

## Workers Viewpoint Organization—Theoretical Mishmash

# Opportunism In Its Own Right

The following is an excerpt from an article on the Workers Viewpoint Organization (WVO), which will be published in the next issue of The Communist, theoretical journal of the Central Committee of the RCP, available May 1. This excerpt deals in particular with the question of the theoretical struggle and the role of theory in the revolutionary movement of the working class. It centers around two articles: "Theoretical Struggle Crucial Part Of Working Class Movement," Revolution, January, 1977 and "RCP Discovers 'Theory In Its Own Right,'" written in the WVO newspaper, January, 1977 as an attack on the Revolution article —Ed.

The philosophical foundation on which WVO's opportunism rests is its distortion of the correct, Marxist theory of knowledge and the relation between theory and practice. In its response to the Revolution article, WVO insists that "There is no such thing as proceeding from the abstract." This is by way of attacking the need to study theory "in its own right," as laid out in the Revolution article. Now it may seem strange that WVO, itself a devoted disciple of the school of theory "for its own sake"—which the Revolution article contrasts with "in its own right" (more on this shortly)—should attack the formulation "in its own right." But in fact, this is totally consistent with WVO's whole warped view.

To WVO, theory is itself "concrete," it cannot be "abstract." WVO tries to muddy the waters for awhile with talk about not "proceeding from the abstract," (our emphasis) but then they get around to saying straight out that only pragmatists "treat it [theory] as abstractions." But theory is *exactly abstraction*—the abstraction and generalization of the material world, the synthesis in the mind of the objective world perceived through the senses. That theory is not abstraction would certainly come as a surprise to Mao and Lenin, for in *On Practice* Mao quotes Lenin as follows: "The abstraction of matter, of a law of nature, the abstraction of value, etc., in short, all scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and completely." (emphasis, parentheses, by Lenin)

Of course, as Lenin points out elsewhere, "truth is always concrete, never abstract." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 94) What Lenin means here is that truth can only be arrived at by the method he termed the "living soul of Marxism"—the "concrete analysis of concrete conditions." But this in no way contradicts the actual process of cognition which, as Lenin states, proceeds as follows, "...from the concrete to the abstract...From living perception to abstract thought, and from this to practice,—such is the dialectical path of the cognition of truth, of the cognition of objective reality." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 38, p. 171) Again, clearly theory is exactly abstraction, and if this leap is not made—along with the leap back to practice—there is no way to arrive at truth, a correct understanding of the real world, and no way to change it in accordance with the laws governing it.

What Lenin and Mao emphasize and what WVO fails miserably to grasp, is that laws, theory, are developed by a leap in the process of cognition, from perceptual to rational. If theory were "concrete," as WVO presents it, then there would not be rational knowledge, theory would not and could not "reflect nature more deeply, truly, and completely," as Lenin insists. In short, there would be no difference between perceptual and rational knowledge. Everything would be both perceptual and rational at the same time, and therefore neither. This view is exactly the reactionary philosophical principle of "combining two into one," in place of the materialist dialectical principle of "one divides into two." And this is exactly the reactionary philosophy embraced by WVO.

In a number of his works, Mao stresses that the process of cognition involves leaps—first from perceptual

to rational, from matter to ideas, and then from ideas back to matter—from rational knowledge back to the practice of changing the objective world. Those who do not understand this process, and specifically do not understand that theory and practice represent separate stages in the process of cognition, that there is a leap from the one to the other, do not understand how practice leads to the development of theory and in turn how theory leads back to practice on a higher level. Or, as Mao puts it, they fail to "comprehend that matter can be transformed into consciousness and consciousness into matter, although such leaps are phenomena of everyday life." Mao stresses that "it is therefore necessary to educate our comrades in the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, so that they can orientate their thinking correctly, become good at investigation and study and at summing up experience"—"summing up experience"—Mao Tsetung, too, must be an empiricist! (See Mao's "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?")

WVO does not understand all this, so they combine theory and practice, two-into-one, which is why they, on the one hand, attack the line of studying theory "in its own right"—as laws abstracted from particular phenomena of practical life—and on the other hand pervert the process of applying theory to practice. What this means for WVO and where it leads them can be seen in their statement that "general theory itself is highly concrete" and, as some kind of amplification of this, "the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat [is] itself highly concrete." Perhaps this is why WVO, when it does deign to "intervene" in practical struggles, insists on passing out leaflets to the workers combining a laundry list of demands—most of them "good Ideas"—with stereotyped, dogmatic rhetoric about the Idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat—as for example in the strike of auto workers last year, when WVO, besides putting forward demands such as 15-minute wash up time, no layoffs, complete job security, etc., informed the auto workers that forming a "Bolshevik" type party was on the order of the day and "the Party must lead the battle for the six-hour day and carry out the immediate preparation for the dictatorship of the proletariat." Since to WVO Ideas and objective reality combine into one and all Ideas are "concrete," then the Idea of the "immediate preparation" for the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is just as concrete as strikers as their strike and its real demands. (These leaflets hit the ground in droves, prompting some to say that WVO was trying to get strikers busted for littering—but we believe WVO's line is responsible, not direct police ties.)

To sum this up, from matter to consciousness—and from consciousness to matter—involves a leap. If no leap is made, if theory is not treated as, in Lenin's words, "abstractions" that "reflect nature more deep-

ly, truly and completely," then there is no way theory can be grasped and applied in practice—which involves another leap. As the Revolution article on the theoretical struggle stresses, "How can theory be applied if it is not studied, how can it be applied well if it is not studied deeply and consistently?"

### Theory "In Its Own Right"

Studying theory "in its own right," which WVO so bitterly and woefully attacks, means studying the basic laws, the universal principles of Marxism, as abstractions reflecting nature (and society) in a concentrated way, not to break the link between theory and practice, turning theory into dogma, something "for its own sake," but to carry out more correctly the dialectic from practice to theory and back to practice, so that as fully as possible we conform our thinking and action to the principles summarized by Mao in *On Practice*: "Start from perceptual knowledge and actively develop it into rational knowledge; then start from rational knowledge and actively guide revolutionary practice to change both the subjective and objective world. Practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge. This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level. Such is the whole of the dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge, and such is the dialectical-materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing."

And such is the basic law which WVO consistently and completely violates. Thus, despite its pompous proclamations that it is "the only organization that can provide leadership" for the working class and oppressed nationalities, WVO is utterly incapable of leading anyone under its influence anywhere but backward, away from the goal of revolution. And, despite its name, it is clear that this organization represents not the viewpoint of the working class, but that of the petty bourgeoisie, which is held down by the existing order and lashes out against it, but is incapable of seeing beyond—let alone leading the masses beyond—the framework of the capitalist system and which, in pursuit of its own narrow interests, declares itself the savior of the masses, and demands that the masses elevate it as such.

But despite WVO, and against it—and other, far more formidable, foes—Marxism is bound to take root more deeply in the working class and among the masses generally, as the Party deepens its grasp of Marxism and its ability to concretely apply it to leading mass struggle, and ever greater numbers of workers and others oppressed by the ruling class are armed with this science and use it as a guide to acting to achieve their own emancipation and the emancipation of all mankind from the fetters of class society. ■

## Order Now!



Volume 1, Number 1  
October 1976

## the COMMUNIST

Theoretical Journal of the Central Committee  
Of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

- **Commodities, Capitalism, Class Divisions—  
and their Abolition with the  
Achievement of Communism**
- **Social-Imperialism and Social-Democracy,  
Cover-Up of Capitalism in the USSR**  
(or How Martin Nicolaus and the October League Have  
"Restored" Socialism in the Soviet Union)
- **Bourgeois Democracy and the  
U.S. Working Class**
- **On the Character of World War 2**
- **Bourgeois Right, Economism, and the  
Goal of the Working Class Struggle**

\$2

**Available May Day**  
2nd issue of

## the COMMUNIST

Theoretical Journal of the Central Committee  
Of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

Featuring articles on

- THE BLACK PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE
- THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE  
FORCES AND RELATIONS OF PRO-  
DUCTION AND THE BASE AND  
SUPERSTRUCTURE
- WORKERS VIEWPOINT  
ORGANIZATION

\$2.

Order through RCP Publications, PO Box 3486,  
Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL 60654

## Revolution

Revolution is the organ of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party of the USA (RCP, USA). It is published monthly. All correspondence to the Party should be sent to RCP, USA, P.O. Box 3486, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL 60654.