



CHARTING THE UNCHARTED COURSE

Proletarian Revolution in the U.S.!

by the RCP, USA

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What is the proletariat or the "real proletariat" in this country? What is the path to revolution here? These questions interrelate and, taken together, constitute charting more of the "uncharted course" that we referred to in summing up our struggle with the Mensheviks.*

The general question here is one of rising to the tasks that are required of our party, rising to the unprecedented task of carrying out a revolution in an advanced imperialist country like this one and, at the same time, to contribute the most we can to the international movement. To rise to this task means that we have to destroy still further remnants of economism, remnants of 40 years and more of revisionism in the international communist movement. But even that is not enough, because destroying all this is inseparably linked with making further advances in the revolutionary science and its application. Could anyone imagine that the world proletariat will successfully meet the tasks posed by the coming world conjuncture without making further contributions to the development of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought? While we have to criticize what's clearly wrong in the past, more will be required of us than simply trashing a few things from some old Comintern documents, important though that is. We have to take a fresh look at old concepts—sorting out correct, incorrect and stale (that is, those that do not apply to particular conditions in this imperialist superpower). And to do so requires still more firmly basing ourselves on the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung

* These Mensheviks (named after their Russian revisionist forebears who opposed Lenin and the Bolsheviks) were an economist clique who split from the RCP in late 1977. The struggle with them came to a head over their support of the revisionist coup in China following Mao Tsetung's death in 1976. The book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* contains the major documents of this struggle.

Thought and combatting opportunism—particularly economism and its companion, social-chauvinism.

In approaching these questions, as well as all that is involved in charting our uncharted course, it is important to keep a truly Marxist approach to Marxism in mind. While stressing the continuance of “general and fundamental tasks,” Lenin pointed out:

“Our doctrine, said Engels, referring to himself and his famous friend—is not a dogma, but a guide to action. This classical statement stresses with remarkable force and expressiveness that aspect of Marxism which is very often lost sight of. And by losing sight of it, we turn Marxism into something one-sided, disfigured and lifeless; we deprive it of its living soul; we undermine its basic theoretical foundations—dialectics, the doctrine of historical development, all-embracing and full of contradictions; we undermine its connection with the definite practical tasks of the epoch, which may change with every new turn of history.” (“Certain Features of the Historical Development of Marxism,” 1910)

First on the question of the proletariat. Since the 1976 Central Committee meeting we have taken a harder look and a much more correct line on the (related) questions of bourgeoisification and the labor aristocracy. At the time of the founding congress, as part and parcel of the economism there, we strongly tended to hide from the question, to dismiss it, or to relegate it simply to a question of “rolling over the top labor hacks.” Since ’76, and in particular since the split with the Mensheviks, we have broken with this static and economist view. But have we done enough?

Both “The Collapse of the Second International” and “Imperialism and the Split in Socialism” address this question head on. In the conclusion of the latter work, Lenin wrote, “. . . it is therefore our duty, if we wish to remain socialists, to go down *lower* and *deeper*, to the real masses. That is the whole meaning and the whole content of the struggle against opportunism.” Earlier in the same essay Lenin quotes Engels on England, and refers to the prospect of “a bourgeois proletariat alongside the bourgeoisie.” These and other points Lenin refers to as “the *pivot* of the tactics in the working class movement that are dictated by the objective conditions of the imperialist epoch.” To those who are infatuated with references to “the masses” in the sense of the mainstream and who wish to cover all manner of crimes under this banner, Lenin again reminds them of Engels’ approach: “Engels draws a distinction between the ‘bourgeois labor party’ of the *old* trade unions—the privileged minority—and the ‘*lowest strata*’, the real majority, and he appeals to the latter who are *not* infected with ‘bourgeois respectability.’ This is the essence of Marxist tactics!”

Engels (and Lenin) of course realized that this bourgeoisification is something in motion. In our case we have analyzed how it is breaking down. Engels linked all this with superprofits and the parasitism of imperialism and was clear that only a small minority of the working class was permanently

benefitted by all this, while the majority experience at best a temporary improvement.

However, Lenin regarded the particular situation Engels was referring to in Britain as somewhat unique—not in the sense that the basic idea of the bribe, parasitism and bourgeoisification did not apply in all the imperialist countries. Lenin was firm in making that point. But he was a bit off about the duration and breadth of these possibilities. He wrote, "In those days it was possible to bribe and corrupt the working class of *one* country for decades. Now that is improbable, if not impossible."

But in fact just this situation has arisen. The Western bloc of imperialist countries, headed by the U.S., has experienced several decades of relative stability and prosperity since World War 2.

We have to examine this situation and its implications. Of course a dialectical materialist study of this should not lead us to the same conclusions as, for example, the Chinese revisionists. In their original "three worlds" article a few years back they examined this situation and concluded that it is hopeless in the imperialist countries, that the revolutionary possibilities are zilch, so the communists' "task" is to give up—or more to the point to join in the parasites' feast by restoring capitalism in China and capitulating internationally so as to assist the imperialists in as broad a portion of the world as possible. That is not at all our conclusion.

But we do have to take a hard look at the situation in order to fulfill our internationalist obligations and, as part of that, our responsibility to figure out how to make a revolution here. There is also the related fact that never before has a revolution been made in a country where the working class was a majority of the population. Today in the U.S. the working class broadly speaking (not simply the industrial proletariat) is a majority. In China it was a tiny minority. In Russia, a rather small percentage. Historically, having a majority working class has always been viewed as an advantage for the revolution. In a certain sense, it is. But isn't there some strategic significance to this fact? Isn't it more difficult to win this whole class to a revolutionary banner? Doesn't it mean we have to look at the strategic significance of the stratification within the working class itself, even within the industrial proletariat?

Even to begin to look at things in this way is going up against a strong historical revisionist current in the international communist movement. A kind of flip side opposite of "three worlds" revisionism is the Soviet and Albanian type "big," "European" revisionism. It marches around under the banner of THE WORKING CLASS, especially THE WORKING CLASS of the imperialist countries. (Mickey Jarvis, * with his economism and chauvinism, taught us something of this by negative example.)

This particular revisionist tendency has a long history, too, within the international communist movement. German social-democracy, in particular, seems to have been much infected by it, and spread the infection internationally due to its great influence. In praising Rosa Luxemburg for breaking with Ger-

*Mickey Jarvis was a leader of the Menshevik clique referred to earlier, noted for his philistinism.

man social-democracy (she declared it a "stinking corpse") Lenin also points out (particularly in relation to the *Junius Pamphlet*) that she did not entirely escape the pervasive stench in the atmosphere. The analogy is relevant for us today, in further breaking with revisionism.

Even Lenin himself seems to have been a bit influenced by this (though not basically nor in its most virulent forms). As the '79 Central Committee Report pointed out, Mao wrote in his *Critique of the Soviet Textbook Political Economy*: "Lenin said: 'the more backward the country, the more difficult its transition from capitalism to socialism.' Now it seems that this way of speaking is incorrect. As a matter of fact, the more backward the economy, the easier, not the more difficult, the transition from capitalism to socialism. The poorer they are, the more people want revolution. In Western capitalist countries, both the employment rate and the wage standard are relatively high, and bourgeois influence on the working people has been far-reaching. It looks as if it is not that easy to carry out socialist transformation in those countries [i.e. seizure of power]. The level of mechanization in those countries is very high, too. After the revolution has borne fruit, boosting mechanization further should present no serious problem. The important question is the remolding of the people."

By reading Lenin, one can get some idea of the prestige of the "German experience," which seems particularly characterized by massive influence in the (big) working class, even during relatively peaceful times. Even Lenin often felt he had to "tip his hat" to the prestige of the German party. For example *What Is To Be Done?* is full of qualifiers about how the Bolsheviks had to do things different from the Germans because of their particular circumstances. Most of Lenin's principles, we can see now, were correct in Germany as well as Russia. Perhaps Lenin could see it at the time, too, but if he did he decided not to pick that particular battle right then when people were running around saying things like "the ears never grow higher than the forehead" (apparently meaning that the Bolsheviks could never be so presumptuous as to put their experience above the Germans'). This "German" experience actually is the experience of revisionism—in the form of the banner of "the working class" tinted pink around the edges. This must be a big part of the heritage we renounce as we develop revolutionary theory and carry out revolutionary work among the proletariat (and all classes) in this society.

While the leading role of the proletariat is a correct and important principle, it is important to examine just what *is* the proletariat, or the "real proletariat," as opposed to the labor aristocracy. In this country, bourgeoisification has deeply and with some permanence penetrated into the industrial proletariat, including into its most socialized sectors. This is especially true in some of the most basic or "key" industries such as steel and auto.

It would be helpful here to quote at some length from some of the preparatory material (in draft form) for the book *America In Decline*:

"Many researchers who have examined the labor force in the U.S. have operated with what has been called a 'dual labor market' model. This model

posits one cluster of jobs which are more or less stable and better paying and another which are more peripheral, marginal and insecure. There is, then, a 'primary' and 'secondary' sector of working class jobs. . . . Briefly, the existence of such 'segments'—and in particular the 'secondary sector'—of the labor market means that there are many low-skill jobs in mainly non-union plants employing less than 500 people, a host of service-related jobs, low-level clerical jobs, agricultural and migrant labor, small-scale construction and some jobs in large-scale industry in which pay is considerably lower than for most jobs in large-scale and highly-unionized industry. People in this segment move from job to job more frequently, that is, from one plant to another. Those jobs put a very low premium on skill and education—and what skills, level of education and length of time workers had on a particular job paid off very little.

"These are your 'dead-end' jobs and they have been filled disproportionately by minorities, women, youth and, more recently, by 'illegals' and immigrant workers. What stands out about these jobs is that they are low-paying and offer little security—and they have been among the fastest growing sectors of the economy. These workers are less likely to work full time and they have, as their main incentive to stay on these jobs—sheer survival. A rather extraordinary finding in one study of such jobs was that many Black workers employed in this sector saw little wage increase from the time they were in their late 20's to their 60's. . . ."

"The other sector in this model consists of the more stable production jobs in large-scale and unionized industry, like operatives in transport and better paid workers in retail, wholesale, and utilities (such as telephone workers). Wages here are generally higher, the fringe benefits are more extensive, employment is more regular, and though working conditions may be either unsafe or stultifying, this is somewhat compensated by higher pay and opportunities for promotion. In these categories experience on the job is more likely to be rewarded. . . . When these more secure workers are laid off they not only have more to fall back on—such as SUB pay—but can generally count (at least until recently) on returning to their place of employment. They have acquired a stake of sorts in these jobs. . . ."

"There are large—and growing—differences in average annual earnings and compensation between these segments. And the working conditions may also vary greatly between these jobs. [It is] the case that a significant section of the industrial proletariat has enjoyed not only a relatively high income but more than that a measure of stability. . . ."

This material goes on to point out how things are changing, but then specifically analyzes how: "Stability is being severely curtailed and most research indicates a 'hardening' between segments. Those entering into these secondary jobs can count on remaining on them at best; more likely they can expect to be shunted in and out of those jobs."

It goes on to make an important observation about stability. It has been the case that "a laid off auto worker is just that—an 'unemployed *auto* worker'." "When these marginal workers are laid off, they are quite simply out of a job;

they are not unemployed 'foundry' workers or whatever."

In addition the material concludes that while the majority of the working class in this country earn wages approximately corresponding to the value of their labor power or below, a substantial minority earns above it. And a majority in the highly socialized "basic" industries and plants above 500 workers earn wages above this level. In general, more socialized industries tend to be higher paying. (Of course, even within these industries there are also—and increasingly—dead-end jobs and workers whose job stability, etc., are much lower. This is often closely linked with discrimination and the youth question.) As a sidepoint it could be said that if a backward steel worker wants to carry on about how welfare recipients are "sponges on working people," then a welfare mother could certainly turn around and call him out as a parasite on the world proletariat. (Of course here we are talking about analysis to serve revolution, not to serve mutual recrimination.)

In the past, while noting some of these facts, we have tended to talk about basing ourselves—at least strategically—in the "basic industrial proletariat." We have tended to operate on the assumption that all this bourgeoisification will just "break down all at once"—propelling this whole section into motion at once—to "roll over onto our plate," so to speak. This is undialectical and unmaterialist. While there is no way to predict precisely what will develop, and while we are not talking about abandoning these workers and the strategic importance of winning them over, it would be silly to believe that all this bourgeoisification (and certainly the ideological effects of long years of it) will break down completely and uniformly. While there is broad erosion of bourgeoisification, the *AID* material points out that a key form of it is the "hardening" of categories—making it, for example, much less likely that young workers will "climb their way up." The conclusion of all this is that the proletariat or "real" proletariat that will form the most reliable social base for a revolutionary line does not completely correspond to the classical "working class in highly socialized, basic industry."

This should not be surprising. The question of socialization today is not the same as 100 years ago. Today, in the imperialist countries, society is highly developed in general, the whole environment is highly socialized. This is because of the development of the productive forces and the fact, as Lenin pointed out in particular in the concluding section of *Imperialism*, that imperialism is "capitalism in transition"—to something higher. He speaks of socialization not just at the enterprise level, but, even on a world level, involving supply of raw material, transport, plans for distribution (he even says that management is socialized) and he concludes "then it becomes evident that we have socialization of production, and not mere 'interlocking'; that private economic and private property relations constitute a shell which no longer fits its contents. . . ." All this is far more important in the class struggle than how socialized a particular enterprise is. The question of what socialization means is different today. Also, between the characteristics of working in large-scale socialized industry, and having "nothing to lose but their chains" the latter characteristic is a more decisive, revolutionary characteristic of the proletariat.

Not that there is nothing to socialization on this level, but who is more likely to be more revolutionary—a worker in a plant of 2,000-3,000 earning \$8-10 an hour or a worker in a plant of 200 or 300 earning \$4-5 an hour?

Marx and Engels did not make the biggest deal out of socialization. See how *The Communist Manifesto* describes the proletariat:

“... a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

“Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack that is required of him. Hence the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour [the term “labour power” was used later by Marx and Engels], is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of the machinery, etc.” (I. “Bourgeois and Proletarians”) (The description, which continues in this section, is all quite relevant.)

When you read these passages with the proletariat in the U.S. today in mind, what stands out is that there *is* a real proletariat in this country today (yes, even in parasitic old U.S. imperialism’s homeland). But on the other hand, this does not, in the main, correspond to the conditions of the workers in the most highly socialized, unionized “basic industries.”

For one thing this means that we should make some changes in how the Draft Programme puts this question. In the main, this document ruptures with economism, including on this question. But, on the other hand, it does not have this full understanding. On page 22 the statement is made that “The backbone of the working class and most decisive force in the proletarian revolution is the industrial proletariat—generally the productive workers (as opposed to supervisory and management personnel) in manufacturing and other basic industry, including utilities, mining, construction and transportation.” This statement is wrong and is echoed in other points in this section of the Draft Programme; it is also an echoed “tradition” in the international communist movement, even its revolutionary sections. Based on the above understanding and analysis of U.S. imperialism, the description of the “industrial proletariat” as the backbone should be changed to “proletariat” and the specific industries cited should not be. Throughout this whole section on the United Front there are quite a few references to the importance of a high degree of socialization in industry, to

“decisive industries” or to the “basic industrial proletariat,” which means the same thing. All this should be changed. This is because while the industrial proletariat as compared to the rest of the proletariat is one important distinction, still more important is the question of the labor aristocracy and the distinction between the “real” proletariat we have been talking about and the more bourgeoisified sections of the industrial workers. The true “backbone” will be those proletarians who will most leap at the chance for revolutionary change as soon as the opportunity presents itself. In the main these forces will likely come from this “real proletariat” which is today a most important social base for a proletarian revolutionary line. Still, this “real” proletariat is principally made up and characterized by being industrial proletariat (though it does include other sections as well). Taken as a whole its conditions of life are more like those of a real proletariat than those of large sections of more socialized industrial workers. Of course we should not look at all this statically, and, partly to combat this kind of thinking and metaphysics generally, we should not broadly and generally use the term “real proletariat.” The word “proletariat” is quite fine and should be broadly popularized. It is also scientific, since it is precisely the conditions characteristic of the *proletariat* that we are speaking of here.

This question of the “real proletariat” is not exactly the same as the question of “roads to the proletariat,” though they are related. The “roads” question as it was raised in Chairman Avakian’s pamphlet, “Coming From Behind to Make Revolution” refers to *political* characteristics of much of the advanced section of the proletariat. As the Chairman put it, “I think a lot of what the advanced section of the proletariat is now are people who for reasons other than simply being members of the proletariat are somewhat politically advanced.” And he goes on to speak in particular of the people who were heavily influenced by the ‘60s—of vets, oppressed nationalities, women, as well as many immigrants, etc. While many of these people are in these lower sections of the working class, still this is not exactly the same question. In fact, quite a few of these people are also in some of the higher sections of the industrial workers and constitute an important advanced force within these sections as well. The main way in which these two questions link up is political, that is, both are important in combatting “mainstream” thinking that has and will smother genuine revolutionary work—and maybe even a genuine revolutionary opportunity—under the weight of economism. The paper “For Decades to Come—On a World Scale”^{*} points out sharply that “Lenin, you see, was not very impressed with the idea of attracting—or attempting to attract—a mass following on a non- (nor certainly counter-) revolutionary basis.” Along the same lines, it has been said that “the majority of U.S. workers today belong in the Democratic Party.” Of course this latter statement should not be taken as a guide to revolutionary work—we should be finding every avenue to raise their level and break them out of it to genuine class consciousness—it is more like Engels put it in regard to the bourgeois state of the English working class: “For a nation which exploits the whole world this is of course to a certain

^{*} This is a paper submitted by Chairman Avakian to this (1980) Central Committee meeting, sections of which appeared in *Revolutionary Worker* issue No. 98 and *Revolution* magazine, June 1981.

extent justifiable." Engels wasn't seeking to "justify" this politically, he was simply making a hard-nosed scientific and historically sweeping analysis. Both this analysis of the "real proletariat" and the "roads" analysis are key to avoiding the suffocating economism of the mainstream and to influence the proletariat (and all society) in as broad and revolutionary way as possible—to prepare minds and organize forces for the revolutionary assault.

It should be emphasized that this should not be perverted into another recipe for tailing spontaneity. *In Struggle! (En Lutte!)* has also noted some similar phenomena in analyzing the Canadian proletariat. In a recent article in their theoretical journal they point out that the highly socialized, unionized sections of the industrial proletariat in Canada today are the most influenced by the labor aristocracy and are the least volatile today. However the conclusion they tend to draw from this is not the same as ours. They give emphasis to the relatively high level of strike activity in other, lower sections and discuss the greater potential for communist influence in that arena.

CL (now the "Communist Labor Party"), in this country, is a good teacher by negative example about where *not* to go with this analysis. They analyzed some of these same phenomena of imperialism (though they tended to make absolutes out of them) and drew the conclusion that they should "go lower." Their political conclusion was to narrow their work to dogmatism among a handful, combined with straight out rightist, economist (and nationalist) work among these lower strata. In other words, tailism, and a way to get "a foot in the door" in the trade union movement. To say the least, our approach must be quite to the contrary. Our goal is to do all-around revolutionary work broadly in the proletariat, and all strata, and to raise the level of the spontaneous to the conscious, armed struggle for power. To us, the words "labor movement" must be a curse.

Of course giving up on the better off sections of the industrial proletariat would be silly at best. Our main concentration should be elsewhere, but even now there is a fairly broad basis for revolutionary work in this section. It would be difficult to successfully complete an insurrection and civil war without a majority of these workers coming over at some point, and some whole sections of them may even play a kind of vanguard political role. (Undoubtedly many individuals will.) Even sections of the labor aristocracy can probably be neutralized and some won over. But all this, in turn, depends on a reliable base, and this is where the importance of the "real" proletariat comes in. Even here, we must be careful to point out that we are not talking about these workers just being some kind of "first stage of the rocket" whose role is to launch the "real payload" (the workers in basic industry) and then basically fall away in significance. This, too, would be economism. These workers will undoubtedly play a crucial role today, and all the way through the overthrow of bourgeois state power and during the socialist stage. Making analysis in order to break with reformist "mainstream" thinking is one thing, while making an absolute out of categories is quite another. Lenin, right before making the point we quoted earlier about going "lower and deeper to the real masses" made this clear: "We cannot—nor can anybody else—calculate just what portion of the proletariat is following and will follow the social-chauvinists and opportunists. That will be revealed only by the struggle, it will be

definitely decided only by the socialist revolution. But we know for certain that the 'defenders of the fatherland' in the imperialist war *represent* only a minority."

An important ideological question is involved here. The majority in this society, let alone worldwide, have no interest in this decadent, moribund imperialist system. This certainly applies to the overwhelming numbers of workers in this country. "Coming From Behind . . ." makes the important point that for the masses of workers things may be still tolerable, but they are not fine. What we are talking about is a section that, because of its daily condition, responds more readily to a revolutionary line and will help swing others into motion as well. We have no need for some "lonely voice in the wilderness" mentality, or some ultimately pessimistic, Bundist (nationalist) lines. This analysis reveals even more profoundly the fundamental weakness of this system. Look at it through the bourgeoisie's eyes. They have a lot to be worried about. We got a little taste of this in the '60s. One of the big reasons the bourgeoisie had to get rid of Nixon is that he had showed political weakness in the face of the masses. Nixon's weakness was the bourgeoisie's weakness, and they cannot afford to show it. The "siege mentality" often described as present in the White House during those years was real. The great thing that stands out here is that tremendous and very broad possibilities are unleashed as further demolition is done on economist thinking in our ranks.

Proletarian revolution will not be a general strike in "decisive industries." Yes, strikes, including economic strikes, will certainly play an important role. One can even speak of "decisive industries," but not from the economist point of view of "crippling industry" or "the most socialized workers;" rather this question comes in from the point of view of supplying and winning a civil war between two regimes, and afterwards, the political and economic battle to build socialism. We are out to seize political power, not some version of the syndicalist strategy of "taking over the factories." Breaking with these economist conceptions truly liberates the real, revolutionary role of the proletariat in the process of revolution.

All this shows the close relation between the question of the proletariat in this country and the other question of "the path to revolution" here—its relation to the historical experience of the proletariat internationally and to the October Road.

By way of introduction to this point, we should look at what went down here in the '60s in light of what is coming up. At the height of the struggle in that decade, the ruling class was on the defensive politically. The division of opinion on the cardinal questions of the day was not at all favorable to them—even including in the working class. Now look at the possibilities ahead. What if the alignment and situation were to start off similar to the "'60s alignment," with the critical addition of a section of the proletariat in the fray from the beginning (the section we have been referring to above)? Why wouldn't that be a favorable situation from which to begin an attempt for the seizure of power? A situation with all the ferment among all the classes of the '60s with a minority section of the workers in at

the beginning, and playing a role in "swinging in" a wider section of the workers further down the line—precisely those who today find their situation tolerable, not fine.

The material basis for this situation is great. It was only because of the relatively greater reserves of U.S. imperialism at the time that it was mainly able to placate the workers during the Vietnam war, and that it was able to extract itself from that war before something far worse happened, including internationally. Stalin makes a similar point in the *History of the CPSU(B)* in summing up the reasons for the defeat of 1905. One reason he gives is "The conclusion of peace with Japan in September 1905 was of considerable help to the tsar. Defeat in the war and the menacing growth of the revolution had induced the tsar to hasten the signing of peace. The loss of the war weakened tsardom. The conclusion of peace strengthened the position of the tsar." (p. 94) While the analogy to Vietnam and the '60s is not exact (for one thing there was an actual revolutionary attempt to seize power in 1905) Stalin's (surprisingly!) dialectical analysis here is relevant. Looking ahead, the U.S. imperialists, as the head of an imperialist bloc in a world war, will have it "all on the line" and will not have such graceful flexibility. The more one breaks with economism and sees revolution in this revolutionary light, the more possibilities open up, the better the situation looks.

With this as background, let's take a closer look at the "path of the revolution question" and what it has in common with, and how it differs from, the experience of the "October Road."

The "October Road" is used in two ways. First it applies to the general principle of the need for a Leninist-type party to lead an armed seizure of power and to establish a form of the dictatorship of the oppressed class or classes. This principle is applicable universally—that is in all types of countries. The second aspect of the October Road is more specific in that it applies to the imperialist countries. Here it refers to the general strategy of insurrection followed by the setting up of a regime and the pursuance of a civil war with the opposing regime. This war, though it may take years, is principally characterized by the strategic offensive. Revolution proceeds from the cities out to the countryside. This applies specifically in the developed capitalist and imperialist countries, and is generally applicable in this country.

Beyond this there was a number of specific features of the October Road as it developed in Russia which do not in the main apply and it is necessary to break with such iron models. Lenin made a point that in October 1917, the Bolsheviks had a majority in the working class (at least in Moscow and St. Petersburg). And in fact the insurrections at that time (as opposed to the civil war which followed) were relatively bloodless. In "Marxism and Insurrection" (written in September) Lenin argues that it would have been wrong to go for power in July because the objective conditions for victory did not exist. At one point he lists: "We still did not have a majority among the workers and soldiers of the capitals. Now, we have a majority in both Soviets. It was created *solely* by the history of July and August, by the experience of the 'ruthless treatment' meted out to the Bolsheviks, and by the experience of the Kornilov revolt." Lenin's second point here, which he elsewhere refers to as the workers' still lacking "savageness,"

underscores an important political principle about paying attention to shifts in the mood of the masses and to "turning points" in the history of the growing revolution. But to make an absolute out of the first point—the need for a majority of workers—would be a dogmatic reading of history indeed. That was not Lenin's attitude toward 1905, and here also it is important to remember the difference between the relative size of the working class in Russia then and here today. Under our conditions if we were to hinge launching an attempt to seize power on the precondition of having achieved a majority in advance in the working class, we might well be condemning ourselves to waiting forever.

Lenin wanted to win. This we should learn from him. Especially as he saw the conditions for success maturing, he did not want to waste it in a premature attempt. All these are correct principles. But we should not cling to mechanically copying everything about previous experience. As Lenin himself put it in "Guerrilla Warfare," "We do regard it as our duty relentlessly to combat stereotypes and prejudices which hamper the class-conscious workers in correctly formulating a new and difficult problem and in correctly approaching its solution." (1906)

It should also be pointed out that what Lenin refers to as a "turning point" in the history of the revolutionary movement is often easier to see in hindsight than it is to grasp at the time. Such turning points can be missed. This, too, seems to be a law of every revolution. Lenin was struggling like hell to get the Bolsheviks to take the offensive in October. He had to threaten to resign his post, and barely squeaked by with a majority on the Central Committee. Lenin once wrote "the independent historical action of the masses who are throwing off the hegemony of the bourgeoisie turns a 'constitutional' crisis into a *revolution*." ("Reformism in the Russian Social-Democratic Movement," 1911) If this is so, then its reverse can be true as well. That is, *lack* of independent historical initiative (and particularly leadership of it by the vanguard) can turn a revolution into a constitutional crisis. These are a dime a dozen, relatively speaking, and are resolved by the bourgeoisie.

A general point should be made parenthetically here. It seems that historically the biggest political retreats have been sounded by communists right when the opportunity for advance is the greatest—i.e., the Second International, the 7th World Congress of the Comintern, etc.

We should not worship spontaneity, least of all in insurrection, but it may also be true that we will not exactly be given that choice by an important section of the masses. In response to Plekhanov's "they should not have taken to arms" line on the 1905 revolution Lenin referred to Marx's letters to Kugelmann:

"Marx immediately (April 17, 1871) read Kugelmann a severe lecture.

"'World history,' he wrote, 'would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favorable chances.'

"In September 1870 Marx called the insurrection a desperate folly. But when the masses rose Marx wanted to march with them, to learn together with them in the process of the struggle, and not to read them bureaucratic admonitions. He realized that to attempt in advance to calculate the chances *with complete ac-*

curacy would be quackery or hopeless pedantry. What he valued above *everything else* was that the working class heroically and self-sacrificingly took the initiative in *making* world history. Marx regarded world history from the standpoint of those who *make* it without being in a position to calculate the chances *infallibly* beforehand, and not from the standpoint of an intellectual philistine who moralizes: 'It was easy to foresee . . . they should not have taken up . . .'

"Marx was also able to appreciate that there are moments in history when a desperate struggle of the *masses* even in a hopeless cause *is essential* for the further schooling of these masses and their training for the *next* struggle." ('Preface to Marx's Letters to Kugelmann,' 1907) (This essay, and many others cited here are available in the collection, *Marx, Engels, Marxism*, FLP, Peking, 1978.)

We may be confronted with the situation of trying to "turn a 1905 into a 1917." The '60s have played a kind of 1905-type role in this country though as we pointed out they never got fully to the scale of a dress rehearsal struggle for power. But perhaps something that starts off looking like it will not succeed, looking as though the necessary forces are not in the fray, will require us to support it, lead it, seek to broaden it and try to turn it into a successful attempt. Involved here is the question of what kind of stand do you take to sections of the people who take an advanced stand in relation to other sections. The "real proletariat" point discussed above bears on this. So does the point made in the document "From . . . Toward" * where it speaks of the potentially important role that the Black masses can and do play, both in their own right and as a potential lever to move others. What if an insurrection began with a sharp struggle of a section of the masses that was overwhelmingly from the oppressed nationalities starting the battle? Tailing such a section is no answer, but neither is taking the philistine, academic hands-off attitude blasted by Lenin. An insurrection is not a rebellion, or even many rebellions. But it is possible that under turbulent overall conditions, perhaps world war, that maybe the fifth rebellion could be the spark for an insurrectionary attempt. Here our work of "diversion" would be tested severely. It is not possible to say in advance that this couldn't happen, nor even that it could not succeed particularly if the vanguard carried out its work correctly.

The point is not to try to predict this with a crystal ball. The point is to challenge old, economist conceptions of what an insurrection and civil war is. We have to get away from straight-jacketing preconceptions of the sort that the enemy is 100 families and that millions upon millions will surround them (after a round of successful general strikes). In "Guerrilla Warfare" Lenin wrote, "The forms of struggle in the Russian revolution are distinguished by their colossal variety as compared with the bourgeois revolutions in Europe. Kautsky partly foretold this in 1902 when he said that *the future revolution* (with the exception *perhaps* of Russia, he added) would be *not so much a struggle of the people against the government as a struggle between two sections of the people*. In Russia we are undoubtedly witnessing a wider development of the *latter* struggle than was the case

* "From a Qualitative Leap, to the Qualitative Leap"—a document summing up May Day 1980 and other questions which was also submitted to this Central Committee meeting by Chairman Avakian.

in the bourgeois revolutions in the West. The enemies of our revolution from among the people are few in number, but as the struggle grows more acute they become more and more organized and receive the support of the reactionary strata of the bourgeoisie." (emphasis added)

In another place in the same essay he writes, "In certain periods of acute economic and political crises the class struggle ripens into a direct civil war, i.e., into an armed struggle between two sections of the people. In such periods a Marxist is obliged to take the stand of civil war."

When one adds to this picture of revolution the point made by Lenin that it is not so simple as two armies lining up, one for socialism and one against, one gets a hint of the complex, variegated nature of insurrection and civil war, and the kind of task it is to lead it. This should also intensify our desire to chase away economist preconceptions about civil war, which would doom it to failure. Lenin wrote "... a Marxist must take cognizance of actual life, of the precise facts of reality, and must not cling to a theory of yesterday, which, like all theories, at best only outlines the main and the general, and only comes near to embracing the complexity of life.

"Theory, my friend, is grey, but green is the eternal tree of life." ("Letters on Tactics," April 1917)

To return again from another angle to the point that revolution is "not so much a struggle of the people against the government as a struggle between two sections of the people." It is certainly possible, given past history, and our understanding of the proletariat, that a big section of the masses in the battle right at the start will be Black masses. Because of this, the bourgeoisie is quite likely to slander and to rally forces to attack this proletarian struggle as "race war." (Today, in Turkey, for example, the state is suppressing the masses' revolutionary struggle under the banner of "stopping Left-Right violence.") It would be the duty of the party to expose this, and to work to further broaden the forces. "Race War" would certainly be a lie. From the beginning there would certainly be other oppressed nationalities, youth, vets, whites in the "real proletariat" and others in the battle. And beyond that the objective class content of such a struggle would be in the interests of the proletariat of all nationalities here and internationally. And from the beginning the party would be working to lead and to broaden the struggle. But, still, the enemy would almost certainly be attempting to attack the struggle in this way. (Once again we must stress that this is not some absolute prediction, but an attempt to break with preconceptions and give some idea of likely forces and questions that will be involved in such a complex and changing struggle as an insurrection. In any case it is certainly a much more likely scenario than such preconceptions as all the auto plants—urban and suburban—start things off by going up together. The latter could happen, but we should be politically prepared for other, more likely, events, and—above all—be flexible.)

The bourgeoisie would certainly be aided in their attempts to paint all this a race war by the actions of certain of their reactionary agents among the people—such snakes as the KKK, Nazis and others who would certainly come into the battle with overt or covert support.

It is worthwhile to study your enemy. The KKK is working the suburbs and talks about "surrounding the city." A reactionary, racist group calling itself the Christian Patriot Party is doing similar things, and preparing to fight a "race war" with the suburbs and rural areas as their base. The point here is not to fall into the trap of thinking such forces are more of an enemy than the bourgeois state, but to understand Lenin's point about how "among the people," enemies receive support from the bourgeoisie. Such will be people through which the bourgeoisie tries to rally important sections of their social base under a "race war" (and anti-communist, anti-"foreign enemy") banner. In Germany in 1918, the bourgeois army disintegrated and an insurrectionary attempt was put down by a "free corps" which the bourgeoisie reconstituted with the combined forces of loyal army units and paramilitary rightist groups. These Christian Patriots, in a perverse sort of recognition of the "real proletariat" question, are also on something of a prison reform campaign—warning of the "dangerous element" to society that is bursting at the seams in there, waiting to exact their terrible revenge on civilization.

In doing their lying "race war" propaganda, the bourgeoisie will attempt to pick up on perceptions and distorted partial truths to get over. The proletarian party, in turn, must combat this at every turn and seek to broaden the struggle further into an all-around and successful seizure of power by the proletariat. While, again, the Marxist principle that "nothing ever turns out quite like it was expected" applies, it is still a complex struggle like this that we must be prepared to work in and turn into a "1917."

There will certainly be those who say that such a situation is hopeless for the proletariat, does not possibly contain the seeds of successful revolution and doesn't correspond to Marxism. Lenin had some appropriate words for them:

"Apart from the fact that they are all extraordinarily faint-hearted, that when it comes to the minutest deviation from the German model even the best of them fortify themselves with reservations—apart from this characteristic, which is common to all petty-bourgeois democrats and has been abundantly manifested by them during the whole course of the revolution, what strikes one is their slavish imitation of the past. They all call themselves Marxists, but their conception of Marxism is impossibly pedantic. . . . It does not occur to any of them to ask: but what about a people that found itself in a revolutionary situation such as that created during the first imperialist war? Might it not, under the influence of the hopelessness of its situation, fling itself into a struggle that would offer it at least some chance of securing conditions, not altogether of the usual kind, for the further development of civilization?" ("On Our Revolution," 1923) Lenin went on, "Napoleon, it may be recalled, wrote: '*On s'engage et puis . . . on voit.*' Rendered freely this means: 'One must first join a serious battle and then see what happens.'"

And in the same essay, Lenin asks if it were not also possible to envision "conditions which enabled us to accomplish precisely that combination of a 'peasant war' with the working-class movement suggested in 1856 by no less a 'Marxist' than Marx himself as a possible prospect for Prussia?"

How does this apply to our situation? The key strategic alliance in the Soviet Union was the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and peasantry. On that basis, the form of the Bolshevik insurrection and civil war became precisely the combination of a peasant war and the working class movement. In our situation, the key strategic alliance is between the struggles of the oppressed nationalities and the working class movement as a whole. Does this not have strategic implications for the path of the revolutionary insurrection and civil war in this country? Why not some form of combination of the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed nationalities (which the bourgeoisie will attempt to slander and attack as "race war") with the working class movement? This combination will exist from the beginning and will have to be broadened and deepened through the intense work of the proletarian vanguard in every sphere, including military. All this has implications, too, for our work today, which, though not leading an insurrection, is work aimed precisely at, as we have said, preparing minds and organizing forces for the seizure of power.

Is this Franklinism? * No. Franklin was very empirical. He looked at what was going on in society right then and thought it would go straight ahead to revolution. He also thought that the permanently unemployed would be the basis of the revolution and that protracted urban guerrilla warfare was the military strategy. None of this was correct. Our basic answer to Franklin was correct. We pointed out the applicability of the October Road in the sense that the military strategy in this country had to be insurrection followed by civil war. We emphasized that the proletariat was the leading force of the revolution, though there was a strong (and later much stronger under Menshevik influence) tendency to mean the employed workers stably at work in large-scale industry. Franklin's line, for all its adventurism, was fundamentally quite pessimistic. In particular, he despaired of broader forces being brought into the revolutionary struggle, except on the basis of economism. There is a world of difference between this outlook and what we are talking about now, which points out the basis (and some of the methods) for unleashing the broadest possible conscious activism of the masses. If someone tried to sling the label "Franklinism" to attack this line, they would be quite wrong and another piece from Lenin seems an appropriate response. He wrote that when he saw "a proud smugness and a self-exalted tendency to repeat phrases learned by rote in early youth about anarchism, Blanquism and terrorism, I am hurt by this degradation of the most revolutionary doctrine in the world." ("Guerrilla Warfare")

It is time to break with old, economist preconceptions if we are to face the tests ahead as part of the advanced detachment of the international proletariat. To those who said "People will confuse us with the Anarchist-Communists."

* Bruce Franklin was a leader of the Revolutionary Union, a forerunner of the RCP, USA. In 1970 he led an opportunist split off from that organization with a line of revolutionary adventurism, challenging the leading role of the proletariat in the revolution and echoing some of the positions of the Weatherman organization.

...” Lenin replied: “It is an argument of routinism, an argument of inertia, an argument of stagnation.

“But we are out to rebuild the world. We are out to put an end to the worldwide imperialist war into which hundreds of millions of people have been drawn and in which the interests of billions and billions of capital are involved, a war which cannot end in a truly democratic peace without the greatest proletarian revolution in the history of mankind.

“Yet we are afraid of our own selves. We are clinging to the ‘dear old’ soiled shirt.

“But it is time to cast off the soiled shirt and to put on clean linen.” (“Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution.” April, 1917)

With the analysis we are making, both of the proletariat and of the path to revolution, we are making crucial preparation for revolutionary activity. We are not coming up with “get rich quick” schemes or new recipes for tailing spontaneity. Instead we are engaged in ideological and practical preparation for actually making a go for it when the time is right. To even make such an effort, let alone to have a chance at success, it is necessary to break with social democracy and social pacifism and all the pre-conceived notions that a revolutionary situation will necessarily present itself to us all nice and ripe so we can pick it like a plum. In a sense we are clearing the ground of economist litter and all other obstacles so as to be able to see such an opportunity as it is arising and not to miss it. We will have to firmly grasp Lenin’s point that a revolution is a civil war between two sections of the people, and also his point that when a revolutionary situation comes, it never turns out to be quite as you expected it. □