

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.

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.

POSSIBILITY AND ACTUALITY

Possibility is one of the important categories of dialectical philosophy. It describes events and situations that might happen or which people might be able to make happen, that is, to make actual.

Making Things Happen

Some things are possible by themselves, without human action. It is possible that the earthquake zone near Japan will produce another tsunami. For the communist movement, however, we are most concerned with what it is possible for us to make happen to move toward communism, or what it is possible for the capitalists to do to their system or to their enemies, including us.

For some event to be possible, it isn't enough that we can imagine it. It isn't possible for pigs to fly, but people can image this or write a story about it. For something that doesn't exist yet to be possible, there must be some way to get there, some factors that exist now or will exist that creates that possibility. This means that possibilities are limited, even though there is usually more than one at any one time.

Something will be possible at some specific time only when there is already something in the current situation that can bring it about. It is possible now for a basketball player to make 20 free throws in a row only if he or she has already developed the skills needed to do this. It is possible to double the number of *Red Flags* sold at a particular workplace only if there are enough people who don't already read it, but who would be willing to if the sellers can organize the effort to reach them.

Creating Possibilities

There are lots of things that are not possible now, but we know or expect that they will be in the future.

Some of these possibilities come into existence by themselves. It isn't possible for a normal 5-year-old girl to have a baby, for example, but in the normal course of events, she will develop that possibility. Other things become possible when we create the conditions they need to exist. Distributing *Red Flag*, making political friendships, and fighting for communist ideas on the job will open up more possibilities for the growth of the party, possibilities that don't exist yet.

Communist revolution isn't possible today, and two kinds of developments are necessary to make it possible. ICWP needs to grow larger and stronger, especially in the industrial working class and in the military. The capitalist system also needs to grow weaker. This is a development we can see going on in front of us, as its economic crises, imperial rivalries, and wars grow more deadly.

Finding Out What is Possible

There are several ways that people can find out what is possible. It is easy to see that something is possible if it is already actual, or has been. For example, we know that it is possible for very large numbers

of people to live under very equal conditions, since this happened during the communist revolution in China in the 1930s and 1940s.

Other knowledge of what is possible comes from practical experience. An experienced furniture worker can look at a fault in a piece of wood and tell whether it can be fixed with putty or has to be tossed out.

In many cases, however, we have to rely on the best theories we have to tell us what is possible. It will never be possible for capitalism to serve the working class. It will be possible to defeat it, however, because the contradictions of the system continue to grow, and can only be resolved by destroying it.

Adding to practical experience and correct theories, however, there is another crucial way to find out whether something is possible—by trying to make it happen! Trying to make something actual is sometimes the only way to know for sure what can be done now. You have to take a risk. This important idea is the basis of the slogan we should take over from the revolution in China: “Dare to struggle, dare to win!” Join ICWP and make your contribution to the struggle to win communism.

**2011 SUMMER PROJECT:
ICWP'S RED SUMMER
BRING RED FLAG'S COMMUNIST IDEAS
TO INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, FARMWORKERS
AND SOLDIERS
IN SEATTLE, DELANO AND LOS ANGELES**

Appearance and Essence:

“THE TITANIC WAS ALL RIGHT WHEN IT LEFT HERE”

Last week, the city of Belfast in Northern Ireland celebrated the 100-year anniversary of the launch of the *Titanic*, which was built there. One spokesman said that the ship, which went down on its first voyage, was “all right when it left here.” It’s easy to see why some people thought this was so at the time: the ship was brand new and advertised as “unsinkable.” But this idea was — and still is — superficial and wrong. Although it was not obvious, the *Titanic*, like many other ships, had a serious flaw: if enough compartments were damaged, it would sink.

This example brings out a fundamental distinction between two different aspects of things. The *appearance* of something is its superficial side, the part that we can see or easily find out about. The *essence* of a thing is its real, inner or underlying character, which may or may not be what it appears to be.

Appearances are not necessarily subjective, but may be recognized by many people. A lightning strike, for example, may be photographed and measured, and seen by hundreds of people. What they don’t see, however, is the essence of lightning, electrical discharge that produces the flash and the bang. The appearance of chicken pox is obvious, but the essence of the disease, a viral infection, isn’t visible.

Finding the Essence

The essence of a thing or process explains what causes it, and figuring out that cause can be

difficult since it is usually different from appearances. Marx wrote that scientific study would be unnecessary “if the manifest form and the essence of things directly coincided.”

Finding the essence usually means constructing a correct theory and testing it in practice. One of the designers of the *Titanic*, who was on the ship when it struck the iceberg, immediately used theories of physics to calculate that the ship was going down, once he knew the extent of the damage. Marx was able to develop theories that explained important features of capitalism. Prices of things, for example, are appearances, but the essence that underlies them and explains the average price is the human labor necessary to produce those things.

Essences Develop

Some people make the mistake of thinking that an essence is permanent and prevents changes. This idea would rule out the dialectical development of things. Marx pointed out that the human essence is not “inherent in each single individual.” Instead, it is contained in people’s social relationships, so the essence changes as society changes. The inner nature of the US economy has also changed over the last five or six decades. It has moved from primarily producing goods into finance and speculation that led to the current crisis (in 2010, US corporate profits from finance were 50% larger than those from manufacturing).

Essence and Illusion

Distinguishing essence from appearance is critical for understanding how capitalism works and overcoming illusions about it. One fundamental illusion about the system is that workers are paid for their work. The truth is that the value of the products that workers can buy with their wages is substantially less than the value they create when they work. Surplus labor, the labor workers are not paid for, is the source of the capitalists’ profits.

Some appearances are illusions that are deliberately created. Capitalists claim that elections allow everyone to have a role in deciding laws and policies. In essence, however, elections are a scam that tries to make capitalist rule seem legitimate. They are just as phony as professional wrestling. All the candidates are loyal to the bosses, and what they actually do often bears no relation to what they claim to support.

Essence and the Fight for Communism

Getting to the essence of things reveals possibilities that aren’t always obvious. This includes that capability of the working class to revolt and fight courageously against capitalist oppression. We see this all over the Arab world today, but it was invisible a year ago. The essence of capitalism includes intensifying contradictions, which increase its weaknesses every day, weaknesses that help create the conditions for communist revolution and make our victory possible.

Study Group discusses contradiction

What is a contradiction you face in your personal life?" asked a high school student who was leading our summer project study group on dialectical materialism after a brief presentation about contradiction as the unity and struggle of opposites.

Comrades and friends came up with an amazing range of contradictions.

"Hating sexism, but sitting with my family every day watching sexist soap operas on TV."

"Knowing I want to be a teacher, but holding back from doing it for fear I won't do a good job."

"Taking a shot-gun approach to mobilizing masses of high school students versus concentrating on developing a few students who can mobilize their friends."

"Wanting to serve the working class by organizing in the military, but being afraid to get killed."

We talked about each of these and other contradictions in turn, trying to get more deeply into what was actually going on with each of these contradictions. Is sitting quietly with your family during the soap opera really fear of struggle? Is holding back from getting a teaching job based on an unrealistic assessment of what communist teachers do in the classroom? Is taking a shot-gun approach to organizing based on an idealistic, wishful thinking, view of what is required to develop communist cadre?

Then the young comrades leading the group gave a brief presentation about how contradictions are resolved. One comrade told the story of a wise old man who said he had two dogs fighting inside of him, one pulling him to do good and the other pulling him to do bad. When asked which dog wins, he responded, "The one I feed the most." We decided that once we identify a contradiction, we need to intensify the struggle, strengthening the side that we want to win. Usually that means taking a collective approach, helping the comrade figure out how to raise the struggle against sexism in soap operas with her family, or having communist teachers talk about their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom so that the future teacher has a more realistic view.

We talked about the revisionist (phony communist and ultimately defeatist) idea of smoothing over contradictions. The comrade whose contradiction was about the military said that he thought he was smoothing it over at this point rather than sharpening it.

For now he's going to ignore the question of joining the military and concentrate on organizing students, but he realizes that this is a reformist answer. We pointed out that the basic contradiction is between individualism and serving the collective, and that this contradiction comes up over and over again in the lives of all of us. We assured him that he will have to deal with this contradiction in one form or another all his life, and that his comrades will be there with him to fight it through.

--Always learning



“How can you tell whether or not someone will be interested in our paper, *Red Flag*?”

That’s what we discussed in the first of two study groups about dialectical materialism. We started the meeting reporting on our experiences in several transit divisions as well as on the streets of a town near a military base. This group had distributed about 600 *Red Flags* at transit divisions during the first week of the project, and another 60 to Marines.

“If they’re dressed conservatively, I would think they wouldn’t want it, but if they’re dressed like me (less conservatively and with an anarchist patch on his shirt) I would think they would be more receptive,” said a young man. “But I haven’t tried it.”

“If I see them turn down two other people, I won’t try myself,” said a fifteen-year-old high school student participating in his second summer project. “But sometimes people surprise you.”

“That’s for sure,” said a veteran comrade. “I went up to a very buttoned-down looking bus driver, and was surprised to find that he was very interested in our ideas. He said he hated the union leadership because they were just like the bosses and was very grateful for our paper.”

“If somebody rejects two other comrades,” said a young man who joined ICWP at May Day, “you should still try to talk to them. Maybe you will have a different approach, and be able to point out something that your other comrades didn’t.”

All these comments led to a very interesting discussion about dialectical materialism, the communist philosophy that helps us understand the world and change it. We discussed the difference between idealism and materialism. We first clarified that we’re not using the terms in the traditional sense: idealism meaning you have high moral standards and ideals and materialism meaning you’re all about the money. For communists, idealism means having ideas that are not backed up by material reality, and materialism means understanding the world by scientific inquiry—investigation being the first step.

So we had been doing a lot of investigating in the summer project about how people respond to communist ideas. From these experiences, we found out that you can’t judge people by appearances. You also can’t accept all the racist, sexist and anti-working class stereotypes you get from TV, church, school, etc. You have to go out and talk to workers, presenting a communist analysis of the world situation. Then you see how they respond, and how much workers have in common.

We ended the discussion by asking, “How do we know we can mobilize the masses for communism?” The answers to this question clearly pointed out the difference between idealism and materialism. One person said, “We’ll win because we have guts!” Others said, “We’ll win because workers need these ideas, and we have seen from our experience that when we take *Red Flag* to them, they take them as their own.” We concluded that it’s not just about guts, or optimism, or dedication. It’s about doing the day-to-day work of putting forward communist ideas to workers, whose own lives prove them to be true.

The main idealism we have to combat is the idealism which holds us back from seeing the urgency and taking the opportunity to mobilize the masses

for communism

--Struggling for a Materialist Outlook

UNIVERSAL, PARTICULAR AND INDIVIDUAL, PART I

Being human is something we all have in common. We are all also animals and mammals. Most of us are workers. The philosopher's term for these general characteristics, humanity, being an animal, being a worker, etc., is universals. A universal is a general characteristic, but that doesn't mean it applies to everything. It is the kind of characteristic that applies or could apply to several or many things.

The things that have these general characteristics are called individuals. An individual can be a person, a thing, or even process or social class. If we say that "Barack Obama is male," we are saying that one individual, Obama, has a characteristic that he shares with a huge number of other individuals, and this characteristic is a universal, being male.

Besides universal and individual, there is a third category, particular, that fits in between these two. Particular focuses on a single case or a narrow range of cases of some universal. If we talk about a group of workers in a single shop, and learn that some of them are *Red Flag* readers and some are not, then we have several individuals in a particular group or situation that have the characteristic of being *Red Flag* readers, a universal.

Why bother with this terminology?

There are several reasons why communist philosophy uses these terms. As we saw in previous columns, knowledge in the form of laws and generalizations is essential for organizing the

fight for communism, and these laws and generalizations use universals to describe individuals and particular situations. Another reason that especially concerns us here, however, is that wrong ideas about universals are a major area of idealist and pro-capitalist philosophy. To understand what these theories say, we need to separate several ways of talking about universals.

Universals are described by words like "human," "animal," "capitalist," "strike," etc. But the word "human" is not the same as the concept human. "Human" is a word in a particular language. The concept human, a creation of thought, is not the same as any particular word, and can be expressed in any language. Both the word and the concept are also different from the biological, social and historical factors that make something a human being. These factors, characteristics or laws that make up the real universal human are not words or thoughts but aspects of the real world.

Two Capitalist Theories about Universals

Several completely wrong ideas about universals are influential in capitalist philosophy. One view says that there are only words and concepts, but no real universals, at least none we can know about. This theory, called conceptualism, says that we humans form concepts only by a process of leaving out details—excluding the particular. Thus we form the concept horse by leaving out the size, weight, color, health, breed, etc. of individual horses.

The conceptualist says that if there is a real universal that corresponds to this concept we form, we know nothing about it. Conceptualists say we can form the concept of a worker by leaving out the details of any particular job and be left with only with being paid a wage. The real causes and consequences of being a worker, the essence of being a worker, which is the real universal, is unknown and irrelevant. If this were true, there would be no social laws about being a worker, nothing behind the surface that would need to be figured out about work under capitalism.

A similar, more extreme idea is called nominalism, which flatly denies that there are any universals. Nominalism says that the different things we apply one word to have nothing in common except that we use the same word for them. If this were so, there could have been no laws of nature before humans evolved, since there were no languages then.

Conceptualism and nominalism have in common that whenever we say that that some individual has some general characteristic, that characteristic has no counterpart in the real world. Our words and concepts correspond to nothing beyond speaking and thinking, a clear example of an idealist point of view. Unfortunately these are not the only idealist views about universals. In our next column, we will talk about a different idealist viewpoint, and outline the dialectical materialist view of universals.

UNIVERSAL, PARTICULAR AND INDIVIDUAL, PART II

Conceptualism

In the last issue we introduced the concept of a “universal,” something which is responsible for the common features of individual things or processes. Examples of universals include human, atom, worker, female, etc. We also discussed some wrong views about universals, like nominalism. Nominalism says that particular things or events have nothing in common except that we use the same words to describe them.

Nominalist Thinking

Nominalism is a fairly common mistaken way of thinking. Suppose someone works several jobs and is treated badly by the boss in each one. A nominalist thinker would say that it is a coincidence that these three different individual bosses are vicious, and not look for the common explanation. That explanation is that most bosses treat most workers badly most of the time because they are enforcing capitalist exploitation of workers’ labor. A nominalist mistake is also made by people who see that the U. S. government is fighting two wars to control oil and gas (and just finished fighting in a third one) but don’t see that there is such a thing as imperialist war.

According to nominalist philosophers, the world is just an unstructured bundle of individuals, and words (“signifiers”) only refer to other words, not to something in the world. Only theories that discuss very narrow topics (“micro-narratives”) can be constructed, they say, and Marxism, which describes the whole world of social relations, is impossible.

Nominalism’s cousin is “conceptualism.” Conceptualism says that there is nothing outside thought that corresponds to concepts. This makes it impossible to explain why we work out particular ways of describing what individuals have in common and reject others. Good concepts are ones that describe accurately and also help explain. If we defined “human” as “a two-legged animal with soft earlobes and no feathers,” it would pick out human beings accurately, but is still a crazy concept. It doesn’t describe the things that actually make us human like the ability to work, plan, cooperate, and fight oppression, etc.

Using bogus racist concepts, like defining “intelligence” as what IQ tests measure, gives wrong results but makes them look scientific. Conceptualists excuse this scam by claiming that scientific concepts are merely “hypothetical constructs” which don’t have to correspond to anything real. But corresponding with reality is just what knowledge must do to guide practical activity.

Platonism

Nominalism and conceptualism leave no room for universals, but Platonism makes an opposite mistake. Derived from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, Platonism imagines that there is a separate ideal realm of universals, which most people can barely perceive. Each universal is supposed to be a perfect example, and things in the real world are considered to be just defective im-

itations of them.

Platonists treat universals as if they had a kind of spiritual power. After World War I, the French government built a huge building on the battlefield at Verdun to hold the bones of 150,000 soldiers who died there in a single battle. Stained glass windows on the building portray this imperialist slaughter as a battle of Justice and Humanity (the French side) against Ignorance and Brutality (the German side). But rival capitalist powers fought this war, not universals!

Platonism is common in religion, too. The Bible describes God as “the Word” that “became flesh and lived among us” as Jesus. “The Word” (“logos”) here means “explanation” or “reason,” so God is being described as a universal.

Marx and Engels gave an example of how Platonism holds people back from struggling for communism. A Platonist sees the real humanity as something perfect, but the humanity he actually finds is “a crowd of run down, overworked, sick, hungry, poor people.” The Platonist tries to ignore this and focuses on his idealized higher reality, and “thus falls directly back into idealism, while the communist materialist sees the necessity and at the same time the conditions for re-designing both production and social structure” (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*).

In the next issue, we will summarize the dialectical materialist view of universals, which rejects the idealism of nominalism, conceptualism, and Platonism.

UNIVERSAL, PARTICULAR AND INDIVIDUAL

Roughly speaking, a “universal” is what different individual things or particular situations have in common. Human beings, planets, revolutions, etc. have groups of specific properties that make them humans, planets, etc. A useful term for these groups of core properties is “essences.”

As an example, let’s consider the essence of humanity. We are not looking for a definition of “human” or a way to tell if some animal is human. Definitions, like “man is the tool-making animal,” (which doesn’t actually apply just to humans) wouldn’t tell you what makes something human, anymore than wearing a mechanic’s uniform would determine what makes someone an auto mechanic, even if every mechanic wore one.

The Marxist viewpoint is that what makes something human is both biological and social. At any given period in history, social relationships make up part of our nature, and that nature will change when social relations change. In particular, someone’s social class, which is part of his or her social relationships, has powerful and wide-ranging effects. Both the biological and social sides of the human essence are material, however, not something immaterial or merely ideal, as Platonists would say (Platonism was explained in the last issue).

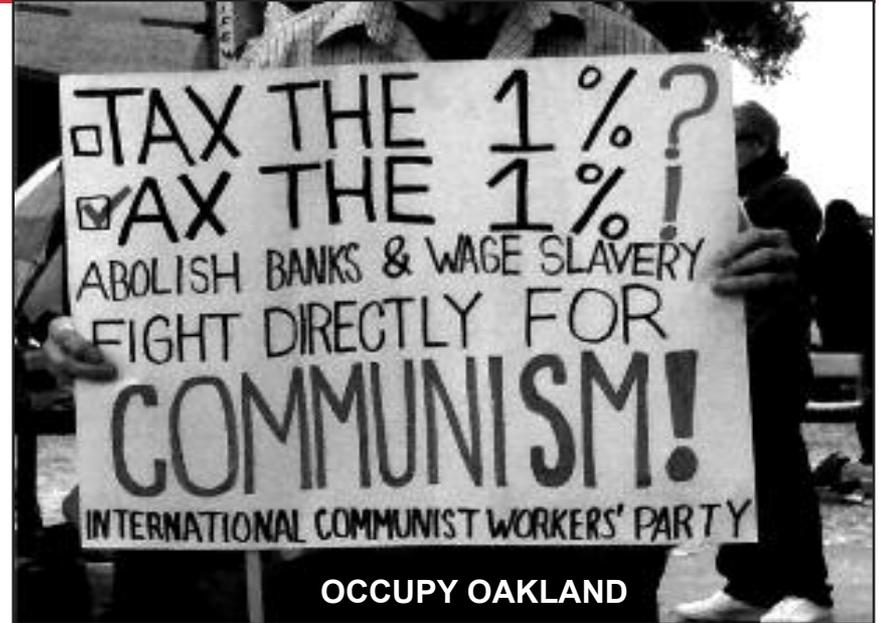
The humanity example shows that the essence of a universal can change over time—it’s a moving target. In the future, when people have grown

up under communist social relationships, everyone will be less competitive and individualistic, and better at cooperation.

Universal and Individual: A Dialectical Relation

Universals depend on individuals and can’t exist without them, since they are the common characteristics in these individuals. Lenin wrote that “Every universal is (a fragment, or an aspect, or the essence of) an individual.” A universal can’t exist unless something has it or at least could have it. If humans had never evolved, there would be no such universal as humanity, but the universal “mammal” would still exist if there were mammals.

Individuals also depend on universals, since universals are the characteristics of individuals and define their relations to other individuals. Earth is a planet with a solid surface, liquid water, and an atmosphere. Each of these properties is a universal, and partly defines which individual thing Earth is. But there is more in an individual than any short list of universals can describe. As Lenin put it, “Every universal only approximately embraces all the individual objects” that have it. Astronomers are now discovering more Earth-



OCCUPY OAKLAND

like planets, and each is different from Earth in some way.

Understanding the universals in individual things is important because the essence of a universal can have big effects. All revolutions have some features in common, like mass mobilization, hatred of the government, etc., that partly determine the course of the revolution. Universals point to necessary connections, like imperialist rivalry causing wars, and they are key parts of theoretical principles and generalizations.

The Right Universals Matter

Some universals do a much better job than others in indicating the capabilities of individuals.

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UNIVERSALS from page 16

Social class universals, like worker and capitalist, refer to essential factors that have strong effects, and are more important than other social universals that refer to race, gender or nationality, which reactionary “identity politics” treats as primary.

A big part of scientific investigation is finding the right universals, universals that name the common factors that mainly determine what happens in particular situations and leaves out factors that matter less. Using universals that are too abstract and leave out too much can be especially misleading. It would be a mistake, for example,

to try to understand the prospects of life under capitalism by focusing on human nature. That’s why Marx wrote that his economic studies did not “proceed from man but from a given economic period.”

It would also be a mistake to discuss the fight for communism by talking about revolution in general. The French Revolution replaced the feudal aristocracy with the capitalists, but kept exploitation and class rule. Revolution to destroy capitalism will be different, since destroying class society altogether requires relying on mass understanding of, commitment to, and mobilization for communism.

The right universals, put into the right theories, are vital guides in the fight for communism, but the particular or individual still has more content than universals do. Even a good theory doesn’t fully describe all particular cases, but knowing about those cases can be the basis for improving it. Thus the party needs to learn from many individual workers’ experiences and struggles, and combine them into better knowledge of universals and better theories based on them. The ICWP will play this central role in developing the science of revolution, and use it to lead the working class to communism.

WORKERS VS. BOSSES: FIGHT TO THE FINISH

If we say, dialectically, that the world is made of contradictions, it's because in each thing or process, universally, there are two opposing sides. Day and night are opposites, cold and heat, poverty and wealth, exploited and exploiters, capitalism and communism, etc.

The contradiction between two opposites is only resolved when the struggle between them is sharpened and one side destroys the other.

Under capitalism, the contradiction is between workers and bosses. This contradiction pits the exploited workers against the exploiting bosses, converting them into opposites.

Although opposites, however, one can't exist without the other. This is what is known dialectically as the unity and struggle of opposites. The workers can't exist without the bosses and the bosses can't exist without the workers, under capitalism.

As long as capitalism exists, this will always be the case, which could give the impression that this contradiction doesn't have a solution. The bosses, on their side, always try to avoid the resolution of this contradiction since it means getting rid of them and their exploitation for good, destroying their capitalist system.

But, what about strikes?

Workers' strikes are also contradictions: workers against a section of the capitalist bosses. A strike, even if it's defeated by the bosses, can serve to advance and deepen our class' revolutionary communist understanding.

If the workers of a particular sector organize and carry out a strike to demand better working conditions, they will be sharpening the contradiction between workers and capital.

But, if in the development of the strike, differences arise over how some workers see the strike politically; depending on what those differences

are, this could show a lack of political consciousness on the part of those who take the negative side, because it would strengthen the bosses' power.

The leaders of unionized workers defend capitalism to the hilt. That's why they refuse to give the workers political education: the theory and practice of the significance of the class struggle. Thus they disarm the workers politically, hindering them from fighting for their true interests.

An example: In 2006, the community leaders in Los Angeles, CA. called on workers to participate in a march and a one day strike on May 1st for the rights of undocumented workers.

Archbishop George Mahony and the lawyer Luis Carrillo, starting two weeks before the planned march and strike, advised the workers that it would be better to go to work on that day so they wouldn't get fired.

Archbishop Mahony had a lot of influence with the workers, as did the lawyer Carrillo. But these people aren't workers, nor leaders of the working class. They are part of the bourgeoisie, supporters of the capitalist system, the main opposite of the working class.

Mahony represents the church, but the church has never represented the working class. Nevertheless, many workers believe that the church really cares about their interests. This means not knowing how to distinguish our friends from our enemies.

Liquor and Religion

Another example was during the strike of farm workers in California from 1965 to 1970. The company, Christian Brothers, promised the leaders of the strike that they would negotiate and sign a labor contract. But they said that the union should first try to get labor contracts with other companies. Once it was successful, then the com-

pany promised to sign with no problem.

The leaders were confident that the company would fulfill its promise. After five years of striking, when more than thirty agricultural companies had signed labor contracts with the union, Christian Brothers was asked to negotiate the promised contract. But, since in money questions sentiments don't count, the company completely refused to negotiate a contract. It was necessary to declare a strike and a boycott of their products to force them to sign a labor contract.

The Christian Brothers Company is owned by religious people very committed to the business of producing wines and liquors through the exploitation of workers. That's how all the capitalists are—no matter what their beliefs, nationality or "race."

Political strikes against capitalism: springboard for revolution?

A strike is not a workers' revolution for political power and the overthrow of capitalism. Generally, workers' strikes only concentrate on fighting for certain reforms or concessions from the bosses. However, communists can organize political strikes against capitalism.

These strikes shouldn't be underestimated, because they could well be the "spark that lights the prairie fire," if we consider how useful big strikes or a general strike could be if linked to the struggle for political power.

Clearly we would take the strikers to other factories, schools and barracks to organize mass mobilizations in the streets so that these could serve as a springboard to spur on the workers' revolution for communism and defeat capitalism.

This is the only way to put an end to the contradiction between the workers and the capitalists, between the exploited and the exploiters. Join ICWP to speed up this process.

THIEVES ALWAYS FALL OUT:

HOW CAN COMMUNIST PHILOSOPHY HELP US UNDERSTAND THE EUROPEAN FINANCIAL CRISIS?

Appearance and Essence

The essence of a process, the reality under the surface, can be very different from how things look on the surface. In the mid-2000s, the Greek economy seemed healthy, but the government was spending heavily on armaments (against Turkey) and on a big public sector, running up debts. The European Union has rules that limit the amount a member state can be in debt, and Greece was over the limit. With the help of U. S. banks, especially Goldman Sachs, they were able to hide the debt with financial trickery—until the financial crisis hit. In 2010, the Greek government had to come clean, admit that they lied, and ask for a bailout.

Contradictions Become Intense

Contradictions don't usually stay put. Their tendency is to become more intense and cause bigger problems. This certainly happened in Greece. There was a contradiction between what the Greek government owed and what its future resources were. Initially the European bosses' solution was simple: lend Greece some money and make workers pay with cutbacks and tax increases. The first deal, in April 2010, was to lend Greece \$61 billion. By May, worker protests and the downgrading of Greek government bonds to junk status made it clear that that would not be enough. The E. U. and the International Monetary

Fund agreed to lend Greece \$140 billion, with \$105 billion for Portugal and \$115 billion for Ireland, which were also in big debt trouble.

In July 2011, the Greek government asked for another \$37 billion to keep from defaulting on their debts, and workers' rejection of cutbacks grew. The big E. U. states, and especially Germany, demanded more cutbacks in Greece, but it became clear that Greece could never pay back the debt. So a new deal was made that meant that Greek debt holders would lose 50% of their investment, a so-called "haircut." This scared the big banks who hold the debt (especially German and French banks). They're scared, not just about Greece, but about other E. U. countries whose debts are big. It sent interest rates on government debt sky-high. The governments of Greece, Italy, and Spain were replaced, and it still is not clear whether the Greek government will get the deal it needs to avoid default.

Necessary Development

Part of dialectical materialist analysis points out that there are objectively necessary developments that take place, results that are bound to occur whether anyone wants them to or not. The German bosses are getting a good lesson in this. Germany has been booming and the Euro currency is great for German exports. But the German (and French) banks have invested heavily in

the EU government debt that could turn out to be worthless. Some of these banks are already on the edge. If they fail the German government will have to bail them out. But it's doubtful that Germany and France can make the smaller countries do what they are told. Right now, they are trying to get the whole E. U. to agree to stricter rules so that the big states can commit the small ones to things they don't want to do. They also insist that there be no more "haircuts" for the banks.

Limits of Capitalist Unity

Although it isn't a general principle of dialectics, it's a fact that the capitalists' capacity for unity is limited. Thieves always fall out. The contradictions among European capitalists, especially between the big countries and the weaker ones, are growing. There is a good chance that new rules to tighten E. U. unity won't work if they are adopted. Greece may default and the Euro currency may fail. If so, the crisis will spread across the world.

None of this could happen under communism. With no banks, no debt, and no money, and the working class's great capacity for unity, we won't have crises like this. Our challenges will be about how to best meet humanity's needs and take good care of our planet, not how to invest and exploit. Join the fight for communism, join ICWP.

FREEDOM IS MASS MOBILIZATION FOR COMMUNISM

Capitalist Freedom

Capitalists love to identify freedom with capitalism. Their idea is that the freest possible person is a capitalist with lots of money and nothing to prevent him or her from investing it to exploit workers. The essence of this idea is that any kind of external interference is a limitation of a person's freedom. Thus the most perfectly free person would be an individual who wasn't formed by his/her circumstances, but made himself/herself. Capitalist philosophers call this idea of freedom as creating yourself "autonomy" or "self-determination."

People Don't Create Themselves

In reality, no one is his or her own parent, and by the time children are old enough to make their choices, they are already strongly influenced by their circumstances. We are all products of our society, our class, our families, our neighborhoods, the capitalists' government, schools, religious institutions, the media, etc. People don't make themselves. What capitalists call a "self-made man" is just someone who stepped on many people to get a pile of loot he didn't inherit.

Materialist Freedom

In their book *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels explained the materialist conception of freedom. They defined freedom as power "over the circumstances and conditions in which an individual lives." This idea acknowledges the materialist principle that people are products of their circumstances, but rejects self-determination as merely "imaginary freedom."

The materialist view of freedom explains why workers are not free under capitalism. The bosses, our enemies, have much more power over our circumstances than we do. Many of the world's workers don't even have the power to feed themselves adequately, and we all depend on capitalists for our wages. Control of the means of production, of money, of the government and

the media—all give capitalists tremendous power over us, power we don't have over our own circumstances

Freedom Requires Collective Action

People can get power over their circumstances by acting collectively. Many people working together can have the creativity and strength for tremendous accomplishments, but it's mighty tough for workers to do this under capitalism. Most mass movements—from trade unions to civil rights to the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street—are ignored, lied about, taken over, or smashed by capitalists.

Although capitalists have much more power than workers, capitalism limits collectivity so much that even capitalists have limited power over their own circumstances. The economic crises and imperialist wars that necessarily result from conflicts among capitalists themselves make the system uncontrollable. So even capitalists aren't all that free under capitalism.

Communism is Real Collectivity

Marx and Engels pointed out that under communism, "the community of revolutionary proletarians ... takes their conditions of existence and those of all members of society under their control." Without capitalists, without a repressive government, without money or wages, collective humanity can decide how to use our labor, natural resources and technology to meet our needs, direct our own future and provide lots of choices for individuals.

This kind of freedom wasn't (and isn't) possible under socialism, with its wages, inequalities, and life-long trades and professions that limit the kinds of work a person can do. Only the united action of the masses gives us the greatest power over the conditions and circumstances that make us what we are and provides the resources for individual development. Thus "personal freedom becomes possible only within the [communist]

community," Marx and Engels wrote, because "only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions."

Mass Mobilization for Communism

Achieving communism will take a long, hard fight that can only be won by the mass mobilization of the working class. But mass mobilization isn't just the way to get to the goal of communism. Mass mobilization for communism gives workers the greatest possible power over our conditions and circumstances, and is thus working-class freedom itself. Join us in the fight for workers' freedom.



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A DIALECTICAL LOOK AT THE APPEARANCE AND ESSENCE OF ELECTIONS

Elections are a cheap disguise (although they cost a lot of money) appearing to give workers a voice, but actually they serve only to cover up the fact that the capitalist class monopolizes political power. Elections, and democracy itself, are the sheep's clothing used to hide the wolf of the dictatorship of capital. We need to work for qualitative change that exposes to all workers the bosses' political dictatorship and trashes the myth of democratic elections.

In US elections, there are two parties: the Democrats, who appear to the masses as standing for social programs; and the Republicans, who appear to stand for small government and religious issues. However, if we scratch the surface appearance, we find that there are no serious differences between, for instance, Obama and McCain during the last US presidential election. Both wanted to fund the war in Iraq and escalate the occupation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both agreed that the main focus of foreign policy is the War on Terrorism, and agreed on expanding the military. Both agreed to the Patriot Act, a policy permitting government to monitor people's phone calls and internet usage, to use warrant-less wiretaps, etc. Each had his own stealth form of pushing the military draft. Obama proposed national service; McCain proposed to expand Americorp and ROTC.

The essence of elections is determined by the bosses' class interests. This essence is the inner, hidden nature of what primarily drives elections, and it explains why elections are needed at all. Understanding the nature of elections involves analyzing the needs of the capitalist class and figuring out which policies and politicians serve those needs best, while still appearing to workers that they have a choice.

The appearance and essence of elections to-

gether compose a contradiction; they depend on each other for their existence but are opposites. The phony election process appears to be genuine and tries to hide from the working class the essence of elections: the tyranny of capitalism over workers' lives.

The capitalist-driven essence of elections is commanded by the mechanisms of capitalism: competition, the anarchy of production, inter-imperialist rivalry, etc. The bosses cannot control these mechanisms. As the development of capitalism leads again and again to inter-imperialist world war, the bosses permit only candidates wholeheartedly workers to die for their profits. The bosses only permit candidates who advocate policies that do not disturb the usage of tools that maximize exploitation, such as racism, sexism, nationalism, the wage system, which is wage slavery, and money.

The resolution of contradictions requires a qualitative change, a transition into the opposite. Currently, the appearance of elections is crucial to disguising and maintaining capitalist dictatorship. Workers need to bring about a qualitative change that transitions this situation to one where the essence of elections becomes apparent: expose and abolish the capitalist-driven election process that perpetuates wage slavery.

Considering the limits of both the appearance and essence of elections, voting guarantees the perpetuation of all the tools to maximize exploitation and capitalist power; it maintains the status quo. The qualitative change grows closer as we continue with our quantitative work to organize and strengthen ICWP in all areas. We need to write, read, donate to and distribute *Red Flag* to strengthen our connection to the paper and also to strengthen *Red Flag's* connection to our working class, to cast aside false hopes in voting and

instead turn to actions that hasten communist revolution to abolish capitalism and build a system without exploitation.

Red Flag Editorial Comment:

This article does a good job at explaining that elections hide the dictatorship of capital over the working class. It doesn't make it clear that there is no way that elections can serve the working class. In a communist system, there won't be elections. We won't decide things by voting.

The way the Party works now is a model for the way communism will work in the future. Leaders are and will be chosen by workers and others who have confidence in their comrades' leadership in developing and fighting for our communist ideas and uniting us to mobilize for communism. We do and will make decisions by analyzing, discussing and struggling to advance the fight for communism, to advance the interests of the international working class.

Voting is a passive act that doesn't require our full participation. Communist centralism, however, means that all comrades and friends actively participate in the discussion and the work of understanding, spreading, and developing communist ideas and practice. All will participate in planning and carrying out and evaluating production and distribution in all their social relations.

The bosses' definition of politics is a passive process of electing someone who will do all the leading. That's the opposite of communism, in which masses of workers through their party will lead every aspect of society to guarantee that the needs of the working class are met.

A DIALECTICAL LOOK AT THE APPEARANCE AND ESSENCE OF UNITY IN SPORTS

History shows that soccer originated in China, dating back from the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC followed by England in the 18th Century when they started modernizing it and introduced it to the rest of the world.

Throughout history, soccer was used by ancient empires as political propaganda to divide the countries. Today is no exception. Although often overlooked, sports and politics are intricately intertwined. For example in the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, the dictatorship in that country utilized the World Cup as an instrument to show the rest of the world that there was supposed harmony within the country.

The 1930's, 40's and '50's marked a new turn in the sports field when political leaders of fascist regimes created a global political atmosphere. Mussolini and Hitler were architects of promoting fascism, nationalism, and racism in soccer

and other sports. These dictators could see that fostering nationalism in soccer would divert many of the youth and other people away from the main problems in the society. They associated sports with an extension of military training.

In this new era we can clearly see that capitalists haven't stopped following the examples of their old masters with new influential marketing techniques in soccer. The 21st century has witnessed an increase in euphoria that arises every day between the famous classic "Real Madrid vs. Barcelona," a tremendous battle on the field as well as off between fans, particularly in Europe, the USA and Latin America.

The rules that apply in soccer are parallel to those applied similarly by our whole society which are uniform, unbreakable and ultimately non-negotiable. The objective of sports worldwide is a double-edged sword for imperialism as

they strengthen their empire and at the same time exploit and create separation between workers.

We can analyze and conclude that capitalism teaches us to measure the athletes, based on strength, superiority and of course to be defenders of the system. Thus it is that while we continue to let ourselves be manipulated by this system, participating in discussions or attacking our same class, then unwittingly we become complicit with the same system which, seeing it in perspective, does not benefit us in any way whatsoever. On the contrary, it affects us by taking us away from the real issues that occur in our lives.

Soccer is indisputably fascinating. It's the sport that is played the most on our planet. Unfortunately it has been affected and taken to another dimension by the same corruption that this system offers us.

How I imagine sports will be under Communism:

I think that winning medals and titles in competition should be abolished. The athlete as well as the whole working class will be free of all types of exploitation. Sport will be practiced collectively, exclusively as part of the exercise that human beings need to live a healthy life.

No athlete will be seen as superior or inferior to another. Let's say, "Enough!" to division based on nationalism! Help us to fight this capitalist evil and contribute to building a new communist society. Social equality for all! Strength is on our side! It depends on us to make the change happen!



SOLDIERS DISCUSS COMMUNIST PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE

While pulling guard duty one night with a few other soldiers we started a very good discussion regarding dialectics.

It started off as a conversation regarding different philosophical topics. We started off discussing Descartes and then moved on to Plato. Next we moved on to how many truths there are in the world. I was very into the conversation and when I got the opportunity I introduced dialectics into the conversation.

None of the soldiers knew what it was, but some had heard of it. I began by explaining to them the difference between idealism and materialism, the scientific way of looking at the world. This intrigued them very much, especially since most of them had heard of idealism and materialism but didn't know the real meaning of either. Most of them were using the media definitions—like idealists care about other people and materialists are all about the money. After a pretty long discussion about whether they themselves were idealists or materialist we had to end the conversation because our shift was over.

I really didn't know the impact I had made on them until the next morning. While standing in formation, the guys I had pulled guard duty with the night before all came up to me and even brought a few others with them and asked me to continue on discussing what I knew. This time I started off by explaining to them what dialectics is. Once I was done explaining dialectics I introduced them to dialectical materialism: the philosophy of change, which includes all processes, including how to change the world.

The way they hung on to every word I said was amazing. We continued the conversation every chance we got, each one bringing new questions every time. I was amazed at how much they enjoyed discussing dialectics. It just goes to show that we shouldn't fear discussing deep topics like this with soldiers or anyone else.

Later, one guy asked me how I knew so much about this stuff, and I told him about this paper I read, *Red Flag*. He got really interested in it, and we agreed that, since he's going home soon, I would send him the paper when he got home.



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SAN DIEGO, April 19. The 14th Dalai Lama is completing his tour of college campuses in Southern California, preaching “Compassion Without Borders.” The DL has been the leader of the Tibetan nationalist movement since the feudal government that he headed was overthrown by the Chinese Red Army in 1959. Preaching compassion for everyone, he has often shown his own compassion for leaders of the U. S. empire.

Hypocritical Pacifism

The DL got the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and has been hailed as a “man of peace.” Although he claims that “war is outdated and illogical” [1], he says that “you can’t blame America” for “still relying on showing force” in international relations [2]. The DL has long refused to say that the U. S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are wrong, claiming that “it is too soon to tell” about Iraq but “Afghanistan may be showing some positive results,” [3] and may lead to “perhaps some kind of liberation.” [4] The DL has announced his affection for George W. Bush: “I love him. Because since my first visit, I noted he is a human being [who is] very nice, very open, very straightforward” [5]. He also endorsed Bush’s “War on Terror”: “Terrorism is the worst kind of violence, so we have to check it, we have to take counter-measures.” [6] Although the DL expresses sympathy for Palestinians, he doesn’t denounce Israeli oppression, but asks them to appreciate Zionist economic development: “To the Arabs I say, it is sad, sad what happened to you. But look at what the Jewish people have done here. Take the good.” [7]

“Don’t Fight for Equality”

Although he is an anti-communist, the Dalai Lama claims to be a “Marxist as far as economic theory is concerned” and says that equal distribution is a correct moral principle. [8] He rejects fighting for equality, however, and attacks “agitators” who “claim to be fighting for equality or for justice.” The rich “have to decide on their

own that it is good to share what they have.” They should realize that “in the long run it is in the interest of the richer people themselves to make sure that there is a less extreme gap between themselves and the poor around them.” [9]

Tibetan Nationalism and U. S. War Preparations

Tibetan nationalism has been useful to the U. S. empire since the 1950s when Tibetan guerrillas were trained by the CIA. These days, as the rivalry between the U. S. bosses and China’s capitalist rulers intensifies, Obama has met the Dalai Lama several times, and “underlined the importance of the protection of human rights of Tibetans in China.” [10] Like all capitalist countries, Chinese capitalism produces racist inequality and conflict like that between the Han majority and Tibetans and Uighurs. But nationalist movements, which don’t see racism as an attack on the working class, help generate racism, not destroy it, and can help imperialists make propaganda against their rivals, as Obama does against China.

Non-Struggle Philosophy

The DL’s consistent message is not to fight the bosses. Don’t act out of anger or hate, he says, but forgive instead. Everyone should become a “peaceful person” (except U.S. imperialists?) and “inner peace creates useful energy.” [11] Getting a “peaceful life” is supposed to be the main thing, which Buddhism claims to make possible even in the midst of unemployment, the bosses’ drive for imperialist wars, and racist murders. The truth is that there is no peace under capitalism, and hatred of the bosses is a good thing that can drive us to fight harder. It is internal contradictions, not “inner peace,” that cause change. Communists understand that collective struggle not only moves us towards communism, but is the best way workers can live under this system. Workers and students shouldn’t search for an impossible subjective peace, but join the struggle for com-

munist and serve the working class.

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