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Sectarianism, Economism — What Are They?

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Considerable confusion has arisen within the ranks of the Party in connection with discussions around “economism” and sectarianism.

This has led some comrades to reject work around the economic demands of the toilers "in order to concentrate on politics."

Such a separation of politics and economics is undialectical, un-Marxist and extremely dangerous, not only for the economic struggle but equally so for the struggle for peace.

The struggle for peace is an all-round, many-sided struggle, in which the battle against the economic effects of warmongering on the lives of the people plays a vital role in arousing them to the fight for peace.

Inflation, shortage of consumption goods, lack of housing, electricity, and other problems are becoming more acute as the result of war preparation.

Maurice Thorez stated: “Even when the common struggle is waged only under the slogan of higher wages, it represents a definite contribution to the battle for peace and, in effect, means refusal to pay for the war policy pursued by the rulers” (From *For a Lasting Peace* May 4, 1951).

As I said at a recent discussion, the struggle for peace and for the economic interests of the masses is indivisible, and cannot be arbitrarily separated in the way some comrades are doing. They are, in today's conditions, two aspects, or sides, of the one campaign.

Secondly, “economism” and sectarianism are not one and the same thing, as some comrades seem to believe, nor is “economism” the basis of the sectarianism which unfortunately still hinders and frustrates the Party's approach to the workers.

Economism, in the sense Lenin fought it in the early days of the workers' movement in Russia, was the opportunist theory that renounced politics on the part of the labour movement, which denied the necessity of a political party of the working class.

The trade union bureaucrats in the United States always determinedly opposed a mass workers' party in that country and taught that election bargaining with either of the two parties of the monopolies, the Republican and Democrats, is all the politics the workers need.

In Australia, as in other capitalist countries, the workers have thrown up political parties, the ALP and the Communist Party.

It is not necessary in this article to point out the failings of the ALP as a workers' party, other than to state that its reformist leaders strive to create an artificial separation between

economics and politics, i.e. the business of the unions is purely of a trade union, industrial, economic character, and the unions should not discuss politics nor take part in political struggles.

“NO POLITICS”

The reformists endeavour to prevent the struggle of the militant unionists on the big political issues that so vitally concern them by raising this anti-working class slogan of “no politics in the union.”

In our party, we have sometimes referred to some of our trade union activists as “economists,” meaning that they have become so preoccupied in industrial activities that the political issues pass over their heads.

It is difficult, for example, to get them to take part in Party election campaigns, or to assist in cementing the alliance of the workers and farmers by backing farmers’ demands or at the present moment to campaign correctly and effectively for peace in their unions and to learn to connect in a proper way, the struggle of the unions with the broader campaign for peace and the five Power Pact.

This so-called “economism” of our trade union and other comrades is obviously different from the economism which Lenin fought successfully in Russia because they are members of, and understand the role of, the Party, even if they do often make the mistake of not sufficiently linking the economic with the broader political struggle of the Party.

SECTARIANISM

What, then, is sectarianism? It is, in the first place, opportunism. Left sectarianism, Stalin has said, is “the reverse side of the Right opportunist medal.”

It is sectarian dogmatism, the forcing on the workers of a narrow interpretation of the Party's principles, an insistence on formulas, instead of convincing and learning from, and giving a broad, constructive leadership to the workers. It is the tendency to work among a narrow group of militants and regarding the mass of the workers as incapable of understanding or taking action.

It is also a tendency to replace concrete argument with abuse, especially against people who honestly disagree with us on a number of questions, or abuse of the right-wing instead of a concrete exposure, or “exposure” without putting forward the Party's constructive program.

It means lumping together the rank-and-file labour workers with the leaders who collaborate with the bosses, or regarding every Catholic worker as a "Catholic Actionist" intent on disrupting the workers’ struggle.

UNITED FRONT

Sectarianism means attacking these workers, or attacking their beliefs in a narrow or personal way, instead of raising their political consciousness, above all, by leading them into political and economic struggles of the labour Movement on the basis of the United Front, by means of patient explanation of the aims of the Communist Party and by concrete criticism of the right-wing and other misleaders of the people. These are common manifestations of our Party's sectarianism.

The most outstanding example of sectarianism on the part of the Central Committee was in the days of “Lang is right” when this demagogue succeeded in arousing a great mass movement.

The Party leadership then contented itself with “exposing” Lang and failed to present alternative proposals, refused in the main to work with and within the movement led by Lang, so as to take it beyond the limits set by Lang and to be in a strong position to take the leadership when the inevitable day arrived when Lang let down this vast movement.

“TURNING INWARDS”

Sectarianism is a “turning inwards” of the Party instead of outwards. It is a refusal to work among the masses, and, therefore opportunism.

Our “economist” tendencies and sectarianism no doubt link up in a number of ways and feed each other but they are not identical.

I have witnessed or heard of examples of the most gross forms of sectarianism indicated above, in the past few months, even weeks.

Is it any wonder that the Party's progress is slowed down?

Must not each one of us look at himself and resolve to improve his mass work in order that the Australian working-class can play a worthy part in the historic world struggle for peace and to speed the incoming of People's Democracy and Socialism?