the study of proletarian revolutions, starting from the Paris Commune (1871) to the experience of the Chinese Revolution (1949-1976), shows that proletarian power was accompanied by immense progress at the democratic level for the peoples of the countries where they took place. The Paris Commune, the October Revolution, and the experience of socialist construction in China provide numerous examples illustrating the fact that the overthrow of the exploiting classes is the initial material condition for the labouring masses to have access to rights and material conditions of existence of which they could only dream of while remaining under the old regime, whether it was slavery, feudal society, or capitalism. However, the experience of 20th century socialism, notably the degeneration of the former USSR, the overthrow of socialism in China following the death of Mao Zedong, and the collapse of the so-called “popular democracies” of the Eastern bloc seems to contradict the thesis that only socialism can allow the broad masses to access the most authentic democracy. So what should we think?

It is incontestable that these revolutionary experiments demonstrated the capacity of the proletariat to undertake consciously and deliberately the transition from capitalism to communism. In doing so, the proletariat has also demonstrated in practice, on a large scale for a relatively long period and under various conditions, that it was able to lead and organize the entire working people and to lead itself without the aid of the capitalists or the boss. However, it is important to bear in mind that proletarian revolutions have been limited experiences: at most one third of the world's population was at one time or another a citizen of a socialist country; although having advanced in the transforma-

tion of social relations, the fact remains that the antagonistic classes didn't disappear. This fact should not, however, make us forget that under socialism the proletarian masses really laid the foundations for the abolition of social classes. Undoubtedly, what has most gripped the imagination of many activists is the persistence of the state, worse its strengthening. Each of these problems contributes to the problem of the transition from capitalism to communism; they should not be minimized. However, as we shall see later, it is possible through historical study and political analysis to better understand the challenges posed by these problems. We need to go beyond this simple observation.

The light brought by Marx and Engels

What Marx and Engels analyzed, and on what they built the foundations of what will later be called Marxism, are societies in the process of developing capitalism in which there was a progressive proletarianization that would continue accelerating. From this growing proletarianization, there logically had to emerge a relatively concrete program of action that, above all, would be immediately applicable to the revolutionary forces of the time: namely, to give the proletariat immediate access to power. In other words, the development of material conditions and the development of persistent contradictions within capitalist societies in the process of industrialization raised the problem of determining the form of the proletariat's conquest of power. In this sense, "the conquest of democracy" represented, for a majority of socialists of the 19th century, a first step towards this conquest of power. And, having passed this first stage, the proletariat was to make use of its political supremacy "to gradually extract all capital from the bourgeoisie." Thus, the proletariat, erected as a ruling class, had to use its political power to abolish step by step the material foundations of capitalism. This is what Marx

and Engels explicitly emphasize in the Communist Manifesto: “The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.”¹

At the time when Marx and Engels drafted the Communist Manifesto, the first genuinely proletarian revolution, the workers’ insurrection of June 1848 in Paris, had not yet taken place. One can therefore speculate that when they wrote the Manifesto, Marx and Engels were in fact writing a declaration for a future war against the bourgeoisie. That is, they were anticipating the possible evolutions of the class struggle if the proletariat succeeded in gaining ground under capitalism and if it succeeded in overcoming the obstacles imposed by bourgeois society. This assumption is justified by the fact that the writings of Marx before June 1848 and the experience of the Commune of Paris (1871) differ markedly on certain essential points from the writings that would follow these experiments. Care must therefore be taken to distinguish the Marx who seeks to anticipate the course of events from the Marx who will reflect on the practical experience accumulated during the revolutionary period. It is important to make this distinction because we risk losing sight of the revolutionary Marx and thereby endorse certain revisionist theses conveyed by supposed “specialists” of Marxism (Marxologists and Marxians from bourgeois universities) who seek to oppose a so-called “democratic” against a “dictatorial” Marx.

The only reasonable explanation for the theoretical variations we encounter in Marx is to understand them as flowing from his analysis of concrete reality. When Marx was in the process of writing the Manifesto with Engels, he was perfectly aware that the immediate and unavoidable objective of the proletariat

¹Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) (<https://www.marxists.org/archivernarx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>).

was the conquest of democracy and not the direct seizure of power; that is why the program proposed in the Manifesto was one of alliances with other political forces. The justification for these alliances was that they would, Marx and Engels hoped, materialize as quickly as possible the triumph of the exploited majority against the exploiting minority. This logic allows us to better understand the usefulness of the last section of the Manifesto, entitled "Socialist and Communist Literature". In this section, Marx and Engels present a general view of all the so-called "socialist" tendencies of the period and the relation the communists maintain with these tendencies. They emphasize that, with regard to the different parties which really oppose capitalism, the communists exert a class analysis and an analysis of the concrete situation, by taking into account the material reality (which country, which stage, which forces, etc.), in order to determine their attitude towards the other parties; that is why what is on the agenda at a given moment may differ from one country to another. For example, if what is on the agenda is the abolition of feudalism (as was the case in most European countries in the mid-19th century), then communists must not hesitate to support the bourgeoisie, but on the condition that the latter advances the struggle against feudalism. However, although they might support other forces to overcome certain obstacles, the communists seek at all costs to preserve their autonomy: that is, they develop towards the proletariat class in order to organize it, notably by making it aware of the contradictions that separate its interests from those of the bourgeoisie, with a view to preparing the next stage—the proletarian revolution. This is why the communists "fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement."

If Marx and Engels did not hesitate to favour alliances with

other forces in order to achieve particular objectives, for example to gain more democracy, they nevertheless left open the question of what will happen to the “future of the movement”. First thing to note: Marx and Engels were not system builders; they avoided speculating about communist society, especially turning such speculation into a dogma concerning the future. Nevertheless, Marx and Engels were interested in the political regime that was to supplant capitalism. Indeed, with the help of historical materialism and the careful study of revolutionary experiences of the 19th century, they elaborated general principles on the question of proletarian political power and its relationship with the state. Therefore, if we want to make progress in our investigation, we must: i) identify these principles; and ii) analyze them. This is what we will try to do in the following section.

Marx and Engels on Democracy and Socialism

There are two main axes by which Marx and Engels proceed to the critique of bourgeois society: i) the implacable criticism of the capitalist mode of production; and ii) the critique of the bourgeois state. In particular, what Marx and Engels will illustrate is that the bourgeois state is a bureaucratic and military apparatus that the classes in power use to repress the working people. Now, what we can say of this first observation is that many people today seem to share it, especially our contemporary petty bourgeois democrats. However, Marx and Engels went much further than a simple critique of capitalism by demonstrating that its state was not an immutable entity or something imposed from outside society but that it had arisen precisely at one stage in the development of human societies. This is what Engels emphasized when he wrote:

The state is therefore by no means a power imposed on society from the outside; just as little is it ‘the reality of the moral idea,’ ‘the image and reality of reason,’ as Hegel asserted. Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction within itself, that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, may not consume themselves and society in sterile struggle, a power apparently standing above society becomes necessary, whose purpose is to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power arising out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly separating itself from it, is the state.²

In a class society, the state will necessarily serve as an instrument for the domination of the oppressed classes “[b]ecause the state from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but because it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class.”³

Marx and Engels will demonstrate that the state in ancient and feudal societies has served to oppress slaves and serfs, just as the modern state maintains the dominance of the bourgeoisie

²Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/>).

³*Ibid.*

over the proletariat, making a parallel with the Manifesto's claim that "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."

Since the role of the state is to repress, it should be understood that its power rests on the armed force that the ruling class uses to subjugate the population. Engels specifies, moreover, that the state is not only composed "of armed men, but also of material appendages, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds."⁴

In their criticism of the modern state, the founders of scientific socialism mention two characteristic features of the capitalist state: bureaucracy and the permanent army. Describing the gigantic bureaucratic and military machinery typical of the capitalist state, Marx writes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: "The executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organization, with its wide-ranging and ingenious state machinery, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million—this terrifying parasitic body which enmeshes the body of French society and chokes all its pores."⁵

What is the link between capitalism and the existing political forms? This question brings us back to the problem of democracy. In many texts, Marx and Engels clearly demonstrate that they consider that democracy under capitalism in no way modifies the fundamental function of the capitalist state. For example,

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>).

it is often said today that there is a difference between “formal” rights and “real” rights and therefore, since the latter only exist in principle, it is necessary to struggle to give them legal form. The criticism of Marx and Engels is not limited to such platitudes because, for them, the fundamental problem is that the modern representative state remains an organ of class domination: “The modern State, again, is only the organization that bourgeois society takes on in order to support the external conditions of the capitalist mode of production against the encroachments as well of the workers as of individual capitalists. The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine—the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital.”⁶ And even in the most democratic republic “wealth exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely.”⁷

Since the bourgeoisie maintains its control over the means of production and the state, how can we then understand the role of democratic gains in the struggle for communism? On the one hand, gains in democratic rights are an enormous step forward for the workers movement, improving conditions for the masses and providing them with new weapons for their struggle. But on the other hand, as long as capitalists control the means of production and the state, the extension of democratic rights cannot change the fundamental situation of the working class. Therefore, those who rely on reforms, elections, and universal suffrage as the main means of change make a major mistake. First, they confuse improvement (gains brought by reforms are temporary more often than not) with real transformation; second, they confuse the use of suffrage in bourgeois society, which mostly favours the exploitative minority and the maintenance of the exploitative capitalist system, and its use in a socialist society

⁶Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1980) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/index.htm>).

⁷Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, *op. cit.*

that favours the majority. In fact, under capitalism, universal suffrage (i.e. elections) is only (in so far as the proletariat is capable of emancipating itself) “the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the modern state, but that is enough. On the day when the thermometer of universal suffrage shows boiling-point among the workers, they as well as the capitalists will know where they stand.”⁸ For the proletariat, what remains to be done is of course to overthrow the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels considered that the ultimate goal of the revolution was the complete elimination of the state. As Engels indicates:

The state, therefore, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies which have managed without it, which had no notion of the state or state power. At a definite stage of economic development, which necessarily involved the cleavage of society into classes, the state became a necessity because of this cleavage. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes has not only ceased to be a necessity, but becomes a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they once arose. The state inevitably falls with them. The society which organizes production anew on the basis of free and equal association of the producers will put the whole state machinery where it will then belong—into the museum of antiquities, next to the spinning wheel and the bronze axe.⁹

Thus, once power is stripped from the bourgeoisie, it cannot be expected that the complete abolition of classes and the ex-

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

tion of the state will occur immediately. In fact, a system as complex as capitalism, especially its material bases (all the systems of ideas that have been developed, the political-juridical superstructure, customs and habits, and so on) make capitalist society a machine which cannot easily be dismantled; that is why there must be a period during which the economic, political, and social conditions necessary for these changes will be put in place. It is during this period of transition from capitalism to communism that the working class is organized into the ruling class and uses its own state to break the resistance of the capitalists and realize the socialist transformation of society. This transition is summarized by Marx in the following way: “Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.”¹⁰ Here we can notice that Marx is modifying an important idea of the Communist Manifesto. In fact, Marx brings together, under the notion of the revolutionary proletarian dictatorship, the task of constituting “the proletariat as the ruling class, the conquest of democracy” and that of “wrest[ing], by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.”¹¹ Three key concepts are used to describe the political structure after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie: i) constitution as the ruling class; ii) the conquest of democracy; and iii) the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Does this mean that Marx has moved from a simplistic democratic position to a position in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Not

¹⁰Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/>).

¹¹Marx & Engels, *op. cit.*

really! Indeed, Marx is consistent with the general orientation of the Communist Manifesto. Already in the Manifesto, he emphasized that the conquest of democracy will be possible only “by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.”

In the years following the publication of the Communist Manifesto, in engaging with the problematic of proletarian revolution, Marx and Engels would return many times to these three points, especially in light of the Paris Commune. In March 1871, the Paris workers took power and established the Commune. Although this event lasted only a few months, it is nevertheless an important event, the analysis of which contributed to clarify the Marxist point of view on the revolutionary transformation of the state. In fact, the Commune was at once the first experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the first experience of proletarian democracy.

At the level of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Commune was “essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor.”¹² Also, the majority of the representatives in power were naturally workers or recognized representatives of the working class; this is why the laws and decrees adopted by the Commune were aimed at the exploiting classes and defended the proletariat and the masses.

At the level of democracy, the Commune illustrated how the

¹²Marx, *The Civil War in France* (1871) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/index.htm>).

dictatorship of the proletariat could extend democracy to the majority of the people. Marx himself insisted on the democratic character of the proletarian power of the Commune by stressing the following points: i) the municipal councillors were elected by universal suffrage; ii) the councillors were responsible and revocable at all times; iii) the majority of the councillors were recognized workers or representatives of the working class; iv) the political attributes of the civil servants and the police were examined and the responsibility and revocability of their staff at all times was established; v) workers' wages were applied to all levels of government; vi) the permanent army was abolished.

These mechanisms put in place by the Commune represent a progress. In terms of democracy, they represent so many initiatives aimed at ensuring the control of workers over their state. Thus, the Commune was to be not a parliamentary body but an active, executive, and legislative body at the same time. In this sense, it represents the beginning of the end of the traditional form of bourgeois parliamentarism, which is presented as the ultimate in democracy by bourgeois ideologues, since there are many parties and there is much discussion of problems (concerning solely the capitalists) but where the problems of the people are never truly taken into account.

The Commune thus provided an excellent example of proletarian political power. It illustrated how the working class could use the proletarian state—that is, a state that was emptied of its bourgeois substance—as an instrument for establishing its dictatorship over the bourgeoisie, while at the same time expanding democracy for the vast majority—that is, for the labouring people. Commenting on the Commune, Engels would submit that such a state, proletarian in essence, was no longer a state in the strict sense of the term since it was no longer an instrument in the hands of a minority in order to oppress the majority of the population. Conversely, it could be seen that the revolutionary

power served the interests of the majority of the working people, in particular by repressing the handful of exploiters. Thus, the elevation of the proletariat to the position of the ruling class is in fact the first step in the process that eventually leads to the extinction of the state as a whole. In this sense the state is, as Engels remarks, “nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at the earliest possible moment, until such time as a new generation, reared in new and free social conditions, will be able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap-heap.”¹³

Despite its short existence, the experience of the Commune has proved to be rich in lessons for the revolutionary movement. If the Commune is to be celebrated for its achievements, though, it must also be critiqued for its errors and inadequacies. Moreover, the most important lesson that Marx and Engels derived from the Commune stems not from its achievements but from its shortcomings and its errors. In particular, Marx and Engels will point out that the Commune had not been sufficiently determined in the exercise of its dictatorship against the bourgeoisie, and that this had enabled the bourgeoisie to reconstitute its forces thus facilitating the overthrow of the Commune itself. According to Marx and Engels, in the face of such facts, it was now clear that the working class could not simply take the State apparatus as is and operate it on its own account; the proletariat had to break the bourgeois state and replace it by the proletariat organized as a ruling class.

¹³Engels, *The Civil War in France: 1891 Introduction* (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm>).

We are now ready to conclude this section. Marx and Engels do not oppose the multiparty system as such. Indeed, when it is necessary, they do not hesitate to favour alliances. However, they always consider these questions by subordinating them to: i) the overthrow of capitalism; ii) the importance of proletarian power; iii) progress towards communism. Thus multipartyism, far from representing a panacea of democracy, should be relativized by the analysis of its real content: what are these parties, what classes do they represent. We should emphasize, however, that when Marx and Engels write and struggle political parties, in the modern sense, are novelties (the first political party paradoxically was the Bonapartist party of the future Napoleon III); consequently, it will be up to their successors to deepen the communist conception of the role of democracy, parliamentarism, and multipartyism.

Lenin contextualized

Lenin applied the Marxist theory of the state in the context of capitalism that had reached its imperialist stage. The material conditions having changed, Lenin demonstrated in practice and in theory the vitality of revolutionary Marxism. In fact, Marxist theory is a living theory that feeds on the truths of accumulated past experience and innovations in dealing with new situations. Without mastery of past experience Marxism dissolves; without innovations it dogmatizes itself.

Like Marx and Engels, Lenin also engaged in a reflection on democracy and socialism. He also sought to anticipate the problems of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and the transition to communism. And, like Marx and Engels, he was led to these questions through practical experience—in his case, the experience of the Russian Revolution. There is therefore an important reflection in Lenin on democracy and socialism which extends that of Marx and Engels'. For the sake of clarity, we will divide

Lenin's reflection into four moments which correspond to so many moments drawn from the history of the Russian revolution: i) the period of the first revolution of 1905, during which Lenin wrote his pamphlet *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*; ii) the period before the conquest of power, during which he wrote his work *The State and Revolution*; iii) the period following the episode of the constituent assembly, to which corresponds the work *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*; and finally iv) the period during which Lenin studied the problems related to the Soviet state, especially in the often misunderstood text *Better Fewer, But Better*.

Bolshevism as a political current had, from a theoretical point of view, raised the conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a political question of prime importance not only for the emancipation of the Russian proletariat but also as a thesis which would lead to the struggle against opportunism. When Lenin wrote his pamphlet *Two Tactics*, he faced the problem of advancing the revolution in a backward capitalist country, since in Russia there was a very large peasant and petty-bourgeois population capable of supporting the democratic revolution, but not necessarily a socialist revolution. This situation placed the proletariat under the obligation to forge alliances in the struggle for democratic revolution, especially with the peasantry, while avoiding losing sight of the fact that the democratic dictatorship is not the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin asserts that democratic rights are indispensable to the struggle of the working class and that the progression of the proletarian revolution requires the construction of a democratic revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. However, Lenin knew full well that the Tsar would never give up the constituent assembly and that at most he would only accept a consultative assembly. In the particular circumstances of Russia, the bourgeoisie, who should have normally led the struggle against Tsarism, refused

to play any revolutionary role and only sought adjustments with Tsarism. Now, if the revolutionary proletariat wanted a constituent assembly, it was expressly to liquidate Tsarism and not to make adjustments with it. Consequently, since the bourgeoisie refused to install a provisional revolutionary government, it was then up to the revolutionary forces to lead the struggle against Tsarism. Nevertheless, the struggle for the constituent assembly posed the problem of the admissibility of the participation of the revolutionary forces to a revolutionary democratic government. Indeed, because of the material conditions, such a government could only apply at first the minimum program of the revolution, but not immediately socialism. In this situation, what was the policy to follow? Lenin would decide in favour of the admissibility of the participation of the revolutionary forces in the government insofar as it is a question of: i) countering counter-revolutionary attempts; and ii) defending the interests of the working class. The idea underlying Lenin's reflection is that the revolution in preparation in Russia was essentially a bourgeois revolution that interested the peasant as much as the worker. Criticizing the Mensheviks, Lenin emphasized:

A bourgeois revolution is a revolution which does not go beyond the limits of the bourgeois, i.e., capitalist, social and economic system. A bourgeois revolution expresses the need for the development of capitalism, and far from destroying the foundations of capitalism, it does the opposite, it broadens and deepens them. This revolution therefore expresses the interests not only of the working class, but of the entire bourgeoisie as well. Since the rule of the bourgeoisie over the working class is inevitable under capitalism, it is quite correct to say that a bourgeois revolution expresses the interests not so much of the proletariat as of the bourgeoisie. But it is entirely absurd to think that a

bourgeois revolution does not express the interests of the proletariat at all.¹⁴

The question of proletarian democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat were put into practice during the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905, where for many months there was a mass mobilization combining two powerful means: the political strike and the armed insurrection. Thus, the forms of struggle, the extent of the participation of the masses and the protracted nature of the struggle, inevitably placed the question of political power on the agenda. At the local level, this manifested in agreements between the revolutionary forces in order to start expelling the former authorities. By expelling the former authorities, the proletariat was creating a political space in which new organizations and forms of political participation, especially the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, were to emerge. Then will come the Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies, Peasants' Committees, etc.

Surprised by the creativity of the masses, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were quick to encourage and support the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, considering that these "are in fact the embryo of the new revolutionary power" and that even if "this type of democracy was still chaotic and disparate" and that its tasks and structure were still to be defined, it nevertheless remained that "what constitutes its living soul is the passage of power to the hands of workers, the abolition of exploitation and the coercive apparatus."

The defeat of the Moscow insurrection in December of 1905 will mark the ebb of the revolutionary wave in the cities. But the revolution would continue to develop in the countryside: there were peasant uprisings everywhere, accompanied by insurrections

¹⁴Lenin, *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/tactics/>).

and guerrilla struggle. However, without the leadership of the urban proletariat, the movement would fade for a period of ten years, marked by reaction.

Written on the eve of the October Revolution, *The State and the Revolution* is essentially a systematic exposition of the Marxist theory of the state and a denunciation of the various opportunistic deformations of Marx's point of view. In addition to supporting the fundamental theses of Marx and Engels on the state, Lenin criticizes opportunists who see the state as an organ of class conciliation, or maintain that the proletariat would emancipate itself without "breaking" the bourgeois state machine. Moreover, Lenin showed that the transition from capitalism to the imperialist stage made it even more necessary than before to destroy the bourgeois state, while simultaneously making revolution more difficult:

Imperialism—the era of bank capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, of the development of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism—has clearly shown an unprecedented growth in its bureaucratic and military apparatus in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries. World history is now undoubtedly leading, on an incomparably larger scale than in 1852, to the 'concentration of all the forces' of the proletarian revolution on the 'destruction' of the state machine.¹⁵

Lenin also asserted the need for the working class to build its own revolutionary state power after having overthrown the capitalists. Similarly, he stressed that the transition from capitalism

¹⁵Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>).

to communism can take on a variety of political forms; however, it was clear to Lenin that, despite this diversity, the essence of these political forms would necessarily be singular, namely: the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin thus adopted a partisan perspective of democracy in opposition to the idea of pure democracy. He wished to point out that democracy always bears the mark of the social system in which it is formed: “If we are not to mock at common sense and history, it is obvious that we cannot speak of ‘pure democracy’ as long as different classes exist; we can only speak of class democracy. (Let us say in parenthesis that ‘pure democracy’ is not only an ignorant phrase, revealing a lack of understanding both of the class struggle and of the nature of the state, but also a thrice-empty phrase, since in communist society democracy will wither away in the process of changing and becoming a habit, but will never be ‘pure’ democracy.)”¹⁶ It is this idea that will be particularly developed by Lenin in his work *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, but before entering into this discussion let us return to the historical period which serves as the background for the debate between Lenin and Kautsky, that is the period surrounding the struggle for the constituent assembly.

Following the abdication of Nicholas II in February 1917, the Provisional Government pledged to elect a Constituent Assembly. On June 14, 1917, Kerensky, then Minister of Justice, decided to proceed with this election despite the continuation of the war and the occupation of part of the Russian territory. All political parties, including the Bolsheviks, supported this initiative. The election date was then set for November. Meanwhile the October Revolution happened. The conditions having changed, Lenin thought that it was necessary to postpone the ballot, or at least to modify the electoral system. The relationship to

¹⁶Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1918) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/prrk/>).

parliamentary electoral tactics is a good example of Leninist politics: namely, that mass action is always more important than parliamentary action. It is the combination of forms of action—“legal, illegal, economic strikes, political, parliamentary action, insurrection”—and the conquest of political power by a revolutionary process that destroys “the old state machine” and brings about the conditions for a new socialist democracy. In 1918, the strategic priority was the destruction of the old capitalist state machine and the construction of a new proletarian power. Here Lenin demonstrated that democracy and dictatorship are not two opposing types of state, as Kautsky and the bourgeois democrats sought to maintain, but that both should be considered in the light of which class held power. The Constituent Assembly was therefore convened and dissolved in January 1918.

The establishment in Russia of the revolutionary workers’ and peasants government by the Second Congress of the Soviets and the subsequent dissolution of the Constituent Assembly would polarize the working class movement throughout the world. Also, Lenin noted that proletarians instinctively understood that the Soviets represented an instrument in the struggle of the proletariat as a form of the proletarian state; leaders corrupted by opportunism continued to fetishize bourgeois democracy. According to Lenin, the watchword of a constituent assembly was considered part of what he called an accumulation of opportunism in the workers’ movement in the period of the Second International. For him, this election represented “an error”: “We were obliged to convene the Constituent Assembly even after the victory of the proletariat, so as to prove to the backward proletarians that they had nothing to gain from that Assembly. To bring home the difference between the two, we had to concretely contrapose the Soviets and the Constituent Assembly and to

show the Soviets as the only solution.”¹⁷

First among opportunist leaders to oppose the revolution was Karl Kautsky, who was considered at the time an important Marxist theorist and was a leading figure of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, one of the most important parties of the Second International. In a series of articles published in the German press early in 1918 and later in a pamphlet entitled *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Kautsky argues that the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in favour of the Soviets represented an important deviation from Marxism. Kautsky's avowed objective was to criticize Bolshevism and implicitly the theses defended by Lenin in *The State and the Revolution*. According to Kautsky, Marx would have suggested that the transition to socialism could only be achieved democratically and not through a dictatorship. In fact, Kautsky supported that socialism and democracy were complementary. For him, socialism was simply unthinkable without democracy, and socialist democracy represented the authentic form of democracy. The problem with this position is that it came to deny the real constituent capacity of the proletariat. Indeed, all of Kautsky's arguments serve to deny the possibility of a political form that the masses would uphold and which would be different from socialist-liberal democracy. The underlying assumption is that the bureaucratic military machine is subordinate to Parliament, i.e. to the “modern representative state”, which is conceived as an institution above the classes that can contain, alternately or jointly, a bourgeois or proletarian content. For Kautsky, the task of the proletarian revolution in relation to the state is to make the liberal form of democracy more “just”, namely to invest this form with a real democratic content. Here, then, are two

¹⁷Lenin, *Speech On Parliamentarianism* at the Second Congress of the Communist International, Aug. 2, 1920 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x03.htm#fw5>).

diametrically opposed points of view: whereas for Lenin the task of the socialists was to organize the proletariat as a political power (that is to say, as a ruling class), for Kautsky the task of the socialists was that of organizing the proletariat in order to win a socialist majority in Parliament.

The fundamental objective of Marxist politics is the conquest of political power by the proletariat, and therefore the conquest of the state. Marxism that gives in to opportunism restricts this conception to the mere conquest of the existing machinery of state power by the political representatives of the proletariat. At this level it is difficult to distinguish this pseudo-Marxism from liberal reformism where there is no reason that would require the working class to suppress the existing bourgeois institutions. The contrast between an authentically revolutionary point of view and a reformist or pseudo-revolutionary point of view becomes clearer when we examine the relationship between democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

First of all, before the revolution, the proletariat and the peasantry, like the various nations that made up Russia, had basically no political rights. Russia was a country dominated by the feudal and capitalist classes, whose alliance was materialized by the tsarist autocracy which monopolized all power. Moreover, the Duma (the Russian legislative assembly) was not representative: only 15 per cent of the population could vote and the feudal nobility, with barely 200,000 members, held more than half of the seats. Trade unions and peasant associations were illegal, as were the democratic and socialist revolutionary parties. The press was subjected to strict censorship and the secret police and the army were freely used to crush any opposition.

After the fall of the Tsars in February 1917, when the anger of the masses exploded, inflamed by the terrible conditions imposed by the war, things began to change. Workers and peasants quickly took advantage of these new conditions. According to

Lenin:

(1) the source of power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas—direct “seizure”, to use a current expression; (2) the replacement of the police and the army, which are institutions divorced from the people and set against the people, by the direct arming of the whole people. . . (3) officialdom, the bureaucracy, are either similarly replaced by the direct rule of the people themselves or at least placed under special control.¹⁸

In concrete terms, the soviets would constitute the heart of the new state apparatus. Other institutions would also be established—for example, the Red Army, which was the result of the expansion from detachments of armed workers. Administrative bodies would be trained to ensure the conduct of the country, the distribution of food, and so on.

Thus, the dictatorship of the proletariat is the logical extension of the class struggle waged by the proletariat. Lenin notes that it is the continuation of the class struggle beyond capitalist domination, that is to say a historical period in which the revolutionary proletariat puts in place a new form of state in order to remove any resistance from the overthrown bourgeoisie, establishing a new system of production and a new form of society. Since the proletariat, by leading the revolution to term abolishes all class distinctions, the coercive function of power will tend to perish; more precisely, it will tend to wane at the rate of decline of any resistance, thus signifying the disappearance of the objective basis of the existence of social classes.

Historically, there is nothing peculiar to the fact that the emerging revolutionary forces (i.e. the forces which are factors of

¹⁸Lenin, *The Dual Power* (1917) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr>)

progress in a given mode of production) impose the revolutionization of the productive forces and consequently the suppression of the old social relations, by suppressing the resistance that the ruling class, which represents these ancient relations, will necessarily launch. In this sense, all changes in the mode of production are accompanied by episodes of revolutionary dictatorships (as demonstrated by the transition from feudalism to capitalism). The lesson that can be drawn from this state of affairs is the following: revolutionary policy in a revolutionary period is to seek to impose the will of a class or a united front of classes on the population on a given territory.

By opposing “pure democracy” to all forms of “dictatorship”, Kautsky reveals his ignorance (or bad faith) since he ignores the distinctions that are necessary, starting with the fact that pure democracy does not exist and has never existed, but is a form of state power whose use can serve either to compel the majority of the people for the benefit of a minority (capitalism), or to compel the minority to the benefit of the majority (socialism). In this sense, “democracy” is a form of dictatorship. That said, Kautsky was not alone to criticize the Bolsheviks. Indeed, Rosa Luxemburg also criticized the decision of the Bolsheviks to dissolve the Constituent Assembly and she defended the idea that, under the pressure of popular mobilization, these parliamentary institutions can play a revolutionary role. On this last point it seems that she revised her position since in an article on the situation in Germany she would write: “Either national assembly or all power to the workers’ and soldiers’ councils; either the renunciation of socialism or sharper class struggle, in full battle dress, by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. That is the dilemma.”¹⁹

This undoubtedly brings us back to the problem of “democ-

¹⁹Rosa Luxemburg, *National Assembly or Government of Workers’ Councils?* (1918) (http://www.redbannermagazine.com/Rosa_Luxemburg.pdf).

racy”, whether viewed from the proletarian or the bourgeois point of view, and which is a real problem of how to conquer and exercise power. But this power cannot materialize, as long as classes exist, only in the state and in the capacity of a part of the population to dictate its will (which is not arbitrary) by means of the monopoly of arms. This axiom applies to bourgeois revolutions, as proven by the different episodes of the period of bourgeois revolutions (1789-1849), but most importantly to the revolutionary proletariat. In fact, the Russian proletariat would use the Soviet state to exercise its dictatorship in order to crush the exploiting classes so as to break their resistance and prevent the return of capitalist domination. Concretely, at the political level, the Soviets deprived the bourgeoisie of its right to vote, dismantled parties and arrested its leaders. And as we have seen above, the Constituent Assembly was also dissolved when its representatives refused to adopt the Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People and to recognize the reality of the power of the Soviets.

Of course, it is important to emphasize that Soviet power primarily means the extension of proletarian democracy and that it does not proclaim any pure democracy nor pretends to grant equal rights to capitalists and exploiters. As such, the 1918 Constitution specifically deprived the feudal lords and the bourgeoisie of their civil rights. More generally, under Lenin, Soviet power presented three characteristics that are linked to the peculiarities of the Russian revolution: i) deprivation of electoral rights for the bourgeoisie; ii) different proportional representation granted to workers and peasants, thus preponderance of the vote of the city to the detriment of that of the countryside; and finally iii) a system of indirect elections. Although these measures may seem undemocratic, in practice they did reinforce real democracy among the oppressed masses. In the particular context of the October Revolution these measures flowed logically from the

level attained by the struggle and contributed to strengthening democracy amongst the exploited.

By reserving the right to elect or to be elected only to persons participating in production or carrying out socially useful work, Soviet power ensured its proletarian character while at the same time strengthening democracy among the oppressed. By ensuring that delegates to the Soviet Congress were elected on the basis of one representative for each 25,000 voters in the city and a representative for each 125,000 voters in the countryside, Soviet power gave some advantage to the revolutionary proletariat. Lenin specifies the conditions that led to the adoption of this measure:

Our Constitution was obliged to introduce this inequality because the cultural level is low and because with us organisation is weak. But we do not make this an ideal; on the contrary, in its programme the Party undertakes to work systematically to abolish this inequality between the better organised proletariat and the peasants. We shall abolish this inequality as soon as we succeed in raising the cultural level. We shall then be able to get along without such restrictions.²⁰

Indirect elections had many advantages in the context of Russia. Indeed, in a country without the tradition of bourgeois democracy, where illiteracy was widespread, indirect elections ensured more flexibility and closer contact between delegates to the Soviets and the masses. Moreover, in the conditions that existed, in a large country with difficult communications, this was the system that could best enable the masses to quickly dismiss their delegates and replace them if it proved necessary. It

²⁰Lenin, *Report On The Party Programme at the Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)*, March 18-23, 1919 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/rcp8th/03.htm>).

should also be noted that this functioning had not been dictated by the Bolshevik Party but that it stemmed from the traditional historical operation of the Soviets:

Indirect elections to non-local Soviets make it easier to hold congresses of Soviets, they make the entire apparatus less costly, more flexible, more accessible to the workers and peasants at a time when life is seething and it is necessary to be able very quickly to recall one's local deputy or to delegate him to a general congress of Soviets.²¹

Overall, the dictatorship of the proletariat makes it possible to extend democratic rights to a majority of the population. Lenin, speaking of the dictatorship of the proletariat, wrote:

The dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat organised in the Soviets; the proletariat is guided by the Communist Party of Bolsheviks [...]. In its work, the Party relies directly on the trade unions [...]. Thus, on the whole, we have a formally non-communist, flexible and relatively wide and very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the Party is closely linked up with the class and the masses, and by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the class dictatorship is exercised.²²

In principle, we are placed in front of a new state apparatus significantly different from the old one. But the flexible and powerful apparatus of which Lenin speaks is not a matter of will or of possessing general ideas: “[t] he point is whether

²¹Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, *op. cit.*

²²Lenin, “Left-Wing” Communism: an Infantile Disorder (1920) (<https://www.mantists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/Iwc/>).

the old state machine (bound by thousands of threads to the bourgeoisie and permeated through and through with routine and inertia) shall remain, or be destroyed and replaced by a new one. Revolution consists not in the new class commanding, governing with the aid of the old state machine, but in this class smashing this machine and commanding, governing with the aid of a new machine.”²³ But to make the state function in the conditions of Russia would soon prove to be a difficult task for which the proletariat was insufficiently prepared.

Very early on, because of the civil war, the revolutionary power was placed under the obligation to appeal to the specialists of the old bourgeoisie who would come to occupy an important place in the proletarian state. However, insofar as the proletariat could not directly assume the management of all affairs the maintenance of such a state apparatus was not entailed. The problem is then not so much how to maintain this apparatus but rather that it escapes the control of the proletariat. This problem is something Lenin noted:

We took over the old machinery of state, and that was our misfortune. Very often this machinery operates against us. In 1917, after we seized power, the government officials sabotaged us. This frightened us very much and we pleaded: ‘Please come back.’ They all came back, but that was our misfortune. We now have a vast army of government employees, but lack sufficiently educated forces to exercise real control over them. In practice it often happens that here at the top, where we exercise political power, the machine functions somehow; but down below government employees have arbitrary control and they often exercise it in such a way as to counteract

²³Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, *op. cit.*

our measures. At the top, we have, I don't know how many, but at all events, I think, no more than a few thousand, at the outside several tens of thousands of our own people. Down below, however, there are hundreds of thousands of old officials whom we got from the tsar and from bourgeois society and who, partly deliberately and partly unwittingly, work against US.²⁴

Here we have an overview of the difficulties that accompany the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus and the birth of a new proletarian state. To the extent that the state is under the leadership of a revolutionary party and really serves the struggle to advance in the transition to communism, it must be considered that, even with its shortcomings, it serves objectively the interests of the proletariat. Indeed, in the period of the progression of socialism, regardless of the revolutionary experience studied, it can be seen that the proletarian state favours the active participation of members of the working class in organizations that prepare and realize their effective participation in the exercise of power. Conversely, in the period of the retreat of socialism, the proletarian state tends to cut itself off from the masses and come to dominate them.

By equipping itself with an apparatus enabling it to continue the struggle for communism, the proletariat is in a position to adopt measures capable of democratizing more and more society. For example, by turning over “to the working people and the poorest peasantry all technical and material means for the publication of newspapers, pamphlets, books, etc., and guarantee [ing] their free circulation throughout the country... the Russian

²⁴Lenin, *Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution*, Report to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, November 13, 1922 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/nov/04b.htm>).

Socialist Federated Soviet Republic offers to the working class and to the poorest peasantry furnished halls, and takes care of their heating and lighting appliances. . . [it] considers work the duty of every citizen of the Republic, and proclaims as its motto: ‘He shall not eat who does not work.’. . . It grants all political rights of Russian citizens to foreigners who live in the territory of the Russian.”²⁵ In so doing, the proletarian state contributes to the emancipation of the masses by guaranteeing a minimum material basis for continuing the revolutionization of society.

Of course, the extension of democracy to the vast majority of the population produces positive effects. However, it also produces unwanted side effects. In particular, the extension of democracy revives the idea that once democracy is secured, it will be enough to repeat the operation of elections to ensure the democratic and peaceful functioning of society for the benefit of the majority. In short, according to this perspective, it would be enough to add to the socialist society the leadership mode of bourgeois society—the whole problem is there:. Indeed, Marx’s warning against the idea of using the state machine as it stands can be understood in two ways: understood in a restricted way, it applies only to the state apparatus; understood more broadly, it also applies to practices associated with the control of this apparatus, including elections. In Russia as in China (as we shall see later), the majority, that is to say the proletariat and the working masses as a whole, did not have an immediate awareness of the tasks to be accomplished in the transition to communism; they did not yet have a complete communist consciousness. It is therefore necessary to develop a new mode of leadership that enables the masses to rise up politically while participating in the direction of things. Failure to understand this would prompt us to return to the idea of “pure democracy” proposed

²⁵ 1918 *Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic* (<https://www.mandsts.org/history/ussr/government/constitution/1918/>).

by Kautsky and other pseudo-socialists, “who replaced the class struggle by dreams of class harmony, even pictured the socialist transformation in a dreamy fashion—not as the overthrow of the rule of the exploiting class, but as the peaceful submission of the minority to the majority which has become aware of its aims.”²⁶ But more importantly, it is to forget that in the Russian context the peasantry formed the majority of society and was far from being communist; otherwise the passage through the dictatorship of the proletariat would be a useless detour.

Let us stop for a moment to discuss the idea that democracy is a form of organization of the power of one class over another. What should we make of this idea? In class societies, democracy is one of the forms taken by the dictatorship of the ruling class: under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, democracy serves to maintain the capitalist system and neutralize the independent action of the masses; under the dictatorship of the proletariat, proletarian democracy is one of the means by which the working class can organize itself into the ruling class by dragging all the masses into the struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Although democracy is always in the interest of a class, the proletarian dictatorship has the advantage of marking a real improvement over the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie since the interests of the proletariat are not antagonistic to those of the working masses in general. Conversely, since the interests of the bourgeoisie are antagonistic to those of the working masses, the former is therefore obliged to exaggerate the formal aspect of democracy and to reduce to the absolute minimum the exercise of real democracy. Moreover, since bourgeois democracy serves only the minority interests of the bourgeoisie, this explains why bourgeois democracy can only function through a substantial state apparatus: “Naturally, the exploiters are unable to suppress the people without a highly complex machine for performing

²⁶ *The State and Revolution, op. cit.*

this task, but the people can suppress the exploiters even with a very simple ‘machine’.”²⁷

About Multipartyism

The distinction between bourgeois and proletarian democracies brings us back to the problem of the role played by multiparty politics. For some, multipartyism is called to play a secondary role under socialism since, in theory, proletarian democracy represents the non-antagonistic interests of the proletariat and the working masses. Others advocate the idea that multipartyism is called upon to play a more important role because the working class does not exercise its power directly, but rather through the mediation of the state.

The multiparty system can be discussed in many ways. The worst way to discuss it is to do it from a point of view that is detached from material reality. Indeed, in order to situate the discussion of multiparty politics, it is important to recall that the fundamental role of proletarian democracy is to achieve the following tasks: i) to make the working class able to exercise real power; ii) to persuade the intermediate masses (hesitant, still influenced by bourgeois ideas) to continue the transition to communism; iii) to bring the masses to the struggle against the bourgeoisie; iv) to allow the proletariat to retain the initiative in the struggle at all times.

To achieve the tasks we have just enumerated, proletarian democracy must necessarily involve the vast majority of the masses in building communism. For Marxism, the capacity to engage the masses depends above all on the political line that is being implemented. But if the interests of the proletariat and the working masses are not antagonistic, then the most decisive condition for the extension of democracy and the transition to

²⁷ *Ibid.*

communism will not be whether there is a party or many parties, but rather whether this party (or these parties) has the capacity to guide the masses: that is, to judge correctly the stages of the revolution, to identify the right targets, and thus to lead the struggle of the masses against the bourgeoisie under its leadership. As Lenin puts it: “In the sea of people we are after all but a drop in the ocean, and we can administer only when we express correctly what the people are conscious of. Unless we do this the Communist Party will not lead the proletariat, the proletariat will not lead the masses, and the whole machine will collapse.”²⁸

What about the state in all this? It seems that the proletarian state poses an antinomy for the proletariat. On the one hand, it gives the proletariat the material means of its power (freedom of press, assembly, organization-planning, control-arms, etc.), that is, it ensures that the proletariat will be able at all times to continue the revolution; it is therefore a state that associates the masses with the exercise of power. In this sense, the proletarian state is much more democratic than the bourgeois state. But at the same time, the proletarian state remains a “state apparatus”, that is, a machine that does not coincide completely with the proletariat and tends to detach itself from it. It is in order to overcome this antinomy that Lenin will put forward the idea that the masses must use the means guaranteed to them by the state power in order to direct it, transform it, and ultimately lead it to its extinction. In other words, the proletariat must lead the struggle in two areas: i) for the State to remain proletarian, and ii) to transform it so that it continues to respond to the interests of the proletariat. In so doing, Lenin emphasizes that under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the proletariat is also

²⁸Lenin, *Political Report Of The Central Committee*, 11th Congress of the R.C.P.(B.), March 27, 1922 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/mar/27.htm>).

fighting the bourgeoisie on two fronts: the first front is the mobilization of the masses (a struggle from below); the second front consists in endowing the revolutionary proletariat with a state apparatus enabling it to organize the mobilization of the masses (it is therefore a struggle from above). But because the state apparatus is relatively autonomous towards the masses, the danger that it is completely detached from its proletarian base and thus becomes an instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie is immanent, hence the necessity at the same time to defend it and to fight it—that is to say to transform it constantly.

Although initially the Soviet Constitution was extremely democratic (promoting the involvement of the masses in political life, giving the people the right to dismiss their deputies, etc.), in practice, especially in the wake of the Civil War (1918-1921), a strong tendency to concentrate power in the hands of a growing number of senior leaders had emerged. Later, once Lenin died, little effort would be made to solve this problem. Thus, the organs of the revolution, the soviets, the Congress of the Soviets, etc. gradually lost their importance to the detriment of the presidium of the executive and the Sovnarkom (the Council of People's Commissars).

Against this bureaucratic excess, the way indicated by Lenin was rather to aim at strengthening the real exercise of power by the proletariat and its allies, that is to say gradually extending the power of the party to incorporate the conscious proletariat, then the whole of the working masses. It was through the participation of the masses in the management of affairs that the distance between leaders and the masses would diminish until disappearing, and that cooperation between all members of society would extend. In a certain

way, it can be said that the state was expanding, since the proletariat itself came to supply its functions. However, by extending itself to the entire proletariat, the state ceased by this

very fact to be an apparatus detached from the masses and above them. In doing so, the state would be dissolved by society and tend to disappear completely along with democracy, democracy being itself a state form.

If already in 1917 a social transformation in Russia appeared to be as unlikely as it was difficult, four years later it would encounter even greater obstacles in an exhausted and somewhat destroyed country. Indeed, it was necessary to begin to establish the first material bases to begin the transition towards communism. The years of civil war had, so to speak, placed Russia in a situation approaching catastrophe. For example, industrial production had regressed by 50 years, meaning it had fallen back to the level of the early beginnings of capitalism in Russia. This regression was accompanied by inflation, food rationing, and famine. However, a greater menace threatened the revolution, stemming from the social and economic consequences of the Civil War. Particularly noteworthy is the weakening of the working class, the leading force of the revolution, which, by its heroism and its sense of abnegation, had succeeded in preserving revolutionary conquests. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the proletariat had halved: its most advanced elements had been massively involved in the fighting, during which many were to die, while others had been absorbed by urgent political tasks. As a result, many of them had to abandon factories and return to the villages.

The marked weakening of the proletariat meant that it was now necessary to govern a country in which the most important element remained the peasantry. In the wake of the October Revolution, a good part of the peasantry had accepted the leadership of the proletariat. It had accepted it because, by the same token, it defended the conquered land against the former landowners. But now that the Civil War had ended and the counter-revolutionary peril was definitely dismissed, millions of

demobilized peasants were returning home, hungry and with little hope of finding a job: “Millions of hungry people thrown on the roads. A ruined economy. A decimated proletariat. . . This situation could only lead to discontent and despair among the masses, enabling agitators on all sides to find a favourable ground for undermining the confidence of these masses in a revolution which, according to them, could no longer guarantee bread and peace.”²⁹ This despair was to lead on some occasions to open conflicts, notably during the Kronstadt insurrection.

Under these conditions, it was imperative that the working class tighten its ranks so as to remain the ally and guide of the peasantry. This essential task was made difficult by the defeats suffered by the international proletariat (notably in Germany in 1919). It is in this context that we must place the 10th Congress of the Party, in particular the banning of factions and the establishment of the New Economic Policy (NEP): this was to strengthen the leadership of the proletariat, by strengthening the party and maintaining the alliance with the peasantry. Obviously, this policy could not fail to cause serious problems. Moreover, these problems would occupy the thoughts of Lenin in the last years of his life.

We must not deceive ourselves: the revolutionaries took seriously the problems that confronted the continuation of the revolution. Indirectly, the important discussions that took place around the problem of the role of trade unions in the revolution would be part of an attempt to ensure the maintenance of a proletarian leadership while, as far as possible, expanding democracy. The ins and outs of the discussion are well known. On the one hand, Trotsky wanted to incorporate the unions to the state: that is, he conceived of trade unions as coercive bodies,

²⁹Tom Thomas, *Apropos des rvolutions du XXe sicle ou le dtour irlandais* (1991) ([http://www.demystification.fr/les-livres-de-tom-thomas-2/a-propos-des-revolutions-du-\)oteme-siecle-ou-le-detour-irlandais](http://www.demystification.fr/les-livres-de-tom-thomas-2/a-propos-des-revolutions-du-)oteme-siecle-ou-le-detour-irlandais)). [Our translation]

hierarchical and whose leaders were appointed according to the practices in force in the army. On the other hand, the Workers' Opposition argued that the trade unions should assume all the management of production, demanding that "the organisation of the management of the national economy [be] the function of an All-Russia Congress of Producers organised in trade and industrial unions, which shall elect a central body to run the whole of the national economy of the Republic."³⁰ What the Workers' Opposition proposed was the abolition of the whole centralized state apparatus and the civil servants, and its replacement with a "free federation of communities of self-administering producers", in a context where we couldn't really speak indiscriminately of "producers" in a society still divided into classes. Opposing these two groups, Lenin would present an entirely original orientation; unfortunately, there will be insufficient time to ensure its implementation. According to Lenin, although coercion was necessary in the organization of the economy, for this coercion to be effective it had to be accompanied by the maximum of persuasion and democracy since, according to him, the state was in such a situation that "it is the business of the massively organised proletariat to protect itself, while we, for our part, must use these workers' organisations to protect the workers from their state, and to get them to protect our state."³¹

Returning to the problem of multipartyism, many commentators of the Russian Revolution consider that the decision taken at the 10th Congress to ban fractions illustrates the totalitarian character underlying Bolshevism. This point of view is reinforced by the fact that at the previous congress (1920), the members of the Workers' Opposition had denounced the bureaucratization

³⁰Lenin, *Summing-Up Speech on the Report of the C.C.* at the 10th Congress of the R.C.P.(B.), March 9, 1921 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/10thcong/ch02.htm>).

³¹Lenin, *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes* (1920) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/dec/30.htm>).

of the party and the state.

Lenin also shared this concern to fight bureaucratization, as demonstrated by one of his last writings in which he stated that “our state apparatus is so deplorable, not to say wretched, that we must first think very carefully how to combat its defects.”³² However, contrary to the opposition, he inscribed the problem of bureaucratization within the wider problem posed by the continuation of the class struggle and the construction of socialism. It is in this sense that one must understand his proposal to set up the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection to train the workers to control the state and learn to manage it themselves. What is striking in the actions of the Workers’ Opposition is the determination and the spirit of division which seems to animate it. Indeed, in a country on the brink of economic and social bankruptcy, the Workers’ Opposition elaborated plans, engaged in polemics, voted resolutions, and so on. . . and yet it did nothing in practice to solve practical problems. For example, Shliapnikov and Kollontai, although part of the government, would not propose any measures to combat the bureaucracy they denounced. Criticism without practical resolution tends to increase the spirit of division, which manifested itself more and more to the point of threatening to lead the party to a split. Although the work of the Workers’ Opposition contributed little to alleviate the problems encountered by the Russian Revolution, some of the problems it highlighted merit some consideration and appropriate response. Indeed, as a mass party, and especially as the sole party of the government, the Communist Party must necessarily reflect, as Lenin had anticipated, “something out of those ranks.”

Although legitimate, the problems raised by the Workers’ Opposition would remain unanswered. Indeed, the difficult situation in a country then characterized by a proletarian dictatorship

³²Lenin, *Better Fewer, But Better* (1923)
 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/mar/02.htm>).

in which the peasantry was the main force, and where economic ruin and productive decline accentuated misery, represented such an important threat that the criticisms of the Workers' Opposition were seen as attempts to weaken the party at a time when discipline and unity were necessary. It was in these dramatic circumstances that Lenin decided to vote on a resolution on the unity of the party which allowed for the exclusion of those who would be guilty of fractional activity by a decision of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission: this was an exceptional and extreme measure dictated by the consciousness of an extremely grave peril. Lenin would say that this resolution was "an extreme measure that is being adopted specially."³³ But the provisional remained definitive.

According to the author Tom Thomas, "the imperialists, by pushing the Bolsheviks to these extreme and serious measures (we know that often the right viewpoints are at first in minority), politically gained what they had not been able to win on the battlefield."³⁴ Thomas is possibly right. However, we do not subscribe to the hypothesis that the decision to ban fractions represented a first step towards the suffocation of the minority and the "monolithicism" of the party dear to Stalin. Of course, the decision to ban fractions did represent a real limitation of democracy; nevertheless it would be wrong to regard it as an anticipation of the serious violations of socialist democracy that would come later. Indeed, Lenin's concern would be to ensure on every occasion the maximum of democratic practice inside and outside the party: the exclusion of the fractions being dictated by the material conditions and the state of the class struggle. In Stalin's view, democracy is conceived as a formal category, that is

³³Lenin, Summing-Up Speech on Party Unity and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Deviation at the 10th Congress of the R.C.P.(B.), March 16, 1921 (<https://www.mancists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/10thcong/ch04.htm>).

³⁴Tom Thomas, *op. cit.* [Our translation]

to say he did not consider it (especially after the industrialization of the late 1920s) as a means to mobilize the masses to struggle against the bourgeoisie and against that which reproduces it in the economic base and the superstructure, since it is definitively annihilated. In other words, according to Stalin, the revolution had reached a new stage, where the question of “who will prevail” was definitively resolved.

Since democracy was treated as a resolved issue, it should be understood that, for Stalin, political tasks were submitted to technical tasks. Political bodies such as the Soviets no longer served any purpose, whereas the technical and planning agencies were called upon to take the full place, since it remained only to organize the “peaceful labour” of production through the state. Stalin thus identified the interests of the proletariat with those of the state, and from there he came to reduce the dictatorship of the proletariat to the strengthening of the state apparatus. In so doing, Stalin retains nothing of Lenin’s warning to protect himself against the state, while knowing how to use it to the utmost for the interests of the proletariat. In fact, Stalin did quite the opposite, that is to say, he emptied the mass political organizations (Soviets, trade unions, etc.) for the sole benefit of the state apparatus. Ultimately, these measures weakened and then eliminated workers’ control and would eventually facilitate the restoration of capitalism. Indeed, because the socialist state had come to assume control of the bulk of the economy, the bureaucracy of the state apparatus was able to freely merge with the practical leaders in production (managers, etc.) in order to form a new bourgeoisie.

Naturally, certain factors contributed more than others to accelerate the formation of this new bourgeoisie. To give only one example, at the level of the Soviets, the process of degeneration of their democratic character, which began in the late 1920s, came to an end in the 1930s when they were no longer the

living organs for debating and exchanging through which the working class could exercise control over the state. However, by forgetting that the state, although under the control of the proletariat, remained partly bourgeois, Stalin contributed to accelerate the formation of a new bourgeoisie. By concentrating the technical tasks to the state and concentrating decisions in the hands of specialists, this new bourgeoisie was able to develop freely. It was not a multiparty system that allowed this new bourgeoisie to consolidate itself; incidentally, the suppression of the old bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties had been made necessary for maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat as a way to put a stop to the counter-revolutionary activity of these parties. What had more than anything else contributed to the rise of the bourgeoisie was the absence of proletarian control over the party and the state. This situation could have been counterbalanced by an increase in the participation of the non-party masses in the soviets and an extension of mass investigation over the orientations taken.

Mao's contributions

Mao contributed to the Marxist analysis of the proletarian state, proletarian democracy, and the socialist political system. In his essay *On New Democracy*, Mao sheds light on the fact that “the numerous types of state systems in the world can be reduced to three basic kinds according to the class character of their political power: (1) republics under bourgeois dictatorship; (2) republics under the dictatorship of the proletariat; and (3) republics under the joint dictatorship of several revolutionary classes.”³⁵

As we have already shown, for Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the function of the socialist state is to ensure the domination of

³⁵Mao Zedong, *On New Democracy* (1940) (<http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/ND40.html>).

the proletariat over the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the socialist state's historical function is to ensure the transitory stage from capitalism to communism, and that is why Lenin indicates that "the transition from capitalism to communism is certainly bound to yield a tremendous abundance and variety of political forms, but the essence will inevitably be the same: the dictatorship of the proletariat."³⁶

New Democracy, on the other hand, is a transitional form of state between the capitalist state and the socialist state. The peculiarity of New Democracy is that it has emerged in countries hitherto dominated by imperialism, colonialism and the comprador bourgeoisie in the form of a "joint dictatorship of several anti-imperialist classes." Although it was Mao Zedong who first theorized the idea of New Democracy as a form of revolutionary power adapted to the particular case of China, nevertheless the communists of other dominated countries, especially in Vietnam, have also sought to develop from Mao's initial reflection this model of strategic alliances between classes in the form of a united revolutionary front.

The protracted people's war under the leadership of the Communist Party gave birth to a popular democratic dictatorship, that is, a joint dictatorship of the revolutionary classes (including elements of the national bourgeoisie) under the leadership of the working class. Thus, as the revolution progressed towards its socialist stage, the state had to be transformed into a dictatorship of the proletariat based on the alliance of the proletariat and the peasantry:

Clearly, it follows from the colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal character of present-day Chinese society that the Chinese revolution must be divided into two stages. The first step is to change the colonial,

³⁶Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, *op. cit.*

semi-colonial and semi-feudal form of society into an independent, democratic society. The second is to carry the revolution forward and build a socialist society. At present the Chinese revolution is taking the first step.³⁷

The Communist Party of China did not exclude the possibility of concluding alliances with certain fractions of the national and local bourgeoisie as part of this first stage. In fact, the party would ally on several occasions with different forces, but it would always consider these alliances as secondary—that is, the party always submitted these alliances to the leadership of the proletariat. The CPC considered the peasantry, especially the poor peasants, as the main force of the revolution. Indeed, at the moment of the seizure of power, the peasantry occupied an enormous and preponderant place in China, with 500 million peasants against less than 10 million workers. The Chinese revolution was first agrarian and anti-imperialist. Mao wrote on this subject:

A certain degree of capitalist development will be an inevitable result of the victory of the democratic revolution in economically backward China. But that will be only one aspect of the outcome of the Chinese revolution and not the whole picture. The whole picture will show the development of socialist as well as capitalist factors. What will the socialist factors be? The increasing relative importance of the proletariat and the Communist Party among the political forces in the country; leadership by the proletariat and the Communist Party which the peasantry, intelligentsia and the urban petty bourgeoisie already accept or are

³⁷Mao Zedong, *On New Democracy*, *op. cit.*

likely to accept; and the state sector of the economy owned by the democratic republic, and the cooperative sector of the economy owned by the working people. All these will be socialist factors. With the addition of a favourable international environment, these factors render it highly probable that China's bourgeois-democratic revolution will ultimately avoid a capitalist future and enjoy a socialist future.³⁸

Since in the first stage the revolution remained, essentially because of its social character, a bourgeois democratic revolution, its demands objectively tended to pave the way for the development of capitalism. But since it was not led by the bourgeoisie, this revolution was of a new type, which served to pave a still wider path to the development of socialism.

Although, as in Russia, the Chinese bourgeoisie was deprived of its right to vote, the fact remains that a whole series of mechanisms were put in place to encourage the participation of non-communists in the government. For example, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—which, during the revolutionary period of China, would include many representatives of democratic parties, some of whom will also hold positions in government—was established.

We must emphasize the importance accorded by the CPC to the united front so as to draw all possible forces into the side of the revolution. During the years of the People's War, the CPC advanced the concept of a united front, enabling it to develop on a large scale its ability to isolate the enemies of the proletariat, maximize its allies while maintaining independence at all times. Thus, in the liberated zones, the CPC established united front governments and, even after the victory of the

³⁸Mao Zedong, *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party* (1939) (<http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/CRCCP39.html>).

revolution, it continued to pay great attention to maintaining the united front and bringing the democratic masses (the peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and elements of the national bourgeoisie) onto the road to socialism. As the party defended the importance of debate and mutual criticism among the forces participating in the united front, it also contributed to strengthening democracy. Speaking of the different forces involved in the joint dictatorship, Mao said:

We should allow democratic personages to challenge us with opposing views and give them a free hand to criticize us. Otherwise we would be a little like the Kuomintang. The Kuomintang was mortally afraid of criticism and went in fear and trepidation each time the Political Council was in session. Criticisms from democratic personages can be of only two kinds, those that are wrong and those that are not. Criticisms that are not wrong can help remedy our shortcomings while wrong ones must be refuted.³⁹

As we can see, the concept of New Democracy gave way to a form of multipartyism within a united revolutionary front. However, many Communists and Third Worldists have underestimated the importance of the impacts of the continuation of the class struggle once power has been taken away. They came to underestimate the difficulties of moving towards the second stage. Indeed, given the productively backward nature of the dominated countries, the victorious revolutions in these countries could not fail to face difficulties in establishing a truly new society; it is on this pitfall that many struggles for national liberation have failed. At best, these movements prepared the

³⁹Mao Zedong, *Talks at a Conference of Secretaries of Provincial, Municipal Autonomous Region Party Committees* (1957) (<http://www.manamao.com/Mao/TPC57.html>).

ground for the appearance of more modern societies, sometimes socially more equitable, but always bourgeois. It is partly against this point of view that Mao undertook to initiate the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, he promoted the Cultural Revolution because he considered that the socialist transition in China was threatened by a “new bourgeoisie” which advocated a path of development based on the preservation of its dominant position in the social relations and all the privileges that flow from them.

As early as the 8th Congress of the CPC, Mao had given a serious warning to those who forgot that the establishment of democracy was to succeed the transition to socialism; Mao pointed in particular to the people “who seem to think that, as state power has been won, they can sleep soundly without any worry and play the tyrant at will. The masses will oppose such persons, throw stones at them and strike at them with their hoes, which will, I think, serve them right and will please me immensely. Moreover, sometimes to fight is the only way to solve a problem. The Communist Party needs to learn a lesson.”⁴⁰

Drawing lessons from the experience of the USSR, Mao would insist on the importance of both extending and strengthening socialist democracy while conducting a firm struggle against attempts to restore capitalism. Hence the essential task of distinguishing contradictions among the people and the contradictions between the people and the enemy, the former being overcome by the democratic method, in particular by the introduction of new forms of political upbringing of the masses and to increase their participation in the political leadership. Moreover, it can be considered that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a large-scale attempt to find new forms enabling the masses, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, to resist the bourgeois

⁴⁰Mao Zedong, *Speech at the Second Plenary Session of the Eight Central and Committee of the Communist Party of China* (1956) (<http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/SPS56.html>).

counter-offensive by raising the level of socialist political education and increasing revolutionary democracy among proletarians and peasants.

It is impossible here to take a complete account of the experience of the class struggle under socialism. To return to the problem of multipartyism, one can observe in the light of historical experience that it has been tolerated and put into practice under certain conditions, particularly: i) multiparty politics is submitted to the political and revolutionary leadership of the proletariat; ii) the multiparty system is submitted to the objectives of the transition to communism; iii) a class is represented by one party and only one party; iv) the state and the party should not be confused; v) elections should not be confused with the state apparatus; vi) proletarian democracy abolishes democracy, multiparty politics, parties, and the state through the increasingly direct participation of the proletarian masses and the absorption by them by the tasks associated with these institutions; in so doing, the proletariat abolishes social classes.

The case of Nepal

In the spring of 2008, after more than 10 years of an exemplary and heroic people's war by the Nepalese people and massive popular demonstrations that ultimately led to the abolition of the monarchy and the abdication of the king, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) became the main political party following the elections to the first Constituent Assembly of Nepal. In the aftermath of these elections the CPN (Maoist) would lead a coalition government that would hold power until May 2009. Although having won a majority, the result of the elections did not allow the CPN (Maoist) to govern alone and the party had to form a government in alliance with other parties representing the old order. To achieve this result, the party agreed to

major concessions, the most important of which was the virtual dissolution of the People's Liberation Army, the return of land and seized property to exploiters and oppressors, the demobilization of the Communist Youth League, and compromises with imperialism, Indian expansionism, and other enemies of the revolution. However, the decision to end the People's War and to rely on multiparty politics was not a tactic merely dictated by the conjuncture but stemmed from strategic considerations that were conveyed in the concept of "Socialism of the 21st century" adopted by the CPN (Maoist), which it sought to present as a creative application of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

India's Maoists were the first to warn the Nepalese comrades against the abandonment of people's war. According to them, this abandonment stemmed from the bad conclusions reached with regard to democracy and the multiparty system. Indeed, for the Indian Maoists, these conclusions contributed to the creation of illusions among the masses regarding bourgeois democracy; what ought to have been a means was treated as an ends. This was a danger that Mao himself had already emphasized when he wrote:

Those who demand freedom and democracy in the abstract regard democracy as an end and not as a means. Democracy as such sometimes seems to be an end, but it is in fact only a means. Marxism teaches us that democracy is part of the superstructure and belongs to the realm of politics. That is to say, in the last analysis, it serves the economic base. The same is true of freedom. Both democracy and freedom are relative, not absolute, and they come into being and develop in specific historical conditions.⁴¹

⁴¹Mao Zedong, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (1957) (<http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/CHC57.html>).

The Indian Maoists rightly pointed out that the only real guarantee for the realization of the revolutionary program was to raise the class consciousness of the broad masses, mobilize them in class struggle, arm them and train them to be able to fight against the exploiters and all the reactionary forces in order to defend the gains made. Conversely, very little could be expected from the elections since the gains that can be made through a government that took power through elections were very limited and, even worse, that the survival of such a regime depended primarily on the application of a conciliatory policy towards the bourgeois parties on several crucial issues. This was tantamount to overestimating the prospects for the radical restructuring of society or the economy.

What the Indian comrades were fundamentally opposed to was the understanding and practice of the CPN (Maoist), who they reproached for a practice deemed diametrically opposed to that pursued by the CPC under Mao. Indeed, the Chinese Communists had bitterly defended the full autonomy of the party and its organizations before making a united front with the forces of the Guomindang during the anti-Japanese war. In fact, Mao had preserved for the most part the full independence of the party and had kept the People's Liberation Army intact despite the pressure exerted upon it by the bourgeoisie. But what the CPN (Maoist) was doing was quite the opposite: by disarming its military forces and abandoning the liberated bases in order to forge a united front with the comprador-feudal parties, it was also abandoning its own capacity for action.

The important question is therefore not the multiparty system itself, but rather the question of who controls the instruments of the revolution. Indeed, in China, even while participating in a united front with Jiang Jieshi's Guomindang, the CPC under Mao's leadership never contemplated abandoning its military forces or abandoning the bases of support for the revolution.

It was from these very bases of support, and counting on its military forces, that the CPC was able to succeed in defeating the bourgeoisie. Even if a Maoist party came to power through elections, losing its army will put it in danger of being overthrown and then destroyed. Let us admit that this is not the case and that the danger is not immediate: then it remains that a party that accepts the parliamentary game must necessarily comply with its rules and therefore respect the legality: that is, it must refrain from mobilizing the masses to carry out its anti-feudal and anti-imperialist policies. Moreover, even the independence of the judiciary must be recognized as a part of multipartyism and parliamentarism. Now, without the dictatorship of the proletariat, this power is a bourgeois power. And this is without counting all the regional, national, international, cultural, and political institutions that surround the state and contribute directly and indirectly to the maintenance of the power of the bourgeoisie. In fact, many of them work for the counter-revolution.

The conclusions that the revolutionary communists must draw from historical experience are the following: before the seizure of power, as after, multipartyism must be subjected to the necessities of revolution and the transition to communism.

According to many bourgeois Marxist theorists, the problem of the Communists is that they are in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat; this dictatorship inevitably leads to abuses, bureaucratization, and the disappearance of democracy. The problem according to them, when it is not revolutionary violence, is the power of the single party and, vice versa, the absence of another political formation that can play the role of societal watchdog. According to these specialists, “genuine socialism” would be characterized by traditional democratic institutions (parliament system of justice state etc.) to which would be

added the law of the majority. In short, our contemporary Marxologists share the same positions that Kautsky defended against the Russian revolution.

The Maoists must draw conclusions other than these. The dictatorship of the proletariat is essentially a fundamental historical period for proletarian democracy. In the transition to communism, the role of the dictatorship of the proletariat is to form a system of leadership for a transitioning society. This system of leadership is concentrated in the Communist Party and party-driven mass organizations; its structure operates on the basis of democratic centralism and the mass line as the main method of leadership. The state is added to and combined with this system of leadership, as an institution detached from the rest of society and the repository of some of the use of violence. In short, what marks the dictatorship of the proletariat of representative bourgeois government is, in particular, the articulation between four mechanisms of social cooperation, namely: the state; cooperation through the production and exchange of goods and services; cooperation through voluntary association for collective purposes; and finally the party. It is this structure, made up of the Communist Party and the mass organizations, which in the first socialist countries animated and lead the whole of society.

It is the test of reality, or practice as the Maoists say, which alone makes it possible to reveal which of the two systems—the multi-party system under capitalism or the single leadership of the Communist Party and the mass organizations under socialism—is the most democratic, that is, the best adapted to direct the activity of the masses in each area (economic, cultural, civil) with always better results. However, as we have shown, each social class has only one party, since members of this class share a fundamental common interest that surpasses their differences (these secondary differences are manifested through

multipartyism): defense of capitalism for the bourgeoisie; abolition of capitalism for the proletariat. The action of the Communist Party in the movement of the masses proceeds from the consciousness that the structure of bourgeois society in the imperialist countries is such that it is impossible for the bourgeoisie to dispense with a certain degree of collaboration, of neutrality on the part of the masses. The bourgeoisie needs the collaboration of the masses, be it passive, given the degree of socialization of the productive forces. By necessity, the bourgeoisie is engaged in two distinct policies: i) with the state, strike the fighting organizations of the masses; ii) with the multi-party system, neutralize and pacify the masses.

Under capitalism, multipartyism and parliamentarism play a special role in concealing the fact that the participation of the proletariat in the organizations and institutions of bourgeois society is incompatible with the position it occupies as a class in society. In bourgeois society, the proletariat and the working population as a whole cannot participate in the control of the state or in the management of public affairs, much less to freely flourish. What is characteristic of proletarian democracy, however, is not so much the multiparty system, nor the parliamentary contest, but rather the new forms of organization of the masses which favour the broad and growing participation to politics of the categories which in bourgeois society are oppressed, exploited, discriminated against, marginalized, and excluded. Under the leadership of a truly revolutionary communist party, the Soviets, the people's communes, the labour brigades, and so on, demonstrate that the real and mass participation of the masses in decision-making and the application of these decisions are the principal means of transforming material conditions, thus creating the conditions by which the masses themselves will solve the problems in their way.

Nowadays, bourgeois domination often takes the form of the

democratic republic, the ideal envelope of capitalism as Lenin liked to say, for it offers many advantages to the bourgeoisie. In relation to the other classes, the democratic republic, in particular the multiparty system, allows the bourgeoisie to maintain the illusion that they are leading society. Indeed, the possibility of dismissing a government during elections serves as a valve for the anger of the masses; this is why the elections are the privileged instrument of the bourgeoisie (when it has firmly in hand the state apparatus) in order to control the level of frustration among the masses. Moreover, the multiparty system provides the bourgeoisie with the mechanisms necessary to resolve conflicts between capitalists.

Socialist society aims at communism, and to achieve this goal it must above all abolish social classes and consequently the state. One cannot use “the ideal envelope” without transforming it. Indeed, before and throughout the historical period of the struggle under socialism, it is the living application of democratic centralism that makes possible the full participation of all exploited without exception in the management of affairs. It is through democratic centralism and the revolutionary mobilization of the masses that the proletariat will develop the new forms that are most appropriate to maintain the course on the transition to Communism, thereby rendering superfluous the state apparatus. Although, historically, some communist parties had to participate in parliamentarism, and many others have forged multiparty alliances, this does not mean that multiparty politics plays an important role in revolutionary strategy. The mistake that some people make is to believe that the Communist Party is a party like the others. Even if it is formed in bourgeois society like other parties, and even if it performs tasks similar to those of other parties, the Communist Party is not a party like the others. Indeed, its aim is not to appropriate power for itself but to mobilize, organize, and educate the working class

within the struggle so that it is able to lead the mobilization of the masses in order to put an end to capitalism.

The Austerity Apparatus: some preliminary notes

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The following is a guest contribution by a supporter of the PCR-RCP and thus does not necessarily reflect the views of the Party. A book length expansion on these “preliminary notes” entitled Austerity Apparatus will be released some time in 2017 by Kersplebedeb.

— *the Editors*

What a mistake it was to recognize austerity. In 2009 a British conservative, avatar of the old empire, declared an “age of austerity” as fact. Before long, the term achieved conceptual status, a maggot deposited in the ear of everyone who bothered to listen, or listened to those who listened. A brain worm producing lesions on the mind of the mainstream left in the imperialist metropolises.

Before 2009 we didn’t use this term. We described the same thing but not with that word which demanded respect: austerity. For that which is austere ought to command our attention; that which is true is also strict, cold, factual—like a simple algebraic operation where 2 is forced by 1+1.

The word-become-concept proliferates. It is no longer just a word coined by conservative politicians, it has become an

economic concept taken up by every ideologue of the imperial-capitalist order; it has become an ideological state apparatus—the austerity apparatus. It produces subject positions just as it produces its own conceptual development. It is a myth inasmuch as it was a word coined by a reactionary politician who would have endorsed the same policies, in any period, regardless of how he chose to semantically codify these policies. It is a concrete fact insofar as it has become a theoretical concept, the buzzword that mediates a multitude of crisis capitalist policies.

Before the austerity apparatus we spoke of neo-liberal capitalism and the multiple policies it enacted during its crises—none of them newer than capitalism itself, though we never tired of developing new words for old trends. Casualization and precarity, for example. These terms, and others like them, can now be understood as part of a singular apparatus which is in fact a modern re-articulation of an atavistic norm: the production of surplus-value, the extraction of surplus-labour.

As the cliché goes, the more things change the more they stay the same. Not a very progressive cliché: a truism for conservatives about a static world; a claim that there is no such thing as change when change is a fact of history and biology; a demand that things ought to stay the same because that is just how reality is even though this is taken for granted. Then again, the discursive universe governed by the austerity apparatus would like us to believe that change is impossible, that it is the limit of the real, while at the same time claiming it is new.

Under capitalism, then, things change while staying the same. A mutation of the interior, a transformation and rebranding of older trends, to mirror the formal changes of the social formation. They weren't using computers in 19th century workhouses, were they? No, but they were producing surplus-value and extracting surplus-labour and that, more than the development of new machinery, is what matters.

Capitalism is adept at changing everything while changing nothing. Everything on the level of appearance, the in/formal operations. Nothing on the level of substance—such a transformation would require the end of capitalism as capitalism.

Hence, a year before this apparatus had a name—right at the moment when it was being generated as an apparatus—those of us involved in labour disruptions at the heart of the imperialist metropolises were already primed for its discourse. In 2008 we were told that it was “not the time” for strikes since workers needed to “tighten their belts” in these “tough times.” That there was “not enough money to go around” and that even modest economic struggles were selfish. By 2009, these anti-worker ideologues and their devotees had a concept under which to mobilize their arguments about how and why workers should absorb the excesses of those capitalists who wanted to maintain their wealthy lifestyles: austerity. In this sense, the austerity apparatus is simply that which functions to police the everyday operations of crisis capitalism. In another sense this apparatus is the mobilization of operations that are a normative part of capitalism even without a crisis. But this is simply how economic crises are also part of capitalism’s day-to-day functioning: capitalism is crisis, implicitly or explicitly.

Here we have three regulative functions of the capitalist state of affairs: a state of social peace, sometimes called the welfare state; a state of anxiety, sometimes called neo-liberalism; a state of emergency, sometimes called fascism. Today’s austerity apparatus emerges in a state of anxiety, promising a state of emergency while mobilizing its discontents to focus only on a return to a state of social peace rather than challenge the state of affairs as a whole. The class struggle—the civil war that lurks at the heart of every state—is thus contained.

Before 2009 the austerity apparatus was still being built, now it is ascendant. A novel representation of the old, a different

composition of the same, it attempts to prolong business as usual while simultaneously proclaiming its uniqueness.

1

Austerity has become that which must be defeated at any cost to the extent that the strategy intended to challenge austerity has now become a strategy that also preserves its basis. Austerity is thus a cunning machine, developed by crisis capitalism, that channels dissent into the protection of capital itself. The strength of this apparatus is not that it conceals the ravages of capitalism but proclaims them openly so that it is austerity rather than capitalism that is challenged.

The material basis of the misery exacerbated by brutal austerity policies and practices is not “austerity” anymore than the misery of a cancer patient is located in abnormal bleeding, cysts, and infections. These symptoms are indeed brutal, but if the physician mistakes them as the disease then the patient will have little hope of surviving. And if it suddenly became a medical practice to ignore the cancer and focus only on the symptoms we would be correct to conclude that these doctors were collaborating with cancer.

Hence, that which has branded itself austerity is nothing more than the conventionalization of symptoms, all of which are dependent on capitalism itself, particularly crisis capitalism. The conventions are clear: cut social services, gut welfare capitalism, re proletarianize the more privileged ranks of the working-class, sink the worst excesses of contemporary capitalism in the global peripheries, and make the poorest workers and non-workers pay with their bodies and lives. All in the interests of allowing the ruling class to persist in generating enough surplus-value for the cancer stage of capitalism so that, by surviving as a class, capitalism can also persist.

The conventions become an apparatus—the austerity apparatus—that keeps the patient of the social body breathing. A rather useful apparatus in a world where technicians, rather than physicians, reign supreme: a world in which partial knowledge is celebrated, where a “totalizing” analysis is treated with disdain, and where long term restorative care is ignored in the interest of immediate damage control. You enter that room with the patient and think only of the problems of the life support system—how it can be jerry-rigged, how its tubes and wires can be fixed—rather than the disease that devours the body. You fix the machine and you succeed in marginally extending the life of the terminal patient, refusing to recognize that all you have done is ensure that their symptoms will eventually become worse, that the next apparatus will be less effective and perhaps more brutal.

2

The austerity apparatus normalizes crisis capitalism. By functioning so as to draw attention to itself it obscures the logic of its construction, or at the very least distracts us from focusing on this logic. The austerity apparatus proclaims its existence as a fact, more real than that which generates its facticity, and demands collaboration: austerity is here, focus on this and only this! And even if we believe ourselves canny enough to see through its deceit, and are able to openly proclaim why and how this apparatus came into existence, our attention is still often caught within the workings of the apparatus itself, our strategy limited by its operations.

How else can we explain the excitement caused by Syriza’s victory in Greece amongst those who, at the same time, admitted that Syriza’s anti-austerity program was not tantamount to a total, anti-capitalist program? They were still distracted, despite their claims to the contrary, demanding similar experiments even

in the midst of Syriza's absorption by the austerity apparatus. And when the absorption was complete—when Syriza capitulated as we should have known it would—the excited either feigned shock or argued that capitulation was the only revolutionary option. Thus:

A reformist discourse dominates the movement, most notably articulated by the trade union, student, and community apparatuses. This discourse instrumentally mobilizes the just demands of the people with its misleading diagnosis of the current social and political situation as one of simple mismanagement of the state by the current regime under the influence of greed and neoliberal ideology. I. . .1 The struggle to satisfy the people's needs is routed onto the dead end and illusory path of redeveloping the management of public finances and taxation. [. . .] The above strategy is doomed to fail. To correctly diagnose the problem is to admit that austerity is primarily the inevitable consequence of the deep crisis of capitalism. The 2008 financial crash and the following worldwide recession is a brutal reminder of this historical reality: the bourgeoisie, collapsing under the over-accumulation of capital, is finding it more difficult to extract the profits from production. Its only options are on the one hand, to throw itself into financial speculation—until the outbreak of the next bubble and the evaporation of its fictitious wealth—and in other hand, to wage a ruthless struggle against the proletariat by increasing exploitation to extract more value. The policies of austerity are a necessary condition for this second objective. They

now represent the ultimate horizon of capitalism.¹

And yet we need to go further: a correct diagnosis of austerity is not only admitting that it is the result of the deep crisis of capitalism (even many of those drawn to a reformist strategy might admit this, in word if not in deed), but in recognizing that this deep crisis, this ultimate horizon, has been part of everyday capitalism since its inception.

3

The discourse of austerity is essential to the austerity apparatus. This discourse is more than a discourse of reformism, though it does function to mobilize reformism as the only “reasonable” response to its discursive hegemony, but concerns the epistemological status of austerity itself. We are meant to believe that austerity policies are a new development, an emergency that requires the entirety of our focus. But capitalism has always desired this austerity and has, for the most part, successfully functioned as completely austere. The “kinder, gentler” capitalism challenged by austerity (i.e. welfare capitalism) came into being because what we would now classify as “austerity measures” was originally the norm.

In his analysis of how a regulated working-day came to be, Marx sketched out the way in which capitalism typically functioned to promote “Houses of Terror” where workers would be worked as long as possible, since a reserve army meant that they existed in large supply, and under the most brutal methods. He concluded:

Capital cares nothing for the length of life of labour-power. All that concerns it is simply and solely the

¹PCR-RCP, “Austerity: the Desperate Reflex of Capitalism in Agony” (<http://www.per-rcp.ca/en/archives/1509>)

maximum of labour-power, that can be rendered fluent in a working-day. It attains this end by shortening the extent of the labourer's life, as a greedy farmer snatches increased produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility. [...] The capitalistic mode of production.., produces thus, with the extension of the working-day, not only the deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal, moral and physical, conditions of development and function. It produces also the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself.²

From its beginning, though, “the passion of capital for an unlimited and reckless extension” of exploitation—of what now is re-baptized as austerity—is always mediated by limits imposed by “a protracted civil war, more or less dissembled, between the capitalist class and the working-class.”³

More importantly, however, this kind of austere capitalism remains the norm for the majority of the world, billions of workers who function according to a workhouse ethos that is not at all limited to 18th and 19th century capitalism. Meaning that this is also the ethos of 20th and 21st century capitalism, at least for much of the world's working population, so to think of it as austere—as if capitalists have suddenly become more vicious than they already were—is to become enraptured by the discursive myth of the austerity apparatus.

This myth is necessary for the daily functioning of the austerity apparatus: it makes the pursuit of a reformed capitalism palatable, prevents recognition of proletarianization, and permits us to ignore the fact that our “kinder, gentler” capitalism is just as austere. Just as the ruling class demands that the working

²Karl Marx, *Capital vol. 1* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2003), 253.

³*Ibid.* 282-283.

poor of the imperialist metropolises absorb the excesses of the crisis so that the capitalists can continue to extort the same level of surplus-value, during times of imperialist stability the working class of the same metropolises will not cease to insist, though not always explicitly, that the workers of the so-called “third world” absorb the excesses of global capitalism so that imperial citizens can enjoy the limited benefits of social democracy.

4

Class struggle, the “protracted civil war” that determines the meaning of any and every social formation, is thus that which the austerity apparatus seeks to repress. But repression, as psychoanalysis has taught us, is never complete. Being the basis of any and every social formation, class struggle cannot cease to exist (without, that is, either the elimination of classes or human societies), but it can be rendered invisible, suppressed to such an extent that the subject of austerity becomes convinced of its non-existence.

Since the state of social peace (welfare capitalism, an imperial detente between labour and capital) is that which the austerity apparatus seeks to normalize by making it the goal of all who challenge the reign of crisis capitalism, class struggle is repressed through this sublimation. And in the case of the state of emergency, which means the onslaught of fascism, this civil war will also be repressed: right populists are often adept at tricking the dangerous classes into adopting a substitute civil war—the yolk against the other.

Although the austerity apparatus cannot eradicate class struggle—since to do so would be to eradicate class society, the basis of the apparatus itself—it functions to contain this protracted civil war. In times of crisis, class struggle will become pointed as the violence beneath capitalism’s supposed social

peace is made apparent, but the austerity apparatus is that which manages crisis.

A labour disruption is always a moment of concrete class struggle. A strike, for example, is an event where workers recognize that their daily existence is in contradiction with that of their employers. At the moment of emergence, however, these disruptions and strikes are only objective instances of class struggle. The point is to make them conscious of themselves, to turn them into instances where those involved become subjects militantly dedicated to struggling, as part of a larger class, against capitalism itself instead of capitalism's local ciphers—particular employers, bosses, managers, scabs. This means a shift from the economic to the political, or more accurately the point in which economic struggle is given meaning by the opening of its political dimension.

The austerity apparatus works to contain class struggle by attempting to prevent this political dimension from manifesting. Economism is its goal, a regulation of class struggle according to the economic norms of capitalist society: a struggle only to meet immediate economic demands (the lower the better, of course!) rather than a struggle that develops, due to an interrogation of the economic instance, into a political struggle against capital.

5

A state of social peace, a state of anxiety, a state of emergency—these are all just positions of the state as a singular concept. We are thus still dealing with the theory of the capitalist state (that is, capitalism as a general mode of production that necessitates the political formation of the state) despite those odd attempts, from both bourgeois and “radical” theorists, to claim that the state is no longer conceptually relevant. In order to understand the austerity apparatus we need to reassert the order of the real:

the capitalist state exists, and exists in multiple forms, and is not anachronistic; it mediates the imperial order in which the austerity apparatus is capable of operating.

6

All of this talk of Empire, initially popularized by Negri and Hardt, has succeeded in making the singular fact of the state appear obsolete. Although this is not the case—the state does exist and is relevant—it is still the fact that there is a rotting corpse of theoretical literature that would have us believe otherwise.

Empire de-territorializes. Empire is capitalism beyond the state. Empire has rendered borders and the centre-periphery distinction obsolete. Empire is some further development of capitalism, beyond imperialism, where the capitalist delirium of a market without borders—the lie of the invisible hand that every business student desperately wishes to believe—has been accepted as truth. “Unlike the modern State, which pretended to be an order of Law and Institutions, Empire is the guarantor of a reticular proliferation of norms and apparatuses. Under normal circumstances, Empire is these apparatuses.” But this is vague conjecture, nebulous theorizing, that demonstrates an ignorance of what a state is and has always been: the modern state still exists, still functions as an order of law and institutions while, at the same time, guaranteeing this “reticular proliferation of norms and apparatuses”—the austerity apparatus being a recent example of one amongst many. The state also is these apparatuses inasmuch as any machine is the sum-total of the functions of its apparatuses.

Let us return to Lenin’s definition of the state, the clearest and most concrete conceptualization. Although it is often deemed unfashionable to cite Lenin, this is because what is correct is quite often unfashionable, particularly if it comes from revolutionaries

who initiated historic sequences that threatened the imperialist-capitalist order.

So from Lenin: the state is primarily a class dictatorship. That is, a machine for the suppression of one class by another. As long as there is class struggle there are states of class

[^4] Tagiun, *Introduction to Civil War* (Los Angeles: Semio-text[e], 2010), 134.

struggle, determined by those national boundaries that these machines call into being. To assume otherwise is to assume that there is no machine of class power, no class struggle, and the utopia of capitalism is complete. The state, being a machine of class suppression, does not simply pretend to be an order of law and institutions; the order of legality and institutional norms exists because of a given state and the apparatuses it necessitates as a machine of class power. If there is Empire then it is derived from the conglomerate of multiple states—some imperialist, some victims of imperialism—which is to say that there remains imperialism, commanded by the most powerful nation-states, and this is the order of the real.

7

A state is also a state of affairs. This is what a machine does: function so as to regulate a particular norm or norms. All machines have a definite function, no matter how complex their operations, something they do. A television is a machine designed to broadcast televised programming. A computer is a machine that computes data in a variety of ways. A state is a machine that suppresses, according to the limits of the mode of production, various classes. Such suppression is a state of affairs—that is, it produces a state of being, a particular reality—and there can be no state of affairs without a state machine. Those who deny the state deny the concrete because they cannot explain how and

why business as usual functions. According to Empire? But this would also have to be a state of affairs and thus presuppose a state formation.

State of social peace, state of anxiety, state of emergency... these are simply various perspectives of the state of affairs. The machine of class management will sometimes be forced to make concessions so as to ensure its promulgation, occasionally worry about its fate, and always be ready to declare martial law. Consent: social peace. Coercion: emergency. And the nebulous state between: anxiety.

If we are to speak of an austerity apparatus we must first reckon with the persistence of the state, which will not vanish without the disappearance of class struggle, and understand how it is a component part of this machine of class suppression.

8

While it is correct to recognize that the economic crisis that began in the early 2000s is unique insofar as it is the first truly “global crisis and not regional,”⁴ it is wrong to assume that the mechanisms of austerity are as new as the crisis they seek to command. The ideology that attempts to navigate an economic crisis is less unique than the crisis itself, and much contemporary theory wastes its time in conflating the unique aspects of the crisis with the less unique, but entirely novel, aspects of ideological containment. Austerity is not crisis, but the latter has functioned as a stand-in for crisis—which is why we often waste time speaking of austerity, and not the crisis, as the material foundation for the current conjuncture when we are in fact looking at a world in reverse. Today’s crisis, an immanence grasped by Marx and Engels the moment they conceptualized a world

⁴Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism* (Cambridge: Semiotext [et 2011], 13.

market, produces novel variants of ideological containment that are similar to past strategies— what we now call austerity. Unfortunately, austerity is often misconstrued as being the foundation of crisis: hence these strange assumptions that a creditor-debtor contradiction has replaced the contradiction of capital-labour, that neo-liberalism is a complete rupture with liberalism, and that we need to invent entirely new categories to explain the crisis in particular assemblages of ruling class hegemony.

Every crisis challenges the way in which ruling class hegemony is internally configured. Austerity measures, even if they did not use this name in the past, were mobilized in bourgeois internecine struggles: we can locate narratives about “thriftiness” and the “sin of excessive spending” in past crises; we can discover a struggle between ruling class factions in the discourse of the plutocrat. A challenge to the internal configuration of ruling class hegemony, however, is not a challenge to its hegemony as a class. And today’s austerity apparatus hopes to convince us that, whatever problems the crisis causes, this hegemony is not also in crisis.

9

In this age of austerity, as with any moment of capitalist crisis, the state of affairs experiences a simultaneous crisis of security. Social peace with capital crumbles; a state of emergency becomes imminent. The ravages of a failing system begin to disrupt spontaneous consent to bourgeois rule as the values of the ruling class become questionable—even the culture industry makes a buck by promulgating distrust for the so-called 1%. The coercive aspect of the state manifests to enforce consent: the most unruly elements of the rabble, as ever, are beaten and jailed (again, this is a normative experience for those outside of the imperial metropolises, as well as those colonized and super-

exploited populations within); the confused and anxious are socialized to consent to an increase in coercive apparatuses (surveillance, a larger and more disciplined police force, counter-insurgency, etc.) in a space that once believed itself free from the repressive wing of the state.

10

The ruling class security discourse is possessed by a cynical irony: capitalism is responsible, particularly during crisis, for producing the worst forms of insecurity (lack of access to food, housing, safety, clean water, etc.) and yet attempts to secure the continuation of this insecurity through increased militarization that it labels security. Security for the ruling class and its lackeys, yes, but not for the vast majority of the world's population. Biel has investigated this contradiction to a significant degree, noting that:

The ruling order builds its credentials on combating insecurity on behalf of society, on rebuilding the structure which the era of unpredictability dissolves. To do so, it claims exceptional (extraordinary) repressive powers. The notion of 'terrorism' is convenient in conjuring up everyone's nameless fears of some threatening or chaotic force. In the United States, you have more real risk of being killed by a law-enforcement officer than by a terrorist, [...] but the discourse turns this reality upside down, such that capitalism's own failure becomes the justification for an entrenchment of its dominance. As a result, the whole debate which should be about a solution to crisis becomes siphoned into building the repressive

apparatus.⁵

In the age of austerity the masses experience real insecurity; the austerity apparatus functions to convince these masses to accept the very coercion that promotes this insecurity in the name of its opposite. From the perspective of the ruling class, however, the promotion of widespread insecurity means security for the state of affairs. Hence, “the politics of security are organized around the management of the population and the promotion of suitable forms of life to the exclusion of other forms.”⁶

11

The security of the ruling class has always been a concern of the capitalist state of affairs; all class societies must produce state apparatuses that protect the dominance of the class in command. What we are now observing at the height of today’s crisis—the so-called age of austerity—is, again, a novel articulation of what has been intrinsic to this social system from its very beginning, just as it has been intrinsic to the reproduction of previous modes of production. Moreover, those at the peripheries of global capitalism (including the peripheries within the imperial metropolises) have consistently experienced the coercive aspect of the system. A crisis merely extends the sphere of coercion, moving it from these supposed “states of exception” (which are, in fact, not exceptions but, for the majority of the world, the norm) to the heart of the system where the consensual aspect of the system is usually ascendant.

⁵Robert Biel, *The Entropy of Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 169, our emphasis.

⁶Colleen Bell, *The Freedom of Security* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 25.

The Occupy movement, for example, demonstrated that large segments of the US “middle class” (the scions of those populations who traditionally accepted bourgeois values as common sense) were no longer willing to consent to the state of affairs. Despite its inability to move beyond the limits of petty-bourgeois rebellion, it would still be inaccurate to conceptualize the Occupy movement as entirely petty-bourgeois, as some have done. There was an element of possible proletarianization: a formerly privileged population was forced, by the crisis, into recognizing the limits of an order that it might have accepted—that it might have consented to—in a period of capitalist stability.

12

The austerity apparatus has produced its own subject. The austerity subject, the capitalist social being whose social consciousness is determined by the operations of the apparatus that called it into existence. The austerity subject accepts the state of anxiety as a fact of nature and believes that its solution is found either in emergency or social peace. The austerity subject is either fascist or social democrat. . . . And here again we find historical precedent: there was a time where social democrats were indeed called social fascists. It’s really the same subject; only its stance, the state of affairs towards which it faces (peace or emergency?), determines its consciousness. Sometimes the formal difference between stances might appear significant—those demanding a return to welfare capitalism in the face of austerity are different than those who embrace austerity—but other times these formal differences are minuscule: those who accept austerity as inevitable, while complaining about this inevitability, will propose activities that parallel the stance of the most fascist variant of the austerity subject.

13

The austerity subject is not a total subject but only a facade that is cobbled together from the ideological detritus accumulated by the day-to-day functioning of the austerity apparatus. It is a subject position, rather than a subject that possesses complete unification between being and consciousness, that overcodes other subjectivities that lurk within capitalism as a whole. Hence, it can be both the liberal and conservative subject, the rebellious and faithful subject, the would-be communist and the crypto-fascist. Contradictions abound: the austerity apparatus is such that, as a jerry-rigged machine, it is never able to produce total fidelity to its operations; at best it can only paper over contradictions and pull already-existing subjects into its orbit.

The machine produces a normative subjectivation, but no subjection is total; there is always something within every human being that remains under-determined. And the normative subjectivation of the austerity apparatus is even less complete than other subject-orders because, at this stage in the capitalist state of affairs, it is becoming difficult for the entire system to maintain its hegemony. Following the financial crisis, even at the imperialist metropolises, capitalist values are becoming less-and-less “common sense.” When even the culture industry is forced to refer, though in a distorted form, to successful capitalists as out of touch, or as parasitical “1%ers”, it becomes increasingly obvious that the contradictions are becoming apparent and the valuation of ruling class hegemony is no longer popular.

The subject position produced by the austerity apparatus is one that, if it does recognize the limitations of the entire system, will remain within the orbit of this machine despite its complaints. It is an austere position because it strictly limits its behaviour to the boundaries imposed by the system, the boundaries the austerity apparatus intends to protect.

14

If it did not take very long for the austerity apparatus to transform the average capitalist subject into an austerity subject, this is because capitalism has always disciplined its subjects into accepting adaptation to its internal mutations. The ruling ideas of the ruling class are such that, when understood as a mirror of common sense values, all variations can be incorporated into the average subject as a matter of course, translated into the next articulation of common sense by degree.

The pressures produced by crisis capitalism did not happen overnight, though sometimes the crisis erupted in unexpected ways, and decades of ideological discourse that anticipated this age of austerity were already part of the ideological constellation. Years of casualization and precarity preceded (and contributed to) the ideology of austerity; long before this, at the “rosy dawn of capitalism,” what we now call austerity was part of the “natural order.” With such a history, it should be no surprise that the capitalist subject came into existence with some ur-form of austerity at the heart of its being. All justifications for its existence were already made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the austerity apparatus is simply re-operationalizing old ideological reticulations. These are compelling because we have accumulated them into our consciousness simply by living and breathing the stench of senile capitalism.

15

Every political position that bypasses the norms established by the austerity apparatus to challenge the machine upon which it depends will be classified as totalitarian or “ultraleft”. By who? By either the apologists of the state of affairs or a traditional left leadership that has been domesticated by the social peace of welfare capitalism. In the end, the anxious subject of auster-

ity, regardless of the direction it faces, wants the same thing: pacification.

If austerity is that which must be defeated at any cost— even if this cost implies that welfare capitalism can and should be “fixed”—then a politics that does not collaborate with the terms imposed by its apparatus is guilty of foul play. Of ruining the left for the more rationally minded activists and their sober understanding of socialism.

These totalitarians demanding a return to revolutionary communism, these “ultra-leftists” who speak of making the implicit civil war explicit, are possibly “destroying the chance of a real step in advance, and thereby delaying the whole movement” when they could be “supporting people whose ways are generally not [theirs], [and so] help the carrying out of such progressive measures” as the end of austerity. These words resonate now, especially amongst those austerity socialist subjects who like to (mis)quote Lenin’s Left Wing Communism, even though they belong to the 20th century’s arch-renegade, the epitome of opportunism, Eduard Bernstein.

16

Homogenization according to democratic discourse becomes the norm for a left appropriated by the austerity apparatus. Even if a discourse of “difference” is utilized to undermine communist demands for class solidarity it is done so only to homogenize all of these differences into a common project of democratic damage control. Class struggle is collapsed according to a common anti-austerity agenda that all people, regardless of their class position, are expected to endorse. Those who reject this agenda and demand something more— something revolutionary—are accused of violating a rainbow coalition of liberalism.

Unity based on class solidarity is treated as a denial of differ-

ence, particularly different sites of oppression. Unity based on class collaboration, which is the cruelest form of homogenization, is first sublimated and then valorized.

The austerity subject is mistaken for a revolutionary subject when, in this case, the former is little more than a domesticated version of the latter—a diminishing echo across the chasm of decades: “revisionist contamination has completely tamed the so-called far left. Wild wolves who allow themselves to be trained become calm little dogs in just a few generations.”⁷

17

The domestication promoted by the austerity apparatus is alien to the lowest strata of the proletariat. The working poor, whose life was already austere, are rarely convinced that they need to “tighten their belts” and abide by the austerity ideology when there are no belts left to tighten. In many ways the contradictions of capitalism are apparent to this down-and-out faction of workers. Here domestication operates according to older principles: a proliferation of religious mystification and conspiracy theories—ideologies generated by the machinery of capital to prevent the anger of its victims from reaching the correct targets.

The type of domestication generated by the austerity apparatus is aimed primarily at the petty-bourgeoisie, particularly that section of the petty-bourgeoisie that is being reproletarianized. It is a containment policy, class inoculation.

⁷PCR-RCP, “Legitimate Revolt is Not a Conspiracy” (<http://www.pcr-rpc.ca/en/archives/1045>).

18

Now ill-equipped to deal with austerity, the traditional leadership of the left and working-class finds itself outmanoeuvred. Austerity reigns, domestication is complete, reproletarianization is denied by campaigns of collaboration. And yet the fact remains that reproletarianization is happening and only decades of economic privilege amongst the ranks of the crumbling labour aristocracy and its culture industry are keeping the masses in line.

Between capital and the most oppressed masses of the imperialist metropolises the bulwark of a domesticated leadership is becoming paper-thin. reproletarianization of the so-called “middle classes” means also the regeneration of the lowest levels of the working-class, the formation of a proletarian hard core that is slipping the yoke of its domesticated leadership. This is a class that was never as integrated, that is becoming less and less enamoured with those who speak in its name, and that develops in the cracks of welfare capitalism—opened by the austerity apparatus—because it has been long excluded from the unions and labour councils, ignored by a left that focused only on those workers already organized by capital.

Along with the domesticated austerity subject we also discover the germ of its hated double: the revolutionary subject, the very thing the austerity apparatus forbids. And yet this subject is necessitated by the fact of reproletarianization. Harsher operations of capitalism mean that workers will become conscious of these operations, particularly if they occupied the lowest ranks of the working-class before the policies of austerity were conceived. The austerity apparatus, however, functions so as to contain these rebellious subjects, to pull them back into its operations. Its anxious subjects—either would-be fascists or domesticated opportunists—are deployed as agents of containment.

19

Just as the state of affairs instinctively, according to its day-to-day operations, develops various apparatuses in order to produce domesticated subjects, so too should any movement that aims to be a counter-state develop similar apparatuses. If what now goes by the name “austerity” in some ways represents capitalism’s ultimate horizon—its internal and pitiless crisis logic rendered bare—then communism represents capitalism’s ultimate (that is, an alternative ultimate) horizon. In order to conceptualize this other horizon we must think of it as a counter-state of affairs that needs to be brought into being by producing its own subjects, institutions, culture, and ideology.

A counter-state of affairs cannot be brought into being spontaneously, or by the assumption that multiple sites of struggle lacking organizational unity constitute a coherent movement. The proliferation of struggles against the state of affairs is indeed a healthy multiplicity when compared to the cancer of capitalist singularity but its inability, by itself, to demonstrate a counter-singularity (that is, a counter-state of affairs capable of building its own alt-hegemonic apparatuses) is also its weakness. What is required is a comprehensive, fighting revolutionary party. A partisan war machine.

20

The partisan war machine, the revolutionary party that intervenes from a position of unified singularity, is necessary because a political class that is conscious of itself as a class cannot otherwise exist. As Lazzarato explains, in an attempt to excavate the reality imposed by austerity capitalism at the imperialist metropolises:

No longer based in the factory, the new class com-

position that has emerged over the years is made up of a multiplicity of situations of employment, non-employment, occasional employment, and greater or lesser poverty. It is dispersed, fragmented, and precarious, far from finding the means to constitute a political 'class' even if it represents the majority of the population.⁸

Unfortunately he takes this fact of dispersal and fragmentation as evidence that the proletariat no longer exists as a potential political subject, subordinated as it is to the subjectivation mobilized by crisis capitalism. Worse, he loses himself in the unsubstantiated claim that the class struggle is between debtor and capital rather than labour and capital. As is typical of these chic theoretical operations, the solution is a non-solution: "1 azy action..., the exact opposite of the purpose-driven action of capitalist production."⁹ A refusal to do anything but refuse, because there is no class composition beyond the molecular; dispersal into vague categories of debtor and creditor must mean a dropping out of organizing altogether with the pretense that such a refusal is synonymous with organization.

What Lazzarato should have grasped is that the revolutionary class can never constitute itself as a political class without the intervention of a party. Even before this fragmentation, when the first world proletariat was discovered within the organized industrial factories, it was still unable to constitute itself as a political class, to be the proletariat for itself. Why? Because trade union consciousness was the norm, an earlier form of economism dominated, and the limits were established by bourgeois ideology. He skirts this understanding so as to declare, in a stunning

⁸Maurizio Lazzarato, *Governing by Debt* (South Pasadena, Semiotext[e], 2015), 12-13.

⁹*Ibid.*, 252.

refusal to examine the literature, that “[D]o less than the rest of the Marxist tradition, Lenin fails to foresee the integration of the working class and the population into the capitalist economy through increases in wage and income.”¹⁰ Stunningly, he manages to undermine this claim several pages later when he articulates the very theory (e.g. “the labour aristocracy”) that Lenin put forward to explain the very thing he supposedly failed to explain.¹¹ The point being, this integration was foreseen and theorized. Following Lenin, there is an already existent theorization of the integration and dispersal of the workingclass.

Although today’s partisan war machine must locate its subject in this dispersal, rather than hoping to discover it waiting in unionized sites of production, the task remains the same: organize those who have nothing left to lose but their chains around a revolutionary project, go deeper into the masses, establish a fighting, political class.

21

A partisan war machine provides the kind of singularity to class struggle that is necessary to break the limits imposed by the current state of affairs. The name “austerity” now defines these limits; as long as we accept the narrative of the austerity apparatus we will also accept these limits. We require a machine with operations designed to lay siege to these limits with apparatuses that will function as siege engines, subjects who will function as soldiers.

To conceptualize such a war machine as already being diffuse, vaguely deployed amongst a nebulous movement that is believed to be the magical result of disconnected and multiple sites of struggle, is to imagine that we have already achieved the kind of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 234-235.

hegemony where this diffusion is possible. Hence, every theory of micro-politics, autonomous workerism, Imaginary Parties and Invisible Committees, and anarchist diffusion fails to grasp the significance of partisan singularity.

If capitalism can tolerate a certain level of multiplicity—different capitalist parties with conflicting values—this is only because it already imposed its singular hegemony. It already utilized explicit fighting parties, in different regions where it began to establish its class rule, so as to force a state of affairs that would make its promised mode of production universal. Of course it is this underlying singularity—the singularity of capital—that fears the multiplicity of the masses, the confusion of rebellion.

Against this we need another singular politics that, in its singularity, can mobilize the mass multiplicity that the current singular order fears. To the singularity of the bourgeoisie we raise the singularity of the proletariat. Against the multiple variants of the bourgeois order we must raise the multiple sites of rebellion that this order attempts to contain.

22

The revolutionary partisan war machine will produce its own subjects; such subjects do not exist, in a complete form, outside of this comprehensive righting party. What we find instead are partial subjects primed for mobilization, those whose being and consciousness are defined by resistance to the bourgeois order, who are not easily domesticated or managed by the austerity apparatus. The most rebellious faction of these potential subjects exists at the lowest level of the state of affairs, the so-called “hard core of the proletariat.” Those who already understand that they have nothing left to lose but their chains, who instinctively desire to become revolutionary subjects.

Even still, the revolutionary subject does not fully exist prior to a revolutionary party that is capable of pulling it into its orbit. Here there is only a fragmented and potential existence, a rebellious dream of an operationalized subject— a conflicted subject, a manner of being that instinctively resists the subjectivity capitalism works to impose. Only the singularity of a partisan war machine will functionalize these possible subjects, providing the necessary movement unity.

23

Revolutionary partisan war machines do not will themselves into existence—they do not spontaneously manifest, like djinn freed from the magic bottles of a multitude of struggles—but are consciously constructed through struggle. There will be failed machines, competing blueprints, parties that end up being captured by the state apparatus and reintegrated in the capitalist order, anachronistic inventions that keep functioning despite the fact that they do nothing except chug along as antiquated curiosities. Most machines successful in solving a particular problem were not the only proposed solution.

Faced with the potential eruption of multiple partisan constructions, and aware that many of these will either fail or become relegated to activist obscurity, the (left) subject of the austerity apparatus often reacts with antipathy. Failure and confusion only confirm anxiety; it is better, this subject reasons, to pursue a neo-reformist politics and refuse to recognize that this channelling of energy is precisely what produces its anxiety. Even worse, like a junky who recognizes that the anxiety they experience between fixes is the result of the fix itself, there are austerity subjects who recognize the problems of their political practice but would still rather pursue this practice than involve themselves with a revolutionary partisan political order. It's

hard to kick a bad habit.

24

Elsewhere we spoke of a “new return” to the concept of the theoretically and practically unified revolutionary party, best signified by the partisan project promised by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.¹² But what does this new return mean, practically, in the face of the austerity apparatus that unceasingly operates to enforce the singular order of capitalism? How can a counter-order, with the same unflinching singularity, unfold in a landscape where multiple rebellions have been ameliorated, undermined, appropriated?

One solution to this problem would be to propose the kind of partisan war machine that belongs in 1917, or even 1948, where these multiple sites of rebellion had not yet produced their own historical trajectories. There was no consolidated feminist movement, anti-racist movement, queer movement, etc. in these periods, though the revolutionary orders at those times possessed the potential to incorporate them in their civil wars. We find subterranean histories of this potential, an entire and conflicted body of theory that demonstrates these problematics were not ignored by some stereotypical understanding of class struggle in the abstract. Unfortunately, those who seek an old return to the problem of the party ignore these subterranean histories of their own movement and reduce everything to the vaguest and most abstract understanding of class struggle, transforming events such as the October Revolution into moribund caricatures.

Today’s partisan war machine cannot afford a return to such an unqualified singularity. Rather, its revolutionary totality must mobilize and systematize multiple sites of rebellion, transforming them into coherent apparatuses and directed operations. These

¹²See *The Communist Necessity* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2014).

rebellious sites cannot be ignored in the hope that they will be solved by some bland and unqualified notion of class struggle; they need to be linked and subordinated to this machine's overarching struggle, made coherent by its singularity. After all, most struggles against exploitation and capitalism, despite whatever limitations they possess, in some ways demonstrate important insights about class struggle as a whole—they can educate and transform any potential coherent movement.

25

Today's partisan war machine must be a movement of movements, a singular complex of repurposed multiplicities. A class struggle machine that, under its aegis, collects and assembles the proletarian variants of feminist, anti-racist, queer, anti-ableist, trans, etc. struggles that, by themselves, are incapable of challenging the state of affairs. A proliferation of mass organizations and fronts that are transformed by a singular civil war machine—a revolutionary party that draws in these disconnected movements—but also transform this machine into something that is more than the sum of its parts.

When a singular revolutionary movement contains entire movements there is a point where the quantitative becomes the qualitative. By mobilizing all of these rebellious movements under a coherent party structure, there is the point where the machine becomes more significant than what number of movements it has been able to draw into its operations. Here begins a qualitative shift in the machine itself, where this quantity of very particular components influence its development. Here begins the partisan war machine that is not merely assembling internal movements but is being repurposed as a class struggle movement based on the trajectories it has chosen to encode with its own dominant trajectory—a trajectory aimed at the dissolution of

capitalism.

Challenges Facing the International Communist Movement

Documents from the PCR-RCP International Department

In this section we release some material issued by the PCR-RCP International Department. Those documents were prepared two years ago in 2014 in the context of ongoing discussions with various Marxist-Leninist-Maoist parties and organizations. As stated in the May Day 2016 International Declaration that the PCR-RCP Canada signed along with some 30 other MLM parties and organizations, fighting the current state of dispersion in the International Communist Movement is an urgent task for our movement. Therefore, we support the call for holding a Unified International Conference of MLM Parties and Organizations. Through two-line struggle, a higher level of coordination between Maoist forces could be attained, which will help trigger new Peoples War's and enhance the anti-imperialist movement under the hegemony of the revolutionary proletariat. Summarizing the experience of the now defunct Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) and debating the challenges our movement is now facing at the world level are at the heart of this process.

—*the Editors*

On the experience of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) and the fight for regrouping the Maoist forces at the international level

Any initiative for regrouping and uniting the various Maoist parties and organizations from different parts of the world cannot succeed without making a comprehensive assessment of the more than two decade-long experience of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM). This report should be seen as our contribution to this process. It is updated from the paper our Party submitted for issue No. 1 of the Maoist Road journal.¹

Despite some important ideological and political weaknesses, the 1984 founding Declaration of the RIM was globally correct and sufficient at that time to support the historical decision of creating a new international center in defense of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought (as it was understood at that time) and revolutionary China. The establishment of the RIM has been an important step for separating our movement from the revisionists in China and defending Chairman Mao's immortal contributions against the Hodjaite dogmato-revisionists.

Among the weaknesses of the Declaration, the most important one was certainly the non-recognition of Maoism as the third stage in the development of the ideology of the international proletariat and the absence of a comprehensive understanding of this ideology as it is now synthesized in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. This was finally corrected with the adoption by the

¹“On the International Unity of Maoists”, p. 20 (<http://www.bannedthought.net/International/MaoistRoad/MR01-Eng-Final.pdf>).

RIM of the “Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism” statement in 1993 after a long ideological struggle mainly waged by the comrades from the Communist Party of Peru. Twenty years later, we consider this statement still valid; it can still be considered as a minimum and correct basis for demarcating revolutionaries from the various revisionist and opportunist trends within the international communist movement.

On the political level, the 1984 Declaration was exceptionally weak regarding the tasks the communist parties and organizations from the imperialist countries should fulfill for developing the revolutionary struggle in their concrete conditions. On this specific question, the Declaration has been unable to go further than the already weak line defended by the Chinese comrades in their 1963 “25-Point Letter”; it especially didn’t take into account the important experience of the workers and communist movement in the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s, including the rich experience of proletarian armed struggle in various European countries.

In its 1984 Declaration, the RIM presented itself as the embryonic center of the world revolution and gave itself the task of developing new communist parties where there was none. The signatories of the Declaration had taken six commitments: 1) establishing an international journal; 2) training new Marxist-Leninist parties and strengthening existing ones; 3) undertaking joint and coordinated campaigns; 4) implementing policies and measures adopted by international conferences; 5) to the extent of their abilities, applying and helping financing the tasks related to the improving of communists’ unity; 6) constituting an embryonic political center to provide leadership within the overall process of building the ideological, political and organizational unity of communists.

What has worked best among those commitments was certainly the launching of the A World to Win magazine. Regard-

ing the other commitments, there were some victories, but no more. The RIM played an active role in the establishment or re-establishment of Maoist parties in the Indian subcontinent, including Nepal. In India, the RIM helped to resolve the fratricidal conflict between the Maoist Communist Centre and the CPI(ML) People's War. In this regard, the role played by RIM parties and other parties within the CCOMPOSA (the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia) has been beneficial.

The broad campaign to defend the life of Chairman Gonzalo of the Communist Party of Peru after his capture in 1992 was probably the best political campaign waged in the history of the RIM. This campaign had an impact in particular in Nepal, where important mass events for saving the life of Dr. Abimael Guzman were organized; the Nepalese comrades thus benefited from this international campaign to strengthen themselves. Unfortunately, due to the inability of the CoRIM to correctly handle the two-line struggle against the right opportunist line that emerged within the Communist Party of Peru after the Fujimori regime made public the peace letters in October 1993, the campaign to defend the life of Chairman Gonzalo was abandoned by the RIM, while it should have been continued and expanded.

For us, any organization like the RIM that intends to become a center of world revolution, even in an embryonic form, should aim to exercise not only an ideological leadership, but also a political leadership on the movement. Through international campaigns, by promoting unity of the revolutionaries in each country, by helping the various Maoist forces to coordinate themselves, by mobilizing the masses in support to people's war and revolutionary struggles unfolding in various countries, etc., an international organization must come to exert such leadership; otherwise it is doomed to atrophy. And that became the case with the RIM.

The numerous reports on the people's wars led by RIM's participating parties in Peru, Turkey and Nepal in the *A World to Win* magazine concretely helped to popularize these revolutions. But generally speaking, RIM was often seen as being only an ideological center, which was not conducive to the emergence of Maoist parties in each country. Even the support to people's war in Peru or Nepal remained mainly ideological and lacked of concrete calls for action in solidarity with these struggles.

The effective leadership of any international grouping is of paramount importance. Ideally, organizations that lead people's war should exercise the leadership role. But this did not happen in the RIM. The most active organizations in its initial building had no experience of people's war.

After Mao's death and the victory of the Deng's revisionist clique in China, the RCP,USA stepped in as a defender of Mao's revolutionary legacy, rightly criticizing the Albanian line, which camouflaged a form of revisionism in spite of its bombast and high professions of Marxist-Leninist faith. Thanks to them, Mao's revolutionary legacy was still on the agenda to guide the revolutionary forces. For that reason, the RCP,USA acquired a high credit in the international Maoist movement. It played a central role in gathering the revolutionary forces who claimed to still be inspired by Mao, but also in defending the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the revolutionary leadership of the so-called "Gang of Four." The presence of the RCP,USA in RIM's leadership was therefore "natural" and certainly legitimate.

Although it eventually joined it, the Communist Party of Peru (*Partido Comunista del Peru*, PCP) played a less active role in building the RIM. Yet, the people's war in Peru was attracting the eyes of the world. It helped the RIM improve its influence. But for various reasons, the PCP never held a leadership position within the RIM structure.

The PCP was one of the first organizations to uphold Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as the science of revolution. After Marxism, Marxism-Leninism had played a crucial theoretical and practical role in the progression of the proletarian revolution. But here, we came to a point where “Marxism-Leninism”—as it was understood and practiced by many—revealed its insufficiency. Some organizations that claimed to follow Marxism-Leninism were not at all revolutionaries; some were even practicing the worst forms of parliamentary cretinism. Marxism-Leninism was the official ideology of political regimes that called themselves communists, but were in fact building state capitalism. As mentioned earlier, thanks to the struggle waged by the Peruvian comrades, the RIM finally recognized Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in 1993.

Following the capture of Chairman Gonzalo and the “bend in the road” that the PCP tried to surpass, the launch of the people’s war in Nepal again played an important role in the development of the RIM. The CPN (Maoist) made a thorough analysis of the experience of the PCP and it succeeded—at least at first—in creatively applying MLM to the reality of Nepal, where social relationships were still heavily imbued with feudalism. The initial success of the People’s War from 1996 to 2005 generated a lot of interest among the revolutionary masses in various parts of the world. But again, the RIM didn’t succeed—and even tried—to build a strong mass movement in defense of the Nepalese revolution.

Today, there is no longer a socialist camp on which the various revolutionary movements and people’s wars could rely on to face the hostility of the big imperialist powers. A victorious people’s war in a given country will face a huge challenge if it wants to establish a minimally stable peoples’ or proletarian power without being crushed by the imperialist armies. While they succeeded to establish people’s power in vast areas of the country and to attain the stage of strategic equilibrium, the Nepalese

comrades have been unable to resolve the problem of conquering power and maintaining a revolutionary regime because of the capitulation of the Prachanda-Bhattarai leadership.

The revolutionaries within the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) would have certainly benefited from a more active and concrete support by the RIM and other revolutionary forces abroad. There was a need for a broad mobilization against the continuous plots managed by US imperialists and Indian expansionists (sometime in collaboration with the Prachanda-Bhattarai leadership) against the Nepalese revolution. But this didn't happen—or not enough broadly. Today, the revolutionaries who are fighting for opening a new way forward within the Communist Party of Nepal — Maoist and other communist groupings need and deserve the support of our movement.

In order to be fully useful and effective, this support to the revolutionaries who are in a process of regrouping, re-organizing and finding a way to re-launch the revolutionary mass struggle in Nepal must be (as they should have been) supported by a critique of the wrong tendencies that appeared within the UCPN (Maoist). Politically and ideologically helping the Nepalese comrades to surpass the big challenges and difficulties they faced should be part of any support. But this kind of support can hardly come from parties and organizations that don't have any experience of revolutionary action or that are quietly waiting in their respective countries for a possible appearance of a so-called “revolutionary situation” that finally never happens.

The various Maoist parties and organizations should use this work of supporting revolutionary people's wars—like the ones that developed in Peru and Nepal from 1980 to the beginning of the 21st century—to build up forces that will help them unleash people's war in their respective countries. If there had been tangible progress by revolutionaries elsewhere, the people's war in Nepal would have been less isolated and the possibilities of

conquering power by the revolutionary masses better.

All in all, the RIM suffered from a lack of will to bring about real political leadership to the movement. We believe this weakness is related to a faulty understanding of the principle of universality of people's war and its practical application. And clearly, it is the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP,USA), who headed RIM's Committee (CoRIM), who bears the main responsibility for its demise.

Since a few years, the RCP,USA contends that the "new synthesis" produced by its leader Bob Avakian is a development of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism that all Maoist forces should uphold. The RCP,USA has come to consider that there cannot be a viable international revolutionary action without recognition of this so-called synthesis. We agree with the comrades of the Communist Party (Maoist) of Afghanistan that Avakian's "New Synthesis" is "post-MLM" and that in the end, it is nothing more than right opportunism, an abandonment of the proletarian dictatorship and a total capitulation to petty-bourgeois viewpoints and methods.

Today, with the disappearance of the RIM, there is an urgent need to regroup and consolidate the various Maoist parties and organizations that are still upholding MLM and applying it in practice in their concrete conditions. Each of them will benefit from a better coordination and a more organized ideological and political debate.

Our Party supports any initiative that could strengthen this process of regrouping, debating and possibly uniting the Maoist parties and organizations. This may include the relaunching of an international journal like Maoist Road; multiplication of bilateral meetings; holding of regional and even international meetings of Maoist parties and organizations; launching of common political campaigns like the one currently going on against the counter-revolutionary war launched by the reactionary state in India

against the people's war led by the CPI (Maoist); etc.

If the reconstruction of an international center appears to us as an urgent task, we should not act too quickly and rush things in this regard. Unprincipled "unity" and apparent centralism will only have the effect of masking the weaknesses of our movement. Any international (or even regional) process should address these weaknesses and allow time for the ideological and political struggle to unfold: this is a necessary condition if we want to attain a better and common understanding of what is to be done to unleash the revolutionary struggle of the international proletariat; so the process should serve this objective.

In the end, an international organization is necessary to promote the development of Maoist parties in every country. Such parties must make a thorough analysis of the internal situation of their given country, particularly with regard to class relations and the revolutionary strategy that is required to attain socialism and communism (these two elements being the core of a communist program), and they should then implement this strategy. On its part, the international organization will coordinate the relationships between each national organization, wage joint campaigns and help resolve conflicts that may arise between some parties. In doing so, it will develop its capacity to act as a central leading body, not only at the ideological level, but at the political level too; and it will win its recognition as such.

The basis of unity of any group should be as specific as possible. Yet, at the international level, it is clear that national realities are very different. Some countries are still heavily steeped in pre-capitalist relations of production, with a large peasantry. There are imperialist countries where national issues were not resolved. Countries spread over large areas, others not. Some have strong revolutionary traditions, others not. And so on.

This had consequences at the organizational level. The failure of the Third International was partly the result of the notion that it was for the proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries and that of the “socialist homeland” to lead the world revolution. This notion was not convincing, especially in the colonized nations, where what was happening in Europe didn’t suit the situation. Of course, the main leaders of the International tried to take these differences into account. But the fact remains that notions that may be valid in Europe were not necessarily valid in India and China.

The stance of the Communist Party of China, who would not initiate the establishment of a new international grouping after the split with Moscow in 1963, can be attributed to mistrust in relation to a kind of global party that is supposedly clairvoyant in everything. Still, the example of a “revolutionary model” and bilateral relations are not always enough to create cohesion between revolutionary forces at the international level.

The RIM has never really set on what would be the optimal organizational form of a new international grouping. In its 1984 Declaration, it raised the question: “The concept of world party and the resultant over-centralisation of the Comintern should be evaluated so that appropriate lessons from that period can be drawn as well as from the positive achievements of the First, Second and Third Internationals. It also is necessary to evaluate the overreaction of the Communist Party of China to the negative aspects of the Comintern that led them to refuse to play the necessary leading role in building up the organisational unity of the Marxist-Leninist forces at the international level.”

The organizational basis of unity depends on the ideological and political one. That basis must be universal both in principle and in practice. Within the RIM, there have been advances in the recognition of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as the science of revolution. In assessing the experience of Socialist China,

the Marxist-Leninist movement understood that class struggle was continuing under the proletarian dictatorship, requiring the unleashing of numerous cultural revolutions.

The Communist Party of Peru correctly stated: “What is fundamental in Maoism? Power is fundamental in Maoism. Power for the proletariat, power for the dictatorship of the proletariat, power based on the armed force led by the Communist Party. More explicitly, this is 1) power under the leadership of the proletariat in the democratic revolution, 2) power for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the socialist and cultural revolutions, 3) power based on the armed force led by the Communist Party, conquered and defended through people’s war.” (On Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, First Congress of the Communist Party of Peru)

RIM’s 1993 Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism! Statement meanwhile stated: “Lenin said, ‘Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat.’ In the light of the invaluable lessons and advances achieved through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution led by Mao Tsetung, this dividing line has been further sharpened. Now it can be stated that only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat and to the recognition of the objective existence of classes, of antagonistic class contradictions, of the bourgeoisie in the Party and of the continuation of the class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat throughout the whole period of socialism until communism. As Mao so powerfully stated, ‘Lack of clarity on this question will lead to revisionism.’”

It is clear to us that as a science of revolution, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is universal. People’s War is part of Mao’s immortal contributions so it also has a universal character. Before its disappearance, the RIM officially recognized this. Even the

RCP, USA recognized this too—but only on paper.

However, there remained a lot of disagreements on its practical application. For some, the protracted people's war would apply as such only in countries dominated by imperialism, and as long as the people's war will not win there, it will be difficult to make a revolution in any imperialist country. This is a mechanical application of Mao's idea.

For us, people's war can only be protracted. And it necessarily has to be waged in a given national situation. It is the duty of each Maoist party to prepare and initiate people's war on its own territory. Working to prepare the initiation of a people's war will ensure that all parties are working to gather forces for waging armed struggle. It is understandable that Trotskyist sects or revisionist parties that only go by legal activity, selling newspapers or making entryism in trade unions or reformist parties, will never mobilize or gather forces for the revolution. If a party takes part in militant mass actions; if it inspires itself from revolutionary action of a new type; and if it does not confined itself to simple radical critique of all other currents but acts specifically towards the revolution, then it will accumulate strength.

Being clear on a common strategic perspective—People's War—can only increase the cohesion of a new international organization. There may be differences in how it will be waged in each country. But a minimal agreement on the fact that we must engage in or prepare for armed struggle and that such struggle is linked with the destruction of the bourgeois state and the establishment of a new power is essential for cementing an international grouping. The fact that all parties are committed to at least try to launch a people's war creates a serious basis for discussion between them.

To summarize, our Party thinks that the basis of unity of a new international grouping should recognize: 1) MLM as the

science of revolution, 2) the continuation of class struggle under socialism, which necessitates the waging of cultural revolutions, and 3) the universality of protracted people's war, not only in principle but also in practice. At least, parties and organizations should be open to discuss point 3 and not condemn it a priori.

In addition to this, it is also necessary for Maoist parties and organizations and for a possible international center to not only uphold and defend MLM but to apply it in practice. Instead of trying to "surpass" MLM as the Avakianists pretend they are doing, the theoretical leap forward our movement should make is to use MLM to better analyze and understand the current context in which we are trying to unleash and spread the world revolution. We should analyze and develop a more comprehensive and common understanding of the political economy of the world imperialist system; of the current contradictions at the international level and of the relationships between the world contradictions and the internal contradictions in a given country or region; of the development of capitalism in the so-called "emerging economies" such as India and Brazil and its impact on the world revolution; of the challenges posed by the development of new techniques of imperialist warfare currently experienced in different parts of the world; etc. These are the kind of theoretical developments that will enable our movement to make leaps forward.

At the same time, supporting people's war currently going on remains crucial for any revolutionary party or regional or international grouping. We already referred to the role the campaign to defend the life of Chairman Gonzalo played in building the revolutionary movement in Nepal. The great uprising of May 1968 in France was preceded and certainly prepared by the important movement in support to the Vietnamese people that spread for a few years in that country.

Any attempt to re-establish a new genuinely internationalist

grouping should leave room for parties and organizations that lead people's war or are really working to wage it. The contribution of parties like the Communist Party of the Philippines and the CPI (Maoist) is absolutely necessary for an international center to become more than a name on a paper.

For our part, we reaffirm our bold commitment to advancing the revolutionary struggle in Canada as part of the proletarian world revolution, to proletarian internationalism and the process of regrouping the various Maoist forces at the international level.

– March 2014 (slightly updated in April 2016)

Towards a New General Line of the International Communist Movement

The PCR-RCP (Canada) does not believe that it is the purview of a single party to put forward a General Line for the International Communist Movement. Rather, there must be principled debate between comrades from different parties and organizations to jointly elaborate what would be the General Line of the ICM. This contribution briefly introduces the main questions we think our movement should address and summarizes our current approach in face of them.

What should be the objective of a General Line for the ICM?

A General Line should articulate the political principles upon which there can be unity amongst revolutionary forces. It should give parties and organizations around the world a general political direction and analysis of the path of revolution and revolutionary struggle. Such General Line must be creatively applied to each country's own particular situation and contradiction. We believe

that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism must be the basic principle upon which a general line for the ICM can be developed.

We believe that the 1963 “Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement”; the 1984 RIM declaration; and the 1993 RIM document, “Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism!” should guide our efforts. However, these documents in of themselves are insufficient and necessitate the development of a new General Line for the ICM due to the concrete changes that the world has undergone, and the political developments in the ICM, especially the experience of people’s wars in Peru, Nepal, Turkey, Philippines and India.

The era of national liberation is largely completed, however, the persisting forms of neo-colonialism and semi-colonialism continue to emphasize the need for New Democratic Revolution in the majority of the world today.

There are two main tendencies in the world today: New Democratic Revolution in the neo-colonial and semi-colonial countries, and socialist revolution in the imperialist countries.

It must be understood that communism is not “inevitable”—in the sense that it would emerge from the sole development of objective conditions without any influence of subjective factors. It must be struggled for everyday.

What are the basic contradictions in the world today?

There are three basic contradictions in today’s world: 1) The contradiction between the imperialist countries and the oppressed peoples; 2) the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; and 3) the contradictions between imperialist countries.

We believe that the third contradiction, whilst important, is less important than the other two basic contradictions.

In the 1963 “Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement”, a fourth contradiction was mentioned: the contradiction between the socialist camp and the capitalist camp. We believe that this contradiction no longer exists today as there remain no socialist countries. This does not mean to suggest that this contradiction will not reappear in the future with the success of revolutions.

What is the relationship between contradictions at the global level and contradictions at a national level?

The main contradiction at the global level is between the imperialist countries and the oppressed peoples. Revolutionary forces in the imperialist countries should give support to the oppressed peoples through the sharpening of contradiction between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the proletariat in any given imperialist country. Their role is not simply ‘cheerleading’ anti-imperialist struggles in the oppressed countries.

Revolutionaries in imperialist countries should develop new proletarian initiatives to advance the class struggle in all spheres of work. They must apply revolutionary defeatism, i.e. fighting for the defeat of their own ruling class and supporting genuine revolutionary and popular forces that are fighting against it.

It is important to understand that the main contradiction at the global level has an important influence on the contradictions within a given country, and vice versa. It is also important to understand that the contradictions within a given country have their own dynamics and development semi-autonomously from the global main contradiction.

We believe that the contradiction between imperialist and oppressed countries has taken a new additional form to the economic and political, i.e. environmental destruction. Revolu-

tionaries around the world can no longer seek to reproduce the industrialization and consumption patterns that have characterized the imperialist countries. The New Democratic Revolution in the oppressed countries must take environmental sustainability as a core principle in its break from semi-feudalism. Similarly in the imperialist countries, the socialist revolution has to take seriously the environmental disaster that is being wrought by imperialist consumption and exploitation, and in the process of raising political consciousness of the proletariat must develop new environmentally sustainable forms of political, social and economic organization.

What is the balance of forces in the world today?

The USA is the main imperialist power in the world today. However, the European Union, Russia and China are growing imperialist powers that are coming into increasingly sharpened contradiction with the USA, especially Russia and China in the foreseeable future.

Even though the imperialists are paper tigers because of the contradictions inherent to capitalism and imperialism, their concrete political and organizational strength should not be understated at a national or local level.

While we should not reject the possibility of a World War III, the current situation is characterized by a permanent state of imperialist wars.

The balance of forces is unfavourable to revolution on a subjective level, but is increasingly favourable on an objective level. It can no longer be decisively said that revolution is the main trend in the world today. Revolutionary forces around the world remain politically, ideologically and organizationally weak.

There exist huge mass movements in the world today; how-

ever, most of the time, revolutionary forces do not lead them, and instead petit bourgeois or even bourgeois elements lead them. The mass movements led by the CPI(Maoist) and the Communist Party of the Philippines in particular are of great inspiration to revolutionaries around the world.

There is a strong desire amongst the working classes and peasantry for revolution; however, this desire has not been realized because of the subjective weaknesses that exist.

What are the main forces for the revolution in the world right now?

The global contradictions are sharpest in Africa, Asia and Latin America; thus, it is the majority of the world who has the greatest potential to become storm centers for worldwide revolution.

The most advanced experience of revolutionary struggle since 1976 have been in Peru, Nepal, the Philippines, and India. However, the PPW's in Peru and Nepal in particular have suffered great setbacks in the past decade.

The peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America comprise the main force of the revolution today.

The leading force is the worldwide proletariat under the leadership of their revolutionary parties. Amongst the leading force of the worldwide revolution those parties that are already engaged in PPW or are taking advanced steps towards PPW are the vanguard of the leading force.

What is the effect of this balance of forces on the revolutionary forces?

The existing balance of forces has caused ideological and political confusion in the ICM. It is thus incumbent on all revolutionaries to engage in study and ideological line struggle to arrive at a

principled ideological unity. Thus, we believe that revolutionaries must reject the following perspectives:

- The perspective that the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, or imperialism against the oppressed peoples can be resolved through any other means than armed revolution. This armed revolution takes the general form of PPW, although with particular national characteristics. The building of a new power requires the destruction of the old state. As pillars of bourgeois democracy, parliamentarism and bourgeois elections must be rejected by proletarian revolutionaries.
- The perspective that the ever increasing sharpening contradictions inherent to capitalism will be resolved through a revolution solely on the basis of an economic crisis. It is only through New Democratic and socialist revolution that these contradictions will be resolved.
- The perspective that revolutionaries in their struggle against US imperialism should strategically support other imperialist powers or reactionary regimes. It is important to note that this does not mean that tactical support cannot or should not be offered; however, this must accord with the goals of proletarian revolution.
- In the imperialist countries, Maoist parties and organizations must break with the classic “insurrectionist” strategy and work hard to apply protracted people’s war strategy to their concrete conditions.
- While it remains possible and necessary to use any legal possibilities to accumulate forces, but revolutionaries should concretely and strategically prepare for armed struggle and people’s war.

What are the concrete problems facing the International Communist Movement?

Among those certainly are:

- The absence of Maoist parties in the vast majority of countries.
- Not enough reflections on the new challenges in the class struggle in the current context: parties and organizations should not only uphold MLM on paper but apply and develop it in practice.
- Too much “cyber-Maoists” and not enough militants on the ground building the party, the army, the mass movements and the revolutionary organs of people’s power.

What problems are posed in light of revisionism in the USSR and China? And the setbacks in Peru, Nepal, etc.?

The triumph of revisionism in USSR and China and the setbacks of PPW in Peru and Nepal all underline, in their own way, the fact that Right opportunism and social democracy remain the main danger facing the ICM.

There should be no confusion between diplomatic relations of a revolutionary state or embryonic state, party-to-party relations and the building of revolutionary alliances at the anti-imperialist level, which are three distinct tasks or levels of activities that any revolutionary movement approaching the conquest of power must undertake. There can be no question of any permanent or stable state of “pacific coexistence” with the imperialists and bourgeoisie.

Socialism must not be seen as a mode of production but as a transitional period between capitalism and communism during which class struggle continues and remains antagonistic. During this whole period, the main task of revolutionaries and the dictatorship of the proletariat is to fight against capitalist relations and prepare for communism and the dissolution of the state apparatus.

In the imperialist countries, there is no intermediate stage between capitalism and socialism. In the countries oppressed by imperialism, there is no intermediate or “preparatory” bourgeois stage before the New Democratic Revolution, contrary to the revisionist line upheld by Prachanda-Bhattarai.

Problems of building socialism are not mainly related to the formal existence of a single or multi-party regime: above all, it is a question of having the masses organized, waging class struggle against the bourgeoisie, destroying old social relations and breaking with the old ideas. The party must exercise its ideological and political leadership by leading the masses in that process and not by any formal proclamation or institutionalization of its leading role.

What are the concrete tasks for revolutionaries around the world right now?

Our party humbly suggests that revolutionaries undertake these tasks:

- To build the three main tools of the revolution, i.e. revolutionary party, revolutionary army and a united front of revolutionary classes.
- To lead and transform the people’s consciousness and resistance towards revolution.

- To create the conditions for building a unified center of Maoist parties and organizations. This requires both ideological struggle and concrete support and solidarity between them (unity-struggle-unity), while respecting autonomy and independence of each of them.
- The building of a genuine anti-imperialist front with a revolutionary leadership at the helm.
- The building of joint mass campaigns against the imprisonment of political prisoners, and against Operation Green Hunt and Oplan Bayanihan.
- The production of an ideological journal, in which parties can engage in debate and dialogue about issues confronting the ICM, and give reports about joint activities, etc., could play an important role in creating the kind of unity the movement needs to establish a new international center.

— May 2014 (slightly updated in April 2016)