

A Critical History of New Communist Movement 1969-1979

By Paul Costello

MARXIST-LENINISTS



UNITE!

WORKERS AND
OPRESSED PEOPLE
OF THE WORLD
UNITE!

1973

PARTY OF A NEW TYPE

One of the greatest problems faced by Lenin was the creation of a proletarian party which the bourgeoisie could not smash. The Bolshevik Party was a party of a new type and was the first party to successfully lead the proletariat to take state power from the bourgeoisie. Since that time the success of the proletariat has primarily depended upon the ability of the



CALL FOR A CONGRESS

Originally published in 1979, this piece discusses the first ten years of the New Communist Movement from a critical view against dogmatism and sectarianism. While we don't agree with all the takes within in this, it serves as an important analysis and understanding of some of the pitfalls the New Communist Movement fell into. Many patterns of which we see happening amongst the left and Neo-marxist grouplets forming around the country. We must learn from the New Communist Movement and not replicate their mistakes. *Revolution In The Air* by Max Elbaum is a great book for further reading. There's also the *Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line* which has many original reports and articles from the debates mentioned within this article. (This article is there too). We hope this is used as a tool to get folks critically thinking about how they are organizing today, and connecting the dots of marxist history, strengths, and yes the many mistakes, in the United States.

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By Paul Costello

“This task is not an easy one: to fight for science, Marxist science, in the face of a tradition which embodies the very opposite. Yet its necessity can never be doubted.

“As Marx himself, wrote:

“There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.”

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The history of the new communist movement presents an extremely complicated and confusing picture of countless small groups developing, interacting, growing and splitting. In origins, the NCM appears to have burst on the scene at the end of the 1960s, virtually out of nowhere.

In reality it was a product of the 1960s and the mass struggles of those years. To understand the new communist movement an understanding of the 1960s is therefore imperative. At the same time we must recognize that the decade of the 1960s was itself unique inasmuch as it was the beginning of the end of a particular period in American history which started with World War II.

The end of the second world war and the anti-labor offensive typified by the Taft-Hartley Act, the Smith Act persecution of the Communist Party and McCarthyism helped to inaugurate a new “long wave” of capitalist expansion in the United States. Although it carried America through the 1950s this economic “miracle” began to falter in the following decade. The effects of a transition from a long wave of expansion to one of economic contraction and stagnation were only beginning to be felt in the 1960s, while their full impact would only become apparent in the following years.

Politically the American empire in the 1960s was facing renewed challenges to its hegemony in Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as from Europe and the Soviet Union. The Cuban revolutionary victory on the very doorstep of the United States was only the most obvious sign of this process. Likewise the ideology of cold war liberalism and its knee-jerk anti-communism proved itself hopelessly compromised as the Great Society was dismantled in the wake of the war in Vietnam, and the burgeoning war economy.

The decade of the 1960s was a decade of transition, embodying elements of both the old and the new. This contradiction was reflected in the contradictory currents of mass struggle which erupted in those years. Different classes and class fractions were affected differently by the crisis. The organized sections of the white working class, for example, were the least affected sections of the class and, therefore generally quiescent throughout this period.

The minority peoples, and particularly Blacks and Black workers, on the other hand, were severely affected by the crisis. Racism, segregation, high unemployment, the decay of northern cities, as well as the particularly oppressive conditions in the south and in northern and southern factories fueled their discontent.

Another group adversely affected was the youth, particularly minority youth and students. They faced an uncertain future in view of the contradiction between a growing labor pool and a shrinking

job market. With the growth of the Vietnam War, youth also faced the draft and certain military service abroad.

Of all youth, students were the one group which responded most sharply to the contradictions emerging in the new period. The mass production of university graduates during the 1950s had already filled many institutions and businesses and the students of the 1960s were caught between leaving school and being drafted and staying in school with decreasing employment possibilities after graduation.

The mass struggles of the 1960s, civil rights and Black liberation, anti-war and student struggles and the numerous other mass phenomena, women's liberation, the new left and the counter-culture were all responses to the new stage of US imperialism and the unfolding crisis of late capitalism. The confusing character of the times was reflected in the confused proliferation of mass activity, which often erupted spontaneously, with movements developing independently of one another.

The new communist movement did not develop organically out of any one of the mass movements of the 1960s. In fact it developed only when these movements began to wane. While it drew its membership largely from young people who had been involved in mass activity, its ideology and practice were derived from a number of different sources. Before we examine these sources it is necessary to take a brief look at the only significant anti-revisionist communist force which was actively involved in the mass struggles of the 1960s: the Progressive Labor Party (PLP).

Progressive Labor: Antecedent of the New Communist Movement

The Progressive Labor Movement (renamed the Progressive Labor Party in 1965) was organized in 1962 by a group of former members of the Communist Party, USA. Initially the Progressive Labor Movement was quite small, but it began to recruit a significant

number of young activists in the early 1960s as a result of its militant involvement in labor action, the Black liberation movement and student and anti-war struggles, as well as its resolute endorsement of the Chinese polemics against “modern revisionism.”

The founders of PL were ideologically and politically molded in the inner-party struggles of the Communist Party, USA, particularly those in New York state. They were allies of the William Z. Foster group, one of whose members, Robert Thompson, was New York State Party Chairman. The founding PL'ers owed their past positions in the Communist Party to Thompson. Milt Rosen, the head of PL, for example, had previously been New York state trade union organizer.

When, in late 1961, forces around Rosen began to agitate for a more militant line on mass work, the Communist Party quickly expelled them; the Progressive Labor Movement was born. In addition to Rosen, founding members included Mort Sheer, former chairman of the Buffalo party section, Wally Linder, former head of railroad work in New York state, Fred Jerome, a New York student leader and Bill Epton of the Harlem party branch.

Although they had left the Communist Party, they brought with them much of the Party's ideology and practice, mainly those of the Foster group. Rosen's economism and his anti-theory bias was an echo of Foster as was his pre-occupation with the “looming danger” of war and fascism. Also from Foster, Rosen learned to demand adulation from the membership, the style of decision-making in secret and the limitation of democratic centralism for the rank and file. Finally the PL leadership treated their every new pronouncement as if it were an important breakthrough in Marxist-Leninist theory, just as Foster had previously done.

At the same time, PL had grasped the fundamentally revisionist character of the Communist Party, and strove to create a more revolutionary alternative. It concentrated its attention on the working

class and the oppressed peoples and attempted to place itself in the international struggle against revisionism. PL owed much of its ideology to the Chinese Communist Party and would never have achieved so great an influence if it had not been for the influence and inspiration of the Chinese at that time.

Not coincidentally the international anti-revisionist movement and Progressive Labor were their most innovative and creative in the period between 1963 and 1966. PL in those years started the *Marxist-Leninist Quarterly* and the *Challenge* newspaper. It organized an election campaign for Bill Epton in Harlem in 1963, disruption of House Un-American Activity Committee hearings in 1963, and the first major anti-war march in New York City (May, 1964).[1]

By the end of the decade the PLP was a leading force in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and its chapters across the country. A number of factors, however, led to a sharp reversal of PL's influence. Organizationally it was extremely sectarian and bureaucratic. Theoretically its cadre were not well trained in creative Marxism, but rather in a vulgar and dogmatic cult of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.

PL alienated itself from the Black Liberation movement with its slogan that "all nationalism is reactionary." It alienated itself from the anti-war movement by its attack on the Vietnamese for combining negotiation with armed struggle. To its merit PL raised before the student movement the importance of the working class in making revolution, but it did so in such a mechanical, economist, and anti-intellectual manner that it succeeded in turning away many.

PL's approach to the war and Black Liberation as well as its general strategy and style of work were the center of controversy at the SDS convention in Chicago in 1969. On the insistence of a majority of the delegates, supported by the Black Panther Party and many future leaders of the new communist movement (including Bob Avakian and Michael Klonsky), the Progressive Labor members were

expelled from SDS. PL quickly set up a rival SDS organization but neither of the two groups survived as a viable force. Never again was PL to enjoy the influence it once had.

1969 was not only a turning point for Progressive Labor; it was also decisive for many communists involved in mass activity. The break-up of SDS and the growing interest in Marxism-Leninism convinced them of the need to establish openly communist organizations of a Leninist type. Thus the new communist movement was born.

Ideological Origins of the New Communist Movement

The new communist movement, as we noted above, did not develop out of any one movement or political tradition. Instead it was the product of a fusion of a number of different and often contradictory traditions, the most important of which are the following.

1. The tradition of mass struggle characteristic of the decade of the 1960s.

The vast majority of the forces which evolved into the new communist movement received their early experience and political practice in the spontaneous upsurge of the 1960s. Even though this tide of mass activity was ebbing just as the new communist movement was being born it left an indelible mark on the movement which continues to this day.

2. The tradition of the Chinese revolutionary struggle, especially that of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The split in the world communist movement and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party as the center of world anti-revisionism and communist orthodoxy as well as a symbol of the need to continue revolution even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, were central to the political education of the new communist movement. Among American revolutionaries, particularly students,

the Cultural Revolution with its millions of Red Guards, made a tremendous impression.

3. The tradition of world and American communism before 1956.

From the Chinese and Albanian polemics, and from actual participants of these earlier struggles who joined it, the new communist movement was directed to another tradition, that of “pre-revisionist communism,” before Khrushchev’s attack on Stalin and the line of peaceful co-existence, peaceful competition and peaceful transition, inaugurated at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956.

From each of these three traditions, and their particular combination, the new communist movement drew a number of contradictory lessons and ideological notions or myths. These lessons and myths, modified and developed, open and disguised, have characterized and continue to characterize the new communist movement and its progeny to this day.

1. The first tradition, that of the mass struggles of the 1960s influenced the new communist movement both in terms of what it was and what it was not.

The new communist movement was born in the aftermath of spontaneous mass struggle, lacking any disciplined leadership or articulated strategy. As such the movement never really came to terms with its own past. On the one hand it developed an abiding contempt for spontaneity’s lack of leadership and a clear direction. On the other hand it also developed a lasting obsession with mass practical activity as the form of political practice and a standard of measuring success by the number of “masses” involved. Long after mass struggles had subsided the new communist movement continued to speak of “popular upsurges” as if nothing had changed, all the while seeking the magic formula to recreate the mass movements of the 1960s, this time under their own leadership.

At the same time this preoccupation with mass political work and its inevitable complement, pragmatism, produced a contempt for theory, particularly any theory whose immediate link to the latest practical endeavor could not be directly demonstrated. This contempt for theory was reinforced by the new communist movement's turn away from student work with its "academic atmosphere" toward the working class.

This turn toward the working class produced other responses as well. The predominantly petty-bourgeois character of the mass movements became an obvious liability when communists tried to reorient themselves to work in the factories. This produced a kind of class guilt which led to an exaggerated kind of "workerism" and an often crude and mechanical process of "proletarianization." Louis Althusser, noting this problem in France, has accurately described the phenomenon:

"It is also characteristic of our social history that the intellectuals of petty bourgeois origin ... felt that they had to pay in pure activity, if not in political activism, the imaginary Debt they thought they had contracted by not being proletarians."^[2]

2. From the Chinese revolutionary experience the new communist movement gained much of its style of mass work, its rhetorical zeal, its revolutionary strategy and its world vision.

The character of the Cultural Revolution with its ultra-radical phraseology, its worship of Mao quotations and its commitment to turn the world upside down ("it is right to rebel against reaction!") strongly appealed to the fledgling new communist movement. This cult of China was further reinforced as Progressive Labor turned against the Cultural Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party in 1971. Just as PL's insistence that "all nationalism is reactionary" drew new communist forces and progressive nationalist elements in the minority communities more closely together, its violent attack on

China pushed the new communist movement into becoming China's strongest defender in order to distinguish its anti-revisionist communism from PL's.

Had the new communist movement developed in close connection with proletarian, or even mass struggles, reality might have moderated the excesses it committed in its worship of all things Chinese. However, isolated as it was, doctrinaire absurdity and revolutionary phrase mongering flourished. Faithful adherence to Peking Review became more important than critical thinking, deference to Chinese theory and politics more important than the study of American reality.

Denouncing the Communist Party's dependency on the Soviet Union, the new communist movement proudly proclaimed its own allegiance to Peking. One group's boast, "China's chairman is our chairman," was not a mere slogan; it accurately reflected the character of the movement as a whole.

More importantly for its future, the new communist movement adopted wholesale the Chinese characterization of the international situation. The various theories of third world peoples' war, capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, and the imminence of world war as a result of super-power rivalry, all became the guiding lines for new communist organizations.

The form in which these "theories" were appropriated by the new communist movement and internalized as part of its ideology was not accompanied by any genuine theoretical effort or enrichment of Marxism-Leninism. Rather they were a shallow ideological cover for a predetermined political course which acted, by its very poverty, to block rather than stimulate much needed theoretical practice.

Nowhere is this blockage of much needed theory more evident than in the new communist movement's solution to its lack of revolutionary strategy. Against the anti-monopoly coalition strategy

of the Communist Party the movement was required to present its own anti-revisionist strategy for proletarian revolution in the United States. It came up with this strategy, but not by means of a theoretical-political analysis of class and political processes in the American social formation. Instead, it simply transplanted the strategy employed by the Chinese revolution under entirely different conditions: “the united front against imperialism”, and sought to mechanically impose it upon American reality. [3]

3. The third tradition the new communist movement incorporated into its ideology and practice was that of the world and the American communist movements before 1956.

The thrust of the Chinese polemics against Soviet revisionism were couched in the language of a defense – defense of a tradition of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism. Whatever their private opinions, the Chinese leaders wrote these polemics as if this revolutionary tradition could be traced continuously from Marx through Stalin, that is until 1956 when Khrushchev ended the “Stalin epoch.”

These Chinese and Albanian polemics were taken literally by the new communist movement, probably as much out of ignorance as anything else. A more important factor, however, was the desire of the movement to find for itself a native heritage, a link with the history of the American working class. The view that until 1956 the world communist movement, and particularly the Communist Party, USA, were leading revolutionary forces on the true path was precisely the link they were looking for, as it provided them with a connection to the great class battles of the 1930s.

Furthermore, the history of the Communist Party, USA contains so many different left and right periods and practices, that there is something for almost everyone in its legacy. While different groups in the new communist movement attached themselves to different aspects of Communist tradition, a number of elements in the

Communist Party legacy became generalized in the movement as a whole.

First and foremost was an economist analysis of capitalist crisis. Viewing each economic downturn as “capitalism’s last stand” economism equates economic difficulties with revolutionary possibilities, and sees economic resistance on the part of the working class as automatically leading, of itself, to revolutionary consciousness.

Second was the adulation of Stalin and the cult of his theory and practice, something inherent in pre-1956 communism but enormously strengthened by its reproduction and elaboration by the Chinese and Albanian parties. In this way the vulgar Marxism of the Soviets in the 1930s, and the cruel caricature of Leninist organizational practice of those years, was incorporated and glorified at the hands of the new communist movement.

Another element of the Communist Party legacy carried over to the new communist movement was the notion of a Black nation in the southern United States as put forward first in Comintern resolutions. Created not as the result of an analysis of concrete conditions in the United States but rather out of the Comintern’s desire to channel Black nationalism in a communist direction, the adoption of the Black nation thesis by the new communist movement blocked any possibility of a genuine advance in Marxist thinking on the sources of and solutions to Black oppression.[4]

A final element in this tradition which cannot be overlooked is its conception of organization. The notion of a “monolithic” party to which is linked that other notion which sees all other parties as representative of the bourgeoisie, was carried over into the new communist movement with obvious results. Bureaucracy, sectarianism, a sharp dichotomy between leaders and led, a military style and hierarchy, all have characterized the non-Leninist theory

and practice of democratic centralism in the new communist movement.

The ideology and practice of the new communist movement cannot be simply reduced to these three traditions, that of the mass struggles of the 1960s, the Chinese revolutionary experience and the Communist movement before 1956. Yet of all the influences which went into its formation these seem to be the most decisive in shaping its character.

In the none too skillful hands of the new communist movement these three often contradictory traditions were intermingled and confused, some elements cancelling each other out, some reinforcing the others. In the end they fused into an organic ideology, a mythology which could comfort the faithful, secure in their inevitable victory, and justify the movement's near total isolation from reality behind a wall of revolutionary purity.

The history of the new communist movement is not a chronology of its progressive elaboration of Marxist theory and its integration with the workers' movement; that would have required the practice of Marxism as a living science, and its production in accordance with American reality and the political requirements of the workers' movement. Above all, that would have required a break with the above discussed traditions and party building on an entirely different foundation, one which critically assessed our past and present and proceeded rigorously without recourse to mythology.

Instead the history of the new communist movement must be seen as a constant process of combination and recombination of the elements of the traditions from which it emerged. Different organizations have given greater or lesser emphasis to one or another tradition or one or another element but none have been able to make a qualitative break with the overall ideology, none has been able to transcend the limits which mark off this ideology and give it its sterile character. By calling the ideology sterile, we do not mean

to deny it contains elements which are both revolutionary and scientific. What we mean is that these elements are frozen into an ideological system, a mythology, which by its very function, the way it reproduces itself, blocks their practice and development in a revolutionary manner, appropriate to the living science of Marxism.

The effects of this ideology and its limitations on the practice of the new communist movement have been generally recognized: flunkyism, and an uncritical dependency on foreign parties for its theory and politics, lack of a coherent political strategy accompanied by constant tactical flip-flops, sectarianism in relation to the masses and in relation to other organizations, the “burning-out” of cadre in incessant, repetitious activity.

Even a majority of those forces which call themselves anti-dogmatist and anti-revisionist seeking to demarcate themselves from the more extreme features of the new communist movement, remain within the limits of this ideology and its corresponding practices. While they have rejected the Chinese tradition and its results, they have continued to uphold and defend the other two traditions, that of economist and pragmatist economic mass work, on the one hand, and the cult of Stalin and the Communist Party USA before 1956 on the other. An essential break with the theory and practice of the new communist movement has yet to be made.

By essential break we do not mean a simple rejection of the elements and traditions which fused to constitute its ideology, but the necessary theoretical and political critique of these traditions and their function in the theory and practice of the new communist movement. By essential break we mean not just the recombination of these elements in a new way, as is suggested by those who hold to the “rectification line” on party building, but the creation of a new foundation, that of living Marxist-Leninist theory and practice whose relevance and applicability is demonstrated in its ability to explain and orient us toward current struggles and developments,

and not because it had its origins in the communist movement before 1956.

With this broad overview we now turn to examine the unfolding of the new communist movement in its chronological order.

First Period: The Formative Years, 1969-1971

As we noted above, the first period in the history of the new communist movement was characterized by a general decline in the mass movements of the 1960s paralleled by the formation of innumerable small communist and left groupings. Mass activists, disoriented by the ebbing of mass action, either dropped out or began to consider more organized alternatives to the previous spontaneous politics of the 1960s. A tiny handful committed themselves to underground terrorism (Weather Underground); others began to form small communist collectives. At the same time, individuals and groups which had been part of the new left began to develop and elaborate their own non-Leninist theoretical positions in journals such as *Socialist Revolution* and *Radical America*.

Internationally, it was a period in which the European events of 1968 began to recede into less visible forms of resistance and in which the Chinese Cultural Revolution was coming to an end, particularly after the fall of Lin Piao.

The central event which precipitated the rise of the new communist movement was the collapse of Students for a Democratic Society in the summer of 1969. Three groups emerged out of the split within the organization: Progressive Labor's SDS, the Weathermen, and something called Revolutionary Youth Movement II (RYM II), in which many communists were involved, including Michael Klonsky, Bob Avakian and Noel Ignatin.[5]

Avakian was instrumental, together with Steve Hamilton and Bruce Franklin, in forming one of the first important new communist

organizations, the Bay Area Revolutionary Union (RU). Created out of left-wing elements in the California Peace and Freedom Party in early 1968, the RU intervened in SDS in 1969 through its publication of "Red Papers" which polemicized against the Communist Party, USA and Progressive Labor. Initially RU and other communists put their energy into making RYM II a viable force.

By the spring of 1970 it was clear that RYM II, as a national organization, had collapsed. Only two small groups continued to function, one in Atlanta, which changed its name to the Georgia Communist League in 1971. The other in Los Angeles, under the leadership of Michael Klonsky, a former national secretary of SDS, was called the October League (OL). The two groups were united in 1972, retaining the name of October League. [6]

While these communist groups were being created out of the remnants of the white student movement, others were forming in minority communities. In Detroit auto plants, militant Black workers started the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, which in turn resulted in the formation of the Black Workers Congress (BWC) as a national organization in 1971.[7]

At the same time, in America's Chinese communities the example of the Cultural Revolution inspired the formation of a number of organizations of revolutionary youths. Two of these were the I Wor Kuen (IWK) in New York City and the Red Guard Party of San Francisco, both formed in 1969. In 1971 the two groups merged, retaining the name of the former.

In New York and Chicago the resistance to oppression within the Puerto Rican communities resulted in the formation of the Young Lords Organization (YLO) and the Young Lords Party (YLP). By 1971 the Young Lords Party was clearly moving in the direction of becoming a communist organization.

All of these organizations, although still embryonic, shared a number of characteristics by the end of this period. All continued to operate as if mass movements of the previous decade were not in a state of decline, and consequently they considered mass work to be the center of their activity. Party building was the ultimate goal, but it was not yet a practical task.

In composition, all were relatively small groups, mostly students and youth with few working class members or working class ties. While many of these individuals had a great deal of practical experience in the struggles of the 1960s, they had little if any experience in democratic centralist organizational practice or the disciplined, collective study of theory.

All considered the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, USA to be revisionist organizations. All rejected Trotskyism and the politics of PLP. All considered China to be the international center of the world communist movement, and unconditionally supported the policies of the Chinese party and state.

These groups gave theoretical development a relatively low priority in their work inasmuch as they considered all the theory necessary for their practice to exist in the works of Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Finally, all drew the lesson from the failure of the CPUSA that the American revolutionary movement could only go forward if it were guided by a new communist party.

Differences existed on priorities: which was the more immediate task: building the party or building the united front? Differences also existed on the problem of which deviation posed the greater threat to the party building movement: ultra-leftism or revisionism?, and how were they to be combated? Also important was the issue of how best to struggle against narrow nationalism in minority communities, and racism in the white working-class.

The issue of nationalism was complicated by its link to the question of whether or not national rather than multi-national forms of communist organization were permissible. The ex-SDS groups, because of their predominantly white composition, strongly insisted on multi-nationality in communist organization. Conversely, given the strength of nationalism in their own communities and their roots in the national movements, some groups such as I Wor Kuen and the Black Workers Congress argued for separate community organizations for different minorities, both to safeguard their community ties and to prevent minority communists from being swallowed up in the overwhelmingly white new communist movement.

Related to this problem was another, that of identifying the key sector of the working-class for communist concentration. A vestige of the 1960s was the mechanical notion that “most oppressed equals most advanced” with the conclusion that Black Workers would always be the leading force in the workers’ movement. This view continued in spite of the failure of the communist movement to make significant inroads in the Black proletariat and the beginnings of concentration in other sections of the working-class.

In spite of these numerous although general and largely abstract similarities, the new communist groups were divided on an equal number of issues, mostly immediate tactical questions.

In addition differences existed on the character of the Black liberation struggle and the existence of a Black nation, trade union tactics, and the national character of Puerto Ricans in the United States.

This same period also saw the growth of new communist groups which had their origin in the CPUSA. One was the Communist League (CL). This organization traced itself back to the Provisional Organizing Committee (POC), an anti-revisionist organization which had split off from the CPUSA in 1958. [8]

The CL began in California in 1968 as the union of former POC cadre and a small ex-SDS group. Led by Nelson Peery, it grew to national prominence in 1971 through its recruitment of the remnants of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, mostly those who had refused to join the BWC.

The CL made cadre development rather than mass work its central task and considered theoretical work and training to be a high priority for all its members. To its detriment, however, it was excessively rigid and dogmatic in its understanding of theory, accepting uncritically the theory produced in the 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union. The CL situated itself squarely within this mode of analysis, characterized by mechanistic, economist approaches to the complex problems of class relations. In addition its practical work was marred by its own unique interpretation of the Black Nation thesis (“Free the Negro Nation!”) and a corresponding slogan of regional autonomy for the southwest.[9]

Another important force in the new communist movement also had a history linked to the Communist Party, USA. This was the *Guardian* newspaper, which was started in 1948 in connection with the Progressive Party campaign of Henry Wallace. Close to the Communist Party until the 1960s, the *Guardian* was taken over by new left forces in 1968 to become an unofficial voice of SDS. By 1971-72 the *Guardian* staff was moving toward a Marxist-Leninist orientation, and it began to favorably report on developments within the new communist movement, becoming a mouthpiece for its views. Thereafter the *Guardian* came to be viewed as an invaluable asset of the party building movement, its only really mass publication. Each of the major new communist groups, first the Revolutionary Union and later the October League sought to take over the *Guardian* and make it their own organ.

The Communist League and the Revolutionary Union were the two most important new communist organizations in this period. Each represented one of what were emerging as the two trends in the party

building movement. The RU formulated its task as building the mass movements out of which the party would be forged. The CL formulated its task as the creation and training of a core of communist cadre as a necessary prerequisite to intervention in the mass struggles. (More on these differences later on.)

Second Period: Efforts at Unity, 1972-1974

The second period in the history of the new communist movement was characterized by an awareness on the part of all groups of their own weakness and isolation and the overriding need for political and organizational unity. The objective situation had a lot to do with this, given the favorable conditions for the left created by the worsening economic situation and the political and ideological crisis inaugurated by Watergate.

The groups in the new communist movement lacked not only ties to the working class and a sizable membership; they were geographically isolated as well. Most were based in only one or two cities: San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, or Detroit. The *Guardian* had a genuine national circulation but it was only a newspaper collective, not a functioning political organization.

With many common political principles and a need felt by all to build a unified communist movement, the issue of drawing together the various groups dominated this second period. Three major unity efforts were presented in the space of three years: the National Liaison Committee (NLC) in 1972-73, the *Guardian* party building forums of 1973, and the National Continuities Committee (NCC) in 1973-74.

In 1972 the Young Lords Party held a congress to publicly signify its change from a radical nationalist to a Marxist-Leninist organization, and to change its name to the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (PRRWO). Invited to attend the congress were the

Revolutionary Union, the Black Workers Congress and the I Wor Kuen.[10]

The RU used the occasion to propose the formation of a National Liaison Committee, a suggestion which was accepted by the other three organizations. The Committee's principles of unity were vague: anti-revisionism, anti-Trotskyism, upholding Mao Tse Tung Thought, recognition of the need to build a base in the working class, an agreement to engage in common organizing, and the general agreement of each to subordinate themselves to the future party in the process of formation which the NLC was intended to facilitate.

Joint work was initiated in New York, Philadelphia, Detroit and Chicago, but the vagueness of the points of unity could neither conceal nor overcome the very real differences among the four groups. Almost at once struggle arose over IWK's insistence on maintaining an "Asian only" membership and its alleged opposition to working class organizing. Thereafter, IWK left the NLC.

Soon after, struggle broke out over RU's proposal of joint national "flying squadrons" to recruit independent collectives around the country to the NLC. The BWC and PRRWO felt, and correctly so, that these groups would be predominantly white in composition and suggested that the NLC should concentrate instead on work in the multi-national working class. Differences also arose over RU's rejection of the Communist International's Black Nation thesis[11] and its theory that Blacks were "a nation of a new type" throughout the United States. When these differences became irreconcilable in the winter of 1973, the NLC collapsed.

The next effort at unifying the new communist movement was the series of *Guardian* forums organized between March and June 1973. Five forums were held: on party building, the Black national question, building the worker's movement, women and the class struggle, and on Watergate. Among the participants were the RU,

BWC, PRRWO, the Sojourner Truth Organization, and the October League, in addition to the *Guardian* itself. The Communist League, which maintained its own party building strategy, was not invited.

The *Guardian* had three reasons for organizing the forums. 1) to provide a national platform for the different organizations, 2) to offer a means to facilitate unity in the party building movement, and 3) to build the *Guardian* and extend its circulation and influence.

By far the most important forum was the first one entitled, “What Road to Building a New Communist Party?” The speeches delivered there present an excellent picture of the state of the new communist movement in this period, at least of the wing which rejected theory and cadre development as central to party building. Irwin Silber spoke for the *Guardian*, Don Wright for the Revolutionary Union, Mike Hamlin for the Black Workers Congress, and Michael Klonsky for the October League.[12]

The common strategy for party building which was presented at the forum can be called “build the party in the mass struggles.” All four speakers failed to present an analysis of the actual state of class and social forces at that time (1973), and instead spoke as if significant mass struggles were a continuing reality. Consequently they all considered party building to be primarily a task of building mass movements through communist involvement in them. On behalf of the RU Don Wright summed up this view:

“Where does the party come from? Like correct ideas, it does not drop from the sky. It must be built, forged from the mass struggles... We believe that unless we can get proletarian forces together, unless we can build mass struggles in the workers movement, we cannot build the party.” [13]

Since mass struggles were to be primary, theoretical development was not of major importance. All speakers paid lip service to theory,

but none presented an attempt to apply Marxist-Leninism to the particular requirements of party building in the United States in the 1970s. By theory they meant simply the most literal reading of Lenin, Stalin and Mao and the direct application of their writings to American conditions. That the theory necessary for party building already existed was taken for granted by these groups.

All four speakers continued to uphold the erroneous thesis that “degree of oppression equals advanced role” from which they concluded that Black workers would have to be the leading force in the working class. None disagreed that Black liberation was best understood in the context of the Black Nation thesis. All endorsed China’s foreign policy and the leading role of the Chinese Communist Party as well as the notion that the Soviet Union was a “superpower” of a capitalist, social imperialist character.

While differences surfaced only in the question and answer period, the appearance of unity and comradeship fooled no one. The points of unity being discussed were still abstract and they lacked any real political content, that is, they provided no real guidance to the actual practice of the various groups. Missing was any discussion of how the party was to be built in the mass movements, what tactics were required and what was to be the first step in the direction of unification. Also unanswered were the questions of how the united front against imperialism was to be built, its relationship to the party, and how reform struggles were to be conducted in a revolutionary manner.

In the end, the forums achieved only two of the goals established for them by the *Guardian*: they provided a common platform for different groups, and boosted the *Guardian’s* influence among new communist forces. But when they were over, the movement was still no closer to any kind of meaningful unity.

The third major attempt to unify the new communist movement was initiated by the Communist League, which had been excluded from

the NLC and the *Guardian* forums. In May, 1973, the CL called together a number of small groups, held a conference, and published the resulting resolutions under the title, “Marxist-Leninists, Unite!” At this conference a National Continuations Committee (NCC) was established to coordinate forces working toward the party.

The points of unity of the NCC were: adherence to the science of Marxism-Leninism, struggle against the revisionism of the CPSU and CPUSA, agreement with the need for a multinational communist party, and support of the resolutions in “Marxist-Leninists, Unite!”

The line of the NCC was extremely contradictory. On the one hand, it rigidly and mechanically adhered to the Chinese line on the nature of the Soviet Union. It equally dogmatically insisted that fascism was a real danger in the U.S. Finally it continued to see the line of the CL on the Negro nation as central to its theory and practice.

But to its credit the CL, the leading force in the NCC, put forward a line on party building which made theoretical struggle and cadre training in Marxism-Leninism the primary task. The NCC repeatedly criticized the RU and OL for their line of building the party in the mass struggles and their down-playing of theory. Charles Loren of the NCC put it this way:

“The problems faced by the communist movement cannot be solved by going out to the labor movement... In fact, to send out a disorganized communist movement into current labor struggles is a good recipe for increasing the confusion and bewilderment of communists... We will found a genuine communist party and make strides only when we acquire a sound basis in Marxist-Leninist theory.”^[14]

It was this emphasis on theory and cadre development which brought a number of important organizations into the NCC after having become disillusioned with the “build the party in the mass struggles” line of the Revolutionary Union and others. In a short

period of time the NCC recruited the Black Workers Congress and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization. Also briefly involved in the NCC was the August Movement (ATM), a predominantly Chicano organization based in California which upheld the view that a Chicano nation existed in the southwest United States.[15]

The Communist League, however, was no more able to unify the movement than the Revolutionary Union and the *Guardian* before it. Its bureaucratic and sectarian role in the NCC alienated many of its new-found allies. More serious, in terms of its relation to others in the New Communist Movement, was its new line on the international situation which it unveiled in May 1974. The Chinese had just announced their “theory of three worlds” and the Communist League, in terms nearly identical with those that would be used by the Party of Labor of Albania five years later, castigated the new theory as entirely un-Marxian. [16]

Such a sharp break with the Chinese was unacceptable to nearly everyone in the new communist movement, even those already in the NCC. The Black Workers Congress, the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, and the August 29th Movement quickly departed, and by July the only two important groups remaining with the Communist League in the NCC were the League for Proletarian Revolution in San Francisco and the mass-based Motor City Labor League in Detroit.

Throughout this period the October League slowly and carefully constructed for itself a national image of moderation and orthodoxy. Orthodox in its faithful parroting of Communist tradition and contemporary Chinese thinking, it stood out in contrast to the Revolutionary Union’s abandonment of the traditional Black Nation theory and the Communist League’s rejection of Chinese foreign policy. Moderate in its practice and its polemical tone, it appeared different by comparison to the Revolutionary Union’s ultra-left antics in the trade union movement, and the Communist League’s dogmatist and mechanical training of cadre which seemed to slight

mass work. The October League also gained prestige from the association with it of Martin Nicolaus, author of “The Restoration of Capitalism in the USSR,” and Harry Haywood, a former leader of the Communist Party, USA and the POC, and a principal architect of the Comintern’s Black Nation theory.[17]

Third Period: Decline and New Beginnings, 1974-1976

The third period in the history of the new communist movement was characterized primarily by crisis and decline, coming as it did at the end of a period of aborted efforts at unity. On the one hand the crisis manifested itself in the new attitude toward unity: having failed to win others to their party building lines, both the Communist League and the Revolutionary Union decided to go ahead and form parties on their own.

But the crisis had another, wider component. Having tied itself unquestioningly to Chinese theory and policy, the new communist movement as a whole was unable to avoid the crisis which spread to the world Maoist movement as a result of Chinese developments in these years. The first important problems arose in trying to justify the new strategic orientation, the “theory of three worlds”, which found China aligned with world imperialism against the USSR. These were followed by the struggles erupting after Mao’s death and culminated in the dramatic changes which followed the defeat of the “Gang of Four” and the triumph of the Hua-Deng group in the Communist Party of China.

The full scope of this unfolding crisis was of course unforeseeable in 1976. Nonetheless the seeds of the future were already growing within the new communist movement as it attempted to adapt itself to the increasingly pro-imperialist orientation of the Chinese leadership.

Returning to the Communist League for a moment, it continued its National Continuations Committee undeterred by the numerous defections. In September 1974, a congress was held and the NCC transformed itself into the Communist Labor Party with Nelson Peery retaining his leading position. Almost immediately, the new party began moving to the right. It dropped its characterization of the Soviet Union as a social-imperialist power and began to describe it as a socialist country.

With this shift to the right came a de-emphasis on theory and cadre development, and a new interest in indiscriminate recruitment. The Communist Labor Party also developed a strong interest in electoral politics and sought to forge an electoral alliance with the formerly hated Communist Party, USA. As a reward for its efforts the new Party lost a sizable section of its old members who preferred its former leftist orientation, and was totally ostracized by the rest of the new communist movement for its unorthodox positions.

After the collapse of the National Liaison Committee, the Revolutionary Union had continued its party building efforts with only limited success. Although it managed to recruit sufficient numbers to become the largest of the new communist groups, it was continuously plagued with difficulties. These problems were most obvious in its trade union work and its campaign against “bourgeois nationalism.”

The Revolutionary Union’s trade union practice, like that of most of the new communist movement, was basically economist in character. For the RU, however, economism was accompanied by a particular tactic, that of forming autonomous “workers’ organizations” which would be used to try and “jam” the Unions (put them “up against the wall”). The main result of this policy was to isolate the RU’s supporters and prevent them from effectively intervening in Union struggles.

On the matter of Black liberation the Revolutionary Union developed a strong aversion to what is called “bourgeois

nationalism.” This aversion and RU’s economism led it to liquidate any struggle for Black rights as “divisive”: something which would divide the common interests of all workers. The most striking manifestation of this view was RU’s response to the busing issue. In October 1974, *Revolution*, the Revolutionary Union newspaper, bore the headline, “People Must Unite to Smash Boston Busing Plan.”

RU, like so many other new communist groups, failed to grasp the relationship between reform and revolution, and the possibility that integrated education, even if proposed by the bourgeoisie, might benefit the working-class. At the same time it chose to ignore the effects of its objective alliance with Boston racists in the way it conducted its anti-busing fight.

Up until this point the RU had at least maintained certain ties with other forces in the NCM, particularly the *Guardian* newspaper. But by its stand on the busing issue the RU managed to isolate itself; its supporters were forced off the *Guardian* staff and its image was severely damaged. At first, it responded with slander and physical attacks on its opponents. Then it followed the lead of the CL by transforming itself into the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) in September 1975.

The RCP continued the RU’s tradition of economist mass work in the trade unions, and on the campuses. Its youth group, the Revolutionary Student Brigade, attempted, without success, to revive the student movement of the 1960s. Where before it had refused to work with the trade union bureaucracy, it now actively campaigned for “reform” candidates. On the international question it refused to either endorse or criticize the theory of three worlds, a position which satisfied no one within the Party and foreshadowed the split which was to come.

The October League sustained both advances and reversals in this period. With the RCP and the CLP “discredited” it became the next hope of many in the NCM. Throughout 1974, its fervent support of China, its activity in the busing struggle in Boston and its steady

work in the trade unions won it many followers. Of great help in this regard were the number of *Guardian* reporters and columnists who supported the OL and favorably reported its work and presented its line. These included Martin Nicolaus, Rod Such, and Carl Davidson.

Nonetheless some of the same characteristics which had previously favored the October League, now began to appear as liabilities. Its extreme loyalty to China became something of a problem, particularly with China's increasingly pro-imperialist orientation. Likewise its previous tactical flexibility now began to appear as simple opportunism as its vacillation between "left" and right became increasingly frequent. In the beginning of 1975, the October League initiated a new "left" turn with unexpected results.

United front International Women's Day marches had always been a tradition within the left in the early 1970s. However, in March 1975 the October League refused to participate in the march in New York City on the grounds that representatives of the Communist Party, USA were actively involved. Invoking the "principle" of "no unity with revisionism" it pressured others, including the *Guardian* to endorse its stand.

Such outright sectarianism was too much for the *Guardian*. It pointed out that the OL's position was suicidal and self-defeating inasmuch as the International Women's Day Coalition contained a broad spectrum of progressive groups, in which the Communist Party, USA was an insignificant force. Refusing to back down, the October League replied by a campaign of slander against the *Guardian*, accusing it of being anti-China and a front for Soviet revisionism. Martin Nicolaus, Carl Davidson and other October League members and supporters left the staff.

More importantly this dispute allowed *Guardian* executive editor Irwin Silber to develop a number of important critiques of the theory and practice of the new communist movement. His articles targeting a flunkyist attitude toward China and a dogmatic and sectarian approaches to party building stimulated considerable discussion.

Meanwhile the October League continued its “ultra-left” course. Unable to unite any significant forces in its own party building efforts, in June 1977, it reconstituted itself as the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) with China’s blessing.

No longer was it only a question of a crisis of Chinese theory and policy. For many forces and individuals it was becoming increasingly clear that there was a fundamental crisis in the new communist movement itself. The movement was still as disunified as ever, it had failed to build a base in the working class or communities, and it had failed to recruit significant numbers of workers or even independent Marxist-Leninists to its organizations. In short, it remained as it began: a handful of squabbling sects, isolated, and without influence.

This crisis affected the smaller groups more seriously than it did the larger Revolutionary Communist Party or the October League. In the summer of 1975, the Black Workers Congress underwent a four-way split. Two of the breakaway groups, the Revolutionary Workers Congress and the Revolutionary Bloc, disintegrated almost immediately. The other two, the Workers Congress and the Marxist-Leninist Organizing Committee, managed to maintain themselves.

Other small groups reacted to the crisis with a final unity effort. Labeled the Party Building Commission (PBC) it brought together a number of groups who called themselves the “revolutionary wing.” Included in the PBC were the Workers’ Viewpoint Group (now the Communist Workers’ Party), led by a former PL member, Jerry Tung, the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, the August 29th Movement, and the Revolutionary Workers’ League, a Black communist group which developed out of the mass-based African Liberation Support Committees.

The “revolutionary wing” was in many ways the logical outcome of the new communist movement; it carried many of its central elements to their most absurd conclusions. Lacking its own theoretical foundation, it made the literal reading of the classics and

their direct application to U.S. conditions its framework. Lacking an understanding of how to fight for reforms in a revolutionary manner it rejected any involvement in reform struggles. Lacking significant ties to the workers it reduced all communist activity to party building tirades supposedly aimed at the advanced. Lacking an understanding of the crisis of the new communist movement, it reduced the problems to a struggle between Bolsheviks (themselves) and Mensheviks (all others). Lacking an understanding of democratic centralism and inner party struggle it created military-bureaucratic sects which settled differences with verbal abuse and even, at times, physical violence. [18]

After a few joint forums the Party Building Commission dissolved amid mutual recriminations and verbal and physical violence. The Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, and the Revolutionary Workers' League, even though reduced to insignificant sects, kept up the pretense that a "revolutionary wing" still existed and derided their former allies as the "chicken wing." If previous unity attempts had ended in tragedy, this one certainly ended in farce.

While the new communist movement was entering a general period of confusion and uncertainty, the non-Leninist left was beginning a process of transformation from a network of primarily professional and academic circles into a mass movement. Groups such as the New American Movement and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee were increasingly active. In the summer of 1976 James Weinstein, formerly an editor of *Studies on the Left* and *Socialist Revolution* presented a proposal for a mass socialist weekly newspaper. In November 1976, *In These Times* was launched.

The spring of 1976 found the new communist movement in a general state of crisis, decline and demoralization. Incapable of resolving the crisis into which it had fallen, it might have continued to simply disintegrate had it not been for an unexpected event: the revolutionary war of independence in Angola. The reality of events

in Angola could not be ignored; the response of the new communist movement produced a decisive realignment of forces and the potential for a decisive break with the very foundation upon which the movement had been constructed.

After driving out Portuguese colonialism, the Angolan revolutionary government was faced with hostile forces masquerading as liberation fronts and supported by South Africa, the United States and China, who, fearing Soviet influence in Africa, supported the insurgents. The bulk of the new communist movement faithfully echoed the Chinese position and united with it and U.S. imperialism against the Angolan revolution.

While previous Chinese foreign policy moves had created disquiet among certain communist circles, this latest development could not be passed over in silence. The *Guardian*, which prided itself on its world coverage of anti-imperialist struggles, openly criticized the Chinese position on Angola, and, more importantly, inaugurated a full-scale discussion on the general line of the Communist Party of China, particularly its assessment of the Soviet Union as the “main enemy of the peoples of the world.” By so doing, it objectively called into question one of the fundamental components of the ideology of the new communist movement and posed the necessity of a sharp break with the flunkyism which typified so many of the new communist groups.[19]

In taking up this struggle the *Guardian* was not alone. It was supported by a number of collectives around the country. These included the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC), El Comite/MNIP, the Tucson Marxist-Leninist Collective, and the Ann Arbor Collective, among others. All these groups recognized the need for some kind of a break with the tradition of the new communist movement. No one was yet sure how decisive the break would be or on what basis the new movement would be organized.

In an attempt to understand the process which led to this break, the Ann Arbor Collective noted the maturation of three factors at work in the new communist movement: 1) an increasing awareness that communists could not look to any existing international center for answers to their theoretical and political questions, but had to rely on themselves; 2) a growing awareness of the political bankruptcy of the majority of new communist parties and sects; and 3) a developing consciousness that the recent flowering of Marxist theoretical work in Europe and elsewhere was contributing to a genuine revival of communist theory and revolutionary political practice. [20]

The Ann Arbor Collective, while noting these factors, also warned that they were maturing unevenly, that is, different groups were perceiving and responding to the points differently. Some saw the bankruptcy of the dogmatist sects, but still clung to China. Some were ready to break with China, but continued to hope that the New Communist Movement could remain united. Most wanted to break with China and the dogmatists, but remained oblivious to the necessity and possibilities of a theoretical breakthrough.

Thus, while the existence of the three above-mentioned factors contained the possibility of a decisive break with the past of the NCM, the unevenness in the maturation of the three factors limited the kind of break which in fact occurred. We will examine these limitations in looking at the next period in the history of the new communist movement.

Fourth Period: New Splits, Uncertain Futures, 1977-79

The last two years have been ones of international crisis for the capitalist system. The recovery which followed the 1974-75 recession was limited and partial, and a new international recession was clearly on the horizon in 1979. The rising rate of inflation and unemployment continued unabated and the manifest inability of

bourgeois economists to resolve the crisis presented unprecedented opportunities for community activity and the spread of Marxist ideas. If nothing else, the growth of the non-Leninist left in these years eloquently attests to these possibilities.

Unfortunately, the communist movement has been unable to meet the challenge as it has remained locked in the myths and traditions of its birth. For the new communist movement these have been years of further stagnation and isolation. For those forces calling themselves anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionist, it was a period in which the opportunity and necessity of making a decisive and irreversible break with the new communist movement was repeatedly passed up or ignored. Instead, these forces remained linked to the past by a thousand visible and invisible theoretical, ideological, and political threads.

For the new communist movement these were years of further splits and decline. The loss of prestige of China, particularly after Mao's death and the defeat of the "Gang of Four", the new policies and the break with Albania, all damaged the credibility of continuing reliance on China as an international center. While the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) enjoyed Peking's blessing, the Revolutionary Communist Party underwent a major split over the significance of China's internal and external policies. The majority upheld Mao's legacy and the line of the "Gang of Four" but one fourth of the organization refused to criticize the new Chinese leadership and rallied to form a new group, the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters. Since the split, Bob Avakian has led the RCP into an increasingly violent and provocative series of campaigns, which are strikingly similar to the kind of pseudo-military antics which Progressive Labor made famous. [21]

The China-Albania break also led a number of smaller groups to declare their allegiance to Albania as the new international center of world communism. The most important of these are the Communist Party, USA (Marxist-Leninist), formerly the Marxist-Leninist

Organizing Committee, and the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist-Leninists. If the pro-China group grew less numerous in this period, they also grew more united. While the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) is still the most prominent force in this tendency, it has been challenged for its pre-eminent position by the League for Revolutionary Struggle, which was formed in 1978 out of the merger of I Wor Kuen and the August 29th Movement.[22]

The growing crises of the pro-China and pro-Albanian parties and sects gave added impetus to the efforts of anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionist forces to demarcate themselves in theory and in practice. But while differences between the two movements on the character of the international situation and the meaning of proletarian internationalism were becoming more pronounced, the anti-dogmatists tended to limit their break with the new communist movement to these issues and to the issue of sectarianism.

Within the new movement the same two party building strategies which characterized the new communist movement reappeared. On the one side was the fusion line, essentially a reworked version of the “build the party in the mass struggles” approach. On the other side was a new kind of primacy of theory and cadre development line.

Throughout this period the struggle over the primacy of fusion versus the primacy of theoretical development continued to intensify. Those on the fusion side were led by the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee and included a number of smaller groups around the country. Those on the “theory” side included the *Guardian*, the Tucson Marxist-Leninist Collective, the Ann Arbor Collective and later on the Guardian Clubs and the Red Boston Study Group, although the *Guardian* and the Clubs had their own particular interpretation of what “primacy of theory” meant.

Compounding these differences were the problems associated with the small size of the “anti-dogmatist” forces. Although many of its

supporters entertained hopes that the new movement would grow by drawing in significant numbers of unaffiliated Marxist-Leninists who had been disaffected with the new communist movement, these hopes were not realized for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the *Guardian*, which was the major ideological force in the “anti-dogmatist” camp nationally, failed to follow up on its critique of Chinese foreign policy.

Instead of broadening the campaign to a general offensive against the theory and practice of the new communist movement as a whole, and opening up the paper to new forces, it took a cautious attitude and even retreated somewhat by failing to provide a real analysis of either the lessons of on-going Chinese developments or their reverberations on the divided new communist movement.

Only the *Guardian* with its national circulation and prestige was capable of carrying the fight forward in the 1977-78 period. Its failure meant that an important opportunity was lost and the impetus which the new “anti-dogmatist” movement had gained in 1976 was largely lost the year after. Instead of a steady widening of the gap between the two movements, we have seen strong elements of inertia and paralysis among some “anti-dogmatist” forces. There still remains a virtual identity of views on many problems.

Like the new communist movement before it, the “anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionist communist movement” has been plagued by divisions and splits. Already, several different positions have emerged. The most significant organizational development has been the creation of the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center (OC-IC), headed by the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee, but including a score of other smaller groups around the country. The majority of the OC-IC groups hold to the “fusion” line on party building.[23]

The fusion line has two components. On the one hand, it is basically a rehash of the old “build the party in the mass struggles” line which

results in an economist, pragmatist absorption in narrow trade union struggles. On the other hand, it is a plan for building a national party building center, not on the basis of theoretical-political struggle, but primarily out of organizational consolidation and sectarian maneuvering. [24]

At present the OC is attempting to consolidate itself in a fashion not unlike the NLC and NCC before it. The refusal of the NNMLC to join the OC has triggered sectarian polemics between the two organizations, with the OC-IC Steering Committee focusing almost exclusively on organizational as opposed to political differences. The recent Labor Day national conference of the OC-IC strikingly demonstrated the arrogant and bureaucratic style of work which the Steering Committee has adopted in dealing with opposing viewpoints.

Finally, the political line of the OC-IC has so far been developed in the most hierarchical fashion with little emphasis on advancing cadre development in the OC-IC organizations.

The OC-IC is united around 18 vague points of unity including, like the *Guardian*, the position that the U.S. is the main enemy of the peoples of the world (point 18). This latter point came up for serious debate when a group desired to join the OC-IC yet maintain its allegiance to the Three World Theory and China as the international center of world communism. In April of this year, a series of conferences was held on whether point 18 should be a line of demarcation in the OC-IC. While the conferences unanimously upheld point 18 as a line of demarcation, the debate was characterized by extremely economist and empiricist analyses and was more of an organizational victory for the OC-IC rather than providing it with a deeper theoretical and political unity.

While the *Guardian* failed to deepen its offensive against dogmatism, it did recognize the need to give itself an organizational base from which to influence the course of the anti-dogmatist

movement. The ideological basis for this development was laid through Irwin Silber's debate with PWOC over which was primary for party building: the unity of MLs or the fusion of communism with the working class. In June 1977 the *Guardian* released its party building supplement containing 29 points of unity. While the 29 points covered more issues than plans put forth by the dogmatists, the points remained vague and were in fact repetitious of the general dogmas that had been circulating in the NCM for years.

In September 1977, the *Guardian* launched the Guardian Clubs in 5 cities. United on the basis of 10 points derived from the original 29, the first and only year of the Clubs was characterized by a lack of unity on the practice and strategy for the Club network. Leadership from the *Guardian* was almost totally absent and the Clubs functioned more as *Guardian* support groups than as communist organizations engaged in party building.

Finally, a series of internal struggles over the strategy for Club development erupted and the Clubs split with the *Guardian* to form the National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs (NNMLC) in March 1979. Irwin Silber, who resigned as executive editor of the *Guardian*, heads the new organization. The NNMLC today holds to the line that the key task in party building is the rectification of the general line of the communist movement and the re-establishment of the party. [25]

Rectification calls for a return to the theory and practice of the Communist Party, USA before 1956, and the "rectification" of developments since then on that basis. Rather than call for the construction of a new communist party, the NNMLC calls for the reconstitution of the Communist Party, USA as it once was (before 1956).

As can be seen from their lines, the leading forces of the new "anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionist communist movement" have broken with one tradition of the new communist movement, that of China and the

Cultural Revolution, only to cling more tenaciously to the other two, that of exclusive preoccupation with mass practical activity and that of the communist tradition before 1956. Only the forces grouped around the *Theoretical Review* have called for a break with all three traditions which have paralyzed the communist movement of the last ten years and the construction of new foundations for American communism. We have called these new foundation's the "primacy of theory line" by which we have meant that only on the basis of living Marxist theory, unfettered by the negative traditions of the past, and a political practice organically connected to and derived from this theory, can lay the basis for a genuine revival of communism in the United States.

By Way of Conclusion

Given the considerable length of this article, we are not going to repeat here the conclusions we have incorporated throughout the text. Nevertheless, a few concluding remarks do seem appropriate. For those who came out of the new communist movement and still consider themselves guided, in one way or another, by its legacy, the assessments contained in this article may seem unduly critical. In fact, it may appear that we have thrown the baby out with the bath water, to use an old expression.

We hope, however, that our judgment will not appear to be hasty or unconsidered, as it is a product of more than ten years of struggle and participation in communist activity, the majority of it spent in the new communist movement. We have come to these conclusions based on critical study and participation in that movement, its theory and its practices, its mythology and the sad reality of its history.

We have no interest in worshipping old icons, or in setting up new ones. Our only interest is in the future of revolutionary Marxism in the United States. It is this interest and our commitment to it which has led us to reject the foundations upon which the new communist movement and its progeny were, and continue to be, constructed. It

is this commitment which has led us to attempt to assist in the construction of another kind of communism, one free of mythology and the shackles of the past. It is this commitment which has compelled us to fight for living, critical, revolutionary Marxist theory and a politics and practice consonant with it.

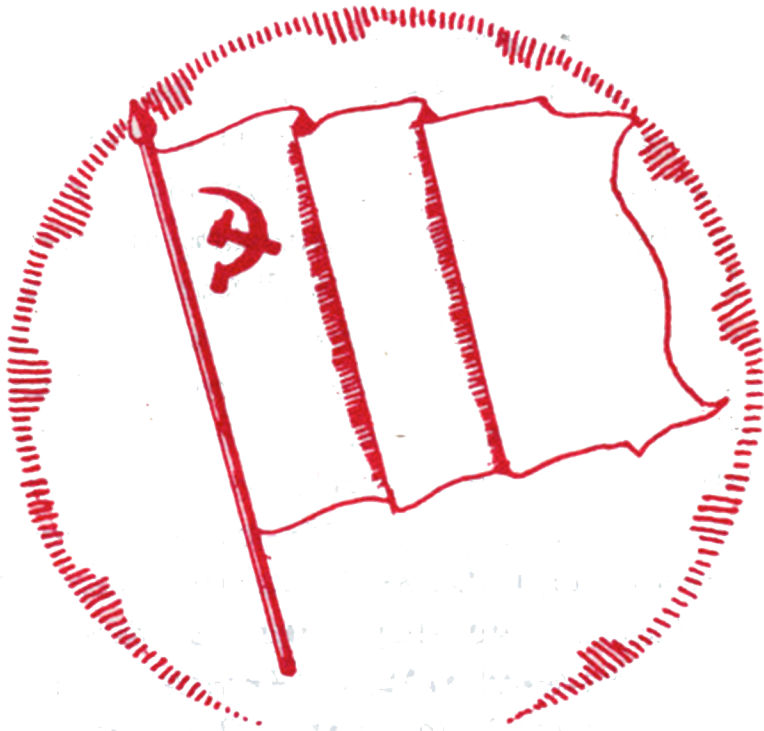
This task is not an easy one: to fight for science, Marxist science, in the face of a tradition which embodies the very opposite. Yet its necessity can never be doubted. As Marx himself, wrote:

“There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.” [26]

Endnotes

- [1] On the history of Progressive Labor, see Jim Dann et. al., “The Five Retreats” (unpublished manuscript), excerpts of which are published elsewhere in this issue.
 - [2] Louis Althusser, “For Marx” (Pantheon, 1969), p. 27.
 - [3] For a new communist critique of the United Front against Imperialism strategy see, “A Critique of the United Front Against Imperialism as a Strategy for Revolution within the U.S.,” by the Commentator Collective.
 - [4] See “A Critique of the Black Nation Thesis” (Racism Research Project, 1975).
 - [5] On SDS see “SDS” by Kirkpatrick Sale (Vintage, 1973). On RYM II see “Debate Within SDS-RYM II vs. Weathermen” (Radical Education Project, 1969).
 - [6] “Unity Statement” (October League, 1973).
 - [7] On the Black Workers Congress and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers see James A. Geschwender, “Class, Race and Worker Insurgency” (Cambridge University Press, 1977), and Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, “Detroit: I Do Mind Dying” (St. Martin’s Press, 1975).
 - [8] On the POC see the articles by Bert Lewis and Noel Ignatin and the document by Milton Palmer in *Theoretical Review* #12.
 - [9] See Nelson Peery’s “The Negro National-Colonial Question” (Vanguard, 1977) and “Regional Autonomy for the Southwest” (Communist League, 1974).
 - [10] Resolutions and Speeches of the First’ Congress, Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (November 1972).
 - [11] Resolutions of the Communist International on the Negro Question, October 1928, October 1930.
 - [12] See story and speeches in *Guardian* beginning on April 4, 1973.
 - [13] *Guardian*, April 25, 1973.
 - [14] Charles Loren, “The Struggle for the Party” (Cardinal, 1973), pp. 11, 23.
 - [15] Fan the Flames. A Revolutionary Position on the Chicano National Question.
 - [16] See “International Report” in the *Western Worker*, June 1974.
 - [17] Martin Nicolaus, “The Restoration of Capitalism in the USSR” (Liberator Press, 1976). Harry Haywood, “Black Bolshevik” (Liberator Press, 1978).
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- [18] See “The Degeneration of PRRWO: From Revolutionary Organization to Neo-Trotskyite Sect” by former PRRWO cadres.
- [19] See the *Guardian* viewpoint, “Aim the Main Blow at U.S. Imperialism,” *Guardian*, September 8, 1976.
- [20] Ann Arbor Collective, “Against Dogmatism and Revisionism: Toward a Genuine Communist Party,” (Nov. 1976), p. 16.
- [21] The RCP’s view of the split is presented in the book “Revolution and Counters-Revolution” (RCP Publications, 1978). The Revolutionary Workers’ Headquarters view is presented in *Red Papers* 8.
- [22] See Statement on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist).
- [23] For a critique of fusion see: Ann Arbor Collective: “On Party Building,” and Tucson Marxist-Leninist Collective, “Party Building Tasks in the Present Period: On Theory and Fusion.”
- [24] See Paul Costello, ”Party Building: Our Aim is True” in *Theoretical Review* #12.
- [25] See “Developing the Subjective Factor” and “Rectification vs. Fusion” both published by the National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs. For a critique of the NNMLC see “A Joint Statement on the Party Building Line of the National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs,” in *Theoretical Review* #11.
- [26] Karl Marx, “Capital” (International, 1967), Vol. 1, p. 21.
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