

mrcpcml

modern communism

manitoba regional committee communist party of canada (marxist-leninist)

Volume 9 Number 2

February 18, 2008

Editorial

The Need for a New Centre of Revolution in Canada

By definition, revolution refers to a profound or fundamental change in the way things are. Within the context of modern capitalist societies such as Canada, it refers to the radical reorganization of the political, economic and social orders – the elimination of capitalism and its replacement with socialism. Evolution is popularly understood as the gradual, almost imperceptible, transformation of one thing into another. Since the emergence of the modern Canadian working class during the last decades of the nineteenth century, two tendencies have existed within the working class movement - a revolutionary tendency and an evolutionary

tendency.

For the first half of the twentieth century, this division also existed within the trade union movement. On the one hand the Gomer-style craft unions stood for the gradual reform of capitalism, while, on the other hand, a section of the Knights of Labour, the socialist-led unions, the Industrial Workers of the World and, later, the communist-led unions stood for the radical, revolutionary transformation of society from capitalism to socialism. While certainly not the dominant section of the trade union movement, the latter unions and their socialist/communist leaders had

See page 2: New Centre of Revolution

The Immediate and Most Urgent Necessity is the Elimination of Capitalism and the Establishment of Socialism

New Years Message of the MRC, released December 31, 2007

One of the most important challenges that has presented itself to the MRC during the past decade is the need to raise capacity to a new level, both in terms of theory and practice. The MRC was forced, on the basis of its own experience, to examine how a revolutionary organization should function. It theorized on issues of the right to conscience, the essence of democratic centralism and issues of the internal life of a communist organization. While it did not discover anything particularly new, the MRC made the principles that were rediscovered its own; they are not just words on a page but things that have been reaffirmed on the basis of its own experience.

Now there is a new challenge: how to build unity with other revolutionary individuals and

organizations that come from different political tendencies and have different notions of organizing, to create a genuinely revolutionary organization in Canada? The answer to this question is that it is done by being political, by arguing on the basis of experience and logic and not on the basis of dogma. After all, Lenin did not have any authority on which to base the Bolshevik Party, but millions accepted his logic based on their own experience. We have an advantage. We have a hundred additional years of experience, both positive and negative, to help us make our case.

At the same time, to say that there is an overgrowth of ideology in our society would be an

See page 3: Necessity for Socialism

Visit our web site at <http://www.modern-communism.ca>

New Centre of Revolution...from page 1

a major influence within the broader working class movement, especially in Western Canada.

A radical change occurred in the Canadian working class movement during the Second World War. The Communist Party of Canada, which by then had become the undisputed leader of the revolutionary trade union movement, was declared illegal by the Mackenzie-King government and its main leadership was incarcerated. A mass mobilization led to the eventual release of Tim Buck and other communist leaders, but the party itself remained illegal. However, Mackenzie-King offered Buck a way out of illegality. The party could regain its legal status if it dropped the word “communist” from its name and eliminated revolutionary change from its programme. Despite broad internal opposition, Buck was able to push this deal through and the party re-emerged under a new name – the Labour Progressive Party.

A key element in Buck’s victory over the more revolutionary sections of his party was the theoretical work of Earl Browder, the leader of the Communist Party of the USA. Browder, inspired by the alliance between the Anglo-American imperialists and the socialist Soviet Union, came up with a new version of the evolutionary path advocated by earlier socialists like Bernstein and Kautsky. According to Browder, the U.S. and Canada were exceptional cases. In those countries the capitalist class was young and democratic – at least those sections represented by the FDR Democrats in the U.S. and the Mackenzie-King Liberals in Canada. The Republicans and Conservatives were identified with the fascists and Browder advocated that the communists should ally themselves with the “democratic” section of the capitalist class against the reactionary, fascist section in the struggle for socialism. Browderism became the theoretical underpinning for Buck’s Liberal-Labour alliance in Canada and a similar alliance between the communists and the Democrats in the U.S.

The impact of this Liberal-Labour alliance on the Canadian working class movement cannot be underestimated. For the first time in the twentieth century there was no centre of revolutionary politics

in Canada. The communist movement and all of the trade unions it led officially adopted a social-democratic stance - the “Peaceful and Parliamentary Road to Socialism”, and began justifying this position within the working class. The Canadian Exceptionalism of the CPC reinforced the anti-revolutionary prejudices of the Gomper-style unions, and the CCF and the Canadian working class became convinced that revolution was neither possible nor necessary in “democratic” Canada.

The informal truce and alliance between Mackenzie-King and the CPC was just the first step. King then proceeded to offer a similar deal to the trade unions, offering to provide them with legitimacy and state recognition in exchange for a pledge of class peace. This deal was formalized during the late 1940s and early 1950s with the adoption of the Rand Formula and the legal incorporation of the trade unions into the Canadian state with the passage of new labour laws. A crucial requirement for any trade union seeking legal status with the Canadian state was the adoption of a constitution pledging that the union would pursue harmonious relations between employers and employees. On the basis of this definition various unions were declared illegal and hundreds of revolutionaries were removed from leading positions in the unions.

There was only room for one social-democratic party in Canada and the CPC was quickly replaced by the CCF/NDP as the “labour” component of the Liberal-Labour alliance. By 1956 the Canadian trade union movement was united in the new Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) on the basis of opposition to revolution, opposition to class struggle and opposition to communism. The Cold Warriors of the CLC collaborated with the state to purge the communists and other revolutionaries from the trade unions and to crush the remaining communist-led unions. With a few notable exceptions, during the 1960s and 1970s the trade union movement in Canada became a bastion of reactionary opposition to anything healthy and progressive.

The abandonment of revolution by the communist parties in Canada, the U.S. and Western Europe,

See page 3: New Centre of Revolution

New Centre of Revolution...from page 2

coupled with the increasing anti-revolutionary rhetoric coming from the leaders of the Socialist Bloc, contributed to the emergence of a new revolutionary movement, primarily amongst youth and students, during the 1960s and 1970s. This new revolutionary movement was necessarily fragmented ideologically, politically and organizationally. The polemics between the Soviet Union and China were reflected in this movement, as was every other tendency that had existed in the working class movement since the time of Marx and Engels. Furthermore, the stranglehold of the Cold Warriors over the trade union movement made it extremely difficult for the new revolutionary movement to establish itself in the working class. For a variety of reasons, both internal and external, the revolutionary movement that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s and the various groups it gave rise to were unable meet the challenges of the 1980s and 1990s and only fragments now remain. At the same time, a new generation is being increasingly attracted to revolution and socialism and conditions are emerging for this new revolutionary movement to take an organized form.

The problems facing the anti-capitalist left today are quite different from those that confronted us in the 1960s. The prejudices of Canadian Exceptionalism have been further bolstered by the collapse of the socialist experiments of the twentieth century. The state has become more sophisticated in its presentation of non-revolutionary alternatives to young people seeking change. At the same time, the situation has become somewhat clearer. All of the things that the socialists/communists/revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s warned about are now becoming a reality. The post-war social compact

between the capitalists and the trade unions is being dismantled and the Cold War trade unions are in crisis. The working class is demanding new forms of organization that can assist them to wage the class struggle more effectively.

Many things have also become clearer within that fragment of the revolutionary left that remains committed to the project of socialist revolution. The arrogance of putting ideological purity above organizational unity is a luxury we can no longer afford. Most of us have come to realize that ideological unity is a relative thing, usually not a possibility and often not desirable beyond a few crucial precepts. To the extent that it is achievable and desirable, it is the product of years of common struggle and discussion.

In the conditions that we face today, it is our belief that the re-establishment of a centre of revolutionary thought and action is the most urgent task facing the Canadian working class. Within this context, we think that the only principle requiring ideological unity for such an organization is the principle of revolution itself. All those who are opposed to capitalism and who support the transformation of Canadian society from capitalism to socialism should unite to build a new centre of revolution in this country. Differences over strategy and tactics, over forms of struggle and over the precise shape that socialism in Canada will take should be left to the future to sort out. No matter how much we convince ourselves that we have the “most correct” answers to the myriad of problems facing the working class, we are nowhere if we do not have an organization.

Necessity for Socialism...from page 1

understatement. For every problem created by the capitalist system, the bourgeoisie inundates us with dozens of “experts” and their “solutions” to those problems, all of which have one thing in common – they preclude the necessity or possibility for the revolutionary transformation of society from

capitalism to socialism and communism. These “solutions” permeate the entire society.

In response to the devastation of the environment, there are David Suzuki, Al Gore and a host of others advising us that the world is coming to an end. The

See page 4: Necessity for Socialism

Necessity for Socialism...from page 3

problem is so urgent and so huge, they say, that it transcends classes and class struggle. The end of humankind is so imminent that we don't have time to discuss the source of the problem or to look for real alternatives. Instead, we should be satisfied with generalities and superficialities – the problem is human beings, technology, modern expectations, consumerism and so on. The “solutions” presented range from reliance on the market to convince capitalists that environmentalism is profitable to individual actions like recycling and carpooling.

In response to the numerous humanitarian crises in Africa there are the likes of Stephen Lewis and Romeo Dallaire who eloquently describe the enormous human suffering on that continent and then call for the capitalists and imperialists to intervene more energetically to alleviate that suffering. Lewis suggests that if those who are raping and plundering Africa would just reinvest one or two percent of their ill-gotten loot in pharmaceuticals the AIDS epidemic in Africa would be stopped. Dallaire calls on those who are arming African warlords and fomenting genocides to invade Africa in the name of humanitarianism and thereby bring peace to that troubled continent.

In response to the problem of war every irrationality is promoted, from calling on people to love one another to suggesting that Anglo-American troops should be removed from Iraq and put where they are really needed, in Darfur and Myanmar. Illusions are created that the problem of war results from bad individuals (either George Bush or Saddam Hussein depending on the particular perspective) and the “solution” is to elect some peace-loving people in Washington, Baghdad or some other capital. Jingoism has become so rampant that it is even suggested that everyone must support “their troops” regardless of whether or not they agree with the mission of those troops.

In response to the problem of poverty - without which capitalism could not exist - we are given all kinds of “solutions”, such as increasing the minimum

wage, changing the welfare system, and every other kind of reformism.

In response to the crisis confronting the trade union movement (a crisis engendered by the establishment of the Liberal-Labour Alliance during the 1940s and 1950s and exacerbated by the adoption of neo-liberalism in the 1990s) there are experts suggesting that the solution is for trade unions to return to their traditions of militancy of the 1960s and 1970s, to build links with communities and so on.

In every case, when one argues that the real problem is capitalism and imperialism and the real solution is to overthrow them, one is met with protests, claiming that these problems are extremely urgent and people simply cannot wait for revolution to occur; they must act immediately. We are scolded that while we are busy dreaming, people are really suffering.

Canadians have been hearing these things for the past 40 years but what have these advocates of immediate action achieved? The environmental degradation continues to escalate. The humanitarian crises in Africa continue to grow. War has become permanent, “war without end” as the Bush administration crows. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen and poverty is growing not just in relative, but also in absolute terms. Clearly, the short-term, immediate approach is simply not working. To paraphrase Marx, if capitalism could overcome these problems it would no longer be capitalism.

It is the view of the MRC that any analysis which does not recognize capitalism and imperialism as the source of all of the world's most urgent problems is useless and will lead to no real solutions. Actually such analyses are worse than useless because they not only lead down dead end paths and waste massive energies and resources, but they are used to block the way forward toward genuine solutions.

At any particular point in history, the social and political problems confronting human beings are a direct consequence of the way in which the economy is organized. It cannot be otherwise unless one wants to abandon science and adopt the superstitious

See page 5: Necessity for Socialism

Necessity for Socialism...from page 4

trappings of religion. The problems that exist within capitalist society are therefore a consequence of capitalism itself. The question is whether or not those problems can be resolved within the capitalist system. There is no need to duplicate the volumes of writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and others arguing that this is an impossibility. That work has already been done and the conclusions of Marxism on this score are indisputable. Even Samuelson, a Nobel laureate in economics and an architect of neo-liberalism, has admitted that if we concede that land is finite (which he, being a theoretical rather than a practical economist, apparently does not) then the conclusions of Marx are inescapable and capitalism cannot overcome its inherent contradictions.

This is not to say that socialism will be a problem-free nirvana. It will also be confronted with problems that emerge out of the way in which production is organized, problems which can, ultimately, only be resolved through the transformation of socialism into communism, into truly classless society. Communism will also have its own inherent problems, primarily those posed by the fact that land, despite Samuelson's musings, really is finite, at least as long as we remain a planet-bound species, while the material, cultural and spiritual needs of human beings are limitless.

What is the Immediate Problem?

No matter which problem we are confronted with, the source of the problem always comes back to the capitalist system, itself. Therefore, the immediate problem is not how to end environmental degradation, poverty and disease or war, but how to end capitalism. This cannot be considered a long-term goal; it is the most urgent and immediate problem confronting humanity. It cannot be put off for a future day because we are weak, divided and lack the necessary resources to do the job, while today we confine ourselves to so-called "achievable" goals.

There is no doubt that we - meaning the revolutionary, anti-capitalist forces - are weak,

divided and lacking in resources, both human and material. But just because we aren't prepared or sufficiently strong does not alter the nature or immediacy of the problem, which is to eliminate capitalism and usher in socialism. So, we can either waste our time bemoaning our sad state of affairs or get busy transforming our own situation. After all, we are talking about transforming all of human civilization; if we can't even transform our own situation we aren't of much use to the working class or society.

What is the first step in transforming our own situation? History has taught us that the first step is to build a national revolutionary organization, a centre of revolutionary thought and action. That is the first and indispensable tool in transforming our present situation; without that tool it is meaningless to talk about developing programs, training cadres, building links with the working class or any of the thousand and one other things which we absolutely need to accomplish if we are to successfully overthrow capitalism. Those who claim that such a national organization already exists (i.e. theirs) are deluding only themselves. If such an organization already existed then the movement would not be in the sorry state it is in today and there would be no need for this discussion.

What is the Basis of Unity?

The first issue that must be considered whenever the establishment of a new organization is being considered is: What is the basis of unity? If this question is not dealt with in a profound manner then nothing lasting will emerge and whatever centre may be established will not be revolutionary and, as such, will be worse than useless.

Since at least the 1960s, Canada has been plagued with the concept that the basis of unity of a revolutionary political organization should be a document, a statement of long and short-term aims and objectives of the organization and/or a policy platform. Experience has proven the futility of this

See page 6: Necessity for Socialism

Necessity for Socialism...from page 5

approach. The drafting of a declaration of long and short-term aims and objectives invariably leads to disunity rather than unity because everyone involved is certain that if their views are not followed the organization will not succeed. Furthermore, this approach disenfranchises future members, preventing them from shaping the form and content of the organization. This is not to say that such a document plays no useful purpose; only that establishing it as the basis of unity is putting the cart before the horse.

The same is the case for a program of action or a policy platform. First, without a revolutionary political organization and all that that entails, how is it possible to draft a useful program of action? The best that can be hoped for are some general, feel-good policies that essentially say that we stand on the side of the angels and if the workers will only support us we'll solve every problem. At worst, such a program will serve as a basis for splitting with those who don't agree with one or another policy. Once again, a useful political program can only emerge on the basis of years of practical activity which is systematically raised to the level of theory. Political programs cannot be reduced to a series of policy objectives in the way that bourgeois parties do. The political program of a revolutionary organization must be designed to achieve specific political and organizational objectives; that is, it must serve the strategy and tactics of the organization, rather than form the basis of strategy and tactics. It is a tool, not a basis of unity.

Documents of either type must reflect the current concerns of the organization in a living way. In other words, they should sum up and consolidate the theory and practice of the organization at a particular point in time. Then they can serve as a guide for further action. However, to serve such a role they must remain impermanent and changeable; only an organization which is dead will be reflected in any such document. Making either type of document the basis of unity of the organization necessarily means that the organization will be still-born.

Another, and much more pernicious concept which has plagued revolutionary organizations, is the thesis that the basis of unity is ideology. This thesis emerged in a big way during and after the great polemics in the communist movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It is important to understand that the polemics in the communist movement arose on the basis of a *de facto* split which was based on political differences between and within various communist parties, first and foremost on what attitude to take towards imperialism and revolution, but also on other, less principled issues. As subsequent history has proven, the differences were not always ideological differences as parties on both sides of the debate have ended up conciliating with and collaborating with imperialism. While the polemics began with the principled criticism of the positions being adopted by Nikita Khrushchev and his followers, it soon degenerated into a power struggle between two opportunist factions (led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China) bent on using the international communist movement to further their own hegemonic ambitions. To a large extent, so-called ideological differences were used by parties on both sides of the polemics to cover up their actual practice. In any event, the main consequence of the polemics was to raise the issue of ideology as the basis of unity of the international communist movement and to split the communist movement on that basis. Afterwards, it did not matter what any particular party actually did or did not do; all that mattered was which side of the "ideological" debate it was on. In other words, ideology became the basis of splitting, not the basis of unity of the communist movement. That process has continued down to this day, with "ideological differences" being used to justify splitting when the most urgent necessity for the revolutionary and communist movement is to unite politically against capitalism and imperialism.

While it seems intuitive that organizational unity must be based on ideological unity, this is only because we are bombarded with bourgeois ideology

See page 7: Necessity for Socialism

Necessity for Socialism...from page 6

every second of every day. The concept of putting ideological unity in first place is actually a religious concept which has no place in a revolutionary organization. It is a form of philosophical idealism which considers ideas to be primary and matter to be secondary, a reflection of ideas. Assigning primacy to ideology rather than politics will destroy any political organization, even bourgeois political organizations.

In practice, unity on the basis of ideology violates both democratic rights and the right to conscience within the organization. Ideological purity is demanded of the members and, just as in the Catholic Church the Pope interprets and arbitrates the will of God, in a political organization where the basis of unity is ideology, the leadership determines what/who is ideologically correct and what/who is not. Individuals are expelled or worse on the basis of the ideas that they express. How can a movement dedicated to the overthrow of class society, the elimination of all rank and privilege and of all forms of arbitrariness tolerate such a practice?

Does this mean that ideological unity is irrelevant or undesirable? No, of course not. Some level of ideological unity is a precondition for two individuals to get together to discuss the possibility of building a revolutionary organization. The issue is that ideology cannot be made the basis of unity of an organization. The basis of unity of a political organization can only be politics. Ideology must serve politics and not the other way around. In other words, the degree of ideological unity required at any particular time must be determined by the political objectives at that time. Furthermore, it is important not to expand the need for ideological unity any further than necessary. In some sense, ideological unity, like truth, is relative and, ultimately, unobtainable. No two individuals have the same sets of experience or the same thinking processes. So, some degree of difference will exist even if they are looking at the same data. The level of experience, analytical skills, education and many other factors also contribute to differences between individuals. To expect ideological unity on more than

a small set of ideas is unrealistic and, generally, unnecessary.

Furthermore, strict ideological unity can be extremely detrimental to the health of an organization. If everyone agrees on everything, how can an organization grow and respond to changes? By their nature, human beings have an imperfect understanding of reality. Learning is primarily a social, not an individual, experience and understanding expands through the exchange of ideas and the sharing of both experiences and analysis. An organization which insists on ideological unity as a starting point, rather than as a long-term and ever elusive objective, dooms itself to intellectual paralysis and dogmatism, to formulaic regurgitation of phrases and formulations. Such an organization can never hope to overthrow capitalism, let alone the bourgeois ideology that capitalism gives rise to.

The basis of unity of a revolutionary organization must be an agreed-upon political goal. Since the political purpose of a revolutionary organization is the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by socialism, that should be the basis of unity. Given the overwhelming pressure against revolution and socialism from bourgeois society, that is not such a small issue of agreement, after all. Those who demand more are really saying that they don't really believe a person's motives and that they should prove their commitment to revolution and socialism by reciting some liturgy. The proof of one's commitment to revolution and socialism is not proven by a person's knowledge of the writing of Marx or Lenin or some other leader; nor is it proven by the ability to parrot some phrases. Rather, it is determined by the person's deeds; and whether those deeds are modest or heroic in scale is also not an issue. Revolution is not an individual act, despite the propaganda of bourgeois romanticism. Revolution is a social act, the act of a class. Within that, individuals play a role and make whatever contribution they are able to make. So the basis of unity should be expanded to reflect the importance of actions over words – the basis of unity of a revolutionary organization should be

See page 8: Necessity for Socialism

Necessity for Socialism...from page 7

agreement with the principle of the revolutionary transformation of capitalism to socialism and participation in the work to make that goal a reality. That was the basis of unity that Lenin proposed for the Bolshevik Party a century ago and it led to the greatest revolution the world has yet witnessed. Can we say that the needs of the Canadian revolution are greater?

The Challenges We Face

This should not be interpreted to mean that the MRC believes that a party of the Leninist type is no longer needed in Canada. In fact, we are convinced that no other type of party will do. However, we are also acutely aware that the authority of Marxism-Leninism has been seriously undermined to the point that it essentially has to be re-established from square one. Demanding unity on the basis of Marxism-Leninism will only ensure that the work never gets off the ground. We cannot simply insist that others should accept Marxism-Leninism as the basis of a new party; rather, we will be forced to argue for those principles on an ongoing basis using logic and the experience of the Canadian working class. Furthermore, the same necessity exists even within those parties that call themselves Marxist-Leninist, as our own experience teaches us. Just because a party calls itself Marxist-Leninist does not guarantee that the content of that party will be Marxist-Leninist; there is a need for continuous renewal on the basis of solving the concrete problems facing revolution. If our experience has taught us anything it is that nothing can be taken for granted and that there is no substitute for being political. In other words, instead of trying to convince others of the truths of Marxism-Leninism, the Marxists-Leninists should put their theory into practice and actually provide coherence and leadership to the revolutionary movement.

We face a number of specific challenges in the immediate period. The first and most important challenge is to unite the anti-capitalist forces in Canada on the basis that there is no alternative to revolution. This is no small challenge given the entire

history of Canadian Exceptionalism and the Liberal-Labour Alliance. However, we have the good fortune of living in the period when the Liberal-Labour Alliance is revealing its true nature and the “alternatives” flowing from that alliance are being discredited.

The second task we face is to work with those who agree with the necessity for revolution, to create an actual revolutionary organization to make such a revolution a reality. Once we succeed, that organization will face a whole host of challenges concerning the form and content of a revolutionary organization. However, once such an organization is established, those who are looking for an alternative will have somewhere else to turn rather than the bankrupt “solutions” of the bourgeoisie. That will give us the base and the momentum we need to carry the day on the other questions as well.

In the final analysis, no one gets to choose the circumstances in which they find themselves. They only get to choose whether they can live with those circumstances or whether they must work to change them. It is the work to change the world which invigorates and energizes communists and revolutionaries; it is the struggle which gives us life. In this spirit, the MRC wishes all of our comrades and friends health and every success in their work in the New Year.

Modern Communism

**Bulletin of the Manitoba Regional Committee
of the Communist Party of Canada
(Marxist-Leninist)
Editor: Ken Kalturnyk**

**To contact the Manitoba Branch of CPC(M-L):
Fax: 477-6741
Email: mrc-cpcml@mts.net
Internet: www.modern-communism.ca
Produced by volunteer labour**