

UNDERNEATH THE STAGNATION, THE STAGE IS BEING SET FOR RENEWED STRUGGLE

Opening Speech Third National Conference of the Marxist-Leninist Party Fall 1986

In this issue of the Supplement we continue our coverage of the Third National Conference. We print two speeches, which have both been edited for publication.

Comrades, welcome to the Third National Conference of the Marxist-Leninist Party.

This conference is being held under two slogans.

One of these slogans is quite a particular one. We give various forms of it in one after another of the mass struggles. This is a slogan that will be particularly useful in presenting the nature of the conference to the workers. It is **Rank-and-file action against the Reaganite offensive!**

The other slogan expresses the more general tasks of the workers' movement. These tasks include those pointed to by the rank-and-file action slogan but they also include more. It is **Build the workers' movement as a revolutionary movement!**

This conference will concentrate on the line for the working class movement. It does not aim to present changes in the line, nor answers to further, related, theoretical questions (unlike the Second National Conference which, in discussing the struggle against racism and national oppression, took up the issue of whether to recognize the right to secession of a territory in the black belt South). But instead the purpose of this conference is to give comrades the chance to examine the work of the Party in the light of the overall line and to see how this line has been applied throughout the organization in the current circumstances. In the period since the Second National Conference we have a number of successes. These examples which will we will be discussing show a number of things such as lessons concerning the type of organizations which we are building to draw the workers around the party. We cannot simply invent these forms from our head, but we have to be conscious of the actual state of the workers, of what sort of organization they will accept at this point and that they will actually take part in.

To this end, there will be speeches on various of these developments. As well, there will be some more general speeches on the question of the workers' movement. One will be on trends in the strike movement. [It appeared in the Supplement of Dec. 10.] The other will be on drawing the

workers into the political movement.

Besides these speeches concerning the workers' movement, this conference, as our conferences and congresses generally, will review overall party developments. There is for example the international work of our Party; the last period has seen exciting developments on this front. And there is the review of the state of the Party itself, including the work in consolidating the Party organizations, and so forth.

The contradictory features of revolutionary work in the present period

In all these things a certain feature stands out. One of the concrete features of revolutionary work in the last few years has been its contradictory nature. We have achieved successes on various fronts, but we also know that this is a difficult period for revolutionary organizing. By recognizing this, we have adopted our policies to deal with it.

Take our basic work among the working masses in the U.S.

Deeper among the masses -- Build the Marxist-Leninist Party!

At the last conference we put forward the tasks of "Deeper among the masses -- Build the Marxist-Leninist Party!" We adjusted various features of our work to ensure that our links with the masses were maintained in the present period. We pointed out that we are opposed to the reformist liquidators whose method of adapting themselves to the current period is to give in to the Reaganite atmosphere propagated by the bourgeoisie. And we are also opposed to the semi-anarchist liquidators, such as the RCP ["Revolutionary Communist Party"], whose method of dealing with the situation consists of cursing the working class and looking elsewhere. We believe that our stand for Marxism-Leninism is directly connected with our basing ourselves on the working class. And we formulated policies to maintain and to strengthen our links with the working class.

Since then we have carried out these tasks. We have strengthened our local work in order to deal with those currents of struggle that arise even in periods of stagnation of the movement, such as the present. And the reports in this conference will give various examples of this, and by propagating these examples and discussing them this will help us to improve our work further on this front.

We have also changed the *Workers' Advocate* so

that it would help our work of moving closer to the masses. It is been basically regularized; it has more articles that are shorter and more pointed and that are easier to read; and yet we have also maintained the theoretical and polemical work through longer articles and the supplement to the paper. This is not a matter of perfection, and there are various suggestions that are coming forward for further improving the work of the paper, but it is a question of building on our successes on this front.

It is the Marxist-Leninists who have held up the red flag Among the masses

In this past period it has been our Party that fights for the revolutionary stand in the mass movements. Whether it is upholding anti-imperialism in the fight against new Vietnam-style intervention in Central America, indeed upholding that there should be mass actions and militant struggle at all; or whether it is upholding revolution as the path for overthrowing apartheid in South Africa; or whether it is upholding the interest of the black and Mexican masses against racism and oppression and not kowtowing to the bourgeois, sold-out, upper strata of these nationalities; it is our Party that holds up the red flag.

These are important accomplishments.

Look the difficulties straight in the eye

At the same time, we don't hide that this is a period where communist work faces difficulties, but we look this fact straight in the eye. [For one thing, while the anger of the masses continues to percolate, this is a period when there is much inertness among the masses and when renegacy and liquidationism are fashionable in the left. In particular organizational work is slow and painful. It is hard to build and maintain organization, hard to draw the masses into organization. It is a common experience that the masses welcome the idea of struggle, want to see it, but will not themselves set up the organization or give rise to the revolutionary core needed to sustain such struggle. The speech went on to discuss the effects of this on the Party and Party circles, on the size of the Party, etc.] ...

The speech on the state of the Party will, among other things, go into these questions in more detail. It will point out the tasks that follow from this question. The issue is not that comrades should become more active to compensate for the organizational inertness that shows up in this period among the masses and for the pressures on Party organization -- we are already working flat out. This issue is that we must be conscious of

maintaining party methods, such as the internal ideological life of the party.

For example, we are getting closer to the masses and we spend a great deal of time putting our finger on the mood of the masses when we consider what to write in leaflets and articles, when we plan actions that we are going to call the masses to perform, and so forth. Among other things, this results in that we are highly conscious of the backward moods as well as the activist moods of the masses. This is natural, but if we don't maintain an active internal and external ideological life of the party, these backward moods can have corrosive effects on us as well.

Marxism-Leninism is a world movement

So now let us move on to other issues that shall be taken up in the conference. This same contradictory nature of the current period -- where there are successes but also difficult conditions -- can also be seen on the international front or our work with regard to the international Marxist-Leninist movement. [This is the movement that arose in struggle against revisionism and that opposes Soviet and Chinese revisionism. But it faces grave challenges, including the spread of liquidationist and petty-bourgeois nationalist views among parties and forces that once took a spirited stand for revolution. The rightist influences and practices have already caused a number of fiascos, and they must be corrected. This is closely connected with carrying the struggle against revisionism through to the end and going beyond standpoints which have proved inadequate. And it requires an open discussion among the world's revolutionary Marxist-Leninists and class-conscious workers of the vital questions of the world movement.]

Since the Second National Conference there have been advances in our work on the international front. This advance has taken place despite the fact that various parties that a while back hinted at or expressed, at least to some extent, opposition to certain rightist stands, now are turning to the right in their practices and views. Those advocating the rightist views are fighting hard to prevent any open discussion of the path for the world movement and to undermine and wreck the forces that stand for the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist stand. Despite this hard situation, in the last year or two, we have accomplished more than ever in our work with the revolutionary communists of other lands.

One of the most noticeable things was the solidarity tour to Nicaragua. This was the biggest international trip, in terms of the numbers of comrades involved, that our Party has taken for a long

time. And it is certainly one of the most successful.

It had a good impact in Nicaragua in rendering support to the Marxist-Leninists there so that their sympathizers and mass base could see their international support.

It had a good impact on our own Party circles in the U.S.

Furthermore it will continue for some time invigorating our work in support of the Nicaraguan revolution as presentations, slide shows, speeches, and articles on the tour continue to have impact. This is important as the issue of Nicaragua continues to heat up. Recently, for example, it was announced in the press that the Reagan administration is considering breaking relations with Nicaragua; it is debating whether to wait for a pretext to use against Nicaragua, or to forget about such niceties altogether as everyone knows what the Reaganites are up to anyway. The only part of the administration that argues that it would be a mistake to break relations doesn't argue that it is wrong to commit aggression, but simply that the U.S. embassy in Managua is so useful for counter-revolution that it would be a mistake to close it down.

So continuing work in support of Nicaraguan revolution maintains great importance at such a time.

Another sphere of our international work is our Party's connection with various other organizations who are taking a revolutionary stand, a left stand, a Marxist-Leninist stand, either against or despite the current rightist influences that are doing damage to the world Marxist-Leninist movement. This of course includes our ties with the Marxist-Leninist Party of Nicaragua, but it includes contact with other organizations as well. ... This work is important both for strengthening the general ties binding together the Marxist-Leninist militants of the world, and because it is a part of the process of building a strong struggle against the rightism that has caused disasters to the world movement, part of the process of clarification of ideas among the forces that refuse to give in to this rightism. And for our Party, proletarian internationalism, proletarian solidarity, has always been exciting, always been one of the fundamental sources of our enthusiasm and verve.

The polemic on the Spanish Civil War

In connection with this, I would also mention our polemic on the Spanish Civil War and on the Communist Party of Spain (Marxist-Leninist). Earlier our Party dealt with the mistaken stands and general orientation that appeared at the 7th Congress of the Communist International. This was

important. But it turned out that much of the debate on the 7th congress is being done indirectly through promotion of wrong orientations that did damage to the heroic work of the communists and other fighting workers during the Spanish Civil War. So instead of complaining about this, we ourselves began to carry out work to deal with the history of the Spanish Civil war.

As well, our discussion of the views and actions of the Communist Party of Spain (Marxist-Leninist) is also important for the controversies in the world movement. [The CPS(ML) leadership has been an influential spokesman for the idea that the controversies over questions of principle in the international Marxist-Leninist movement should not be discussed openly; at the same time, it claimed to have the answer to how to oppose rightism. But the CPS(ML) has taken a rather dramatic turn to the right in the past year or two. This is a problem in itself, and it also sheds a light on the weaknesses in the previous standpoint of the CPS(ML) leadership. We hope that our comradely analysis and criticism may be helpful to the Spanish comrades in defending themselves from further damage, and we believe that examination of the Spanish experience will be useful more widely in the world movement.]

At the same time, there is no question that the overall situation internationally remains difficult. Many once-revolutionary forces have degenerated, and the forces loyal to revolutionary Marxism-Leninism are, on a world scale, small in size. We don't close our eyes to this. We see how illusions in this doesn't help one's work in the international movement. But we are not abandoning this field of struggle either, for we are but one contingent of an international party, and we fight to maintain this international movement as well as our domestic movement.

The revolution faces difficulties today, not the least of which is confused orientations. But despite everything, the revolutionary movement continues to flare up around the world, and one of our tasks is to spread enthusiasm for the revolution and faith in the revolutionary goal.

The historic role of the present difficulties -- tearing down all that is false

Today the conditions are harsh. But the work of the revolutionaries is all the more important. By maintaining their struggle and organization throughout this period, they ensure that this period will also have a historic role. The harsh conditions, as well as our criticism and that of other revolutionary Marxist-Leninists, are helping tear down all that is false, all that has proved inadequate or corrupt. And throughout this period,

conditions are being prepared for a bigger revolutionary wave in the future.

Revolution depends on objective conditions

Revolution depends on objective conditions. No party, no matter how heroic, no matter how dedicated, can call up at its will a revolution or the spread of revolutionary ferment. Marxism has dealt with this right from the beginning. Take one of the earliest periods of Karl Marx's activity. In the period of decline after the European wave of revolutions of 1848 to 1849, Marxism dealt with this question. The Marxists don't pretend that revolution exists when it doesn't. But they don't stop their activity either, and they don't passively wait for the great days.

This is important when evaluating our work. We cannot by our work call into existence a new revolutionary wave at our will. We can maintain and build our ties with the masses; we can maintain the party; and we can thus maintain for the masses the lessons that have been won by over two decades of revolutionary struggle starting in the upsurge of the 1960's. It would be the utmost setback for the working class if these lessons were lost and had to be won all over again from scratch.

Very well, if revolution depends on objective conditions, what is happening to the working class today?

The situation of the working class today

The bourgeoisie is on a Reaganite rampage. It is gloating every time it tears down the conditions of the masses. For example, in commenting on "Labor Day" this year, a major bourgeois newspaper set forth the desire of the bourgeoisie of slashing \$15,000 a year or so in wages and benefits from the pay of steel workers, rubber workers, auto workers, etc., and of reducing the pay of all workers who have managed to achieve a higher wage level than average, to a so-called "market wage". And of course, the intention is to push down the average and below-average wages as well. We see, for example, that the real value, adjusted for inflation, of the minimum wage has fallen over one-quarter in the last few years alone.

And the bourgeoisie has gone far in carrying out this program, has gone far to reducing the wages of the workers. In the statistics sometimes it likes to try to hide this by figure-juggling. One method is to report average family income, where the decline in the wages of the workers is compensated somewhat by the increase in families where two or more family members work (and where the income of workers and of the bour-

geoisie is averaged together). By reducing job security, by reducing the wages and benefits, by slashing one protection after another that the workers had -- or thought they had -- the bourgeoisie is producing conditions for a wider spread of discontent.

Unlike the RCP, we do not gloat alongside the bourgeoisie over the fall in the workers' standard of living. We would have preferred that the workers rise up in struggle earlier, for their conditions have never been good even in better times. But when, despite our efforts, this increasing impoverishment occurs, we see that the bourgeoisie is preparing material conditions to destroy the very things it tries to use as safeguards against the class struggle. It is methodically tearing down the illusions in the bourgeoisie, in the life that it can offer the masses.

Besides the direct destruction of the workers' wages, there are other factors.

The last few years has seen a huge increase in the number of working women. Large numbers of proletarian women always worked, but the numbers are increasing. And meanwhile the bourgeoisie is using technical progress to undermine the conditions of various spheres of work where women are concentrated. For example, large amounts of clerical work are being eliminated or exported to low-wage areas abroad.

There is also the huge crisis building up among the black and other oppressed nationality people. Sooner or later the upper strata of the oppressed nationalities is not going to be able to barter away the upsurge of the masses for their own benefit.

Underneath the stagnation, the stage is being set

So underneath the present period of stagnation in the movement, conditions are building up for a new upsurge. When this will begin to break out is hard to say. But as sure as the sun rises in the east, it will come. And this time the working class movement will be far more central to the upsurge than it was in the 1960's.

And what will happen then to the revolutionary party? In 1917, prior to the October revolution, Lenin wrote his "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution" in which he states, among other things:

"Prior to January 22, 1905..., the revolutionary party of Russia consisted of a small group of people, and the reformists of those days (exactly like the reformists of today [that's Lenin's parenthetical comment]) derisively called us a sect'. Several hundred revolutionary organizers, several thousand members of local organizations, half a dozen

revolutionary papers appearing not more frequently than once a month, published mainly abroad and smuggled into Russia with incredible difficulty and at the cost of many sacrifices--such were the revolutionary parties in Russia, and the revolutionary Social-Democracy in particular, prior to January 22, 1905. This circumstance gave the narrow-minded and overbearing reformists formal justification for their claim that there was not yet a revolutionary people in Russia.

"Within a few months, however, the picture changed completely. The hundreds of revolutionary Social-Democrats suddenly grew into thousands; the thousands became the leaders of between two and three million proletarians. The proletarian struggle produced widespread ferment, often revolutionary movements among the peasant masses, fifty to a hundred million strong; the peasant movement had its reverberations in the army and led to soldiers' revolts, to armed clashes of one section of the army and another. In this manner a colossal country, with a population of 130,000,000 went into the revolution; in this way, dormant Russia was transformed into a Russia of a revolutionary proletariat and a revolutionary people."

This is what Lenin said. And at such times as Lenin was talking about, the existence of the revolutionary party is decisive for the orientation of the revolution. And at such times the revolutionary party grows, and has to grow, so that it can embrace the rapidly-swelling revolutionary masses and imbue them with the revolutionary ideology.

Yes, Lenin was referring to a party that was many times greater in size than ours, even before January 22, 1905. But then again, the revolutionary ferment in Russia broke out years before Jan. 22, 1905. The revolutionary ferment had begun with the mass strike wave of the 1890's, which converted communism in Russia from a group with adherents which you could count on one hand to a mass trend. And even though that strike wave declined, it left a mass ferment among the working class that never ceased in all the years up till 1905. In 1902 Lenin already wrote that "The revolutionary movement continues to grow with amazing rapidity..." (Collected Works, vol. 6, p. 184)

And 1903 and 1904 were years of major development of the revolutionary movement. January 22, 1905, "Bloody Sunday", was not the moment when the revolutionary ferment broke out, but when the ferment began to break out in revolution.

So when the revolutionary ferment hits, the Party and the ranks of the revolutionaries will not grow to millions at a bound. We will still be faced with a tremendous growth of the revolutionary movement needed to rise to the conditions described by Lenin as existing prior to 1905, and the revolutionary movement will still be called a "sect" by the bourgeoisie. They will call the revolutionary proletariat that -- right up until the onset of the proletarian revolution.

The upsurge will underline the need for the proletarian party

But our task will be to prevent the Marxist--Leninist trend from being swamped in the huge growth of the movement. We will seek to have the lessons of Marxism-Leninism recreated in the experience of the masses in the upsurge, and it is the work of the proletarian party that infinitely facilitates this process. The workers come to the lessons of revolution through their own experience. But without the aid of the revolutionary party, revolutionary consciousness and organization may come too late, and the revolutionary upsurge could be frittered away.

We do not intend to let this happen. The Party shall live and carry on the tasks that history has laid on it. And then years later, when the American workers have their own outbreak of the revolution, their own Jan. 22 and following months, we will be able to say of today's proletariat, as Lenin said of the proletariat back then:

"...It does show how great the dormant energy of the proletariat can be. It shows that in a revolutionary epoch... the proletariat can generate fighting energy a **hundred times greater** than in ordinary, peaceful, times. It shows that up to 1905 mankind did not yet know what a great, what a tremendous exertion of effort the proletariat is, and will be, capable of in a fight for really great aims, and one waged in a really revolutionary manner!"

[The opening remarks then concluded with the presentation of the proposed agenda.] <>