The method and principles of communist organisation

Wed, 20/05/2009 - 17:31

This document aims to summarise Leninist-Trotskyist thinking on certain critical questions of communist organisation.

Introduction

Part one of the theses sets out Lenin’s conception of the relation between the communist party and the working class, correcting certain misunderstandings of Lenin’s famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view) pamphlet What is to be Done? and demonstrating the practical utility of Lenin’s critique of economism (?chvostism?) today. But the paper goes beyond this, introducing a novel examination of the consonance between Lenin’s conception of class consciousness and Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism. The theses identify the contradictions of class-consciousness as having a material basis in the essence of capital itself.

Part two returns to the question of organisation of the communist party, examining widely overlooked features of the Comintern’s 1921 theses on organisation. These include the relation between decentralisation (?autonomy?) of party units and centralisation of leading functions, the role of the division of labour in a working class party, duties of units and individual members, the interrelation between large central committees and party executive bodies.

Part three examines the question of the relation between agitation (?a few ideas to many people?) and propaganda (?many ideas to a few people?) in Marxism, criticising the widespread view that propaganda is merely about ideas whilst agitation is a call to action. A different distinction is used to show how the party’s propaganda, agitation and organisational work must all serve to develop and guide revolutionary political action.

From an examination of some of the principles governing the work of a revolutionary party, the theses go on in part five to summarise the main challenges faced by small pre-party organisations of communists, and can be read in conjunction with the League for a Revolutionary Communist International’s 1992 ?Theses on the Early Stages of Party Building?, which is available here [1].

Further development of some of the issues presented here is envisaged, especially with regard to democratic centralism, the campaigning activity of the party, the tactic of the workers’ united front, the anti-imperialist united front, and the relation between the communist organisation and the trade unions.

Part I ? Party and Class

1. Marxism is ?the doctrine of the class struggle? of the proletariat (Lenin). Analysing the historic development of human social relations from the standpoint of the materialist dialectic, Marxism emphasises the centrality of class struggle as the principal determinant of social change.

2. Capitalism is a mode of production in which the products and services created through labour, and the forces of production themselves ? including human labour power ? take the form of commodities. It is a system of generalised commodity production. In the capitalist mode of production two fundamental social classes confront one another: the bourgeoisie (the class of capitalists) and the proletariat or working class, which has no basic means of subsistence other than the sale of its labour power to the capitalist.

3. The proletarian’s commodity ? labour power ? is unique in one vital respect. It creates more value (the socially necessary labour-time congealed in the commodity) than is needed to reproduce it. The worker receives in wages not the value of the commodity produced but the value of the commodities she must consume to reproduce her ability to
work. The excess ? surplus value ? is the source of the capitalist?s profit.

4. This systematic exploitation is the source of the constant self-expansion of capital. Competition between capitals drives the capitalist to seek to increase the proportion of unpaid over paid labour in both absolute and relative terms. This drives the capitalist to extend working hours and/or cut pay (absolute surplus value), and/or to increase the intensification of work (relative surplus value). Further, in countries where public provision of benefits to the working class has been wrested from the bourgeoisie, the capitalists everywhere press for a) the reduction of deductions from profit drawn by the state in the form of taxes, thus reducing social provision for the maintenance of the working class and b) for the opening of public enterprises to penetration by capital.

5. By exerting a constant pressure on the proletariat, capital compels it to unite in resistance. This process, often partial, sectoral and fragmented, at times limited to economic conflict between workers and their employers over pay and conditions, at other moments rising to the level of a generalised struggle, is the basic objective foundation of the class struggle of the proletariat.

6. As a class constituted by the growth of modern industry and the capitalist labour process, the proletariat is already objectively a class in itself. But it is not yet a class for itself. When the workers of a single factory or of a single branch of industry engage in struggle against their employers, this is only a ?weak embryo of class struggle? (Lenin). The struggle of the workers becomes a class struggle in the strict sense only when the leading representatives of the working class of a country are conscious of themselves as a class and launch a struggle that is directed, not just against individual employers, but against the entire class of capitalists and its government. Only when individual workers realise that they are members of the working class as a whole, only when they recognise that their day-to-day struggle is a struggle against the entire bourgeoisie and government, does this struggle truly become a class struggle.

7. It is the task of Marxists, by conducting propaganda and agitation among the working class and by organising the working class, to turn the spontaneous struggle of the workers into the struggle of a whole class. This means turning it into the struggle of a definite political party for definite political goals ? the forcible overthrow of the capitalist state, the establishment of working class power, the suppression of the bourgeoisie, the confiscation of the property of the great capitalist corporations and the institution of a democratic plan of production. Only this outcome ? the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat ? opens the road to the systematic dissolution of class divisions, the abolition of all forms of exploitation and the creation of a new, higher, associated mode of production (socialism), and ultimately a society without the need for any form of mandatory division of labour or state coercion (communism).

8. The proletarian (communist) party should be ?the vanguard, the front line troops of the proletariat, leading in all phases of its revolutionary class struggle and the subsequent transitional period toward the realisation of socialism, the first stage of communist society.? Without such a party victory is impossible.

9. The formation of a proletarian party is the primary goal of Marxists, in whatever country they may be, under whatever political and economic situation prevails at a given time. This task comprises the fusion of communism and the working class movement. Once such a party exists, the duty of revolutionaries is to work under the party?s direction for the expansion of its influence, for the conquest of the masses, for the organisation of the revolution and socialism.

10. The expansion of capitalist social relations across the world, the vast growth of world trade, the development of an international division of labour, the interpenetration of national economies in a global market, the huge growth in numbers of the working class worldwide, the failure and degeneration of all efforts to construct post-capitalist social relations within national confines ? all these factors demonstrate that the proletariat is an international class confronting an international system and class enemy. The proletarian party must therefore be an International ? a world party of social revolution. The recreation of such a world party is ?the primary objective of revolutionaries throughout the world.

11. Leon Trotsky correctly argued that it is utterly wrong and at root a concession to national prejudice to view ?a national organisation as the foundation and the International as the roof. The proletarian party must be, by contrast,
founded on an international basis. Marx and Engels founded the communist movement in 1847 with the creation of an international organisation. The same thing was repeated in the creation of the First International, in the case of the Zimmerwald Left which opened the road to the foundation of the Third International, and in the founding of the Fourth International in 1938. In the period of globalisation at the beginning of the 21st century, this essentially practical internationalism is as necessary as ever.

12. A correct conception of the relation between the communist party and the working class is an indispensable theoretical tool for the guidance of the action of the party. Without this, errors harmful to the development of the proletarian class struggle are inevitable. Nor can a party consistently represent the revolutionary interests of the proletariat without a correct understanding of this relation.

13. Opportunist and/or sectarian errors invariably flow from misconceptions in this sphere. Thus Leon Trotsky observed that centrists groupings that vacillate between proletarian revolution and the bourgeois programme of reforming capitalism invariably fail to conceive of the relation between the party and the class correctly. He wrote: "if centrists were able to understand the interrelationships between the masses and the vanguard, between the vanguard and the leadership, between the historical process and the initiative of the minority, then they would not be centrists."4

14. That the proletariat is formed by capital as a class in itself is an objective fact. The wage labour/capital relation determines social development irrespective of the extent to which the proletariat is conscious of its existence.

15. Nevertheless, to constitute a class for itself, the proletariat requires not merely the action of capital, but its own conscious activity. Thus the subjective factor the effect not merely of general historic and social trends but of the thought and action of associated individual participants in the struggle of the revolutionary class is critical in determining the conduct and outcome of the proletarian struggle.

16. The success or failure of these subjective efforts are determined in the final analysis not by the moral, physical or intellectual superiority of the historical actors, but by the extent to which their theory and practice grasp and unfold the real historical and social contradictions lodged within the objective situation, the real opportunities the potential that capitalism repeatedly offers the working class for its own emancipation.

17. Recognition of the existence of objective reality independently of our ability to perceive it is known as materialism. Yet all attempts to express materialism as a denial of the ability of conscious human activity to effect profound changes in objective reality are necessarily imperfect, because they thereby deny the contradictory nature of reality itself. They are inherently undialectical and therefore since all matter is in a permanent state of motion ultimately non-materialist.

18. That is why, as early as 1845, Marx in his Theses on Feuerbach insisted that "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating?The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice."5

19. On the other hand, while it is a foundation of the materialist outlook that material reality exists independently of our ability to perceive it, all attempts to attribute conscious, human, characteristics to objective processes, or to deny the impact of subjective human activity in changing the outcome of objective processes, must stultify and crush the independent action of a revolutionary class.

20. Passive expectation of an automatic, spontaneous, transformation of working class consciousness from sullen acceptance of capital to revolutionary communist action can only mislead the proletariat. This processism is invariably deployed as a means to dissuade the working class vanguard from giving a lead to the class as a whole. In attributing to a disembodied, impersonal, historical process those tasks that in reality fall to human beings themselves, it paralyses
the will of the historical actors and seeks to drag the proletarian vanguard to its knees before the existing consciousness of the non-class conscious, i.e. bourgeois-influenced, mass of the working class.

21. The task of the revolutionary party is therefore dispassionately and accurately to analyse the opportunities and dangers presented by objective reality, and then to campaign boldly among the workers for those steps that can and must be taken by the proletariat to realise the potential lodged in the contradictory situation. This is neither a mere act of will, free from objective determination, nor an automatic process independent of human agency: ?The transition from a bourgeois society to a socialist society presupposes the activity of living men who are the makers of their own history. They do not make history by accident, or according to their caprice, but under the influence of objectively determined causes. However, their own actions-their initiative, audacity, devotion, and likewise their stupidity and cowardice-are necessary links in the chain of historical development. The crises of capitalism are not numbered, nor is it indicated in advance which one of these will be the ?last?. But our entire epoch and, above all, the present crisis imperiously command the proletariat: ?Seize power!? If, however, the party of the working class, in spite of favourable conditions, reveals itself incapable of leading the proletariat to the seizure of power, the life of society will continue necessarily upon capitalist foundations-until a new crisis, a new war, perhaps until the complete disintegration of European civilisation.?6

22. A proletarian party must therefore be not merely the organiser but the strategist of the social revolution.

23. Time and again in history, a mechanical faith in the objective process and a downgrading of the importance of class-conscious revolutionary activity in history has given rise to severe opportunism in the working class movement.

a. In the Revisionist controversy of the 1890s ? the first great ?Crisis of Marxism?! ? Eduard Bernstein and his supporters in the developing opportunist Right Wing of the German social democracy, securing a base among the party?s bourgeois intellectuals and the trade union officials, held out the prospect of capitalism spontaneously abolishing economic crises, ameliorating the condition of the proletariat, and being capable of reform into socialism. The purpose of social democracy therefore became not to divert the spontaneous economic movement of the proletariat into a class movement, but to participate in the daily movement without pressing for revolutionary goals: ?the movement is everything, the goal is nothing.? (Bernstein).

b. In the 1890s, the ?Economist? or ?Tailist? (?Chvostist?) trend in the Russian social democratic movement appealed to the spontaneous development of working class consciousness as justification for abandoning agitation within the working class for directly political goals, focusing their efforts almost exclusively on the economic struggle, the struggle between workers and their employers over pay and conditions.

c. After the split of the Russian Social Democrats in 1903, the Menshevik (Minority) wing took up this erroneous position, arguing that the workers? party could not and should not organise the revolution, leading them subsequently to denounce the armed uprising in 1905.

d. In 1917-18 the official leaders of the Second International denounced Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution of 1917 for voluntaristically forcing the pace of historical development by seizing power supposedly before the objective conditions for working class rule and socialism had sufficiently matured.

e. Following the Stalinist degeneration of the Third International, centrist currents like the German SAP opposed the fight to form a new (fourth) International on the grounds that the consciousness of the masses was not yet ready to accept such a step, despite the fact that it was objectively necessary.

f. The Stalinist Comintern and its national parties resisted the revolutionary agitation of the Fourth Internationalists in France in the deep social crisis of 1936; the French Communist Party argued against a general strike and working class self-defence against fascism on the grounds that the crisis had not yet developed into a revolutionary situation of its accord.

g. In 1951 the Fourth International itself degenerated into centism, when its International Secretariat (and the leaders of the future International Committee split) hailed the Yugoslav regime of Tito as representing the spontaneous regeneration of Stalinism. In place of struggle for the programme of revolutionary communism, the International now conceived its role as being to assist the leaders of the left wing of Social Democracy and Stalinism to express the historical process, now conceived as an objectivist schema of spontaneous development. The sections of the International were thus converted into centrist appendages of social democratic and Stalinist reformism.

h. Even currents which swear by their organisational independence from the apparatuses of treason will succumb to
opportunism if they do not correctly grasp the relation between objective development and their subjective tasks. Thus the British Socialist Workers Party of Tony Cliff failed to agitate for a general strike during the British Miners' Strike of 1985, and actively conducted agitation among the miners and their supporters against this slogan, on the grounds that the spontaneous development of the class struggle had not yet reached a stage at which this demand could be realised. Thus they helped paralyse the will of the vanguard layers of the working class to mobilise the action necessary to defeat the class enemy.

i. Today in the vast international convergences of working class movements and parties that occur in the World Social Forum and the continental forums in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, the centrist Fourth International? despite recognising that it is itself not a world party of social revolution? rejects the open fight for the formation of a new International, relying once more on the objective process to carry out the tasks of the revolutionaries.

24. The equal and opposite error is subjectivism? failure to comprehend that the tasks of the revolutionaries are not independent of objective developments. This in essence non-materialist, idealist, conception forms the theoretical basis of all forms of adventurism, ultra-leftism, sectarianism and ultimatism, all refusal to engage in tactical compromises in order to bring the programme of revolutionary communism into the heart of the working class movement. Because of the essentially eclectic and inconsistent nature of centrism, it is often the case that a given centrist formation can evince objectivist and subjectivist errors at one and the same time. The shared basis of both errors is a misapprehension of the relation between party and class.

a. Thus one hundred years ago the Social Democratic Federation in Britain refused on grounds of ?principle? to participate in the formation of the Labour Party, despite the fact that a fateful battle was taking place over the class basis of the party and its programme.

b. Rejection of the need for revolutionary communists to participate in the reformist Trade Unions represents a subjectivist refusal to recognise the need to respond to objective reality and struggle to wrest control of the workers? organisations from the reformists, no less harmful than the opportunist objectivist approach of adapting to the programme of the trade union bureaucracy.

c. The policies of renouncing electoral struggle in bourgeois democracies, of refusing participation in bourgeois parliaments, of rejecting the tactic of the united front of the revolutionary and reformist workers, of refusing to take advantage of opportunities for legal work, of individual terrorism, of precipitate armed actions aimed at provoking the masses into revolution before they have been won to it, of presenting the revolutionary programme to the masses as an ultimatum which if not accepted will result in the withdrawal of the revolutionaries support for the workers? common struggle: all these errors arise from an idealist indifference to the real objective developments that shape the class struggle. A revolutionary trend that cannot overcome this error will never connect with the masses, never translate the revolutionary programme into effective agitation, and will inevitably degenerate into an isolated sect, commenting on the struggle from the sidelines but divorced from genuinely revolutionary action.

25. In his famous pamphlet What is to be Done?, Lenin argued that class consciousness does not arise spontaneously in the proletariat as a result of its trade union, economic struggle, the struggle of the workers with their employers over pay and conditions, what Engels called simply ?resistance to the capitalists?. This Lenin called Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei? ?mere trade unionism?: a struggle only over the terms of the workers? exploitation. The political expression of this economic struggle he called trade union politics, a reformist striving to secure better conditions within the prevalent bourgeois mode of production: ?the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology, to its development along the lines of the Credo programme [i.e. the programme of the tailist trend in Russian Social Democracy ? editor]; for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism, is Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei, and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of social democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy.??

26. This concept was no innovation on Lenin?s part, no ?vanguardist? revision of some ?more spontaneist? Marx. In fact it derives directly from Marx?s analysis of the roots of bourgeois ideology?s sway over the working class.
27. In Capital Marx showed how the formal equality of the wage labour/capital relation—the apparent legal parity of the parties to the employment contract—conceals the exploitative essence of capital. This is nothing more than the natural extension of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism from exchanges of simple commodities such as manufactured goods to the proletarian’s exchange with the capitalist—the sale of her commodity, labour-power, in return for wages. The apparent equal terms of the sale are only a fetishised form of appearance which conceals a real relation of exploitation. Yet the fetishised form of appearance nevertheless has a real objective foundation: the capitalist mode of production based on generalised commodity production and the exchange of commodities. In the case of the wage labour/capital relation, this exchange of commodities is the wage contract, the agreement of the proletarian to work for a defined period for a capitalist.

28. Marx explained how his own discovery of the secret of capitalist exploitation did not in and of itself abolish the objective basis of bourgeois ideology: “The belated scientific discovery that the products of labour, in so far as they are values, are merely the material expressions of the human labour expended to produce them, marks an epoch in the history of mankind’s development, but by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labour. Something which is only valid for this particular form of production, the production of commodities, namely the fact that the specific social character of private labours carried on independently of each other consists in their equality as human labour, and, in the product, assumes the form of the existence of value, appears to those caught up in the relations of commodity production (and this is true both before and after the above-mentioned discovery) to be just as ultimately valid as the fact that the scientific dissection of the air into its component parts left the atmosphere itself unaltered in its physical configuration.”

29. Thus Marx’s scientific discovery of surplus value and the secret of capitalist exploitation in no way abolished the form of appearance of the equality of the legal parties to the wage labour/capital relation. Reformism and trade unionist politics arise naturally from this fetishised form of appearance: “What initially concerns producers in practice when they make an exchange is how much of some other product they get for their own; in what proportions can the products be exchanged? The determination of the magnitude of value by labour-time is therefore a secret hidden under the apparent movements in the relative values of commodities. Its discovery destroys the semblance of the merely accidental determination of the magnitude of the value of the products of labour [including the value of labour-power—editor] but by no means abolishes that determination’s material form.”

30. In this way Marx laid bare the deepest and most fundamental underpinning of bourgeois ideology in the working class and its movement. And there are other reasons too: the capitalists’ monopolisation of the means of mass communication; the growth in the imperialist countries of an aristocracy of labour which the bourgeoisie attempt to bribe from super-profits derived by the exploitation of semi-colonial countries; “the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, that it is more fully developed, and that it has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination” even the ?unevenness of experience? often referred to by the followers of Tony Cliff plays its part (though their spontaneism and purblind rejection of the theory of the labour aristocracy leave them with nothing but this, thereby transforming a valid description of life into an invalid general theory of ideology).

31. For all these reasons, in Lenin’s words: “Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes.”

32. Contrary to the slanders of the economists and the anarchists, this emphatically does not mean that the proletariat can only develop a class conscious movement under the dictatorship of bourgeois intellectuals. This falsehood derives from a misreading of Lenin and Kautsky’s comments on the historical origin of scientific socialist analysis. Kautsky observed that “socialist consciousness appears to be a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships just as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and, like the latter, emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty
and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of social democracy is to imbue the proletariat (literally: saturate the proletariat) with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle.\textsuperscript{12}

33. Lenin endorsed this, but specifically pointed out: \textit{This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and develop that knowledge. But in order that working men may succeed in this more often, every effort must be made to raise the level of the consciousness of the workers in general; it is necessary that the workers do not confine themselves to the artificially restricted limits of \textit{literature for workers}? but that they learn to an increasing degree to master general literature.\textsuperscript{13} In this context the role of the party is to efface all distinctions between workers and intellectuals within its ranks, by demanding of the intellectuals that they adopt the standpoint of the workers, and by encouraging worker-militants to adopt a scientific world view and programme based on the interrelation of all the classes in all countries, attending to the interests of the workers not only of today, but of the future.

34. Once Lenin?s theory is accurately stated and understood, we can see how false is the claim of Tony Cliff of the British SWP \textsuperscript{?} repeated by Committee for a Workers International founders Ted Grant and his successor Alan Woods in the International Marxist Tendency \textsuperscript{?} that if we accept Lenin?s formulation then \textit{precious little is left of Marx?s statement that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself.}\textsuperscript{14} On the contrary, Lenin?s concept does not annihilate the truth of Marx?s statement, but activates it by reminding us that our self-emancipation must be a conscious act: \textit{all worship of the spontaneity of the working class movement, all belittling of the role of \textit{the conscious element}, of the role of social democracy, means, quite independently of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the workers.}\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Part II ? Organisation of the Communist Party}

35. The first principle of communist organisation is that the party?s form must be adapted to its historic task, to \textit{the conditions and purpose of its activity.}\textsuperscript{15}

36. Differences in the conditions of struggle between one country and another, differing conditions of legality and illegality, uneven levels of class activity, the specific interrelation of the working class and the peasant movement, democratic and national questions, and above all the ceaselessly changing conditions of capitalist society and proletarian resistance oblige the working class vanguard constantly to adopt appropriate forms of organisation. No formula for organisation, no ideal form or structure, can be regarded as absolutely correct and unchanging for all time.

37. Nevertheless, the communists? point of departure is not just the unevenness and differentiation of the conditions of struggle, but also their unity, the fundamental identity of the conditions of proletarian struggle in all countries and at all stages of development. A common basis can therefore be elaborated for the organisation of communists everywhere.

38. No one has ever demonstrated how a revolutionary class can come to power other than through the organisation of a party. As with every human endeavour, the collective struggle of the proletariat requires leadership. The communist party?s organisation must thus be based on its fundamental task of leading the proletarian revolution.
39. The preconditions of success are that the party is based upon and advances a revolutionary programme, that it conceives of its task as a vanguard correctly, that it itself has a stable and effective organisation of leaders, that it trains and develops a range of party groups operating under the direction of these leading bodies in distinct spheres of struggle, that it can knit these groups together in common action, that it is adaptable and flexible in the face of the ever changing conditions of struggle, and that it seeks out and establishes the closest possible ties with the working masses. The form of organisation suited to the successful performance of these tasks is democratic centralism.

40. Ninety years of calumny has been heaped on the concept of democratic centralism from all sides ? from the bourgeoisie, the reformists, anarchists and spontaneists, opportunists and sectarians of every stripe. That they have had success in inuring significant sections of the proletarian vanguard against democratic centralism is due to two main factors:

a. The class-determined disposition of the petit-bourgeoisie to personal ?independence? at the expense of collective discipline, itself a product of the petit-bourgeoisie?s modus vivandi and its existential fear of disintegration by the economic and political action of the principal social classes. This intermediate stratum has enormous influence on the top layers of the working class, living as they do alongside them and exercising disproportionate influence over communications, ideology and culture.

b. The criminal abuse of the term democratic centralism by the Stalinist bureaucracy, both in the former USSR and in contemporary capitalist China, to excuse a totalitarian regime of bureaucratic of bureaucratic centralism in which all democratic rights, all debate and discussion, all attempts to subordinate the actions of the leadership to the interests and wishes of the workers is choked off through police terror.

41. By contrast with this perversion, democratic centralism involves both the fullest internal democracy and debating of disputed questions and disciplined common action in the implementation of party decisions. These two elements are not distinct unrelated factors placed artificially side by side, but must be a real fusion of centralism and workers? democracy. The only way that this can be achieved is by the continual collective activity of the whole party.

42. Bourgeois political parties typically adopt a form of organisation based on a division between a top layer of functionaries and a passive membership base. This model has been gradually adopted by the organisations of the non-revolutionary workers? movement, by social democrats, Stalinists and increasingly many of the centrist organisations. Formal democracy (where tolerated at all) is not sufficient to overcome the negative effects of this division, and in such parties centralist discipline is invariably exerted only by the functionaries over the members, never the other way round.

43. Furthermore, only on the basis of unceasing common activity, of the struggle of the whole party, can centralisation be understood and accepted by all militants as an indispensable means of strengthening the effect of their work and thereby raising the impact of the party?s activity as a whole. Formal democracy alone will therefore never be sufficient to establish the real bonds of solidarity and common endeavour required to make of centralism not an artificial imposition but a valued tool of every party militant.

44. Observing the bureaucratisation of the Second International, and how the domination of its leading party the German SPD by a caste of functionaries served to accelerate its decline into class collaboration and social chauvinism, the revolutionary Communist International concluded that a necessary precondition and basis for effective democratic centralism must be the obligation of communists to carry out party work. This principle was both of general application and of particular conjunctural importance to the Comintern?s task of integrating and revolutionising parties that had broken away from the Second International, had proclaimed adherence to the Comintern, but which had not yet completed their actual transformation into revolutionary vanguard parties.

45. Thus the Comintern stated unambiguously: ?in its effort to have only really active members, a communist party must demand of every member in its ranks that he devote his time and energy, insofar as they are at his own disposal under the given conditions, to his party and that he always give it his best service.?16 Conditions of party membership were commitment to communism (acceptance of the party programme), formal admission (perhaps first as a candidate member), regular payment of subscriptions to the party, taking the party press and, ?most important?, participation of every member in daily party work.
46. In order for this requirement to be meaningful in practice, the task of the leadership of the party is to seek to make
the maximum possible use of all resources at its disposal, ?everything and everyone in the proletarian class struggle?,
by distributing and allocating work to every single party member without exception. Only in this way can the efforts of
the membership be directed towards drawing ever more workers and youth into the revolutionary movement while
maintaining leadership ?not by virtue of power but by virtue of authority, i.e. by virtue of energy, greater experience,
greater versatility, greater ability.?17

47. Every party member should therefore be assigned to be part of a small working group for the conduct of work
distributed among such groups by the party. Functions might include distribution and sales of literature, putting up
posters, communicating party decisions to members and supporters of the party, organising and preparing discussion
and study groups, individual discussion with contacts of the party and door-to-door propaganda. More specialised
groups should exist for intelligence gathering, defence of demonstrations, fundraising, publication of the party press,
theoretical work, maintenance of electronic communications, and, we can add in the twenty-first century, development
and maintenance of the party website.

48. Small groups of this type should also be constituted for daily communist activity in workplaces, colleges and
schools, trade unions, social movements, peasant organisations and the military. Where a small group succeeds in
drawing more activists into the communist movement, it can be expanded into a fraction whose work is coordinated
and led by the smaller group.

49. Where it is expedient for the communists to establish a broader oppositional formation, for example in a workplace
or to challenge class collaborationist bureaucrats in a trade union, the communists should always maintain their own
small working group to strive for leadership. While striking common agreements for action and struggle, the
communists own propaganda must remain communist ? pedagogically adapted so as to be comprehensible to its
recipients, but absolutely true to the party?s programme and revolutionary goals.

50. In addition to working in small groups of this type, all members of the communist party should be obliged to attend
regular general membership meetings of all party members in a particular locality. These too should be carefully
prepared by a small working group charged with this task.

51. Where an existing party or section of a party breaks with reformism or centrism and wishes to join the revolutionary
party, the task is not to discard the existing organisation and require immediate adoption of a pristine model structure,
which can only disorganise party work. Instead the communist leadership must seek to develop the existing structure,
one step at a time, into an effective instrument of revolutionary struggle.

52. The task of the party leadership is not merely to furnish the party with correct theoretical, perspectival and
programmatic guidance. It is to exercise permanent direct leadership of and influence over the party?s work. This
means allocation of work to members, advice to members in the effective conduct of the work, education of comrades
in Marxism and training in practical work. This must also involve the critical task of identifying weaknesses,
opportunities for improvement and mistakes on the part of all party organisations, including the leadership itself.

53. There is no question of the party leadership being able correctly to appraise itself of the strengths and weaknesses of
party work, to provide effective guidance to comrades, to suspend fruitless endeavours and launch new initiatives to
take advantage of emerging opportunities, to allocate work effectively, without establishing a system of reporting. The
duty to report therefore applies to each member of the party, each small working group, each fraction and each general
membership organisation. The decentralisation of responsibility that this involves is both the necessary corollary of
centralised leadership and a vital corrective to it.

54. Each individual and group should report to the party organisation under whose direction and leadership they work.
The purpose is to provide timely, brief, factual information on the work of the comrades and the conditions they
encounter in their work, including the success or otherwise of the group in performing its assignment, the opinions and
?mood? of the masses, the attitude and orientation of the union leaders, the activity of the reformist, centrist and petit-
bourgeois organisations. The party as a whole is in turn obligated to report regularly to the International.

55. ?It is important to enforce the duty to report so systematically that it takes root as one of the best traditions in the communist movement.?18 The establishment of a functioning system of reporting is no petty detail but a key distinguishing feature between a professional revolutionary endeavour and ad hoc, disjointed, amateur activity. This applies with even greater force to the obligation of the leadership itself to report effectively and timeously to the party.

56. As Lenin was driven many times to observe, the development of the vanguard party from ad hoc, makeshift forms of organisation to a professional organisation cannot be achieved in one leap, and is itself a process of persistent struggle against disorganisation, against inexperience, against amateurism. Success cannot be achieved in this struggle without conscious specialisation of comrades in distinct areas of activity. A real division of labour must be established in the party.

57. Resistance to this division of labour and specialisation of party tasks is a residue of the pre-party stage of proletarian organisation and is common both to sects and to propaganda societies of small size and relatively isolated from the masses. The notion that everyone can and should do a little bit of everything stems from small scale production and thus derives ? like the tradition of sects itself ? not from the modern conditions of production and class struggle but from the proletariat?s artisan past. Like the need for revolutionary organisation itself, let alone the need for harsh class struggle methods, the necessity of the proletarian vanguard to apply a division of labour cannot be abolished within the parameters of class society. It is a condition of effective social labour ? including the labour of revolution.

58. Thus some party militants will specialise in agitational work. Others will conduct principally organisational work. Many will be specialised in defined practical functions. Necessarily fewer, because of the extent of knowledge and experience required, will specialise in conducting propaganda (many ideas to a smaller number of people) and the political education of the party. The art of revolutionary leadership consists of selecting the appropriate persons for the appropriate activity.

59. This division of labour in no way lessens the obligation of every communist to study Marxism and the political conditions of the day, nor the obligation of the party and its leadership to organise the education of the members in a systematic manner. Intensive study, familiarity with the doctrine of the proletarian struggle, knowledge of the party programme and of the erroneous programmes of opponent organisations ? all are essential if units of the party are to be able to give a lead in their allocated sphere. Failure to organise this education is to allow the proletarian organisation to degenerate back towards the social democratic model of a passive mass membership governed by learned functionaries.

60. Special steps must be taken to ensure that the division of labour established by the party does not reproduce, but rather systematically challenges, the socially oppressive and sexually and racially discriminatory aspects of the form of division of labour imposed by capital. Thus stereotypical relegation of women to organisational roles, refusal to recognise the intellectual development of minorities and youth, the systematic subordination of the socially oppressed to members of the dominant national or gender group, the silencing of workers by intellectuals must all be actively identified and rooted out as harmful to the development of the proletarian party.

61. The proletarian party should focus its activities primarily on the main cities and working class centres. The party should proceed to conduct work in the countryside and among the peasants only once a firm base in the urban centres has been achieved. In each given locality the party groups should not disperse their forces too soon, reducing their effect and scattering the cadres, but should work to achieve deep roots for communism in a given area, proceeding to expand the geographical sphere of party operations once the real effect of communist leadership can be demonstrated by reference to the party?s impact in a given area. Geographical party entities should be divided only when they are too large to hold effective general membership meetings, or when it is demanded by the variegation of party tasks in discrete milieu.

62. The party should avoid too schematic a hierarchy. As the Comintern observed, ?To attain the greatest possible centralisation of party work it makes no sense to chop up the party leadership into a schematic hierarchy with many
levels, each completely subordinate to the next. Instead district committees should oversee and coordinate the work of party branches in urban districts and smaller outlying towns. Branch committees should be elected from their branch meetings. The membership of the district committee should be elected from general meetings of all members of branches in the given area and should be approved by the party’s central committee. The elective principle should be applied wherever legality permits.

63. The central committee should be elected by the party as whole – usually by an annually meeting congress of delegates elected by the branches and districts – and be responsible to the party as whole. Between congresses the decisions of the central committee are binding on all members and party organisations. The central committee should wherever possible comprise members able to reflect the widest ranges of party experiences, by geography, industry, sphere of activity, gender, age, race and nationality. General trends of opinion within the party should be adequately represented within the central committee.

64. A smaller executive body should be elected by the central committee, to be responsible for the day to day running of the party. Ideally this body would comprise full time appointees of the party and would be able to meet frequently. It should be as far as possible a politically homogenous body, representing the opinion of the majority of the party and charged with its implementation. The task of the leadership is not only to generate broad policy and programmatic responses to political developments and to manage the production and dissemination of party literature and electronic communications, but also to oversee the implementation of agreed tasks, allocate work and defend the party from attack.

65. The party as whole should be under the leadership of a world party, should be a section of a world party. Its decisions should be subject to the approval of the International Executive of the International. Decisions of the International should be binding on national parties.

Part III - Communist Propaganda and Communist Agitation

66. The ideas disseminated by the communists must be communist ideas. All attempts to issue non-revolutionary, non-communist programmes and arguments , for tactical advantage, to establish front organisations or electoral vehicles on a non-revolutionary policy, or to conceal the aims of the proletarian party from the working class, are ipso facto opportunist, placing perceived short term advance before the general interests of the working class and socialism.

67. Propaganda is the dissemination of a large number of ideas to one or a few people. Agitation is the dissemination of one or a few ideas to a mass of people. Without propaganda: no cadres, no renewal of leadership, no informed proletarian opinion, no living democracy in the party. Without agitation: no dialogue with the masses, no intersection of communist ideas with the daily struggles of the vanguard, no rallying of new layers to the banner of the party, no permeation of the party’s slogans into the consciousness of the broadest layers of the people.

68. It is a sure sign of opportunist backsliding to make of the distinction between agitation and propaganda that the former must involve a call to definite concrete action whilst the latter need not. The reason is that every aspect of the communist party’s work, of its theoreticians as well as its propagandists and its agitators, is an attempt both to raise the consciousness of the masses and to extend and deepen the revolutionary activity of the masses.

69. The campaign against the World Trade Organisation can serve as an example of this. Marxist theoreticians conduct research and analysis of the function of the WTO, the fraudulent nature of free trade agreements, their effect on the development of the semi-colonial world, how it reinforces the super-exploitation of semi-colonies by the imperialist powers, how this expresses the nature of the imperialist world system as capitalism in the epoch of its decline. In a series of articles for the party press and its website, propagandists explain this analysis, using further concrete examples to lay bare the imperialist nature of the WTO, how it cannot be reformed but must be abolished. Party agitators, on the other hand, using primarily the spoken word and short leaflets, take one or two examples of the ruination of small producers in Africa, the appalling conditions of super-exploitation of the workers in the factories of Bangladesh and China, contrasting it with the vast profits gained by the multinational corporations and the imperialist bourgeoisie as a result of the WTO’s rigged trade rules. They rouse passionate indignation of workers and youth at the injustice of the WTO and the imperialist system. All three support the Marxists’ call to action: to protest militantly at the next
gathering of the World Trade Organisation for the abolition of the WTO and capitalism itself.

70. The effect of communist agitation and propaganda in raising and revolutionising the consciousness and activity of the masses demands the party?s most careful attention. The selection of slogans, development of arguments and adoption of positions on political questions must not be conducted in a casual manner but be judged according to this criterion. The leadership must take care to ensure that the entire party is informed of the form and content of the party?s slogans, demands and positions.

71. Communist propaganda and agitation must bear in mind the need to relate to and assist the revolutionary understanding and development of those workers whose journey to class consciousness and communism is only just beginning. The programme and world view of the communists must be made accessible, popularising revolutionary ideas without vulgarising them or lowering their horizons. As the Comintern explained, ?communist propaganda should use its slogans to reinforce the budding, unconscious, partial, wavering and semi-bourgeois tendencies towards revolutionary politics which in various situations are wrestling in [the worker?s] brain against bourgeois traditions and propaganda.?20

72. The main forms of propaganda and agitation of a proletarian party are: production and distribution of the party press and leaflets; promotion of the party?s electronic communications; intervention in the struggles of the trade unions, the political struggles of the workers and social movements; and discussion with individuals (through door-to-door agitation, street agitation with book tables, posters, petitions, leaflets and megaphones, public meetings and rallies). Propaganda must be conducted not only among the top layers of the working class ? invariably the preference of opportunists ? but among the low paid, the urban poor, the youth, women, national and racial minorities. Special publications and translation into minority languages must be produced for these ends.

73. It is a cardinal error for the vanguard party to content itself with propaganda for revolution while passively abstaining itself from the daily, partial, limited, sectional struggle of the workers. There is a tendency, encountered by the Russian Social Democrats when they first progressed from propaganda circles to widespread factory agitation, for those in the circle spirit to look down somewhat on the struggle of the workers for small improvements in their conditions of work and living standards. Instead the communists must participate in the workers? struggles, becoming as closely connected as possible to the lives of the workers and the practical issues that arise in the movement. Only in this self-sacrificing way will the communists distinguish themselves from the centrists and reformists parties, which are merely propaganda and recruiting parties, whose activity consists only of collecting members, speechifying about reforms and exploiting parliamentary impossibilities.?21

Part IV ? Pre-party organisation of communists

74. The revolutionary party is the fusion of communism and the working class movement. Where no revolutionary communist party exists, the first duty of communists is to fight for its formation. This obliges communists to unite their forces in a pre-party organisation of struggle.

75. The fusion of communism and the working class movement cannot occur if communism itself has been debased by adaptation to bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology. The first task of the communist pre-party organisation, the precondition for its success in bringing a proletarian party into being, must be the defence of Marxism from the unceasing campaign of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideologues to revise scientific socialism and gut it of its revolutionary content. Thus the polemical defence of Marxism from all varieties of revisionism, reformism, centrism, economism-chvostism, Stalinism, Maoism, populism, post-modernism, syndicalism, opportunism, sectarianism and anarchism are among the very first tasks of the communist pre-party organisation.

76. No less central to the earliest stages of struggle for a proletarian party, and as an integral part of this struggle, the communists must strive to apply Marxism to contemporary conditions, to show its explanatory power, to demonstrate how it serves to guide the masses in the struggle for power. Thus the communists must aim not only at the defence of Marxism in abstracto, critical as this will be, nor merely at the defence of Marxism from revisionist misinterpretation and misrepresentation. It must also re-elaborate a Marxist programme, set out clearly a strategy for the working class.
77. This programme, taking as its point of departure the Marxist analysis of capitalist global relations and a correct appraisal of the dynamic of objective global political developments, must set out a series of interlinked demands that can connect the daily struggles of the proletariat and oppressed peoples to the struggle for social revolution. Where the communists have achieved this in the form of an international programme, the task of communists in any given country is the elaboration of an analogous programme of action focused on the national terrain. In specific struggles, in discrete departments of industry, among differing sectors of the struggling masses, the communists will develop still more focused action programmes, always and everywhere taking their point of departure from the international situation and the unifying objective of world proletarian revolution.

78. The defence of Marxism as doctrine of the class struggle of the proletariat and the creative application of Marxism to contemporary conditions through the development of a re-elaborated communist programme are absolute preconditions for the advance of the communist pre-party organisation towards its goal. Without a firm foundation in scientific socialist ideas, without a programme re-elaborated in contemporary conditions, no fusion of communism with the working class movement is possible, no proletarian party can be established.

79. These tasks condition the development of the communist pre-party organisation. To perform them, a grouping of tens, scores or hundreds of communists must rigorously and ruthlessly prioritise its work. This means of necessity an emphasis on the production and dissemination of a wide range of ideas, directed necessarily at first to a relatively small number of people. Thus the main work of the communist pre-party organisation will be propaganda. The communist pre-party organisation is therefore a fighting propaganda group. The production and dissemination of communist literature, the organisation of regular in-depth discussion meetings for workers and youth, the systematic conduct of individual propaganda will be its first tasks.

80. This focus on propaganda, this dissemination of a large range of ideas to a relative few, this rigorous prioritisation of tasks is designed not to reconcile a small group to isolation and impotence, but to overcome it as quickly and effectively as conditions permit.

81. For a propaganda group prematurely to declare that it is the proletarian party constitutes an idealist deviation, an error of the first order. It means that the communists, satisfied with the strength of their ideas alone, declare themselves the leading part of the proletariat without first having condescended to merge their doctrine with its most advanced fighting detachments.

82. This error commonly takes the form of the declaration of a ?mini-mass party?. The pre-party group, impatient with or incapable of addressing its propaganda tasks, attempts to jump over the stage of focused propaganda. This commonly takes the form of pretending to be a party, seeking to deny its real small size and lack of influence, attempting therefore to immobilise the group?s supporters from contact with and knowledge of the real mass movement beyond its ranks. By involving its members in essentially shallow agitation, disconnected from the real balance of class forces or real political conjuncture, the grouping inevitably develops vulgar politics with sectarian and even cult-like features. Immune from contact with the broader, non-communist, workers? movement, the membership?s genuine revolutionary education cannot proceed, it cannot assess the accuracy of its leadership?s prognoses, check or criticise them, reorient the organisation. Such a ?party? may ossify or develop a rapid turnover of membership; either way it cannot effect a dynamic fusion of applied communism and the real working class.

83. At the same time, the propaganda group must avoid like the plague the equal and opposite danger arising from its isolation and small size: passive propagandism. The history of the collapse of the Fourth International after the Second World War demonstrates only too clearly the danger arising from isolation from the working class. Any attempt to abandon practical work, to turn the propaganda group?s back to the real struggles of the masses, can only result in sectarian disregard for the interests of the proletariat, opportunist prostration before the existing leaders of the masses, or more often than not, some unhappy combination of the two.

84. As we wrote in 1983: ?we reject absolutely any attempt to justify abstract propagandism. We do not advocate study circles divorced from the class struggle. Our programme is for the action of millions, not for saving our souls. We focus
our propaganda on the key issues of the international and national class struggle. We take our place in the mass
organisations of the working class, we orient to every major struggle – strikes, campaigns around democratic rights, the
struggle of the unemployed, democratic reform in the unions, or the mass reformist parties.22

85. Today we would add to this list, of course, mass mobilisations against the institutions of international finance
capital, mass struggles against war, occupation and racism, movements against privatisation and neoliberal attacks on
welfare, struggles to constitute new workers’ parties in Germany, Britain, Brazil from breaks from the social-
democracy, struggles within the mass social forums and the pan-continental and global convergences of resistance.

86. Without a strong theory and programme, the fighting propaganda group cannot commence its work, cannot survive. At the same time, without an orientation to the real working class anti-capitalist struggle, the propaganda group cannot develop, cannot proceed towards its objective.

87. The fighting propaganda group is therefore a dialectical concept. It puts programme first not just in theory, but in its
practical struggle within the working class. It seeks through its intervention not to leave struggles as it finds them, but
to generalise from the experience of the entire working class movement in order to advance proposals that can take the
struggle forward to victory, combating the reformist and centrist misleaders in the process. In this way it seeks to train
future cadres for the movement – leaders who understand, develop and apply communist politics. As Trotsky wrote in
1934, ?The real initiators of the [Fourth International] begin with Marxist quality and turn it afterwards into mass
quantity. The small but well-hardened and sharply ground axe splits, hews and shapes heavy beams. We should begin
with an axe of steel.?23

88. Despite the objectively imposed stages of its development, the fighting propaganda group? s primary aim is to
transcend this first stage through the formation of a proletarian party, or, as we put it in 1983, to be ?propaganda groups
seeking to transcend their existence as propaganda groups.?24

89. The emphasis of the pre-party organisation on propaganda in no way reduces the importance of agitation around
key goals of the working class in heightened periods of class struggle. The early Russian revolutionary social
democracy and the precursors of the Fourth International both understood well their propaganda tasks, but both also
saw that it was necessary for their propaganda groups at critical stages in the development of the class struggle to
advance also an increased agitational profile among the masses.

90. Thus the revolutionary Marxists in Russia noted that in the mid-1890s the emergence of a new strike movement in
the factories required them to go beyond the previous orientation primarily to the organisation of discussion circles for
workers. Observing that many of the early circle workers had developed a closed, circle spirit and tended to look down
upon the less conscious, less politically formed workers that launched the strike movement, Kremer and Martov
produced the pamphlet On Agitation, which Lenin described as containing valuable insights. This proposed to
supplement the propaganda of the Marxists with the promotion of a smaller number of political ideas directed at the
larger vanguard of fighting workers that was emerging. Though the incipient economist (Chvostist) trend sought to
restrict this agitation to economic questions and to ?calls to struggle?, Lenin insisted that it should also be directed to
the broadest political goals, should take up the oppression of the Jews and religious minorities, oppose attacks on
students, youth, the peasants and nationalities, should call for a republic, agrarian revolution and urban revolutionary
risings, etc. Above all they conducted agitation for the formation of a new political party, which they convened at
founding Congresses in 1898 and 1903.

91. The tocsin call of increased levels of class struggle must rouse the propaganda group to a broader appreciation of its
tasks. While prior to the German catastrophe of 1933 the International Left Opposition considered itself a faction of the
Third (Communist) International, and therefore devoted most of its activity to propaganda directed at members of the
mass Communist Parties, after 1933 it reorganised as the International Communist League, to openly address workers
roused by the German defeat with the need for new parties, a new International and world social revolution.

92. This obliged Trotsky to seek to purge the ICL of sectarian characteristics that had inevitably developed during its
long years of isolation and imposed propagandism. Trotsky therefore emphasised the need for the small sections of the ICL to turn to the masses. Alongside the essential propaganda that formed the irreducible foundation of the ICL’s work, its sections engaged in agitation in the trade unions, in some countries within mass social democratic parties, at other times through promoting breaks from those parties and agitation for new workers’ parties. Slogans included the need for general strikes against the attacks of the employers in France, soviets in revolutionary Spain, workers’ militia against fascism, a new workers’ party in the USA. He advised his supporters to find a road to the less organised workers too, to the women workers and the youth.

93. In his Transitional Programme (1938) Trotsky mercilessly castigated those passive propagandists who could not make the necessary transition to a period of heightened struggle. He observed that their propaganda often became converted into an excuse not to find a path to the masses, to deny the revolutionary potentiality of the new period: ?Incapable of finding access to the masses, they therefore zealously accuse the masses of inability to raise themselves to revolutionary ideas.? He added: ?He who does not seek and does not find the road to the masses is not a fighter but a dead weight to the party.?25

94. History reveals a number of routes from a fighting propaganda group to a party:

a. Acquisition of individual adherents. It is always essential to pursue this - a failure to do so represents passive resignation to an isolated fate. It is not theoretically excluded that in certain circumstances this path can result in the establishment of a proletarian party. Yet, given the vicissitudes of the class struggle, and the fact that sudden increases of tempo will not await the completion by the revolutionaries of their early tasks but will often occur before the revolutionaries have assembled the forces for a party, individual recruitment alone cannot be the sole path applied.

b. Merger with other propaganda societies. This can occur through splits from other formations and fusions on a revolutionary programme. Where these organisations are propaganda societies without the masses, the strictest and most intransigent attitude is necessary on questions of programme. Examples of this include Trotsky’s intransigent attitude to the German SAP and the Bloc of Four; a negative example is the fusion of the Nin grouping with the Right Oppositionists of Maurin in Spain, resulting in the formation of the centrist POUM, which failed the test of the Spanish revolution.

c. Entryism. It is permissible for revolutionaries to enter a reformist or centrist party when it is polarising and a significant section of it is moving to the left under the pressure of events, when it is possible to enter under one’s own banner and to conduct propaganda and agitation for a revolutionary programme. No compromises of programme are permissible ? the centrist concept of entrism sui generis in which the revolutionaries are expected to suppress revolutionary criticism in order to gain positions of influence in the party is ipso facto opportunist and must be utterly rejected. When conducting entrist operations, revolutionaries must continue to say what is, must maintain the utmost fidelity to the internationalist principles, must recognise a decisive attack by the bureaucracy when it comes and respond to it with an open revolutionary counter-offensive; must not cling to a party that will not tolerate the presence of revolutionaries but must seek to rally forces to its programme including the fight for a new independent proletarian party; and must devote the most attention to the youth as the sections of the party least likely to be lulled to sleep by the conformist and sceptical propaganda of the reformists.

d. Labour/Workers’ Party movement. Where sections of the working class are can be rallied for the first time to a new party, or to break from existing mass reformist parties, the communists must participate in this movement, taking the utmost care to avoid both sectarianism and opportunism. This means calling on mass organisations that are resisting the attacks of capital to unite in a new party, without programmatic preconditions, whilst at the same time advancing as clearly as possible, from the outset, a revolutionary programme for the party. The notion that unless a new workers’ party is revolutionary ab initio the communists should abstain from participation is sectarian and has the effect of ceding control of the new formation to the reformists, thus ultimately aborting the fight for a consistently proletarian party (see Lenin’s advice to the British Communists with regard to the formation for the Labour Party). Conversely, any notion that the new party must first adopt a reformist or centrist programme in order to appeal to the existing bourgeois ideology of the masses is inherently opportunist. The communists must combine tactical flexibility with programmatic intransigence if such a movement is to result in the victory of the communists and the establishment of a truly proletarian party.

e. Action of an International in fusing national propaganda societies into parties and/or splitting reformist parties. The
The clearest example of this path is the action of the Communist International between 1919 and 1924 in promoting the formation of united communist parties in many countries. This involved establishing strict criteria for the admission of parties to the Comintern, seeking to purge splits from the social democracy of not only programmatic but also the practical vestiges of reformism, challenging the sectarian deviations of the propaganda societies that merged under the auspices of the Comintern to form new communist parties, imposing international democratic centralist discipline on component national sections and ? last but not least ? promoting the development of programmatic and tactical unity of the International as a whole.

95. The appropriate form of organisation of a fighting propaganda group is democratic centralism. Communists must reject as a petit-bourgeois deviation the notion that pre-party formation can dispense with this. The tasks of ideological and practical combat that the propaganda group confronts in no way reduce the importance of democratic centralism?s key components: full democracy in internal discussion; unity of action, including in the dissemination of propaganda and ideas; the obligation of all members to conduct communist work. Without democratic centralism, an isolated propaganda group will without fail degenerate into an idle discussion club, passively reflecting the ideas fashionable in the broader movement, unable to intervene decisively and at critical moments to address the crisis of proletarian leadership.

96. Practical internationalism applies with equal force at the pre-party stage of development. The danger of nationalist-centredness and degeneration is no less but greater when a grouping is small and lacks ties to the masses. That is why Leon Trotsky insisted that where a new revolutionary group arises in one country or another ?on the very next day after its formation it must seek or create international ties, an international platform, an international organisation, because a guarantee of the correctness of the national policy can be found only along this road.?26

97. A revolutionary party must consist predominantly of revolutionary working class militants. It must be the real vanguard of the class. Building such a party in Britain and internationally is the primary task of the League for the Fifth International. Our programmatic work on Stalinism, social democratic reformism, centrist, the trade unions, women and imperialism is geared towards providing rock solid foundations for such a party. Without such foundations all talk of a party is nonsense. As we have repeated many times, however, foundations without anything built upon them are just as useless. Our programmatic work is designed to win us recruits from the working class. Passive propaganda, however, will not achieve this. A vigorous intervention into the actual struggles of the working class, the focusing of our programme and propaganda to those struggles, an active commitment to the victory of those struggles, however partial they may be, will win us recruits. We are a fighting, not a passive propaganda group ? fighting to pass beyond our present limitations of size and resources and to develop into becoming a factor in events in the class struggle.

98. To help us achieve this goal, we urge all revolutionary-minded militants to contact us, discuss our activities and our ideas with us, and join us.

ENDNOTES
1 Communist International, 12 July 1921, Guidelines on Organisation,
2 Workers Power, Fundamental Principles of Our Programme, Permanent Revolution issue 1, Summer 1983
3 Trotsky, L., 1930 To the Editorial Board of Prometeo, available on Marxist Internet Archive
http://www.trotsky.org/archive/trotsky/1930/06/06a.htm [2]
4 Trotsky, L., Centrist Alchemy or Marxism? April 24, 1935
5 Marx., K., 1845, Theses on Feuerbach, available on MIA,
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm [3]
6 Trotsky, L., March 28 1935, Once Again, Whither France?, available on MIA,
7 Lenin, V., I., 1902, What is to be Done? Burning Questions of our Movement, available on MIA,
8 Marx, K., 1976, Capital, volume 1, London, Lawrence and Wishart
9 ibid, pp. 167-168

11 Lenin, ibid

12 Cited in Lenin, What is to be Done?

13 ibid

14 ibid


17 ibid

18 ibid

19 ibid

20 ibid

21 ibid

22 Workers Power, 1983, The Death Agony of the Fourth International, chapter 5 ?A radical restatement of programme is necessary? 

23 Trotsky, L., 1975, p. 268 Writings 1933-34, Pathfinder, New York

24 Workers Power, Death Agony, op. cit.


Source URL: http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/method-and-principles-communist-organisation

Links: