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Newspaper

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Dialectics: The Communist Philosophy of Struggle, I

Note: This is the first of three columns summarizing communist dialectics. It is based on an ICWP pamphlet available on the Internet at [http:// ICWPRedFlag.org](http://ICWPRedFlag.org)

By fighting for communism, the working class is making a huge change in society, a change we won't be able to make without understanding a lot about how change takes place. Dialectics is the philosophy of change and development, advanced by Marx and Engels and developed further in the Soviet and Chinese revolutions and by communists who have learned from them. It is our most important tool for understanding how the capitalist system works, what its fatal weaknesses are, and how to defeat it. This series of articles is an introduction to the basic ideas of dialectics, applied to some important topics, including economic crisis and inner-party struggle.

The Unity of Opposites: the Basis of Dialectics

The most important concept of dialectics is the *unity and struggle of opposites*. This means two things or processes which are connected, but which interfere with each other. This combination of unity and struggle is called a "dialectical contradiction."

For us, the most important dialectical contradiction is the unity and conflict between the working class and the capitalist class in capitalist society, but there are much simpler examples. A basketball game is a contradiction between two teams that are united in a single game, with each side playing defense and trying to hold the other back.

Contradictions occur everywhere in nature, like the forces of attraction and repulsion inside the nucleus of an atom. Capitalist competition is a network of contradictions between capitalists who try to outdo each other in the market. The rivalries of capitalists of different imperialist countries, who are competing for control of resources and labor for maximum profits, are in contradiction with each other. In the working class movement, there are contradictions between reformist and revolutionary politics. Inside the party, there are contradictions between different political ideas and strategies.

Contradictions Cause Change

Contradictions are important because they make things change. The internal back and forth struggle of the two sides of the contradiction causes change, and point that change in a particular direction. As long as capitalism lasts, the contradiction between workers and capitalists pushes capitalist society toward crisis and revolution. The contradiction between two basketball teams drives both teams to play harder. Contradictions inside the nucleus of an atom can make it break up into smaller atoms. Contradictions inside a party can cause a split.

Marx wrote that contradictions "create a form in which they can move themselves." They direct the motion that they cause so that the clash of the opposite sides is minimized. The contradictions in a thing can also prevent forward movement, like someone with a rock in his shoe, or a political movement with intense internal disagreements.

Contradictions are Resolved

Contradictions cause change, but they don't last forever. Eventually they get *resolved*, that is, they stop being contradictions. When the buzzer sounds in the basketball game, the game ends and the contradiction is resolved until the next game. Most contradictions don't end this way, however. There is no referee to call time on class struggle under capitalism. The contradictions of capitalism are only ended when communist revolution destroys capitalism. In the process of eliminating capitalism, however, new contradictions will arise. When contradictions are resolved, new ones are always created.

Contradictions Develop

A critical question of dialectics is how contradictions behave over time. Pro-capitalists or revisionists (fake Leftists) often claim that the two sides of a contradiction can "peacefully coexist" for a long time. Union big shots discourage strikes and accept positions on corporate boards, promoting the illusion that workers don't have to fight the capitalists, but can "share governance." As the current capitalist economic crisis deepens, celebrity politicians like Obama and Villaraigosa claim that "we are all in this together," and should accept "shared sacrifices."

Communists understand that the contradictions don't work this way. They tend to develop and *become more intense*, bringing the conflict out in the open and making the stakes higher. The "peaceful coexistence" idea is wrong because it emphasizes only the unity of the two sides of a contradiction, and ignores their struggle. Over the long haul, however, most contradictions tend to become more intense, and struggle becomes the more important aspect. This was Lenin's point in his famous statement that "The unity ... of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute."

Next Issue: Contradictions of the Capitalist Economy

Dialectics: The Communist Philosophy of Struggle, II

Note: This is the second of three columns summarizing communist dialectics. It is based on an ICWP pamphlet available on the internet at [http:// ICWPRedFlag.org](http://ICWPRedFlag.org)

In the last issue, we learned that a dialectical contradiction is a unity and struggle of opposites things or processes which are connected, but which interfere with each other and cause change. We found that contradictions tend to become more intense, that is, the two opposite sides interfere with each other more. When contradictions reach a peak of intensity, they are resolved, like the worker capitalist contradiction, which is resolved by communist revolution. In this issue, we discuss some basic contradictions in the capitalist economy.

The Falling Rate of Profit

One of the reasons identified by Marx that the contradictions of capitalism tend to become sharper is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This means that the rate of profit on each dollar invested tends to get smaller over time. Because of

competition, each capitalist must try to produce things more cheaply than the next one. Individual capitalists lower production costs by introducing more machinery into production, thereby reducing the number of workers. Other capitalists are then forced to automate in order to keep up. The result is a much larger amount of money sunk into technology.

More money spent on machinery means a lower rate of profit because of one key fact: Workers' labor is the source of all value. Profits are *only* made from workers labor, by capitalists making workers produce much more value than the workers get in wages. The value produced by the labor that capitalists don't pay for is called "surplus value," and it is the ultimate source of profit, interest, and rent.

There are several ways that capitalists can try to counteract the fall in the rate of profit, like reducing the wages of workers. Capitalists can do this directly, or they can move production to areas that already have lower wages, like the southern U. S, Mexico, or Asia. The U.S. automakers, for example, have been making cars and car parts in Mexico and Brazil for a long time. This not only means that they can hire workers for less in those countries, but the threat of moving jobs away helps the auto bosses keep U. S. workers' wages down. Inside the U. S., capitalists are also reducing wages by making greater use of racism, super-exploiting a section of the working class, for example, by increased use of immigrant labor in basic industries. This is particularly true of the companies that outsource production to lower wage, non-union shops. The result of all these changes has been a significant decline in wages and cutbacks in benefits since the 1970s.

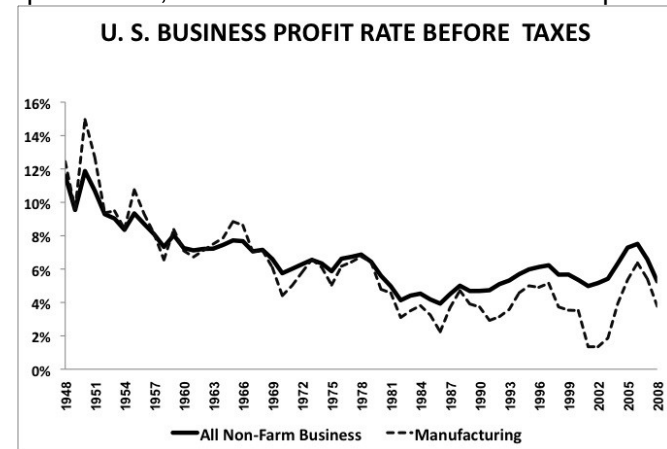
The intensifying contradiction between workers and capitalists can be seen in the current economic crisis. As capitalists try to cope with the weaknesses of their system, they are increasing their attacks on workers, laying them off, cutting back on their health care and education, foreclosing on their houses, and sending them off to wars like Iraq and Afghanistan for capitalists' profits and resources.

While we should join in and lead the resistance to cuts and layoffs that is now taking place against these attacks, reform movements will not prevent things from getting worse for workers and students. The weaker the U. S. capitalists get, the less room they have to make concessions to angry workers. The future of capitalism holds only more misery, war and further steps toward fascism until revolution destroys capitalism and resolves the worker-capitalist contradiction.

One Side of a Contradiction Is Dominant

In the conflict between the two sides of a contradiction, one side is almost always dominant. Situations where the two sides are "even" are rare and temporary. But the dominant side does not have to stay dominant. The side that is dominant needs to fight to stay on top. The other side fights to gain the upper hand.

Competition is a kind of contradiction, and capitalists in competition with each other have to do whatever it takes to keep up with their competitors. Even capitalists who are in a strong position for the moment know that they can lose. General Motors was riding high for decades, but has finally lost out to its competitors, especially to Toyota, and gone bankrupt.



Imperialist countries of the past, like Spain or Britain, who were dominant for a while, have ended up as minor powers. They lost out in the struggle and their imperial power was destroyed. Now the U. S. empire is facing increasing challenges from Russia, China and Europe. While it remains the dominant power, that situation will not last indefinitely.

These intensifying contradictions in the world tend to intensify the contradictions in pro-capitalist thinking, and this represents an opportunity for the growth of the communist movement. More people are questioning the system and are open to a communist analysis of it. The same is true of the Obama administration's major escalation of the war in Afghanistan, as the contradictions of the economy drive the U. S. capitalists to greater efforts to control the world's main sources of oil and gas. All aspect of U. S. capitalism are gearing up for war, including the military, industry, education, and even health care. This process will intensify the contradiction between capitalism and the international working class, moving toward resolving it with revolution.

Next issue: Dialectics and the fight against revisionism in the communist movement.

Dialectics and the Struggle Against Revisionism

Part One: The constant struggle against capitalist ideas

The idea of communism has existed in various forms for most of human history, but communism only became a science about 150 years ago. Marx and Engels, and later communist revolutionaries developed scientific communism, based on the experience of the working class struggle for communism. As they learned from revolutionary successes and failures, communists needed to revise their ideas. ICWP has learned, for example, that socialism and its wage system leads back to capitalism, not communism.

Inside the communist movement, however, there must be a constant struggle against capitalist ideas and practices that contradict communism. Intense capitalist propaganda for patriotism and reformism, as well as fear of defeat and of capitalist repression, influence people to give up on communism or look for an easy way to get there. This is the origin of *revisionism*, that is, capitalist ideas and practices that prevent the victory of communism.

Before World War I, revisionism turned the socialist parties in most countries into supporters of imperialist war. In the 1950s in Russia and the 1970s in China, the victory of revisionism turned socialism back into capitalism. Revisionist tendencies are always found in the communist movement, and fighting them is absolutely essential to move forward and to prevent past victories from being reversed.

One kind of revisionism says that direct struggle for communist revolution isn't necessary. It claims that reforms lead eventually to revolution, that some "lesser evil" capitalists are allies of the working class, that elections can advance the communist movement, or that imperialism does not have to lead to war.

An opposite revisionist view does not recognize the opportunity that the sharpening internal contradictions of 21st century capitalism give for revolution, claiming that revolution is impossible or that capitalism will be too strong to defeat for generations.

These opposite views have in common that they lead to compromising with capitalism, either because it can't be beaten or because it isn't that bad.

Although there were big struggles against revisionism by the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a mass movement against revisionism by millions of workers and students, and in the Progressive Labor Party in the past, revisionism eventually won in all these movements.

One of ICWP's most important tasks, as it builds up the communist movement, is to carry out the struggle against revisionism, both inside and outside the party.

Internal Contradictions are Primary

The importance of the struggle against revisionism is an example of a general principle of dialectics. This principle says that how something changes and what it becomes are due primarily to its internal contradictions

Although external conditions make a difference, it is mainly the contradictions inside a process or system that determines how it will change. The history of class society, for example, is the "history of class struggle," as the *Communist Manifesto* said. The conflict of the social groups inside society that have opposite relationships to production determines how society develops. This means that social change does not come about primarily by factors outside society, like climate or natural environment, although these things certainly make a difference. Instead, the effect that external factors have on society is mainly determined by factors internal to it.

The internal is also primary in determining the growth of the party. Internal factors such as its line, its composition, its leadership and its size mainly determine how it grows. Probably the most important thing to understand about internal contradictions for our work is that *our weaknesses hold us back more than external conditions*.

This means that we can only win by making a determined struggle to overcome internal weaknesses, including tendencies toward revisionism. But you can't struggle against weaknesses you don't know about or don't face up to, so the struggle against them requires being honest and self-critical with our comrades, our friends, and the masses we are trying to win.

Next issue of the Red Flag — The dialectics of inner-party struggle

Revisionism and the Dialectics of Inner-Party Struggle

As we learned in a previous column, a dialectical contradiction is a unity of opposites, two sides that are connected with each other but also interfere with each other. Over time, dialectical contradictions tend to "heat up" and become more intense. That is, the two sides come to interfere with each other more and more. Intensification eventually leads to resolution of the contradiction. As Marx put it, resolution happens when the two sides "fight to a decision," until one wins, for example, the working class overthrows the capitalists.

This general principle, that contradictions are only resolved by becoming more intense, applies to the internal

contradictions of the working class and of the party. Contradictions inside the party are normal and unavoidable as we struggle to learn from the experience of class struggle. As we intensify the contradictions between correct and incorrect ideas and actions to resolve our internal contradictions, we must fight for the most advanced line we can work out, not the line that most people readily agree with. Both inside the party and in the mass movement, we should fight for a “higher unity,” that is, agreement with critical communist ideas that are necessary to move forward, not just popular viewpoints.

In most circumstances the best attitude toward people who make mistakes is to try to “cure the disease to save the patient,” that is, to defeat wrong ideas but continue to unite with the people who have had them. In the struggle against revisionism, however, situations arise in which this outlook is not correct. In the last dialectics column we saw that revisionism, the capitalist ideas and practices inside the communist movement, not only prevents the victory of communism, but reverses gains already won. The struggle against revisionism is the struggle against the enemy's outlook inside the communist movement. People who are committed to this outlook cannot necessarily be won away from it, any more than bosses can be won over to communism. Such people have to be defeated, not merely their ideas.

People sometimes believe that comrades who have contributed to the communist movement at one time can't turn into revisionists. But this is perfectly possible, and the examples of people like Plekhanov and Mao Zedong prove it. Their transformation illustrates an important idea of dialectics, that in the certain circumstances, a thing can turn into its opposite.

We apply this principle when we try to turn an economic crisis or imperialist war into an advance for the communist movement. Likewise, someone who lacks confidence in the working class or fears defeat or repression can be transformed from a communist into a revisionist.

Dialectics also teaches us, as Lenin put it, that the *unity* of two opposites is “temporary and conditional,” but their *struggle* is absolute. Communism and revisionism are opposites. If one side is not defeated inside the party, the struggle of these opposites sharpens, and overcomes any previous unity. Sometimes the result is a split in the party.

A split in a communist party represents a significant setback, since it means that part of what was created by the struggles of many comrades is no longer advancing the movement for communism but is holding it back. However, splits can be a necessary part of the advance of the communist movement in the struggle against revisionism.

A split in the movement led to the formation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, originally called the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks). It was the Bolsheviks who led the great victory of the October Revolution in 1917. That victory would not have been possible if the Bolsheviks had remained united to the revisionist Mensheviks, who actually fought an armed struggle against the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917.

After the victory of revisionism in the Soviet Union in the 1950s, many new parties, including the Progressive Labor Party, were formed by splitting from revisionist-led, pro-Soviet parties. This is also the process by which ICWP was formed by splitting from PLP.

Our task in the ICWP is to turn the setback of the victory of revisionism in the PLP into its opposite, into a new step forward in the march toward communism. Dialectics tells us that the struggle does not move forward in a straight line, but advances by twists and turns. Join us and move forward with us in humanity's most important struggle, the fight for communism.

Note: ICWP is committed to make the study of dialectics a mass activity, not limited to a few “experts.” We invite you to send in examples of dialectics from your own experience or political work, as well as questions you would like to see

answered in *Red Flag*.

Revolutionary Dialectics: The 1960s Struggle in China

As we saw in earlier columns, a dialectical contradiction is a combination of opposite tendencies, processes or forces. Dialectical contradictions are important because they cause change, like the contradictions between the US and other imperialists that are leading to wider wars.

The biggest issue in the philosophy of dialectics is how contradictions get *resolved*, that is, stop being contradictions. Marx said that resolution happens when the two sides "fight to a decision," and one defeats the other, like the working class overthrowing the capitalists. Revisionists have a different line on resolution. They say that contradictions can be resolved by merging the two contradictory sides or even that the two sides can peacefully exist indefinitely without resolution.

Part of the struggle against revisionism in China in the 1960s was a big debate about this issue that involved many thousands of people. Mao Zedong, then the leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC), proposed the slogan "one divides into two" to express the idea that contradictions are everywhere and what appears unified has opposite aspects.

Yang Xianzhen, head of the CPC's philosophy school, defended the slogan "two combine into one." This meant that the two sides of a contradiction don't have to fight until one wins, but could merge into a so-called "synthesis." Many US union leaders have this approach. They claim that workers can have a kind of synthesis with the bosses "for the common good."

Yang described Chinese society as having a "synthesized economic base," which combined capitalist and communist social relations. He said the capitalist side didn't need to be smashed, but would disappear gradually and peacefully. The actual result, however, was that capitalism won in China.

Yang's defenders claimed that "two combine into one" was a law of dialectics. To support this idea, they gave various examples of things that actually do combine, such as atoms that combine into molecules. They left out the fact that many atoms cannot combine and others do so only after a complex struggle.

In August, 1964, Mao got into the debate. Instead of rejecting synthesis outright, he said that what synthesis really means is the stronger side "eating up" the weaker one. When the Chinese revolution overthrew the capitalists, he said,

"The synthesis took place like this: their armies came, and we devoured them, we ate them bite by bite. It was not a case of two combining into one as expounded by Yang Xianzhen, it was not the synthesis of two peacefully coexisting opposites. They didn't want to coexist peacefully, they wanted to devour you." [1]

Here are a few of the other important points made in the debate:

I. Opposite sides of things or processes are usually formed by dividing up, and not by combining two already existing things. Capitalism, for example, did not come about by sticking workers and capitalists together. Instead, the class differences between workers and bosses emerged and became more sharply defined, a process driven by the internal contradictions of capitalism.

II. *When opposites do combine, their conflict continues and can intensify.* European capitalists have fought a long struggle to create the EU but big cracks are now showing in it, with big financial crises in Greece, Spain, Ireland and Hungary.

III. *When you create unity, you must actually resolve the contradictions that stand in the way.* Unity of the international working class can't be achieved by ignoring differences or making unprincipled compromises. Instead the Party must lead a massive ideological struggle for unity around the most advanced line that can be figured out.

In contemporary China, the philosophical gains of the 1960s have been reversed. Philosophy textbooks now claim that the sides of a contradiction can merge together, or that they can co-exist without destroying each other. One text predicts that "although there is significant competition among the economies of different countries, the present economic process of globalization should jointly develop on the basis of equality, in a mutually beneficial way." [2] In other words, China can create an empire without challenging other empires--a myth that serves the interests of China's new bosses.

Rejecting this nonsense, our communist movement can learn from and spread widely the true dialectics that China's past revolutionaries helped develop and fought for.

[1] S. Schram, *Mao Tse-Tung Unrehearsed*, London, 1974, pp. 224.

[2] *Marxist Philosophy*, edited by Zhu Guoding,

Socialist vs. Communist Dialectics

In his study of dialectics, V. I. Lenin, leader of the Russian communist movement until he died in 1924, came to the profound conclusion that unity is not the main aspect of a contradiction:

"The unity ... of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute."

This means that the struggle inside a contradiction does not tend to die out, but eventually becomes more intense. Beginning about 1930, the Russian communists developed a different view of dialectics. They started to use the term "non-antagonistic contradiction" and its political counterpart, the concept of a "non-antagonistic class relationship." Basically this amounted to a seriously wrong idea about socialism, that despite the fact that socialism had a wage system, inequality, classes and class conflict, its internal contradictions tended to die out rather than become more intense. This theory undermined the struggle for communism in the USSR and China by claiming the inequalities and conflicts of socialism aren't destructive, don't need to be struggled against, but would die out by themselves.

Russian communist philosophers made a number of attempts to define what an antagonistic contradiction was supposed to be. Proposed definitions claimed that antagonistic contradictions were resolved by becoming more intense, or by violence, or by

the two sides becoming independent of each other. Non-antagonistic contradictions were claimed to be capable of being resolved gradually, without using violence or becoming more intense.

Leaders of the communist movement in China borrowed the concept of non-antagonistic contradiction and added to it the concepts of “contradictions among the people” that were said to be non-antagonistic. The convenience of this terminology was that “the people” could be shifted whenever the Chinese communist leaders wanted to make an opportunistic alliance. “The people” then became whoever agreed to cooperate with the communist movement, including capitalists and landlords.

Scientific study of the various theories that have been put forward about how contradictions are to be resolved, including the analysis of the evidence available from a variety of sources, including the practice of class struggle, war, and natural science, etc., lead to the following conclusion: *Contradictions are only resolved or moved toward resolution by intensifying the struggle of their opposite sides, by increasing their negative relationship to each other.*

Thus the main political task the working class has is to intensify the contradiction between itself and the capitalist class, in order to move that contradiction toward resolution by revolution. On its side, the capitalist class is also intensifying the worker capitalist contradiction by increasing police terror, lowering wages, wiping out civil liberties, spreading fascist ideology and racist propaganda, and promoting patriotism and loyalty to the “homeland.” This intensifying contradiction can only be resolved by revolution, but revolution or violence is not always involved in making social contradictions more intense.

The way a contradiction is made more intense depends on the particular things or processes within it. Resolution by violence does not describe some special type of contradiction, but only one particular way in which a contradiction can become more intense. Resolving a contradiction within an individual person or inside the party also happens by making it more intense, but the means for doing this are discussion, criticism and practical changes in behavior rather than violence. Contradictions within people and collectives are not resolved by waiting for them to die out or “managing” them. Unresolved contradictions continue to act and cause change whether they are ignored or not. Frank and honest discussion in which contradictory viewpoints, practices, and tendencies, confront each other intensifies these contradictions, but just for that reason, it moves them toward resolution.

Hoping that conflicts will go away by themselves, or making a pact that “I won’t criticize you if you don’t criticize me,” does not resolve contradictions among friends and comrades, any more than it resolves the contradictions of capitalism. True, communist dialectics recognizes that contradictions don’t die out, but are resolved by struggle and intensification.

Dialectical Materialist Philosophy: Quality and Quantity

Dialectical contradiction is the central concept of dialectical philosophy. Contradictions cause change, become more intense and are eventually resolved and replaced by new contradictions. Dialectics also has other laws that help explain what happens in processes that are driven forward by contradictions.

Two important concepts for describing things and processes are **quantity** and **quality**. A **quantity** is a property that can be

measured in numbers, like temperature, age, hourly wage, rate of profit, number of **Red Flags** sold, etc. One feature of quantities is that when they change, they usually go through intermediate stages. If the temperature falls from 90° at noon to 50° at midnight, it goes through the temperatures between 90° and 50°. A large change of quantity doesn't usually happen in an instant, even if it happens fast.

A **quality** is a property that cannot be measured in numbers. Qualities include being square, beautiful, green, unemployed, at war, etc. Change of quality can often happen quickly, without going through intermediate stages. When you heat water, its temperature (a quantity) gradually increases. At a certain temperature bubbles suddenly appear and boiling starts. The change from not-boiling to boiling is a qualitative change in the water.

It is a law of dialectics that change of quantity (an increase or a decrease) eventually leads to a qualitative change if it goes far enough. If you add enough heat to ice, intensifying its internal contradictions, liquid water will result: a change of quality from solid to liquid. If you continue adding heat, the liquid water will eventually turn into steam, a second qualitative change.

Each quality has quantitative limits, and when it goes beyond them, the quality changes into another quality. Although people live to different ages, increasing age eventually leads to death, a qualitative change from life. Life eventually reaches a limit, and death results. While humans are alive, the quality of being healthy has quantitative limits. Consistently overeating makes a person fat and can eventually lead to death; consistently eating too little results in malnutrition and eventually death.

Many scientists recently combined their data on Alzheimer's patients into one huge database. This made it possible to find biological markers for the disease that no research group could have found alone. When the number of Party members increases enough, some old forms of organization and leadership will not work any longer, and new ones must be developed.

When one quality of a thing or process changes into an opposite quality, some other qualities change along with it and some do not. Qualitative change preserves some qualities and changes others. Water that boils is still water. A worker who gets laid off is still a member of the working class, despite the change of quality from employed to unemployed.

The development of the contradictions inside the capitalist system produces qualitative change, as some aspects of the system change from minor features to major ones, and vice-versa. As intensifying rivalry among capitalist empires--the US, Russia, China, Europe, etc.--produces larger wars, the US capitalists need to make a qualitative change into fascism within the US itself, lowering the living standard of US workers, increasing repression, and calling this "patriotic" and "sacrifice for the common good."

The idea that quantity eventually changes into quality helps us understand how the communist movement grows. Consistent political work, especially distributing the Party press and recruiting members in key sectors like industry and the military, eventually changes the quality of the movement from merely opposing the capitalist class to defeating it and taking state power.

Before the revolution, however, our movement will go through many qualitative changes. If a shop goes from one or two **Red Flag** readers to, say, 10% readers, it will mean a qualitative change in the political understanding of the workers in that shop. It would probably mean the party becoming the actual leader of the workers in that shop, another qualitative change. When this happens in enough shops, schools and military units, the result will be a qualitatively new stage at which mass recruitment to the party is possible, and communist revolution is closer.

Revolutionary Dialectics: The Negation of the Negation

In the last issue of **Red Flag**, we discussed the differences between change in the *quantity* of something, like your age or your weight, and a change in *quality*, like the change from health to sickness or life to death. In this column, we will look a little deeper into qualitative change, and discuss what happens as qualitative changes follow one another.

A qualitative change can only happen when some aspect of a thing or a process has been replaced by an opposite characteristic, like the solidity of ice being replaced by the fluidity of liquid water when ice melts. This transition from one quality to an opposite quality is called a *dialectical negation*.

This use of the word 'negation' does not mean that the transition it describes is something negative or bad. If you have been out of work and find a new job, the transition you make is the negation of your unemployment, which isn't a bad thing.

A dialectical negation is never a complete change in all aspects. Some of a thing's qualities change into their opposites while others are preserved. A healthy person who gets the flu undergoes a negation from health to sickness, but that person's brain, heart, legs, etc., will usually continue to work.

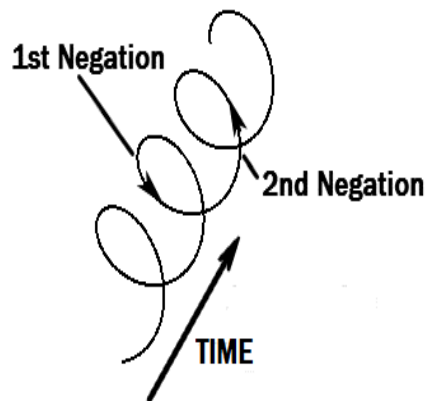
The contradictions inside things drive them to change. Sometimes this change is just change in quantity, but if quantitative change continues far enough, it produces qualitative change, that is, dialectical negation. Another way to put this point is that qualities have quantitative *limits*. If the rivalry of competing capitalist countries becomes intense enough, they make the transition from peace to war, or from small wars to big ones.

Dialectical negation does not happen all the time, but it does happen eventually. As long as a process lasts, the contradictions in it will drive it to the next negation. History keeps going, one dialectical negation after another. This is part the dialectical law called the *Negation of the Negation*.

A dialectical negation is never completely reversed. If you have an accident and break your arm, that is a dialectical negation. If your arm heals, that is a second negation. Your arm may seem as good as new, but in fact the structure of your broken bone has permanently changed, even if what is new is too small to notice. In other dialectical negations, the difference is a big one. If a seed grows into a plant (a negation) and the plant produces a new seed with altered genes (a second negation), the new seed may produce a plant with quite different characteristics (a mutation). This is an essential part of evolution by natural selection. Marx described the history of capitalism as capitalists grabbing the land and labor of workers and small farmers (a negation), and communist revolution as grabbing the means of production from the capitalists (a second negation). This second negation does not take us back to pre-capitalist days, but is a huge step forward.

One way to describe how negations follow negations is by comparing a process to a spiral. Each negation is a half twist around the spiral. If you start at the top, two half twists bring you back to the top, but farther along the spiral. So history is not circular. Situations that

are similar to the past can happen, but always somewhat different from what happened before. This is the second part of the law of the Negation of the Negation.



Sometimes people describe the result of the second negation as a partial repetition of the original situation on a “higher level.” The result is higher, but *only* in the sense that the process is farther along in its development.

“Higher” does not mean *better*. The process of the death of an empire, for example, goes through many dialectical negations that make it worse and worse. As we build up the communist movement, however, we need to use the Law of the Negation of the Negation to understand the course of the struggle for communism. This will be the topic of our next column.

Revisionism and the Negation of the Negation

In previous columns, we have seen that processes develop through a series of qualitative changes called “dialectical negations.” These transitions are called negations because they involve the end of one quality and its replacement by an opposite quality. This happens, for example, when a child becomes an adult, or a tire goes flat. These transitions negate the childhood of a person or the inflation of a tire.

Dialectical negations follow each other, one after the other, as long as a process lasts. If a negation happens and a second one follows, the result can be similar to the starting situation, but it will never be exactly the same. If you melt an ice cube and refreeze it, or drop a bowl of Jello and pick it up again, it won’t turn out the same. This principle is called the “Law of the Negation of the Negation.” It says that there are no complete reversals or circles in the history of a process, but there can be partial reversals. You might get the Jello back in the bowl, but it won’t look like it did at the beginning.

The negation of the negation principle applies to processes of all kinds, but it is particularly important in the process of fighting for communism. A crucial part of building up the movement to wipe out capitalism is the struggle against revisionism, capitalist ideas and practices inside the movement itself. Revisionism constantly recurs because of intense capitalist propaganda for patriotism and reformism, as well as fear of defeat and of capitalist repression.

Fighting revisionism is crucial because it can reverse previous gains in the fight for communism. Before World War I, revisionism turned the socialist parties in most countries into supporters of imperialist war. In the 1950s in Russia and the 1970s in China, the victory of revisionism turned the dictatorship of the working class back into the dictatorship of the capitalist class.

In Russia and in China, the working class negated capitalist rule by revolution. Later, the victory of revisionism negated workers’ power by turning the communists in power into a “Red Bourgeoisie,” but with significant differences from before the revolution. Those countries now have new capitalist classes that rely on a lot of economic development and education that was the result of the socialist period, and a huge working class to exploit.

The working class of all countries also got something new from this negation, however. The experience of the unsuccessful anti-revisionist struggle in Russia and China has become the basis of a more advanced line in the battle against revisionism and capitalism.

That experience made it possible to understand that socialism, by keeping the wage system and the market, where exchange value dominated over use value, were huge concessions to capitalism that guaranteed revisionism’s triumph. The idea that the working class must refuse socialism’s fatal compromises and fight directly for communism was developed in the 1980s in Progressive Labor Party. This vital step forward negated the mistaken socialist line of the old communist movement. Unfortunately

revisionism eventually won out in PLP, turning it into a reformist movement and negating its major advance. Now we have to negate this revisionist victory by building the ICWP and developing anti-revisionist communist work much further.

To do this, we have to analyze the successes and failures of the past and figure out how to move the workers' movement forward, including the fight against revisionism. ICWP has already made important steps in this process. As **Red Flag** shows, ICWP makes communist revolution primary in its work in schools, trade unions, and the military. We have also developed "communist centralism" further inside the Party, so that all members understand disputed issues and the whole Party is involved in the struggle to develop the line and fight revisionism in theory and practice. The communist philosophy of dialectics, including the law of the negation of the negation, gives us a powerful tool for understanding this process. Despite partial and temporary reverses, the weaknesses of capitalism and the strengths of the working class will allow us to win the final victory.

The Communist Philosophy Of Knowledge: Part I

Where does knowledge come from? Capitalist ideology provides many wrong answers to this question: that knowledge comes from academic authorities, from geniuses, from God, sacred books, religious leaders, etc.

Marx's answer to this question is the basis of communist philosophy of knowledge. He wrote that whether human thinking is true or not is a practical question: "Man must prove the truth—that is, the reality and power ... of his thinking in practice." The truth of any thinking that is not connected with practice can't actually be figured out—and wouldn't matter anyway!

To understand where knowledge comes from, then, means understanding human practical activity. We must also understand how practice can provide knowledge that is useful to people in various ways, including the most important task for the working class, making communist revolution.

Practice is different from merely observing something, since it always involves the activity of *changing things*, as well as being changed yourself by your activity. Practice starts with making a living, raising kids, and paying the bills. This practice is only possible because of the practical activity of producing the things every one needs to live: food, clothes, housing, etc. The practice of production includes things that workers usually don't get paid for like producing and raising children.

Since they are directly involved in production, workers usually know much more about the production process than their bosses do. The knowledge they get from production helps them produce more effectively. Knowledge doesn't just derive from practice— it *directs* practice.

Under capitalism the practice of production always involves another kind of practice: class struggle. What jobs there are, what the pay and hours are, who pays what taxes and how are those taxes used, which class runs the government—these are all subjects of class struggle. So are the practical struggles about who gets shot by the cops, or goes to prison, fights in wars, or starves to death. Finally, there is the practical battle the working class must fight to overthrow capitalism and establish communism. Being involved in all these conflicts is part of practice, but the practice of past revolutions and of current organizing for revolution is the kind that is most critical for the success of communist revolution.

There are several other kinds of practice that are important for knowledge. Under capitalism, capitalists fight wars for profits and the labor, and raw materials (like oil) that capitalists need to make profits and keep their rivals from making them. The practice of

these battles between the capitalists of different countries is a very important source of knowledge. Along with the death and suffering they cause, wars have been a source of new scientific discoveries and technological improvements. The practice of fighting wars also provides a vital kind of knowledge for communist revolution. To overthrow the bosses and defend workers' victory requires practical experience in fighting, and soldiers and vets are a key resource in developing the workers' army.

Besides production, class struggle, and war, scientific experimentation is essential for some kinds of knowledge. Experimentation is a form of labor in which obtaining information is the main goal. Experimentation often involves the skills and tools similar to manual labor—scientists need to “get their hands dirty.”

There are other kinds of practice that not part of production, social conflict, or science, but are important parts of human life. These include activities like dating, playing sports, drawing a picture, playing a musical instrument, etc.

Not every kind of practice leads to knowledge. Practicing a religion or reformist politics provides very little basis for knowledge. These also have a corrupting influence on people that makes it more difficult for them to honestly evaluate evidence and find the truth. Practice based on the wrong political line may only provide the knowledge that the line is wrong.

Practical knowledge is as vital for revolution as it is for other things workers need to do, but knowledge also goes beyond practice to theory. In the next column, we will discuss why revolutionary theory is necessary for the victory of communism, and how theory is tested and corrected by practice.

The Communist Philosophy Of Knowledge: Part II

“Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” – V. I. Lenin

The previous column discussed the most important idea of the communist view of knowledge, that knowledge derives from practice and provides a guide to practice. Practice includes many activities: work, raising your family, class struggle, war, scientific experiments, etc. This column is about two different kinds of knowledge: generalizations, and theories. Generalizations collect specific cases together and combine them into single statements: “Women usually get paid less than men,” “Inspecting a bus is an easier job than fixing its brakes.” “More **Red Flags** are sold at factory A than factory B.” “There are no construction jobs in this city.” “Most revolutions take place during or after a major war,” etc.

Knowing generalizations is essential to plan and carry out all kinds of practical actions, including political organizing. But for many kinds of practice, from building a T.V. set to communist revolution, another kind of knowledge is necessary: theoretical knowledge. Knowledge of theories makes it possible to understand what lies behind events and makes them happen. For example, the statement “A capitalist economy goes into recession or depression roughly every eight years” is a true generalization, but it doesn't explain what causes these economic crises to happen or whether they must happen. Only theoretical knowledge allows us to do this.

Theories differ from generalizations in two ways. Every theory must have its own categories, the things and quantities that the theory uses to explain events. The categories of economics include price, value, labor, profit, wages, surplus value, etc. Categories of physics include force, energy, mass, atom, electron, etc. Categories of political theory include communism, socialism, capitalism, revolution, opportunism, revisionism, agitation, reform struggle, etc.

Some categories describe things that are easy to see or measure, like price in economics or weight in physics, but often categories describe things that are not obvious. Categories can describe aspects of reality that lie below the surface. Things like viruses, surplus value, atoms, or revisionism can't usually be seen, but they can be detected indirectly or figured out. The second way that generalizations differ from theories is that theories have laws and principles that describe the connections between categories. For example, it is a law of physics that the rate at which an object speeds up is proportional to the force applied to it. It is a law of economics that the average price of something is proportional to the amount of human labor necessary to make it. It is a biological law that you can't get tuberculosis without being exposed to a certain kind of bacteria.

Bangladesh, 2005--Garment workers on strike



Laws like these have to be tested and confirmed in practice, but they can't always be formed the way that generalizations are, by summing up particular cases. Often the particular cases of theoretical categories can't be seen at all. Even when they can be seen, individual cases only tell us what has happened, not what can happen.

To prove that a theory is true, it is necessary to compare it to alternative ideas, test it in practice, and accept it only if it gives the best explanation of the facts. For example, capitalist economic theories claim that crises are not inevitable under capitalism, but can be prevented by government regulation. The communist explanation is that economic crises result from the rivalry between capitalists, which means they can't carry out a common plan to control their own markets. This means that crises must happen and can never be ended under capitalism.

Economic theories are certainly not the only ones we need in the fight for communism. We must extend and improve our political theories about the fight against revisionism and the mobilization of the working class to create and maintain communism. We must not only understand how to create theoretical knowledge and apply it in practice, we also need to learn how to modify theories that practice shows to be wrong. This "dialectic of theory and practice" will be the topic of our next column.

The Communist Philosophy Of Knowledge, Part III

"Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action," —V. I. Lenin, 1917

In the last column we discussed the difference between generalizations from experience and theories. Generalizations like “most union leaders side with the bosses” are important knowledge, but can’t explain why things happen and don’t show what is possible and what isn’t. Only theories and the laws they contain can do this. For example, the law of the falling rate of profit explains how capitalist crises happen and shows that they must happen.

Discovering true theories is not an easy process. It requires knowledge of facts and generalizations, but goes beyond them. People have to think up laws and explanations, compare them with other theories, and test them in practice. This is always a collective process, but some individuals, like Marx or Einstein, can play a leading role. Theories grow out of practice, but that is not enough to show which ones are correct. Only testing a theory in practice can show whether a theory that sounds pretty good is actually true.

About a hundred years ago, most physicists believed a theory that said that empty space isn’t possible, but must be filled with invisible stuff called “ether,” for light to travel through. Scientific experiments were made to try to measure the motion of the Earth through the ether, but didn’t find any. Some scientists tried to argue that the ether was really there but could not be detected because it was dragged along by the Earth. This idea and some other attempts to “save” ether theory were finally rejected because they led to other results that did not work out in practice.

Similarly in the political theory of communism, leaders of the old communist movement thought that the working class could only get to communism by going through a stage of socialism. This theory turned out to be wrong. Socialism proved to be a form of capitalism, with capitalism’s wage system and government hierarchy, and can never lead to communism.

Coming to this conclusion was not simple. The history of Russia, China, and other countries showed that the generalization “Socialism doesn’t lead to communism” is true. Explaining why it is true requires a correct theory of socialism. Like the scientists who kept defending ether theory, some people still claim that socialism could work if it were “done right.” The reason that this idea is wrong is that socialism’s wage system gradually generates a new capitalist class that matches socialism’s capitalist relations on the job and in the party and government. People with privileges fight to keep them or are replaced by those who will. Even the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, a huge mass movement of workers, peasants and students, could not kick the new capitalists out of power in China, where they remain to this day.

People who believed that socialism was necessary thought that workers were not “ready” for communism, and had to go through something else first. Reformism makes a similar mistake, assuming that workers cannot be won to fight directly for communism. Actual practice shows that these theories are wrong and lead to defeat. Both in natural science and in politics, if the theory that guides you is not at least close to the truth, it will fail in practice. In the fight for communism, some failures due to wrong theories are just temporary setbacks, but reformism and socialism are fatal mistakes that are being paid for in workers’ suffering and blood.

The rejection of socialism is a big step forward in communist theory and practice, but we still need a much better understanding of how to win communism and keep it. One key idea is the mass communist party, rather than a small party of leaders. The main job of ICWP is to build a mass communist party in the factories, schools, and the military.

The mass party is only part of the story, however. To win communism, defeat revisionism, and actually run communist society, we need the approach of “mobilizing the masses of workers for communism.” ICWP is putting this idea into practice, so we can build up the communist movement now and improve the theory of mass mobilization to do this better. Our next column will discuss the how we

are beginning to do this.

Developing And Testing A New Communist Theory Communist Theory Of Knowledge: Part IV

In our last column we discussed the failure of the theory that socialism leads to communism. We not only noted that socialism has never actually done that, but explained why: Socialism is a form of capitalism. Its wage system and its government and party hierarchies are capitalist institutions and they inevitably produce a new capitalist class, as happened in China and the USSR.

We also outlined ICWP's theory of how to fight for communism and organize communist society, mass mobilization for communism.

Mass mobilization for communism was put into practice in limited ways inside the old communist movement. In the late 1920s, Soviet workers in many industries organized "communes" to pool their wages. They were made to stop this after a few years, since it undermined socialism's wage system.

As the Chinese communists fought for power, they lived on a "supply system," where everyone got a similar allowance for food and clothes. This system was abolished under socialism, but looking back later Mao Zedong commented, "...the collective lived an egalitarian life. In work everyone was industrious and in warfare all were courageous. There was absolutely no reliance on material incentives, but rather a reliance on the drumbeat of revolutionary spirit." Further mass mobilizations for communism took place in China in the People's Commune movement of the 1950s and during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

Mass mobilization for communism doesn't just mean having a mass communist party. It means putting the fight for communism in the hands of workers and their allies, and relying on their initiative and creativity to strengthen the fight. Concretely it means encouraging those who are short on experience as organizers or who don't yet know the ins and outs of communist theory to join ICWP if they agree that the working class needs communism. When millions do the best they can, we can win.

Mass mobilization for communism means making it possible for people who respect ICWP but aren't sure about communism to work with us to distribute **Red Flag** and make it their paper. Our commitment is not to offer the working class anything short of communism, like reformism or socialism. But we also struggle to create close relations—communist relations—with those who don't agree with us fully, and ask them to do more.

An article in the last **Red Flag** (Jan. 19) from an industrial workplace gives examples of this approach. One black worker took several **Red Flags** and gave the Spanish part to a latino worker. An asian worker heard that there had been a **Red Flag** article about a labor issue in the plant, and asked another worker for a copy. That worker got a copy and brought it in the next day. One worker who wanted to discuss communism asked why the get-together had to be done so cautiously. Another worker figured out why we have to keep our **Red Flag** network secret from the bosses when someone asked who had written an article about their workplace.

These examples are modest but they show the idea of mass mobilization for communism, relying on workers' initiative to push the movement forward.

Some workers at the same plant have been asked to write articles or letters for **Red Flag**. This is another important example of mass mobilization for communism. It's your paper—let others know what your experiences have been or what you think about communism.

The positive experiences mentioned here are important in two ways. They help show that the mass mobilization for communism can work in practice, and they provide information about how to expand and correct ICWP's understanding about how to apply this approach.

This is a key point of the communist philosophy of knowledge. All knowledge comes from practice and the theories derived from practice guide further practical work. Practice shows the strengths and shortcomings of a theory and allows it to be improved. This is the dialectic of theory and practice, the philosophy which has proved itself in the practice of over 100 years of working class struggle for communism, and is still the way we learn how to win.

Communist Materialism: Thinking And Reality

In previous columns we have outlined some of the main ideas of dialectics. (These columns can be found on the ICWP website: <http://icwpredflag.org>) But the communist philosophy is not only dialectical, it is materialistic. This column begins a series which will discuss materialism.

To avoid confusion, it is useful to remember that the word "materialism" gets used in more than one way. Some people describe a person who is greedy and selfish as "materialistic," since his aim in life is to have more material goods. This is not what materialism means in philosophy.

Probably the most basic topic in philosophy is the relation between thinking and reality. The two most basic views about this question are called materialism and idealism. Materialism says that every thing that exists is something material or a property of something material. Material things include atoms, living cells, plants and animals, human beings, human societies and economic systems, galaxies, and the whole universe.

Most of these material things have properties like weight, color, and size, but things that are more complex have more complex properties. Plants can produce sugar, and animals can produce offspring. Human beings can work, talk and think, and struggle toward goals they choose. Economic systems can produce wealth and poverty. All of these are material properties.

Materialism says that thought can only occur in a brain. A brain is a certain kind of material object that is subject to specific laws of nature. Although some thinking goes on in animal brains, the only brains that can think at the highest level are human brains. Some kinds of idealism say otherwise, and claim that there are non-material, supernatural beings that can think, like gods or ghosts. This kind of idealism does not see humans as the makers of human history, but as ruled by supernatural forces that humans can hope to influence through prayer and religious observances. All scientific evidence contradicts this, but idealism is not a scientific point of view.

Materialism says that all thoughts take place in brains. But brains don't think very well all by themselves. Thinking requires interacting with the world through practical activity and with other people through social relationships. When people learn a common language, they learn many concepts, which are building blocks for their own thinking.

Materialism says that what people think depends on the world around them, which they perceive, think about, work on, and learn from. But most of that world does not depend on what anyone thinks about it. The facts that the sky is blue and that capitalists

exploit workers do not depend on individual or collective belief that this is so. Thinking does not create reality and most of reality is not directly affected by thought. Human thinking can affect reality only indirectly, as part of the goals and plans that are parts of all human labor, including their political struggles.

Idealists sometimes say that thought is a special kind of stuff, completely different from matter and not depending on material reality. They say that certain kinds of thought, which express ideals or moral values, are non-material aspects of the universe that can affect society through their supposed “spiritual power.” Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, who opposed militant struggle against racism, claimed there was a “soul force” that could overcome physical force. Materialists deny this. Racism exists because it serves the material interests of capitalists, and it can only be eliminated by eliminating the capitalist class and establishing communism.

This does not mean that fighting racist ideas is not important. Struggle against all kinds of wrong ideas and lies is a crucial part of fighting for communism. As Marx wrote, “material force must be overthrown by material force, but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.” Thought is a material property of material systems, that is, brains. Ideals are goals that humans choose, and values are created by human brains to express the interests of some social class or group. Once the working class decides to fight for communism and learns how to do it, the force of millions of people can defeat capitalism and keep it from coming back

Materialism and Knowledge

What Materialism Is

Materialism says that ideas, thinking, and ideals are parts of material reality that are created by human beings in processes that take place in their brains. Materialists say that ideas result from peoples’ interaction with each other and with other material things in nature and society. Although thinking influences reality when it directs human activity, material reality has a much bigger effect on thinking than thinking has on the rest of reality. This is the central idea of materialism.

What Idealism Is

Idealism means opposing materialism in various ways. Some idealists say that there are nonmaterial beings, like gods or ghosts, that can think. Other idealists claim that some kinds of thinking affect reality directly, so that thinking about the world differently or believing different theories about it makes the world different. Still other idealists see brains as producing correct ideas all by themselves, without extensive interaction with the rest of the world.

In this column and the next one, we will discuss some of the specific ways that material reality affects thinking more than the other way around. We will discuss the materialist philosophy of how people discover true ideas and learn, why false ideology is dominant under capitalism, and the relation between communist political ideas and the contradictions of capitalist society. In this column we discuss the materialist philosophy of how people learn.

Materialist Theory of Knowledge

Perhaps the most basic way in which thinking depends on material reality is this: Thoughts have not always existed, but only became possible when animals with brains evolved, which happened a very long time after the beginning of the universe. Thinking has only been raised to a higher level through biological evolution of modern humans and their production of their own historical development. But thinking still depends on material reality every day, in discovering knowledge and in learning.

As we discussed in previous columns, all knowledge derives from practical activity. As Fredrick Engels put it, “the most essential and immediate basis of human thought” isn’t nature itself but “the alteration of nature by people.” This is the materialist view of knowledge. People’s ideas derive from what we do as we interact with the part of reality that those ideas are about. People are not just born with correct ideas about the world and correct these ideas don’t grow in brains by themselves.

Idealist Theories of Knowledge

Idealists deny this. Some idealists claim that important knowledge is built into human brains, like linguist Noam Chomsky’s theory of “innate ideas.” Others claim that knowledge about the world depends very little on practice, but is deduced by a few “geniuses” with special brains. This idealist view doesn’t even work for the most theoretical kinds of knowledge. Most new laws of physics, for example, are discovered by experiments and could not be deduced from previously known principles.

How People Learn

Learning things that are already known by other people also shows the materialist approach is correct. No one would think you can learn to fix cars, play sports, or be a political organizer without practice in that specific activity. But the same is true when you learn theoretical knowledge. To understand concepts and see how they work, people have to work their way through specific examples. Examples are not only essential for understanding, but are also important tests of ideas. If someone makes a general claim that might be wrong, discussing examples is an important way to check it.

Idealism Makes Learning Harder

Idealist theories of learning are not just false, they do a lot of damage. Psychological research show that kids learn better in school when they understand that practice and effort are what counts, not some special kind of brain (see *Scientific American Mind*, 11/28/07).

Certainly people learn different things at different speeds, depending, for example, on whether they already know how to learn a specific subject. But the general method is the same: getting particular cases right, often after first getting them wrong and learning from mistakes.

The Dialectical Relation of Thought and Reality

Learning is one important example of the materialist pattern of the relation of thought to the rest of reality. We can describe this as a “dialectical relation with a dominant side.” Thinking and reality are opposites that influence each other, but reality is the dominant side. We will discuss this more in a future article.

Boeing Workers On Army, Democracy & Communist Potential

SEATTLE, WA — A day never passes without Boeing workers debating the meaning of the Mid-East uprisings. I consciously started a number of these discussions, but, by now, my friends bring it up on their own.

Workers have a genius for expressing key political questions in sharp, riveting ways. We kept revisiting questions on the army, democracy and the possibility of communist revolution.

Veterans Discuss Armies

"I can't believe the Bahrain army beat those demonstrators as they slept in the parking lot," said a veteran friend at shift start. No hello, how was your weekend!

"Remember how the sergeants used to yell at us to never let our rifles out of our sight, even when we were sleeping," I joked.

'No shit!' he agreed adding that we may need those guns in Wisconsin.

"Has anybody started a petition to recall that governor?" he asked.

"Come on!" I answered. "Do you really think we get rid of one guy and it's going to change capitalism? "You're right, he can't be doing this on his own. Some big money-men must be behind it."

"You'll never see the U.S. Army breaking into that Governor's, beating him up, telling him he can't destroy those workers lives."

"No shit!" again.

Capitalist Democracy = Dictatorship

Another mill hand wandered over with Egypt and democracy on his mind. I tried to explain that democracy was, in reality, just another form of the bosses' dictatorship.

"We live under a dictatorship," I insisted.

Before I could continue he interjected, "Yeah, and the name of the dictator is John (our boss)!"

"You see," I said. "You come to work and you understand the real nature of capitalist dictatorship. Our boss is the capitalist's agent."

He took a *Red Flag*.

Communism Will Change How We All Think

A third discussion took place in a co-worker's living room with his wife. He read *Red Flag's* lead article, "Capitalism Fails Egyptian Workers." It showed how the bosses are not invincible and how the working class can be a vehicle for revolutionary change.

He was not so sure. "There have always been these ideas around," he theorized. "Sometimes the capitalist ideas win out; sometimes the communist ideas. Sometimes the unions are in retreat and sometimes they advance."

“Well, ideas don’t exist in a milk bottle,” I retorted. “There’s a material basis to think the working class can lead a communist revolution. Mobilizing the masses for communism in the here and now will allow the workers to reach their potential.” We discussed how different relations of production led to different ideas dominating a society. The exploited in slavery were property; the exploited in feudalism were serfs tied to the land and nobles. Capitalism, wage slavery, gave birth to a new class of exploited, the working class, and with it the potential for communism. Human nature is defined differently in each of these societies.

We then discussed the material basis of racism under capitalism. The bosses have huge economic and political incentives to promote racist ideology and practice. Communist production organized around need, not profit opens up the possibility of eliminating racism. His wife lit up.

He hemmed and hawed even as he saw the logic. Because of our long friendship, I knew I could put him on the spot (and me too).

“Is it possible you’re clinging to this theory that ideas have no basis in reality because it takes you off the hook?” I said. “If ideas and movements just come and go with no rhyme or reason then you don’t have to grapple with these important questions of reform or revolution.”

“Look,” he interrupted, not liking where this was going, “I think these communist ideas are great and I’ll contribute in any way I can.”

We arrived at a dollar amount he would contribute to *Red Flag*.

SOME CONCRETE EXAMPLES:

What you spend most of your time doing is what you get good at. The Tuhamara in Mexico are the fastest runners in the world. Why? Because they run everywhere! Why are a lot of kids good at soccer or basketball but not so good at reading? Because they spend all their spare time playing ball. The main way to be a better reader is to read. Anything. Just read, you’ll be a better reader.

Anybody who’s ever watched a baby learn to walk knows that it’s fall down, get up, fall down, get up, over and over again. The same goes for skaters...ask anybody with a skate board.

Notes From A Communist Farmworker

The way people think under capitalism should be in synch with the position they occupy in the society. A boss thinks like a rich person, because he’s rich and he belongs to the ruling class, the capitalists. And a worker should think like a worker, because he belongs to the working class. But, there are workers who think like the rich. But this is an incorrect way to think, since workers who think like this can even get to the point of becoming enemies of their own class.

And, what about a politician? What’s his place in society? Whom does he serve? And, how does he think? If a bourgeois politician has a place in the bureaucracy of a capitalist government, his mission is to support and strengthen the capitalist system, a system based on the exploitation of the workers. Even when the politician comes from a working class family, the fact of occupying a place in the state means that his way of thinking won’t be that of a worker but of the privileged. So this politician lives well, dresses well, and makes a lot of money, and is friends with other people who live well. And he was educated in a university whose job it is to ideologically win students to support the capitalist system.

So then, this supposed politician, due to the fact that he serves the capitalists, will never think like a worker.

Workers Who Think Like the Rich

Why are there workers who think like the rich without being rich, and even act as enemies of the working class? We can see that the State, as maximum representative of the capitalist system, strengthens and reinforces the power of the bosses, imposing on society the way of thinking that most serves their interests, using all the means at their disposal to mold the thinking even of first graders in school.

If the capitalist system is based on exploitation, racism, deceit, etc. it's logical that the rulers teach children in school to always compete in everything but never to share. If sharing were promoted as the main social value, the ruling class would have to be the first to share their wealth with the workers. That's why in the schools they always have to push the bosses' ideas of: "me first", "mine" "what can't be for me shouldn't be for anyone," etc, etc. They teach the children in school to think like bosses. And so when the children become adults, even when they are simple wage slaves, they'll have ideas of the rich bosses.

Another way the State pushes the bosses' ideas is through the media and the politicians, who repeat like parrots about the American Dream, land of opportunity, democracy, etc., But its enough to know that millions of old people, after years of work, raising children for the wars and paying taxes, don't have adequate medical insurance; that millions of workers and their families who don't have health insurance, who are unemployed, and without a place to live, to understand that the American dream, democracy for all, and about the "opportunities" are a pure lie.

If we workers don't learn to know what interests are hidden behind every one of these pretty phrases, we'll only continue being stubborn victims of capitalism.

Because the essence of capitalism, in which we live, is the exploitation of workers, and all the rest is appearance.

How Will People Think Under Communism?

Understanding that nothing is eternal in the world and everything is in constant change and movement, nature changes, social systems change, and with this also peoples' way of thinking changes.

So the capitalist system also will change and will be substituted by a communist system. This change won't happen through elections, but through an abrupt, violent change, that is, through a workers' revolution, with which the working class will wrest power from the capitalist class.

Once this has occurred, the key institutions where we'll ideologically educate the people from their infancy, like the factories and schools and our party itself, will no longer be fertile ground for the sewers of the bosses' ideas. These institutions will only serve the workers and our communist society. Because capitalism will pass into history.

With this radical change, society's way of thinking will be different. The workers won't think like the rich, nor will they think like exploited wage slaves. Instead they'll think like people with dignity, committed to work for the wellbeing of a society of communist social equality

Materialist Ideas Will Prevail Over Idealism

In previous columns we have talked about the interaction between that thinking and the rest of reality. Reality influences thinking whenever people learn, and thinking influences reality as part of the goals and planning of human labor. The basic idea of materialism is that reality is the dominant side of this relationship. When people learn, they get their ideas from interacting with the material reality that those ideas are about. We can call this reality the material basis of the ideas that are learned. Ideas, at least those that last for a while and are accepted by many people, must have a material basis. A material basis for a certain kind of thinking means something real that influences people to accept it. But ideas can reflect reality in more than one way. This column discusses the concept of ideology, that is, thinking that reflects the outlook of a specific social class.

What Ideology Is

An ideology is a system of ideas that express the outlook or the interests of some class or social group, in a way that can be completely false. Capitalist ideology contains false ideas that seem to make capitalism more acceptable to its victims. These ideas include that selfishness and greed are natural and healthy, that people of some races are stupid or lazy, that women are less able or less important than men, that capitalism can eliminate poverty and war, that capitalists are generous and kind, that there is a God who rewards those who work hard and don't revolt, etc.

The Ruling Ideas are the Rulers' Ideas

Capitalists put all the institutions of capitalist society to work propagating these lies and others like them. The newspapers, the TV, the Internet, movies, popular music, schools, universities, government agencies, the military, churches, capitalist political parties, think tanks, etc., have enormous resources dedicated to mislead workers and their allies and dampen resistance to capitalist exploitation. The result of the capitalist monopoly over propaganda is that most people accept at least some capitalist ideology. As Marx and Engels wrote: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."

Capitalists themselves believe at least some capitalist ideology. They think that a system that is so wonderful for them has to be the best. But their ideology works for them whether or not they believe all of it themselves, since it is essential to keep them in power. They can promote religion, for example, or "shared sacrifice" for imperialist wars even if they don't believe these things themselves.

Capitalist ideology can get in the way of capitalists' understanding of their own system, especially in economics or international conflicts. The myths that capitalist markets regulate themselves or that resistance to imperialism is just a "clash of cultures," which are promoted at elite universities, make it harder for capitalist theorists to figure out policies to try to fix capitalism.

The Material Basis of Racism

Some capitalist ideology has a material basis beyond their propaganda machinery. The tremendous racial and ethnic inequalities that capitalism creates and maintains in many countries provides a material basis for racist ideology. In the U. S., for example, capitalist propaganda blames the victims for the lower wages, worse schools, police terror and mass imprisonment that

capitalism imposes on black and Latin workers. It promotes the lie that racial inequality is the result of low intelligence or “inferior” culture, while the real cause is capitalism itself. Capitalists in other countries push similar lies about the most oppressed and exploited workers there.

This continuing unequal situation is a material basis for racist ideas. This is also true of the wage system, which promotes the idea that skilled workers or mental workers are smarter or deserve more than unskilled labor. As long as these inequalities exist, they provide a material basis for racist, sexist and other elitist ideas, and continue to generate these ideas. Thus the struggle for the idea of human equality cannot be completely won under capitalism, but only under communism, which ends social classes and racial and gender divisions for ever.

Next week: Working class ideology.

Communism is Working Class Ideology

In the last column, we discussed the capitalists’ ideology, the lies that express their point of view. The working class also has an ideology that expresses its material interests, the ideas of communism. Although our means for spreading working class ideas are very modest at this point, those ideas have a material basis in the life of the working class.

Communist and Capitalist Ideology

Communist ideology is the opposite of capitalist ideology in many ways. For one thing, communist ideology is true or close to the truth, and communists always struggle to make our understanding better. ICWP knows that our winning weapon is the fullest possible understanding—by millions of workers—of the truth about capitalism and about communism.

Understanding capitalism leads the way to communism. Capitalism can no longer let us have what we need to live. Capitalism’s imperialist wars and economic crises have already led to layoffs and firings, cutbacks, and lost savings, houses, and pensions. In the U. S. Congress, both Democrats and Republicans are determined to cut “entitlements” like Social Security and Medicare. State governments are attacking public employees, cutting wages, benefits, and seniority. They are trying to destroy unions, even though the unions are already part of the bosses’ state machinery. The world capitalist system has already created a planet of slums, and it is squeezing more out of the working class every day.

Communism or Fascism

As U. S. capitalism loses its grip on key oil-rich areas, it must fight more wars—it now has one more in Libya. Rivalry between capitalist powers, especially between the U. S. and China, is bound to lead to larger wars. The capitalists’ ultimate response to these severe crises is fascism, a combination of racism, patriotism and repression. Every day, workers’ only choice is becoming clearer: communism or fascism.

Why Communism is Working Class Ideology

Communism is a society without privilege, ruled by the mass mobilization of the working class without bosses. So far, however,

only a minority of workers is committed to this goal. How can we be confident that this will change? Or, speaking materialistically, what is the material basis for mass acceptance of communism? The answer has two main aspects: the miserable future that capitalism has to offer, and the collectivity of the working class.

Working Class Collectivity

Collectivity has been a key feature of human life ever since humans evolved. It was the way all humans lived until social classes were created. Competition and conflict—the opposite of collectivity—are built into capitalism (even in its socialist form), and their unity is limited except when they have no choice, like facing a major war.

The life of the working class, however, teaches collectivity. Capitalist organization of labor forces workers to learn to work together and disciplines us, especially industrial workers. The practical life of the working class also teaches collectivity. If your car breaks down and you can't afford to fix it to get to work, you have to organize other workers to help. At a higher level, struggling against the bosses can teach us how to use the power of collectivity in practice.

Capitalism also limits how much collectivity can exist, even in the working class.

“What's in it for me”, as well as racism, nationalism, and sexism are types of boss thinking that are pushed everywhere under capitalism and undermine collectivity. But the working class has a potential for unity and collective action that the bosses cannot equal. More importantly, communist organization of society with mass participation and without privilege, is the highest expression of human collectivity, the ultimate development of the collectivity that workers learn in life.

Learning to Win

The knowledge of how to win that ICWP has developed so far, based on a theoretical understanding of capitalism and the experience of past revolutions, is critical for communist victory. We must, however, improve that understanding by taking up the collective experience of the working class, and mobilizing the creativity and determination of millions of workers. Only the party can make possible both the correct analysis of our collective experience and the mobilization of the working class that will carry us through to victory, but it can do this only because communism is the true working class ideology

The Dialectics Of Opposition And Contradiction

Contradiction is the central concept of dialectical philosophy, and some of our previous columns have focused on it. In this column we discuss a more general concept that includes contradictions, the concept of opposition.

What Opposites Are

In order for things or processes to be opposites, they have to be different, but much more than difference is required. Opposites have to be exclusive, so that nothing can be entirely on both sides of an opposite relation at the same time. Also, opposites

have to interact and change each other, at least some of the time.

An important example that shows these two features of an opposition—exclusion and interaction—is the relation between parents and their children. In every particular parent-child relation, the parents are one side and the children are the other. So being a parent excludes being a child in that relationship, and vice-versa. In each relationship, the parents are influenced by their children, and the children are influenced by their parents. So the parent-child relation is an opposition.

Is Something Wrong Here?

Some people are bound to object that they don't oppose their parents, but get along with them fine. This objection brings out the meanings of the concepts of "opposition" and "contradiction" in dialectics, which are a little different than the ordinary use of these terms. Contradictions are defined as opposites in which the two sides interfere with each other, struggle against each other, or hold each other back. Not every opposition is a contradiction, however, at least not all the time. If an opposition is not a contradiction, it is called supplementary. Oppositions between parent and child, husband and wife, discussion and action, buying something and selling it, etc., can be supplementary at least some of the time.

Supplementary Oppositions Change

Suppose a diesel mechanic works on an engine that comes with a really good manual. The procedures and settings in the manual work perfectly in practice. The ideas in the manual and the practical work on the engine are opposites. Statements on paper and actual work on an engine are exclusive things—nothing is both. But the book was created from actual work at the engine ^{factory} and now guides actual work in the shop. So the contents of the manual and engine repair work interact, and are supplementary opposites.

Further experience by the mechanic is likely to change this situation, however. No manual is perfect. The mechanic may find better ways to do certain jobs, and not follow the manual any more. Or, he or she may find that if you tighten certain bolts as much as the manual says, they tend to break and create a problem that is hard to fix. Then the manual and the mechanic's practice aren't supplementary anymore, but in contradiction. It may be possible to eliminate the contradiction by getting stronger bolts or by changing the manual. Even if this is done, however, some new contradiction is bound to show up later. Like the relation between parents and children, this case illustrates a general truth about opposites: They don't stay supplementary, but are contradictory at least some of the time.

Worker-Capitalist Opposition

The opposition between the capitalist class and the working class is always a contradiction, never supplementary. In the rare cases capitalists do something that workers actually want, it's only a tactic to keep exploiting them. But union bosses and politicians regularly say otherwise. They call on us to "share the sacrifice" of capitalist wars and economic crises, and push the lie that both workers and capitalists would benefit from this. The fact is that the worker-capitalist relation is always a struggle of opposites. Capitalists are always the enemies of workers, as the slave-owners and feudal lords were in previous systems based on the exploitation of labor.

The Dialectics of Opposition

Some oppositions are always contradictions, and all oppositions are contradictory sometimes, but there are important principles in communist dialectics that apply to all oppositions. In the next column, we will discuss the principle that things can turn into their opposites in particular circumstances.

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Dialectics and Transitions Into the Opposite

In the last issue we discussed the dialectical concept of opposition, and its relation to contradiction. In order to be opposites, things have to meet two conditions: they have to be exclusive, and they have to interact. Opposites are called supplementary when they work together and support each other. Opposites like parent and child or discussion and action are supplementary at least some of the time.

Opposites that struggle and interfere with each other are contradictions. Some opposites, like workers and capitalists, are always contradictory. Many political debates are precisely about whether an opposition is contradictory or not. Revisionists, people who claim to be communists but say that workers cannot win by fighting directly for communism, often claim that the opposition between reform and revolution are supplementary, that reforms and revolutionary political activity can work together. The truth is that reform and revolution are always contradictory, and that all oppositions are contradictory in at least some circumstances.

Opposites Have a Dominant Side

When opposites interact, one side is almost always stronger than the other. Practice, for example, is richer than theory and often corrects it. The capitalist class is dominant until a successful revolution and then the working class has the upper hand.

In each relation of opposites, the side that is dominant determines the quality of the system or process that the opposites form. When parents have small children, the adults are the dominant side. When the parents grow old or

become ill, however, the quality of the opposite relationship changes and grown children often make decisions for their parents. This shift of the dominant side is called a transition into its opposite, or as we described it in an earlier column, a dialectical negation.

Transition into its Opposite

It is an important idea of dialectics that under specific conditions, things can make a transition into their opposites. This transition does not mean, for example, that the working class will turn into capitalists after the revolution. It means that in its relation with the capitalist class, the working class will make the transition from being dominated to being in the more powerful position, and will use that power to set up communism.

Some people refer to the transition into its opposite as a law, but this may not be appropriate, since the specific conditions required are different for different opposite relationships, and might never occur for some of them. For example, in the nucleus of many atoms, attraction is dominant over repulsion, and it may stay that way indefinitely. In atoms that are radioactive, however, repulsion can become dominant and make the atom split apart.

How to Make a Transition Happen

A transition happens when a weaker opposite gets stronger or a dominant one gets weaker. In some opposite relations, like the relationship between parents and children, the transition is inevitable. In other cases, the transition isn't inevitable, but something can be done to make it happen. At work places, campuses, and military bases the bosses' ideas are dominant, because the capitalists have a near monopoly on the means to distribute ideas. But distribution of **Red Flag**, communist political discussion, and involvement in practical struggles can spread communist ideas that make sense to many workers, students and soldiers. This means that consistent communist political work can eventually make communist ideas dominant in most areas.

This should be the goal of our work wherever it is possible. Even in areas where communist ideas don't eventually become dominant, their acceptance by some will weaken capitalist control and help advance the fight for communism. Of course there are circumstances where we know that communist ideas will never be dominant, like the management of big corporations or inside the leadership of capitalist governments, which means that those institutions have to be destroyed. All this is in line with the idea of transition into an opposite, since that only happens in appropriate circumstances. Transition into the opposite is not rare, however, but occurs often and illustrates that importance of understanding dialectics to understand how to change the world.