

SOURCES OF IDEOLOGICAL ERRORS

Errors in theory arise out of onesided perceptions and out of limited experience. The problem of recognizing onesidedness is not always a simple one, particularly when surrounding objective forces *are actually moving in a onesided direction*. It is when these change their direction that onesidedness is perceived, and then often not without some lapse of time. In addition, in periods of rapid social change, when history proceeds by leaps, old contradictions develop new expressions. The struggle between the new

and the old takes on new forms and polar opposites may even change their positions—as in the changing relationship between world capitalism and world socialism.

Out of the new constellation of forces, new social laws come into being, which are not immediately grasped. In the meantime, practice continues on the basis of old concepts. The disparity between these and the new reality widens. Errors pile up. The exposure of error through criticism and self-criticism, essentially a method for distinguishing the true from the false, becomes utterly indispensable.

These sharp reversals are deprecated by those who view the world from the standpoint of highly generalized, abstract and “eternal” principles. For them the world is free of dynamic contradictions and therefore of the need for ideological reappraisals. But Marxists engaged in changing the world can act upon reality only with a scientific study of the laws of its motion. But their very work of changing society gives birth to new social relations and new laws of motion. In short, *successful employment of correct concepts makes for their obsolescence*. In addition, successful employment of concepts also leads to a wariness of discarding them.

Marx formulated this contradiction as the lag between consciousness and the rising new forces and relations of production.*

Because of this contradiction, ideological errors are

*This lag produces the left sectarian dogmatist and the right opportunist eclectic. The dogmatist attempts to resolve this contradiction by squeezing reality into ready-made formulas. He schematizes, simplifies, sees neither errors nor problems and refuses to recognize that the advance of society as of scientific knowledge proceeds through a series of “errors.” The eclectic, an unprincipled opportunist and day-by-day theorizer, on the other hand, floats with ease on prevailing winds and currents. To him nothing is absolute.

unavoidable. If recognized and corrected, however, they need not lead to serious consequences. On the contrary, Marxist parties as a rule gain strength and vitality in subjecting such errors to analysis, tracing their source and frankly exposing them.

“Within the party,” wrote Mao Tse-tung in *On Contradiction*, “opposition and struggle between different ideologies occur constantly; they are the reflection in the party of the class contradictions and the contradictions between the old and the new things in society. If in the party there were neither contradictions nor ideological struggles to solve contradictions, the party’s life would come to an end.”

During such periods of reappraisal, it is important, however, not to fall into a nihilistic rejection of everything in the past or of assuming that that which is held erroneous today was erroneous yesterday. Such attitudes may turn into a source of weakness and despair or open the way for degenerative tendencies.

Even worse is the confusion of “legitimate” ideological errors with symptoms of party decay and weakness. Wrong practices based on incorrect concepts regarding certain specific phenomena must be differentiated from wrong practice resulting from abandonment of basic Marxist-Leninist principles (isolation from the masses, neglect of proper educational activities, bureaucratic arrogance, slander, intrigue, cliquism, etc). Symptoms of degeneration are easily recognizable. Shielding them under the cover of ideological errors, a frequent device of party leaders unwilling to admit such degeneration, only serves to perpetuate the disease.

Can the American party blithely reject Leninist theory which has proven its general correctness in the historical

developments of this century? Or arrive at what is valid for America in Marxist-Leninist theory on the basis of mere scholastic discussions?

The main slogan of the Draft Resolution is that "we must interpret the theory of Marxism (no longer Marxism-Leninism) in accordance with the conditions of our country." Yet the Draft Resolution admits repeatedly that despite decades of study and experience American Marxists "do not know the conditions in our country" and "are ignorant of many crucial aspects of American life." Such ignorance obviously could not but lead to mistakes in practice, to lame, clumsy and distorted applications of Leninist principles. But incompetence in the field of tactics and practice must not be confused with a failure of theory.

There are no grounds for supposing that the American Communist Party can revitalize itself by rejecting Leninist theory as obsolete; or conversely by "strengthening the Draft Resolution" through mere declarations of allegiance to "sound theory" as demanded by Foster.

The leadership's analysis of theoretical "errors" regarding the attitudes toward the Soviet Union, the "overestimation" of the danger of war and fascism and the improper evaluation of the national economy does not convincingly demonstrate that these "errors" could have led to the disastrous decline in the party's size and influence.

The argument that correction of errors in theory will solve the problem of the party's isolation and declining strength is equally dubious.

In the thirties, the Communist Party provided leadership to mass movements and its influence extended to millions. Programmatically and theoretically, however, as Fred Fine has noted: "We were out of this world . . . a very strange animal for an American organization." (*The*

Worker, July 1, 1956) The guiding theoretical works at that time were Foster's "Toward a Soviet America," Olgin's "Why Communism?" and J. Peters' "Manual of Organization." These "out of this world" documents have long been repudiated by the party.

But because of the direct participation of the party in the tumultuous struggles of the thirties, the party's influence was not decisively hampered even by its "out of this world" theory. Its close contact with the people gave it a youthfulness, a humanity and a dynamism it has not since regained.

THE MEMBERSHIP'S OPINION

The rank and file members of the Communist Party do not share the confidence of the leadership that formulation of new theories will resolve the party crisis.

Responding to its readers' demands, for the first time in its history, the *Daily Worker* has opened its columns to a free expression of opinions. Hundreds of communications have been sent to the paper by members of the party and sympathizers. The Krushchev revelations unleashed a free and unprecedented democratic discussion.