

Postmodernism in the Imperialist Country^{*†}

Red Guards Charlotte

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Preface

This text was produced by the now defunct Red Guards Charlotte organization which upheld and attempted to apply Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, principally Maoism, to conditions here in Charlotte. Their efforts were often sectarian and alienated the Maoists from the revisionist and reformist left without having established a real mass-base amongst the people. We should learn from their experiences and divide one into two, keeping the good and discarding the bad.

- Charlotte Revolutionary Study Group (CltRSG)

Postmodernism in the Imperialist Country

In our mass work, postmodernists have pushed back on our use of the term “postmodernism.” They haven’t yet been convinced of its danger, and currently argue [against] its use by claiming that the term is too “vague” and is a mislabeling of other issues.

It is true that we could benefit from having a concrete definition of postmodernism and its manifestations, so that we can oppose it more sharply.

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[†]RedLibrary: Thank you to a. Ishmael for submitting this.

Criticism is a gift. Even if the “criticism” is wrong, it helps us sharpen ourselves in opposing it. This is how we will win.

Maoism is not armed identity politics, and Maoism is not postmodernism. So how are they different then? Maoism says that within the U.S. the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is primary. Between proletariat and bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie is the primary aspect, which means concretely the U.S. is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. This is where postmodernism first departs from Maoism. Postmodernists in practice don’t recognize that class is the primary contradiction within this society, let alone recognize who has the upper hand in that.

The biggest threat that postmodernism poses is dissolving proletarian revolutionary organizations. The question of political power is the reason for this. Maoism, understanding the primary contradiction in society, seeks political power for the proletariat.

Postmodernism, because it doesn’t recognize power as something wielded in service to a class, seeks political power for none. It removes class character from power. It criticizes “power” in general instead of the political power of the current ruling class. Foucault¹ is one of the top postmodernists in this sense. Power is recognized, but as dissipated from a lot of different sources instead of as something wielded by a class over another class.

Therefore, objectively, postmodernism is a ruling-class ideology: in not choosing a side on the question of power, it has objectively chosen the side of the oppressor. This failure to assign class character also shows up in handling the question of violence. According to many postmodernists, both power and violence are bad no matter which class they are in service to. Why? Because they are being viewed only as flat and abstract ideas, not material things that exist, and that can therefore take on a new shape, in our world.

Since classes are not principal to postmodernism, it centers the secondary contradictions in society as if they were primary. And even in doing this it does not coherently prioritize any contradiction over any other, because it rejects the idea that there can be a hierarchy of contradictions. But even with this theoretical rejection of priorities, it has already prioritized the su-

¹CltRSG: Michel Foucault, 1926-1984, French philosopher who pioneered postmodernism despite rejecting this label.

perstructure as primary, barely recognizing the base if at all.² Every contradiction in society, every manifestation of oppression, is front and center all at once, and then sometimes one usurps another in oppression Olympics.

Stemming from its idealism, postmodernism values the gains of the individual over the gains of the class. Take patriarchy, a “secondary” contradiction in society, as an example. For the postmodernist, more women CEOs are a fine substitute for the masses of working women gaining political power. Even when further “left” postmodernists criticize this, they end up supporting the same thing in another form.

Here form and essence form a contradiction because in form, the changes are good. Representation is progressive. But, in essence, the changes actually ensure the unchallenged rule of the bourgeoisie.

This example stems from both liberal and postmodern trends: what does having more CEO women do to free proletarian women from their exploitation? Nothing. What about the women and girls who are bought and sold through institutionalized rape? Women ascending to the status of the bourgeoisie does not help them.

But what it does do is temporarily satisfy the demands of some who call themselves feminists, by meeting their demands. With such a concession feminism doesn’t become revolutionary in its day-to-day application. This is the limitation. Postmodernism seeks individualization in the face of totalization, and, therefore, disunity in the face of unity.

We must tackle the questions of patriarchy and oppressed nations. Long-term, this is the best way to prevent postmodern analyses from filling the void.

Within the imperialist country, Charlotte is no exception to having to confront postmodernism daily. RGC is not the first to attempt to theorize this and, in fact, our understanding and development on this issue is largely due to comrades in other cities, and then other countries, whose work we look up to and follow. We are not immune to postmodernism internally and have had to oppose it within our own ranks, and must continue to.

²CltRSG: In Marxist theory, the **base** is the economic infrastructure such as privately owned factories while the **superstructure** are all the ideas of a given society which sprout from the base such as entrepreneurs being creative visionaries who deserve the wealth they accumulate.

Postmodernism Today: A Brief Introduction **by Siraj**

This piece is useful. It laid solid foundations as to how postmodernism is expressed. It was written to go into postmodernism itself very deeply, and to touch on its shortcomings, giving us more of a full picture. In writing this we heavily referred to it and have by and large defended its claims.

In our opinion, the piece may have been written specifically to win over a more academic crowd, but this could be wrong. Our main criticism is that it did not necessarily identify the main contradiction and use that throughout the piece. Perhaps as an introduction it did not aim to do so. Since postmodernism is not in stasis, and because the piece was written around fifteen years ago or more, we need to take what it gave us and develop it further. Before the problem can be solved fully it needs to be understood fully.

The Party-building effort³ does depend on the Maoist movement's ability to attack postmodernism thoroughly, as ruling-class ideology is one of our biggest obstacles, both internally and externally. It will continue to be. We must wage a protracted struggle against it and overthrow its dominance.

Good Questions, Bad Answers

The contradiction concerning power is primary, and the other contradictions within postmodernism build off of this one. Below are some of the common manifestations of postmodernism in today's conditions. The list should be elaborated so that it comes to reflect reality. The forms listed should not be considered in vacuums separate from each other, but as a whole—a historical trend that is inherently political.

1. Rejects historical materialism

Again, in analyzing the world postmodernism stays within the realm of ideas, and this is how its rejection of historical materialism manifests. The analysis of whatever is coming into question is not rooted in its history. Postmodernists regard history abstractly and not as a moving thing. Their analysis

³CltRSG: Here they are referring to themselves and the other Red Guard organizations around the country who were attempting to build a new Communist Party constituted on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, principally Maoism.

does not pose [the] history of the development of production as directly related to the ideas prominent in society.

This is why, when postmodernism rears its ugly head while calling itself “Maoist,” it reduces Maoism just to a set of principles, a checklist of empty platitudes, but in actual analysis substitutes the easier set of politics already popular on the left.

One good example of this is postmodernists pretending that “sex work” is not oppressive. What is commonly referred to as “sex work” results from patriarchy. Primary within what is called “sex work” are prostitutes—and strippers, “cam girls,” and so on are a secondary manifestation.

In this case postmodernists do not bother to examine the history of prostitution and its objective situation in patriarchy. They view prostitution in a kind of vacuum where participation in it can somehow shape the reality of misogyny for the better, instead of viewing it in its totality, where it already objectively helped the bourgeoisie through patriarchy. Postmodernism’s rejection of historical materialism can be expressed in one phrase: treating the old as if it were new.

2. Changes in language become the force of social change

Postmodernists may not always say this word for word, but it is what they put into practice. Their language changes may appear radical, but do not get to the root of the issue.

For example, misogyny is renamed “femmephobia” (which describes something smaller than the totality of misogyny). Talking about how femininity is specifically hated is good, but it is not divorced from misogyny. In practice “femmephobia,” because it does not have a historical materialist definition, becomes subject to redefinition by an individual at any given time. In the absence of historical materialism, this is how oppression is confronted.

3. Microaggressions as the source of oppression

Because language is so important, the ways things are said means more than what is represented by the words. Racism and misogyny do manifest in one-on-one interactions. But in practice, postmodernist activists spend much more time and put much more importance on these individual-level interactions than they do on collective material liberation—worse, privilege-checking becomes liberation. Even when postmodernists organize together

this does not mean that their individualized ideology has changed.

To understand the difference between totalized oppression and microaggressions we can look to the words of the PCR-RCP:⁴ “The oppression of women is not the deed of the identitarian free will of individuals. It imposed itself to every woman, and did so independently of the subjective perception each woman had of herself. The oppression of women is universal, and so will be their liberation.”

4. Identity politics

“One of the main forms postmodernism takes in leftist circles is identity politics. As we use it here, the term ‘identity politics’ refers to a method for analyzing the world that puts identity as principal over political line. That is, it treats the opinions expressed by individuals who face oppression as the indisputable truth. It should go without saying that this method of analysis denies reliable access to the truth by throwing out the possibility that the opinion of the individual or group in question could be contradicted by a scientific analysis of capitalism-imperialism, as informed by a deep and broad examination of the facts of history.”⁵

Idealism⁶ is the reason for the phenomenon identified here by RGA [Red Guards Austin]. In practice it says the identity forms the truth, rather than the truth forming the oppression experienced by the individual with the identity—that the asserted moral framework is more important than political line.

In general, identity politics are very alien to working-class people. Post-modernists need to learn from the masses in this way. In mass work we ourselves have had to, when the Points of Unity of a local mass organization were criticized by a community member for being written “for y’all not for

⁴CltRSG: *Parti Communiste Révolutionnaire-Revolutionary Communist Party* was a Maoist Communist Party in Canada which, for a time, was truly revolutionary, but eventually succumbed to revisionism and dissolved in 2021.

⁵Red Guards Austin, “On Identity Opportunism” <https://redguardsaustin.wordpress.com/2017/04/10/on-identity-opportunism/>

⁶CltRSG: Idealism, in the philosophical sense, is opposed to materialism, which Marxism is based on. Idealism places ideas as principal in the development of history while materialism places matter at the center of its analyses.

us”—in a style and content that was too insular to the left. He was right, and that set of Points of Unity had a lot of postmodernism in it. We ended up rupturing with the leftover postmodernism represented there, and changing the Points of Unity.

Individualism is a petty-bourgeois sickness. Because of capitalism, ideas like individualism are widespread and deeply rooted, and this cannot be ignored. But in spite of this, the working class does yearn for unity among its oppressed sections. The working class, though aware of its exploitation to some extent, is unfamiliar with individualism in the form of identity politics, and when confronted with it, rejects it.

This is because identity politics don't get to the root of exploitation, and the masses can smell it. Activist communities cannot say the same, and this is because their class stand is petty-bourgeois.⁷

Similarities and differences among the working class form a contradiction, and for proletarian unity to be achieved, the masses must turn the similarities into the dominant force in that relationship. Today's left, in all its postmodern glory, has made it out to seem like differences among the working class are dominant, and in general this does not reflect reality.

Postmodernism is partially a response to the contradictions of patriarchy, white supremacy, and other ways exploitation manifests. In the face of these contradictions, postmodernism sought answers that would emphasize the dominated aspects (in patriarchy, women; in white supremacy, oppressed nations). This is not bad, because the dominated people must be free. But postmodernism overcorrected for the white-chauvinist and male-chauvinist errors by becoming their mechanical opposite, taking away the full picture that describes the reality of exploitation, and instead saying that it is all represented by listening to the right voices: those of the dominated sections in society. This is a subjectivist error: the totality of the contradiction is not identified, and so no concrete plan for action can be made. In the face of this many radical postmodern activists either drop out of politics or take one of the “plans for action” available— electoral politics and/or NGOs.⁸ And so, liberalism is currently taking the form of postmodernism in many ways.

⁷CltRSG: Class stand refers to the class to which one's views correspond to and represent in fact, rather than the class someone is from or the class they intend or claim to represent.

⁸CltRSG: Non-Governmental Organizations, more commonly referred to as nonprofits here in the U.S.

5. Class is ignored

Class oppression is turned into “classism,” just another oppression on a level playing field with other oppressions. And even then it’s about whether a person is poor or not and not about relation to the means of production.

It is true that secondary contradictions should not be ignored, and to do so is a subjectivist error.

Take women’s liberation and capitalism, for example: the two are not equal as determining factors in society. The contradiction between proletarian women and proletarian men is secondary to the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Postmodernism, however, would have us not prioritize one over the other. But what they have really done is insist that we not take a starting point to transforming society. The radical feminists chose a primary contradiction but got it wrong and said that the primary contradiction in society was between women and men. This is absurd because putting women in positions of power under capitalism does not then lead to the ability to end capitalism or resolve the other contradictions of society. Ending capitalism is what allows proletarian women, now free from the base of their oppression, to complete the revolution against patriarchy through continued class struggle.

This does not mean that eradicating patriarchy must “wait” until we have taken down capitalism, and this mechanical approach is similar to insurrectionism⁹ as it does not appreciate the protracted nature of struggle. First of all, a revolution is not possible without the participation of proletarian women. But even if we were to “wait” until after socialism to begin proletarian feminist organizations, we would be dooming the project of ending patriarchy by asking that a section of the proletariat embark on something they do not yet have any experience in, divorcing it from the class struggle.

Unity is temporary. In the fight against capitalism, proletarian men and proletarian women have temporary unity for the cause of socialism. This does not mean that the contradiction between them has ceased, but it is not in the spotlight. It begins being resolved in the course of the class struggle, in [protracted people’s war]. Their unity strengthens through the process

⁹CltRSG: As opposed to the military strategy of protracted people’s war. Insurrectionism (in the modern Maoist context) favors a long legal movement that transforms into a violent seizure of power followed by a civil war, while PPW features a long process of accumulating strength through guerrilla military actions before seizing power in the heart of the cities. Many Maoist groups argue for the universality of the latter and others disagree.

of overthrowing capitalism. When the political power of the proletariat has become dominant over that of the bourgeoisie, the contradiction between proletarian men and proletarian women reemerges now that the proletariat as a whole is the primary aspect of the bigger contradiction, class.

What liberal feminism today does is takes the dialectic between bourgeois men and bourgeois women and puts it as the primary contradiction of gender, since the bourgeoisie is currently the primary aspect. Some of the postmodernist trends, in response to this, don't really accept this contradiction between men and women as primary to gender at all, and so mechanically negate it, or at least disregard it. But even liberal feminism and postmodernist feminism, though different, are close together in essence and fade in and out of each other.

Siraj said that postmodernism is an "unremitting war of all against all," and dialectical materialists reject this as really a call to not do anything lest it be problematic or somehow harm someone else.

6. Intersectionality

We do not deny that exploitation overlaps with oppression in a way that intersectionality attempts to describe. Intersectionality answers the right questions with ultimately wrong conclusions.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw developed the term "intersectionality" in the 1980s as a result of a case in which a Black woman, Emma, claimed she was not hired because of being a Black woman. But when she sued the employer, her case was dismissed because it was said that the company hired Black people (men) and also hired women (white). According to Crenshaw there was no place for her to describe that she was suffering the effects of both. When speaking on what gave rise to the term she says,

"Many years later I had come to recognize that the problem that Emma was facing was a framing problem. The frame that the court was using to see gender discrimination, or to see race discrimination, was partial, and it was distorting. For me, the challenge that I faced was trying to figure out if there was an alternative narrative, a prism that would allow us to see Emma's dilemma, a prism that would allow us to rescue her from the cracks in the log, that would allow judges to see her story."

What are the limitations and kernels of truth in this? In this example the truth is in the fact that Black women face a double oppression. Here, one person is being talked about in job discrimination, but there's no class analysis. In a class analysis, proletarian Black women face a triple oppression. This does not mean unity is not possible; instead, principled unity is achievable during the class struggle, with a material commitment to rupturing with misogynist and racist practice.

From its outset intersectionality was meant to help the current system adapt. What intersectionality wanted to describe had the potential to help us acknowledge that oppressions cannot be separated from each other, but in practice this has been turned into its opposite, into a constant separation.

Now let's examine something different from intersectionality, feminist standpoint epistemology. "Epistemology" is defined as "the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity." This theory insisted that "starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order" (Sandra Harding). This claim has a dual nature. On the one hand its claims should be taken to acknowledge that women hold up half the sky, and their collective oppression must be addressed using proletarian feminism.

But what is the problem with standpoint epistemology? It misused the universality of the proletariat as the class to end all classes to individualize a "standpoint." What it is trying to correctly address must never be taken out of the context of the whole of proletarian women, understanding that even individual leaders in proletarian feminist organizations represent proletarian women as a section of a class. Standpoint epistemology in practice says that a person who faces more oppression has a better grasp of reality. This is wrong.

Even standpoint epistemology itself claimed that it "extended and re-framed the idea of the standpoint of the proletariat to mark out the logical space for a feminist standpoint."

The "standpoint of the proletariat" was written about by Lukacs.¹⁰ It said that the proletariat is the class that can best describe reality. Knowing that Maoism is all-powerful because it is true, we can see where this idea originally came from Marxism. But Marxism is something meant to shape

¹⁰CitRSG: György Lukács, 1885-1971, Hungarian Marxist and philosopher, both a critic and defender of the U.S.S.R. and Stalin.

the world, not leave it in the realm of ideas, and the leap from the standpoint of the proletariat to feminist standpoint theory represents pretty well how Marxist ideas are taken by academia and nullified by removing the practice from them. This is more dangerous than if they did not take Marxist ideas at all because now the bourgeoisie can claim it understands Marxism, and control how it is defined, and confine it to universities.

Why is this different from revolutionary communism? Because it is idealism. Where standpoint epistemology really went wrong was it accepted dialectics but favored dialectical idealism over dialectical materialism. The “standpoint” of the dominated in society (women) is only ever meant to be a point of research and observation. It is not meant to inform a revolutionary practice. The other thing is, a common misinterpretation is that a good “standpoint” of an individual equals a good analysis.

This just doesn’t seem to be true among the working class and seems to apply only to academia. Women can have incorrect ideas that stem from their social experience, for example, “we need more police presence” is something we commonly hear from working-class women in mass work, and not nearly as much from men. It’s because they genuinely experience a lot of violence in their communities due to the war on drugs and intra-community violence stemming from the drug trade. In this case women yearned for peace for their families, which is an important part of the picture, but did not arrive at correct ideas. If we use materialism, we can conclude that this is because the system that exists around these observations doesn’t offer any alternatives.

Standpoint epistemology does come under fire from hardcore postmodernists as “too universalizing” on the experiences of women as a whole. It is true that aspects of women’s oppression are universal. But just because a theory has been criticized by postmodernism does not mean it has not made concessions to it in practice. Indeed, revisionists¹¹ sometimes receive anti-Communism, yet they have in practice gone against genuine Communists. Feminist standpoint theory has really done the same under capitalism. For proletarian feminism we should investigate and universalize the aspects of women’s oppression that are universal.

“Feminist standpoint theories, then, involve a commitment to the view that all attempts to know are socially situated. The social situation of an epistemic agent—her gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and physical

¹¹CltRSG: Those who have revised “the revolutionary heart out of Marxism,” like the CPUSA. This often looks like the negation of class struggle.

capacities—plays a role in forming what we know and limiting what we are able to know.” This is not untrue in that factors shape experience and therefore knowledge. Where the real misinterpretations come about is with “all attempts to know are socially situated.” Experience is socially situated, but this confuses the objective and subjective.¹² Is this implying that it would be impossible for someone with a petty-bourgeois class background to grasp the truth of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and use that to transform their own life? Can a cis man comrade know the ways women are oppressed day to day? A cis man can know these things (perceptual knowledge) without experiencing them; subjectively he does not know the full weight of experiencing that but he can still grasp it. To an extent he can also gain rational knowledge through seeing his woman or woman-read comrades experiencing misogyny in front of him.¹³ Still there is a contradiction Communists must resolve—how can the rational knowledge of women’s oppression be transferred to those who do not experience it? Through proletarian feminist organizations who theorize and propagate, but never divorced from the larger class struggle.

Admittedly we do not have the right answer to this yet. Are all attempts to know socially situated? How is this different from, saying as the identitarians do, “You can’t understand this because you don’t have this social situation”?

We should take the true kernels from this and apply them but only using Marxism. This took an idea that was originally “Marxist” and made it into something more dead than living.

7. Decolonization

When postmodernists refer to decolonization they talk about colonial structures as built up in one’s head, informing their worldview. But worldview does not fall from the sky. Just like all things, it has a material basis. So, to truly “decolonize,” we must actively destroy capitalism because colonization

¹²CltRSG: The object being the totality of the real world with the subject being a limited thing within that totality. Objective encompasses the whole while subjective only considers a part.

¹³CltRSG: Perceptual knowledge is the stage of observing different phenomena while rational knowledge is the stage of understanding how the different phenomena relate to and are dependent on one another thus giving the subject a greater understanding of the object, reality. For a deeper explanation of the stages and development of knowledge look to Mao’s *On Practice*.

created capitalism and they cannot be separated.

The logical conclusion of decolonization is similar to the cultural nationalism that took over the Black liberation movement in the 1960s and '70s, answering people's righteous revolutionary potential with another ideology that is limited to the superstructure and will not go back to turn the base on its head.

“Decolonization” does not create a more generalized idea of where national oppression comes from—instead it individualizes it. Everything is measured in relation to the most oppressed identity, so a Black person having lighter skin and different texture of hair is seen as less oppressed. Oddly enough postmodernism can start to define race according to race science.

Decolonization would have one believe that doing everything but destroying white supremacy will destroy it.

Line struggles involving postmodernism in Charlotte

Postmodernism has shown up in a local mass organization in various line struggles.¹⁴ The following description of line struggles are not being written to embarrass comrades who have pushed postmodernist lines. Indeed, all of us have made errors of caving to postmodernism in the past, and none of us are immune from it. Postmodernism is not a flat thing and takes different forms in revolutionary political spaces. We are grateful that comrades have line struggled, because it makes the revolutionary movement stronger.

One line that has resurfaced multiple times is a tendency to label generalizations, generalizations based on class, as “assumptions.” One instance of this was when there was a small fundraiser held outside of a bar and restaurant. The fundraiser is for a local woman who we met through a local mass organization. She was loyal in participating in servings and other events. She had been unfairly evicted a couple of years back, and it was affecting her ability to sign a lease—income aside, having an eviction on your record means few landlords, if any, will accept your application. Therefore, our fundraising efforts are going to be combined with pushing the debt collector to accept a

¹⁴CltRSG: Line struggles being the manifestations of the contradictions existing within society reflected in the Party. Usually two lines emerge, one proletarian and one bourgeois. This is perfectly normal and Parties need to equip themselves to navigate these line struggles which will persevere all the way to communism.

lower amount of money than expected to settle the debt, to cancel it. We chose to hold the fundraiser outside of this bar because the owner of it was sympathetic to ideas of socialism.

The logistics team of the mass organization was later de-briefing the fundraiser. One of the comrades who had been there (A) commented that the area surrounding the bar is one of the centers of gentrification in Charlotte, and so the class character and class stand of people who tend to frequent the bar is more petty-bourgeois than it is proletarian. The comrade commented that we should keep this in mind when fundraising for the proletarian cause from the gentrified area, that it was different from fundraising in a proletarian neighborhood. He was not necessarily specific in how. Throughout its history this mass org has grappled with the fact that we often fundraise from activist “communities” to serve a more working-class community, and how to handle this contradiction correctly.

Another comrade (B) rejected much of this, saying that people were either going to give a dollar in solidarity or they were not, and that asking people to donate is not the same as asking that person their politics on the housing issue. They asked more about gentrification and what constitutes gentrification, which is valid and good to do. However, they rejected the generalization about petty-bourgeois class character and class stand based on hanging out in a gentrified area. They said that assumptions about individuals should not be made in this way.

In the face of this, comrade (A) pretty much retracted their statement, conceding that comrade (B) had been correct, and that the issue needed more nuance before any generalizations could be made.

Another comrade (C) who had also been there aligned with (A)’s original statement, said that they had been wrong to retract. Comrade (C) said that class is a good starting point for generalizations, and to individualize “politics” is a postmodernist error. They said that the politics one is sympathetic to can vary from person to person, yes, but in general class is more important than the whims of the individual, and that class informs an area’s political climate. They said that (B) was right in the sense that concrete investigation is necessary, but if we are not able to make such generalizations in the first place we will not be able to develop them further. For example in a gentrified area, fascism is more prevalent than in thoroughly proletarian areas. All comrades who participated in the struggle were thanked for their participation. However, this did not mean concession on the issue of generalizations.

Another confrontation with postmodernism in the mass org was after the first political orientation class. The turnout for the event had been pretty low in terms of numbers. However the mass org gained one new committed member, who had grown up around Arbor Glen, as a result of the orientation.

Line “A” emerged saying that the mass organization was stagnating (evidenced in consistently low turnout) and the proposed way to correct this was to have purposely “de-politicized” events. The comrade proposed having “kickbacks” and other party-type events so that more people would be attracted and could be brought in. They said that the mass org should intentionally unite with the community more, and on this last part they were correct.

Line “B” said line “A” was a panicked reaction to low turnout. They said that though unity with the community is necessary, even in a mass organization quality is more important than quantity. A proposal to take out the politics is in essence a proposal to hollow out the organization of any meaning in the face of challenges.

Line “B” also said that line “A” was imposing a petty-bourgeois method of friendship as the basis for political relationships. They criticized line “A” for wanting to take the method popular with activists and make that the primary method for attracting new community members into the mass org. This was the postmodernism in line “A,” and was not the first time this friendship-over-politics line had reared its head in Charlotte.

Line “B” did, however, concede then and there that line “A” was right, that more intentional effort should be made to unite with the community in a real way. They said we should be in the “non-political” spaces that community members are already in, uniting with them there instead of creating “non-political” spaces to bring people into.

In synthesis this meant to add different methods to outreach, still including door-knocking and canvassing, but prioritizing our contacts and assigning each volunteer of the mass org to 1-2 community contacts who were especially interested in the mass org, and requiring that volunteers of the mass org meet up with contacts to actually get to know them and their lives as they already existed. The goal here was to figure out a person’s internal contradictions and what was standing in the way of them becoming a revolutionary. Getting working-class people to set aside time is difficult. So far only a couple of volunteers have been able to meet up with their contacts one-on-one, and we will be excited to analyze this method after we have given it more time. Another good thing that partially came out of this line struggle was a talent

show fundraiser that was held in the community. Politics were not taken out of command, but were combined with a cultural event.

Another line struggle in the mass org that involved postmodernism was on the question of new members. Line “A” said we are stagnating because a couple people have dropped off since the organization formed, and we have not gained many new members to replace them. Therefore, we should not cut off new volunteers from the activist “community” who are attracted to our work.

Line “B” said that we should not try to isolate people who support us in the activist community, and should allow them to support from a distance in ways that we need. But, for making people into full volunteers, right now we should really focus on people who come to our servings because they live in the neighborhood—mass contacts, or people who we do not know through the activist community.

Bringing in more activists would undoubtedly mean bringing in more postmodernism. It is bad to try to mix postmodernism and mass work early on, especially if its lines haven’t been combated thoroughly: postmodernism can take over quickly. Instead comrades should be won away from postmodernism to an extent, then come in, and the struggle continues there. This does not mean anyone should be kicked out due to line struggles unless they become completely antagonistic.

Another line struggle that included the fight against postmodernism concerned the mass line.¹⁵ This one applied in a couple different places. When we formed we started serving hot food. A couple months in, a comrade gave a criticism, saying we should stop serving it because it was not something the community had asked for initially. They also said it was too expensive, and they were right on this point. We stopped serving hot food as a result of this criticism. Throughout the months that we stopped and instead only focused on clothes and diapers, a few community members have either asked why we stopped, or suggested we do hot food again. Either way the masses are not a bargaining chip in line struggles and can have both correct and incorrect ideas, so we should analyze this contradiction fully.

The postmodernist line saw the mass line as something very close to identity politics. It saw the mass line only as a way to do exactly what

¹⁵CltRSG: The mass line is a Maoist concept that can be summed up as hearing the ideas that come “from the masses,” applying the science of Marxist theory to these ideas and then bringing these ideas back “to the masses,” this is the Communist method of leadership.

people from the community say they need. It therefore negated the need for synthesis. It's like identity politics because it waits for a member of an oppressed group (in this case, community members) to say something outright before determining it as truth or something worthy of carrying out. In response to this the competing line (only much later) said this is dogmatic and could be morphed to justify the masses not needing a revolution simply because people do not yet commonly say "we need a revolution."

Even with criticisms that take the form of postmodernism, there are still occasionally some correct aspects. Where was the postmodernist line partially correct? It did aim to address actual needs of the community more, which was something we still don't have the perfect answer to. The root of this problem was how we went about our initial social investigation/class analysis. We asked, "What is the biggest issue in the community?" This was a great start and we uphold this decision. However, where we went wrong was only really collecting people's answers to this, such as, "housing," "no rec centers for the kids," "not enough groceries" etc., without recording the deeper reasons people saw these as problems. Even when we had longer conversations with people about where they saw the issue as coming from, we were more concerned with writing down the symptom of the problem than the essence of it. This error came from seeing the mass line as more of a numbered checklist than a way to identify the root of the problems and address them. In the future we will focus more on really asking deeper questions and listening to community members. Hopefully this will help us identify class enemies, and start campaigns against them, seeking to really solve the problem with class struggle. The comrade who brought up this concern had a valid aspect to his point, and the answer lies in getting to the root rather than relying on postmodernist methods.

With our study group, postmodernism has been very prevalent, sometimes more prevalent than in the other organizations. This is because the study group exists in the realm of ideas and doesn't have political action attached to it. It is a study group held once a week. Many attracted to it are students, academics, activists, and friends of activists. The study group disproportionately represents people steeped in postmodernism in a way that the masses are not. It has use because it's a way to attract people to Maoism, and for everyone present to study alongside comrades. This can only be overcome by identifying the main contradiction in the study group and especially by engaging postmodernist ideas head-on. We are working on reconstituting the organization so that it is more of a mass org and less of a

left org.¹⁶

In the antifascist coalition the biggest manifestation of postmodernism is the insistence on decentralization. This manifested in the planning leading up to D28, specifically in the line struggle over propagating a date and a time for the action. Eventually the line to organize a demo did win out, but we procrastinated and threw our hands up in the air.

Though a fight against power, antifascism in the U.S. does not yet represent a fight for power. It is the job of Communists to overcome this using temporary unity against fascism to win comrades over to the cause for PPW. This must be done by applying dialectical materialism to the question of centralization vs. decentralization in street actions. It also means uniting with anarchist comrades on tactics where they clearly have more experience fighting fascists than we do.

In the future we are going to create more temporary coalitions for specific actions, winning people over a few at a time. In this way we can face the problem of ultra-democracy early on, and in more successive steps.

In our experiences confronting postmodernism in antifascism, we really learned not to blame our own shortcomings as a collective on external contradictions, but on internal contradictions. In the case of planning leading up to D28 we cannot blame our shortcomings on the postmodernist line coming from comrades outside our collective. Instead we must take it upon ourselves to commit to the line for more organized resistance and concretely this means taking initiative for an action, instead of waiting for everyone to agree before doing it. This is the way comrades have been won over in the past.

Against postmodernism, against reformism!

Objectively postmodernism allows the bourgeoisie to continue to inflict violence on the working class. All the contradictions within lead back to the main question of power. Correct criticisms of postmodernism will help the working class seize power. With the ideas described in this piece the left has effectively been pacified into accepting bourgeois rule.

It is true that postmodernism is still changing and adapting and despite its staleness is very much a living thing. We must take this threat seriously and defeat this weapon, sharpening our own. It is crucial that this is done

¹⁶CltRSG: This refers to the first Charlotte Revolutionary Study Group, the lessons of which we should not ignore!

both internally and externally, and especially internally because as we saw in Canada it can overtake even a revolutionary Communist organization.¹⁷

Similar to what “Condemned to Win”¹⁸ states about revisionism, there are two types of postmodernists. The first type is the hardcore leaders, who will not be won over and should be opposed ruthlessly, such as Christopher Winston¹⁹ and Martin McAlpine. And then there are future comrades, who have become attracted to postmodernism in the absence of a Party to lead them to a New Power in Protracted People’s War.

In either case, postmodernism should not be approached softly. Even with the case of future comrades who can and will be won over, they cannot be won over without seeing Communists concretely oppose postmodernism. This necessitates identifying postmodernist leadership and isolating them without remorse, winning over the second type by defeating and isolating the first.

This means we should stop overemphasizing patience as a way to negate line struggle, and instead enter into line struggle with postmodernists enthusiastically, wherever it is. We should also do away with respectability politics that keep us from entering line struggle in this way. We should not uncritically inherit things that are popular on the left today, because in doing so we really just put the struggle against postmodernism off until later. We have learned through trial and error that this does not work.

In dealing with our past encounters with postmodernists, particularly the rape apologists, we would have been much better off using the direct and confrontational method. We were right in opposing them, and in the future we will be even better at confronting it head on.

Postmodernists allow equal status to all elements and therefore reject hierarchies and power. In this climate, politically bad leadership seeks to opportunistically “replace” actual Communist leadership as long as the replacement panders to identity politics, even trying to mix communism with postmodernism. Even in finding the right answers to patriarchy and national oppression we should not mix them with postmodernism. We should not oppose postmodernism shallowly but then cease the struggle against it, and we

¹⁷CltRSG: This refers to the PCR-RCP mentioned above [RedLibrary: Footnote 4].

¹⁸CltRSG: Red Guards Austin, *Condemned to Win!*, 2016. <https://redguardsaustin.wordpress.com/2016/07/05/condemned-to-win-position-paper-from-red-guards-austin-2016/>

¹⁹CltRSG: Also known by his internet handle BlackRedGuard, he was the leader of For The People St. Louis.

must not be centrists on the issue.

Attack postmodernism at its root!

Fight for political power for the proletariat!