

A Brief History of the Political Line of the Communist Workers Group (Marxist-Leninist)

The Communist Workers Group (Marxist-Leninist) [CWG] joined the public polemics within the anti-revisionist, Marxist-Leninist movement in the United States in June 1975. The occasion was publication of *Our Tasks On The National Question: Against Nationalist Deviations In Our Movement* [*Our Tasks*]. In the three to four years prior, the group had developed along lines similar to the rest of what has become known as the New Communist Movement [NCM]. The small group sprang from the mass democratic, anti-war and anti-imperialist struggles of the 1960s. The individual organizers and, later, theoreticians of the CWG began to study Marxism-Leninism [ML] to more clearly understand these movements, the domestic and international economic and political situation and class forces at play during the early 1970s. As the movement developed, their study of ML was instrumental in sorting out all the contending political lines purporting to represent “true” communist leadership.

The CWG considered itself to be fully within the ideological parameters of the ML movement. The group upheld Marxism-Leninism as the scientific method of studying, analyzing and understanding social relations. It, therefore, viewed the class struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie and for the dictatorship of the proletariat as the motive force of history in all stages of capitalist development. The CWG further located the origins of modern revisionism within the CPSU and the CPUSA as well as cohort parties around the world, and acknowledged the leading role of the Communist Party of China [CP China] and the Party of Labor of Albania [PLA] in the international struggle against this revisionism. On these bases, the CWG shared with the rest of the movement a belief in the formal necessity of building a new, anti-revisionist Communist party within the United States.

However, though the CWG followed the general pattern of development of ML groups at the time, there were significant differences in its particular history that gave the small group a unique perspective and position within the movement.

In the first place, the principal organizers of the CWG were not former leaders or members of SDS or any other student, anti-war or national minority organization. They thus brought little radical intellectual baggage and certainly no personal following or pre-existing political line into the study of ML.

Secondly, the living history of the democratic struggles of the 1960s was there for all to see and study, as was the documentary history of the developing ML movement. As the individuals who formed the CWG became more familiar with ML method and principles, their analysis of the ‘60s movements and the turn to ML (especially Mao Zedong Thought [MTT]) led the small group to evaluate the movement as an expression of objective class interests. The CWG began to assess the new movement in terms of the class background of the leadership, the class content of the various political lines and the continuity of class standpoint with the anarchistic, nationalist and democratic movements of the 1960s. This focus on the class character of the movement as a whole became one of the defining features of the CWG.

In practical terms, this meant that the core of the CWG’s early study of ML was the effort to understand the fundamental principles of Marxism found primarily in the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Stalin’s theoretical work on the National Question [NQ] was also studied and upheld as fundamental Marxist principle. Mao was initially considered to represent a left bulwark against Rightist opportunism within both the CP China and the international movement, but Mao Zedong Thought was not recognized by the CWG as a “distinct version of Marxism-Leninism.”

This early study was enhanced by the practical work that the fledgling circle performed in support of the radical and Marxist elements of the Iranian Students Association USA [ISA]. The leading cadre of the CWG had established an arrangement with China Books for distribution of communist literature, which they did at ISA meetings, demonstrations and information tables. They also assisted the ISA in printing and circulating their Persian language anti-Shah, anti-imperialist literature. But the critical aspects of this relationship were the political discussions between the ISA and CWG individuals. By the early 1970s, the left wing of the ISA had become splintered along the same ideological and political lines as the developing New Communist Movement [NCM] internationally: straight nationalist, pro-Soviet, Maoist, Trotskyite, New Left, etc. Working with the ISA was, then, a training ground and object lesson for what was to come in a few years when the CWG made attempts to engage the ML movement in principled polemics. This was especially true around the National Question, an issue of central importance to Iranian revolutionaries. As it turned out, failure to correctly resolve the NQ proved central to the perpetuation and solidification of modern revisionism in the burgeoning international “anti-revisionist” movement.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

For those familiar with the progression of the American NCM from personal experience or by studying the documents on the Marxist Internet Archive, one might wonder: why *Our Tasks on the National Question* in mid-1975? Hadn't all of the major ML groups dealt with the NQ back in 1972-73? Hadn't most of these groups declared party building as the immediate central task of the movement and formed themselves into “pre-party formations” already? Wasn't the Revolutionary Union [RU] ready to anoint itself The Party in a matter of weeks?

All of this was true enough, but the CWG was not wont to simply tag along with trends in the movement when matters of principle lay unresolved. The CWG understood that, while the NQ was objectively a question secondary to the class struggle and the task of party-building, its importance within the movement in 1975 lay in the fact that the NQ acted as “a barometer for the entire movement, since the resolution of this one question [revealed] more than any other how well or poorly American communists [understood] Marxism-Leninism” (*Our Tasks*). From its analysis of the solutions to the NQ being offered by the main political lines, the CWG further understood that none of the groups had even the slightest idea of how to deal with the NQ in a principled ML manner. *Our Tasks*, then, was an attempt to interrupt the party-declaring mania of the time by exposing the opportunist errors of the entire movement around the NQ and by pointing out that, “Until the National Question is resolved correctly in theory, there can be no truly communist party” (Ibid).

Underlying the analyses and polemics produced by the CWG was an effort to help establish a communist style of work within the ML movement. For the CWG, the first aspect of such a style was to understand that the guiding principles of ML are generalizations or abstractions of objective historical phenomena. As such these principles could not be simply set aside if they didn't fit a desired political line. Therefore, the first section of *Our Tasks* was a straightforward tutorial restating the fundamental principles on the National Question elaborated by Lenin and Stalin.

Of course, all the ML groups formally acknowledged the primacy of these principles, but the NQ proved to be a veritable playground for both ‘creative enhancements’ of these self-same principles and religious repetition of various theoretical pronouncements of the 3rd Communist International [CI]. Thus, the “setting aside” of principle is exactly what the movement had done, continuing a tradition established by the CPUSA since at least the mid-1930s.

This failure, or refusal, to understand the objective nature of ML principle was reinforced by the movement's inability to take up a second aspect of a communist style of work, that is to say, an uncompromising thoroughness

in all aspects of party work. The CWG pointed out that, contrary to the self-serving pronouncements of the various ML groups on the NQ, "...a thorough and conscientious study of conditions peculiar to the U.S. ...[had] not been fully analyzed in any Marxist text" (Ibid.).

Thus, for the CWG by mid-1975, the amateurishness, confusion and lack of clarity typical of any young and developing communist movement was becoming "...a willingness to bend facts to preconceptions, to omit 'unsuitable' information or principles and, when pressed, to revise fundamentals of Marxism in order to accommodate petty-bourgeois tendencies" (Ibid.). While the rest of the movement was struggling to take sides in the debate on the National Question, the CWG was pointing out that the entire movement had succumbed to a tendency to "compromise on principle" and bow to "the spontaneity of national divisions, which in turn has both a narrow nationalist and great-nation nationalist, or white-chauvinist, aspect" (Ibid.).

Though the CWG was uncompromising in its exposure of opportunism around the NQ, it did not consider itself a "leading center," nor did it offer a resolution to the National Question in all its aspects in the United States. Rather, it saw its task as helping to clear the "theoretical field" of amateurishness and deviations of all types so that the movement as a whole could establish a "Marxist-Leninist method on the National Question." For example, *Our Tasks* was particularly sharp with the Revolutionary Union (RU) since it was one of the largest and "relatively prestigious" ML groups poised to declare itself The Party. But the CWG made clear that its criticism was against deviations in line, not organizations or cadre or even the leadership so long as said leadership did not persist in its opportunist line.

As it turned out, no one publically acknowledged the critical analysis put forward by the CWG. After publication of *Our Tasks*, representatives from a variety of ML groups approached the CWG in their recruiting drives, but none of the groups responded in print and none altered their political line, though there were splits within and between the ML groups centered around disagreements on the National Question.

In terms of the development of its own understanding of modern revisionism, *Our Tasks* opened, in large part unwittingly, a Pandora's box of opportunist history that could not be closed and which ultimately proved to encompass the entire international communist movement. The key was the CWG's analysis of the CPUSA's line on the National Question and the United Front.

In many ways, *Our Tasks* did not deviate from the anti-revisionist orthodoxy prevalent at the time. Like the rest of the anti-revisionist movement at the time, in *Our Tasks* the CWG held that the XXth Congress of the CPSU in 1956 marked the beginning of the "official liquidation of all points of principle" by the leading party of the international movement. The CWG also maintained that the CPUSA "formalized its retreat to revisionism" in the resolutions adopted at the 16th National Convention in 1957. Further, the CWG upheld Stalin as a Leninist against the CPUSA's 1959 refusal to acknowledge him as critical to the formulation of ML principle on the NQ. And, most importantly, the CWG maintained that the "principle of the United Front" was a "fundamental of Marxism." Given that the CWG was critiquing the CPUSA's line and practice of the "middle and late 1930s," it is clear that the United Front refers to the Popular Front as advocated by the CI. At the same time, *Our Tasks* pointed out that one of the principal reasons the Comintern intervened with the CPUSA on the NQ during the 1928-1930 period was to combat the racism prevalent within the Party. This racism, the CWG argued, "stemmed from the Party's overall lack of principle and grasp of Marxism-Leninism." In particular, *Our Tasks* argued that the CPUSA "consistently misunderstood" the theory of the National Question. The Party consequently suffered large and small errors of interpretation that ultimately grew into a "major deviation, as was the case throughout the development of the line of the CP." Presaging opportunism on the NQ within the NCM, the CPUSA's major deviation, as elaborated in *Our Tasks*, confused categories and subordinated political principle to practical usefulness in courting the democratic movements of national minorities. The CWG correctly identified the practice of judging principles by

their utility as one of the “determinative” elements of modern revisionism that eventually led to the complete liquidation of the NQ by the late 1950s. For the CWG the liquidation of the NQ was merely the “Party’s formal position on Blacks in the U.S.” because the “Party’s practice remained unchanged, i.e., reformist” (Ibid.).

In an even more sweeping denunciation of opportunism in the early days of CPUSA, *Our Tasks* dated the “complete embourgeoisement” of the Party to the “United Front period of the middle and late 1930’s.” In turn this meant “the practical liquidation of all points of principle” by the internationally acknowledged vanguard of the American proletariat. For the NQ, this meant that the formal support of the right of nations to self-determination was coupled with reformism in practice, that is to say: “practical capitulation to the leadership of the Black bourgeois reformists.” On the question of the United Front, the CWG declared that “like every other fundamental of Marxism” the CPUSA transformed the United Front “into a means of tailing after liberal reformism.”

In 1975, the CWG’s line on the CPUSA was significantly different from any other within the anti-revisionist movement. However, at this point the CWG still gave the international movement and thus Stalin, Mao and other party leaders, the benefit of the doubt. Initial investigation of the history of the international movement revealed the opportunism of the CPUSA to be so stark and transparent that it seemed entirely possible that this one Party was simply distorting the General Line of the movement as a whole. This assessment changed over the next year and a half as the CWG dug deeper into the history of international communism and followed its own prescription to “pay more attention to [Lenin’s] style of work, his thoroughness, his eye for detail, and his ability to rise to the most complex tasks before the working class” (Ibid.). And as the depth of opportunism within the entire international communist movement began to reveal itself, the CWG would also hold to its other advice to the American anti-revisionist movement: “Just as we should not hesitate to change our views when we are proven wrong, we should not hesitate to make a clean break” (Ibid.).

THE PARTY QUESTION

Our Tasks was not written simply to clarify ML principles on the National Question and provide an example of the CWG’s conception of communist work. It also intended to show that the NCM as a whole had not mastered Marxist-Leninist principles enough to even consider forming a new communist party. This warning was lost on the NCM. Despite the failure of a series of “unification” efforts between 1972-74 (almost all of which failed around contention on the National Question), the sectarian self-proclamation movement began to bear fruit by late 1974. Between 1974 and 1980 half a dozen groups/organizations declared themselves to be the vanguard of the American proletariat,

In keeping with its dedication to the movement as a whole, the CWG stood apart from the party-declaration frenzy and began an exhaustive examination of ML theory and practice focused on the communist party and the rise of modern revisionism. This research was done in collaboration with an allied circle in English Canada – the Organization of Communist Workers (ML) [OCW]. The result of this joint work was *The Movement For The Party* [*The Movement*] published in November 1976. [This work can be found in the Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism under Canadian Anti-revisionism: Second Wave 1971-1983: OCW (ML)]. The polemical focus of *The Movement* was the Quebecois/Canadian anti-revisionist movement. Though the CWG had previously concentrated on the movement in the United States, the two groups agreed that the class history and political lines of the Canadian movement were fully representative of modern revisionism and could, therefore, stand in as an archetype of opportunism on Party-building. Though the OCW is the only named author of *The Movement*, the CWG, for the purposes of this history, is also credited with the content of the political line of the work because it was a truly joint effort.

In researching and writing *The Movement*, the CWG and OCW were only beginning to understand the extent to which petty-bourgeois radicalism permeated the NCM and its antecedents in the international communist movement. Therefore, in order to combat the rush to consolidation of opportunist trends into opportunist Parties, the CWG/OCW continued to defend a rigorous and somewhat doctrinaire conception of party building. The criteria by which *The Movement* judged political line on Party building were based almost exclusively on the published works of Lenin and Stalin regarding the history of the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party prior to World War I and the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) after 1918. Thus *The Movement's* party building tutorial elaborated the historical basis of the Party, the class composition and tasks relative to periods and stages, and the relationship of the Party to the working class movement as a whole. Though the CWG emphasized the flexibility and interpenetration of tasks during each period or stage of development, the overall effort was designed to establish clear standards of orthodoxy in opposition to the 'creativity' of principle dominating the NCM.

During the eighteen months between publication of *Our Tasks* and *The Movement*, the CWG shifted considerably to the left in its attitude toward the NCM and its understanding of the sources and development of modern revisionism. In *Our Tasks* the CWG spoke of confusion, lack of clarity, deviations and errors in a very young and developing movement. In *The Movement* there is no such comradely hand slapping. *The Movement* exposed all of the major groups in the Canadian movement as solidified petty bourgeois trends. On this basis, *The Movement* placed all of these groups and organizations outside of the burgeoning anti-revisionist movement. In fact, CWG was arguing that the NCM in Canada and Quebec existed in name only. That is, the NCM was becoming clearly recognizable as radical petty bourgeois anti-imperialism assuming the mantle of revolutionary Marxist leadership in the name of the working class.

PETTY-BOURGEOIS RADICALISM

Rather than concentrate on Party-building as a separate question, the OCW examined the political thinking of the Canadian NCM groups from their pre-ML days to their current Party building theory and practice. This investigation revealed a continuity of class standpoint with a veneer of ML rhetoric. The Canadian NCM as a whole was characterized by a variety of petty-bourgeois positions: anti-imperialist nationalism, economism, social reformism, radical trade unionism, creative interpretation of "independent" Marxism and left phrasemongering. The 'movement' was a true mishmash, but a consistent manifestation of petty bourgeois ideology struggling to dominate the working class. Such a struggle was the "specter" haunting the international working class movement from its beginning.

Historically the spontaneous working class movement developed separately and independently from communist theory and thus the communist movement. So, while Marx considered "socialists and communists [to be] the theoreticians of the proletarian class," these theoreticians, by and large, did not come from the working class. The 'revolutionary' theoreticians within working class organizations have, instead, almost always come from disaffected sections of both the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie. In *The Manifesto*, Marx argued that "a portion of the bourgeois ideologists ... have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole." Marx further maintained that this "small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class." As we shall see, this is a remarkably generous and historically incorrect characterization of bourgeois and petty bourgeois intellectuals. It is, in fact, the 'dialectical' loophole by which petty bourgeois radicalism has assumed the guise of revolutionary Marxism and dominated the socialist and communist wings of the working class movement for over one hundred and fifty years.

The petty bourgeois origins of the NCM were well known inside the movement. The leaders were college-educated activists after all. But the prevailing point of view within the NCM was that one's class viewpoint could be independent of one's class background. Linking class background with ideology posed the danger of tainting the icons of communism, including Marx, Engels and Lenin themselves. The CWG did not honor this taboo, but was initially only concerned with the class background of the NCM as it manifested itself in political line. However, what the analysis in *The Movement* began to reveal was how difficult it was for petty bourgeois intellectuals to actually break from bourgeois ideology. These revelations laid the groundwork for the CWG to question the entire concept of the transformation and leading role of petty bourgeois intellectuals throughout the history of the international communist movement, including the leading Parties of the modern anti-revisionist movement itself, the CP China and the PLA.

MODERN REVISIONISM

Prior to 1975-1976, the PLA and CP China appeared to be united in principled opposition to the modern revisionism of the Yugoslav Party, Euro-communism and after 1961, the CPSU. Based on the critical analysis of these two Parties, the CWG initially understood the rise of modern revisionism to represent "the success of the Right in gaining supremacy in all but two Parties of the international movement, just as old revisionism triumphed in all but one Party of the Second International." However, by the time *The Movement* was completed in the fall of 1976, there was enough "limited information" circulating throughout the NCM about "two-line struggle" in both of these leading Parties that the CWG began to question the received wisdom concerning modern revisionism and the struggle against it. As the CWG looked more closely into the history of anti-revisionism, it could no longer regard the PLA and CP China as fully principled opponents of modern revisionism. It was becoming clear to the CWG that the appellation "consistent defense of Marxism-Leninism" could no longer be applied to the Parties as a whole, but only to their most "principled elements." And even then, these "principled elements" were judged to have developed only an "incomplete and hesitant opposition to international modern revisionism."

In its study the CWG still relied on the PLA's distinction between "old" and modern revisionism. Modern revisionism was different, according to the PLA, because, firstly, revisionist 'communist' Parties were now holding state power and secondly, because the social-economic base of revisionism had expanded under socialist state capitalism in the East and liberal democratic imperialism and Social Democracy in the West. But the PLA also had a third criterion, one that the CWG pinpointed as a fundamental misconception.

For the PLA, modern revisionism diverged from "old" revisionism because it consciously speculated with 'changed circumstances' whereas the revisionism of Bernstein and the 2nd International simply "misunderstood" the "new conditions" of imperialism. Given that the basis of Bernstein's 'modification' of Marxism was also based upon speculation with new conditions (see Lenin: *Marxism and Revisionism*), it was easy for the CWG to point out that such a superficial analysis failed to recognize the "theoretical and organizational" continuity between revisionism, i.e., Social Democracy, and modern revisionism. For the CWG this aspect of the PLA's view was not simply an "oversight." It was, rather, "... typical of the aversion that most theoreticians of the ML trend share in relation to the history of the international communist movement" (*The Movement*).

The importance of such an aversion was that it allowed the leading anti-revisionist Parties to shield their own historical links to revisionism and on this basis create a mythology of consistent struggle against modern revisionism. To accomplish this the PLA led the way in lauding the VII Congress of the Communist International and its leading spokesman, Georgi Dimitrov. As late as 1982 the PLA still extolled Dimitrov as an "outstanding communist" to whom "... goes the great credit of having worked out the policy, strategy and tactics of the

communist movement” including the PLA. Here the PLA is, of course, referring to the “new conditions” of the “threat of fascism and war” and Dimitrov’s “... idea of the creation of broad anti-fascist popular fronts, as a form of organization and union of the working class, the peasantry, the intelligentsia and all the patriotic and democratic forces in the struggle against fascism and imperialism” (*Albania Today*, 1982, 4).

In *The Movement*, therefore, the CWG drew the link between the “embourgeoisement” of the CPUSA during the United Front period of the middle thirties and the political line of the VII Congress of the Comintern, specifically developed and advocated by Dimitrov. The CWG argued that the Comintern line represented “a wholesale adoption of Social-Democratic views in relation to fascism and imperialist war, an adoption of revisionist theses, within the Marxist-Leninist movement. The seed for this new species of revisionism, a form appearing not merely as ‘Marxist’ but as ‘Marxist-Leninist’, was thus supplied directly from the body of ‘old’, Social-Democratic revisionism. Modern revisionism did not simply ‘appear’ with the advent of Khrushchev. It did not arise, as the current fairytale has it, only ‘sometime after WWII’, in isolation from Social-Democracy and the ‘old’ revisionism.” For the CWG, then, “Modern revisionism is the continuation of Social-Democratic tendencies into the international communist movement: it is the ‘fusion’ of Social Democracy and Communism” (*The Movement*).

Within the NCM the CWG’s view of modern revisionism was considered sectarian, dogmatist, Trotskyite, anti-Marxist-Leninist, counter-revolutionary and, generally speaking, anathema to one and all. Maintaining the accepted mythology regarding modern revisionism was critical for the NCM as a whole. Such a narrative allowed the NCM groups to ignore their own speculation with new conditions and continuity of petty-bourgeois class outlook. But with the “international leadership” clearing a path, the “new communists” could simply defer principled analysis to the dictates of whichever Party they chose to align with. The opportunism underlying and dominating the entire NCM became much clearer as the anti-revisionist ‘unity’ of the CP China and the PLA began to unravel under the pressure of national and social chauvinism that came to the fore between 1975-1977.

FORWARD

Concurrent with completion of *The Movement*, the CWG began publishing the newsletter *Forward*. Four issues of *Forward* were published between November 1976 and August 1977. *Forward* is best known for the “Chart of the Development of the US ML Movement” in *Forward* #3, March 1977. While this chart was a revelation for the NCM, it was simply a graphical representation of the CWG’s consistent concern with class viewpoint and historical connections. Much more importantly, within the ten months of publishing *Forward*, the CWG, along with the OCW, extended their study of the history of the international communist movement back through the rise and fall of the Communist International. On this basis, the CWG began to understand the actual history of modern revisionism.

FORWARD #1, November 1976

In the article *The Split In World Communism* in *Forward* #1 the CWG elaborated and clarified the argument made in *The Movement* concerning the origins of and struggle against modern revisionism. A key feature of the CWG’s argument was that it was naïve of the NCM, including itself, to follow the PLA and CP China in believing that “it took only a few speeches by N. Khrushchev to turn the world movement on its head.” Not only did this view grant extraordinary personal power to Khrushchev it also represented as principled Marxist-Leninist practice the political line and activity of the world Communist Parties during the 1930s and 1940s. The CWG maintained that this was not only false, but also that it served as a political basis for the opportunism prevalent within the various NCM groups.

The problem, as the CWG saw it, was that the VII Congress of the Communist International succumbed, without challenge, to Dimitrov and Stalin's --yes, the CWG now included Stalin as a primary source of social-chauvinist revisionism-- idea of "genuine revolutionary pragmatism." Such "pragmatism" was, of course, derived from a "new historical situation," and involved postponing revolutionary struggle in order to fight Fascism, subordinating revolutionary tasks to struggle for reforms, fusing the internationalist interests of the proletariat with the national interests of the petty and big bourgeoisie of the "peace-loving" bourgeois-democratic imperialist countries, to hide the imperialist interests of World War II behind the catch-phrases of peace and democracy, etc. Given this analysis, the CWG contended that the XXth Congress of the CPSU in 1956, rather than being a break from previous principle, simply summed-up and creatively elaborated the line that had been laid out twenty years before by the CI.

On this basis, the CWG corrected the view that it had espoused in *Our Tasks*, that the CPUSA had been so opportunist that it was "simply distorting the General Line of the movement as a whole." Now the CWG argued that all of the crass opportunism of the CPUSA, so familiar to the NCM, was more correctly understood as a "direct outcome of the opportunist tendencies fostered by the CI's program from 1934-35" (*Forward* #1). And even though the CPUSA was roundly rejected within the NCM, it was becoming clear to the CWG that the NCM's emphasis on "people's struggles," the "mass line," the "united front against imperialism," etc. was, in fact, drawn from the same well of opportunism. That is to say, it was a continuation of the General Line of the VII Congress of the CI as 'updated' by the CP China.

The CWG published *Forward* #1 two months after the death of Mao and one month after the purge of the Gang of Four by the CP China. In spite of its developing critique of the gospel of 1956 as the origin of modern revisionism, the CWG still believed that the struggle of the CP China and the PLA against the revisionism of the CPSU "laid the basis for the creation of a truly principled Marxist-Leninist movement worldwide." This is clearly stated in the article *The Situation in China and Social-Chauvinism in Our Movement*. In this article, the CWG also maintained that Mao, the "Gang" and others represented the left wing of the Chinese Party and had been the only hope of stemming a takeover of the Party by Rightist elements long entrenched within the Party. As brazen as it may have seemed to the rest of the NCM, the CWG did not hesitate to identify the purge of the "Gang" as a consolidation of the Right within the CP China such that they had taken "almost complete control over the official Party apparatus." Furthermore, the CWG argued that this "open turn to the Right" by the CP China meant that the Chinese Party could "no longer be considered one of the guiding lights for the new movement" (*Forward* #1).

The CWG's point of view was based on analysis of the international political line being advocated by the Foreign Ministries of both China and Albania. The CWG argued that the line being advanced by the two Foreign Ministries was "overtly social-chauvinist." The group drew this conclusion because the basic premise of the common line of the CP China and the PLA was that a "new historical situation" had altered the revolutionary tasks of the working class. The international line of the two 'leading Parties' no longer called on the workers to turn imperialist war into proletarian revolution, but, instead, called the working class to unite with all who could be united --including their own imperialist bourgeoisie if "circumstances" demanded. The function of such a broad united front was to blend the national interests of every country (save the two superpowers) and the class interests of every class (outside the two superpowers). The purpose was to protect the national interests of China and Albania. The split between the PLA and the CP China confirmed the CWG's analysis. As soon as China re-established relations with the United States and declared the Soviet Union to be the greatest threat to humankind, the political unity between the two Parties began to fall apart. Albania was more threatened by the "2nd World" countries in NATO than by Soviet social imperialism and could not abide any suggestion that the workers of the NATO countries join their bourgeoisie to stop 'Communist' expansion.

At that time, November 1976, the CWG was alone within the anti-revisionist movement in the content of its stand against the Chinese party. According to the CWG, the rest of the movement had divided into “three distinct social-chauvinist trends.” First were the overt chauvinists, such as the October League in the U.S. and the Canadian Communist League, who followed the Chinese line word-for-word. Second were the “comradely opponents,” such as the *Guardian* in the U.S., who objected to the Chinese effort to isolate the Soviet Union. The proponents of this line acted as covert defenders of Soviet social-imperialism. Finally came the “Centrists,” such as the Revolutionary Communist Party in the U.S. and En Lutte in Canada. While the Centrists acknowledged that promoting national defense of any imperialist nation to the working class was in contradiction with ML principles, they excused the petty-bourgeois national content of China’s foreign policy by calling it diplomacy. While avoiding any direct criticism of the CP China, the PLA or --god forbid-- Mao, the Centrists attacked the overt supporters and comradely critics of China within their own country as social-chauvinist traitors to the working class. But, to complete the circle, the Centrist line also allowed for “special circumstances” in which alliance with one’s own imperialist bourgeoisie during an imperialist war is entirely acceptable. By claiming that the “Three Worlds” theory was simply statecraft, the Centrists provided cover for social-chauvinism as a legitimate “form” of M-L.

It was apparent to the CWG at this time that the “new international communist movement, to the extent that one exists” was in shock and disarray. For precisely this reason, the CWG stated directly that the groups and individuals continuing to strive for a principled theory and practice of M-L could no longer count on the PLA or the CP China to “show the way.” Instead the CWG argued for the remnants of the movement to “carefully study the various lines put forward in the name of these Parties and determine which represent Marxism-Leninism, and which revisionism.” To accomplish this task the CWG called for an “open and resolute struggle” against social-chauvinism wherever it may appear. In *Forward* #2, January 1977, that is just what the CWG did.

FORWARD #2, January 1977

In *Forward* #1 the CWG held out some hope that there were principled anti-revisionists within the PLA. Such hope depended upon the ability of the hoped-for-elements, “to expose the revisionist coup in the CP China and oust their own revisionists” before their Party made a similar swing to the Right. By *Forward* #2, January 1977, it had become clear to the CWG that no one in the PLA was taking this simple, yet bold, step.

Based upon study of an “abbreviated version” of PLA Chairman Enver Hoxha’s Report to the 7th Congress of the PLA, the CWG called out the PLA for its covert attack on China’s political line on the international situation. In his Report, Hoxha criticized the idea that the “Third World” was the main force in the struggle against imperialism and pronounced it anti-Leninist. However, ‘Comrade’ Hoxha forgot to identify the source of this “anti-Leninist” theory even as he proclaimed that “the peoples must be told openly about the situations” and that the PLA had “always done their internationalist duty towards international communism.” But, said the CWG, such Kautskyite tactics merely covered the PLA’s Centrist political stance. Both the PLA and the CP China emphasized the united front against the two-superpowers. The PLA’s criticism was only that the Theory of Three Worlds went a little too far by singling out the USSR; by including virtually all “2nd World,” secondary imperialist, countries as allies; and by lumping all “3rd World” into one unified anti-imperialist bloc. The PLA held that such a position obscured the real main contradiction: the “...ruthless struggle between the bourgeois-imperialist world, on the one hand, and socialism, the world proletariat, and its natural allies, on the other....”

The PLA’s political line excluded some of the 2nd World imperialist countries from the anti-superpower united front and appealed directly to “...all the peoples of the world, ... all progressive people who have the true and complete *interests of their nations* at heart and have made them *the aim of their struggle and life...*”. The PLA’s

social-democratic populism was summarized in the call for all “natural allies” to unite in defense of “freedom and independence” for their peoples. As the CWG pointed out, however, this was not a call for the working class to defend the political right to self-determination. It was a call for national defense. That is, for economic freedom and independence. For the CWG, this was national chauvinism cloaked in socialist garb.

In analyzing the PLA’s line, the CWG drew on Lenin’s recognition of the rise of a petty bourgeois nationalist opposition to imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century. Lenin had cautioned that not all anti-imperialism was in the interests of the international working class. His point was that the political and economic interests of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are international in nature. Given this, the national form of social organization acted as a fetter on the advancement of their class interests. Only the petty-bourgeoisie and developing national bourgeoisie could benefit from the national economic freedom and independence called for by the PLA. Regardless of the PLA’s covert criticism of the political line of the CP China, the CWG concluded that the two Parties differed only in the openness of their social chauvinism.

Research by the CWG and OCW into the history of the communist movement, especially the history of the Communist International, provided a key to help explain the predominance of social chauvinism within the entire anti-revisionist movement. The CWG noted that the PLA was originally established and that the CP China had matured during the mid-1930’s. According to the CWG, this was the period in which the CI had blended social democracy with communism, or more precisely, renamed Social Democracy as Communism. Unlike the 2nd International, in which factions of several parties split the movement to try to establish a principled communist movement, no Party or faction of a Party broke from the 3rd International in order to re-establish principled leadership of international Communism. In fact, in 1943, after the Comintern --“the international leadership of the daily struggle of the revolutionary proletariat of all countries”—had been dissolved, Mao argued that “what is needed now is the strengthening of the national Communist Party of each country, and we no longer need the international leading center” (*The Comintern Has Long Ceased To Meddle In Our Internal Affairs*, 1943).

Based upon this history and the international political lines advanced by both the CP China and the PLA 30 years later, the CWG concluded that the “break” with the Soviet bloc version of modern revisionism was driven by national interests, not Marxism-Leninism. Generalizing from all the analysis they had done to date, the CWG proclaimed: “Modern revisionism has developed, like Social Democracy before it, as an international trend in which the national element plays the predominating role.”

Just as the CWG debunked the claim that modern revisionism was limited to the post-1956 era, the group’s study led it to conclude that the sources of this new “ML” opportunism could be traced back to the 1920s. This was a significant leap in the CWG’s thinking about the rise of modern revisionism. In *Forward #1*, the group still maintained that prior to the VII Congress of the CI, though the world Communist Parties exhibited a variety of opportunist inconsistencies and backsliding, the Parties had not yet become “stuck around consolidated opportunist lines.” The CWG also asserted that “The Communist International was not, as the Trotskyites would have it, betrayed during this period, it was simply struggling for its life.” Consistent with this point of view, the CWG maintained that prior to his “turn to social-chauvinism,” Stalin had led a principled and successful struggle against a variety of opportunists including individuals in leadership positions within the CI: Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Radek, Lovestone, and others. But as the CWG dug deeper into the written record of the CI, it became clear that their initial understanding of the CI was not just too forgiving, it was wrong.

By January 1977, the CWG had determined that “the sections and leadership of the CI (including Radek, Zinoviev, Trotsky, Bukharin, Stalin, Dimitrov, and others) did not implement the principles that were established to guide it, that its development went from bad to worse, culminating in an open turn to social-chauvinism in 1934-35 and its liquidation in 1943.” Such a critical challenge to accepted orthodoxy was not a point of view that the anti-

revisionist movement could tolerate or even understand. As the San Diego Organizing Committee (Marxist-Leninist) opined in *The Communist* in May 1977: "The Communist Workers Group (ML) in its newspaper, *Forward*, uses its revolutionary sounding formulations to write off the whole international communist movement, including the dictatorship of the proletariat in China and Albania, as revisionist! Their political line on the international situation puts them solidly in the camp of international Trotskyism!"

In response to such a typically shallow dismissal or the more common refusal of any ML group to acknowledge let alone engage the CWG in principled struggle, the small group did not hesitate to forge ahead in its study and analysis of the historical development of modern revisionism.

FORWARD #3, March 1977

Forward #3 contained the Chart of the Development of the US ML Movement and two articles detailing the full scope of opportunism within the seven years of development of the NCM. The CWG took the movement to task for one of the principal "creative" applications of ML: changing the Leninist definition of "advanced worker" to suit the lower expectations of petty-bourgeois radicalism. The CWG pointed out that where Lenin argued that "advanced" workers are those "...who devote themselves entirely to the education and organization of the proletariat, who accept socialism consciously and who even elaborate independent socialist theories" (*A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social Democracy*), the NCM, and particularly the "anti-dogmatism" trend, simply lowered the criteria for proletarian class consciousness to militant trade unionism. Following this path, the NCM could reassure itself that while such "advanced workers" "may not be all that sympathetic to communism" they could still bond with the NCM around "caucus-building" and development of a "systematic approach to our problems." [Movement for a Revolutionary Left: *A Critique of Ultra-Leftism, Dogmatism and Sectarianism*]

With such an understanding of class-consciousness and its "vanguard role," there was little chance that the NCM could sustain any influence within the working class. However, the CWG's research into the development of the communist movement revealed that the blatant reformism coupled with radical phrase mongering so typical of the NCM had a long and storied history. The CWG was finding that such an opportunist combination was, in fact, the totality of the communist movement dating back to the 1920s. As this realization began to sink in, *Forward* #4, August 1977, became the final effort of the CWG, as a participant within the NCM, to uncover and expose the roots and branches of modern revisionism.

FORWARD #4, August 1977

The bulk of *Forward* #4 dealt with the self-proclaimed "anti-dogmatist," "anti-left" trend within the U.S. ML movement. In the article *Guardians of "Socialist" Opportunism* [*Guardians*], the CWG laid out the objective, practical result of this trend's heartfelt phrase mongering: defense of Soviet social-imperialism and elimination of any line resembling principled Marxism-Leninism within the movement for the Party. The "anti-lefts" wished to return to the early days of 'harmony' among the fledgling ML groups. As the CWG would have it, this meant before "the break-up of the movement into a number of distinct trends" driven by "the classic petty bourgeois striving for each to be master of his own dung-heap." For the CWG, such a plea for unity around the lowest common denominator was "an inadvertent admission that the ML movement has nowhere to go."

While the CWG concluded in *Forward* #4 that the ML movement could only be understood as a "collective opportunist farce," this was not the end of the CWG's work to uncover the actual foundation of all varieties of modern revisionism. Within its critique of the "anti-left" trend the CWG had singled out three political elements of petty-bourgeois radicalism that served, in large part, as the ideological and practical basis of modern

revisionism. These three elements were the class position of the intelligentsia, the theory and practice of the united front, and the question of Soviet power.

ON THE RADICAL INTELLIGENTIA

A year prior to *Forward* #4, the CWG had pointed out that one of the prescribed methods for the petty bourgeois radical to gain credibility among peers was to “come to terms” with his/her class background. It had always been grudgingly acknowledged within the anti-revisionist movement that its class origin was the petty-bourgeoisie, specifically the intelligentsia. Initially the movement dealt with this problem by simply dismissing it. That is, any radical could overcome this contradiction by declaring allegiance to one or another version of “Marxism-Leninism.” Now, however, after the movement had pulled itself apart into as many trends as the market could bear, the anti-dogmatists made a more straightforward case for unity among the socialist intellectual leadership of the movement. Speaking to the underlying truth of the ML movement, the Ann Arbor Collective (Marxist-Leninist), one of the anti-left groups, stated, “intellectuals do not constitute a class themselves nor do they together form a strata of some other class”. Since, according to the Ann Arbor comrades the petty-bourgeois intellectuals of the ML movement “actively help to produce, reproduce, or represent the interests and consciousness” of the working class, by definition they become “organic intellectuals” of the working class (*Against Dogmatism and Revisionism: Toward a Genuine Communist Party*). Voila, problem solved.

As the CWG saw things, of course, the problem was not solved at all. For the CWG, in the first place, “... the ‘intelligentsia’ (and we must hang it in quotes, since in bourgeois society education by no means implies intelligence) under capitalism is always, through its habits, social position, means of subsistence, attitudes and outlook, permeated with bourgeois and petty bourgeois vices and petty strivings.” (*Guardians*) This is obviously a far cry from a “classless” radical intelligentsia.

In the second place, the CWG understood the 1960s movement from which the leadership of the MLs emerged as “a demonstration of the crisis of the petty bourgeoisie under imperialism and its attempts to maintain its class privileges at the expense of the working class.” In this view, the CWG was following Lenin’s analysis that the constant life-and-death struggle of the petty-bourgeoisie under imperialism resulted in “repeated ‘populist’ and petty bourgeois rebellions” in which the petty bourgeoisie takes “an ‘anti-imperialist’ stance in order to secure their class interests” (*The Movement*). Therefore, rather than assume, as did all other NCM groups, that the 1960s movements were a positive training ground for their current “revolutionary” Marxist-Leninist politics, the CWG argued that this period was “such an eclectic outburst of so many social strata, and represented such a wide spectrum of contrary interests and demands, that its only common denominator was the class character of its organized leadership” [*Guardians*]. Thus, the spontaneous rebellions of the 1960s were indeed a training ground, but for the skills of opportunist leadership, not for revolutionary praxis.

Though every ML group and individual leader had to acknowledge the class origin of the NCM, only the CWG concluded that this class background had not been overcome by the movement as a whole: “It was precisely from such organized leadership –from SNCC, SDS, Black Panthers, Young Lords, the various anti-war committees, feminist circles, and so on –it was precisely from these that the new ML movement emerged, bringing with it the same people, the same habits, the same petty bourgeois class prejudice, and the same aspirations. Everything is so similar, in fact, the only thing that distinguishes the new movement from the old is the abbreviation “ML” and the recognition that the petty bourgeoisie is politically impotent unless it rallies the working class to its aims” [*Guardians*].

To represent petty bourgeois intellectuals as classless was not simply a self-defense mechanism for the leading ideologues of the NCM. It was one variation on the theme of “new conditions” or a “new phase” of imperialism

that altered the class character and interests of the “progressive” petty bourgeoisie in particular, but also the national bourgeoisie in the developing countries and even the imperialist bourgeoisie of “Second World” countries. The NCM groups held that under this “new phase” of imperialism the working class must unite with “all who can be united” in order to carry out “proletarian revolution.” “All who can be united” meant simply all classes and strata that have “contradictions” with imperialism. The Popular or United Front was the principal form in which this potential unity of formerly hostile classes and strata was expressed.

ON THE UNITED FRONT

There is little question that the entirety of the NCM adopted the idea of a united front as one of, if not the most important, aspects of ML strategy and tactics. More specifically, the CWG pointed out that regardless of minor differences in interpretation of exactly what was meant by “united front,” all of the “anti-revisionist” groups upheld the general understanding established by the VII Congress of the CI. That is to say, they sought “... a multi-class alliance uniting the working class, the petty bourgeoisie, ‘anti-imperialist’ and ‘progressive’ elements of the intelligentsia, and in some cases ‘progressive’ anti-monopoly bourgeois elements who side with the ‘peoples’ against the imperialist bourgeoisie; or, in more familiar terms, ‘uniting all who can be united against the main enemy’” [*Guardians*]. The CWG then explained that this conception of “united front” was a distortion of the original use and meaning of the term.

As the CWG excavated more of the history of the communist movement, it became clear that the idea of a united front sprang primarily from the splits within and from the Second International. The First World War and defeat of all save the Russian revolutionary struggle after the war exhausted the international working class movement. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, regrouped after the Bolshevik revolution and began a concerted attack on the international working class. In such circumstances, the mass of rank and file workers called for unity of action by the contending socialist, syndicalist, anarchist and communist parties. By late 1921, the CI had responded by calling for a united front of the working class organized from below and centered on joint practical activity. As the CWG explained it: a united front consisted of “those tactical maneuvers necessary to achieve the unity of the proletariat; to, by creating joint actions between communist and Social-Democratic workers, raise the class consciousness of the latter and isolate the Social-Democratic leadership. The united front was meant as one means to overcome the split in the workers’ ranks caused by socialist opportunism and to assert the class independence of the proletariat” [*Guardians*]

The “modern” meaning of united front, then, distorts the question of “alliances” between working class organizations and different classes and strata and confuses such tactical arrangements with internal working class unity of action. The result, as the CWG clarified, was another “above class category of tactics, tactics that could be employed regardless of what specific class interests were involved.” And, once again, the CWG pinpointed the CI as the origin of this opportunist conception of the united front. Even though the CI had initially proposed a united front from a more principled perspective, the CWG concluded that this opportunist distortion of the united front was initiated between the Third and Fourth Congress of the International. The CWG identified Radek, Zinoviev, Trotsky, and the German Rights as the instigators of this creative manipulation of the working class desire for unity. Further, the CWG linked this early turn to opportunism to the abandonment of communist united front tactics by the 7th Congress.

The CWG concluded, then, that the conception of the united front dominating the communist movement since the mid-1930s was the “common meeting ground” on which all variations of petty-bourgeois radicalism “contend for influence within the working class.” The united front is critical for the radical petty-bourgeoisie because it is the only political form through which this class can hope to convince the workers of their “common” anti-imperialist

interests. And it is only through such “honest” swindling that the petty-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie can “subordinate the proletariat to their own class interests.”

For the CWG, history had clearly shown that one of the principal ways the radical intelligentsia maintains influence within the working class is through nationalism. Thus, the CWG argued, “several generations of opportunists” had distorted the entire conception of the united front. Furthermore, behind the “radical” cry for above-class unity lurked “the most intense national-bourgeois and intra-petty-bourgeois class rivalry, national jealousy and narrow national defencism, expressing the desire of each socialist bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie to safeguard ‘their own’ sphere of economic influence” [*Guardians*].

The breakdown of the formal unity of the international “anti-revisionist” movement along national lines during the late 1970s verified the CWG’s analysis of the class nature of the united front. Among all the NCM groups, only the CWG recognized that the conventional idea of united front had “become a euphemism for outright betrayal and deception of the working class.” For the CWG this betrayal had far-reaching effects beyond simple debates on tactics and strategy. The group determined that the “social-chauvinism and revisionism” endemic to this conception of the united front had inevitably led to the dissolution of the international movement into “a number of nationally distinct revisionist trends.” It was this “turn of the entire world movement ... that most discredited communism in the eyes of the working class and made the work of professional anti-communists, Social-Democrats, labor aristocrats and Trotskyites in ‘disproving’ and distorting Marxism-Leninism all the easier” [*Guardians*].

ON SOVIET POWER

The third component of both modern revisionism and anti-revisionism dealt with the question of state power. Of course, the entire NCM bragged on their “revolutionary struggle” for the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” aka soviet power. However, as the international anti-revisionist movement became confused by and began to question the strategy and tactics of the CP China during 1976, cracks began to appear in the NCM’s “united front” of sloganeering. This was especially apparent when the previously accepted view that capitalism had been restored in the USSR began to be questioned by the centrist, “anti-dogmatist” trend within the NCM. When it came to analysis of the USSR, ostensibly an existing socialist state, the movement revealed the petty-bourgeois nature of its conception of soviet power.

One of the cardinal features of the “anti-dogmatist” trend was their line cautioning the NCM against drawing conclusions too rapidly on the nature of the Soviet state. For the “anti-dogmatists” revisionism was primarily an ideological phenomenon that did not necessarily translate into any “practical, economic outcome.” As the CWG explained: “They thus admit to the obvious fact of the CPSU’s revisionism, while denying the equally obvious fact that revisionist rule is a form of bourgeois dictatorship, the oppression and exploitation of the proletariat by a ‘socialist’ bourgeoisie” [*Guardians*].

Aside from their penchant for “creative” interpretation of Marxism –a trait they shared with the rest of the NCM—the “anti-dogmatists” had a more immediate, and as it turned out, prescient interest in their “friendly criticism” of the USSR. For, to declare the Soviet Union not simply revisionist, “but as a monopoly capitalist, imperialist and social-fascist superpower, then the nature of socialist countries which have ‘comradely’ ties with the USSR might also be put into question” [*Guardians*]. And if Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, etc. are questionable as “socialist” states, then why not China or Albania which, aside from their “social-chauvinist defense of their own ‘precious’ national interests,” are in all essentials of state power identical to the Soviet Union. And if China and Albania come into question, then the whole shambles of the NCM would come tumbling down.

The “anti-left” line isolating revisionist theory from revisionist practice was relatively easy for the rest of the NCM to ridicule. However, since the overthrow of the capitalist state is the fundamental question of working class revolution, the CWG was not about to let the rest of the “anti-revisionist” movement off the hook.

As expected, the “dogmatists” of the NCM followed the opportunist leads of the CPC and PLA in denouncing “Soviet revisionism, class oppression in the USSR, and the Soviet’s imperialist ambitions worldwide.” However, they did so only by bickering over details of “the law of value, the role of commodity circulation, centralism versus decentralism,” etc. In other words, the “left” critique of the USSR focuses not on which class holds state power, but “less volatile economic categories of material incentives, the role of profit, productivity, unemployment, economic strikes, unfavorable trade with Eastern Europe, etc.” [Guardians]

In this way, the CWG noted, all trends of the NCM “expose the USSR and discredit its socialist pretensions” in line with their own class interests. To succeed in this endeavor, all of the “anti-revisionist” movement must avoid the “cardinal question relating to revisionist rule, the question of soviet power.” Different trends emphasized different aspects of Soviet revisionism, but as the CWG recognized, no party or group (including the CP China and the PLA) “explained how, specifically, proletarian rule is to be exercised, the relationship between the Party and the Soviets (workers’ communes or councils), or between the Soviets and governmental bureaus” (Ibid.). The CWG argued that this critical component of communist theory was left out of any attack on modern revisionism by the CP China and the PLA because “soviet power is precisely what they themselves lack,” a characteristic that they shared with the USSR. [Ibid.].

In *Forward #4* the CWG maintained strict adherence to Lenin’s description of the soviet form of organization from *The State and Revolution* and ticked off its characteristics directly from that text: “the armed organization of the masses of workers and semi-proletarians, the direct election and recall of their representatives, the establishment of factory-level wages for all state officials, the combination of executive and legislative powers in the Soviets’ hands, the subordination of governmental functions to the Soviets’ control and direction, the creation of workers’ committees to patrol the state ’officialdom’ and eliminate the excessive development of bureaucracy, the drawing in of every worker and semi-proletarian into soviet participation and administration of the state” [Ibid.]. In short, by soviet power, the CWG meant “the actual administration of the state by the masses of workers and semi-proletarians themselves” [Ibid.].

Without this direct administration and control of the state apparatus by rank and file workers at all levels, the CWG maintained, “the dictatorship of the proletariat becomes a hollow and opportunist catch-phrase.” It becomes a hollow catch phrase in the CWG’s view because: “When the proletariat seizes state power, it aims to create an entirely new social system, a system that requires new methods and new organs of power, historically new productive relations that revolutionizes all existing social relationships. Everything must be built from the ground up” [Ibid.]. According to the CWG, capitalist restoration will inevitably occur unless there is real working class control of the state apparatus because revisionist restoration is precisely “the infestation of socialist construction by bourgeois habits and vices, the strengthening of privileged strata over the masses of workers and semi-proletarians, the establishment of a bureaucracy independent of the authority of the proletariat, the utilization of socialist means for bourgeois ends” [Ibid.].

As noted above, by this point in the evolution of its political line, the CWG had dismissed the anti-revisionist movement as an expression of petty bourgeois reformism hiding in a “communist” disguise. For all the opportunist wrangling around the National Question, the Party question, the Principal Contradiction, capitalist restoration in the USSR, China and Albania versus the Soviet Union, China versus Albania, etc., the CWG pinpointed the essential reformist core of the NCM: “They are all for ‘socialism’ when it is equated to ‘good deeds’ towards the working class, abundant jobs, a rise in the standard of living, a benevolent Party that insures equality

and keeps a clean line, a modicum of mass initiative, periodic shake-ups of the bureaucracy, good schools, clean streets, and so on. They turn against such petty bourgeois paternalistic 'socialism' the moment it matures into open bourgeois/revisionism and social-imperialism, when the Party and government bureaucracies solidify into unmistakable ruling elites, the economy stagnates, the standard of living falls off, etc. as in the USSR. And they cannot conceive of 'socialism' or the threat of revisionism in any other terms. The soviet organization of power simply does not exist for these people!" [Ibid.].

A THIRD WAY FOR THE PETTY BOURGEOISIE

As indicated above, the CWG's research and analysis of the sources and components of modern revisionism lead it to conclusions that directly challenged its own previous understanding of principled Marxism-Leninism as well as the creative opportunism that had become commonplace within the anti-revisionist movement. One of the most insightful conclusions the CWG drew from its critical analysis was that the petty bourgeoisie had finally realized a Third Way to state power.

It had long been a staple of Marxist-Leninist theory that there could be no "third way" between monopoly capitalism and proletarian revolution. Lenin had developed this thesis in opposition to Kautsky's critique of the Russian "dictatorship of the proletariat" as an anti-democratic coup d'état. Kautsky and the remaining social democratic parties of the Second International argued that the only legitimate path for working class revolution was to win a majority within the existing "democratic" institutions. In the case of the Russian revolution, this meant the Constituent Assembly, not the Soviets. Lenin raked his former mentor over the coals for this pandering to bourgeois democracy under the guise of democracy in the abstract: "...in capitalist society, whenever there is any serious aggravation of the class struggle intrinsic to that society, there can be no alternative but the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the dictatorship of the proletariat. Dreams of some third way are reactionary, petty bourgeois lamentations..." (*Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*).

Through its analysis of modern revisionism and the question of Soviet power, the CWG realized that the notion of a "third way" had been transformed through the acquisition of state power by revisionist "communist" Parties. It was no longer a question of bourgeois versus proletarian dictatorship, it was now a question of maintaining and advancing capitalist relations within the formal structure of a "workers state." For the CWG, state power held by titular communist Parties offered the petty bourgeoisie "... an alternative to ... being ousted by monopoly capitalism, or ... being ousted by the impending proletarian revolution." (*Guardians*) Such a characterization of the socialist countries and self-proclaimed communist parties was more than a simple addition to the catalogue of evidence against "socialist opportunism." It was recognition of a truly "new condition" undermining the revolutionary potential of the international working class. The CWG put it this way: "That a 'third way', a temporary alternative to both open monopoly capitalism and proletarian revolution, does exist for these p.b. strata; that it is in fact possible to artificially (by way of socialist opportunism) perpetuate capitalist relations, secure the position of the privileged classes over the proletariat, and sabotage the workers' independent activity; that these elements can even, as has occurred in the USSR and East European countries and is currently occurring in China, mature into a socialist big bourgeoisie capable of demanding a re-division of spoils on a world scale; is the most important historical lesson of the past 50 years" (Ibid.). The CWG's analysis was, in fact, a harbinger of the demise of the USSR and the solidification of "communist capitalism" in China, Vietnam, Cuba, etc.

This was a startling realization for the CWG, but it made perfect sense given the revisionist history that the group had uncovered. More importantly, it pointed the way to an even deeper analysis of the historical development of Marxism-Leninism. After publication of *Forward #4*, the CWG took up Lenin's counsel to the Fourth Congress of

the CI in 1922: “the most important thing in the period we are now entering is to study.” Of course, the CWG had always concentrated on studying the principles of Marxism-Leninism, but now their focus shifted to a critical analysis of these works as well as the political practice of Marx, Engels and Lenin. In particular, the group concentrated on the dictatorship of the proletariat, the question that Lenin had stated was “the key problem of the entire proletarian class struggle.” The CWG agreed with Lenin: “It is, therefore, necessary to pay particular attention to it.”

THE CWG DISBANDS

In *Forward #1*, the CWG announced their intention to produce a “full exposure” of the “overtly social-chauvinist” line of both the CP China and the PLA. This work was to be done in conjunction with the OCW and was “hopefully” to be finished and distributed by the beginning of 1977. By the fall of 1977, it had become clear to the CWG that the lines of the CP China and the PLA were only the most recent expressions of a strain of petty bourgeois opportunism traceable at least to the early 1920’s. For the CWG, then, any hope of laying the foundation of a principled Communist Party was to be found in the struggle to expose the full course of development of the entire spectrum of modern revisionist tendencies. That is the task the CWG set for itself after the publication of *Forward #4*.

To accomplish this task the CWG and OCW comrades devoted their time to intensive study and internal debate. For detailed analysis of the Third International the group focused primarily on the *International Press Correspondence* (INPRECORR) and its progeny *World News and Views*, as well as the *Communist International*, all organs of the Executive Committee of the CI. This study was supplemented by examination of Dimitrov’s *Selected Works*, reports from various congresses and individual participant’s recollections. In conjunction with this work, the CWG and OCW divided up study of the entire English editions of Marx, Engels and Lenin’s collected and selected works and collections of correspondence.

The CWG applied two fundamental standards to this study. First, it upheld the essential point of view that Marxist-Leninist principles do not exist in the abstract. For the CWG, the established principles of ML were to be understood as focused generalizations of objective historical phenomena of class relations under capitalism. Furthermore, from its beginning work, *Our Tasks on the National Question*, the CWG had considered ML principles to be guidelines “marking the objective limits within which we must work.” On this basis, the CWG was able to re-evaluate inconsistencies in the interpretation and application of these very principles, inconsistencies that previously had been accepted as the consequences of shifts in strategy or tactics.

Secondly, the CWG had always understood Marxism as a method of analysis and had incorporated Marx’s well-known 1843 counsel to Ruge regarding the content of his still developing theory. Marx’s point was that the “new trend” differed from and had an advantage over all other radical advocates of democracy and communism in that “we do not dogmatically anticipate the world, but only want to find the new world through criticism of the old one” (*Marx to Ruge*, September 1843). And, of course, every self-proclaimed Marxist is familiar with the rest of this passage in which Marx clarifies that “constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair.” Rather, the mission of the new trend was the “*ruthless criticism* of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be.” For the CWG trying to get to the root of modern revisionism in the fall of 1977, this instruction meant that the work of the giants of Marxist theory had to be evaluated with the same bright light as that applied to the likes of a Bob Avakian or a Mark Klonsky.

In *The Manifesto*, Marx had argued that “... a portion of the bourgeois ideologists ... have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.” Marx further maintained that this

“small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class.” After six months of intensive and unsettling study and struggle, the CWG and OCW concluded that Marx and Engels were wrong in this judgment. The group determined further that this failure to recognize the depth, power and adaptability of petty bourgeois class outlook had permeated Marxist theory and practice from its inception, in spite of the myriad formal attacks on petty bourgeois deviations. All MLs could agree that petty bourgeois leadership of the Social Democratic parties had led directly to the counter revolutionary collapse of the 2nd International, but the CWG traced this leadership failure back through Engels to Marx and forward through Engels to Lenin, particularly on the question of the struggle for and content of proletarian state power.

By the spring of 1978 the CWG could see that the NCM would collapse soon enough and it was some solace to know that this movement would never gain any credibility among the workers. But the group also recognized that its continued participation in the NCM would be nothing more than the selfsame effort of petty bourgeois intellectuals to control the working class. There was, of course, intense political and emotional debate covering the gamut of petty bourgeois imagination within the group. In the end there was only one honest solution: the Communist Workers Group (Marxist-Leninist) was to be no more. So, the group disbanded.

However, the CWG also understood that what they had discovered should be heard, at least once. Over the next several years this task was shouldered by comrade Tom Clark.

TOM CLARK: 1947-2010

Tom Clark was, for lack of a better term, the founder of the CWG. Though the CWG had no organizing congress, formal principles of unity, or Party programme, individuals gathered around Tom primarily because of his ability to explain Marxist principles in clear and simple terms. Clark created the Workers League of Struggle prior to formation of the CWG in order to introduce individual activists to Marxism-Leninism and to train the more dedicated comrades for communist theoretical and practical work. Within the CWG Tom was the sole author of *Our Tasks on the National Question*, the principal editor of *The Movement for the Party*, and one of the primary writers for *Forward*, in which his work included the *Family Tree Chart of U.S. Anti-Revisionism: 1956-1977*.

When the research of the CWG and OCW comrades revealed fundamental contradictions within Marxist-Leninist theory and practice from its beginnings, Clark was the only individual within the CWG with the wherewithal to turn shock and dismay into the clear-headedness and resolve required to put together all of the disparate parts of the story into a coherent and comprehensive critique. The story that needed to be put together was that of the counter-revolutionary nature of the intelligentsia, specifically the socialist and/or communist variety.

Drawing on the historical investigation by the CWG/OCW, Clark concluded that for the radical intellectual, Marxism offers not only a grand scheme of historical progression and aim, but also a central role for intellectuals in this struggle. In fact, within all varieties of Marxism, the role of the socialist intellectual is not only to help this historical “forward motion and hasten the advent of the new society” (*Preface: State and Counter-Revolution*), but also to actually lead this struggle of the working class. However, as Tom recognized, when the radical intelligentsia falls in love with the materialist basis of Marxism, their attachment is “not with scientific materialism, but with Marxism; not with a mode of thinking, but with a system of beliefs.” (Ibid.) In conjunction with the idea of historical progression, this “system of beliefs” allows the radical intellectual to assign “the momentum and grandeur of a world historical force” to their narrow class interests (Ibid.).

The over-arching point of Clark’s critique was that the petty bourgeois intelligentsia, whether advocating for imperialism or socialism and regardless of the social structure within which they live, could only continue to exist as part of a parasitical strata. It is “parasitical” because in order to be “free” to pursue interesting ideas, conduct “principled” debate, research, write, etc. the intelligentsia must be supplied with the means of subsistence without

“having to actually work for a living” (Ibid.). The essence of petty bourgeois ideological work, whether capitalist or socialist, then, is simply to define and proselytize “how the privileged status of their kind is to be secured.” (Ibid.)

Coming out of the anti-revisionist movement, Tom sought to expose the way that the radical intelligentsia maintained and enhanced their own class interests in the name of the working class. The answer was the socialist state. Clark argued that the socialist state was a relatively stable solution for capitalist crisis because it provides the illusion “that the source of class conflict itself has been eliminated.” That is to say: “Socialism retains capitalist monopoly, social classes, economic inequality, a repressive mechanism, and so on, while declaring that capitalism, classes, inequality and repression have been abolished. And that has given it a tremendous advantage over the democratic and fascist state forms. It has been so advantageous, in fact that the socialist state has matured from an obscure ideology into a world historical power” (*Introduction: State and Counter-Revolution*).

Given this analysis, the final work based on the historical research and practical experience of the Communist Workers Group, authored by Tom Clark, was titled: *The State and Counter-Revolution: A Critical History of the Marxist Theory of the State*.

THE STATE AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

The State and Counter-Revolution [S&CR] was completed in 1983 and revised in 1990. It was never published because, on the one hand, Tom could not find a leftist publisher willing to take on such a “blasphemous” piece of work. On the other hand, no regular publisher was interested because the NCM had already imploded, the Soviet bloc was falling apart and China had unabashedly restored capitalism via the socialist market economy. During the 1980s it appeared that Marxism-Leninism had been relegated to the dustbin of history. However, given the revived interest in Marxism and the increased activity of the radical intelligentsia internationally during the last ten years, there is no better time than now for S&CR to be studied in detail.

The simplest way to introduce S&CR is to quote Clark from 1990:

“... I realized that the whole thing is predicated on the reader really giving a good goddamn about the subject matter.” (Personal Correspondence)

“... it shouldn’t really have academic value, or self-reference with some ongoing debate, i.e., be by and for the left intelligentsia.” (Personal Correspondence)

“The central (and for the socialist intellectual, most abrasive) conclusion from this analysis is that Marxism-Leninism is not a proletarian, but a middle class ideology, and that what has occurred in the socialist movement over the past hundred plus years has been a historical counter-revolution against the working class.

“The very people, who, with the best of intentions and often at personal sacrifice, gave themselves to the cause of working class emancipation, have in reality been the leading force in an objective class effort to perpetuate their own social privileges over the mass of workers. Where the communist parties, the vanguard detachments of the middle class, have taken state power, they have instituted a kind of “capitalism with a human face”, an officially benevolent dictatorship that enforces class peace through bribes and subsistence guarantees, but which ultimately rests, like all bourgeois governments, on the power of armed force.” (Introduction: S&CR)

“Yeah, there are New Class theories and “critical self-knowledge of the intellectuals” theories and “Lenin as hard-ass” theories and “dialectics + 19th Century Materialism,” the common approach of which is to create new definitions in an academic way, i.e. generate more petty bourgeois intellectual bullshit. But what I want S&CR to do is simply document the **old** bullshit by exposing the internal inconsistencies and contradictions that arise

when principles get in the way of class prejudice.” (Personal Correspondence)

“So hopefully it’ll be enough to rephrase the thing so that it’s absolutely sky-blue clear that yes, the general critique of capitalism, classes, exploitation, parasitism, etc. generated by Marxism is the accepted starting point, and that the point of *S&CR* being where that general critique breaks down in the face of issues of winning political power.” (Ibid.)

“From my narrow standpoint, it’s better to look at what has actually occurred. Lenin’s line in *What Is To Be Done?* regarding trade unionism and trade union politics, the need for revolutionary theory, theory coming from the outside, etc., are all materially grounded arguments. As a general phenomenon it’s accurate. Which is not to say that there won’t be workers who, from their own experience, begin to draw general conclusions on class society, the role of the state, etc., without outside help. But again, where are these guys? If you’re going to make general theoretical conclusions, you have to draw the line somewhere. More useful, from a material standpoint, to examine what has occurred and try to understand why and keep it in a practical arena, than to think any headway (this is a pun, you see) is made by approaching the issue from a seemingly “scientific,” “philosophical,” “abstract” angle ... which really ends up being a lot of blah-blah-blah say some shit.” (Ibid.)

“In fact, what’s “new” in the “view” is showing that the specific criticism of petty bourgeois opportunism made at various times by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, criticisms which have a valid class basis, really stand as a **general** criticism of the intelligentsia as a whole + here’s how it works historically.” (Ibid.)

“The most needed exposition of “new views” is really: what forms of organization of power **combat** the tendencies to regenerate petty bourgeois and big bourgeois class influence. What **practical** measures for social control will keep everyone honest, eliminate careerism, bureaucracy, etc? What price do you have to pay to keep from going through all these things twice?” (Ibid.)

Rick Atkinson

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