

# Leaders and Faction Fights

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(Article II. in the series on the Opposition in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union).

MANY workers are very much puzzled by the controversy now going on in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They say:

"How is it that Communists cannot agree with each other on a common program? Why do they fight with each other so much? What are they fighting about? Is it a struggle for power between individual leaders? Is it a question of personal likes and dislikes, personal ambitions and antagonisms? How do they expect to lead the working class if they cannot agree with each other?"

## Differences on Policy.

Factional struggles within a Communist Party are due primarily to differences as to the policies that the Party should pursue. When there are such differences, they must be discussed and settled. Where those differences are of a fundamental character, sharp controversy often results.

The individuals who are identified with one or another policy tend to symbolize that policy and be identified with it, and the conflict between policies appears to those who do not understand political events as a conflict between persons.

## Controversies in the Republican Party

ALL parties have such controversies, in the course of their development. This is true not only of the working class parties, but of the capitalist political parties as well.

Take for example, the republican party. The history of the republican party has been a history of factional controversies concerning policies. This is due primarily to the fact that the republican party is not a homogeneous party. It is a combination of various classes, such as big business, the petty-bourgeoisie, and large sections of the farmers.

Changing conditions and the pressure of these various classes upon the political line of the republican party cause the controversies. To mention only a few of the recent ones, there was the conflict between Roosevelt and Taft, which caused an open split in the republican party in 1912 and the formation of the Bull Moose or progressive party. There was the struggle between LaFollette and Coolidge, which caused another break in the republican party during the 1924 elections.

At present, there is the controversy between the so-called progressive bloc or insurgents and the standpatters, which expresses itself as a conflict between the Norris-Borah group and Coolidge.

## Democratic Party, Too.

The democratic party has a similar history. To mention only a few recent instances, there was the difference between the Populist West, symbolized by Bryan, and the financial East, symbolized by such men as Parker.

In the last presidential election, there was the Smith-McAdoo conflict.

New controversies are preparing in the democratic party at the present time.

## One-Class Parties Are Not Homogeneous.

A COMMUNIST PARTY is far more homogeneous in its class character than the republican or the democratic party.

Nevertheless, even the working class is not homogeneous.

There are various strata or layers in the working class. There are skilled workers and unskilled workers. There are recently de-classed individuals from other classes, who have become a party of the labor movement. There are elements who have entered the labor movement from the farming population and carry with them some of the old tendencies from the class which they have come. There are elements entering into the composition of the working class which come from different countries and carry with them different traditions and outlooks.

## Workers Influenced.

Finally, a working class party does not operate in a vacuum, but operates in a world in which other classes exist. Some elements of a working class party are more responsive to the pressure of the viewpoint of other classes than are other elements.

Sometimes by reading the capitalist press, sometimes by association with members of other classes, sometimes from members of one's family or from friends, sometimes by contact with the bureaucracy of the trade unions and even while in struggle against it—in short, in all sorts of ways, some members of the working class parties are affected by and express the pressure of other sections of the population upon their method of thinking, and thus bring into the working class party the viewpoints of other classes, although they genuinely believe that they are expressing the working class viewpoint.

## If Lenin Lived?

Many workers believe that if Lenin were alive, there would not now be such a controversy in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

This is not so.

The history of the German labor movement while Marx was its leader and the history of the Russian labor movement while Lenin was its leader are full of records of such controversies.

## Marx and His Opponents.

THUS, while Marx was alive, than when no man had more authority in the revolutionary movement of his day, there were continuous controversies between the tendency that he represented and contrary tendencies.

One need only mention the bitter controversy between Marx and Bakunin, between the Marx and Proudhon, between Marx and Lasalle, between Engels and Duhring; or, after the death of Marx, between the revisionists and the Marxists, to see that the whole history of the movement that built up the Second International was a history of such controversies about fundamental political differences.

We know now that these differences represented differences of class viewpoint, but to many of the workers of that day, the differences were incomprehensible and Marx was accused of having a reckless love for controversy.

## Lenin's Controversies.

THE same is true of the development of the Russian revolutionary movement during the life of Lenin. One need only mention the controversy between Lenin and the Populists, between Lenin and the Economists, between Lenin and the Legal Marxists, the struggle between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, the controversy inside the Bolshevik Party over the question of boycotting the Duma, etc. Or we may jump to the period after the revolution of 1917 and find that controversies continue inside the far more homogeneous Communist Party. There was the struggle over Brest-Litovsk, the controversy over the NEP, the controversy over the nationalization and militarization of the trade unions, the controversy over the question of democratic centralism, the Workers' Opposition, and many more.

## Engels Saw It In 1882.

Engels commenting upon this fact that parties can only form a correct policy by discussion and argument about which policy is correct until they have settled it, often after serious controversies, expresses himself as follows in a letter to Bernstein in 1882:

"Apparently all labor parties in big countries can develop only in the process of internal struggle in complete accordance with the laws of dialectics. Antagonisms cannot be concealed for long. They can only be settled by fighting them out."

## When Do Controversies Occur?

IN periods of revolutionary development, changes in historical conditions are particularly frequent and abrupt. Such changes require a change in the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary party and it is precisely at such moments that controversies of a sharp character are most likely to occur. At such moments, when conditions change rapidly, when history makes a sharp and abrupt turn in a new direction, many elements fail to recognize the necessity for a change of tactics. They continue marching ahead on the same road that they were following before, when it is necessary to cut off on a new road or cut across fields on which no path has yet been chartered.

Thus the same leader, continuing to lead in the same direction when a new direction is necessary, becomes a misleader, and it becomes necessary for the working class to cease to follow him, oftentimes even to fight him.

## No Right to Mislead.

No man has a permanent right to leadership. In the revolutionary movement there can be no such things as self-appointed leaders.

He who leads aright is followed. When he leads in the wrong direction then the conscious and revolutionary working class party ceases to follow him, or marches to its own destruction. The revolution is not respecter of persons.

In fact, the more prominent a leader has been in the past, and the greater his reputation, the more dangerous his influence for bad becomes when he attempts to lead in a wrong direction.

## The Case of Plekhanoff.

HISTORY is full of such cases. There is the case of Plekhanoff.

Plekhanoff was the founder and outstanding theoretical leader of the Russian Social-Democratic Party. He stood forth as the champion of Marxism against the Revisionists, and made original contributions of his own to the field of revolutionary working class science.

Yet when Plekhanoff failed to grasp the situation facing the Russian working class, when he offered guidance in the wrong direction, when he attempted to lead the working class away from the path that its interests dictated to it, then they ceased to follow him. They were compelled to forget his past services and to attack him and undermine his influence in the revolutionary movement.

As it became more apparent that the policy he proposed was really a policy contrary to the interests of the working class. And in the interests of its enemies, it became necessary to fight Plekhanoff. When he died, the leaders of the Communist movement decided not even to go to his funeral, although the Russian revolutionary movement owed a great debt to him for some of his past services. They decided that they were in a fight, that he was on the wrong side in that fight, and that many workers would

be misled by their tribute if they went to his funeral.

## Plekhanoff's Memory.

Now that he is dead, now that the Russian revolution has consolidated itself and his power for harm has disappeared, the Russian working class is ready to acknowledge his great services in the development of their movement.

Plekhanoff's works have been published in a tremendous edition by the state publishing house and are used as text-books and spread broadcast among the Russian masses. But when he died in the midst of the revolutionary struggle, while counter-revolution still threatened, and while there were hostile armies on the soil of the Soviet Union, then the Russian Communists were too busy making history to be overnice about recording it. It was far more important to attack his misleadership than to give credit to his past services, for he represented an enemy of the working class all the more dangerous on account of his former influence and prestige.

## The Renegade Kautsky.

SIMILARLY, there is the case of Kautsky. Today he is an enemy of the working class, and there is no conscious worker that does not hate and struggle against him.

Yet in the past Kautsky, too, gave important service to the international labor movement.

Today the thing that is important about Kautsky is the fact that he is a renegade, an enemy of the working class. Perhaps long after his death, when his power for harm is gone and when his power to hurt the labor movement is at an end, there may be more emphasis placed upon his past services and contributions to Marxism and a little less upon his treachery and renegacy.

## "What Are You Doing Today?"

Many workers find it hard to think clearly about comrades like Trotsky and Zinoviev. They are blinded by their past services and are not even willing to attempt to analyze the present political significance of their actions, and their proposals.

Past services, while they entitle to a place in the recording of the past, in the writing of history, are no substitute for present services.

A man is only a leader because he sees farther in the right direction than do others, because he points out the path and himself takes the lead in marching along it. The same man, when he sees less clearly or when he sees wrongly and points a path in a wrong direction, is no longer a leader. Let him not dare to say: "Look what I did for the movement yesterday."

For the working class must always answer: "But what are you doing for the movement today?"

It is useless for him to urge: "On such an such an occasion I was right" when it is clear to all conscious workers that on the present occasion he is wrong.

## No Room for Blind Hero-Worship.

IT is hard for admirers of Trotsky and Zinoviev to believe that they represent a tendency hostile to the interests of the working class today, as it was hard for admirers of Kautsky to believe that of him in 1914, or for admirers of Plekhanoff to believe it of him in 1917.

But the revolutionary movement has no place for blind hero-worship. History subjects every leader to continual test, and the workers ask at every moment: "Where are you leading?"

The vanguard of the working class is not made up of blind followers, and the wisdom of no individual is greater than the collective wisdom of the party that judges him and that places him in a position of trust and removes him from that position according to how he serves at any given moment.

Therefore, in considering the question of the controversy in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it is necessary for workers to strip themselves of personal prejudices in favor of one or another individual and to examine closely the tendencies that each individual represents. One must see beyond persons to political trends, beyond eloquence and blinding phrases to their objective content, beyond even the subjective intentions of individuals to the actual objective direction in which they are leading.

Not even the question of personal sincerity is involved for very often a leader may firmly believe that his proposals are for the good of the working class and they may be just the contrary.

## Trotsky and Zinoviev "Revise" Leninism.

Nor is it sufficient to note that Zinoviev and Trotsky still swear loyalty to Leninism, while they are attacking the principles that it represents.

The revision of Marxism by the Bernsteins and other revisionists was carried on under the slogan of "saving Marxism" precisely as the present revision of Leninism by the Opposition is carried on under the slogan of restoring the principles of "true Leninism."

In short, neither words nor personalities are to be considered, but the direction in which the proposals of the Opposition would lead the working class of the Soviet Union and of the world.

This forms the subject matter for other articles.