

Statement on the Opportunist Former Leadership of the US Maoist Movement*

Revolutionary Study Group

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In spring of last year, Tribune of the People News and several adjacent organizations dissolved due to opportunist leadership. Recently, the online publication Communist International released a statement on the situation of the Maoists in the US. The following is a statement by the Revolutionary Study Group in light of the CI statement and recent developments in the movement. We are the largest and most active grouping to emerge from the old movement, consisting of a closely-knit national network of organizations in more than a dozen cities. We sincerely appreciate the encouragement the CI statement offers to make this long-overdue clarification.

It is true that the state of the US Maoist movement is complex. We are now generally disorganized, there is a significant amount of pessimism, and there are trends of liquidationism that have emerged. However, the CI statement is vague, and unfortunately a plausible interpretation is that it directly endorses these opportunists, who have committed crimes against members of the movement and refused all self-criticism, instead doubling down on their anti-people positions.

The liquidation comes as a result of the mass rejection by hundreds of comrades of an opportunist leadership of no more than ten people who were

*<https://struggle-sessions.com/2023/01/29/statement-on-the-opportunist-former-leadership-of-the-us-maoist-movement/>

responsible for egregious anti-people actions. A full evaluation and synthesis of the problems of opportunism and revisionism is a pressing task. This statement begins to address this problem, but is by no means exhaustive. The old leadership has committed both “left” and right opportunist errors. An analysis of the primary aspect of these errors and a precise characterization will be made with the completion of a more comprehensive evaluation. For the sake of brevity, we will label them as opportunists.

The Errors of Leadership

The main ideological error of the old leadership was a metaphysical, mechanical world view, most egregiously in their ideas about the masses and their own place among them. To be blunt, they were utterly convinced of their own intellectual and moral superiority. Their outlook is black-and-white thinking, which is antithetical to Maoism. They did not understand dialectics as a unity of opposites, and could not recognize the difference between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. They were unable to divide one into two when analyzing people, things, and events, resulting in profound subjectivism. Despite their lip service to women’s emancipation, their assessments of individuals’ competence and worth played out along sexist lines. Their organizational methods perverted democratic-centralism in order to create and maintain a bourgeois leadership based on personal loyalty. This resulted in the liquidation that we now have to contend with.

Ultimately, these political errors were carried out in organizational methods that can only be described as gangsterist and lumpen. They resorted to steep financial penalties, corporal punishment, sleep deprivation, regularly demeaning, intimidating, shouting, and cursing at comrades including in hours-long “struggle sessions” and “trials,” and isolation from friends and family. One of the most egregious examples of their callousness and self-serving was leaving a vocally loyal cadre in a position of leadership even after learning he had attempted sexual assault—and expelling him only after it came to light he later committed rape, empowered by the authority they chose to leave him with. As a result of the opportunists’ mistreatment and abuse, many comrades who were in various levels of organization in the movement are burnt out, pessimistic, and demoralized.

Misunderstanding antagonistic/non-antagonistic contradictions led to several political errors. They pegged cadre and mass activists as “revisionists”

and “bourgeois headquarters” for minor organizational infractions or for trying to struggle against political lines. With this, they would expel good militants and refuse to organize with some people, forcing many through abusive and endlessly prolonged “rectifications” designed to break opposition to the personalist rule. People who used to be in revisionist organizations for example were treated as committed enemies rather than as young activists in the process of learning. Likewise they discouraged reading ‘unapproved’ material such as documents from the New Communist Movement. This was a mindset of a metaphysical “contamination” by revisionism, rather than a correct approach to dividing one into two, distinguishing the good from the bad, and learning from mistakes.

They could not think creatively, and they tried to mechanically apply ideas from Brazil and Peru to conditions where they did not fit, or implemented these methods in form but not in essence. One example of this is with the ideological organ, Tribune of the People. Over time, quantitative measures such as number of newspapers sold were emphasized over mass work centered within the trenches of class struggle. This was a mechanical application which failed to grasp Lenin’s concept of a “scaffolding” which acts as a collective propagandist, agitator, and organizer.

They encouraged people to think of family and friends as “liberals” who were ideological opponents rather than masses who should be learned from and patiently won over. They had a sectarian approach to other Maoists and progressive organizations. Internally and externally, they sought to split rather than to unite. Overall, they saw enemies when they looked at friends. As a result, they treated friends as enemies. This led to anti-people actions such as financial and psychological abuse.

Overall, they greatly stifled two-line struggle. Even where they were not trying to crush dissent with abuse, the leadership prevented two-line struggle with their poor methods of communication and ideological development within the organizations. When they did ostensibly hold formal two-line struggle, they used it as an opportunity to ambush, embarrass, and brow-beat comrades rather than to patiently seek unity in the correct line while elaborating and enriching it. The leadership did not dedicate enough attention to politically developing cadre and activists. The study materials they did produce did not focus on synthesizing lessons as Chairman Gonzalo taught, but on superficial analysis. Contacts who reached out to the ideological organ were criticized coldly, as if they were already advanced cadre making serious mistakes.

The Causes of Disorganization

The leadership failed to operate with democratic-centralism, principally centralism. Centralism is in the first place the centralization of correct opinions. It relies on broad democratic foundations within the organization. The leadership did not solicit the ideas of the lower bodies or provide them sufficient time and material to hold genuinely informed deliberation on the direction and decisions of higher bodies. Instead, they made decisions in advance and only held discussions as a formality, while seeking out and punishing any significant dissent. They did not place trust in the masses, instead relying on the imagined intellectual supremacy of the main leaders. They disdained democracy because they viewed everyone else as inferior. This stifled the centralism of correct ideas. As a result, organizations stagnated, and there were very few avenues for directing criticism and ideas towards the leadership in ways that would receive proper attention.

Even facing such organizational failings, many comrades made several attempts to communicate criticisms through proper channels and to utilize internal organizational mechanisms. When contradictions sharpened last year, the leadership shut down avenues for struggle and did not respond when comrades reached out soliciting self-criticism and response to the criticisms raised. With this, we can see the leadership demonstrated a disregard for following proper internal channels. This rejection of democratic-centralism was a major cause of the disorganization. As to what unity and struggle are possible with the opportunists, we will address this below.

Liquidationism, disorganization, and pessimism are serious problems we have to address. Many good comrades are taking indefinite time away from activism. Others whom we consider friends are now seriously questioning international organs like Communist International and even Maoism itself, especially the essential questions of maintaining an organizational center and centralism itself. But we should be clear that these problems were fertilized in the manure of the old leadership's opportunism. Through political underdevelopment, unnecessary isolation of individuals and groups, a pattern of unprincipled expulsions and splits, and a tendency to rely on disbanding local chapters or entire organizations as a solution to internal problems, the former leadership fostered the conditions for liquidationism in the current movement. We know from publicly available information that the old leadership disbanded several mass organizations and chapters, that they expelled entire committees on unprincipled grounds, and that they limited avenues

for criticism and two-line struggle to a farcical degree.

The opportunist leadership denied people genuine Marxism in ideological or organizational terms. Any problem with liquidation, disorganization, and demoralization we contend with now is overwhelmingly an outgrowth of the opportunism which was in command prior to the events of Spring 2022. The opportunist leadership may not have explicitly called for the liquidation of the organizations in the movement, but through their actions and ideological deviations, they guaranteed it. The struggle against liquidationism then takes concrete form as the struggle against the opportunists who created the conditions for the current condition of disorganization and demoralization. It must also entail patient and compassionate struggle with many former comrades who have left the movement. We are confident many of these people will return to our ranks when they see the capability and advances of our movement proven in practice, and know that they will be shown a respect and comradely attitude never afforded to them by the opportunists.

The Struggle against Opportunism

Many of us still struggle with metaphysical/mechanical thinking. Dialectics can be very difficult to consistently apply. However, because these ideological errors and failure to grasp dialectics led to a long pattern of anti-people actions, these opportunists should be expelled from any organizations in the Maoist movement. Sectarianism, subjectivism, dogmatism, and idealism can often be rectified internally. However, because these errors manifested in anti-people actions, greater disciplinary action is necessary.

The opportunist leaders were cruel, callous, and vindictive. Our comrades are traumatized, demoralized, and physically ill due to their actions. They left us a movement scattered and disorganized. But moreover, they hurt our friends and comrades through their anti-people conduct. In the course of the revolutionary struggle, we must constantly combat bourgeois tendencies that emerge in our movement. More often than not, we can criticize and struggle with comrades. This is because, despite their errors which are secondary, they still have a genuine desire to serve the people, which is primary. The opportunist leadership did not proceed from this revolutionary commitment to the people, but rather from an anti-people individualism and self-aggrandizement.

We will comment briefly on what possibility there is for unity with the

old leadership: for the foreseeable future, the only unity possible with them is based on their complete withdrawal from political life, a sober and genuine commitment to self-criticism and accountability for their crimes, and quiet attempts at personal transformation. The transformation they would have to undergo to once again make themselves useful to the people as activists is profound. We believe we have reason to doubt they will achieve that on their own in the near future, as even now they have shown no remorse whatsoever, only more bile and threats. Our movement is far from having the capability likely needed to reform these individuals. What's more, we have far more to gain by directing our energy elsewhere, including consolidation of our current forces and rectification of any inherited errors. But because we are Marxists, though it may take great effort and very long time on their part, we will not rule out the possibility. As for anyone who may be currently supporting the old leadership who themselves have committed no abuses, they are encouraged to break with them as soon as possible and come forward with an honest self-criticism: they will receive a patient and even-handed assessment of what it will take for them to continue in the movement.

This position demonstrates a genuine adherence to the principle of striving for unity and not for splitting—a principle never held in high regard by the opportunists. It recognizes the fundamental law that one divides into two and that anyone can change, that even enemies can be transformed into friends with the correct line—a fundamental law never truly grasped by the opportunists.

At the same time, our movement needs to rectify the metaphysical thinking espoused by the opportunist leadership. This way of thinking still skews the approach taken by many activists. Many genuine comrades have used the same black-and-white thinking to assess the old leadership. We cannot combat opportunism with opportunism or metaphysics with metaphysics. Instead we should have a two-sided, dialectical approach. We need to divide the good from the bad. Claiming that all the various prior organizations and ideological organs in the Maoist movement to reconstitute the CPUSA were entirely ideologically bankrupt is harmful to efforts to reorganize the movement on a solid footing. Arguing that everyone involved in the dissolved organizations should never organize again is a mindset based in the same metaphysical thinking of the opportunist leadership. If we proceed from an assumption that any previous organizations were entirely failures, then we risk concealing the true nature of those failures behind platitudes about revisionism and blanket accusations unsubstantiated by a concrete analysis of

concrete conditions. We cannot understand Marxism unless we understand revisionism, and vice versa. Those who make sweeping claims about revisionism do not fully understand Marxism. But to the extent that they do not fully understand Marxism, the main reason is that the opportunist revisionist leadership taught them metaphysics.

To truly expose the errors and crimes of opportunism, we must measure the bad against the good. The opportunist leadership would not have been able to carry out the errors they did if they hadn't introduced Maoism as defined by Chairman Gonzalo, if they hadn't produced useful ideological interventions (on the question of the seizure of power for example), if they hadn't led a few struggles that won partial demands. Nothing is completely bad: the opportunist leadership did have some good aspects. They used these to cover for profound and surmounting errors.

This is why we need to understand the good in order to understand the bad. We must deepen our understanding of dialectical materialism and aim at political development at all levels of organization as a central task. We must unite and reorganize the movement through two-line struggle and rectification of previous errors.

It is politically untenable for any comrades to recognize and work with the opportunists. The US Maoist movement is making significant advancements in uniting, deepening our ideological-political development, and engaging in class struggle without them. Our commitment should not be to any particular individual but to the masses and the ideology of the proletariat. We urge the international Maoist movement to recognize this opportunist sect for what they are: isolated, unremorseful, and pathetic.

We conclude by commending the founding of the International Communist League. We greatly appreciate the concern and suggestions from the international communist movement about the revolutionary movement in the United States. We welcome criticism from comrades internationally, and encourage them to continue to investigate the questions addressed above. The reconstitution of the Communist Party of the USA is an important task and will serve the international proletariat in its struggle for power. The current bend in the road is temporary and victory is inevitable.

Combat chauvinism, metaphysics, subjectivism, and liquidationism!

Unite under Marxism-Leninism-Maoism!

Long live the International Communist League!