

The Marxist-Leninist Party

Historical

The international experience of the world's working class has shown conclusively that socialism can only be achieved under the leadership of a Marxist-Leninist Party.

After the Socialist Revolution in Russia the name of 'Communist Party' signified a Marxist-Leninist party, but that is by no means the situation today since revisionism became dominant in Russia and China.

When Lenin and Stalin wrote and talked of the Party, it was in the sense of a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary party, whose aim was the overthrow of capitalism and the achievement of Communism. That is fundamentally still the sense in which we speak of the Party in what follows.

Despite heroic efforts by the British workers in the Chartist movement of the 1830s and the 1840s, the French workers in a number of revolutions including 1849, 1851 and the great Paris Commune of 1871, and also of the German workers in their struggles against the anti-Socialist law of 1878-1890, internationally the workers were unable to achieve the state-wide overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism during the nineteenth century, although the Paris Commune was able to hold on to workers' power in the French capital for six weeks.

In the earlier part of the century an essential ingredient of success was lacking - the existence of a scientific theory of revolution. This was developed only with the work of Marx and Engels. And in the latter part of the century imperialism was already on the rise, enormously expanding the suppressive apparatus of the military-bureaucratic state machine and at the same time creating a labour aristocracy in the main capitalist countries as the social basis for an opportunist, anti-revolutionary trend which came to dominate the labour movements of Western Europe. With the notable exception of the Bolshevik Party under Lenin's leadership, all the social-democratic and so-called 'socialist' parties of Europe collaborated with their imperialist governments and supported the first imperialist World War. Nearly all the leaders of such parties, with a few notable exceptions such as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany, had buried the teachings of Marx and Engels on the necessity of socialist revolution and the forcible overthrow of capitalism embodied in their writings on the state. As for the British Labour Party, from the beginning it was a bourgeois party with no attachment to Marxism, as also has been its counterpart, the New Zealand Labour Party.

Thus it was that despite the existence of a revolutionary situation throughout Europe on the outbreak of World War I and for several years after it, only in Russia was the proletariat able to seize political power and build a socialist society. For only in Russia did a genuine revolutionary socialist party exist, one capable of winning the entire working class to the banner of socialist revolution and forging a revolutionary class alliance with the mass of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie to establish a lasting dictatorship of the proletariat. Elsewhere the parliamentary parties of social democracy became willing tools of the capitalists and landowners. In Germany

they aided the officer corps loyal to imperialism in forcibly suppressing the developing revolution.

Historically, the Bolshevik Party, built by Lenin was actually a party of a new type, precisely such as was needed by the workers in the epoch of imperialism.

Leninism, Its Role in History

We have in previous pamphlets pointed out that imperialism is a special stage of capitalism, 'the highest stage', Lenin called it. It is:

Capitalism in that stage of development in which the domination of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the partition of all the territories of the globe among the great capitalist powers has been completed. ¹

The breaking away of many countries from direct colonial or semi-colonial rule by the big imperialist powers has been one of the important developments in world affairs since Lenin. But the fundamental economic, political and social character of imperialism remains: it is moribund, parasitic capitalism in which political reaction all along the line is a dominant feature, arising from its essential nature.

In his lectures on The Foundations of Leninism, Stalin correctly defined Leninism as

Marxism of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution. To be more exact, Leninism is the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution in general, the theory and tactics of the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular. ²

The fact that Leninism evolved in Russia rather than elsewhere was due to that country being the focus of the major contradictions of imperialism: the contradiction between capital and labour; that between the major, capitalist, oppressor countries ruled by the monopolies, and the weaker or less-developed countries they exploited and plundered; and that between the imperialists (i.e. the monopoly capitalists) of one country or group of countries and those of another country or group of countries. All of these contradictions reached an extreme level of intensity in Russia, were sharper there than elsewhere. Besides which there existed in Russia a brutally oppressive, feudal-type autocracy, a vital prop of Western imperialism, which meant that legal possibilities for developing a proletarian revolutionary socialist party were vanishingly small.

The Party of A New Type

Such conditions of which we have spoken required a party quite different in character from the old-type social-democratic parties of the West, which relied on parliamentarism, trade unionism and the development of co-operatives as their main activities. These parties were formed and developed during the relatively peaceful period of the heyday of the Second International, the organisation of European socialist parties, most of whose leaders became representatives of the

labour aristocracy, corrupted and bought out of the super profits derived from imperialist exploitation of the colonies. With the exception of a few, typified by German Marxists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (both murdered on the social-democratic government instructions by army officers while in police custody), they paid lip service to Marxism, advocated peaceful transition to socialism and collaborated with the capitalist class. Such people were quite unfitted to lead the working class in proletarian revolutionary struggle against imperialism. For this, what was needed was a party of a new type, a party of the Leninist type, one which took the question of proletarian revolution seriously, which upheld the revolutionary ideology of Marxism and fought against the deep-seated opportunism of the parties of the Second International. It had to be a party which sought to prepare the working class and the toilers generally for the seizure of political power, for the smashing of the military-bureaucratic state machine and the setting up of working-class state power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, so as to construct a new, socialist social order. For these were the tasks facing the workers early in the epoch of imperialism and imperialist wars. They are fundamentally still the tasks facing the workers today.

In creating a party of a new type, Lenin carried on immense theoretical and practical-organisational work. The first phase of this work was the establishment of ideological unity on the basis of revolutionary Marxism, and required the carrying on of an intense struggle against opportunism and all other anti-working-class trends such as anarchism and other forms of petty-bourgeois revolutionism. Lenin carried on this work through his founding and editing of the newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark) in 1900. This paved the way for establishing organisational unity, for building a tightly-knit, disciplined Party organisation capable of carrying on both illegal (the main form) and legal work among the working class and the masses under the conditions imposed by the Tsarist autocracy.

From the beginning of this work, Lenin saw it as an integral part of the world revolution which necessitated leadership of the class struggle internationally by parties united around the ideology of Marxism and organised for revolution. He never shifted from this standpoint. In his article on the Tactics of the R.C.P.(B), a Report Delivered at the Third Congress of the Communist International, July 5, 1921, he said:

When we started the international revolution we did so not because we were convinced that we could foretell its development, but because a number of circumstances compelled us to start it. We thought: Either the international revolution comes to our assistance, and in that case our victory will be fully assured, or we shall do our modest revolutionary work in the conviction that even in the event of defeat we shall have served the cause of the revolution, and that our experience will benefit other revolutions.³

In the chapter headed 'The Party' in his *Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin contrasts the pre-revolutionary period of more or less peaceful development with the new period of open class collisions, the period of imperialism, when the proletariat is confronted with directly revolutionary tasks which required the reorganising of all Party work on new, revolutionary lines. He writes:

To think that these new tasks can be performed by the old Social-Democratic parties, brought up as they were in the peaceful conditions of parliamentarism is to doom oneself to hopeless despair, to inevitable defeat ... Hence the necessity for a new party, a militant party, a revolutionary party, one bold enough to lead the proletarians in the struggle for power, sufficiently experienced to find its bearings amidst the complex conditions of a revolutionary situation and sufficiently flexible to steer clear of all submerged rocks in the path to its goal. ⁴

What were the requirements and characteristic features of a party of a new type, capable of conducting an all-sided, life-and-death struggle for socialism under the conditions not only of Tsarism but of the new epoch of imperialism? These were formulated by Lenin in the midst of revolutionary work and intense class struggle. Their correctness was repeatedly tested in practice in the years leading up to the socialist revolution and beyond, and were found precisely to answer the needs of the proletariat not only in Russia itself, but internationally. They were summarised and lucidly expounded by J. Stalin in his chapter on 'The Party', in 'Foundations of Leninism'. However, we must say here that one formulation (of the sixth basic feature) leaves something to be desired, for the reason that it can be used to give theoretical justification for arbitrariness. We shall have more to say on this aspect when we come to it. What are the specific features of this new Party? Stalin deals with them in the following order:

Specific Features of a Leninist Party

1) The Party as the advanced detachment of the working class

The Party is not simply any detachment, but an advanced detachment of the class, made up of its best and most advanced elements, a detachment armed with Marxist-Leninist theory so that it is capable of acting as the General Staff of the working class, giving leadership to the class and the masses in the most complicated conditions of struggle. Without revolutionary theory, a knowledge of the laws of the movement and of the revolution, the Party would be incapable of directing the struggle of the proletariat.

The Party cannot be a real party if it limits itself to registering what the masses of the working class feel and think, if it drags at the tail of the spontaneous movement, if it is unable to overcome the inertia and the political indifference of the spontaneous movement, if it is unable to rise above the momentary interests of the proletariat, if it is unable to raise the masses to the level of understanding the class interests of the proletariat. ⁵

In other words, the Party must be a leading force, a vanguard, not a rearguard. The Party must be inseparably bound up with the working class, tied to it with every fibre of its being. But its level of consciousness and activity must be above that of the class as a whole in order to lead it. Lenin wrote;

To forget the distinction between the vanguard and the whole of the masses gravitating towards it, to forget the vanguard's constant duty of raising ever wider sections to its own advanced level, means simply to deceive oneself, to shut one's eyes to the immensity of our tasks, and to narrow down these tasks. ⁶

This distinction of which Lenin speaks must not be allowed to widen into a gap, otherwise the Party would lose moral and political credit among the masses and they would not accept its leadership.

2) The Party as the organised detachment of the working class.

To really direct the workers' class struggle the Party must not only be the advanced detachment, but the organised detachment of its class. Its tasks are complex; it has to master difficult conditions; it has to know when to go on to the offensive and when to retreat, to protect the proletarian forces from the enemy's blows. To accomplish its tasks it must itself be organised, be the embodiment of discipline and organisation in order to imbue the masses with these same qualities. It must, in consequence, be an organised whole; it must have a system of authority within the Party, 'with higher and lower leading bodies, with subordination of the minority to the majority, with practical decisions binding on all members of the Party,' all expressing the principle of directing work from a Party centre.

This concept of a tightly-organised, disciplined party was fought for by Lenin, particularly at the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, as the Marxist-oriented workers' party was known at that time (1903). During the Congress (which Lenin analysed in his book *One Step Forward*) the ideological and political opportunism of some of the Menshevik delegates became concentrated around the question of organisation, namely the first paragraph of the Party Rules. Lenin's formulation required members to belong to an organisation of the Party. The Menshevik Martov opposed this with a formulation that would allow any high school student, professor, sympathiser or striker to be entitled to call himself a Party member. Lenin strongly opposed this idea of 'self-enrolment', of an amorphous group instead of an organised whole, as obliterating the distinction between class and party. Had the Party adopted Martov's formulation it could never have led the working class to a successful revolution. (Actually, from this Congress on, a split took place between Bolsheviks (majority) and Mensheviks (minority) in which the Bolsheviks became, for all practical purposes, a separate party.

Lenin also condemned the wavering elements who were not prepared to accept the system of authority within the Party, and described their attacks on it as 'aristocratic anarchism'.

It should be noted here that the Communist (Third) International set up after World War I under Lenin's guidance had as one of its Conditions of Affiliation (written by Lenin) the following clause on Party organisation:

13) The parties affiliated to the Communist International must be built up on the principle of democratic centralism. In the present epoch of acute civil war the Communist Party will be able to perform its duty only if it is organised in the most centralised manner, only if iron discipline bordering on military discipline prevails in it, and if its party centre is a powerful organ of authority, enjoying wide powers and the general confidence of the members of the Party.⁷

Democratic centralism means a combination of central direction of the Party with the principle of election of all Party bodies. In Russia itself this did not and could not become the rule in the

Bolshevik Party until the Sixth Party Congress in July, 1917, for the very good reason that the Party had to be formed and operate illegally up to the end of Tsarism in 1917. Illegality forced limitations on democracy. Congresses and Conferences were held either abroad or underground. Nevertheless Lenin always sought to achieve the maximum of democracy possible in all circumstances. The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) published in 1939 in English (and therefore not the revisionist 'History' written in Khrushchev's time) which was a veritable handbook for study in all Communist Parties for many years says:

Of course, as under the Tsarist autocracy the Party existed illegally, the Party organisations could not in those days be built up on the principle of election from below, and as a consequence the Party had to be strictly conspiratorial. But Lenin considered that this temporary feature in the life of our Party would at once lapse with the elimination of Tsardom, when the Party organisations would be built up on the principles of democratic elections, of democratic centralism. ⁸

From their opportunist standpoint the Mensheviks placed little importance on the organisation of the Party as a weapon to achieve the revolution. The real importance of such organisation is emphasised by the prophetic words concluding One Step Forward:

In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organisation. Disunited by the rule of anarchic competition in the bourgeois world, ground down by forced labour for capital, constantly thrust back to the 'lower depths' of utter destitution, savagery and degeneration, the proletariat can become, and inevitably will become, an invincible force only when its ideological unification by the principles of Marxism is consolidated by the material unity of an organisation which will weld millions of toilers into an army of the working class. Neither the decrepit rule of Russian Tsardom nor the senile rule of international capital will be able to withstand this army. ⁹

3) The Party as the highest form of class organisation of the proletariat.

In most countries the proletariat has a variety of organisations. At the time of writing, in New Zealand there are mainly the trade unions and unemployed workers' organisations, but at various times there have been co-operatives, youth and women's organisations, and there will be again. In Russia there were many more, including parliamentary organisations, press, cultural and educational organisations, especially the Soviets.

Under socialism some of those organisations would directly adhere to the Party. Under capitalism, there is a constant struggle to win support in them, for the Party cannot achieve real leadership in the working class without having the leadership and the confidence of the non-Party organisations. 'Without them it would be impossible to consolidate the class positions of the proletariat in the diverse spheres of struggle; for without them it would be impossible to steel the proletariat as the force whose mission it is to replace the bourgeois order by the socialist order... These organisations should work in one direction for they serve one class, the class of proletarians.' ¹⁰ And only the Party has the necessary qualifications to exercise overall leadership in non-Party organisations, not by means of any official subordination of other groups, but precisely because it is a rallying centre for the finest members of the class, because its experience

and prestige make it the only body capable of giving centralised leadership to the workers' struggle in the fight for their basic class interests.

(It should be noted that in the world Communist movement as it developed, Communist parties did not always adhere to this requirement. Often, lacking correct leadership and understanding of the role of the Party, individualism became common, and some members became 'just' trade unionists, cultural workers, youth workers etc. In such cases, the main fault lay with the leadership for disregarding this essential feature, i.e., that the Party is the highest form of class organisation).

Stalin was obviously familiar with this tendency in the international movement both before and after the revolution, declaring:

That is why the opportunist theory of the 'independence' and 'neutrality' of the non-Party organisations, which breeds independent members of parliament and journalists isolated from the Party, narrow-minded trade union leaders and philistine co-operative officials, is wholly incompatible with the theory and practice of Leninism.¹¹

4) The Party as the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Party is not an end in itself, though it guides the proletarian class struggle. Besides being the highest form of class organisation, it is 'an instrument in the hands of the proletariat for achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat when that has not been achieved, and for consolidating and expanding the dictatorship where it has already been achieved.'¹²

Lenin emphasised in Left-Wing Communism that the Bolsheviks could not have held power without maintaining iron discipline, without having the unstinting support of all the best elements in the working class, capable of influencing and leading the masses.

It is the role of the Party not only to lead the workers in class struggle, but to imbue them with discipline and organisation, without which it is impossible for them to overthrow such an enemy as imperialism. The Party cannot fulfill this role unless in itself it is the embodiment of these qualities. As well, it has to educate and remould the petty-bourgeois strata and to act as a bulwark against their vacillating and indisciplined habits once it has won power. Only a party with iron discipline and steeled in the struggle can accomplish this task in addition to the others. That is why the Party regards itself as an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But when the state withers away during the period in which classes are abolished on an international scale, so too the instrument of the proletarian state will wither away.

The foregoing is the Leninist point of view on the role of the Party in the state. But Khrushchev distorted and perverted this teaching. Asserting that the Soviet Union had no class antagonisms, that it had fully built socialism and was in the stage of building communism, he declared in speeches and reports from 1956 on that what existed in the USSR was not the dictatorship of the proletariat but the state of the whole people, not an instrument for maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat. He removed many thousands of solid proletarians in the Party apparatus particularly in the Central Committee, and replaced them with petty-bourgeois and new-

bourgeois elements. Thus he paved the way for the revisionist degeneration of the CPSU and those parties and groups that followed the CPSU line. Thus he prepared the ground for the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. The wholesale denigration of Stalin played a major role in this process.

5) The Party as the embodiment of unity of will, unity incompatible with the existence of factions.

To achieve the complete unity of will and action which are essential for the conscious, iron discipline needed in a proletarian revolutionary party, factions and factionalism cannot be permitted. This does not mean that there cannot be criticism and differences of opinion in the Party, and that 'blind' discipline must prevail. On the contrary, iron discipline is voluntary, conscious discipline and presupposes the discussion and criticism of different opinions. But once such discussion is concluded and a decision is reached, that decision is binding and unity of will and action must be the rule (but always, we may add, within the framework of democratic centralism, where the decisions of higher Party bodies take precedence over those of lower Party bodies).

It is liberalism to permit freedom of factions. (A faction is an organised group within the Party, with its own programme, tactics and discipline opposed to those of the Party). Factions lead to the existence of different centres instead of one centre, with a consequent undermining of that unity and discipline which is essential both for the achievement and upholding of the dictatorship of the proletariat. When Trotsky and others organised factions to further their independent views after the Revolution, they were unhesitatingly opposed by Lenin, who fought at the Tenth Party Congress (1921) for the dissolution of factions and their prohibition on pain of expulsion from the Party. Such a resolution was passed by the Congress.

6) The Party becomes strong by purging itself of opportunist elements.

The proletariat is not walled off from other classes in society. Its numbers are constantly increased by members of the petty bourgeoisie, by intellectuals, and by peasants or small farmers forced into the ranks of the proletariat by the operation of the economic laws of capitalism. Also, elements of the labour aristocracy exist within it. 'This stratum of bourgeoisified workers, or the "labour aristocracy"', says Lenin, 'who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and, in our days, the principal social (not military) prop of the bourgeoisie. For they are real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class..., real channels of reformism and chauvinism'.¹³

Elements of all these petty-bourgeois groupings find their way into the Party, introduce a spirit of hesitation and opportunism into it. They are the main source of factionalism and disruption from within. It is impossible to fight imperialism successfully without removing these opportunist elements from the Party's ranks in good time.

We now come to a formulation whose opening statement we consider runs counter to Leninism. Here is what Stalin actually says:

The theory of ‘defeating’ opportunist elements by ideological struggle within the Party, the ‘theory’ of overcoming these elements within the confines of a single party, is a rotten and dangerous theory, which threatens to condemn the Party to paralysis and chronic infirmity, threatens to make the Party a prey to opportunism, threatens to leave the proletariat without a revolutionary party, threatens to deprive the proletariat of its main weapon in the fight against imperialism ... Our Party succeeded in achieving internal unity and unexampled cohesion of its ranks primarily because it was able in good time to purge itself of the opportunist pollution, because it was able to rid its ranks of the liquidators and Mensheviks. Proletarian parties develop and become strong by purging themselves of opportunist and reformist, social-imperialists and social-chauvinists, social patriots and social pacifists.

The Party becomes stronger by purging itself of opportunist elements. ¹⁴

The shortcoming of this formulation lies in its opening statement: ‘The theory of defeating opportunist elements by ideological struggle within the Party ... is a rotten and dangerous theory’. This is tantamount to advocating the elimination of ideological struggle as a means of solving contradictions within the Party.

It is certainly necessary for the Party to purge itself of opportunist elements. At the end of the chapter on ‘The Party’, Stalin uses the following quote from Lenin:

With reformists, Mensheviks in our ranks’, says Lenin, ‘it is impossible to be victorious in the proletarian revolution, it is impossible to defend it. That is obvious in principle, and it has been strikingly confirmed by the experience of both Russia and Hungary ... In Russia, difficult situations have arisen many times, when the Soviet regime would most certainly have been overthrown had Mensheviks, reformists and petty-bourgeois democrats remained in our Party ... In Italy, where, as is generally admitted, decisive battles between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie for the possession of state power are imminent. At such a moment it is not only absolutely necessary to remove the Mensheviks, reformists, the Turatists from the Party, but it may even be useful to remove excellent Communists who are liable to waver, and who reveal a tendency to waver towards ‘unity’ with the reformists, to remove them from all responsible posts ... On the eve of a revolution, and at a moment when a most fierce struggle is being waged for its victory, the slightest wavering in the ranks of the Party may wreck everything, frustrate the revolution, wrest the power from the hands of the proletariat; for this power is not yet consolidated, the attack upon it is still very strong. The desertion of wavering leaders at such a time does not weaken but strengthens the Party, the working-class movement and the revolution. ¹⁵

All this is perfectly clear, and no one would dispute it who sought to build a Party of the Leninist type. But Lenin’s formulation by no means excludes ideological struggle within the Party in order to expose opportunists and reformists and to remove them from the Party’s ranks. And in fact Lenin conducted many such ideological struggles against people who became reformists or leant towards reformism, as, for instance, against the ‘Liquidators,’ a grouping which sought to liquidate the illegal Party apparatus and confine the Party solely to legal work, and against the ‘Otzovists’, a grouping which opposed all legal work, thereby endangering the underground

organisation by depriving it of legal cover. He also conducted struggles against waverers. In the same article on the Italian Socialist Party just quoted, Lenin writes of how, on the eve of the October Revolution,

... prominent Bolsheviks and Communists, such as Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov, Nogin and Milyutin, wavered and expressed the fear that the Bolsheviks were isolating themselves excessively, were taking too much risk in heading for an uprising, and were too unyielding in their attitude towards a certain section of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. The conflict became so acute that these comrades demonstratively resigned from all responsible posts in Party and Government, to the great glee of the enemies of the Soviet revolution ... But a few weeks later - at the most a few months all these comrades realised their mistake and returned to their posts, some of the most responsible in the Party and the Soviets. ¹⁶

But then we cannot ignore the fact that at a crucial moment in the Revolution, Stalin himself also wavered. This was while the German army was overrunning Russia in February, 1918. The Germans were demanding from the Soviet Government a reply within 48 hours to their offer of peace terms. Needless to say, these were extremely onerous.

At a meeting of the Party's Central Committee on February 23 Lenin called for the terms to be accepted. A majority of the Central Committee opposed him. Lenin denounced their policy of 'revolutionary phrases,' and threatened to resign from the Central Committee and the Government if the terms were not accepted. According to the minutes, Lenin said:

Some have reproached me for coming out with an ultimatum. I put it as a last resort. It is a mockery for our Central Committee members to talk of an international civil war. There is a civil war in Russia, but not in Germany. Our agitation remains. We are agitating not by words, but by the revolution. That too remains. Stalin is wrong when he says that we need not sign. These terms must be signed. If you don't sign them, you will sign the Soviet power's death warrant within three weeks. ¹⁷

After Lenin's criticism Stalin went over to supporting Lenin, and that gave a majority for acceptance.

The point is not so much aimed at showing inconsistency by Stalin (although unquestionably he wavered), but to show that Lenin had to wage fierce ideological struggle to win over waverers on a question of life or death for the revolution, yet he made no attempt to use organisational measures against the opposition.

After Lenin's death, Trotsky campaigned against Lenin's basic policies, particularly opposing the possibility of building socialism in one country, while at the same time he tried to falsely assume the mantle of Lenin as the real leader of the Socialist revolution.

Stalin between 1924 and 1927 waged a correct, lengthy ideological battle against Trotsky and his adherents. In a series of closely-reasoned and thoroughly-substantiated theoretical works (which included political reports to the 13th, 14th and 15th Party Conferences), Stalin completely

demolished Trotskyism theoretically and showed it to be an anti-Leninist and anti-Marxist trend. Some of his main works in this period were: Trotskyism or Leninism?; The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists; Concerning Questions of Leninism; The Social-Democratic Deviation in our Party and, referring to the latter, 'Reply to the Discussion on the Report on the Social-Democratic Deviation in Our Party' (A Report to the Executive Committee Plenum of the Communist International); and 'The Trotskyist Opposition Before and Now'.

At the end of this ideological-political polemic against Trotsky, the latter had absolutely no status left, either within the Party or amongst the workers, as a Marxist or Leninist, or in fact as a Party member, and the Party was united in supporting his expulsion. [All of the above-mentioned works can be found in the volume *On the Opposition (1921-1927)* by J.V.Stalin, published in the People's Republic of China in 1974 by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking.]¹⁸

Stalin, in fact, earned tremendous popularity among the Soviet workers and toiling people by his resolute defence of Leninism, of its ideological and political principles, and by the correctness of his leadership of the Soviet state. For in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties he organised the practical fulfilment of Lenin's plans for the construction of socialism in one country, and in particular the industrialisation of formerly backward Russia through a succession of 5-year plans, showing that planned development, impossible under capitalism, was possible under socialism; likewise the collectivisation of agriculture against the hostility of the rich peasants, or kulaks, who resorted to civil war rather than give up their right of exploitation of poor peasant labour.

We are not concerned at the present moment with giving an extended evaluation of Stalin's role. More will be said on this subject in a later pamphlet. The bourgeoisie and the Soviet revisionists are still making such a to-do about Stalin that one is reluctant to indulge in any criticism of him. Imagine, international capital is so sympathetic to communism and to the revolutionary Party of Lenin and Stalin (destroyed by Khrushchev, Brezhnev et al), that they are shedding oceans of tears over Communists unjustly treated, over Stalin's faults. One could almost take them for real, though they are no more than crocodile tears, for every word they utter is shot through with hypocrisy.

Nevertheless, Stalin had his shortcomings. One of them, which gradually became increasingly serious, was the resort to arbitrary brushing aside of criticism or opposition within the Party. In fact, towards the later stages of his life, simple disagreement on a question was likely to be a dangerous matter. The formulation we have criticised rejecting inner-Party ideological struggle gave theoretical justification for such arbitrariness.

It is true that after October, 1917, numerous opportunists joined the Party, jumping on the victorious bandwagon for personal advancement. Lenin while he lived called for the purging of such people from the Party. Stalin also faced this problem, and it is possible that this fact influenced his formulation in the 'Foundations' concerning ideological struggle. However, it is an objective fact of life that contradictions continually arise within the Party, not only the contradictions of ideas, theories, plans and programmes with objective reality, not only contradictions between the old and the new which continuously require solving by the Party in the course of social development, but also contradictions of an ideological character, contradictions over policy and line in which deviations occur. To deal with such contradictions

without resorting to ideological struggle means to resort to incorrect methods, to organisational or administrative measures against this or that individual.

Such methods may appear useful short cuts in difficult situations, but they can grow - and in Stalin's case did grow - into arbitrariness which in time seriously affected Party development. They may bring about the appearance of surface unity, but underneath they lead to passivity, to the suppression of initiative, to slavishness and adulation instead of healthy criticism and self-criticism as the normal means of overcoming inner-Party differences. In Stalin's later years these factors were already slowing down Soviet development. However, the basic character of socialism as a superior system remained, but with bureaucratic distortions. Were it not for these latter, Khrushchev would never have been able to get away with his wholesale denigration of Stalin.

Mao Tse-tung, about whom more will be said in later pamphlets dealing with the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and China, says in his profound essay *On Contradiction*:

Opposition and struggle between ideas of different kinds constantly occur within the Party; this is a reflection within the Party of contradictions between classes and between the old and new in society. If there were no contradictions in the Party and no ideological struggles to resolve them, the Party's life would come to an end. ¹⁹

This is a correct view, fully consistent with materialist dialectics. Ideological struggle to overcome contradictions is the source of Party development. Stalin's formulation is wrong and harmful, and leads to stagnation. In Stalin's last years, all Central Committee decisions of any consequence were announced as being taken 'On the initiative of J.V.Stalin'.

We have spent some time on this question because of its importance as a fundamental aspect of the Party. Without contradiction, differences of opinion, ideological struggle, the Party's leading bodies are reduced to rubber stamps, with dangerous consequences.

As to the basic point of the sixth characteristic feature, the necessity of the Party's purging itself of opportunist elements, as we have said we take exception solely to the first part of Stalin's formulation which excludes the method of ideological struggle for this purpose. All else is sound and correct.

A Further Basic Feature

The six characteristics listed by Stalin and commented on above do not exhaust the essential features of the Party. Marxism-Leninism, as the science of society, does not stand still. New experiences of revolution and mass struggle have to be generalised and incorporated in basic theory, which includes the theory of the Party. 'Foundations of Leninism' was based on the experience of the Russian revolution and the international movement of the period. But beyond that time the Chinese revolution took place under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communist Party (the CPC).

[Of recent years a campaign of denigration against Mao has been waged by the Albanian Party-of Labour, begun by its leader, the late Enver Hoxha, who resorted to distortions of fact, sophistry and outright lies, rather similar in character to Khrushchev's campaign of denigration waged against Stalin. We will substantiate this charge more in a later pamphlet, merely noting here that Hoxha spoke much about the Chinese revolution and dialectics while knowing little about either subject. This is not to assert that Mao made no mistakes (as Hoxha claims in regard to Stalin). The shortcomings of Mao played a role in the capture of power by revisionism after his death. But as in the case of Stalin, Mao's positive achievements far outweighed his faults.]

The fact that the CPC was able, not only to unite the working-class vanguard to lead the revolution but was also able to unite hundreds of millions of Chinese by utilising the method of the 'mass line' testifies to its correctness as a method of work for a Marxist-Leninist party, and to its very great importance in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism. It leads us to the conclusion that a further essential feature is the following:

(7) The method of work used by the Party to win the vanguard and the masses of the people is that of the mass line.

The question of winning the masses is fundamental to Marxism-Leninism. Historical materialism, developed by Marx and Engels, regards the masses of the people as the real makers of world history. Individual leaders can be 'great' only to the extent that they correctly reflect the needs and aspirations of the mass of the people in each historical epoch.

Lenin fought for this concept against the Russian 'Narodniks', who asserted that 'great men' made history, and therefore to overthrow Tsarism it was only necessary to assassinate Tsars and Tsarist leaders. By consistent all-round struggle, the Bolsheviks thoroughly defeated Narodism as a trend in all fields: ideological, economic and political, and destroyed its influence among the working class and the masses.

The mass line method of the CPC also derived from the same Marxist concept followed by Lenin: 'The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history', wrote Mao in 1945.²⁰

The general content of the mass line method is given in the following well-known quotations from works by Mao Tse-tung:

(a) 'Twenty-four years of experience tell us that the right task, policy and style of work invariably conform with the demands of the masses at a given time and place and invariably strengthen our ties with the masses, and the wrong task, policy and style of work invariably disagree with the demands of the masses at a given time and place and invariably alienate us from the masses. The reason why such evils as dogmatism, empiricism, commandism, tailism, sectarianism, bureaucracy and an arrogant attitude in work are definitely harmful and intolerable, and why anyone suffering from these maladies must overcome them, is that they alienate us from the masses'.²¹

b) 'To link oneself with the masses, one must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses. All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well-intentioned'.²²

c) Take the ideas of the masses and concentrate them, then go to the masses, persevere in the ideas and carry them through, so as to form correct ideas of leadership - such is the basic method of leadership.²³

d) In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily 'From the masses, to the masses'. This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge'.²⁴

The last sentence should be particularly noted. The Marxist theory of knowledge is a scientific theory of how man acquires knowledge that is reliable, valid knowledge. Primarily, it is through the activity of the masses in the struggle for production during the course of history, through which man gradually acquires knowledge not only of the laws of nature but also of the relations between people and classes in society, repeatedly testing the correctness of developing knowledge through his social practice. This includes scientific experiment.

What is meant by the various errors referred to in quotation (a) above? They are all tendencies in the working-class and Communist movement which depart from and are opposed to the scientific outlook of Marx's dialectical materialism and the method of solving problems by applying it in practice.

Mao Tse-tung writes:

The Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism has two outstanding characteristics. One is its class nature: it openly avows that dialectical materialism is in the service of the proletariat. The other is its practicality: it emphasizes the dependence of theory on practice, emphasizes that theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice. The truth of any knowledge or theory is determined not by subjective feelings, but by objective results in social practice. Only social practice is the primary and basic standpoint in the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge.²⁵

Dogmatism and empiricism are different aspects of subjectivism, which is the neglect of deep, all-sided study of things or processes, the study of objective reality as it is, and instead, looking at things superficially and one-sidedly. Subjectivists see only a part and not the whole.

The error of dogmatism belittles practice and the necessity of learning from practice. In a letter to Sorge, Engels wrote that Marxism was not a dogma, but a guide to action, a statement

requoted often by Lenin. A dogma, in religion, is a completed, ready-made, immutable doctrine. In politics and ideology it is the same. Dogmatists try to overawe people with Marxist phrases torn out of context instead of using the Marxist method to study social practice and learn from it. Dogmatists in leading positions in the Communist Party of China caused immense harm to the Chinese revolution between 1931 and 1934 by relying only on foreign experience and rigid formulas instead of studying the concrete conditions of China and understanding what was specific to them.

Empiricists restrict themselves to their own experience and do not understand the importance of theory for revolutionary practice or see the revolution as a whole; they work blindly but industriously. They don't understand Lenin's statement: Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement, nor do they know how to integrate theory with practice.

Commandism is more or less self-explanatory. As a method of work it replaces explanation, analysis and discussion of tasks or problems by ordering people around. It reflects the disease of impetuosity because it oversteps the level of political consciousness of the masses and violates the principle of voluntary mass action. It is an error which can be avoided by going among the masses and making investigations.

Tailism is, giving no leadership but following at the tail of a movement, waiting to see what position the masses take up spontaneously before doing or saying anything. Opportunists, revisionists, social democrats and 'leaders' of the Labour Party type are almost invariably tailists.

Sectarianism is a form of subjectivism in that it ignores the views of the workers and the masses and is therefore a tendency to run on ahead of the objective situation without taking the masses into account. Sectarianism results in those who practice it isolating themselves from the mass movement and acting as a small sect, separated from the masses and hence incapable of leading them forward.

Bureaucracy is the practice of standing over and above the mass of the working people by virtue of being in an official position. Bureaucratic state officials under capitalism are frequently full of arrogance and contempt in their treatment of working people whom they regard as inferiors over whom they have mastery. Under socialism, a consistent long-term struggle has to be waged against it as a bourgeois heritage of capitalism. But bureaucracy can also exist in the Party as a result of some leaders considering themselves above the rank and file, and not bound by the same Party rules. Also it can manifest itself in disregard both for the content and forms of inner-Party democracy in regard to collective decision-making and collective discussion of policy and tactics.

A Practical Method of Work

The mass line method can and should be applied in all fields of party work among the masses, whether it be work on the job, in a trade union or in any people's organisation. The task in the first instance is that of learning from the masses in order to combine learning with leading. Mao points out the general method of leadership applicable in all spheres of work:

The masses in any given place are generally composed of three parts, the relatively active, the intermediate and the relatively backward. The leaders must therefore be skilled in uniting the small number of active elements around the leadership and must rely on them to raise the level of the intermediate elements and to win over the backward elements. A leading group that is genuinely united and linked with the masses can be formed only gradually in the process of mass struggle and not in isolation from it. ²⁶

Mao also notes:

However active the leading group may be, its activity will amount to fruitless effort by a handful of people unless combined with the activity of the masses. On the other hand, if the masses alone are active without a strong leading group to organise their activity properly, such activity cannot be sustained for long, or carried forward in the right direction, or raised to a high level. ²⁷

If the Party work is carried out in accordance with the mass line method and if experience of this work is constantly summed up objectively, then the Party will not be isolated from the masses by running too far ahead, nor will it lag behind their development and readiness to act. Mao writes:

It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change. In such cases we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out. Otherwise we shall isolate ourselves from the masses. Unless they are conscious and willing, any kind of work that requires their participation will turn out to be a mere formality and will fail ... There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them. ²⁸

Practice, Theory and The Mass Line

The philosophical essay *On Practice* was written by Mao Tse-tung to combat the errors of dogmatism and empiricism within the ranks of the Chinese Communist Party. However, it is at the same time a profound, lucid exposition of the Marxist theory of knowledge (which constitutes the main content of the mass line) bringing together in a systematic yet short form the main teachings of Marxism-Leninism in the subject. In this essay he gives an excellent account of how man's knowledge develops.

Man acquires knowledge of the world around him through his senses, through his perceptions of the countless different things and phenomena which he sees, hears, touches, tastes and smells. That is, he first acquires perceptual knowledge. This is not yet reasoned thinking, though it is the basis for it. When sufficient perceptual knowledge is acquired, a leap takes place to rational knowledge, to the use of general concepts with the aid of which reasoned thinking is carried on. But in order to find whether this knowledge is correct, whether it reflects or pictures things and processes accurately, a second stage in the process of understanding (cognising) rational knowledge is required. That is, our concepts must be tested in social practice. This will show

whether our ideas of a thing or process correspond with reality. If so, that knowledge is correct. If not then further study of the thing or process must be undertaken until correspondence is achieved. This second leap, from rational knowledge back to practice, is the more important of the two, for practice is the criterion of truth, the test of the correctness or incorrectness of all ideas concerning objective reality.

From an understanding of the Marxist theory of knowledge it can be seen that:

(1) The social practice of the masses is both the source and testing of correct revolutionary theory.

(2) The development of revolutionary consciousness among the masses must proceed - as with all of man's knowledge - through the two stages of perception and conception on the basis of their own social practice, returning to that basis for testing and correcting.

(3) To understand and raise the level of this consciousness is the task of the revolutionary party. It is only possible for the latter to succeed in this task (a) if it bases all its work on the recognition that the practical experience of the masses themselves is the road through which they advance from lower to higher revolutionary consciousness; (b) if the Party is part of the masses, participating in their social (revolutionary) practice, and therefore able to know and determine both the existing level of consciousness among the masses and the necessary next step to raise it; and (c) if it constantly examines its own practice, sums up, draws conclusions for improving its work and tests them among the masses.

Marx wrote that theory becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses, and together with Engels he worked mightily to develop and spread the Marxist ideology among the masses. Lenin did likewise, utilising the Marxist theory of knowledge - of which he had a profound understanding - to guide the Party in the practical revolutionary work carried out by the Bolsheviks. It was from such work, in fact, that the mass line of the Chinese Communist Party was derived. Soon after the denunciation of Stalin by Khrushchev in 1956, the Chinese Party corrected the picture by publishing two pamphlets showing that despite making errors, Stalin was a great Marxist revolutionary. The second of these (undoubtedly produced under Mao's overall direction), entitled: 'More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', speaking of achieving mass democracy under proletarian rule, says:

Failure to forge close links with the mass of the working people and to gain their enthusiastic support makes it impossible to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, or at any rate to consolidate it. The more acute the class struggle becomes, the more necessary it is for the proletariat to rely, most resolutely and completely, on the broad masses of the people and to bring into full play their revolutionary enthusiasm to defeat the counter-revolutionary forces. The experience of the stirring and seething mass struggles in the Soviet Union during the October Revolution and the ensuing civil war proved this truth to the full. It is from the Soviet experience in that period that the mass line our Party so often talks about was derived. The acute struggles in the Soviet Union then depended mainly on direct action by the mass of the people, and naturally there was little possibility for perfect democratic procedures to develop. ²⁹

Lenin saw the task of achieving a successful revolution as developing in two phases - winning over the vanguard first, and then winning the masses. He wrote in 1921:

The proletarian vanguard has been ideologically won over. This is the main thing. Without this, we cannot take even the first step towards victory; but it is still a fairly long way from victory. With the vanguard alone victory is impossible. To throw the vanguard alone into the decisive battle before the whole class, before the broad masses have taken up a position either of direct support of the vanguard, or at least of benevolent neutrality toward it and one in which they cannot possibly support the enemy, would not merely be folly but a crime. And in order that actually the whole class, that actually the broad masses of toilers and those oppressed by capital may take up such a position, propaganda and agitation alone are not sufficient. For this the masses must have their own political experience. Such is the fundamental law of all great revolutions, confirmed now with astonishing force and vividness not only in Russia but also in Germany.³⁰

Here we see how Lenin applied the mass line in his tactics, though he did not call it that.

In his concept of the mass line, Mao consciously applied the Marxist theory of knowledge to the practical work of the Party, so that at all times it closely linked with the masses of the people, served them and led them forward in a step-by-step process. The only correct methods of leadership and style of work are those which are based on the principle of 'From the masses, to the masses.'

The Mass Line Is A Proletarian Line

To accomplish the socialist revolution, every Marxist-Leninist Party has the task of uniting the working class on the basis of proletarian ideology and of uniting the masses under the leadership of the working class and its party. This requires changing people's ideas on a large scale. But the Marxist theory of knowledge teaches that people acquire correct ideas only on the basis of practical experience, in which ideas are repeatedly tested and corrected. This applies also to revolutionary ideas. Thus, unless the Party's practical work is carried out in accordance with this step-by-step process, all sorts of mistakes will occur, and isolation from the masses will result. Through the concept of the mass line, Mao has clarified in a systematic way the question of how to carry on Party work. This represents a further development of Marxism. The concept of the mass line excludes the possibility of a small group of 'revolutionary elite' carrying out a social revolution on its own.

Lenin, as we know, always stressed the role of the masses, their creative power, and the necessity for the proletarian party to rely on and have the closest links with them. Mao's concept of the mass line embodies these views of Lenin's, further develops the question of the correct relationship of the Party to the masses, clarifies the method of arriving at correct policy, tactics, organisation, methods of leadership and style of work, and clarifies the method of avoiding and combatting erroneous ideas and tendencies within the Party.

The method of work used by the Party to win the vanguard and the masses of the people is that of the mass line.

NOTES

- 1 Lenin, 'V I, Imperialism', vol. 5, sel.wks, (12-vol. edition), p. 81.
- 2 Stalin, J V, 'The Foundations of Leninism'. sel. wks., vol.6, p. 73.
- 3 Lenin, V I, 'Tactics of the R.C.P. (B)'; A Report Delivered at the Third Congress of the Communist International, coll. wks., vol. 32, pp. 479-480.
- 4 Stalin, J V, 'Foundations of Leninism', vol. 6, pp. 176-177.
- 5 *ibid.*, pp. 177-178.
- 6 Lenin, V I, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back', coll. wks., vol.7, p. 261.
- 7 Lenin, V I, 'Conditions of Affiliation to the Communist International' sel. wks. (12-vol.) vl. 10, p. 204.
- 8 'History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)', edited by a Commission of the Central Committee of the CPSU(B), English edition, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1939, p. 49.
- 9 Lenin, V I, 'One Step Forward', requoted from History of the C.P.S.U.(B), p. 51, which is probably the best translation.
- 10 Stalin, J V, 'Foundations'. sel wks., vol.6, pp. 184-185.
- 11 *ibid.*, p. 186.
- 12 *ibid.*, p.187.
- 13 Lenin, V I, Section 4, 'Introduction to Imperialism', coll. wks., vol. 22, p. 194. Requoted here from Foundations, Stalin. sel. wks., vol. 6, p.191, as slightly better translation.
- 14 Stalin, J V, 'Foundations'. sel. wks., vol. 6, pp.192-193.
- 15 Lenin, V I, 'On the Struggle within the Italian Socialist Party', coll. wks., vol. 31, pp. 383-385. (However, our quotation is requoted from Foundations, sel. wks., vol. 6, p. 193, as translation slightly better).
- 16 *ibid.*, vol 31, p. 385.
- 17 Lenin, V I, 'Speeches at a Meeting of the C.C. of the R.S.D.L.P.(B)' February 23, 1918, coll. wks., vol. 36, p. 479.

18 The articles, speeches and reports referred to are also to be found in those volumes of Stalin's works published in the USSR before Khrushchev suppressed them.

19 Mao Tse-tung, 'On Contradiction', sel. wks., vol.1, p. 317.

20 Mao Tse-tung, 'On Coalition Government', sel. wks., vol.1, p. 317.

21 *ibid.*, p. 315.

22 Mao Tse-tung, 'The United Front in Cultural Work', sel. wks., vol. 3, p. 236-237.

23 Mao Tse-tung, 'Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership', sel. wks., vol. 3, p.120.

24 *ibid.*, p.119.

25 Mao Tse-tung, 'On Practice', sel. wks., vol.1, p. 297.

26 Mao Tse-tung, 'Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership', sel. wks., vol.3, p. 118.

27 *ibid.*, p. 118.

28 Mao Tse-tung, 'The United Front in Cultural Work', sel. wks., vol. 3, pp. 236-237.

29 'More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1957, pp28-29. On the title page it is stated; 'The article was prepared by the Editorial Department of the People's Daily on the basis of a discussion at an enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and was published in the People's Daily on December 29, 1956'.

30 Lenin, V I, 'Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder', sel. wks., (12-vol. edition), vol.10, p. 136.

FURTHER READING

(1) Stalin, J V, 'Foundations of Leninism' (particularly Chapter 8, on 'The Party'), sel. wks., vol. 7, or in a separate pamphlet.

(2) Lenin, V I, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party)', coll. wks., vol. 7. Also in separate pamphlet form. (An analysis of the Second Party Congress. Not easy reading, but valuable background to the struggle of Lenin and his supporters to build a party of a new type).

(3) Lenin, V I, 'Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder', coll.wks., vol.31. Also in some Selected Works and as a separate pamphlet. (A summing up of aspects of the struggle to build a party of a new type, with particular criticism of the error of 'left doctrinairism' of 'left dogmatism' - in the parties of Western Europe and Britain).

(4) Mao Tse-tung, 'On Practice: On the Relation between Knowledge and Practice, between Knowing and Doing', sel.wks., vol.1, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965.