

Dialectics: The Communist Philosophy of Struggle

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>

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, celeb-



Young students lead literacy classes at Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Region commune, China, 1960.

rity 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.”

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