

Some Comrades' Experience

The Fight To Grasp Theory

Editor's Note: *The following is an article from some comrades on their efforts in the theoretical struggle. As the article "Theoretical Struggle Crucial Part of the Working Class Movement" (Revolution, January 1977) points out, in an overall sense studying theory with particular problems of the class struggle in mind is the main way in which Party members and others will most deepen their grasp of theory and use it as a weapon against the bourgeoisie. This means different Party units, different areas, even different individuals will be focusing on different questions at any given time. In large part for this reason, the Party gives emphasis to self study as its main method.*

Still, as the same article points out, it is necessary in the Party today to lay stress on getting a grounding in the basics of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought—to take up the study of theory "in its own right." In particular right now this means the study of Marxist political economy, focused on the book, Political Economy—Marxist Study Courses, has been organized with some basic guidance.

This is a report from a group of comrades about how they took initiative in carrying out this task.

For the past several months, the staff of the Worker for the Chicago/Gary area has been studying political economy, particularly the series of pamphlets entitled *Political Economy—Marxist Study Courses* republished as a book (Banner Press, 1976). Studying this subject is very important because it is the foundation of the Marxist analysis of capitalism and capitalist society. Not only does it explain such problems as the deepening economic crisis, the capitalists' attacks, and so on, but understanding political economy also enables us to better understand the political struggles facing our class. Such things as the inevitability of war and crisis can only be fully understood if we grasp the root cause of them—the parasitic and decaying capitalist system.

Furthermore, we can only conduct Marxist agitation and propaganda among our fellow workers, especially but not exclusively in the course of key battles, if we understand things in a Marxist way—if we study some Marxism! More than this, it is only by studying Marxism and studying it deeply that we can ever begin to grasp the science, its principles and method, and arm others with this revolutionary weapon.

In the January 1977 issue of *Revolution*, an article entitled "Theoretical Struggle Crucial Part of Working Class Movement" points out that "the working class can emancipate itself and all mankind only by grasping and applying the science of Marxism, which provides the only correct method for understanding the development of things and the laws governing them—in both nature and society—and which represents the outlook and interests of the workers as a class in overthrowing and sweeping away capitalism and class society as a whole."

Studying theory and grasping it is certainly not an easy thing—it is a real struggle, a struggle to master the dialectical and materialist method. In capitalist society, the ideas and ways of thinking of the capitalists are constantly being thrust upon us every day, in a thousand open as well as insidious ways. At work from the boss, on the television and radio, in the newspapers, in culture, etc., the ruling class has its line—its take on what's going on in society and why. Spontaneously—without consciously and constantly taking up the proletarian view and method of Marxism—it is impossible to thoroughly break from this bourgeois line.

For us, it was a hard first step to grasp the importance of deeply studying Marxism—precisely because of the influence of bourgeois ideology. We had questions about our ability to understand political economy—we are not economists or scholars. And it is true that to really grasp political economy, like all Marxism, meant we not only had to study, but to make a break with old ways of thinking and analyzing things. Most importantly, we had to break with the empiricist tendency to uphold only direct experience as important in acquiring knowledge.

Combat Narrow View of Theory

In discussing the *Revolution* article, and the three forms of the theoretical struggle [taking up theory in its own right, with particular problems in mind, and to combat bourgeois theory—Ed.], it came out that some viewed study as simply a way to solve particular problems. For example, to deal with the problems of conducting agitation and propaganda among our fellow workers, study *What Is To Be Done?*; to correct mistakes in organizing and leading work, check out Mao Tsetung's essays on methods of leadership, etc. Of

course this is an important task of Marxist theory, studying the historical experience of the working class struggle to solve particular problems. But by itself, it cannot train us in the science of revolution, train us to analyze particular concrete conditions, to view the world in the dialectical materialist way.

As the article points out, what we must understand is that Marxism is a guide to action "in a sweeping, all-encompassing sense—a guide for the working class to grasp the laws governing the development of all things, in nature and society, and to carry forward the world historic task of wiping out capitalism and achieving communism. . . ."

In other words, while it is important to understand the lessons of the working class movement historically and particular principles that have been summed up, we must get a grasp of the science of Marxism which provides the only correct method for understanding the direction of things and the laws governing them. If we only studied for particular problems we would never understand Marxist philosophy, dialectical materialism, fully.

In our work, we had often run into the problem that we lacked this solid Marxist foundation. More than once we had trouble conducting agitation and propaganda around a particular question or struggle because we didn't understand it well enough to explain it in a popular way that would bring light into it. Not that we didn't have "the facts" around a plant closing, say, the number of workers affected, the excuses given by the factory owners, the amount of money invested and the amount of profit, where production would be relocated, etc. But we ran into problems in trying to correctly analyze the essence of things, why they were happening, how it fit into the necessity for that capitalist, how it fit in with the deepening crisis, etc. and what it means for the working class struggle not only immediately but in an overall way.

In the *Revolution* article, it is pointed out that, "the thing that enables us to grasp the essence of things, and their interconnections, to grasp objective truth, correctly reflect in our minds the objective world, is Mao stresses, precisely theory. 'Perception only solves the problem of phenomena,' he points out, 'theory alone can solve the problem of essence.'"

As the Central Committee Report states (excerpted in the July 1977 *Revolution*), we must "never forget the revolutionary goal. If we do it will affect the smaller battles because they are dialectically related—whether you understand it or not, whether anyone wants it to be true or not—it is true that what you achieve in changing the conditions of the masses for example is related to the big question of how society is going to be organized. There is no way to get around that. . . ."

Marxist political economy is precisely a sharp exposure of the capitalist system, how it is based on producing wealth for a handful by exploiting the working class. Political economy teaches us that crisis is inevitable, that the capitalist system holds only further impoverishment and misery for the masses, that unemployment and war are part and parcel of the profit system of the moneybags. There is no way it can overcome these contradictions. Studying and grasping political economy teaches us that capitalism cannot be made to "work," and in the sharpest way shows that it must be done

away with.

This is crucial to understand for all our work, in order to correctly analyze the concrete conditions to not only arrive at a correct understanding for a particular battle, but also to show how these smaller contradictions and smaller battles are linked to the bigger picture of revolution and socialism and the abolition of class society.

As the *Revolution* article states, the move from perceptual knowledge to rational knowledge (from practice to theory) represents a qualitative leap. As Mao says, "Fully to reflect a thing in its totality, to reflect its essence, to reflect its inherent laws, it is necessary through the exercise of thought to reconstruct the rich data of sense perception, discarding the dross and selecting the essential, eliminating the false and retaining the true, proceeding from the one to the other and from the outside to the inside, in order to form a system of concepts and theories—it is necessary to make a leap from perceptual to rational knowledge." Who would think that doing something like he's talking about is going to be easy?

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win

In fact, many people on the staff, after reading the first chapter of *Political Economy* became discouraged. In the main, this was because the first chapter deals with some very fundamental questions of political economy—the commodity, value, the two-fold character of labor, etc. There was struggle among the staff around the importance of these things to further study, as well as the difficulty of understanding these terms, for example, and whether it would be possible to go on with the book if the very first chapter posed such problems.

Indeed, no one is born a Marxist, nor with a grasp of dialectical materialism. In opposition, the bourgeoisie promotes every kind of other philosophy to justify their own system and to confuse and misdirect the workers and the masses generally. And, too, each of us by ourselves has only limited experience to start from. While direct experience is important to draw broader understanding of the world, class society, nature, etc. we have to go beyond just our own lives, our own direct experience. All this poses some problems in mastering Marxism.

Every day we are told that we are too stupid to accomplish even the most fundamental jobs at work, much less train ourselves in philosophy. For all these reasons, many active workers and communists are hesitant about studying Marxism. All our staff had at one time or another studied different Marxist works. And all of us had attempted before to study this collection of pamphlets.

But especially after the *Revolution* article on the importance of the theoretical struggle, grasping the importance of study and mastering Marxism, we resolved not to be intimidated, to persevere through initial difficulties and make a breakthrough. We developed a particular method to aid us in this, such as drawing up our own study guides for our reading, as well as discussing chapters among ourselves. But the primary thing in overcoming these initial roadblocks was grasping that "without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement," and seeing this study in that light.

In the course of continuing with the study, we found that subsequent chapters became easier to understand, as our own grasp deepened. In a way, we went through a process of practice, theory, practice on a higher level in the theoretical struggle. In other words, through the course of dealing with the problem of study, we gained a better understanding not only of the subject but also how to study it. This has enabled us to make relatively steady progress with the book. Even the points we had difficulty with in the first chapter have become clearer as we have gone ahead. And along with this, we feel we have laid the basis for further study of political economy and other Marxist subjects. The success of our study

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Theory...

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has raised our enthusiasm to persevere in training ourselves in Marxism-Leninism.

Studying Marxism-Leninism is no straight road forward. And this has posed problems for us more than once. For example, in the first lesson of *Political Economy* the author quotes Marx saying, "The best thing in my book is first. (and on this depends *all* understanding of the facts) *the two-fold character of labor* . . ." The chapter goes on to explain that the one in the same labor of the worker creates both use value in commodity and exchange value. Fine and well, but it still left us very puzzled about what more was explained by this two-fold character.

Through the course of taking up other aspects of political economy, though, we began to grasp the significance of the two-fold character—that this principle enabled us to understand not only the properties of a commodity, but also the law of value in general, the basis for the differentiation between constant and variable capital and other important questions. More importantly we deepened our understanding of wage-labor as wage-slavery and as a specific historical category that not only was not "eternal" but would and must be done away with.

Beyond all this, though, we have developed our understanding of Marxism as a science, as dialectical materialism. True, there is no chapter in this particular book on dialectical materialism as such, but in taking capitalist society and economic relations, dissecting them and drawing lessons from this analysis, Marx used the science of dialectical materialism. From studying how he applied this science to the particular question, we have also learned a great deal about the method of this science—in its "sweeping, all-encompassing sense."

But one reading of a book cannot make someone a Marxist, and crucial to deepening an understanding of Marxism is to use it to make another qualitative leap—back to practice. The development of knowledge cannot stop in either theory or practice, but using Marxism, continually develops both in their dialectical relationship.

Similarly, there are three main forms of the class struggle, not one or two. We feel that our study of Marxism has contributed to our work in the political and economic arenas of the class struggle, and has laid the basis for still more success.

But more than just this, we are resolved to continue to study and deepen our grasp of Marxism, to train ourselves and others in the science of revolution. We have begun to consciously take up the theoretical struggle against the bourgeoisie, and we are determined to see this struggle, too, through to the end.