

## STATE OF THE WORLD COMMUNIST MOVEMENT DISCUSSION

### THE WORLD COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

*The following are notes from a discussion hosted by the Institute for the Study of the Society on the current state of the world communist movement held on January 16, 2000 in Chicago. The discussion was oriented around two readings: "[Marxism-Leninism: Science for Our Times](#)" by Gus Hall, National Chair of the CPUSA (presented as preparatory material for the CPUSA ideological conference October 23-24, 1999 (?)) and "Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland: The Reemergence of Geopolitics" by Charles Glover, Foreign Affairs, March, 1999. The discussion focused on two questions: (1) what are the philosophical underpinnings of the articles, (2) what is the state of the world communist movement today?*

*[Editor's note: These notes were revised in 2004 based on subsequent discussion. The following incorporates those changes.]*

As we enter a new millennium, this is perhaps an opportune time to take stock of the world communist movement. The 20th century spanned the full flowering of industrial society, and the budding of new forces of production based on electronics. The past century began with the rise of imperialism, and ended with the emergence of globalization. The century witnessed the demise of the Second International, the rise and fall of the Third International, and the emergence of new political forces on the world stage in its concluding decade.

Before we can assess where we are today, we must be clear on the philosophical framework that provides the structure for an accurate assessment. Philosophy, as in everything else, is the foundation of political strategy and tactics. A philosophical approach that corresponds to the real world helps guide revolutionaries to political success. Starting from wrong philosophy leads to very wrong tactical conclusions -- bad philosophy results in bad politics. The science of Marxism is a methodology, based on dialectical materialism. It describes why history happens the way that it does, and is the starting point for revolutionaries in understanding where we are today.

Dialectics describes how the process of development unfolds in stages; that one quality does not evolve into a new quality on the basis of a piling up of quantities, but rather that a quantity of a new quality is introduced into a process. At this "certain point," the quantitative destruction of the contradiction within the old quality begins; destroyed and replaced by the antagonism between the new and old quality. A process of a leap transpires, during which the old quality is supplanted by the new quality.

In the process of history, the content of history is the general stages of the development of the productive forces, which can be identified with forms of motive power. These general forms: manual, mechanical (or industrial), and electronic are the foundation of the forms of history, the more familiar categories of slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist and communist society. These forms, however, correspond to specific historical content: the slavery of antiquity and feudalism belong to the period of manual labor; and capitalism and socialism correspond to the period of industrialism. Productive forces form the context of history, not its conclusion. History does not demand any particular form of property relations. Human beings determine this, based on force. New productive forces create (and eliminate) possibilities.

The implications of this understanding of dialectical materialism can be illustrated by contrasting it with the flawed understanding evident in a recent document from the Communist Party USA, attributed to Gus Hall, and published as preparatory material for a CPUSA Ideological Conference in October, 1999.

The most obvious, and most fundamental misunderstanding in the CPUSA document is the conception of how things develop and change. Since the process of change is the field of activity of revolutionaries (at least in how it applies to society), this misunderstanding is a fatal flaw.

For the CPUSA, change occurs via incremental processes, where quantity builds up, until there is so much of the quantity that it changes into quality. Quantities are philosophical straws — once enough of them are piled up, the back of the old quality is broken, and a new quality emerges. The CPUSA sees no difference between contradiction and antagonism — in their view one grows into the other, an antagonism is simply an enhanced contradiction.

The CPUSA confuses the forms of history (slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist) with the content of history (manual, industrial, electronic). In particular, they do not apprehend the fundamental importance of the development of productive forces, and their leap from one quality to another,

as critically significant to the unfolding of history. If they cannot see the radical break from the period of manual labor to industrialism; and the ongoing break from industrialism to electronics-based production, they are blind to what is happening in history. As a result, they see capitalism advancing to socialism, rather than seeing both of these forms as belonging to the industrial age.

The CPUSA leaps from one misconception to another. They distort Marx and Engels' observation that "all history is the history of class struggles." They see just the form of the class struggle, and not the content of it. \*\*That is, they do not recognize that classes arise on the foundation of productive forces, in relation to the forms of ownership, the property relations that each distinct stage of history demands. \*\* They do not see that "class struggle" itself has developed, gone through stages, as new classes have emerged and contested for political power. The foundation of CPUSA politics is the idealistic distortion of "history as the history of class struggles" — because they don't include/comprehend the changes in productive forces.

From these fundamental flaws, great political flaws grow. For the CPUSA, the "technological crisis" exists "alongside" economic crisis, rather than being the foundation of it. In this mishmash, globalization is just an expression of imperialism rather than a new stage of capitalism, superseding imperialism. Since the importance of the revolution in the productive forces is ignored, the implication of the technological revolution currently underway is missed, and they can only see the same political forces that they have seen for the past 70 years. And so for the CPUSA, the political tactic follows of the "need for greater internationalization of working class solidarity, ... internationalization of trade unions" and "the struggle over the value that the working class produces." It vulgarizes working class politics, reducing it to trade union politics. It equates trade union struggles with class struggle. Trade union struggles are economic struggles. Class struggle is the political struggle, the struggle for class power, which is why inevitably the class needs a political party.

New class forces are stepping on to the world stage, born of the revolution in the forces of production, and the inevitable displacement wrought in society as it embraces the new technologies. A new class struggle is emerging.

The CPUSA dismisses the importance of ideas in the process (and hence the role of the subjective) in political struggle. They claim that "Marx was able to debunk the old ruling class concept that the primary cause for all change, or developments, was to be found in changing

ideas, ... and thereby make and change history," when in fact, for Marx, the role of the revolutionary was in fact the introduction of new ideas into the social struggle. Ideas are what transform the social struggle into class struggle. Marx and Engels emphasized the objective factors of history because the revolutionaries of the time disregarded them. Marxism is a study of consciousness and its development.

The CPUSA statement displays a kind of philosophical idealism, that of fitting the world into a set of pre-conceived notions. The CPUSA, at least, displays a consistency in its thinking. It was founded in the industrial period, and the organization still holds to the same ideas. In this stability is their strength. However, once an organization gets founded with a certain purpose, it is extremely difficult for it to change its quality.

Picking apart a CPUSA statement on philosophy is not just a parlor room exercise. To this day, the CPUSA and the other CPs are the theoretical expression of the broader left. They pay lip service to Marxism, but then reduce it to the tactics of the class struggle. In this, they confuse Marxism-the-science with Marxism-the-doctrine. By taking doctrine — the application of the science of Marxism under specific historical conditions — as the science, by seeing it as an unchangeable, unhistorical thing, they are doomed to repeating the tactics of the 1930s in the age of electronics. Thus, they still propose a tactic of uniting with a section of Capital to "fight the right." Their "Bill of Rights Socialism" replaces "dictatorship of the proletariat." But what, really, is the difference between "Bill of Rights Socialism" and democratic socialism? And therefore between that and the "Third Way"? Here lies the danger of this conception of change, when one sees the CPUSA in relation to all of its connections in the various movements. The struggle for the proper understanding of quantity and quality is not a luxury, but a necessity; otherwise, one draws extremely wrong political conclusions.

With the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the past unity between the imperialist camp and the socialist camp has been shattered. Dialectics proposes that thesis and antithesis arise simultaneously. In the unipolar world, with the U.S. as the sole superpower, the antithesis may not be strong enough to struggle with it (yet), but it is there. Various analyses are being put forward to explain recent developments and are jockeying for position. It is essential that we review and critique these analyses.

For discussions going on amongst the remnants of the old CP of the Soviet Union [see, for example, "Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland: The Reemergence of Geopolitics", Charles Glover,

Foreign Affairs, March, 1999] abandon any notion of class struggle, and see that "victory is now found in geography, rather than history." The re-constituted CP in Russia represents the class of bureaucrats who had come to dominate the CPSU. They have no principles, but support whatever will put them in the driver's seat. The CP in Russia has gone over the edge. There is no basis for polemicizing with them, because there is no philosophical common ground. It's like polemicizing with Trotskyists. Their demise is an expression of the destruction of communist ideology on the old basis. What role can the parties of industrialization have now? Their destruction is a verification of the possibility of a real leap forward based on new realities. [This is not to minimize the emerging danger of a world war as the U.S. tries to muscle in on the historical reserve of Russia in central Asia.] It is important that we not see globalization and imperialism as hard and fast categories. Elements of imperialism persist within globalization. The interplay of national interests and imperial interests and global interests today demands more study.

It may be worthwhile to revisit the dialectics of the development of the communist movement. We are in the midst of a leap from one period to another. In previous moments like this, the old international was replaced by a new one, in step with the times. The First International was founded around the fight against industrial capitalism. The Second International arose on the basis of imperialism and the prospect of the bribery of the working class. The Third International was formed on the crisis of imperialism. All of the world's CPs come out of this period.

The CPUSA and the other Third International period parties are what they are because they are from the past period. Most communist forces are trying to resuscitate the Third International. We need a Marxist doctrine for this new period.

Because the application of electronics to the economy is so much further advanced here in the U.S., the flowering of this process may not be so evident elsewhere around the world. We are talking about a leap based on revolution in productive forces. Out of this revolution, this new environment, a new class is growing. This class has no means of survival under these new conditions except within a communist economy — from each according to ability, to each according to need, made a practical possibility by the super-productivity of electronics-based productive forces. These forces are objectively communist.

Our realization is that you can't have a communist movement based on the people who consider themselves "communist". That is, the "communist movement" is not the sum of the world's self-conscious communists. The real communist movement is the objective communist movement.

And that objective communist movement must be awakened and gelled with idea. The task of communists in the U.S. today to changing the thinking of people, and this requires an organization to accomplish this. The Abolitionists were perhaps the last movement in the U.S. to successfully do this.