

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

