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# Class Struggle and Revolutionary Situation

## Part II: What is Class Struggle?

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In the first of its four articles against "Communist ORIENTATION", THE SPARK (organ of the Swedish Communist League Marxists-Leninists) carried the following excerpt from an article in C.O. no. 7, March 21, 1968:

*"Shall we strive to lead the working class in the struggle for higher wages, shorter working hours, mobilize it to demand more bourgeois 'social benefits', more spare time benefits, satisfying its bourgeois needs for time-killing?"*

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*Should we not say openly that the whole of this struggle for the fulfillment of bourgeois needs is leading the working class directly away from socialist ways of thinking? That trade union activity at the present stage is directly harmful to the struggle for socialism?"*

(Right now, we should like to ask the reader to note the expression "at the present stage of development of the parasite state", so that they should not fall into the error of believing that in general, on principle we are of the opinion that struggle for economic demands is harmful to the struggle for socialism.)

After this quotation from C.O., THE SPARK declares that these questions from us show that our way of thinking is in direct opposition to Lenin's and Mao Tse-tung's principles of studying objective facts. Having mentioned "some petty-bourgeois and politically immature elements within the Marxist-

Leninist movement in Sweden", THE SPARK then writes that in the opinion of these people also in Sweden "... any effort to spark off, organize and lead the economic struggle of the working class against the monopoly capital – which struggle is an integrated part of the class struggle of the proletariat – (must be) branded as 'directly harmful' to the cause of socialism".

Later on THE SPARK returns to the problem of class struggle, and in article no. 3 against us it writes:

*"... through contesting the fact that the economic struggle of the working class is an integrated part of its class struggle against the bourgeoisie, objectively they become the assistants of the bourgeoisie in the struggle against the working class,..."*

Finally, in its last article against C.O., THE SPARK writes it is "of decisive importance" for the solution of the task of arousing socialist consciousness with the workers that

*"... Marxists-Leninists should take an active part in the struggle of the working class for its interests. Only by doing so can we win the confidence of the workers and break down the influence of the agents of the bourgeoisie among them. Only by so doing can we achieve the spread of socialist theory among the masses of workers and convince them of the necessity of socialism."*

(We do not intend, at this juncture, to engage in any polemics against the Swedish CLML's newly-created Danish brother of the same name, but in passing we should like to point out the fact that this organisation, in the latest issue of its organ, "Communist", carries an article directed against the "theory of bribery", in which among other things it says:

*"... fight for social benefits, for shorter working hours and so on, in short: to carry out class struggle"*

and later on:

*"... the struggle of the working class and of the socialist world to safeguard, maintain and – with varying success – to extend the social benefits, or in other words: THE RESULTS OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE,..."*

The two organisations not only carry the same name, they are also of one mind.)

**What is class struggle?**

Our answer to this fundamental question will of necessity contain quite a number of arguments used by us before. But seeing that obviously the people of THE SPARK have not yet read what we have written on earlier occasions, and seeing that the open attack on us has got us quite a few new readers – especially in Sweden – we do not hesitate once again to bring some statements from the leading men of Marxism concerning this cardinal issue.

In 1879, Bernstein asked Engels whether the latter could get for him an article about the struggle of the English working class. Engels answered that he could not, but that Bernstein should not be sorry, because actually no struggle worth mentioning was going on. Engels wrote:

*“For a number of years past the English working class movement has been hopelessly describing a narrow circle of strikes for higher wages and shorter hours, not, however, as an expedient or means of propaganda and organization, but as the ultimate aim.... One can speak here of a labour movement only in so far as strikes take place here which, whether they are won or not, do not get the movement one step further.” (Marx/Engels: Selected Correspondence, Moscow 1965, p. 320)*

Two things here are decisive:

First: Economic strikes – for higher wages, shorter hours - may be of importance, if they are being used as an expedient or a means of propaganda and organization. That is not what the people of THE SPARK have in mind. They want to “spark off” and “organize” the very economic struggle in order thus to gain the confidence of the workers. They do not want to make use of the workers' spontaneous strikes for economic aims to organize the working class with an eye to the revolutionary struggle. They want to lead the economic struggle, hoping that then the workers are going to listen to them when they talk politics.

Second: Whether the kind of strikes, of which Engels is talking, are won or lost, they do not get the movement one step further. Seen from a political point of view there is nothing valuable about them. That is to say: these economic struggles are not part of the class struggle.

Lenin wrote about class struggle and the meaning of the word in one of his earliest works: "Our Immediate Task" from 1899:

*“We are all agreed that our task is that of the organization of the proletarian class struggle. But what is this class struggle? When the workers of a single factory or of a single branch of industry engage in struggle against their*

*employer or employers, is this class struggle? No, this is only a weak embryo of it."*

No, is it class struggle when the workers at a factory or a trade struggle for shorter working hours or higher wages – therefore it cannot in general be said, either, that shorter working hours or higher wages are always the result of class struggle. This economic struggle is a "weak embryo" of class struggle. This does not mean that out of each "weak embryo" a class struggle will of necessity grow. In the above quotation from Engels we have just seen that for years workers may produce that kind of "weak embryos", and still it has nothing to do with class struggle, and acquires no connection with class struggle.

Under certain circumstances the economic struggle – the "weak embryo" – develops into class struggle, which is to say that the struggle changes its character. But this does not happen automatically. First of all the "weak embryo" is an "embryo" seen in the historic perspective – an initial phase in the history of the proletariat, in the long-term, inevitable development of the proletariat from its birth as an exploited class to the day on which it seizes power from the bourgeoisie. This development is described in *The Communist Manifesto*.

In the article mentioned Lenin goes on to write:

*"The struggle of the workers becomes a class struggle only when all the foremost representatives of the entire working class of the whole country are conscious of themselves as a single working class and launch a struggle that is directed, not against individual employers, but against the entire class of capitalists and against the government that support that class."*

In Denmark, in 1956, the government made an Act of a mediation proposal turned down by the workers. The workers all over the country answered with strikes, which were directed against the employers as a whole and against the dictate of the government in the interests of the employers. Was this class struggle, then? No, it was not. It was a struggle aimed at forcing the employers to give higher payment for the labour power and at forcing the government not to assist the employers in turning down this demand. The struggle was "political" in the sense that it was also directed against the policy of the government – but it was not political in the sense that it was directed against the government in its capacity of the organ of the capitalist class. The struggle tried to force the government to change its policy, but it was not aimed at changing the fact that the capitalist class has the power in society and, therefore, has a government in office. And then it is not class

struggle. It is class struggle only when the object of the struggle is power in society. Listen to Lenin, further on in the same article:

*"Only when the individual worker realizes that he is a member of the entire working class, only when he recognizes the fact that his petty day-to-day struggle against individual employers and individual government officials is a struggle against the entire bourgeoisie and the entire government, does his struggle become a class struggle. 'Every class struggle is a political struggle' – these famous words of Marx are not to be understood to mean that the struggle of the workers against employers must always be a political struggle. They must be understood to mean that the struggle of the workers against the capitalists becomes a political struggle insofar as it becomes a class struggle."*

The struggle must become class struggle – a struggle for power in society – before it becomes political. Conversely, the struggle must be political – be aimed at power in society – before it becomes class struggle. Every class struggle is a political struggle, Marx says. Every political struggle is a class struggle, Engels says. Class struggle and political struggle, in the socialist sense of word, and the struggle of one class to seize power from another class, and the struggle of that other class to maintain its power – are one and the same thing.

A struggle for higher wages, shorter working hours, longer holidays, better working conditions etc. can n e v e r in itself become a political struggle, a class struggle. In "What is to be done?" Lenin unequivocally asserted that it is the purest of nonsense to try to "lend the economic struggle itself a political character". On the other hand the economic struggle may – under certain circumstances – be raised to the level of a political struggle. Lenin wrote:

*"... what else is the function of Social-Democracy if not to be a 'spirit' that not only hovers over the spontaneous movement, but also r a i s e s this movement to the level of 'its programme? Surely it is not its function to drag at the tail of the movement. At best, this would be of no service to the movement; at worst, it would be exceedingly harmful." (Collected Works, vol. 5, p. 396)*

On an earlier occasion, we brought Lenin's remarks on the relation between reforms and revolution, but we also repeat those remarks here:

*"... to conduct all propaganda and agitation from the viewpoint of revolution as opposed to reforms, systematically explaining this opposition to the masses theoretically and practically, at every step of parliamentary, trade-*

*union, co-operative etc. work. Under no circumstances to refrain (save in special cases, as an exception) from utilizing the parliamentary system and all the 'liberties' of bourgeois democracy; not to reject reforms, but to regard them o n l y as a by-product of the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat." ("The Tasks of the Third International", 1919, V.I. Lenin: On Britain, Moscow, p 413-14)*

The last words – to regard reforms o n l y as a by-product of the revolutionary class struggle – should not be understood to mean that all reforms, which are actually carried out on demand from the workers, must be regarded as such by-products of the revolutionary class struggle. One cannot from the fact that we have had many reforms in Denmark and Sweden draw the conclusion that we have experienced much revolutionary class struggle! Lenin's words must be understood to mean that communists should never make the struggle for reforms – higher wages, shorter working hours etc. – t h e i r objective. These things are the spontaneous objectives of the working class in the struggle against the bourgeoisie – they are never the objectives of communists, of conscious revolutionaries. If and when the working class spontaneously starts a struggle for objectives of that kind, it is the task of communists – whenever possible – to r a i s e this spontaneous struggle for another objective, the objective of class struggle. In so doing they must – as pointed out by Lenin in the above quotation – explain to the masses that revolution and reforms are two diametrically opposed things. "Reforms are concessions from the ruling class, which maintains its rule. Revolutions means to take power from the ruling class."

But reforms may very well be by-products of class struggle. On several occasions Lenin points out that the political strikes during the Russian revolution of 1905 brought the workers reforms, and that the workers should hardly have obtained these reforms, if their struggle had not been class struggle, a political struggle. Lenin stressed however, that the revolutionaries will only welcome reforms, if they serve to strengthen the political attack, but that on the other hand the revolutionaries must never forget that often the enemy will give up a position in order to lead the attacking working class astray and weaken it!

It has never been the task of revolutionary communists to instigate the workers to fight for demands for reforms. It can never be the task of revolutionary communists in the parasite states of today to put up demands for reforms on behalf of the working class and then make an effort to make the workers accept these demands and fight for them. And that precisely is what the people from THE SPARK want to do.

In its program of action the CLML raises the demand for a 36 hours working week, and the Danish and other West European allies of the Swedish undertaking raise corresponding demands. The idea behind this is, partly that the workers will realize that at long last they have found their true friends, partly that the workers will have so much confidence in these "revolutionaries" that they will listen to them when they talk about the need for socialism.

Unfortunately it does not appear from either the programme of action or from the articles in THE SPARK, when – thanks to this effort on the part of the CLML – the workers will be convinced of the necessity for socialism and carry through the proletarian revolution. Maybe this will take place already while, under the leadership of the CLML, they are valiantly struggling for a 36 hours working week (which that very CLML by raising the demand has described as feasible under capitalism). Maybe they shall not be fully convinced of the urgent need to take up arms in order to overthrow the capitalist class, until this class and its society have given them a 36 hours working week with full wage compensation?

The people from THE SPARK do not consider reforms a by-product of the revolutionary class struggle. On the contrary they consider the revolutionary struggle and so the revolution itself a by-product of the economic struggles, which the so-called revolutionary Marxists-Leninists "spark off" in the working class for the carrying through of demands that the same Marxists-Leninists have formulated in their programmes.

The people from THE SPARK and their allies all over Western Europe never understood Lenin's words in "Our Programme" from 1899:

*"(Marxism) made clear the real task of a revolutionary socialist party: not to draw up plans for refashioning society, not to preach to the capitalists and their hangers-on about improving the lot of the workers, not to hatch conspiracies, but to organize the class struggle of the proletariat and to lead this struggle, the ultimate aim of which is the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the organization of a socialist society."*

"For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property", Marx and Engels wrote in 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League, March 1850', "but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improving of existing society but the foundation of a new one." In the same 'Address' the German petty-bourgeois democrats' programme is branded, which according to Marx and Engels wanted "better wages and a more secure existence for the workers... they hope to bribe the workers by more or less concealed alms

and to break their revolutionary potency by making their position tolerable for the moment."

Revolutionary communists do not try to win the workers over, win them over to the revolution, by formulating even greater economic demands than the workers themselves for an "improvement of the conditions of the workers" under capitalism.

In order to win over the workers they shall have to follow the instructions given by Lenin in "A letter to the German Communists" from 1921, where he talks, of this "winning over" and writes:

*"Let us make more thorough and careful preparations for it; let us not allow a single serious opportunity to slip by when the bourgeoisie compels the proletariat to undertake a struggle; let us learn to correctly determine the moment when the masses of proletariat cannot but rise together with us."*

It is the capitalist system itself which sooner or later leads us to the situation where the "bourgeoisie compels the proletariat to undertake struggle". And precisely for the reason that it is so, it is realistic to say that it is possible for revolutionary communists to "learn" to determine the moment when the masses of the proletariat have no other way out than rising together with the communists in socialist revolution.