

IT IS URGENT TO OPPOSE THE RIGHT AND THE LEFT WITHIN THE WORKER'S MOVEMENT

K. Ebrahim, September, 2011

The workers movement consists of three segments: the vanguard, the middle strata and backward elements. Studying the workers movement and proposing a political line without due consideration to the close interrelationships between these three segments, and without understanding the importance of each one of them at each stage of struggle, would be pointless.

Regardless of the importance of the workers movement at its base in mobilizing and organizing the working class, without the intervention of the conscious element, the worker vanguard, the worker movement will remain limited to reformism. At the same time, the importance of the worker vanguard in the education of conscious worker cadres persists; in the absence of a focus by the conscious element on organizing the masses of workers, the workers movement will not have a mass line character and will remain isolated.

In practice, and in taking into account 125 years of workers movement history in Iran, the role of the conscious element in structuring the workers movement at the base, from the very beginning, has been outstanding. Anyone who intends to study, and to promote a political line in, the workers movement cannot afford to disregard the glorious past of this movement or to fail to consider the history of the international workers movement, and still expect to proceed on to resolve the problems and difficulties of the workers movement in Iran.

The organization and structure of the working class in European countries has developed over the course of the past 200 years via the creation of associations and trade unions through the efforts of activist, conscious workers. But the role of the vanguard, and even of utopian communists, alongside this conscious worker element cannot be ignored; it must be accepted that these elements and tendencies have played an important role in organizing and directing the workers movement.

Since the original formulation of proletarian revolutionary theory by Marx and Engels, and the first publication of The Communist Party Manifesto, 163 years ago, the struggle between the communist line and reformist lines, and the struggle against anarchist, opportunist and Right and Left revisionist lines has been continuous to this day. The bankruptcy of reformism on the world scale finally reached to a point that the trade unions which have taken the class collaborationist line with the bourgeoisie have more and more distanced itself from the worker's movement and their reformist line did not get the majority of the worker's approval. In the same manner, the anarcho-syndicalists, the Left and Right political lines of the various labor parties have not gained broad support among the working class, and they have been unable to propel this class to victory in its overthrow of the capitalist and pre-capitalist systems.

Scientific communism, from the very beginning, was aware that the mobilization of the working class within its own trade unions, labor organizations and worker assemblies could serve as the "primary school" for lessons in collective action, for the creation of class solidarity, and finally for the development of the political struggle of the working class to destroy the systems which rely upon private property and upon private ownership of the means of production and exchange, to

establish collective and social ownership, and to eliminate wage labor: in other words, to build socialism and communism.

From the beginning, scientific communism recognized the necessity of the working class becoming politically conscious, the need to establish communist parties in each country, and for local communist parties to create an international proletarian party- a communist international. It also emphasized that without the existence of such parties at the head of the working class movement, this movement would not advance beyond reformism nor break out of the framework of bourgeois relations: it would not be able to eradicate the capitalist system.

The ups-and-downs in the history of the international workers movement demonstrate the validity of this scientific and historical analysis. In the absence of a revolutionary communist party which is capable of providing strategic and tactical guidance both in the short and long term in a correct manner, the seizure of power by the working class and the consolidation of socialism and communism is simply not possible.

All this historical analysis and its conclusions have been tested in Iran; for more than 100 years, Iranian communists have continuously struggled within the ranks of the working class, aiding in its mobilization, implementing over time both correct and incorrect policies and tactics, sharing in both victories and defeats of the working class.

Then, in consideration of this experience, what is to be done?

Genuine communists believe in the revolutionary theory of the working class, and strive to implement it in the concrete and specific conditions of Iran. They have continuously emphasized the importance of the creation of a single revolutionary communist party and consider its creation a primary obligation of communists and the vanguard of the working class. Why? Because in the same manner that among complex life forms the brain plays a determinant role in survival and guidance of behavior, the communist party leads the working class and its political life. And it is clear that uniting conscious workers is much simpler than uniting the unconscious working masses.

More than 91 years ago, Iranian communists, under the guidance of Lenin's teachings and within the general lines of scientific communism, created the Iranian Communist Party on June 22, 1920 – the first important step for the Iranian workers movement. This Party, along with its non-proletarian allies succeeded in the creation of independent Socialist Republics in Gilan Province. It also was successful in organizing workers, women, teachers, and fishermen....etc. But ultimately its activities and organization foundered – on the one hand due to the emergence of Right and Left tendencies within the Party, and on the other hand due to the consolidation of power by the central government's tyrannical dictatorship in collaboration with imperialism. The unequal balance of military forces, and the inability to carry out an orderly and prudent retreat to protect their defense forces, resulted in the crushing of the party's organizations inside of Iran. Consequently the Party organizations were destroyed. However, this defeat by no means represents an example of the incorrectness of the Communist Party's role in organizing and mobilizing the workers movement.

After the downfall of Reza Shah's monarchy, and with the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, some democratic opportunities surfaced for a few years. Due to the central government's weakness during this period, even the reformist and opportunist Tudeh Party of Iran, with the support of many activist workers, was able to successfully mobilize a considerable segment of the working class through the United Workers Council of Iran.

With the intensification of repression of this party, especially after the imperialist coup of August 19, 1953, new democratic opportunities were nevertheless created; however, due to the absence of a genuine communist party and to the outbreak of divisions within the Iranian communist movement, the mobilization of the workers also ground to a halt, and all the labor organizations which were created could not go beyond reformism.

This valuable experience showed that (1) in order to clear the way for the advancement of the workers movement, a vanguard proletarian party is a necessity; and (2) the savage repression of the workers movement indicates the perceived threat that this movement poses to the capitalist system and shows that the possibility of the full organization of the working class, solely via trade unions, does not exist in any country of the world. As a result, the organization of the working class must obligatory be carried out at different levels.

In addition, today, as a result of both Right and Left revisionism, sectarianism is widespread in the Iranian communist movement; the working class movement also suffers from this sectarianism; and we can say for certain that reformists in Iran have the upper hand compared to the Left organizations in this movement at this time.

A further historic tragedy has occurred that several of the Left organizations call themselves “the communist party” and claim to be capable of leading the workers movement; they have even caused divisions among a segment of the workers movement which leans toward the Left. As a result, bourgeois, petite-bourgeois and imperialist elements have been given the opportunity to attract these workers to their political lines!! These sectarianism factions, whether willingly or not, have joined the side of global imperialism or of the local bourgeoisie, and therefore today a very dangerous situation exists for Iranian as well as international workers and the communist movement.

In addition to these Left organizations, there are also other groups among the Iranian Left which have not correctly grasped the primordial importance of a single communist party for the mobilization of the working class; instead, they assign top priority to the mobilization of the working class via trade unions. For instance, in reviewing the article “The Problems and Difficulties of Workers” – in The Workers Research Group, August 2011- we read: “What the workers have witnessed during all of these years is that the regime, with all of its might and for different reasons, has repressed the workers movement.” And further, that “The creation of independent workers institutions . . . always has been a red flag to the repressive system”. Some other organizations in the left movement of Iran also have not understood the primordial importance of the existence of a unique communist Party for(organization of the working class and give the precedence to the organization of trade unions. Namely, the analysis of the “Problems and difficulties of workers”- Analysis worker group, August 2011- they wrote: “All these years, the workers have witnessed that the regime with all his government’s apparatus, with different reasons oppressed the worker’s movement”,” Creation of any democratic and independent structure... was always the red line of system”.

Despite this reality, the author continues to emphasize open, overt activity; he writes: “The rational solution to this, and it is worthwhile to say that this is the creation of independent trade unions, which is the most difficult task of all, and these days this demand is more vital for workers than their daily bread; activists must pay more attention to this demand.” “If the Left activists and also Left political groups redouble their efforts, trade unions could be established in the various factories at a rapid pace ... this effort is the most pressing task facing the people and Left political groups who believe in the workers movement”.

And then finally, “Also, provided that the Left political groups can reach such an understanding, they must focus most of their activities on this task until they are able to see for themselves the on-going development of a working class Party; otherwise, they will always be laboring under the illusion that they are creating a ‘real party’”.

The first part of these expressed views, if we look at the real meaning of the words and we acknowledge “the red line of the repressive system” about the organizing of the workers, that should lead us to realize that organizational activities must take place at different levels, both covert and overt, in the spheres of politics, trade unions, art, sports...etc. And despite the fact that the creation of (a broad-based) an all overt and independent workers organization is among the important priority objectives of Left forces, but its achievement first of all requires the active participation of the workers. Considering the Islamic regime’s repression, achievement of this objective is only possible in the long run. In addition, even if this broad-based workers organization is created, given the likely efforts of Left sectarians, and given the existence of divisions among the political forces of the various existing, diverse existing labor organizations, each one of the various labor organizations presumably will align itself with one or other of the Left factions. This tendency not only weakens without any coordination the everyday struggles of the workers organizations; it benefits the employers and the ruling class on one hand, and the reformists on the other hand. And finally, regarding this mobilization of workers into independent trade union organizations, with the full hearted aid of Left political groups, even if it succeeds: What does this have to do with the formation of a working class Party? And why, without this condition precedent, would “Left political groups” be “laboring under the illusion that they are creating a ‘real party’”, as you pretend?

The organizing issue of workers, whether from a tactical or a strategic point of view, is a basic principle and on-going responsibility of communists. Even more important, and pivotal, is the existence of political party that can guide the struggles of the working class toward the overthrow of the capitalist system. The lack of persistent effort to meet the urgent need for the creation of a single working class party, and the misplaced emphasis on the organization of workers via trade union organizations, does nothing more than promote reformist policies within the workers movement at the expense of revolutionary policy of Party building. That is the capsized dialectics regarding party building, from what the comrades of The Workers Research Group should have in mind.

In the advanced industrialized countries, reformism has been a tool which social democracies, in particular, have promoted within the workers movement. In countries like Iran, where there is outright dictatorship and despotism, any type of protest movement for workers’ rights and well-being is met with violent police repression, and therefore takes on a political form. As a result, the ground for politicizing the workers movement is much more fertile than in the advanced capitalist countries. Therefore, if a political line, especially a communist line, is to be put forward for the workers movement, communists must immediately take up the task of cleaning up their Augean stables which have been fouled for decades by the outbreak of modern revisionism, and recognize the highest priority, which is the creation of a single unified communist party. Contrary to that proposition, The Workers Research Group, in regard to the creation of legal trade unions “The Internationalist Workers Organizations”, presents the following suggestion: ““Legalization of trade unions” has never become a primary demand in workers’ protests. Workers’ protests, as in the past, have essentially taken the form of mass meetings with elections of boards of representatives to press their main demands, which have been for resistance against further erosion of workers’ rights, for timely payment of wages, for regulation to limit (“emergency” terminations / lay-offs expulsion of recruited workers under the pretext of

crisis, and for the defense of workers facing trumped-up charges from the Islamic regime and their employers, which intensify competition among workers”.

“The present methods of the workers struggle, with reliance on unofficial (underground) forces and cells, are the only possible methods to ensure the steady mobilization of the workers’ protests....Abandoning underground organizing.... is suicidal”.

These comrades must be asked if the actual issue at hand is indeed the method of organizing workers’ protests, given their admission that so far the elections of boards of representatives have been “the main form of workers’ protests”; and that “reliance on underground forces and cells” as you pretend; First of all, what has been achieved on the part of the working class, and what difficulties have been resolved? Secondly, how is it that such a large segment of the Iranian working class has not chosen this method which from your point of view is the only appropriate one, and thus no unity in working class practice has been created? Thirdly, why has the method of electing boards of representative not been repressed by the Islamic regime, but instead so much pressure has been put on the trade unions and their leaders? Fourthly, since the workers’ trade unions have been so severely targeted by the Islamic regime, isn’t that proof enough to believe that these trade unions are a danger to the regime?

To limit ourselves to one method in the current working class movement and in the complex class struggle in Iran, is to fall victim to oversimplification of these struggles, to become incapable of seeing the twists and turns by adopting a one-dimensional method in advancing these struggles. Without a doubt, the working class must steadily learn to apply covert methods of organizing, given the repressive power of dictatorships such as in Iran. As a matter of fact, “Internationalist Workers Organizations” admit that perhaps up until now the workers have done so. But insisting upon that means alone amounts to not seeing the forest for the trees. From the point of view of scientific communism, the combination of overt and covert work methods should be resolutely utilized in practice. But when the supporters of these organizations make such statements as: “The workers have no other alternative except continuation of the struggle with the present method, and to strive for the creation of an organization and a political party of their own”, they show that they do not have a clear vision of the priorities of the workers movement – that the vanguard political party of the working class is the leadership of the working class, and without it, the workers movement, whether overt or covert, whether organizing through trade unions or through elections of boards of representatives along the lines of reformism or anarchism, goes nowhere.

The suggestion of these so called left of these comrades, has Right wing consequences and would not be accepted by rank and file workers.

Below is an example of the Left wing approach of other organizations. As background, five Iranian Left political organizations [“The Unified Communist Fedayeen”, “Fedayeen Minority”, “Ranjbaran Party of Iran”, “The Revolutionary Workers Organization (Rahe Kargar)” and “The Minority Nucleus”] put out the following joint statement in defense of workers’ rights:

“On June 9, 2011, in protest against the lack of rights for Iranian workers, and in defense of imprisoned Iranian workers, four French trade unions have organized a protest activity in front of the International Labor Organization (ILO) headquarters in Geneva. With no illusions regarding the bourgeois nature of the ILO, we support this just, responsible action which can exert pressure on the Islamic capitalist regime in Iran; we invite everyone to participate in this protest activity so that we can expose to the world the Islamic regime’s brutality toward workers.”

The Left wingers write: "Isn't the goal of these groups, to be achieved through a joint gathering with several trade unions at the ILO headquarters, to "expose brutality" a matter of surprise? . . . To present their grievance, of the petty thieves and criminals, have they sought refuge in the headquarters of the strong criminals... this state of affairs, more than anything else, stems from their ideological loyalty to Maoism, to Stalinism and all manner of confusion that such loyalty engenders."

Irresponsible and bombastic Left-style rhetoric permeates this pretentious claim. If they understood the techniques of class struggle from a communist and scientific viewpoint, they wouldn't have written such criticism. First of all, participation in a protest organized by four French labor unions, in defense of imprisoned Iranian workers, is a sign of sympathy and solidarity among workers in their international struggle; you, comrades, who make a claim of internationalism without knowing much about it, are resentful of this solidarity! Secondly, if "exposing brutality" is an incorrect action, then perhaps starting tomorrow we should not print and distribute any statement against any criminal governments, since the workers movement cannot be promoted by distributing such statements!! In the meantime, the participation of these five Iranian Left political organizations in the French friends' action will be publicized in the French press, and may even be publicized in the mainstream global media, which helps to further isolate the Islamic regime in the eyes of the people of the world. Thirdly, this protest in front of an international institution is not a "grievance of petty thieves" presented to "legally sanctioned criminals" but rather it is also a protest against an international institution which seats the regime's representatives. Fourthly, you who are so dishonest and disingenuous in your interpretation of such a simple act, how can you permit yourself to attack "Maoism" and "Stalinism", and align yourselves with the imperialist and reactionary propaganda which is being broadcast in their global media?!

Now, in order to expose your limited understanding of scientific communism, we refer directly to this theory. Lenin, in his well known book, *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, writes:

"One will readily agree that any army which does not train to use all the weapons, all the means and methods of warfare that the enemy possesses, or may possess, is behaving in an unwise or even criminal manner. This applies to politics even more than it does to the art of war. In politics it is even harder to know in advance which methods of struggle will be applicable and to our advantage in certain future conditions. Unless we learn to apply all the methods of struggle, we may suffer grave and sometimes even decisive defeat, if changes beyond our control in the position of the other classes bring to the forefront a form of activity in which we are especially weak. If, however, we learn to use all the methods of struggle, victory will be certain, because we represent the interests of the really foremost and really revolutionary class, even if circumstances do not permit us to make use of weapons that are most dangerous to the enemy, weapons that deal the swiftest mortal blows. Inexperienced revolutionaries often think that legal methods of struggle are opportunist because, in this field, the bourgeoisie has most frequently deceived and duped the workers (particularly in "peaceful" and non-revolutionary times), while illegal methods of struggle are revolutionary. That, however, is wrong. The truth is that those parties and leaders are opportunists and traitors to the working class that are unable or unwilling (do not say, "I can't"; say, "I shan't") to use illegal methods of struggle in conditions such as those which prevailed, for example, during the imperialist war of 1914-18, when the bourgeoisie of the freest democratic countries most brazenly and brutally deceived the workers, and smothered the truth about the predatory character of the war. But revolutionaries who are incapable of combining illegal forms of struggle with every form of legal struggle are poor revolutionaries indeed." (Selected Works in one volume in Farsi, p. 764)

“The proletarian vanguard has been won over ideologically. That is the main thing. Without this, not even the first step towards victory can be made. But that is still quite a long way from victory. Victory cannot be won with a vanguard alone.” ((Collected Works,)Ibid p. 762)

This is the problem of the workers' vanguard (in the workers movement is truly defined as such). To refuse this insight, and to instead proceed to seek to resolve the problems of the workers movement (which are far more complex, and which require an accurate knowledge of the tactics and strategies of the working class in advancing the proletarian revolution), is to take on an impossible burden. Its only possible consequence is to move in the wrong direction. If the adversaries of the correct line of the essential role of the vanguard in the workers movement are unable to unite with each other, how will they ever be able to unite the masses of workers along their current prevailing political line? The propagation of sectarianism within the movement is the sole result of their efforts.