

An Introduction to The Distinguishing Features of Leninist Political Practice

This text, "The Distinguishing Features of Leninist Political Practice," was written by the Scottish organization, Communist Formation, and published in the first issue of their journal of the same name in December, 1977. Communist Formation resulted from a split, several months earlier, in the Communist Organization of the British Isles (COBI).

The article broadly outlines the three types of conjuncture*, or "current situations," in which communists can find themselves. Further outlined are the general types of party activity appropriate to each conjuncture. Communist Formation presents preliminary categories and definitions appropriate to all scientific work. At the same time the intention not to provide any kind of "models theory" is obvious; and arguments are made against a linear pattern for the development of capitalism from stability to crisis to revolution. There is no necessary sequence of movement between types of conjuncture. History is not a straight path, but rather a route which zig zags and sustains reversals. Economic crises do not necessarily develop into political crises, nor necessarily into the military crisis of a revolutionary situation.

This article has particular relevance to the U.S. Communist movement. One of the chief failings of the "new communist movement" (although it certainly is not unique in this respect) has been its unspoken assumption that U.S. capitalism has been in a crisis period (or conjuncture) since the Second World War, or at least since Vietnam and the mass upsurge of the late 1960s. This assessment was never made scientifically, any more than was the assessment made by the Communist Party (USA) in the 1930s when it judged that the conjuncture of the "great depression" was a "revolutionary" one.

Rather, the "new communist movement" has always projected its own subjective "revolutionaryness" onto the working class or oppressed peoples. Once having "created" an angry and combative working class, these communists have simultaneously assigned themselves the task of immersing themselves into the mass workers' struggles with the mission of turning these struggles into revolution.

*For a preliminary definition of conjuncture see the article "Introduction to Theoretical Practice" in this issue of the *Theoretical Review*.

Admittedly, many communist groups today assess their role in a more modest way, seeking only to "fuse" themselves with the mass of workers. But behind this remains the notion that there are significant masses of workers seeking an alternative to the system and open to communism. The reality of the situation in this country has been something different, however, as the "new communist movement" has discovered to its grief. Instead of finding themselves immersed in mass struggles on any significant scale, communists have been obliged to create (or try to create) such struggles themselves, an effort which has increasingly involved all their resources and produced only the most modest of tangible gains.

Our insistence on the primacy of theory in this period appears incongruous to many in our movement since their starting point is the crisis of capitalism and the mass activity in which they are immersed. In fact, the primacy of theory only makes sense when it is put forward in the context of a "socially stable conjuncture," a concept which Communist Formation establishes with remarkable precision. Such a concept not only clearly defines the nature of the present period for capitalism, but also theoretically explains why we are not in a period of mass struggle. Once it is clear that, indeed, we are not in a period characterized by mass struggle, it also becomes clear that the principal activity of communists must be other than mass intervention in economic struggles.

In this way we can see that a firm grasp of the Leninist practice of political analysis, and the establishment of the character of the conjuncture as it changes and develops, is the core of Leninist political practice. The question is no longer that of being for or against fusion; but rather whether or not communists are willing to recognize the character of the present conjuncture. It is in a recognition of objective reality that fusion is ruled out as the principal activity of communists today. To the degree that this lucid and forthright article by Communist Formation contributes to that recognition, it will have proven its value.

