

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.

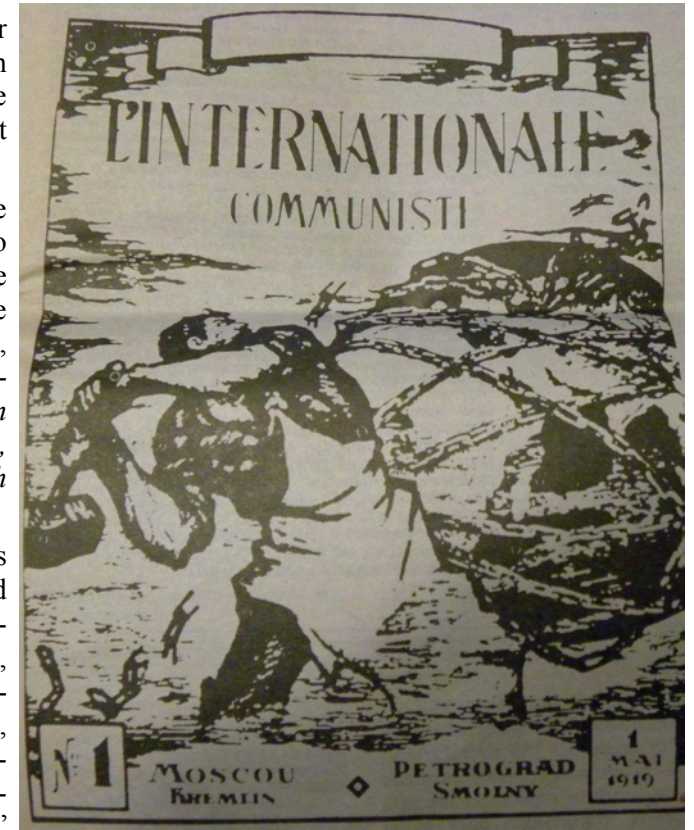
Leaders of the communist movement in China borrowed the concept of non-antagonistic contradiction and added to it the concepts of “contradictions among the people” that were said to be non-antagonistic. The convenience of this terminology

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.