



**GRASPING  
REVOLUTIONARY  
THEORY:**

**A Guide for Marxist-Leninist  
Study Groups**

**\$1.50**

**A Guardian Pamphlet  
by Irwin Silber**



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## Foreword

This pamphlet consists of a series of articles that appeared originally in the pages of the Guardian in the author's column, "Fan the Flames." The articles are intended primarily for those who are coming to the organized study of Marxist-Leninist theory for the first time. This should not be taken to mean, however, that those who have engaged in some formal study of scientific socialism—either in the distant past or even recently—will find this pamphlet merely restating old propositions. The general theoretical underdevelopment of our movement can not be attributed solely to an unfamiliarity with Marxist-Leninist ideas. Even among those who have engaged in forms of organized study previously, the influence of revisionist ideology which thoroughly distorts the basic concepts of Marxism-Leninism (or holds them no longer "relevant") and of dogmatism which approaches the question of theory in a sterile and metaphysical fashion has left its imprint in the form of our movement's wholly inadequate grasp of Marxist-Leninist theory.

It is hoped, therefore, that these articles will prove useful not only to those approaching some of these questions for the first time, but also to those who have been prevented from thoroughly grasping and **internalizing** Marxism-Leninism as a result of the influence of revisionism and dogmatism.

The purpose of this pamphlet is not to promote study of Marxism-Leninism as an end in itself. It has been written in order to provide those who want to make revolution in the U.S. with a tool that will help them develop the theoretical equipment necessary to that awesome task.

— Irwin Silber

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## Grasping Theory

One of the most impressive developments on the U.S. left in the past five years has been the reawakened commitment to Marxism-Leninism as the only sound theoretical basis for social revolution.

Not only has this been typified by the emergence of national new communist organizations and local Marxist-Leninist groups, but it has also produced a near-unprecedented wave of study of revolutionary theory. No one knows for sure how many Marxist-Leninist study groups exist throughout the country, but their number is easily in the hundreds and the actual number of people actively studying Marxism-Leninism on a systematic basis is in the thousands.

This phenomenon is made all the more remarkable by the legacy of anti-intellectual activism that characterized much of the 1960s new left and the general disrepute into which theory had fallen as a result of the political bankruptcy of the revisionist Communist Party which, for years, continued to be associated with Marxism-Leninism in the minds of many people.

In a larger sense, the study of revolutionary theory in the U.S. has been historically impeded by the pernicious American legacy of pragmatism which, basing itself on the assumption that "whatever works is best," has exalted immediate experience at the expense of developing a scientific overview of reality.

This upsurge in the study of scientific socialism as developed through the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao (among others) is, therefore, of the greatest importance in helping us to establish a firm basis for a communist movement that will be equipped to tackle the strategic and tactical tasks of building a party, developing its line and making it into a meaningful (and ultimately vanguard) political force.

As with all other subjective political developments, the process of soundly grasping Marxist-Leninist theory is confronted by the twin dangers of right opportunism and left-sectarianism. By far the biggest obstacle is from the right.

The concentrated weight of bourgeois ideology which pervades 3



“To say that a number of groups are ‘anti-theory’ is not to suggest that they are necessarily at a loss for ‘ideas’ or for words to express them.”

every institution in which ideas are shaped is a powerful force that is not readily overcome. Among the masses of workers, many assumptions basic to bourgeois rule—property “rights,” bourgeois “democracy,” white chauvinism, sexism, individualism—still retain a powerful grip. All this is fed by a carefully cultivated anti-intellectualism designed to make ideology

suspect and at the same time to make the masses believe themselves incapable of grasping theoretical concepts.

The denigration of theory is likewise reflected in the general workers’ movement (the narrow “economism” of the trade unions is itself a reflection of a pragmatic view) and among the broad anti-imperialist forces from whose ranks many of the cadre for a new communist party will inevitably come.

To say that a number of groups are “anti-theory” is not to suggest that they are necessarily at a loss for “ideas” or for words to express them. The various strains of anarchism, “socialist feminism,” revolution by cultural model alteration, “gay liberation” and neosocial-democracy are copious enough when it comes to producing the assortment of political literature which expresses their views.

Despite disagreements with each other, what all these tendencies have in common is the view that Marxism-Leninism is, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, politically bankrupt. In its place, they substitute an enormous variety of utopian schemes and analyses which, in varying degrees, attempt to refute one or more of the following fundamental propositions of scientific socialism:

- Class struggle is the motor force of historical development.
- The proletariat is the only thoroughly revolutionary class in capitalist society.
- Basing a revolutionary strategy on the possibility of a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism is an invitation to disaster and an act of class betrayal.
- Imperialism is a system flowing inevitably out of capitalist development and cannot be changed through some act of will or political position short of the overthrow of the capitalist system.
- A revolutionary party of a new type, along the general lines outlined by Lenin and since amplified by the experiences of many communist parties, is an indispensable instrument for successful proletarian revolution.

• The aim of the working class in seizing state power is to

thoroughly reorganize society along socialist lines and the dictatorship of the proletariat is the indispensable political instrument for the consolidation and construction of a socialist society.

The above by no means exhausts the basic principles of scientific socialism. But it should serve as a useful starting point in differentiating Marxism-Leninism today from the various brands of utopian socialism and social democracy which have an influence on the left, as well as from both revisionism and Trotskyism.

The challenge to revolutionary theory, however, does not come only from the right. Its “left” deviation, a matter which should be of particular concern to the new communist movement, is characterized by dogmatism and a schematic rather than dialectical relationship between theory and practice.

Just as pragmatism “worships” facts, so does dogmatism “worship” theory. The mere compilation of data without the class stand of the proletariat and a world view based on the collective experience of the international communist movement becomes a futile exercise which sooner or later is bound to subvert revolutionary strategy.

Similarly, the “mastering” of the classical works of Marxist-Leninists without fully grasping the dialectical essence of concretely applying theory to problems at specific times and places is to doom such “revolutionaries” to the role of either idle commentators on or totally ineffectual intervenors in the social process.

In the final analysis, dogmatism is merely metaphysics disguising itself as Marxism-Leninism. Revolutionary theory is neither a hothouse for the careful cultivation of unsullied principles nor a polemical sledgehammer to be trotted out when the demands of factional struggle require ideological justification.

Theory and practice are the interpenetrating opposites of revolutionary reality. Theory, which grows out of practice, is the indispensable guide to practice. But ultimately, practice is the more decisive aspect of this unity of opposites. For our task is, as Marx said, not to interpret the world but to change it.

Pragmatism would have us approach this task without benefit of map or compass, without the concentrated experience of world revolutionary thought and practice. Dogmatism would have us approach this task with a textbook and a rented post office box in

“Theory and practice are the interpenetrating opposites of revolutionary reality, but ultimately, practice is the more decisive aspect.”



**"We wage the struggle against the opportunist and social-chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class to our side."—Lenin**

which we can regularly receive the political insights which will guide our struggle.

Both courses may momentarily satisfy a few intellectual vanities, but neither will advance the process of revolution. Only the mastery of Marxist-Leninist theory and, in particular, grasping its dialectical essence, will enable us to chart our own revolutionary path in which the basic truths of scientific

socialism will be applied to the concrete conditions of this place and this time.

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## Starting a Marxist-Leninist Study Group

Perhaps the most hopeful sign of the reawakened interest in Marxist-Leninist theory has been the near-spectacular proliferation of Marxist-Leninist study groups throughout the country in the recent period.

Especially interesting is the fact that the creation of such groups has been largely the result of the self-motivation of those involved rather than the efforts of party-building organizations, although various groups have, of course, instituted study circles as part of their work.

The phenomenon has been so widespread that certain conclusions can now be drawn from it. For one thing, it is clear that in the wake of the activist 1960s which produced a wave of revolutionary expectations among many, there exists today a genuine thirst for Marxist-Leninist theory. A generation which fought bravely out of a deep sense of moral commitment is now looking for answers which it can test against its own concrete experience.

More and more people are coming to realize that the new left critique of the older political parties—CPUSA, various Trotskyist sects, etc.—never came to grips with their real deficiencies. The new left's political instinct that something was rotten was a good one. But instead of focusing on the content of what was wrong, the young radicals of the 1960s settled for that most pernicious of

American political failings, anti-intellectualism and an abhorrence of theory.

All this is what makes the present development so interesting. But still, studying Marxism-Leninism requires a lot more than enthusiasm. Like everything else, it should be approached in a scientific way. The following are some observations concerning study based on concrete experience in one study group here in New York and many discussions with people in other groups.

- Setting up a study group is a serious undertaking. There are always some who are more interested in being in a study group than actually studying. Such matters as regular attendance, punctuality, doing the agreed-upon reading, participating in the discussion and sticking to the topic then become reflections of a serious attitude. A study group which does not demand seriousness from all its members will find itself beginning to disintegrate very quickly.

- The size of a group is important. If it is too big, it quickly becomes unwieldy and there is insufficient internal dialogue involving all participants. On the other hand, if it is too small, the absence of one or two members creates an awkward situation. A good size seems to be in the vicinity of 10-12 people.

- Watch out for ultra-democracy! All ideas are not equally valid. All people are not equally good at chairing discussions, doing reports, etc. One of the purposes of a study group should be to help people develop these skills, but it is hardly the only purpose and certainly not the principal one. The most important is that those in the group move forward in their grasp and absorption of the fundamental ideas of scientific socialism.

- A good study group leader is a plus—but not indispensable. If an experienced comrade is available, take advantage of that person's knowledge and skills. But in the absence of such a person, be conscious of the need for organization, guidance and leadership. Many people coming out of the new left experience have been influenced by anarchist ideas and styles of work which emphasize a mechanical form of democracy in place of the genuine democracy of solving a common task on the basis of utilizing all appropriate techniques.

- Try to develop a scientific approach to the question of what to study. At different times, different works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao or others will be especially pertinent. The choice should be

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**"The defense of Marxism-Leninism does not consist in quoting it but in convincing others of its fundamental practicality to the process of making proletarian revolution."**

made on the basis of not only what's happening in the world or the movement, but also the concrete theoretical needs of the study group itself. Are fundamental socialist concepts unclear? Study the "Communist Manifesto." Are people influenced considerably by anarchism and various counter-cultural ideas? Study "Socialism Utopian and Scientific." Do the study group

members already have a class analysis but are fuzzy as to the distinctions between social democracy, revisionism and Marxism-Leninism? Study "State and Revolution." Are people queasy about their confrontations with various sectarian and dogmatic trends, believing that such groups are wrong, but unable to figure out why? Study "'Left-Wing' Communism" and Mao's essays "On Practice" and "On Contradiction." Are people debating whether or not a party is needed—and what kind? Study "What Is To Be Done?" And so on.

- Create an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence in the study group. Many people will hesitate to express disagreements or even to reflect their own uncertainties if they feel that they will immediately be thrashed for daring to oppose some concept advanced by Marx or Lenin. This works against the fundamental basis for grasping Marxism-Leninism. Anyone can memorize quotations. The important thing is to understand the political essence of a work, to test the relevance of all theory to practice. The "defense" of Marxism-Leninism does not consist in quoting it but in convincing others of its fundamental practicality to the process of making proletarian revolution.

- Utilize the practice of criticism and self-criticism in a systematic way—but guard against doing this ritualistically. Devote 10-15 minutes at the conclusion of each session for an evaluation that can take up such matters as the style of presentation of a report, problems in the conduct of the discussion, suggestions for improving the work of the group, etc.

- In taking up the study of any work—whether a book as a whole, or even a chapter in it—the group as a whole should attempt to answer the following six questions as the basis for developing a full and well-rounded discussion of the work in question:

- (1) What were the circumstances under which this work was written in the first place and why did (Lenin or Mao or whoever) write it?

- (2) Why are we studying it today? What is its particular relevance for us?

- (3) What is the main point of the work?

- (4) What are the secondary points?

- (5) What points made by the author are unclear?

- (6) What points made by the author are either wrong (in my opinion) or no longer applicable?

- And finally, all study groups if they are serious about the content of their study must sooner or later take up the question of the relationship between their study and their political practice. The temptation at first will be to simply bring concrete problems of individual political work to the group for collective discussion. But while this has some small value, it can actually become very quickly a self-defeating process that diverts the group from its main theoretical work and places the members in the untenable position of making "judgments" about concrete situations solely on the basis of one person's view of that situation and without having a common political strategy or frame of reference to go by. More to the point is to see the connection between such study and the concrete task of party-building, whether this means establishing liaison with other study groups or trying to at some point expand the aim of the study group to transform it into a political collective. Whether as individuals or as a group, the study group should develop the perspective that they are training themselves to become members of a new communist party.

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## **"Socialism: Utopian and Scientific"**

The study of revolutionary theory is primarily a practical question. Class-conscious workers, radicalized intellectuals, militants from every oppressed sector seek revolutionary theory in order to better grasp the tools (strategy and tactics) needed to realize their felt historical objectives.

The turn to theory in the past several years by significant sectors of those who came to political maturity in the struggles of the



**“Above all, Marxists regard man’s activity in production as the most fundamental activity, the determinant of all his other activities.”—Mao**

1960s is itself a reflection of this process. Thousands came to see the absolute inadequacy of activism without a scientific analysis embracing every aspect of society and a scientific plan for making the revolution which was much proclaimed but rarely defined during that period. They also came to see, in practice, the woeful inadequacies of various brands

of “Marxism” they encountered at that time but which were not yet seen as revisionism or Trotskyism or social-democracy.

But where to begin in the study of Marxism-Leninism? Some groups approach this question from the broad philosophical perspective, starting with dialectical materialism, moving on to historical materialism, the stages of human development, class struggle, etc. Others, on the assumption that economic questions are ultimately the fundamental ones in society, begin with a study of political economy. Others, aware of the urgency of party-building, start with that question—usually studying Lenin’s “What Is To Be Done?” Still others set out with what might be called simply discussions of current events.

There is probably no fool-proof method of organized study. Life, after all, is dialectical and study is, of necessity, linear. But if the question of study is approached as a practical question there is a better chance of hitting on an approach which will help develop the theoretical understanding of the study group’s members in the most thorough fashion.

Being practical, in this sense, means taking into account the level of development of the study group participants and the principal theoretical and practical questions facing the revolutionary movement at this time.

An excellent work for a beginning study group to start with is Engels’ “Socialism Utopian and Scientific.” This relatively brief work has two outstanding advantages: it reviews and summarizes some of the basic assumptions of historical materialism and Marxian political economy; and it directly confronts a political and philosophical tendency which—in form of counterculture, modern anarchism, glorification of spontaneity, neosocial-democracy—continues to have a desultory effect on many who still approach revolutionary struggle solely as a moral imperative and not yet in a scientific fashion.

The history of this work—as with so many other Marxist “classics”—offers a good example of the practicality of theory.



The pamphlet is itself but a chapter in a much larger work, Engels’ justly renowned “Anti-Duhring,” one of the most brilliant elucidations of the scientific basis for both dialectical materialism and proletarian revolution. Engels wrote his book to deal with a specific problem that had arisen in the German socialist movement in the 1870s, the appearance of a new “socialist theory” as well as “a complete practical plan for the reorganization of society” by a certain Dr. E. Duhring. The book was published at a time when significant unity had been achieved among German socialists and, on the basis of his work, Duhring began to set up his own organization, in effect a rival socialist party.

The practicality of “Socialism Utopian and Scientific” to our own time and our own movement at its present stage of development is called to mind by a simple statement in Mao’s “On Practice.” “Above all,” says Mao, “Marxists regard man’s activity in production as the most fundamental practical activity, the determinant of all his other activities.”

Engels, in this work, lays out with great care and detail exactly why this is so. The importance of this thesis as a starting point cannot, of course, be overemphasized. It is the basis for understanding why the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism is the key to eliminating the material basis for every other form of oppression and exploitation—rather than the other way round. It is on this simple foundation that the communists lay



**“After the theoretical foundations for scientific socialism were laid, utopian socialism became a reactionary diversion from the path of historical necessity.”**

the basis for understanding the nature of society and undertake to formulate the necessary strategy for changing it.

“Historical materialism” Engels summarizes as “that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes

of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggles of these classes against one another.”

Engels takes up particularly the views of various “utopian” socialists—but in doing so he makes a crucial distinction and thereby offers an excellent example of his own mastery of the dialectical method. Not only does he analyze the substance of the theories of the early utopians, but he places them in historical perspective. He points out that while the early socialist pioneers fantasized “new social systems [which] were foredoomed,” their failure rested in the fact that the solution to the social problems they confronted “as yet lay hidden in undeveloped economic conditions.” Therefore Engels sees these early socialists as great pioneers with “stupendously grand thoughts” who were the forerunners of scientific socialism.

But if utopianism was a progressive phenomenon in the period before the full development of industry had made of the proletariat a powerful social class, it turned into its opposite in later eras. Where once the views of the utopians were heralds of the emergence of the working class in modern society, after the theoretical foundations for scientific socialism were laid and then translated into the practical revolutionary organizations of the proletariat, those views then became a reactionary diversion from the path of historical necessity.

In our own time, when the decay of capitalism has engendered such wide alienation that the most diverse intellectual and social forces are obliged to announce their fidelity to “socialism,” the need to distinguish the scientific essence of socialism from the host of schemes which almost daily proclaim a blueprint for the new earthly paradise takes on new significance.

In addition to the above, Engels has included in the preface to “Socialism Utopian and Scientific” what is probably the single best refutation of agnosticism from the point of view of dialectical materialism that has ever been written. Because it appears

in the preface, some study groups might tend to overlook this little gem. In fact, a good rule for every study group—a rule which will help to ensure that theory is viewed in its practical aspect—is to always study the various prefaces and historical notes in every work it takes up.

Aside from everything else, the preface Engels wrote also offers an example of just how witty and skillful in a literary sense both Engels and Marx were. Since the charge is frequently heard that Marxists are singularly lacking in a sense of humor—an appraisal which, unfortunately, some Marxists seem to have unduly devoted themselves to proving—“Socialism Utopian and Scientific” is also a good introductory work in that it offers an appropriate sense of what is still to come for those who read further and further in Marxism.

In conjunction with this work, several short pieces may also be studied which help to emphasize some of the principal questions. These are “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism” by Lenin; “Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy” by Marx, and Engels’ speech at the graveside of Karl Marx.

**“The standpoint of practice is the basic and primary standpoint in the dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge.”—Mao.**

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## **Revisionism and Lenin’s “State and Revolution”**

The word “revisionism” is, understandably, somewhat troubling to many people coming to Marxist ideas seriously for the first time.

Taken for granted as a disparaging label, it may suggest an intellectual rigidity, a resistance to “revising” previously held concepts as they may have become outmoded. And it must be conceded that some do attack revisionism precisely in such a dogmatic fashion.

It is important, therefore, to understand why the growing Marxist-Leninist movement in the U.S. attaches such importance to the struggle against revisionism—and what precisely is meant



“Revolution is a practical and not a theoretical question.”

by the term.

First, let one simple truism be stated. When Marxists use the term “revisionist,” they are not referring to just any change or further development of Marxist theory. Lenin, who was the staunchest battler against revisionism in his own time, undoubtedly did more to develop and update Marxist theory than any other revolutionary

theoretician.

Revisionism as used by Marxists means the abandonment, distortion or revision of the theories of scientific socialism in a particular way. It has meant the advocacy of certain theories and “revolutionary” strategies which objectively abandon the struggle for socialism. Its most common expression has come in sowing the illusion that, in one form or another, there is a parliamentary road to socialism.

At first glance, this may not appear to be such an objectionable heresy. But since revolution is a practical and not a theoretical question, the implications of the parliamentary thesis have profound practical consequences. To base oneself on a parliamentary, peaceful transition theory means the evolvment of a strategy appropriate to such a thesis. It determines the nature of the revolutionary party that will attempt to give leadership to the struggle. Most important of all, it makes a particular appraisal of the enemy’s forces, strengths and presumed weaknesses.

Of course, revisionism does not advertise itself as a betrayal of socialist objectives. Indeed, many revisionists undoubtedly believe with the utmost sincerity that they are upholding the cause of the working class (if not always the proletarian revolution) at the very moment that they are pursuing these fantasies.

It is precisely because the U.S. Communist Party is a thoroughly revisionist party, totally consolidated behind a political line which is unmistakably class collaborationist, that Marxist-Leninists in the U.S. have the task of building a new communist party.

This is the context for taking up the study of Lenin’s two most important works—“State and Revolution” and “Imperialism.” Both of these works, written in the course of less than two years, were not only enlightening studies of two profound theoretical questions. That they were. But they were also at the same time polemics against various revisionist theories concerning the state and the imperialist system which had enormous influence in the international working-class movement at that time.

Lenin’s preface to “State and Revolution” is quite significant in this respect. “The question of the state is now acquiring particular importance,” he writes, “both in theory and in practical politics.... The world proletarian revolution is clearly maturing. The question of its relation to the state is acquiring practical importance.”

Lenin then goes on to point out that “social chauvinism... dominates the official socialist parties” and that the established leaders of the working-class movement have adapted themselves to the interests “not only of ‘their’ national bourgeoisie, but of ‘their’ state.” The struggle of the working class against the then-raging imperialist war as well as for socialism, he says, “is impossible without a struggle against opportunist prejudices concerning the state.”

The “theoretical question of the state is important then, not because Marxist literature on the subject had been somehow deficient up to that point and it was time to fill that gap on the library shelf. It was important in 1917 when Lenin wrote his work because on the solution to the profound theoretical questions involved in this matter rested the practical path of both the Russian revolution and the revolutionary struggles of the working-class movements in all the capitalist countries.

In terms of “updating” Marxism, can anyone suggest that the question of the state has diminished in importance since Lenin’s time? Clearly, if anything, it has increased in importance, as the further development and consolidation of monopoly capitalism in North America, Europe, Japan and Oceania has made of the bourgeois state apparatus a much more powerful and extensive organization than ever before. In fact, it ought to be obvious that in the U.S. (and it is not significantly different in the other capitalist countries), the vast military machine, the elaborate political-judicial structure and the extensive state monopoly capitalist enterprises make the modern bourgeois state the absolute essence of capital’s domination of society.

The question that Lenin posed in his time and we must answer in our own, reduced to its most clear-cut terms, is this:

In the struggle for socialism, can the working class and its allies take over the existing state apparatus—or must it be broken and smashed? The principal purpose of “State and Revolution” is to demonstrate in both theoretical and practical terms why a strategy based on “taking over” the existing state apparatus—and this is

“The conclusion that the bourgeois state apparatus ‘must be broken, smashed,’ says Lenin, ‘is the chief and fundamental point in the Marxist theory of the state.’”



**“Only he is a Marxist who extends recognition of class struggle to the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”—Lenin.**

the essence of the various theories of “parliamentary” and “peaceful” transition—is not only futile but objectively serves the interest of monopoly capital and is, in essence, a manifestation of bourgeois ideology in the ranks of the working-class movement.

The conclusion that the bourgeois state apparatus “must be broken, smashed” says

Lenin, “is the chief and fundamental point in the Marxist theory of the state.”

Inexorably flowing from this point are a host of theoretical and practical consequences. The theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat is based on it—so much so that Lenin writes: “It is often said and written that the main point in Marx’s theory is the class struggle. But this is wrong. . . . Those who recognize only the class struggle are not yet Marxists; they may be found to be still within the bounds of bourgeois thinking and bourgeois politics. . . . Only he is a Marxist who extends recognition of the struggle to recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is what constitutes the most profound distinction between the Marxist and the ordinary petty (as well as big) bourgeois.”

Bound up with all this is the Marxist view on the unavoidable necessity for mass armed struggle to overthrow the rule of capital, for one can hardly speak of “smashing” the bourgeois state and its military foundation in any other way. Directly flowing from that point is the necessity for a tightly structured, disciplined revolutionary party, based on the principles of democratic centralism, which—depending on the period and the main strategic tasks—is prepared to undertake work that is both legal and illegal.

Some revisionists, like the Italian, French and Japanese Communist Parties, are candid enough to admit that they have abandoned the Leninist thesis of the state.

But what about the U.S. CP? Officially, it still tries to lay claim to being a “Leninist” party. It will even occasionally utter some brave and militant-sounding phrases in opposition to imperialism. Its publicly announced “strategy” for socialism, as well as its daily practice, however, are something else again.

What are we to make of their stated goal of a “future democratic state oriented toward the goal of socialism?” What conclusion are we to draw when they frankly avow that the “overall problem” is—“what to do about monopoly capitalism’s control of the

economy and the government, that is, to what extent can this control be restricted and eased?”

To the unwary, such phrases may sound “sensible.” At worst, some may say, they don’t go far enough, but they appear to be worthwhile objectives. Why should we call those who advocate such views ideological agents of the bourgeoisie? Isn’t this overdoing the polemics?

These are the questions which those studying “State and Revolution” today should undertake to answer for themselves. In this study, it is vital to struggle against two incorrect tendencies. One is a scholastic tendency which will tend to confine its study to the historical circumstances prevailing in Lenin’s time. While those circumstances should not be ignored—indeed they are of the greatest importance in properly understanding the work—our purpose in studying “State and Revolution,” it should be clear, is not primarily historical. Much more to the point is that we want to determine the validity of Lenin’s principal thesis to our own period.

The other incorrect tendency is to make that application to our own time in a mechanical and dogmatic fashion. It is easy enough to read “State and Revolution” and demonstrate a thousand times over how modern revisionism flies in the face of its most fundamental conclusions. But contrary to the views which some apparently hold, ideological disputes are not settled by quotations—not from Lenin or Marx or Mao or anyone else.

Our task is to determine for ourselves, on the basis of the most thorough appraisal of objective conditions and today’s social reality, whether the conclusions Lenin reached in “State and Revolution” do indeed offer us the theoretical guidance that we need today.

But even this is not enough. Because all investigation, all ideological debate, proceeds from a class point of view. And so the question must be posed: from the point of view of the working class and its objective historical goal of overthrowing capitalism and building a socialist society, do the basic theses of “State and Revolution” correspond to the real world as we know it today?

The Marxist-Leninists say that they do. And that is why “State and Revolution,” even though the revisionists may choose occasionally to pay lip service to its author, is the most profound ideological weapon in the struggle against modern revisionism.

It is in this spirit that its study should be taken up.

**“State and Revolution is the most profound ideological weapon in the struggle against modern revisionism.”**



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## Mao and the Relationship Between Theory and Practice

Plagued as our movement is by dogmatism of various shades—both left and right—two indispensable essays for Marxist-Leninist study groups to take up today are the essays by Mao Tsetung: “On Practice” and “On Contradiction.”

Written in 1937, the two essays offer a concentrated distillation of the Marxist theory of knowledge. “On Practice” emphasizes the materialist aspect of Marxist philosophy. “On Contradiction” stresses the dialectical aspect.

The introductory footnote to “On Practice” is especially important since it demonstrates once again the practical function of Marxist theory. Dogmatic errors were responsible for “enormous losses to the Chinese revolution” in the period immediately preceding the writing of these essays. Not a small part of those errors came about through the mechanical and uncritical application of certain experiences of the Bolshevik revolution to the concrete conditions of China in that period.

A secondary problem which the essay addresses is that of empiricism, reflected in the views of a number of people in the party “who for a long period restricted themselves to their own fragmentary experience and did not understand the importance of theory for revolutionary practice or see the revolution as a whole, but worked blindly though industriously.”

The point of the essay is not only to stress the primacy of practice in relation to theory—which it does—but to demonstrate that theory itself is a practical question.

“Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it,” says Mao, “but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world. From the Marxist viewpoint, theory is important, and its importance is fully

expressed in Lenin’s statement, ‘Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.’ But Marxism emphasizes the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action.”

Mao’s essay was written to help guide the actions of the Chinese Communist Party at a time when certain extremely significant strategic shifts were required—in particular the decision to see the anti-Japanese struggle as assuming precedence for a period over the struggle against Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang. Likewise Marxist-Leninists today take up the study of this essay in order to help guide their actions in solving the pressing problems of party-building and its relationship to the spontaneous movements among the masses in a concrete fashion.

But the significance of the work goes beyond its immediate practicality. Marxists rarely speak of “absolutes” or “universals.” But the essential ideas of “On Practice” have a universality that informs every aspect of reality. For they summarize in concentrated form the materialist conception of the world—as compared to all manner of idealist explanations of reality.

“On Contradiction” is a much longer work. It is also, in some respects, more interesting and more challenging. Where “On Practice” emphasizes certain fundamental concepts which can more or less be readily grasped, “On Contradiction” offers an almost endless series of provocations.

The basic premise of Marxist dialectics is that one cannot understand objective reality simply by knowing what is. All reality—whether in nature or in social life—is constantly in motion, constantly growing, developing, changing, dying. If one cannot perceive the constant dynamic of phenomena, their interaction with each other, the direction of their movement, their contradictory aspects—then one does not really know reality and therefore cannot act intelligently upon it.

In “On Contradiction” Mao reduces this multifaceted complexity to its essence, to what Marx called “the interpenetration of opposites.” In doing so, he provides the theoretical key with which to unlock the secrets of motion. Once again, while Mao’s concern is with the application of these ideas to the revolutionary process, they too have a universality which can be tested in all of social experience and even in the “natural” world of physics and chemistry.

“The essential ideas of ‘On Practice’ summarize in concentrated form the materialist conception of the world.”



“When the superstructure obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become decisive.”—Mao

A particularly important aspect of this essay takes up the question of the “principal [or dominant] aspect” of a contradiction, with Mao pointing out that the principal aspect does not always remain the same. For a long period of time, the bourgeoisie is the “dominant aspect” of the contradiction between the working class and the capitalists. But with proletarian revolution the

dominant aspect of that contradiction shifts and is reversed. Eventually a new contradiction will arise (actually it already exists in seedling form but will come to full flowering only under socialism) which will ultimately lead to yet another revolution in which the working class—as a class—will disappear.

But, says Mao, some people think that in some contradictions the principal aspect never changes. He then writes in a particularly trenchant passage which by itself could well serve as the basis for one study group session the following:

“For instance, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the productive forces are the principal aspect; in the contradiction between theory and practice, practice is the principal aspect; in the contradiction between the economic base and the superstructure, the economic base is the principal aspect; and there is no change in their respective positions. This is the mechanical materialist conception, not the dialectical materialist conception. True, the productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. When it is impossible for the productive forces to develop without a change in the relations of production, then the change in the relations of production plays the principal and decisive role. The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, ‘without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.’ When a task, no matter which, has to be performed, but there is as yet no guiding line, method, plan or policy, the principal and decisive thing is to decide on a guiding line, method, plan or policy. When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive. Are we going against materialism when we

say this? No. The reason is that while we recognize that in the general development of history the material determines the mental and social being determines social consciousness, we also—and indeed must—recognize the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.”

Neither of these essays are “easy reading.” Most of Mao’s examples come from the experiences of the Chinese revolution. Much of the material seems, at first glance, rather abstract. One may get lost in a maze of contradictions, aspects, antagonisms.

But this is not a bad thing. There is no way in which Mao can supply historical and social examples of the ideas in these two essays which will be most familiar to readers in other countries and at different times. Study groups, however, can and should make their own concrete application and testing of these ideas. But this cannot be done in a superficial manner.

One study group with which I am familiar spent a portion of one fascinating session trying to determine what was the principal contradiction within their own study group. The answer, when it finally emerged out of serious collective discussion, was not quite what most people had expected; but all were convinced that it was the correct one.

In a subsequent column I will relate the various theses that were put forward in that discussion and how it was finally resolved. But since many other groups will undoubtedly find that their situation is similar, rather than offer this group’s “answer,” try that problem for yourself and see how you resolve it.

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## Finding the Principal Contradiction

In a recent study group discussion on contradictions, the question of what was the principal contradiction within the study group itself came up. It was decided to pursue this question as a practical exercise in the methodology of Marxism. As indicated in



The principal contradiction in the study group.

the last column in this series, such an exercise might prove fruitful for other groups.

Among the possible "principal contradictions" put forward by various study group members were the following:

1. Since the group was only a study group and not a Marxist-Leninist collective, the principal contradiction was between theory

and practice; or, more particularly, the absence of any collective practice against which collective study could be measured.

2. Between the study group leader and the other members of the group.

3. Between the men and women in the study group.

There was general agreement that all of these were contradictions. The problem was in determining which—if any—of these was the principal contradiction. After a while, the second and third contradictions were eliminated. This left the first point and—if this had been merely an academic exercise—the discussion could have ended there.

But having also read Mao's "On Practice," some study group members pointed out that they certainly would not be practicing Marxism-Leninism if they merely located the principal contradiction but did nothing to try to resolve it.

"Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world. From the Marxist viewpoint, theory is important...but Marxism emphasizes the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action. If we have a correct theory but merely prate about it, pigeonhole it and do not put it into practice, then that theory, however good, is of no significance." ("On Practice").

In fact, pointed out another study group member, it was only by trying to act on the principal contradiction that the group could determine whether or not its theory had been correct.

There then ensued a lively discussion. How could the contradiction between collective study and individual practice be resolved? Some said that it could be dealt with (if not resolved) by group members using examples from their practice in the elaboration of different theoretical concepts; even to the point of the group undertaking to possibly offer some guidance to different members as they reported on their activities.

At first, this seemed like an "ideal" solution. Actually, as further discussion revealed, it was really an "idealist" solution. Why? First, because the study group had not developed sufficient common political criteria so that its "guidance" would be based on a developed political line. Its basic point of unity was an interest in and willingness to study Marxism-Leninism.

Secondly, the group would be totally dependent on the practice—and interpretation of that practice—by just one person. They would then put themselves in the position of pontificating an "analysis" of a situation without any first-hand knowledge of the situation, without a common political (rather than ideological) perspective and solely on the basis of a report from one individual about whom there was insufficient knowledge enabling them to take appropriate biases and subjective interpretations into account.

Well, if this was not the answer, then shouldn't the group undertake to transform itself into a political collective, with study as one of its main aspects? As was pointed out, some Marxist-Leninist groups had actually developed in precisely such a way.

It did not take long, however, to realize that the concrete conditions of this particular study group were such that the group was not prepared to take such a step. The group had come together to study Marxism-Leninism, but from a variety of backgrounds. With one or two exceptions, most people in the group had not yet fully resolved for themselves their acceptance of certain fundamental Marxist-Leninist propositions. In fact, this is what they had come to learn.

Well, this wasn't getting them any closer to resolving the principal contradictions. "It looks like we'll just have to dissolve the study group," said one disconsolate member. A chorus of "noes" greeted this statement, but there also seemed to be an inexorable logic to it as well and some people began to mutter direfully about the idiot who had proposed the exercise in the first place.

At this point someone made the bold suggestion that maybe the group ought to go back and rethink whether or not it had correctly identified the principal contradiction.

It was then that the discussion really began to come alive. It did not take the group long to realize that they had gone about

"Marxism emphasizes the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action."—Mao



“The contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and us.”

“solving” the problem of principal contradiction in a dogmatic fashion. They had heard or read somewhere that the contradiction between theory and practice was one of the most fundamental—and each had encountered dire examples of dogmatism so often—that they had simply concluded that this must be the principal contradiction in this particular study group without taking

into account the concrete conditions and circumstances of the group. In fact, they had started in an idealist fashion by not examining the actual practice of the study group, analyzing its accomplishments and shortcomings, studying the problems that actually came up—and then putting it all in a larger context.

Not only did this apply to the “principal contradiction” they had decided upon. It was also reflected in the other “candidates” for principal contradiction that had been proposed. Some people had previously had “bad” experiences (or what they considered to be “bad”) with bureaucratic or authoritarian leadership in different organizations and tended to look for this contradiction in every situation—even though in this particular study group the relationship between study group leader and the rest of the people had generally been a good one.

Similarly, some people who rightly saw the struggle against male supremacy as one of the key tasks of the communist movement started with the assumption that the contradiction between men and women (concededly a nonantagonistic contradiction) was bound to be high on the list in this study group—although actual practice had not demonstrated that within this particular group it had evidenced itself as such.

Finally the discussion turned to the actual practice of the study group. “When you come to think of it,” said one person, “we actually spend practically all of our time trying to solve a contradiction that no one has mentioned before.”

“What is that?” asked someone else.

“The contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and us.”

“But that’s not a contradiction,” said someone else. “After all, we’re here to study and learn Marxism-Leninism.”

“True,” said the first one. “That’s the way we are trying to resolve the contradiction.”

“Then the way we should put it,” said still another, “is the contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and our lack of knowledge about it.”



“Or if we want to generalize,” interpolated yet another, “between knowledge and ignorance.”

Some people liked that, but others thought that it had gone too far. “After all, our problem is not ignorance—or knowledge—in general. It is ignorance of Marxism-Leninism. If we don’t make it specific, then we could try to resolve the principal contradiction by studying anything—not just Marxism-Leninism.”

And all of a sudden there was nothing left to debate. Everything had fallen into place. All of Mao’s discussion of principal and secondary contradiction, principal aspect of a contradiction and the unity of opposites in contradictions took on a concrete reality. The “principal aspect” of the principal contradiction in the study group clearly had been “lack of knowledge of Marxism” at the outset. Most people thought it still was, but they could see that the process of change was underway. They also could see how through struggle “lack of knowledge” was going to be turned into its opposite—“knowledge of Marxism-Leninism.”

There was still a final word to be put on the discussion. “Let’s just remember, comrades,” said the study group leader. “We have found the principal contradiction for this particular study group, at this particular time, at this particular stage of its development. That’s very important. It enables us to proceed in a good way. Undoubtedly this corresponds to the actual situation of many other study groups as well. But the other contradictions that were mentioned—and some that weren’t—could also become the principal contradiction at a certain stage. This could happen as a result of our internal development or because events outside our study group might change the general circumstances that brought us together in the first place. We must always be prepared to review the actual circumstances of the group and reopen the discussion.”



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## “What Is To Be Done?”

It is a reflection of the general state of the U.S. left that the study of Lenin's classic work on party-building, “What Is To Be Done?” is high on the agenda of most Marxist-Leninist study groups at this time.

One only wishes that some of those forces who think that the road to party-building rests in the building of coalitions or in “mass action” would attempt to grapple seriously with the ideas contained in this work. Many people picking up “What Is To Be Done?” for the first time are amazed to discover its relevance and immediacy to some of the debates now taking place within our movement.

Not that Lenin offers us a blueprint for party-building. Far from it, although the attempts by some to resolve present-day questions by a mechanical application of Lenin's writings is an embarrassing reminder that the “amateurishness” which Lenin attacked so bitterly in his day is a baneful characteristic of our own movement. The situation confronting communists in Lenin's Russia in 1901-02 when this work was written was significantly different from ours.

The task then is not to study “What Is To Be Done?” in order to learn the mechanics of how to build a party; rather it is to grasp certain fundamental Leninist concepts, first developed and articulated in a rich way in this work, subsequently tested and confirmed in practice, which have relevance to us.

What are those concepts? Basically they are two: the uncovering of “economism” as a trend within the communist movement which, while seeming to base itself on the real conditions of the working class, essentially confines the working class to the struggle for reform; closely tied to this—indeed the inevitable outgrowth of economism—is to minimize the function of the conscious revolutionary organization (the party), maintain it in a primitive and amateurish state and deny its leadership role.

Many people reading Lenin for the first time are surprised to encounter his attacks on economism. After all, it was Karl Marx who demonstrated—and the whole of Marxism is keyed to this view—that economic relations are, in the long run, the most fundamental

of social relations.

Why all this concern with economism then? If economics are at the heart of the matter, if the class struggle is the motor force of history, does it not automatically follow that the economic struggle of the working class, particularly at the point of production, is the most decisive, most important and most revolutionary struggle of all?

This, in effect, is the argument advanced by a significant trend in the Russian revolutionary movement at the turn of the century. “Politics always obediently follows economics,” they proclaimed. They called on the revolutionaries to concentrate their efforts on the “average” worker and not on the “cream” (meaning the most politically advanced) of the workers. Trade union struggles were glorified as “microcosms” of revolutionary struggle. The spontaneous struggle of the working class was hailed as the cauldron from which would emerge socialist consciousness.

Lenin argued against all this. He charged that, in essence, the economists were preventing the working class from developing political consciousness. The real task of the workers, he said, was to organize in order to seize political power—the state apparatus and its attendant “enforcing” bodies—in order to change the underlying economic and property relations. By making the immediate economic struggle of the working class their principal focus, said Lenin, the economists would reduce the revolutionary movement to the level of a trade union movement. And “trade unionism,” he adds, “means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie.”

Was Lenin opposed to the trade unions? Did he believe that the economic struggles of the working class were simply opportunist and that communists who took them up were wrong? Was he opposed to the spontaneous mass struggles of the workers themselves?

To which one might reply: could Lenin have led the Bolshevik Party to state power if he held such backward views?

This is why revolutionary theory must be studied and not skimmed. “What Is To Be Done?” is an argument—not with the workers, but with those “revolutionaries” who were essentially passive and who confined themselves to the consciousness of the working class as it was at any given moment, who in fact tailed behind the consciousness and militancy of the working class, who reduced the importance of revolutionary theory as the indispensable guide to revolutionary action and who completely abdicated

“The real task of the workers, said Lenin, is to organize in order to seize political power—the state apparatus and its attendant ‘enforcing’ bodies.”



Class political consciousness "can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only outside of the economic struggle."

the role of leadership in the working-class movement.

In the heat of these discussions and in order to combat the influence of the ideas of the economists, Lenin helped to clarify the task of the revolutionary and laid the ideological groundwork for forming a new kind of revolutionary party.

The economists—along with sectors of the radicalized intelligentsia—both in Lenin's time and now—tend to see the movement only as it is. Either they bemoan the "hopelessly backward" state of the workers (this is usually expressed as the "white" workers, which means, therefore, a majority of the working class) or else they deify the working class as possessing an innate political acumen based on the individualized experience of exploitation and class struggle which is ultimately far more profound than all the "theories" of the radicalized intellectuals.

All this Lenin considers romantic nonsense. "The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labor legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals.

In the course of its own economic struggle, says Lenin, the working class does not develop class political consciousness. This "can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only outside of the economic struggle, outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers."

Modern-day social-democrats and anarchists have seized upon this statement to show that Leninism is basically an "elitist" view. They paint woeful pictures of arrogant young intellectuals telling the workers what to do, when to do it, posturing their "superior" knowledge of theory before the workers and manipulating the revolutionary process to keep themselves entrenched as leaders of it. And we must concede that some who call themselves Marxist-Leninists lend this slanderous parody some credence by their infantile behavior.

But history will not be confounded by demagogic appeals to egalitarianism. Revolution is made in the concrete conditions which the prevailing economic, political and cultural arrangements have imposed. It is not made by acting as though the transformation of social relations and human capacity which socialism will bring about has

already occurred.

If the study of "What Is To Be Done?" is taken up solely in terms of the arguments of Lenin's time, there is the grave danger (bordering on the inevitable) that many of the modern forms of economism will go unrecognized. Again, Lenin does not leave us a sure-fire formula for detecting economism or any other phenomenon. At all times, one must

keep in mind the context of what he is saying, with whom the argument is being conducted and the particular stage of both the workers' movement and the communist movement in Russia at that time.

If we conscientiously apply that principle we will better be able to appreciate what Lenin has to say. In addition, we will ourselves be better equipped not to parrot Lenin but to differentiate between those concepts which have become a part of the common theoretical equipment of revolutionaries and those which are confined to the particularities of each situation.

More importantly, however, we will be bringing ourselves into that process whereby we can develop the theoretical constructs that will enable us to solve the concrete tasks of making revolution in the U.S.—the first step toward which must be the development of our revolutionary party.

"Revolution is not made by acting as though the transformation of social relations and human capacity which socialism will bring about has already occurred."

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## Two Examples of Pragmatism: Revisionism and Terrorism

Unlike the "activist" 1960s, there are very few people on the left today who would admit to being "antitheory."

Of course, even those who thought that all political questions would be resolved in "action" were not really against theory. They were only against particular theory—most especially Marxism-Leninism. Actually, whether articulated or not—and it frequently was articulated—the leading lights among the "activists" were operating very much on the basis of theory. For the most part, their theory was either a rediscovered anarchism or an updated



“Those who complain about ‘polemics on the left’ would do well to study the writings of the foremost Marxist thinkers.”

variant on traditional social-democracy.

Today, however, it is not nearly as fashionable to come out in opposition to Marxist-Leninist theory. So the struggle against theory takes other forms.

One form is to complain loudly about “factionalism” on the left every time there is an intensification of ideological struggle. “Why does the left have to fight so much

among itself?” is a frequently heard question, usually accompanied by the suggestion that “if we could just bury our differences we could organize a movement that might give U.S. imperialism something to worry about.” Others propose to “resolve” the differences on the left by devising strategies of “unity in action” that somehow are supposed to provide the ideological clarity that is presently absent.

But these people, however well-intentioned, approach the problem backwards. It is undeniably true that the U.S. left is fragmented, but what does this signify? It means fundamentally that in the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of the U.S. Communist Party into total and irrevocable revisionism, no force has yet emerged which has been able to establish the ideological hegemony of a revolutionary political line.

Many have tried. The new left spawned a host of alternatives—ranging from counterculture to “new working class” terrorism—but all quickly demonstrated their incompetence and ideological backwardness. We have also seen various brands of reformism and petty bourgeois socialism surface in new guises—and we have been dismayed to find many self-defined Marxist-Leninist groups collapse into objective class-collaboration on the key question of international line.

That this situation should be accompanied by a range of polemics and ideological struggles is not surprising. And it is not a bad thing. Those who would make revolution in the U.S. are seriously struggling for the political understanding that will enable them to answer the question Lenin posed to the Russian communists in 1901—“What Is To Be Done?” In essence, this is always the question that communists are debating.

Those who complain about “left polemics” would do well to study the writings of the foremost Marxist thinkers. They would find that some of the richest theoretical (and practical) works were actually polemics against others on the left over what might have seemed at the time to some very fine points of “dogma.”

Both Engels’ “Anti-Duhring” and Marx’s “Critique of the Gotha Program”—just to cite two classical examples—are obviously “polemics.” But who can deny that they contain some of the most profound insights into Marxist theory and that they also had a significant effect on numerous practical questions?

And one can just imagine what would have happened to the Bolshevik Party in Russia if Lenin had not overcome the philistine liberalism of “Marxist” thought in his time or if he had tried to resolve the fundamental differences in both the Russian and international communist movement merely by “unity in action.” Indeed, it is safe to say that if Lenin had not settled ideological accounts with the “economist” trend in 1901 and with the revisionist trend 15 years later, the Bolsheviks might not have been able to lead the Russian revolution.

The heart of Lenin’s theoretical work is in polemics. Those two masterpieces—“Imperialism” and “State and Revolution”—are ideological blasts against revisionism and its chief spokesman at the time, Karl Kautsky. And one can be sure that there were many who were engaged in all manner of handwringing at Lenin’s “intemperate” tone and polemical “style.” But both of these were tame in comparison to “What Is To Be Done?”—a work that was written at a time when the Russian Marxists faced certain problems similar to our own—in particular, the lack of a genuinely revolutionary party organization.

To be sure, history does not repeat itself. If one may amplify on one of Marx’s best known comments, the attempt to make history repeat itself can not only turn tragedy into farce, it can also turn triumph into tragedy.

Nevertheless, certain historical themes continue to recur. The modern revisionists, who never (well hardly ever) tire of citing their “Leninist” heritage, seem to have gone back to every one of Lenin’s works and decided that Kautsky was right after all. And just as Kautsky justified himself by saying that he found his theoretical justification in Marx, the modern revisionists claim that they are the true upholders of Leninist theory.

Another theme that keeps popping up is “terrorism.” Many people are surprised when they first study “What Is To Be Done?” to come across a chapter heading entitled: “What Is There In Common Between Economism and Terrorism?” When this is translated into contemporary terms—what is there in common

The modern revisionists, who never tire of citing their ‘Leninist’ heritage, seem to have gone back to every one of Lenin’s works and decided that Kautsky was right after all.”



**“What is there in common between the revisionist Communist Party and the Weather Underground?”**

between the revisionist Communist Party and the Weather Underground?—the question appears at first to be outrageous.

After all, nothing is more characteristic of revisionism than its abhorrence of “violence.” It prattles endlessly about the possibilities of a “peaceful transition” from capitalism to socialism. At the very moment when the masses of the people reject the

bourgeoisie’s own institutional apparatus more than ever before, the revisionists appoint themselves the preservers of the bourgeois legal system and its fundamental legal document, the Constitution. And surely, whatever its faults, the Weather Underground has not been known for its opposition to “violence” or for any abiding affection for the instrumentalities of authority.

Then how are they the same? “The Economists and the present-day terrorists have one common root,” writes Lenin, “namely the worship of spontaneity. . . . The Economists bow to the spontaneity of the ‘pure’ working-class movement, while the terrorists bow to the spontaneity of the passionate indignation of intellectuals who lack the ability or opportunity to link up the revolutionary struggle with the working class movement.”

Lenin in 1901 was arguing for one thing in particular: for the Russian communists to undertake the task of “training the masses in revolutionary activity.” To do this, a party of “professional” revolutionaries was required. But to create such a party, it was necessary to overcome all of the backward and diversionary ideas which had currency then—ideas which, upon a moment’s thought, will be seen similarly to have currency today.

The revisionists keep the masses out of revolutionary activity by tailing after the spontaneous political consciousness of the masses as it is at any given time. This invariably takes the form of the struggle for reform—particularly economic reform. The revisionists try to pose as “militants” by talking about “monopoly” and even occasionally talking about “socialism.” But they never try to train “the masses in revolutionary activity.” In particular, they are constantly attempting to divert the attention of the masses from the struggle to smash the bourgeois state and tell them instead that they can “vote” socialism into office. (This is the reason why they don’t like to have the question of Chile debated. Any honest discussion of the Chilean defeat would pull the ideological rug out from under them.)

32 But the “terrorists” keep the masses out of revolutionary

activity also. Their bombings, their dramatic “underground” acts, the kidnappings—all of these provide “spectacles” in which the masses can watch those who claim to be “revolutionary”—but they do nothing to “train the masses in revolutionary activity.” Indeed, can there be a more graphic demonstration of the connection between economism and terrorism than the actions of the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA)? When they were holding Patti Hearst for “ransom,” the only demand they could come up with was for the Hearsts to distribute some food to the masses. If one set out deliberately to put the masses in a “passive” role, a better scenario could not have been devised.

“Both the terrorists and the Economists underestimate the revolutionary activity of the masses,” writes Lenin.

And when you boil it all down to its essence, doesn’t this characterize both the revisionist CPUSA and the Weather Underground today?

**“Both the terrorists and the economists underestimate the revolutionary activity of the masses.”**  
—Lenin

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## **“Amateurishness” Among Revolutionaries**

In “What Is To Be Done?” Lenin isolates and identifies two major stumbling blocks to the development of the Russian revolutionary movement at the turn of the century: economism and amateurishness.

The task of developing a U.S. revolutionary movement in 1976 has its own set of particularities—and in many respects they are significantly different from the conditions prevailing not only in Russia 75 years ago but also in the Russian left at that time.

Nevertheless, in a broader sense, the ideological tasks of Lenin’s time bear a remarkable similarity to our own. The economism of that period has “graduated” into a more sophisticated expression of revisionism—and just as the “economists” assured one and all that they were the firmest upholders of Marx, so the modern revisionists never tire of paying homage to Lenin—although it is readily apparent that his



**"Amateurishness in organization and practice is, in a more fundamental sense, the outgrowth of a loss of revolutionary will."**

canonization has become a convenient means for ignoring his teachings.

And who among us could deny that the work of U.S. revolutionaries of virtually every ideological stripe is characterized by amateurishness?

To a certain extent, of course, this amateurishness is the result of inexperience. The gap between the collapse of the U.S.

Communist Party into revisionism and the resurgence of a Marxist-Leninist political trend a decade and a half later has cut many of today's young revolutionaries off from the rich, concrete experiences of the past. It is a loss which is sorely felt.

Similarly, in the course of the struggle to reclaim Marxist-Leninist ideology, many of today's communists have fallen into serious dogmatic errors ranging from extremely mechanical application of certain fundamental revolutionary principles to an uncritical tailing after the views of other parties in other countries.

Dogmatism is a particular form of amateurishness which, like terrorism, is particularly endemic to the radicalized petty-bourgeois intellectual.

But amateurishness in organization and practice is, in a more fundamental sense, the outgrowth of a loss of revolutionary will. Here is the way Lenin poses the question in "What Is To Be Done?":

"Can a connection be established between amateurishness, this disorder of growth affecting the whole of the movement, and Economism, which is one of the trends in Russian Social-Democracy? We think it can....Were it only lack of practical training, no one could blame the practical workers. But the term 'amateurishness' embraces something else: it denotes a narrow scope of revolutionary work generally, failure to understand that a good organization of revolutionaries cannot be built up on the basis of such narrow activity, and lastly—and most important—it denotes attempts to justify this narrowness and to elevate it to a special 'theory,' i.e. bowing in worship to spontaneity on this question too."

Notice particularly Lenin's use of the word "narrow." What does he mean by it? He is speaking here of the Economists who argued the primacy of "immediate demands" and who saw the workers' struggle over economic questions as the principal form of revolutionary struggle. But there is an interesting juxtaposition of

thoughts here, for it is always the proponents of reformism who accuse the revolutionaries of being "narrow" and "sectarian." They, on the other hand, are always reaching out to the "broad" masses.

But Lenin rejects this self-serving nonsense. Such power as reformism has, comes from the fact that it limits and circumscribes the working-class movement precisely to the struggle for reforms which may be obtained within the framework of capitalism—and therefore it is much more acceptable to the ruling class.

The masses must be trained to take up the "broad" task of revolution and not merely the "narrow" task of reform. But if the vision of the revolutionary organization is blinded by the ideological siren songs of economic "issues," the primacy of the struggle for "winnable" reforms, the feasibility of the bourgeois electoral process as a path to socialism and various other schemes for "peaceful transition" from capitalism to socialism—then what need does it have for a political organization of trained revolutionaries preparing to confront the armed power of the bourgeois state?

In their neoclassic exercise in modern social-democracy, "Revolution and Democracy," Frank Ackerman and Harry Boyte articulate this narrow, reformist view most succinctly. "The historical task of our revolution is very different" from that of Lenin's Russia, they say. "The nature of our revolution is different and the forms of ruling-class control are different. The American ruling class rules primarily through the 'consent' of the people—through an internalized system of beliefs which people have to become aware of and reject through struggle. The state's monopoly of military power is normally held in reserve, to be used only in emergencies."

Ackerman and Boyte are arguing for the need to develop a "mass socialist consciousness" as the key political task of the left—an undertaking which we would have to agree does not require a Leninist, democratic centralist party. Similarly, an "electoral" strategy for socialism clearly dictates the creation of an electoral party which the main revisionist parties of the world either have become already (as in France and Italy) or to which they are avidly aspiring, as in the U.S.

The economists of Lenin's day, therefore, not only engendered the amateurishness of the revolutionary forces, they upheld it as a

**"The masses must be trained to take up the 'broad' task of revolution and not merely the 'narrow' task of reform."**



**"All those who speak of 'unity on the left' without seeing the absolute precondition of the ideological unity of Marxist-Leninists are bound to fall."**

model. As Lenin said, they even elevated it to a theory whose chief manifestations consisted of glorifying the spontaneous struggle of the masses, denying the role of revolutionary theory (they even intimated the "outside agitator" slander against Lenin), playing down the role of leadership and making a fetish of superficial democratic forms. They were, in short, the progenitors

of "participatory democracy."

Boiled down to its essentials, Lenin's arguments in "What Is To Be Done?" is that if you want to make a revolution it is necessary to make a scientific assessment of the objective circumstances (which is the ruling class, which is the revolutionary class, where do other classes and sectors stand in relation to these, what are the strengths and weaknesses of all these classes, etc.) and conclude from all this the strategic aim of the revolution.

That "strategic aim," all Marxist-Leninists agree (it is a "dividing line" question) is the seizure of state power, the smashing of the bourgeois state apparatus and the replacement of that political structure with the armed power of the working class organized in state form. That is the chief political objective for overthrowing the rule of monopoly capital and it is mere fatuousness to speak of one's "belief" in socialism without such a perspective.

Once revolutionaries thoroughly grasp the full implications of this strategy, the question of organizational form is not a difficult one to solve. (Creating and building the organization is another matter.) What kind of organization—beyond the broad description of a democratic centralist party for which the Bolsheviks have provided the most useful model available—goes somewhat beyond the scope of this series on study groups, but one immediate question must be addressed.

All those who speak of "unity on the left" or an end to "fragmentation" on the left without seeing the absolute precondition of the ideological unity of Marxist-Leninists are bound to fail no matter how many mass organizations and coalitions they may bring into being.

Does this mean that Marxists-Leninists go into an ideological hot-house to resolve all theoretical questions and then emerge to announce the result of their labors to a presumably expectant world? Of course not. Lenin says: "By emphasizing the necessity, the importance and the immensity of the theoretical work

Social-Democrats [the name then used by the Russian Communists] must carry on, I do not in the least wish to suggest that this work must take precedence over practical work; still less do I suggest that the latter be postponed until the former is finished" ("What The 'Friends of the People' Are").

The theoretical tasks of our movement go far beyond grasping the fundamentals of scientific socialism. But without those fundamentals as a firm theoretical bedrock, the way is left open for bourgeois rather than proletarian ideology guiding the work. The organized study of Marxism-Leninism is therefore part of the indispensable theoretical preparation of communist work.

Close consideration should be given to the following extended excerpt from "What Is To Be Done?"

At a time when Russian Social-Democracy is passing through a crisis entirely due to the lack of sufficient numbers of trained, developed and experienced leaders to guide the spontaneously awakening masses [some] cry out with the profundity of fools: "it is a bad thing when the movement does not proceed from the rank and file."

"A committee of students is no good, it is not stable." Quite true. But the conclusion to be drawn from this is that we must have a committee of professional revolutionaries and it does not matter whether a student or a worker is capable of becoming a professional revolutionary. The conclusion you draw, however, is that the working-class movement must not be pushed on from outside! In your political innocence you fail to notice that you are playing into the hands of our Economists and fostering our amateurishness. In what way, may I ask, did our students "push on" our workers? Solely by the student bringing to the worker the scraps of political knowledge he himself possessed, the crumbs of socialist ideas he had managed to acquire (for the principal intellectual diet of the present-day student, "legal Marxism," could furnish only the rudiments, only crumbs of knowledge). There has never been too much of such "pushing on from outside"; on the contrary, so far there has been too little, all too little of it in our movement, for we have been stewing too assiduously in our own juice; we have bowed far too slavishly to the elementary "economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government." We professional revolutionaries must and will make it our

**"We must have a committee of professional revolutionaries and it does not matter whether a student or a worker is capable of becoming a revolutionary." — Lenin**



business to engage in this kind of "pushing" a hundred times more forcibly than we have done hitherto. But the very fact that you select so despicable a phrase as "pushing on from outside"—a phrase which cannot but rouse in the workers (at least in the workers who are as unenlightened as you yourselves) a sense of distrust towards all who bring them political knowledge and revolutionary experience from outside, and rouse in them an instinctive desire to resist all such people—proves that you are demagogues, and demagogues are the worst enemies of the working class.

Yes, yes! And don't start howling about my "uncomradely methods" of controversy! I have not the least intention of doubting the purity of your intentions. As I have already said, one may become a demagogue out of sheer political innocence. But I have shown that you have descended to demagogy, and I shall never tire of repeating that demagogues are the worst enemies of the working class. The worst enemies because they arouse bad instincts in the crowd, because the unenlightened worker is unable to recognize his enemies in men who represent themselves, and sometimes sincerely so, as his friends. The worst enemies because in the period of disunity and vacillation, when our movement is just beginning to take shape, nothing is easier than to employ demagogic methods to mislead the crowd which can realize its mistake only later by the most bitter experience. . . .

I assert that it is far more difficult to wipe out a dozen wise men than a hundred fools. And this position I shall defend no matter how much you instigate the crowd against me for my "antidemocratic" views, etc. As I have already said time and again that by "wise men," in connection with organization, I mean professional revolutionaries, irrespective of whether they are trained from among students or workingmen. I assert: (1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organization of leaders that maintains continuity; (2) that the wider the masses spontaneously drawn into the struggle, forming the basis of the movement and participating in it, the more urgent the need of such an organization, and the more solid this organization must be (for it is much easier for demagogues to sidetrack the more backward sections of the masses); (3) that such an organization must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; (4) that in an autocratic state, the more we confine the membership of such an organization to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more

difficult will it be to wipe out such an organization, and (5) the greater will be the number of people of the working class and of the other classes of society who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it. . . .

Our chief sin with regard to organization is that by our amateurishness we have lowered the prestige of revolutionaries in Russia. A person who is flabby and shaky in questions of theory, who has a narrow outlook, who pleads the spontaneity of the masses as an excuse for his own sluggishness, who resembles a trade union secretary more than a people's tribune, who is unable to conceive of a broad and bold plan that would command the respect even of opponents, and who is inexperienced and clumsy in his own professional art—the art of combating the political police—why such a man is not a revolutionary but a wretched amateur!

Let no active worker take offense at these frank remarks, for as far as insufficient training is concerned, I apply them first and foremost to myself. I used to work in a circle that set itself very wide, all-embracing tasks; and all of us, members of that circle, suffered painfully, acutely from the realization that we were proving ourselves to be amateurs at a moment in history when we might have been able to say, paraphrasing a well-known epigram: "Give us an organization of revolutionaries, and we shall overturn Russia!" And the more I recall the burning sense of shame I then experienced, the more bitter are my feelings towards those pseudo Social-Democrats whose teachings "bring disgrace on the calling of a revolutionary," who fail to understand that our task is not to champion the degrading of the revolutionary to the level of an amateur, but to raise the amateurs to the level of revolutionaries.

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## Dogmatism and "Left" Sectarianism

Study groups are, by their very nature, concerned with Marxist-Leninist theory as theory. Particularly in the present period, with scores of independent study groups comprising a significant sector of the Marxist-Leninist movement, there is an almost inevitable





separation between the study of Marxist theory and communist practice.

Does this mean that those in study groups do not engage in practical political activity? No, many of them do. But “communist” practice has a particular meaning: it means political activity that is developed out of an overall strategic plan—one that is determined collectively by Marxist-Leninists and executed in a disciplined fashion.

In the absence of a Marxist-Leninist party and with most local pre-party formations at a relatively primitive stage of development, we cannot speak seriously of “communist” practice. The tendency toward separation of theory from practice among study groups today is, to a great extent therefore, unavoidable. This is not altogether a bad thing since an undue haste to apply Marxist-Leninist theory to concrete political practice all too often results in political absurdities all of us have observed and which are usually much too embarrassing to recount.

Certainly if revolutionary phrase-mongering could build a party or push the mass movement forward, we would have several powerful communist parties by now and a mass movement rapidly advancing on the citadel of state power.

Life, of course, usually provides telling evidence of ultra-“left” and dogmatic errors. Typically dogmatic propaganda is created out of a textbook or out of some need to prove to others how “revolutionary” one is with virtually no regard for its practical political effect. The workers who read such outpourings end up laughing at these would-be “revolutionaries,” scorning them as merchants of meaningless phrases, impressed more by their ineptitude than by their zeal. The sectarians, as a result, wind up speaking to themselves and arguing with each other. All of this is

dutifully reported reported in the various newspapers of these sects as another glorious advance for “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought.”

Unfortunately, such sectarian nonsense tends to bring Marxist-Leninist theory itself into disrepute and provides the perfect cover for revisionists and opportunists to present themselves to the workers as much more “sensible” than those who claim to be the only upholders of revolutionary “purity.”

Marxist-Leninists must equip themselves to deal with ultra-“leftism” theoretically as well as practically. This is particularly important because in its early stages the Marxist-Leninist movement is invariably made up of a very high proportion of people from the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie—and these strata, by virtue of their own relation to monopoly capital as well as the values engendered by their relationship to social production tend toward both dogmatism and “revolutionary” impatience. (They also tend toward reformism when their sectarianism inevitably results in political futility.)

Many intellectuals, having “discovered” Marxism-Leninism for themselves, immediately judge one and all (in the mass movement as well as among the communists) by their self-perceived lofty status as the reincarnators of “revolutionary” truth. They conduct ideological struggle as though it were the Spanish Inquisition, ferreting out every real or imagined “heresy” without regard to its political application. They guard their “revolutionary” purity as though they were maidens in a Victorian novel—and wind up about equally relevant to the real world.

Some people draw a fatalistic and incorrect conclusion from such silliness. They argue that because some intellectuals make dogmatic errors, we cannot move ahead in the task of building a new communist party until a substantial number of communists directly out of the working class are themselves among the party-building forces. No one, of course, would argue against the proposition that communists in the present period should be trying to bring politically advanced workers into communist organizations—but to establish some quantitative yardstick as a precondition for the party-building process is an invitation to keep communism in the realm of wishful yearning rather than making it a practical political force.

“In its early stages the Marxist-Leninist movement is invariably made up of a very high proportion of people from the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie.”



“We wage the struggle against the opportunist and social-chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class to our side.”—Lenin

One practical thing that study groups can do to deal with the problems of dogmatism and ultra-“leftism” is take up the study of Lenin’s pamphlet: “Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder.” Like so much of Lenin’s writing, it is a lively and marvelously practical exposition of how ultra-“leftism” manifested itself in the Bolshevik Party and its particular forms in the Western

European communist movement in the period immediately after the Russian Revolution.

In this pamphlet, Lenin explores at some length two questions that continue to be debated among communists today: 1) should revolutionaries work in reactionary trade unions? and 2) should we participate in bourgeois parliaments?

In regard to the first question, Marxist-Leninists today generally agree with Lenin’s conclusion that work in the reactionary trade unions is one of the key areas of concentration for communists—although notions of “dual unionism” continue to have some currency in our movement. But precisely because this question in the main has been settled, ultra-“leftism” assumes a somewhat different form today. Instead of opposing work in the trade unions—which in the face of Lenin’s writings on the subject, they could hardly justify theoretically—the modern dogmatists conduct their work in the trade unions in a totally self-defeating manner.

These people are never wanting for militant phrases when it comes to denouncing the “labor aristocracy” and the class-collaborationist trade union leaders. All well and good. They should be denounced—not to satisfy the ideological convictions of the communists, but to discredit these phony leaders before the masses. But what if the way in which the communists go about this task results in them discrediting themselves instead? Should we just sigh and say the workers are “reactionary?” Undoubtedly many of them are—not in their essence, because even the most backward worker is still exploited by the capitalists, but in their conscious perception of the political forces at work in the world.

What is the ultimate purpose of such political activity? Lenin says: “We wage the struggle against the opportunist and social-chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class to our side. To forget this most elementary and most self-evident truth would be stupid.” Yes, it would be stupid. And can we not say that some “Marxist-Leninists” go about waging this struggle in a “stupid” way—a way which seems foreordained to result in the very

opposite of winning workers to the side of the communists?

Lenin’s discussion of bourgeois parliaments and elections is at least as important as his discussion of work in the trade unions—and will probably startle some who have been led to believe by certain “Marxist-Leninists” that bourgeois elections are a form of political smallpox—to be avoided at all costs. Here he takes up the revolutionary-sounding argument of certain German communists who argue that “parliamentary forms of struggle have become historically and politically obsolete.”

These same German communists also acknowledge that millions of German workers are still tied to the dominant political parties. Lenin responds in the following fashion:

“Clearly, parliamentarism in Germany is **not yet** politically obsolete. Clearly, the ‘Lefts’ in Germany have mistaken **their desire**, their political-ideological attitude, for objective reality. That is the most dangerous mistake for revolutionaries. . . . Parliamentarism, of course, is ‘politically obsolete’ for the Communists in Germany; but—and that is the whole point—we must **not** regard what is obsolete **for us** as being obsolete **for the class**, as being obsolete for the masses.” (Emphasis in original)

He goes on to point out that “participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum is obligatory for the party of the revolutionary proletariat precisely for the purpose of educating the backward strata of its own class.”

Does this mean that Lenin thought that socialism could be “elected” in the modern imperialist state? That, of course, is the conclusion that the revisionists draw from Lenin’s writings on this subject—but no matter how much they try, they will never be able to produce a single direct statement by Lenin in support of that bankrupt thesis. In fact, the essence of Leninism—his contribution to the theory of the state, on imperialism, on social democracy—are the exact opposite.

But those who read “Left-Wing Communism” in order to settle debates over the proper tactics to use concerning trade unions or elections will be missing the point entirely. There is a time for participating in elections, Lenin points out, and a time for boycotting them. And there are no absolute criteria by which communists will be able to go back to scripture in order to answer such questions. Painful though it may be, they must decide those

“There are no absolute criteria by which communists will be able to go back to scripture in order to answer tactical questions.”



“Life is constantly bringing to the fore new questions which cannot be resolved simply on the basis of existing theory.”

questions for themselves in the light of concrete conditions.

And that, of course is the whole point. “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement,” says Lenin. This is undeniable. But some people take this to mean that revolutionary theory is the principal aspect of the revolutionary movement. It is this view that leads to ideological

disputes which are all too frequently reminiscent of debates among the ancient Talmudic scholars.

Yes, revolutionary theory is indispensable. Without it, we are sailors in the middle of the ocean on a dark night without a compass.

But a compass itself is still only a guide to something else—action. Life is constantly bringing to the fore new questions which cannot be resolved simply on the basis of existing theory. Lenin’s immensely vital work on “Left-Wing Communism” should be studied, therefore, not because it offers us the definitive answer to the real problems facing U.S. communists in their trade union work or insofar as the bourgeois electoral process is concerned; but because, as with all of Lenin’s work, it will help to equip us with the ability to solve these problems for ourselves.

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## Conclusion

The principal emphasis in this series of articles has been on the study of certain classic works of Marxism-Leninism. This in no way should be taken to mean that the key theoretical tasks of our movement can be resolved solely—or even fundamentally—through the grasping of these classic works.

However, the collective experience of the world revolutionary movement as summed up and concentrated in theoretical form in the classics of Marxism-Leninism are the indispensable preparation for solving the key theoretical questions of our time and place.

The present pamphlet only begins to touch on the riches of Marxist-Leninist theory. The works cited herein are suggested as

useful starting points for doing three things: acquainting people with some of the fundamental precepts of scientific socialism; taking up certain particular concepts which are of immediate relevance to our movement today; and helping to develop a methodology both for study and for theoretical work in general.

Even then, a number of areas are not even touched on—and others are barely introduced.

Aside from certain aspects of Engels’ “Socialism Utopian and Scientific,” the whole question of political economy has not been taken up in the preceding articles. And no one seriously studying Marxism-Leninism can proceed for any length of time without grasping the basic economic ideas of scientific socialism. Study groups should make it their business at some point to take up the question of Marxian political economy in order to develop an understanding of some of the most crucial of the Marxist conclusions in this area.

A useful work to use in this connection is A. Leontiev’s “Political Economy: A Beginner’s Course.” This work was extensively used by the Communist Party in the 1930s and ’40s, but was subsequently dropped. It has since been republished and is recommended as a good introduction to this subject. Many of the most basic Marxist economic concepts are contained in two short works by Karl Marx which can profitably be studied in conjunction with the Leontiev work. They are “Wage Labor and Capital” and “Value, Price and Profit.”

Lenin’s “Imperialism” is another work that should become a required text for study groups. It is the fundamental theoretical work concerning capitalism in the modern era—that is, monopoly capitalism or imperialism. It is particularly important for two reasons: one, it demonstrates concretely and with brilliant argumentation why the theories advanced by the modern revisionists of the CPUSA, the western European revisionist parties and the Soviet Communist Party make a mockery of Marxism-Leninism and, in essence, wind up supporting the conclusions come to by Karl Kautsky, the opportunist leader of the 2nd International; second, it shows how all Marxist-Leninist theory is based on the most specific and concrete examination of reality. Lenin casts a very austere and analytical eye on the imperialist countries. He examines their workings concretely, showing—not merely asserting—that imperialism is a system that flows

“The classics of Marxism-Leninism are the indispensable preparation for solving the key theoretical questions of our time and place.”



**"The Communist Manifesto puts forward in concise and inspiring form the basic precepts of Marxism—and links them to revolutionary practice."**

inexorably out of the laws of capitalist development. It is a work, therefore, that runs counter to the entire spirit of dogmatism which believes that a series of theoretical constructs is sufficient to demonstrate a thesis.

Two contemporary questions which have gripped the attention of our movement have been the national question and the woman

question. Study of Marxist classics will not, by itself, bring about our movement's political line on these questions. But study can help provide us with the theoretical equipment necessary to solve these questions from a Marxist-Leninist point of view. In this connection, study groups should take up Stalin's "Marxism and the National Question" and Engels' "Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State."

The study of the writings of Lenin and Stalin will be immeasurably enriched by concurrent readings in "The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." This text on the history of the Bolshevik Party helps to locate the actual circumstances in Russia at the time such works as "What Is To Be Done?" and "State and Revolution" were written. It will help explain the significance of certain debates and locate them in the real world.

Finally, one work which was not discussed in the original articles but which remains one of the two or three single most important political documents in the entire history of scientific socialism is "The Communist Manifesto." In broad outline, this historic rallying cry to the workers of the world in 1848 puts forward in concise and inspiring form the basic precepts of Marxism—and links them to that indispensable aspect of Marxism, revolutionary practice.

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## Bibliography

Those seriously taking up the study of Marxism-Leninism will want to develop a home library of basic works for constant reference and further reading. Three extremely useful anthologies

and collections are particularly recommended.

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works; 800 pages, paper-(paper), \$4.25. Includes the Communist Manifesto; Socialism: Utopian and Scientific; The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism (Lenin); Wage Labor and Capital; Value, Price and Profit; Origin of the Family; Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx; Critique of the Gotha Program; etc.
2. Lenin: Selected Works in 3 Vols. (cloth), \$12.50. Contains all of the works by Lenin cited in this pamphlet.
3. Mao Tse-tung: Selected Works in 4 Vols. (paper), \$12.50. Includes "On Practice" and "On Contradiction."

Many readers prefer to use inexpensive pamphlets of individual works since these are easier to carry around and can be readily notated. The following is a listing of individual pamphlets and paperbacks mentioned in this work.

**STUDY GROUP PACKET:** Consists of the following 8 separate pamphlets, total cost \$4.75.

- Marx & Engels: The Communist Manifesto
- Engels: Socialism: Utopian & Scientific
- Lenin: State and Revolution
- Lenin: What Is To Be Done?
- Lenin: On Marx and Engels
- Lenin: Imperialism
- Lenin: "Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder
- Mao: Four Essays on Philosophy (Includes On Practice and On Contradiction)

- LEONTIEV: POLITICAL ECONOMY, 282 pp. (paper), \$3.95
- ENGELS: ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY & THE STATE, 285 pp. (paper), \$2.75
- HISTORY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION, 390 pp. (paper), \$4.95
- STALIN: MARXISM AND THE NATIONAL-COLONIAL QUESTION, 405 pp. (paper), \$4.95

All of the above books and collections are available from the Guardian Marketplace, 33 W. 17 St., NYC 10011. Payment must accompany your order. Add 35¢ per item to cover cost of postage.

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