

'PEOPLE DEVOID OF ALL PRINCIPLE'

"The tactics of agitation in relation to some special question, or the tactics with regard to some detail of party organization may be changed in twenty-four hours; but only people devoid of all principle are capable of changing, in twenty-four hours, or, for that matter, in twenty-four months, their view on the necessity -- in general, constantly and absolutely -- of an organization of struggle and of political agitation among the masses." -- What is To Be Done.

These words of Lenin's are brought to mind by the latest switch, or seeming switch, in the line of the Klonsky circle on the question of agitation and propaganda.

Hardly nine months have passed since the Central Committee of the October League, on the proposal of the Klonsky circle, adopted the line of "propaganda as chief form of activity." What a struggle there was at that time over the meaning of this phrase, taken from a sketch of an essay by Stalin!

Two distinct lines emerged at that time. "Propaganda" here means propaganda in the strict sense, as distinct from agitation, said the Klonsky circle in chorus, having "studied up" on the question in the immortal works of WVO and the LMLU. No! "propaganda" here means propaganda in the broad sense, the spreading of ideas, as distinct from mass action, was the reply of one voice, who wrote three papers and a study guide on the subject, including one paper expressly focusing on Stalin's controversial sentence fragment.

How was the issue finally put? Said the one dissenting voice: if the phrase "propaganda as chief form of activity" is meant in the broad sense in which it was intended, I can vote "yes." If it is put in the narrow sense, I shall vote "no." By a ruling from the chair, the question was put in the narrow sense. All voted in favor, one voted against.

That was July 1976. Now, in The Call of Feb. 14, 1977, on pp. 8-9, we find the disputed passage of Stalin's quoted, along with this bland remark in parentheses:

"Editors note: Here the Russian phrase used by Stalin refers to propaganda in the broad sense of the propagation of revolutionary ideas, encompassing both agitation and propaganda."

Nine months earlier this was the crux of the heresy propounded by that "arch-revisionist and lover of the bourgeoisie," Nicolaus; today it is the accepted truth, conveyed blandly in a parenthetical note, as if this had always been the Klonsky circle's view.

Patience and irony, Lenin once remarked, are essential qualities for a Bolshevik. Irony, because the Call article in which this tacit confession that Nicolaus was correct on this point is conveyed, is also dressed up as a "polemic" against Nicolaus, i.e. against the individual whom the Klonsky circle "expelled" for putting forward the view on this point that the Klonsky circle has now adopted for its own. And patience, too, because -- who can tell? -- in another nine months the Klonsky circle may be compelled to adopt as its own yet additional points of line against which it is presently "polemicizing" with all the resources of invective and character assassination it can muster.

Naturally, there is in the Klonsky circle's Feb. 14 article no hint of an admission of error on its part, no suggestion that the Klonskyist proposal to the CC of July 1976 was, in its central thesis, mistaken. The point is long past when anyone expected open, timely self-criticism of its errors on the part of the Klonsky circle.

A valuable hint of an admission of error, however, occurs in passing in a "Report on the Struggle With Nicolaus -- By DB," which the Klonsky circle distributed among its cadre, and a copy of which has reached M-L FORWARD. It says there on p. 23 that "In the struggle against Nicolaus, we also

made some errors of emphasis in our formulation that 'propaganda should be the chief form of work.'" DB then proceeds to "restate our basic line as it has been clarified (!) on this question." This "clarification," of course, differs by 180 degrees from the line adopted in July (and "formulated," incidentally, by this same DB) on the basic point of what is meant by "propaganda" in the disputed sentence fragment.

Of course, DB lacks the frankness to state, even for internal consumption, that the pivotal point of the July proposal was incorrect; that the CC was wrong to adopt it, and that a vote against that proposal "as formulated" was correct. For to admit this would pull the rug out from under the Klonsky circle's reactionary campaign of demagoguery and suppression which was launched directly after the CC meeting against the person who voted "no," in order to "prove" that anyone who votes against the Klonsky circle must be a revisionist.

UNCOMFORTABLE IMPLICATION

Try as DB might to avoid this uncomfortable implication, to skirt the issue and conceal its substance under a heap of nonsense, the cadre of the October League -- insofar as they have not allowed themselves to become mental prisoners of the Klonsky circle -- will not fail to see it. If the line of July, on its central point, was wrong, then to launch "merciless blows" and stir up a storm against someone for having voted against it was doubly wrong.

In any case, the cadre must now defend the new interpretation published in February. To do so, they must be armed with arguments against those who still hold to the old, narrow misinterpretation, which they themselves espoused for nine months. Unfortunately, and precisely because it does not plainly admit that its previous line was mistaken, the Klonsky circle is unable to arm its cadre with arguments against that line. (To do so would be to arm them with arguments against the Klonsky circle.)

As a result, the OL cadre are left in the lurch in ideological struggle. If they want a point-by-point refutation of the narrow, false construction of "propaganda as chief form of activity," -- if they intend to win a battle of propaganda against it in ideological struggles -- they will be forced to sneak their ammunition out of the pages of M-L FORWARD....

"Sneak"? Yes, they will have to do so on the sly, because the Klonsky circle, in its abovementioned "Report," has "directed all OL members to have absolutely no contact with Nicolaus whatsoever." (p. 10) Since it is known that Nicolaus edits M-L FORWARD, reading M-L FORWARD constitutes "contact" with the forbidden individual.

Not so long ago, the Klonsky circle condemned the Avakian crew for prohibiting RU and RCP cadre from reading The Call. Today, the same arrogance.

The Klonsky circle's recognition that Stalin's sentence fragment refers to propaganda in the broad sense -- however belated, grudging and hypocritical this admission is -- is to be welcomed. It is a step in the correct direction. However, all good things have their limits. In this case if propaganda in the strict sense is not the chief form of activity, then what (in the strict sense) is? In lieu of a straight answer, we get more Klonskyite verbiage: "While agitation should quantitatively dominate our work (...), propaganda plays the decisive role." (The Call, Feb. 14.) In other words, most of the forces of the organization should be concentrated on a form of activity that is not decisive? Make sense of that if you will. The tearing apart of quantity and quality is a feature of all metaphysical thought, and can never give concrete guidance to practical work.

The Klonsky circle's line, furthermore, remains stuck in its same anti-Leninist rut on the question of political agitation

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ion. While paying lipservice to political agitation, the Klonsky opinion remains that it is "revisionist" to say that Leninist political agitation should be the chief form of activity of the party in the first main period. But who was it that declared that political agitation is "the cornerstone of the program, the tactics and the organizational work" of the party? It was Lenin in What Is To Be Done. Was Lenin, too, a "revisionist"?

How many months will have to pass before the Klonsky circle admits (internally) that it may have made another "error of emphasis" on this point, and before another 180-degree reorientation is announced in an editor's note in parentheses?

TAILED 'WING' AND CENTRISTS

Highly futile and self-defeating also are the Call's attempts to link the line of political agitation with the "centrists" of the Guardian and with the former "Wing." For, as the Klonsky circle certainly ought to know, the Guardian's Irwin Silber explicitly declared almost a year ago already, before the Klonsky circle, in favor of "propaganda as chief form of activity," the same as the "Wing." The truth is that the Klonsky circle tailed both the "Wing" and the Guardian in adopting the "propaganda" line -- and to this day, it has not been able to draw a line of demarcation against that line.

It will be interesting to watch, therefore, what develops when the Klonsky circle takes on the RCP on this set of questions, as it has promised to do (one of these days). The first attempt, in The Call Feb. 14, did not go beyond a restatement of the commonplace truth that agitation and propaganda must be combined -- a point which everyone, Nicolaus included, has been making against the RCP(RU)'s policy of separate newspapers for about five years, and which virtually the whole of the former "Wing" press has been making against the PRRWO-RWL line (or alleged line -- PRRWO denies it) for more than a year now. The Klonsky circle, in now "rediscovering" this truth and proclaiming it in big letters, is like a kid bragging about graduating from grade school and having learned the alphabet -- three years behind his classmates. If the Klonsky circle intends to grapple more deeply with the line of the Avakian crew, and to achieve something more than a re-run of old PRRWO & Co polemics, it will firstly have to make a clean and principled break with the line of "propaganda" (in the strict sense) as chief form of activity, including with its organizational implications; and secondly, it will have to drop its present pose that all "agitation" is the same -- "just agitation." It will have to make the "discovery," in other words, that there really is a fundamental difference after all between Economist and Leninist political agitation (just as Nicolaus maintained all along), and it will have to acknowledge that all the snotty remarks about "mere agitation" and "agitation in general" that now drip from the lips of the Klonsky "propagandists" were also "errors of emphasis." How many months will it take for this next step?

Truly, only people devoid of all principles are capable of changing, more often than they change shoes, their view "on the necessity -- in general, constantly and absolutely -- of an organization of struggle and of political agitation among the masses." (Lenin)

CAPACITY FOR UNPRINCIPLEDNESS

What the Klonsky circle lacks in principles, however, it more than makes up for in its capacity for unprincipledness. Let us see how DB, in the role of hatchetboy, goes about his work of perpetrating the hoax that Nicolaus advocated alliance with the liberal imperialists. "It is on the question of the ruling class and the liberal imperialists in particular that Nicolaus most clearly exposed himself as a defender, prettifier and supporter of imperialism," writes DB in his internal "Report." There then follows a "quote" from an internal paper by Nicolaus, which DB cites as follows: "In my opinion we should and must form alliances (with the liberal leaders) but only on the condition that we maintain within the alliance our right to criticize...." DB then continues, saying "This general call for unity with the liberals is perhaps the most

telling of all the statements Nicolaus made throughout the course of the struggle." ("Report" p. 14.)

Here is the original text, exactly as written, from which DB, in his fashion, quotes the allegedly damning passage; the paragraph occurs at the end of a paper that is sharply critical of the Klonsky policy of neglecting political exposure of the liberal politicians:

"All the above, concerning our policy toward liberals and reformists and the manner of exposing them, is basic in order for our party (when it is formed) to maintain independence and initiative. We have not yet touched on the question of alliance, namely whether or not and on what conditions it is permissible and obligatory for us to engage in united action (tactical alliance) with liberal and reformist leaders (apart from the revisionists). In my opinion we should and must form alliances, but only on condition that we maintain within the alliance our right to criticize and expose our allies, and on the condition that our allies actually fight for the immediate demands, and not merely say a few phrases. However, in the present situation of our movement and of our organization, the problem of how to maintain our independence and initiative is more urgent than the problem of when and with whom to form tactical alliances. The reason is that we have not yet thoroughly and completely analyzed the errors of our past experiences with 'other leaders' whom we trusted and relied on for a time (e.g. Early Mays, Miller, Sadlowski, 'Worker Sam,' etc.) To eliminate from our thinking the last holdovers of 'trust in other leaders' is the precondition to taking up successfully the question of tactical alliances." (p. 18 of the paper on the articles.)

Let the readers judge whether this is, as DB pretends before the world, a "general call for unity with the liberals," and with the "liberal imperialists" (members of the ruling class) at that. What is actually stated in this "damning" passage? That it is permissible and obligatory under certain conditions to form tactical alliances concerning immediate demands with liberals and reformists in the trade union or community struggles, people of the stripe of Mays, Miller, Sadlowski, and even more obscure individuals; but that a thorough break must be made with the line of trusting and relying on such people before the question of such alliances can even be taken up.

And this is "the most telling of all the statements Nicolaus made throughout the course of the struggle," according to DB! Well, comrade DB, if this is the "most telling" stuff you can bring before the court of public opinion, including the opinion of the OL cadre, then you are wasting people's time. All that you are "exposing" with such tactics is your own insincerity and lack of substance. You are not hanging Nicolaus with this rope, you are hanging yourself.

ANOTHER SAMPLE

Here is another sample. DB reports to the OL cadre that Nicolaus says "you can't rely on the liberals to be for revolution," as if they were for revolution at all. ("Report," p. 15.) Again let's see the original source from which DB quotes. The full paragraph runs as follows:

"It is obvious that you cannot rely on liberals to be for revolution. Liberals are for reform in order to prevent revolution. This is elementary. What needs to be understood in addition, however -- and what the recent events illustrate once again so vividly -- [the reference is to liberal Sen. Schweiker's acceptance of the vice-presidential nomination on the Reagan ticket last August. -- MN, note added] -- is that you cannot rely on the liberals to fight for anything progressive at all, not even for the simplest economic and political reforms under capitalism. Liberals fight for reform only when the spectre of revolution is at hand, not otherwise; and even then they fight for reform only part of the time, and against the revolution the whole time." (p. 7 of the Schweiker article.)

Again, let the reader judge! Has DB stated his opponent's views correctly? Or has he acted in the manner of those contemptible literary con-men and shysters who resort to any sophistry and fabrication, no matter how crude?

Page after page could be filled with similar comparisons, setting the Klonskyite allegations side by side with the originals. There is not one category in the Klonskyite laundry list of charges and insinuations that is not shot through with similar falsifications and hypocrisies. The whole standpoint of the Klonskyite attack is so false, so opportunist, that even in the exceptional case when they hit upon an actual error, it is more by accident than by design. What is characteristic of the whole campaign is -- as Lenin said of the "new" Iskra, when the opportunists took it over -- "its intrinsic dishonesty and falsehood, the attempt to evade the essence of the matter, the attempt to falsify Party opinion and judgement, to misrepresent concepts and facts." ("Note on the Position of the New Iskra," Vol. 7, p. 130.)

Unable to grasp and to stick to a principled line of conduct, and compelled, in desperation, to drop its own arguments and adopt those of its opponents in ideological struggle, the Klonsky circle covers itself with a barrage of the most contemptible sort of political fakery and character assassination. If you tell enough lies often enough, some of them will be believed -- this seems to be the Klonsky circle's motto. It is a principle fit for a fascist dictatorship.

Even today, when the Klonsky circle has comparatively little influence, its methods do considerable harm. It is not so much those whom the Klonsky circle selects as its targets who are harmed by them; in general, they are quite able to defend themselves, and with interest. It is the cause of Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Tsetung Thought which is harmed. Thanks chiefly to the Klonsky method of "polemicizing," nothing that is asserted in The Call today retains any credibility. Not even the truths are believed. The Klonsky methods lower the credibility, respect and prestige that Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Tsetung Thought enjoys in the United States. That is the worst harm that could be done to our cause at the present time, and the best gift that the revisionists could receive. --M.N.

WVO: Blinded

by Circle Vanity

The publication of M-L FORWARD No. 1, with its critique (among other points) of the Klonsky circle's capitulation to WVO on the "propaganda as chief form" question, brought a revealing squeal of self-congratulations from WVO.

Thumping its chest like King Kong, the Workers' Viewpoint paper of Jan. 1977 writes on this point:

"In fact, Nicholas is not far off in 'recognizing' that all opportunists will have to cop to WVO's line . . . The inevitable mutations of the opportunists toward the line of WVO is a testament to its strength" etc. etc.

Now, of course, it is quite true that opportunists change lines like chameleons, but since when does the dirt flatter itself when the chameleon sitting on it turns itself brown? Is this a "testament to the strength" of the dirt?

Since when do Marxist-Leninists pride themselves on the fact that "all the opportunists" are flocking to their line? Isn't this rather something to be ashamed of?

Yes, WVO; you are perhaps right! All the opportunists -- in fact, we may go so far as to say, especially and above everything the opportunists -- are drawn to the "strength" of your line. Yes, all the "Khrushchovs," all the "Mensheviks," all the "marsh" and the "mud" may eventually even "merge" with you. And if you want to boast about this, that is your business.

Apart from this amusing display of the blindness caused by runaway circle vanity, WVO's "polemic" on the publication of M-L FORWARD is marked by a careful avoidance of any of the substantive issues. As befits those who are proud of attracting opportunists . . .