

THE WAY FORWARD

Study Topics

The Way Forward Collective is initiating study periods around questions of profound importance to the anti-revisionist communist movement. The first study topic, in what will be an ongoing process addresses the historic role and it's present day lessons of communist work in the trade union, community and other mass movements. The knowledge of how Communists should work in the mass worker's organizations is vital to the development of a new Communist Party.

Our major function will be to deepen ours and the communist movements understanding of how to raise political consciousness in the course of mass struggle. We will examine the historic failures/successes of the Communist Party USA as well as the dogmatic practice of contemporary ultra-leftists.

We see the study topic participants as allies and potential comrades with our collective.

The first study topic will last thirteen weeks. This means that it will take discipline on our part to see that we keep to this schedule. Each session will have approximately 50 to 75 pages of reading. The topics and readings are in the outline that follows. Upon completion of each study topic we will attempt to layout and discuss our understanding with other Communists. We will also publish theoretical pamphlets around our studies.

A. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

I. THE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

Questions

1. What are the functions of a trade union within capitalist society?
2. What is the relation between the trade unions and revolutionary struggle (What is the relation between the struggle of the trade unions for "the better terms of the sale of our labor power" and the development of class consciousness?)
3. Can the trade unions become vehicles for the revolutionary struggle?
4. What is the relationship between the trade unions and a Communist Party?

Readings

1. "Communist International and the Red International of Labor Unions" -- (3rd Convention of the Communist International, 1922)
2. Lenin: "Essay on Trade Union Neutrality"
3. Writings from Marx and Engels to the International Workingmen's Association

II. POLITICAL VS. ECONOMIC STRUGGLE

Questions

1. What is political struggle? What is economic struggle? What constitutes a political vs. an economic demand?
2. What is the relationship between political struggle, economic struggle and the development of class consciousness?
3. Why is the development of political struggle so strategically important for Communists?
4. Within the trade unions, how do Communists relate to and develop the political struggle, the economic struggle? Which is the strategic priority for Communists?
5. What are the differences between political propaganda and political agitation? What role does each serve?

Readings

1. Lenin: What Is To Be Done, Chapter III.

2. Letters from Marx
 3. Lenin: "Preface to the Pamphlet, MAY DAYS IN KHARKOV"
 4. Lenin: "Apropos Of The Profession De Foi"
 5. From Lenin's Notebook on Imperialism: "Pannekoek, 'State Expenditure and Imperialism'".
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III. DUAL UNIONISM

Questions

1. What is dual unionism? What are the errors of dual unionism?
2. What forms does dual unionism take? Under what conditions has dual unionism surfaced?
3. What are the roots of dual unionism?

Readings

1. Lenin: Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder.
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B. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

IV. OVERVIEW OF COMMUNIST WORK IN THE TRADE UNIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Questions

1. What were the different periods of the CP's work within the trade unions?
What strategy and tactics were characteristic of each period?
2. What was the early social base of the CP within the trade unions?
How did this social base affect their tactics?

Readings

1. Foster: History of the Communist Party, USA.
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V. THE WORK OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE IWW IN THE TRADE UNIONS (1895- 1917)

Readings

1. What was the nature of the debate between the S.P. and the IWW concerning work within the trade unions? What was the basis of their differing ideologies?

2. How did their ideological differences manifest themselves in their practical trade union work?
3. How did the Socialist Party utilize union elections? How did the Socialist Party utilize the electoral struggle?
4. What were the positions of the SP and the IWW on the national question? How did they each conduct work among immigrant labor? How successful were they?
5. How did the SP and the IWW each carry out the task of organizing the unorganized?

Readings

1. Selections from Kipnis: The American Socialist Movement (1897 - 1912)
2. Selections from Foner: History of the Labor Movement in the US, Vol. 4

VI. THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S WORK FROM 1920 - 1934: (THE TUEL, THE TUUL PERIODS)

Questions

1. What was the Trade Union Educational League? What was its program?
2. Why did the CP dissolve the TUEL and set up in its place the TUUL? (The Trade Union Unity League)
3. What was the analysis of the TUEL and the TUUL on the role of social democratic forces? Why did the CP's view of the social democratic forces change and how did it affect their organizing within the trade unions?
4. What were the consequences of the TUUL's decision to set up revolutionary dual unions? How did it affect the CP's strength within the trade unions?
5. How did the CP attempt to put forward political demands, and socialist demands in the trade unions during the TUEL period? the TUUL period?

Readings

1. From Bryan to Stalin (selected sections)
2. Foster: The Party's Trade Union Work During Ten Years, Parts I and II (from The Communist, Sept. 1929, Nov. 1929).
3. Central Committee's Open Letter to Cadre of the CP (from the Communist, 19

4. "The Tasks of the Party for Winning the Majority of the Working Class"
(from the Communist, 1934).

VII. THE CIO PERIOD AND THE UNITED FRONT OF THE 30's

Questions

1. What was the nature and basis of the change in strategy and tactics from 1934 to 1936? What effect did it have on the CP's organizing?
2. How did the CP view the relationship between economic and political agitation during the 30's?
3. How did the CP work in the campaign to organize the unorganized?

Readings

1. Earl Browder: "The United Front - The Key To Our New Tactical Orientation" (the Communist, Nov. 1935)
2. Readings from the Party Organizer, Feb. 1938: Shop Papers In The Chicago Area.
3. Labor's Untold Story, Chapter X
4. Foster: American Trade Unionism, p. 280 "The Communists and the Trade Unions", 1939.

C. PARTICULAR AREAS OF IMPORTANCE

VIII. THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM, NATIONAL OPPRESSION

Questions

1. How did the CP attempt to overcome racism in the trade union movement?
2. How did the CP bring its political campaigns against national oppression to the trade union movement?
3. How did the CP attempt to fight racism on the job?

Readings

1. A pamphlet on "Communist Work in the Chicago Federation of Labor Around Racism"
2. Selections from Foner: Organized Labor and the Black Worker 1619 - 1973

IX. THE LEFT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

Questions

1. How did the Socialist Party and the IWW relate to the developing bourgeois woman's movement?
2. How did the CP relate historically to the ERA?
3. How did the CP relate to the large influx of women into the labor during WWII, and the subsequent attempts to remove women from the labor force and place them back in the home after the War?
4. How did the CP attempt to bring the special demands of women workers into the trade unions?

Readings

1. Selections from Kipnis: The American Socialist Movement.
2. Documents from the CP on the ERA.

X. THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE ELECTORAL STRUGGLE

- (During this session we will focus on the a. Farmer-Labor Party of 1924;
b. Progressive Party of 1948; c. American Labor Party, NY of 1936 - 1956)

Questions

1. What were the attempts of the CP to form a Labor Party?
2. Under what conditions did the CP decide it was correct to form a Labor Party?
3. How did the CP attempt to win support within the trade unions for a Labor Party? Were they successful?
4. What were the programs and demands of each Labor Party?

Readings

1. CP pamphlet: Why a Labor Party; 1924
2. Readings from CP journals, as yet to be determined.

D. STUDIES OF PARTICULAR CAMPAIGNS

XI. THE UNEMPLOYMENT CAMPAIGNS OF THE 30'S

Questions

1. In the mass struggles of the 30's, how did the CP view the relationship between mass militant struggle and legislative action?
2. Why was the CP's Unemployment Campaign so successful?
3. What were its failures?
4. Did the CP make alliances with reactionary labor leaders in the campaign against unemployment?

Readings

1. Selections from the Communist, and from the Party Organizer.
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XII. THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS

Questions

1. How did the CP utilize the legal struggle within the mass political struggle?
2. How did the campaign to free the Scottsboro Boys develop such mass support?
3. How did the CP work and struggle with the NAACP and bourgeois Black groups?
4. How did the CP introduce the Scottsboro Case into the trade unions?

Readings

1. Readings from the Communist, the Party Organizer, and Black journals.
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E. XIII THE DEBATE IN THE US LEFT TODAY OVER ORGANIZING IN THE TRADE UNIONS

Questions

1. What is the relationship between the current ideas of the left organization of our time on trade union organizing and the historical errors of the left-wing and Communist movement in this country?

Readings

1. The October League: "Building Class Struggle Trade Unions", May 1977
2. The RCP's current pamphlet on trade union organizing
3. George Morris (CPUSA) : "Rank and File Rebellion" (written in the 1970's).