

BURNING QUESTIONS FOR OUR PARTY.

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There are many false ideas current in the Party which run counter to the document adopted at Second Congress. Although they often arise in discussion singly they are in fact connected and have a common core. Their origin is in the swamp of social democracy, revisionism and small groupism (mountain stronghold mentality) from which our comrades emerged to found the only true and honest political party of the working class that this country has ever had.

Great tasks confront the Party now. We have reached maturity very rapidly - we had to do so. As our Chairman said to the Albanian Congress, "the situation within Britain is highly volatile, full of revolutionary promise, but very dangerous also." The war in Ireland and the factory closures in Britain show that capitalism is not only approaching economic bankruptcy but political bankruptcy as well. They can no longer rule in the old social-democratic way; workers will not vote for them and they will shoot the workers for whom they can no longer find work. This volatile situation offers great challenge for us. Can we seize the hour, catch the tide which leads to fortune?

The challenge is to build the Party, for the working class to turn quantity into quality: to transform its political wisdom, hard won over centuries of struggle, into its own political instrument - the Party. For the Party in turn the challenge is to galvanise the class, in struggle and through education at every level, into an army utterly conscious of its own heritage and destiny. Then mountains can be moved and capitalism shall be destroyed.

But the Party can only be built on a unified political line. Until we all agree and implement in practice the fundamentally correct line expressed in our Congress document there can be no growth: a Party cannot be built on shifting sands. These thoughts are written in an attempt to advance that line.

RUSSIA in 1902.

Opponents of the line often say that they are combatting economism and they cite Lenin's "What is to be done?" as support for their ideas. In fact, they misunderstand Lenin and misuse the term Economism.

Over...

"Economism" does not mean economic struggle; nor does it mean putting an undue emphasis on economic struggle.

... It means separating the political struggle from the economic.

"The fundamental political tendency of Economism," wrote Lenin, "was to say 'let the workers carry on the economic struggle... and let the Marxist intelligentsia merge with the liberals for the political struggle.'" (What Is To Be Done? Ch.1).

Lenin wrote at a time when Russia was emerging from feudalism into capitalism, before the bourgeois revolution. The serfs had only recently been freed. The peasantry was the largest class. Tsarist absolutism ruled supreme at the centre of a spider web of secret police. Russia in 1902 has more in common with the England of Elizabeth I than with the social democratic monarchy of Elizabeth II.

Lenin saw the task in Russia at the time as being to unite the "political" movement of a section of the Bourgeois and Petit Bourgeois "intelligentsia" against the Tsar with the "economic" movement of the small but rapidly growing proletariat in the factories. The economists were for letting these two movements go their separate ways. Lenin showed that the consequences of separation would be that the politics of terrorism would hold sway among the intelligentsia (individual desperate action in the absence of the mass) and that the politics of social democracy would hold sway among the workers. The task was to unite the two movements around correct politics -Marxism.

No doubt such an analysis was correct in Russia at that time. (Its correctness was proved in practice by the October Revolution.) In a country emerging from feudalism, with a small and illiterate proletariat, the intelligentsia are not proletarian but Bourgeois or Petit Bourgeois by class root and a section of them may see the direction in which history is moving and adopt the class stand of the proletariat (other cases in point are Marx and Chou En-Lai. According to Lenin it was the job of such a section to teach the workers Marxism. This is not to deny that Marxism is the revivator of a working class but rather to affirm that it does not arise spontaneously; and in the case of a young small, relatively inexperienced (and largely illiterate) working class the ideology may come initially from outside. (but note that all this intelligentsia was doing was, in effect ... to transmit the experience of workers in other lands to the workers of Russia.)

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Such an analysis has no application to Britain today. We have one movement only which corresponds to one class - the proletariat. In this most proletarian of countries the intelligentsia (if such a term is even appropriate in this most literate of countries) is proletarian in its conditions of labour even if only newly proletarian in its class practice (and scarcely proletarian at all in its ideological development). The day to day struggle of this great working class for very survival and advance under capitalism is essentially political - class against class. All the elements of revolutionary struggle (and especially the role of the state as the instrument of the employing class) appear in embryo in every such conflict even when the workers involved try to deny them. In Britain there are not two movements of two sectors - the "political" and the "economic". It is the crudest Economism to pretend that there are. It is indeed, ironic that those in the Party who claim to be combatting Economism should be the true Economists. They are such dogmatists that, in order to execute Lenin's dictum to unite the two movements, they have first to separate them artificially. Having effected such an imaginary separation they announce that, hey presto, they will now re-unite what was never severed in the first place. But their means of so doing are so clumsy as to produce the opposite of what they intend - to further the rift, not heal it.

Our Party is composed solely of members of the proletariat. Our aim is to build a Party composed of worker intellectuals (or intellectual workers). Any attempt to separate a political arena or phase of development from an economic arena or phase is to invite a division of the Party into two wings - the "intellectuals" and the "workers", as has happened in other parties with disastrous results. The results would be equally disastrous whether the alleged "intellectuals" dominated the professed workers" --or vice versa. A split, inherited from historical development of a class, which the process of proletarianization has virtually eliminated from the working class as a whole, would have been artificially created within that section of the class which claims to be the most advanced--The Party. again what irony!

over....

Those who take this incorrect stand maintain that there is a Middle Class in Britain - not just a handful of shopkeepers but a class strong enough to be a significant political force. They are seen as a sector which has been detached from the working class - "privileged", "bribed", either with the crumbs of imperialism or with some other beneficent dispensation from capitalism. They include students, teachers, intellectuals" in general, "better paid workers," trade union officials, white collar" and "professional" workers in general, all women, workers who have been promoted, foremen, "bosses men," etc. etc. The list being subjective in origin, can be extended indefinitely.

This "Middle Class" is a very convenient fiction. It is responsible for all the ills that have afflicted us. A strike fails? Well, the Trade Union leaders" sold us out. A century of social democracy? Why, the "Middle Class" politicians have betrayed us. It provides a comprehensive excuse for the failures of our class. But defeats are not due to "misleadership" by an elite; workers may be knaves, they are not fools. Within the Party it justifies inactivity. "We are workers" say one group - so we are perfect, having nothing to learn and will continue to tread the old path of perfection (ignoring the new opportunities, challenges and changes which require that we transform our mode of political action - or inaction). "We are middle class" say another group plaintively - we are so bad that there is nothing we can do save walk in your shadow. We can not organize since our fellow workers are as Middle Class and debased as ourselves. We are so humble that the only role left for us is -to be the theorizers of the working class! Absurd conclusions follow from absurd premises.

The most difficult task (indeed the task) confronting the Party is to bring about the ideological development of the working class, so that workers will discard the false teachings of social democracy and in its place assert their birthright, Marxism, the ideology of and for their class. Such a transformation will not occur spontaneously. Rather it will require struggle, both practical and intellectual, of our comrades among and with their workmates. It will not occur overnight. Rather it will require a protracted struggle in which the gains may not be immediately apparent. It will not be hastened by sending Professors of Marxism-Leninism into the factories; workers are not sheep to be brainwashed by anybody.

Over...

The truth emerges through the struggle to attain it; the role of our comrades is to be the most conscious, the most courageous, the most considerate, and hence to advance this process.

The forum in which this process of development can take place, at present or in the foreseeable future is the trade unions - the only genuine mass organisations of the working class. Some comrades, convinced of their own Middle Class unworthiness, shun the trade unions like the plague. Other, trade union based, take every opportunity to leave their base to explore the more seductive avenues of ad hoc committees, broad fronts, liaison bodies, etc. But all such "short cuts" prove to be blind alleys at the end. Both errors are really the same. They amount to a failure to do the Marxist political work that must be done among the mass of the working class. Why? because of a lack of faith in Marxism? Or a lack of faith in the working class? In fact the two are synonymous - one begets the other, and both beget the unserious style and the pessimism that are preventing us from meeting the challenge of our present situation.

So many deeds cry out to be done,
And always urgently;
The world rolls on,
Time presses.
Ten thousand years are too long,
Seize the day, seize the hour!

