

# For Marxism and Against Centrism on the Labor Question

## Introduction:

The ongoing theoretical struggle between what might be called for simplicity's sake the “state unionist camp”, and authors and organizations like Comrade Saoirse and Red Star Communist Organization (RSCO), has brought forth a rich discussion on a wide variety of important topics and problems. In the following text we hope to respond to common problems and ideas we find in both of these authors’ responses to the state unionism line and our previously published pieces. Despite the already extensive length of this response, we simply cannot respond to everything written by both Comrade Saoirse and RSCO, and instead have limited ourselves to engage on what we feel like are a handful of essential or key disagreements between our respective positions. We hope this article in turn further advances and develops the current struggle, and helps identify the essential questions at the heart of this exchange. As always, we appreciate those who have contributed to this line struggle, and look forward to their and others’ thoughts and responses.

## Briefly, On Party-Building

It is the stance of the Southern New England Labor Council, and its publication New Labor Press, that questions of how current “party-building” projects should be concretely and organizationally linked to mass organizations should not be discussed in open and legal channels such as our publication or *The Masses*, and should instead be discussed, when judged appropriate, in closed channels between revolutionary circles. Nevertheless, in order to adequately respond to RSCO and Comrade Saoirse, we find it necessary to discuss and struggle over the question of party construction in our national context on a theoretical level, according to Marxist theories and texts openly published and read by all.

Our ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, tells us we must keep in mind a variety of essential concepts, and dialectical relationships when discussing the activity and construction of a Communist Party, or its embryo and early “rudiments”. These include, but are by no means limited to:

- ◆ The leading role of the proletariat, and its advanced detachment of the proletariat (the Communist Party), during the entire revolutionary process

- ◆ The contradiction between proletarian and bourgeois ideology within the revolutionary movement (Two line struggle, unity-struggle-unity, and demarcating Marxism from revisionism)
- ◆ The historic task of the proletariat, as led by its party: armed revolutionary struggle for political power (the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat) towards communism
- ◆ The relationship between theoretical and practical work
- ◆ The relationship between objective and subjective conditions, theory, programme, strategy, tactics, and slogans
- ◆ The relationship between and combination of illegal and legal work, closed and open methods
- ◆ The relationship between the conscious and spontaneous elements of the movement of the proletariat
- ◆ The relationship between the universal and the particular
- ◆ The relationship between expansion and consolidation

One of the key theses of Marxism, in comparison to bourgeois ideology, is the recognition that everything in society and nature is dialectically interlinked. As Mao wrote in *On Contradiction*:

*The metaphysical or vulgar evolutionist world outlook sees things as isolated, static and one-sided. It regards all things in the universe, their forms and their species, as eternally isolated from one another and immutable.*

[...]

*As opposed to the metaphysical world outlook, the world outlook of materialist dialectics holds that in order to understand the development of a thing we should study it internally and in its relations with other things; in other words, the development of things should be seen as their internal and necessary self-movement, while each thing in its movement is interrelated with and interacts on the things around it.*

In this sense, even at the most basic stage of initial party-building that we find ourselves in, whatever the primary tasks might be, the need to simultaneously develop correct theoretical and practical work still applies, as does the need for revolutionary circles to base themselves in and lead the proletariat, or the need to correctly combine legal and illegal methods, etc.

To put things more simply: ignoring these contradictions and relationships, i.e. errors of Marxism, revisionism, and liberalism, do not become more okay the more embryonic party-building efforts are. These errors might be more common, or perhaps expected, but they are no less damaging and are not somehow more acceptable because there is no party or party embryo. **The particular subjective stage or situation a given nation's revolutionaries find themselves in does not change the universal components, principles, and methods of Marxism (which expresses itself as Marxism-Leninism-**

**Maoism in the modern context), nor does it change the nature of monopoly capitalism i.e. imperialism.**

The problem is that RSCO and Saoirse seem to take an “either-or”, mechanical, and non-dialectical position on our current tasks, on the dialectical contradictions and relationships inherent to these tasks, and seem to divide the advancement and the development of ideological unity among Marxist circles from those same Marxists circles’ theoretical and practical work within the spontaneous movement of the proletariat. For example, to quote RSCO at length so as not to misrepresent them:

“While we therefore agree that, ideologically and politico-militarily, the road to socialist revolution must pass through the shattered remnants of the so-called ‘state unions,’ we also maintain that it does not, and cannot, begin there. So long as the anti-revisionist tendency remains objectively marginalized and isolated from the mass movement, so long as our forces are politically and organizationally dispersed and so long as our ideological level remains so abysmally low—in other words, until a national pre-party formation and national political leadership worthy of taking up the banner of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism are forged, and forged in deed rather than just in word—the main tasks are ideological rectification and uniting the advanced around proletarian communist politics.”

"1—Ideological rectification: developing the subjective level of our trend through struggle over political line (a practice of which this exchange is a part). Summing up and systematizing the experimental knowledge produced by sequences of mass practice provides the raw material for such a struggle, the resolution of which is the only real basis for unity among the circles today."

"2—Uniting the advanced: as above, this entails uniting the existing circles through a process of struggle-transformation-unity, but also winning over advanced workers to communist politics."

[...]

Our characterization of these errors as a left-economist deviation follows from the main task of communists in the *current conjuncture*, eg, that of the construction of the party through subjective development of our trend and the forging of unity of the advanced. Victory in the struggle for revindications and the growth of the labor movement in general matter only insofar as our work is in service to the former tasks.

To conceive of our role *today* as the mobilization of a revolutionary political movement of millions of workers to smash the state unions entails a gross misevaluation of our forces and our main task.

An approach to the mass movement emphasizing that the role of communists in a mass struggle is to develop their **political base** through the *generation of new mass organizations* that can “revolutionize” the struggle is fundamentally economicist—relying on the “politicization” of economic struggles—and left-sectarian in its consequent self-isolation from the broad masses of the working class. Our view is that it represents the inverse of the rank-and-file error of attempting to “revolutionize” the state unions themselves, as it retains an implicitly stageist conception of the development of class consciousness.

[...]

To rectify our trend's approach to mass work and ensure that our center of gravity remains the political struggle means to to *unite the advanced* (to lay the groundwork for the construction of the party) rather than to *unite all who can be united* (the watchword of the United Front). That is, the main task today is that of party-building, and our approach to organizing the masses must be understood according to our position regarding this general line, rather than the reverse. It is our position that the accomplishment of this task requires, on the one hand, a renewed commitment to political and theoretical struggle (rather than narrow emphasis on practical work), and on the other, a thorough reassessment of our approach to the practical work within which we are engaged.

We propose, provisionally, a line of construction of militant minority groupings within both existing (and therefore revisionist or otherwise politico-organizationally compromised) broad mass organizations *and* new, independent formations which can unite advanced workers around advanced politics—eg, Maoism—in order to carry the struggles forward while recruiting and training communists for the pre-party organizations and circles.

This, coupled with the continued exchange of theoretical documents by the existing circles which sum up our practical work in the mass struggles and our analyses of the contemporary conjuncture can lay the groundwork for a future congress of anti-revisionist communist forces for further struggle and joint work.

As we put forward in a private exchange with the comrades from the SNELC camp:

“given 1) the *objective* dispersal of communist forces, 2) the low overall level of ideological development within our trend (how many of our comrades can seriously claim to be Maoist communist militants without a firm grasp of *Capital* or an elementary understanding of dialectical materialism, for example?), and 3) the serious dearth of meaningful links with the masses, we believe that it follows immediately that we can *only* lay the groundwork for higher level coordination and national leadership by developing practical work where we are: engaging in experimentation and investigation, and struggling in an open way over our conclusions and political/strategic lines.”

The main task of revolutionaries in the United States is to forge the embryo of the Communist Party through achieving the advancement, rectification, development, and unity of US revolutionary circles, this much is true. But what does that actually mean? Is struggling for and emphasizing the correct application of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist principles and methods in circles' sectoral mass work really “economistic” (a position which RSCO seems to both express and contradict at different points throughout their piece)? Is analyzing the political economy of the modern US imperialist-capitalist system, and making practical prescriptions based on that analysis, a “premature” endeavor that does not correspond to our stage of “party-building?” Does party reconstitution at our stage really just look like 1) “ideological rectification” through summing up/synthesizing our practical work, sharing those theoretical works and summations with other circles, and in this way 2) “uniting the advanced” by “uniting the existing circles through a process of struggle-transformation-unity” and simultaneously, on a local level presumably, “winning over advanced workers to communist politics”?

In the United States we find ourselves currently in a situation similar to the pre-RSDLP Russia of the 1880s, 1890s, and early 1900s, where the organizational form of localized/regional open and closed revolutionary circles prevails. In our context, both RSCO, Saoirse, and others are correct in putting forward that the primary task is what Stalin referred to as “uniting the separate Marxist circles and organizations and welding them together organizationally.”

What is left unmentioned in both Saoirse and RSCO’s piece is that according to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, the struggle to forge unity between revolutionary circles in order to form this embryo must be, necessarily, **principally clandestine** due to the character, tasks, and purpose of the militarized, concentrically constructed Communist Party of a New Type that this process hopes to eventually produce. Not only must this process be mainly clandestine, but it must also be necessarily patient and thorough-going, so as not to prematurely or artificially form a national party embryo on a weak basis of unity, as the last handful of party-building projects in our country have been founded on.

On the other hand, the fact that direct and principally clandestine ideological-political unity-struggle-unity between “the existing circles” is the **main** task does not however negate nor liquidate the need for simultaneous, open, coordinated, principled, and embryonic united front work and sectoral mass work between open mass organizations and the generated organisms of revolutionary circles. Indeed, concretely, as part of laying the “groundwork” for the establishment and forging of unity between a nation’s existing circles, as well as part of forging these circles in Marxist methods, and sinking deep roots among the masses and working classes, we must do such work as RSCO claims is premature.

Questions of class struggle versus class collaboration, questions of reform versus revolution, questions of strengthening the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or fighting for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat are not simple tactical disagreements to be resolved at a later date. They are questions of principle at the heart and soul of what it means to be Marxist, what it means to be a proletarian revolutionary, and questions that are essential to practicing Marxism not revisionism. Whether or not there is currently a reconstituted Communist Party, or an ongoing people’s war, does not change the need for Marxists to uphold and unite on these principles theoretically **and** for them to practically apply these principles and methods to their interventions in the spontaneous mass movement and the class struggle.

Again, to put things simply: you cannot “unite the advanced” before using Marxist criteria to identify who exactly the “advanced” are! It cannot be taken for granted that just because a revolutionary circle declares itself to be “Marxist-Leninist-Maoist” and in favor of “party reconstitution” that they are automatically part of the “advanced”. It does not matter if all of given group’s statements are perfectly written and abstractly correct, if that group “**practices** revisionism not Marxism” they are at best part of the intermediate, and at worst openly a part of the “backwards” elements of the revolutionary movement. Accordingly, the state unionism line and the work of NLP is just one part of a broader process of both uniting and identifying the advanced elements within the revolutionary movement, and demarcating them from the intermediate and backwards elements.

As is often the case, Lenin already established the correct position on this debate more than a century ago. To quote at length from his 1894 piece *What the “Friends of the People” Are and*

*How They Fight the Social-Democrats* written precisely during the period of disunited Russian Marxist circles (**and we suggest comrades read the quote carefully**):

“I say this as against those socialists who, while they do not accept the theory of the Social-Democrats, carry on their agitation among the workers, having become convinced empirically that only among the latter are revolutionary elements to be found. The theory of these socialists contradicts their practice, and they make a very serious mistake by distracting the workers from their direct task of **ORGANISING A SOCIALIST WORKERS’ PARTY**.

[...]

The socialist intelligentsia can expect to perform fruitful work only when they abandon their illusions and begin to seek support in the actual, and not the desired development of Russia, in actual, and not possible social-economic relations. Moreover, their **THEORETICAL** work must be directed towards *the concrete study of all forms of economic antagonism in Russia, the study of their connections and successive development; they must reveal this antagonism wherever it has been concealed by political history, by the peculiarities of legal systems or by established theoretical prejudice. They must present an integral picture of our realities as a definite system of production relations, show that the exploitation and expropriation of the working people are essential under this system, and show the way out of this system that is indicated by economic development.*

This theory, based on a detailed study of Russian history and realities, must furnish an answer to the demands of the proletariat—and if it satisfies the requirements of science — then every awakening of the protesting thought of the proletariat will inevitably guide this thought into the channels of Social-Democracy. The greater the progress made in elaborating this theory, the more rapidly will Social-Democracy grow; for even the most artful guardians of the present system cannot prevent the awakening of proletarian thought, because this system itself necessarily and inevitably entails the most intense expropriation of the producers, the continuous growth of the proletariat and of its reserve army—and this parallel to the progress of social wealth, the enormous growth of the productive forces, and the socialisation of labour by capitalism. However much has still to be done to elaborate this theory, the socialists will do it; this is guaranteed by the spread among them of materialism, the only scientific method, one requiring that every programme shall be a precise formulation of the actual process; it is guaranteed by the success of Social-Democracy, which has adopted these ideas—a success which has so stirred up our liberals and democrats that, as a certain Marxist has put it, their monthly magazines have ceased to be dull.

In thus emphasising the necessity, importance and immensity of the theoretical work of the Social-Democrats, I by no means want to say that this work should take precedence over **PRACTICAL** work, —still less that the latter should be postponed until the former is completed. Only the admirers of the “subjective method in sociology,” or the followers of utopian socialism, could arrive at such a conclusion. Of course, if it is presumed that the task of the socialists is to seek “different” (from actual) “paths of development” for the country, then, naturally, practical work becomes possible only when philosophical geniuses discover and indicate these “different paths”; and conversely, once these paths

are discovered and indicated theoretical work ends, and the work of those who are to direct the “fatherland” along the “newly-discovered” “different paths” begins. The position is altogether different when the task of the socialists is to be the ideological leaders of the proletariat in its actual struggle against actual and real enemies who stand in the actual path of social and economic development. Under these circumstances, theoretical and practical work merge into one aptly described by the veteran German Social-Democrat, Liebknecht, as:

Studieren, Propagandieren, Organisieren. [trans – study, propagandize, organize]

You cannot be an ideological leader without the above mentioned theoretical work, just as you cannot be one without directing this work to meet the needs of the cause, and without spreading the results of this theory among the workers and helping them to organise.

Such a presentation of the task guards Social-Democracy against the defects from which socialist groups so often suffer, namely, dogmatism and sectarianism.

There can be no dogmatism where the supreme and sole criterion of a doctrine is its conformity to the actual process of social and economic development; there can be no sectarianism when the task is that of promoting the organisation of the proletariat, and when, therefore, the role of the “intelligentsia” is to make special leaders from among the intelligentsia unnecessary.

Hence, despite the existence of differences among Marxists on various theoretical questions, the methods of their political activity have remained unchanged ever since the group arose.

The political activity of the Social-Democrats lies in promoting the development and organisation of the working-class movement in Russia, in transforming this movement from its present state of sporadic attempts at protest, “riots” and strikes devoid of a guiding idea, into an organised struggle of the WHOLE Russian working CLASS directed against the bourgeois regime and working for the expropriation of the expropriators and the abolition of the social system based on the oppression of the working people. Underlying these activities is the common conviction of Marxists that the Russian worker is the sole and natural representative of Russia’s entire working and exploited population.”

Lenin thus gives to us two principles regarding party-building that do not detract from the welding together of the various Marxist centers, but are actually essential to and inseparable from that process. The first principle he elaborates is that Marxist revolutionary circles cannot just abstractly agree with Marxism but must actively use it in their theoretical work as a scientific tool to “present an integral picture of our realities as a definite system of production relations, show that the exploitation and expropriation of the working people are essential under this system, and show the way out of this system that is indicated by economic development” so as to “furnish an answer to the demands of the proletariat.” The second, “practical”, principle he gives to Marxist circles (all serving and as an integral part of their struggle for unity and the formation/reconstitution of a united vanguard party) “is to be the ideological leaders of the

proletariat in its actual struggle against actual and real enemies who stand in the actual path of social and economic development.”

In this sense both Saoirse and RSCO put forward two interconnected anti-Marxist lines: 1) that our “ideological” “communist work” takes “precedence” over our practical work and 2) that our theoretical work studying and presenting how modern revolutionary circles can concretely lead and answer the demands of the proletariat, and how that practical work can be linked back to the historic conquest of political power by the proletariat, should be “postponed until the former” process of ideological rectification, or whatever we want to call it, “is completed.” The practical and theoretical work of Marxist circles form a unity of opposites, because as Lenin correctly points out: “You cannot be an ideological leader without the above mentioned theoretical work, just as you cannot be one without directing this work to meet the needs of the cause, and without spreading the results of this theory among the workers and helping them to organise.” In this way the theoretical and practical work a revolutionary circle undertakes among the masses, and among the proletariat at the point of production in particular (labor work), is a key way of identifying the “advanced” within the revolutionary movement, who actually grasps Marxism and can apply it to their conditions and work.

The line of state unionism was thus elaborated by us in large part because, as we realized in our work and collaboration with others, there were very few modern attempts at elaborating what exactly revolutionary Marxist practical work in the labor movement looks like as it flows from a theoretical analysis of the current state of the establishment labor movement and our current political economy.

The New Labor-ists have never put forward a universal formula for how revolutionary workers and labor organizers are supposed to organize against the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, rather than for it, or even a timetable for breaking with the state unions. The closest thing to a universal formula would probably be the Draft Shop Unit Guide, which included the following as universally applicable:

“The purpose of a shop unit is to organize a particular workplace, raise the political level of the workers there, and struggle for their immediate concrete demands. What this looks like will be different at every place of work. Nevertheless, there are certain ideological, political, and organizational features that are common across all units, and it must be this way if we are to achieve organization on an industrial level without degenerating into the divisive, weak, reactionary organizations that characterize the bourgeois labor movement. Due to the potential for repercussions, shop units should be organized semi-clandestinely. [...] The first side is the administrative work of organizing the masses. Even in workplaces where the state unions are legally responsible for organizing the workers, there is usually no real system or shop-floor apparatus for actually doing so. It is the job of the workers to construct it, but they must construct and maintain it according to their own needs and capabilities and with their own organizational independence as its basis. [...] The second side is the ideological-political orientation of that work. The state unions have demonstrated, and history has demonstrated in a million different ways, that even tens of millions of organized workers are completely helpless if these organizations are dominated by the bourgeoisie. And the domination of the bourgeoisie is an inevitability if the rank and file is not equipped with revolutionary theory and willing to stand up against incorrect ideas and even physical assault. The growth of the shop units has the effect of weakening them ideologically, since less experienced and therefore less theoretically

sound people are brought in, which may in the long run hinder their further growth if left unaddressed. Therefore consistent political and ideological work is an absolute necessity among the organizers and in their day-to-day work. The creation of a central press organ, like a shop paper or some other regular publication tailored to the needs and capabilities of the average worker in the industry, is an absolutely fundamental task for the shop-floor organizations. Without this, their degeneration into adjuncts of the bourgeois state is a near-guarantee, and even if they do maintain some formal independence, it will be for naught. The organizers, or at least the most theoretically knowledgeable leaders of the organizers, should establish a press organ and create a routine of organizers distributing their ideas and synthesizing the demands and conditions of the workers in a publication to be circulated among the broad mass of workers outside the shop unit. The ideological-political work and practical work of the shop units have a dialectical and mutually supporting relationship to one other. For example, when a strike or shop floor campaign inevitably reaches a set of obstacles or challenges, the extent to which the shop paper has helped to raise the political and class consciousness of the workers involved can be the deciding factor as to whether the action overcomes its obstacles and is successful or whether these small obstacles turn into a slow and inevitable demobilization and defeat.”

And elsewhere: “We encourage workers regardless of political affiliation to develop shop floor organizations and fight for their own economic interests and those of their coworkers. At the same time, we advocate that the leaders of these organizations should study the scientific ideology of the proletariat. This ideology in the modern day is called Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. We believe this because we are not the first revolutionary workers to try and organize our workplaces, nor are we the last to do so. Maoist theory takes the long and proud history of the last two hundred years of workers’ struggle, and defines the causes of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and it is precisely for this reason that Maoist ideas are easily assimilated by the workers and are the most potent force for uniting them. Reformist and bourgeois trade unionist ideas can only split and misguide them. Theoretical work must come first and cannot be separated from practical work: organizing plans and campaigns must always have a solid materialist analysis guiding them.”

Thus, the closest thing to a universal formula for the labor movement put forward by New Labor was that 1) revolutionaries must lead the workers in rebuilding the basic trade-union machinery, which either never existed in most workplaces or was systematically dismantled over by the bourgeois state and their state unionist lackeys over the course of decades in “organized” workplaces, and 2) that in this machinery they have to fight to raise the political consciousness of the workers above their own narrow personal interests in an independent struggle against the class collaborationist ideas and methods instilled by state unionism, and furthermore, 3) that this must be done by applying Maoism to the concrete conditions of the workplace. These three issues are the basic tasks of aspiring communists in the workplace and the source of the entire current controversy.

In this sense, the works of the New Labor Press are meant as a tool for linking the open ideological struggle among revolutionary circles, the conscious element, to the concrete theoretical and practical intervention of the circles in the mass workers movement more broadly, the spontaneous element. Addressing the relationship between the spontaneous and conscious elements of the mass movement is in turn a key part of grasping and correctly putting into

practice another universal component of Marxist party-building theory, the relationship and contradiction between expansion and consolidation. Thus party-building tasks cannot just be limited to identifying, uniting and **consolidating** the already “advanced”, but also must simultaneously address revolutionary circles’ **expansion** among and bringing up of the intermediate elements of the spontaneous proletarian movement and its allied mass movements.

Perhaps the term “shop-unit” is somewhat imperfect or inaccurate, given the predominance of local revolutionary circles rather than a national party-embryo or Party. We propose such bodies as shop papers, shop units, organizing committees, and workers study circles however, in a similar way to how, in spite of the lack of a party or party embryo, many revolutionaries support the creation of open agitation-propaganda circles where there is no ongoing revolutionary work. Later on in the party-building process, all revolutionary agitation propaganda circles should be initiated by and function as auxiliaries of a national party embryo or reconstituted Communist Party. However, given the lack of either of those bodies, and the lack of functioning revolutionary circles in most cities nationally, there is a need to initiate revolutionary work where there is none, and build unity with and lead such work where it surges spontaneously.

The expansion work of revolutionary circles cannot be generally limited to the creation of independent agitation-propaganda circles or generic umbrella street activist organizations. That is because one of the main problems, frankly, with these methods is that they largely draw from and engage in work with the radical youth/intellectuals, the petty bourgeoisie, and the privileged upper-layers of the working class. Revolutionary circles must also seek to generate and encourage the creation of independent organisms specifically aimed at and designed for theoretical and practical work among the workers, specifically the proletariat, due the historically essential nature of their work among, integration with, and leadership of that class in particular.

In this sense, we believe it is better for the NLP and its fraternal organizations to openly propose and advocate for the implementation of Marxist principles and methods in the labor movement than for them to take no such public stances or exercise no such public leadership. Advocating that self-proclaimed Marxists grasp and use Marxist methods, implement Marxist principles, and tie their labor work in service of the eventual establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat is not “economistic”. To suggest such an idea is to mechanically separate the party-building work of revolutionary circles from the practical and theoretical work they do within the class struggle or within other spontaneous mass struggles for demands and revindications. All true Marxists must insist on the correct dialectical and reciprocal relationship between our theoretical and practical work. As it relates to the current discussion, anyone who wants to take part in reconstitution must develop their theory of and practice among the proletariat beyond economistic labor-liberal class collaboration if they are to be recognized as “advanced”. Any disagreement with this amounts to calling for the future Communist Party to throw its doors wide open to the NGO employees, government functionaries, labor “scholars”, and gangsters who dominate the labor movement right now. Accepting the representatives of the bourgeois labor movement into the party actually means liquidationism. It means liquidating the leadership of the revolutionary proletarians and liquidating the trade union struggle, as this is the actual work of the labor aristocracy and their allies.

As a general rule, revolutionaries in the U.S., or in any country, cannot so neatly build walls between the different and varied ideological, political, and organizational tasks that are demanded of us during the process of party-building even at its most basic and primitive phases. While practically many of these tasks are separate insofar as they could be carried out by separate

people and have their own unique sequences and needs, they should all be united by and serve a single plan or goal, in this case party reconstitution. At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, to not unite all of our different tasks and activities cohesively is to guarantee our failure. As the Communist Party of Brazil writes in their masterful piece *Lenin and the Militarized Party*:

“Chairman Gonzalo, smashing the revisionist conceptions that separate the organizational construction from its ideological-political base, established a clear principle of Ideological-Political-Organizational Construction - IPOC, in correspondence with the current stage of our ideology, Maoism: **“On the ideological-political basis, simultaneously build the organization, in the midst of the class struggle and the two-line struggle, all within and serving the armed struggle for the conquest of Power (...)”**”.

Therefore, in the first place, it develops on the ideological basis of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, principally Maoism, Maoism which is the third, new and higher stage of Marxism, today's Marxism, and the contributions of universal validity of Gonzalo thought. Ideological base that needs to be creatively applied to the corresponding concrete reality of each revolution (the need for a guiding thought). Ideological basis that without which we can not take any correct position on any fundamental problem of the revolution in our epoch.

Second, the political line that is the ground of the class struggle. This is where the General Political Line unfolds and specifies in its five elements: 1) international line, 2) Democratic Revolution (Socialist Revolution in the case of imperialist countries); 3) Military Line; 4) Line of construction of the three instruments; 5) Mass Line. Finally, General Political Line, whose center is the Military Line, which is the basis and guide of all revolutionary proletarian action.

It defines, therefore, that the line of construction in the stage of Maoism takes place serving the armed struggle for the conquest of power. That is to say, before starting the People's War, everything is done serving to initiate it, once initiated, everything must serve its development.

This great principle of construction is a powerful guide to solve the problems of the construction of the three instruments, to initiate and develop the People's War, it is valid both for the dominated countries and for the imperialist countries.”

Therefore revolutionary circles in the US are given the following immense challenge: to patiently and simultaneously construct themselves and forge unity with one another on an ideological, political, and organizational basis, **all in the midst of class struggle**, and serving the eventual initiation of armed struggle as part of the conquest of Power by the proletariat led by its Party. Thus the ideological-political struggle for unity of “the existing circles” that RSCO describes, and the practical and theoretical ways they participate in, intervene in, and lead class struggle among the proletariat at the point of production cannot be separated. Questions of ideology, and questions of how to apply that ideology concretely to the class struggle in our conditions, are intimately linked.

While it would be premature to declare some kind of general political line or “embryonic pre-embryo programme”, and demand concrete and uniform unity on these questions, it is however

not premature to begin to struggle over these questions or put forward concrete positions and perspectives on them. Neither is it premature to expect self-proclaimed Marxists to practice Marxism, to put class struggle and revolution before class collaboration and reformism. In this way, the clandestine struggle to form a party embryo, or pre-party formation, and the open struggle for Marxist methods, strategies, and tactics among the existing embryonic united front and sectoral mass work can not be viewed as completely separate processes, but actually as mutually complimentary and interrelated ones. At no point in the process of reconstitution is catering to the whims of the bourgeois state, especially the corrupt anticommunist anti-trade-unionist bureaucracy in the labor movement, an acceptable Marxist practice.

In Russia in the 1890s there was **both** intense struggle over ideology and intense struggle over methods of work, and this was not premature despite the fact that the organizational form of localized and isolated revolutionary circles prevailed. To put it succinctly, we cannot know what exact forms of united front work a general political line elaborated by a Communist Party in the US will propose, but we can know it will not involve pacifism, electoralism, or corporatist-union collaborationism for that would revise basic principles of Leninism. Similarly, we cannot know what exact forms of labor work a general political line elaborated by a Communist Party in the US will propose, but we can know in our current conjecture that it will not involve class collaboration, or the selling-out/channeling of the spontaneous militancy of the workers back into the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Instead, even now, we can demand that such work among the proletariat uphold the Marxist theory of class struggle, class against class, and uphold the struggle for political power for the proletariat and the establishment of dictatorship of the proletariat, rather than negate or undermine that struggle.

## The Foundations of Strategy and Tactics

Related to the above, both RSCO and Saoirse misunderstand how Marxists produce strategy and tactics as they relate to our ideology, our politics, our material conditions, and our practice.

This is how RSCO characterized their attitude to the New Labor-ists: “Broadly, our position is that the comrades of the SNELC put forward an essentially diagnostically accurate analysis of the character of the official trade union movement in the ‘united states.’ The characterization of the official unions as ‘state unions’ remains basically correct and we are largely aligned with the polemic against the so-called “rank-and-file” strategy...” Excellent! It is a huge step forward that more Maoists are beginning to grasp the full depth of the treachery of these institutions. For a long time, the Hoxhaists and the left Trotskyists were the most vocal opponents of these organizations, and this had the effect of giving the proletarians’ struggle against them a weak ideological basis.

“Where we break with the SNELC comrades is in their position that: ‘all revolutionaries in the labor movement must strive to construct ‘a class-based, combative and independent unionism’ in the United States without exception.’ We maintain that such a position, when unqualified, essentially reproduces the economism of the ‘rank-and-file’ strategists under a red banner; we will develop this argument in

detail below. The particular error in question here, which we characterize as ‘left-economism,’ is representative of a broader trend in the anti-revisionist left of a noble effort to build fiercely independent mass organizations that are, in the main, isolated from the class and its day-to-day struggles while still subject to the same political circumscriptions characteristic of the legal mass organizations.” This is less excellent: it is the state unions which are in reality “isolated from the class” and outright hostile to its “day-to-day struggles”. The fact that their work among a highly professionalized and privileged strata within a media company did not run up against this obstacle, and actually gained mass contacts through the state union, cannot be the basis of communist trade union policy. Communists cannot conceive of strategy, tactics, and policy from the standpoint of exceptions, especially when those exceptions are concentrated outside of the proletariat or limited to its privileged upper strata.

Similarly, Saoirse says she agrees with the New Labor-ists practical prescriptions but says that they are perfectly compatible with the theory of “boring-from-within”. I agree with everything you say but not with the theoretical explanation of why it needs to be done that way—this is the essence of Saoirse’s argument. This is obviously unsound: Stalin describes how, when Marxists craft and create strategy and tactics, they begin with and then continue from:

- 1) *The limits of operation of political strategy and tactics, their field of application.* If it is granted that the proletarian movement has two sides, objective and subjective, then the field of operation of strategy and tactics is undoubtedly limited to the subjective side of the movement. The *objective* side comprises the processes of development which take place outside of and around the proletariat independently of its will and of the will of its party, *processes* which, in the final analysis, determine the development of the whole of society. The *subjective* side comprises the processes which take place within the proletariat as the reflection in the consciousness of the proletariat of the objective processes, accelerating or retarding the latter, but not determining them.
- 2) The Marxist *theory*, which primarily studies objective processes in their development and decline, defines the trend of development and points to the class or classes which are inevitably rising to power, or are inevitably falling, which must fall.
- 3) The Marxist *programme*, based on deductions from the theory, defines the aim of the movement of the rising class, in the present case the proletariat, during a certain period in the development of capitalism, or during the whole of the capitalist period (the minimum programme and the maximum programme).
- 4) *Strategy*, guided by the programme, and based on a calculation of the contending forces, internal (national) and international, defines the *general route*, the *general direction*, in which the revolutionary proletarian movement must be guided with a view to achieving the greatest results under the incipient and developing relation of forces. In conformity with this it outlines a plan of the disposition of the forces of the proletariat and of its allies on the social front (*general disposition*). "Outlining a plan of the disposition of forces" must not be confused with the actual (concrete and practical) operation of disposing, allocating the forces, which is carried out jointly

by tactics and strategy. That does not mean that strategy is limited to defining the route and outlining a plan of the disposition of the fighting forces in the proletarian camp; on the contrary, it directs the struggle and introduces corrections in current tactics during the whole period of a turn, making skilful use of the available reserves, and manoeuvring with the object of supporting the tactics.

5) *Tactics*, guided by strategy and by the experience of the revolutionary movement at home and in neighbouring countries, taking into account at every given moment the state of forces within the proletariat and its allies (higher or lower level of culture, higher or lower degree of organisation and political consciousness, existing traditions, forms of the movement, forms of organisation, *main* and *auxiliary*), and also in the enemy's camp, taking advantage of disharmony or any confusion in the enemy's camp—indicate such *definite ways* of winning the broad masses to the side of the revolutionary proletariat and of placing them in their fighting positions on the social front (in fulfilment of the plan for the disposition of forces outlined in the strategic plan) as will most surely prepare the success of strategy. In conformity with this, they issue or change the Party's slogans and directives.

Given the current predominance of local circles, we find ourselves in a situation both without a party programme, and also without any body capable of producing such applications of Marxist theory to our conditions. Nevertheless, a universal truth we can glean from Stalin's work, is that as Marxists our strategy and tactics must always flow from an understanding of our objective and subjective material conditions, the political economy of the current moment. Thus both RSCO and Saoirse are fundamentally wrong in their centrist applications and qualifications of the state unionism line for interrelated but opposite reasons.

Either the establishment "trade unions" are generally corporatist, tied at the hip to the bourgeois state, or they are generally not. There might be exceptions, but as a general rule, either this political-economic thesis is wrong or it is right. As Marxists, it cannot be that the establishment unions have become mainly tools of the dictatorship of bourgeoisie, aimed at achieving peace and conciliation between the upper strata of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and simultaneously our general strategy as proletarian revolutionaries is to collaborate with, expand and strengthen them, or use "militant minority" bodies to seize control of them. Similarly it cannot be that the current establishment unions are legitimate basic organizations of the proletariat, spontaneous products of the American working class generally independent from the arms of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and simultaneously our general strategy should be to split and eventually overcome and destroy them.

In this way, when analyzing what our goals and tasks are, and how they should be accomplished, in any given sector or area of work, our proposals for what to do given our subjective forces and conditions are limited by our objective conditions, by the political economy of the current moment. Again, as Stalin explains:

*Political strategy, as well as tactics, is concerned with the working-class movement. But the working-class movement itself consists of two elements: the objective or spontaneous element,*

*and the subjective or conscious element. The objective, spontaneous element is the group of processes that take place independently of the conscious and regulating will of the proletariat. The economic development of the country, the development of capitalism, the disintegration of the old regime, the spontaneous movements of the proletariat and of the classes around it, the conflict of classes, etc.—all these are phenomena whose development does not depend on the will of the proletariat. That is the objective side of the movement. **Strategy has nothing to do with those processes, for it can neither stop nor alter them; it can only take them into account and proceed from them.** That is a field which has to be studied by the theory of Marxism and the programme of Marxism. [emphasis ours]*

Thus, the state unionism line is an attempt to theoretically outline the objective limits imposed on our subjective strategic terrain by the actually existing labor organizations, NLRB, etc. as they flow from the political economy of the current labor movement as a function of US imperialism and the imperialist state apparatus. We make a series of practical prescriptions on the basis of this objective analysis, prescriptions that are largely based on basic premises of Marxist theory (class struggle not class collaboration, political exposure of and struggle against bourgeois agents and ideological influence among the mass movement, the need for their to be an actual organizational implementation of any given theoretical or political line, the need for our practical work to answer the demands, questions and needs of the proletariat, etc.) but our thesis on which these practical proposals are made remains the following: that the establishment legacy “union” centers (AFL-CIO, SEIU, IBT, NEA, UBC, etc.) have been transformed over the last century into state-sanctioned legalistic workers associations which mainly seek to establish social peace, limit class struggle and promote class collaboration, politically and organizationally tie the working class to the imperialist state apparatus, and negotiate with the capitalists through the mediator of the state to distribute the spoils of US imperialism among the privileged strata of the working class, the labor aristocracy, in ways that still allow for the unconstrained flow of capital, do not threaten production or “national security”, or the pursuit of massive corporate profits.

If the state unions are legitimately leading trade union struggle and have the confidence of the masses behind them, then there is no need for independent organizations aimed at splitting—that would just be sectarianism as RSCO claims we are guilty of. (A claim they share with the *actual* sectarians and labor-bureaucrat factionalists of Teamsters Mobilize/Cosmonaut.) If that were the case, “boring-from-within” would actually make sense, since communists could simply form a caucus or “militant minority” grouping for supporting their own candidates in union elections and promote a policy of higher industrial organization and class unity. Saoirse says the New Labor-ists are pessimistic, but in reality she is way too optimistic regarding the prospects in the state unions: “There is a possibility (even if this possibility is small) that in the course of developing the subjective conditions for a split, the power of the organized rank-and-file may oust the reactionary leadership and replace it with revolutionary leadership. [...] With the proper political line, leadership, and assessment of conditions, is the organized might of the masses not capable of anything?” No one and nothing is capable of changing the class nature of the bourgeois state, no matter what the political line, leadership, or organization. This is not pessimism, but simply an acknowledgment of the objective limitations of imperialism and our

current objective conditions, in the same way that stating that electoralism is a dead end is not pessimism, but simply an acknowledgment that objectively the parliamentary road is closed to us.

The theory of "boring from within" and "militant minority groupings" could have been justified in a time and place where the establishment trade unions were actually **mainly** contributing to the class struggle, **as a general rule** accurately represented the interests and capabilities of the membership, and were willing to tolerate proletarian ideology and communist work within their ranks. However we do not live in such a time. Thus our task is to "take into account" and "proceed from" this objective reality, not deny it, as Saoirse does, or superficially acknowledge and agree with it theoretically, but then refuse to take it into account and proceed from it practically, as RSCO does.

Finally, it's important to establish that when devising our strategy and tactics we must always keep in mind the special role the most basic, deepest, and poorest sections of proletariat play in Marxism. As the PCP writes in their Mass Line:

"[Chairman Gonzalo] expounds the political role the masses play in the struggle for power by way of the People's War and that the struggle for revindications must serve this end. He outlines which masses we should go to, principally to the basic masses, the workers and peasants and the many fronts of struggle according to their specific demands and grievances. We must apply the only Marxist tactic of going to the deepest and most profound masses, educating them in revolutionary violence and in the struggle against opportunism.

[...]

He specifies the necessity of the scientific organization of poverty. Chairman Gonzalo stresses that those most disposed to rebel, who clamor most to organize the rebellion are the poorest masses, and we must pay particular attention to the revolutionary and scientific organization of the masses. This is not against class criteria because as he shows, poverty has its origin in exploitation, in the class struggle: "Misery exists next to fabulous wealth; even the Utopians knew that both are linked: A colossal and challenging wealth next to a revealing and clamorous poverty. This is because exploitation exists."

This thesis is connected to Marx who discovered the revolutionary potential of poverty and the need to scientifically organize it for the revolution. Marx taught us that the proletariat does not have property and is the creative class, the only class that shall destroy property and thus destroy itself as a class. This thesis is tied to Lenin, who taught us that social revolution does not arise from programs but from the fact that millions of people say we prefer to die fighting for revolution rather than live as victims of hunger. And it is also tied to Chairman Mao, who conceived that poverty shall propel the yearning for change, for action, for revolution, that it is a blank piece of paper on which the newest and most beautiful words can be written."

Because of the Marxist principle of assigning a key role to the “deepest and most profound masses”, when discussing the labor movement and the establishment unions we must pay especially close attention to how they relate to the poorest, deepest and most profound sections of the working class and the masses. It is a principle New Labor Press has always attempted to keep in mind in our theoretical and practical work, and one which will be relevant in the sections below.

## **The Thrust of the Current Line Struggle**

After decades of stagnation in the labor movement, the line struggle among Maoists in the labor movement has finally made some headway. The revisionist practice of openly cheerleading the decadent imperialist bureaucrats has been almost totally discredited. The number of so-called Maoists doing this can be counted on one hand. In at least one case, a high-profile Maoist joined the pro-imperialist Democratic Socialists of America and took to cheerleading the shameless Biden shill Shawn Fain. These are good developments that show the Maoist camp is steadily breaking ties with the deeply corrupt imperialist labor aristocracy, and those Maoists who refuse to do so feel less and less welcome within the revolutionary movement every day.

At the same time, the necessary theoretical work of exposing the counterrevolutionary political scheming of the labor bureaucrats continues to lag. It is limited to a handful of shop papers and irregular publications, which themselves are still new-born forces and consequently do not have strong organizational links with the proletariat, especially compared to the state unions which have the force of the bourgeois legal system, corporate management, and sometimes organized crime behind them. This has created fertile ground for centrism among the Maoists, who are lacking confidence in the state unions but either do not see the immediate necessity of preparing a break with them or how this concretely can be prepared right now. This is the thrust of the current line struggle: the centrists, who recognize the extreme backwardness of the state unions but only partially, are opposed to the New Labor-ists, who are fighting to do the practical and theoretical work necessary to lead the workers in re-establishing independent proletarian organizational centers throughout the labor movement and consolidate and expand genuine proletarian trade unionist work.

The focal point in the debate often seems to be the United Parcel Service (UPS), and this is no accident: nowhere else, with maybe the exception of the auto manufacturers, has a "union" come out more openly on the side of the company against the workers. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters in particular has an extremely rotten past and present, and it functions as nothing more than a second set of managers bullying the rank and file of the warehouses: from labor racketeers to company unionists to state bureaucrats not unlike the Deutsche Arbeitsfront, no agreement is too charitable to management and no method too dirty for them to employ against the rank-and-file. UPS has immense importance within the labor movement as the prime example of the “success” of revisionism and the firm where all sorts of labor lines were expressed over a series of sellout contracts and internal organizational developments among the workers. This will be examined in greater detail below, as well as the implications for party-building.

The Maoists, in large part because they are so isolated from work among the deepest and most profound sections of the proletariat, have so far have been unable to come to terms with the full scope of the labor problem, and not coincidentally, party-building efforts of various groups are stumbling on precisely this question. (The Revolutionary Maoist Coalition even prefaced Comrade Saoirse's first contribution with the disclaimer that, "The following article by comrade Saoirse does not reflect the official line of the Revolutionary Maoist Coalition. It has been submitted as part of the two-line struggle in our organization...") If elements of the aspiring vanguard can be said to be struggling with this question, the proletarians have outright given up: trade-union organization is basically nonexistent among the proletariat in the US, and where there are nominally trade-union organizations, trade-union consciousness is simply not there—not to even speak of revolutionary class consciousness. This is the logical result of a labor movement which has *de facto* (*de jure* in the case of the railroad, and post office, and public sector workers) banned any economic action by the proletarians, plundered their resources, and converted the trade-union organizations into mere welfare appendages of the government and bourgeois parties.

At some point, though, this backwardness has to be overcome in order to, as Lenin call us to, transform the mass working class movement "from its present state of sporadic attempts at protest, "riots" and strikes devoid of a guiding idea, into an organised struggle of the WHOLE Russian [US, in our context] working CLASS directed against the bourgeois regime and working for the expropriation of the expropriators and the abolition of the social system based on the oppression of the working people." Marxist theory and practice has time and time again established that the trade unions are an indispensable tool for preparing the proletarians for the seizure of power and exercising the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin even went so far as to say, "*Political power cannot be captured (and the attempt to capture it should not be made)* until the struggle [against reactionaries in the trade unions] has reached a certain stage." [*Left-wing Communism*] The entire history of the international communist movement is rife with conflicts over the issue of overcoming the backwardness of the trade-unions, with various theories varying from entryism to dual-unionism being put forward as universal cures, as well as Trotsky and his ilk outright "skipping-over" (as Stalin described it) the trade unions' reaction. By all accounts, the proletariat *needs* trade unions as a precondition for power.

Consequently, despite the lack of a vanguard party, the revolutionary circles must begin to struggle with one another and put forwards proposals on how to overcome the labor aristocracy and put the trade-union movement on sound political footing. That is the question raised by RSCO and Saoirse's recent polemics: how to struggle against the labor aristocracy. While they arrived through different routes and attached various conditions to it, the reactionary theory of "boring-from-within" was the conclusion put forward as the means for carrying out this struggle right now. Both pieces were written from the point of view of the middle classes, the petty bourgeoisie and privileged strata of the proletariat, and not coincidentally, they both arrive at the conclusion that the proletariat's demands on the trade unions are "syndicalist" and both converge on the theory of "boring-from-within". The RMC's Comrade Saoirse writes from the premise that the New Labor-ists are sound practically but unsound theoretically, whereas RSCO takes the opposite stance, that in theory the state unionist line is correct but its practical prescriptions are unsound right now.

Fundamentally, this situation demands that Maoists chart new territory. If they are not capable of leading the masses in class struggle, politically diverting them away from the influence of the counterrevolutionaries and bourgeoisie, then they literally are not the vanguard of the class and are therefore not capable of constituting its vanguard party. The line struggle is between the people trying to bring trade union work in line with proletarian politics and the people content to carry on the state unionist reformist routine. Saoirse and RSCO's stances are basically centrist, insofar as they both essentially advocate for one aspect of New Labor-ism but ultimately reject it in favor of "boring from within", a slogan with a rich and questionable past in the American labor movement. Centrism, especially of their type, is going to be an issue for a long time due to a number of factors:

1. The fact that the establishment unions have not all degenerated to the same degree or in the same way—with some even retaining some semblance of a trade union apparatus/internal democracy especially those among the petty bourgeoisie and mental laborers in small workplaces—creates confusion as to their overall political role and how Maoists should relate to them.
2. This combined with the severe dearth of theoretical exposures of how they actually function as engines of class collaboration makes it difficult to implement the line of state unionism. The lack of systematic study of basic procedural aspects of the state unions, the social and political background of their leaders, their organizational links and personnel overlap with the government and corporate-partnered NGOS, and how they actually function in the day-to-day lives of the proletarians represents a massive blind spot for Maoists and is a sign of collective ignorance in the labor movement.
3. The fact that the unions are responsible for distributing jobs and benefits incentivizes people to go along with what they say and not challenge the status quo, and their considerable salary outlaws and cushy bureaucrat positions are consistently a source of corruption for everyone including Maoists.
4. The fact that most Maoists are coming out of the activist middle class means ideas favorable to the middle class bureaucrats are going to be smuggled into the Maoist movement.

The correctness of the state unionist line would not even be a question if Maoists had accomplished even a fraction of the revolutionary theoretical and practical work within the labor movement they thought they did. That the established trade unions are front orgs for American imperialism has been an undeniable material fact for decades now. From enthusiastic collaboration with the CIA and FBI, to rampant embezzlement and corruption, to acting as corporate enforcers and strikebreakers, to literal integration into various administrations and state organs and bourgeois political machinery, they want absolutely nothing to do with the trade union struggles of the masses and are in fact actively hindering it in significant cases. Yet Maoists spent decades either denying the historical role of the trade unions, pursuing the Trotskyist "skipping-over" policy regarding the bureaucracy, or opportunistically integrating themselves into it. One catches only glimpses of criticism of the labor aristocracy across

decades of writings, either through vague renunciations or opposition to a major reformist campaign. The amount of actual study of the functioning of these organizations and discussion of how they could be overcome in order to advance the labor movement and practically bring it into line with the struggle for political power is staggeringly scarce. This theoretical work, and the practical fruits and implementation of it, should be considered the key to uniting the embryo of the future party-trade-unionists and the central task of every Maoist in the labor movement.

From our perspective the best thing individual Maoists and revolutionary circles can do to overcome the current state of theoretical and practical poverty in the labor movement is this:

1. Establish some kind of regular publication, ideally in close collaboration with coworkers (not even necessarily communist or trade union activists), which discusses the concrete issues of the workplace and the organizational tasks needed to overcome them. The medium and regularity should be adapted to the specific industry, but at the very least should be done on a quarterly basis (except maybe educators, who should follow a semester-based schedule) so as to include earnings reports and any public statements from government officials, regulatory agencies, courts, corporate spokespeople, and state union officers.
2. Establish an organizing committee in unorganized workplaces or an embryo of what will eventually become real trade union machinery if in a state union organized workplace.
3. Begin coordinating between workplaces. One of the worst aspects of the state union system is the splitting inside and between firms, and there is virtually nobody in the labor movement who takes this issue seriously. Why is there no "Committee for Logistics Unity" aimed at uniting the New Dayers at UPS, the fledgling Amazon organizers, any Maoists at USPS, FedEx, DHL, and even the smaller, less vertically integrated firms like Estes? Do people think industry-level trade union unity is just going to drop from the sky? Even if the state unions are handed custody of all the logistics workers, there is not going to be any industrial union. At the very least, industrial committees could function to unite propaganda efforts around larger political issues and start to lay the groundwork for industrial unions. This also goes hand-in-hand with the first point, the trade union masses will be able to see concretely what they do and don't have in common.
4. Establish some level of coordination between trade union activity and other struggles. How can the trade unions and the tenant unions and other mass organizations support each other? What would political unity between the trade unions and other associations even look like and what is needed to establish that unity? This is a key question for the development of the vanguard party and the class struggle, yet it has been completely ignored, if not actively evaded, by communists whose conception of class struggle does not extend beyond fighting for narrow factional interests. The Maoists who have zero relation to trade union work but do other organizing should figure out some kind of demands to put on the trade unions. If the Maoist trade-union activists can meet them, then excellent, and when the state unions inevitably don't acquiesce, then there is fodder for propaganda. The practice of Maoists "staying in their lane" needs to stop. Even if this practice was the logical result of decades of fistfights and factional wars, it is itself just a superficially more courteous type of factionalism.

Maoism in the West and the US in particular has an atrocious record when it comes to communist work in the trade unions. They essentially flanked the proletarians for decades. The "left" deviation in Maoism declared the trade union form obsolete or incapable of contributing to the proletarian revolution and the rightists capitulated to the bourgeoisie in the state unions under the guise of weakly principled or poorly demarcated "mass work". (And RSCO does both of these while also making theoretical concessions to the New Labor-ists—hence the centrist label.) In both cases Maoists renounced communist theoretical and practical work in the trade unions and as a result Maoists now struggle to differentiate between begging the labor bureaucracy for concessions, legitimate trade union struggle, and the class struggle. What the Maoists need to understand, and what the centrists have not fully grasped, is that they are effectively starting from square one. There is no well-developed body of knowledge on the trade union struggle or a trade union center that can be counted on for political or organizational guidance. They have to build the embryo of these things through the struggle for theoretical and practical unity in labor work between revolutionary circles, just as those circles weld themselves together through clandestine processes to form the embryo of the future vanguard party. And in both cases they can't rely on the assistance or goodwill of the bourgeoisie or its enormous staff, least of all its "progressive" wing or labor regulatory apparatus. There is an enormous, heavily exploited, and completely disorganized proletariat, and a massive apparatus of bourgeois legal discipline and distribution of concessions built around "labor". The proletarians are there, the potential for communist trade union work is there: who will actually do it and how (and when) remains to be seen.

Hopefully this line struggle is the beginning of the end of this shameful chapter in American communism. Both the labor movement and the proletariat's struggle for political power are at issue here. Will the Maoists continue to roll around in the swamp of student activism and middle class radicalism or will they actually adhere to a correct political line? Will they overthrow the state labor bureaucracy or reconcile themselves to it? These are uncomfortable questions, but if Maoists can't see the full scope of the massive failure they've inherited then there's little hope of anything changing for the better.

It should go without saying that nobody wants trade union unity, class unity, and Maoist unity more than the New Labor-ists. But the line of boring from within completely wrecks all of these things, it makes unity an impossibility because the state union system enshrines and often deliberately fosters splits among the masses and in particular seeks to split the trade union masses off from each other as well as from communism. Consequently, it would be a major contradiction for those whose seek to reconstitute a Communist Party to adopt "boring from within" such a system as its labor line or even just as a temporary tactical shortcut. Above all it would mean the vanguard negating itself as the advanced detachment of the proletariat by ceding leadership to the petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy. Instead, the "advanced" should base their labor line on the concrete tasks of uniting the masses through the trade union struggle and bringing the trade union struggle in line with the proletariat's struggle for political power. It is unthinkable that a Communist Party could overthrow American imperialism without the aid of the logistics proletarians, industrial proletarians, etc. and it is

also unthinkable that the IBT and AFL-CIO bureaucracies will take the side of the proletariat. It is simply not possible for a dictatorship of the proletariat to arise, let alone survive, without the active support of millions of organized proletarians which the labor bureaucrats are deliberately fighting against. Who among American communists even acknowledges these basic facts? RSCO raised the specter of dogmatism and Saoirse also saw "a grave error which fundamentally misunderstands the goal of the Communist movement" in the New Labor-ist vision of the labor movement. But neither of them actually accounted for the current situation in the labor movement and the communist movement.

The centrism which currently predominates among Maoists has not gone unanswered. A response to Saoirse from within the RMC was also published in *The Masses*, and this writing from Comrade Kit is notable because it defends the line of state unionism *not* from the standpoint of empirical evidence (of which there is no shortage) but from the standpoint of practical considerations. The borers have never been able to provide a satisfactory explanation for how "boring" can advance the labor movement beyond the limitations imposed on it by the bureaucracy or how it can link the unions with communism. Kit raised important questions regarding the objective viability of "boring", ultimately reaching the conclusion that, "All of this is not to say it is impossible, but extremely unlikely that a takeover can happen and it is therefore not a scientifically grounded strategy. [...] Further, by allowing for the possibility of taking over the union, we create a much greater risk than reward by dangling that victory over our heads. Any real opportunity to take over a union would have to happen so rapidly and involve the disintegration of the union's bureaucratic structure that including it in our general strategy would be ungrounded in reality. Therefore, unless new evidence can support the idea of 'taking over a union,' our general strategy should be in line with the state union theory that we should work from within on the ground level to eventually split the union, while maintaining activists in the reactionary unions to keep connections with the workers there." Saoirse had questioned the connection between the line of state unionism and the overall theory of the universality of people's war, and Kit answered this by comparing "boring from within" to the theory of insurrection and to the practice of the European Communists after the second world war. Basically, Kit says communists shouldn't bank on transforming existing institutions into revolutionary organs through the participation of communists, even if they *should* be working in them to reach the masses. (And Kit is definitely correct here.)

In sum, the line struggle within the labor movement is closely tied to the struggle to reconstitute the vanguard party of the American proletariat. The struggle for proletarian leadership in the trade union movement, the struggle to overthrow American imperialism, and questions of waging People's War and building the vanguard party are all intimately bound up as evidenced by the documents put forward as part of the line struggle. Only the New Labor-ists have put forward an integral theory that defends the leadership of the proletariat in all these aspects of the class struggle and fully takes into account the last half-century of developments within the American labor movement and international communist movement. The centrists, in contrast, have adopted a near-150-year-old dogma (which was only ever fully accepted in the Anglo-sphere) to justify fracturing the labor movement, adapting it to the demands of the bourgeoisie, and accepting the bourgeois lackeys of the labor movement into the revolutionary movement. It is in light of these facts that the accusations of "syndicalism" against the New Labor-ists must be examined.

## On the Accusation of Syndicalism

Despite their declared differences, both Saoirse and RSCO declare the New Labor-ists to be syndicalists. To quote Saoirse: "I am not stating that Communists are hostile to the growth and development of the unions, or that this is something we are opposed to. On the contrary, it is a necessary by-product of our actual goal, which is, of course, Communism. But this does not make the development of the union movement our goal! That is the work of trade-unionists and syndicalists, comrades! We must ask ourselves: what is the union movement? Is it, on its own, a revolutionary movement? I think our comrades would correctly answer that it is not. If a progressive movement is not revolutionary, then what is it? It is a reform movement! Are reform movements the goal of Communist activity? Only the most wicked right-opportunists would say as much! Our goal is nothing short of Communism! But it does not follow that we oppose reforms while on the path to Communist revolution! Just as Lenin told us in 'The Peasant Reform' and the Proletarian-Peasant Revolution, 'reforms are the by-product of the revolutionary struggle'." And RSCO says, "Such an approach [one not informed by a party-building line] means to liquidate the Leninist conception of the revolutionary party as a vanguard of professional revolutionaries, in favor of an essentially syndicalist organizational orientation towards the working class." And elsewhere RSCO says, "Our concern is that many comrades seem to believe that they are capable of articulating a revolutionary approach to an economic struggle, and that it is their ability to do so which divides communist leadership of a given struggle from its spontaneous or organic trajectory. This is, in the last instance, an anarcho-syndicalist outlook, implying, intentionally or not, that it is the mere escalation of the economic struggle which will eventually result in the initiation of armed struggle (or a general strike)."

This claim, that the New Labor-ists represent a syndicalist deviation, holds no water. Syndicalism is the belief that the trade-unions are capable of leading or even carrying out the revolution by themselves, usually accompanied with the belief that the revolution must take place alongside or through a country-wide general strike mainly led by these same trade unions, or in the IWW's case, "one big union" that takes the places of the Communist Party. It means assigning the trade unions a greater role than they are actually capable of fulfilling and diminishing the leading role of the vanguard party or the armed struggle as the means through which the old state must ultimately be overthrown. To quote the New Labor Press' *Shop Unit Guide*: "The Communist Party unites all the various factors in the revolutionary movement under its correct political leadership... This party is responsible for mobilizing the working class and its allies towards the overthrow of the dictatorship of the capitalists (the 'bourgeoisie') and bringing about a worker's government, or 'dictatorship of the proletariat'." Strange to hear accusations of syndicalism when the New Labor-ists have always assigned the position of leadership, and specifically leading the seizure of power, to the Communist Party. Nowhere has it been said that the unions can lead the seizure of power or that the seizure of power must be done through a general strike. It seems like the talk of the objective limitations of trade union organization (which has never been denied by the New Labor-ists) is merely being used as a cover for a continuation of corporatist

bourgeois trade-union politics, which is justified on the grounds that "unions are unions"/"unions are the basic organization of the workers" regardless of their political line, their structure, their role within current US political economy, or actual practice in the trade-union struggle.

Saoirse's trade union metaphysics, which assigned the trade unions a permanently non-revolutionary, reformist, and therefore *bourgeois* political nature, thus brings her to a point of effectively renouncing that trade unions can contribute to the process of proletarian revolution, and thus also foreclosing the possibility of the proletariat seizing power in a non-agrarian country like the United States.

RSCO marched right into the bourgeois trade-unionist swamp alongside her, haughtily declaring that, "A union is a union, whether red or yellow. Both are fundamentally proscribed by their structural role, which is defensive, and have no 'class legitimacy' in the absence of the organizational expression—that is, self-articulation—of the class itself, in the form of its party." Setting aside the description of the party as the "self-articulation of the class" (a formula which either denies the backwardness of the average proletarian or accepts this backwardness into the party, and seems to be borrowed from poststructuralism), how is this not centrism? First of all, a union is not always a union—this is the essence of the state unionist line, which differentiates between trade unions led by bourgeois agents and "unions in name only" (to adapt the RINO epithet) that are just front organizations for the bourgeois state. *And RSCO agrees with this line:* "The characterization of the official unions as state unions remains basically correct..." Second of all, it makes a difference to the party and to the revolution "whether red or yellow". Trade-union organizations may be "fundamentally proscribed by their structural role", but how they act within those limits, whether they are collaborating with the revolution or the counterrevolution, is a pretty significant distinction that must be made by the party of the proletariat. And thirdly, it is precisely the perpetually "defensive" nature of the trade unions which the New Labor-ists are trying to overcome. What RSCO characterizes as "defensive" is not an eternally unchanging characteristic of trade-unions, which historically participated in massive offensives against the bourgeoisie, it is a deliberate policy of permanent retreat imposed on the trade union masses by the state bureaucracy.

Fourthly, this line contradicts itself because as both RSCO and we seem to agree on, there are not two basic types of unions ("red" unions and "yellow" unions), but three: 1) "red" unions, 2) "yellow" unions, and 3) "company" or "state" unions. If the state or capitalists sanction, transform, or create a set of workers associations and "labor relations" legal apparatuses in order to control and suppress the spontaneous class struggle within their enterprises and national territory, those organizations are not even really business unions, which are trade unions that are not explicitly revolutionary or "anti-capitalist", but instead an entirely different form of labor organization altogether.

"Let us be blunt: a union is a union." If only Lenin and the Bolsheviks had understood this when they wrote tract after tract against the very same Menshevik theory of "Trade Union Neutrality" and for the Red International Labor Union against the "yellow" Amsterdam International. As Lenin wrote during the Bolsheviks' struggle against the theory of trade union neutrality:

“It is said—and Plekhanov makes a special point of it— that neutrality is necessary in order to unite all the workers who are beginning to see the need for improving their material conditions. But those who say this forget that the present stage of development of class contradictions inevitably introduces “political differences” even into the question of how this improvement is to be secured within the bounds of contemporary society. **The theory of the neutrality of the trade unions as opposed to the theory of the need for close ties between them and revolutionary Social-Democracy, inevitably leads to preference being given to methods of securing this improvement that involve a blunting of the proletarian class struggle.** A striking example of this (which, incidentally, is connected with the appraisal of one of the most interesting episodes in the modern labour movement) is to be found in the very same issue of *Sovremenny Mir* in which Plekhanov advocates neutrality. Side by side with Plekhanov, we find here Mr. E. P., extolling Richard Bell, the well-known English railwaymen’s leader, who ended a dispute between the workers, and, the railway company by a compromise. Bell is described as the “soul of the whole railwaymen’s movement”. “There is not the slightest doubt,” E. P. writes, “that thanks to his calm, well-considered, and consistent tactics, Bell has won the complete confidence of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the members of which are ready to follow his lead without hesitation” (*Sovremenny Mir*, No. 12, page 75). **This point of view is not accidental, but is essentially connected with the neutrality theory, which puts in the forefront unity of the workers for the improvement of their conditions, and not unity for a struggle that could promote the cause of proletarian emancipation.** [emphasis ours]

A union is not *just* a union, it is a social organization with its own internal life bound up in a million ways to other institutions. It may be revolutionary, or have revolutionary elements in it, or be hopelessly bound up with the counterrevolution. And in fact, RSCO acknowledges this: “We must ask at each step which approach most advances the immediate objective common to all legitimate communists (the reconstitution of the party) without sacrificing *a correct understanding of the counterrevolutionary role of the state unions* in the process.” Where is the confusion then? Furthermore, is “a union is a union” not the exact same metaphysical sophistry utilized by the Second Internationalists when the West European unions were used to organize the workers and enforce labor discipline for the purpose of waging the first World War?

What kind of argument is “a union is a union”? It is not a Marxist or a materialist argument. It demonstrates complete disdain for the very real grievances the proletarians have with these so-called “unions.” It is the completely dismissive attitude adopted by every state union bureaucrat hack towards the rank and file, which is aimed solely at justifying their shameless catering to the bourgeoisie, which is what this argument really is. Any mention of the inherently non-revolutionary limits of trade-unionism only begs the question of who set these limits and how. Philosophically, it is a repetition of the bourgeois concept of the law of identity, as opposed to the Marxist law of contradiction. Just because an organization identifies as a “trade union”, does not make it objectively a “trade union”.

In reality, a self-identified union is not always an actual labor union in a Marxist or objective sense. It has a definite beginning, development, and end, and it can serve either the historic goals of the

bourgeoisie or the proletariat, and it can do so in any number of ways. This has been proven countless times throughout history, in both world wars, in the golden age of organized crime in the US, and in the fascist countries, where the “unions” were in fact not unions at all. To say “a union is a union” is to negate the internal struggle within every union between collaborationism and class struggle and it negates the struggle in the trade-union movement between bourgeois and proletarian political lines. RSCO might as well have said, “Let us be blunt: A equals A”, about which Lenin said, “vacuousness, ‘unerträglich.’ [unbearable]” In fact, this type of metaphysical thinking is exactly how communists get trapped in thoroughly bourgeois institutions: the logic is they were once organizations participating in class struggle, so they must still be, or are at least capable of being so. One need only look at the CPUSA and its defenders to see where this thinking leads.

RSCO contradicts themselves when they say, “Our concern is that many comrades seem to believe that they are capable of articulating a revolutionary approach to an economic struggle...” They then articulate precisely such an approach when they say, “It is only by diverting the mass struggles away from their economic circumscription and towards a revolutionary political outlook that we can break with bourgeois ideological capture.” The fact that the “revolutionary approach to an economic struggle” lies precisely in the revolutionaries’ ability to divert it is what necessitates some kind of independent organ in the first place, an organ which they both endorse and renounce. They go on to say, “Such a diversion is not a question of merely the organizational vehicle through which the struggle is carried out. [Not “merely” but surely that is a factor to be taken into consideration?] Therein lies the ‘left’ component of the error in question, precisely in the position that—in order to successfully carry out our task of political intervention in the movement today—communists must transform or generate new organizations independent from revisionist or bourgeois ideological influence or the organizational interference of class enemies (corporatist union staff, etc.).” But then RSCO also calls for “new, independent formations which can unite advanced workers around advanced politics.” So evidently, there is a need for some political pushing-on from the outside. It seems like their disagreement might come down to simply haggling over who can be included in what organ and what the responsibility of each should be.

RSCO's outlook is fundamentally that of a trade-union bureaucrat. The Gauche Prolétarienne passage is a declaration that the main problem (and RSCO agrees that this is the "problematic" that "the antirevisionist trend remains categorically trapped within") is getting workers involved: “[the fundamental] problem is not knowing how to fight but knowing how to get people to show up for the fight.” This is a post-left "self-articulation" (to use their word) of the trade-union bureaucrat. The problem is not who must be fought, or how this fight must be waged, or by whom, but "get[ting] people to show up". *Logically*, its just nonsense. Obviously part of knowing how to fight is knowing how to recruit and direct people for a fight. *Practically*, it means renouncing the leading role of the conscious elements, eschewing concrete plans, and pandering to the spontaneously active elements with no political distinction. No doubt the state unions can get people to “show up for the fight”, but it means nothing when “the fight” is just a photo-op or a performative step within the broader process of class collaboration and establishing social peace. *Ironically*, this is the same Gauche Prolétarienne that said, "We don't hide the fact that we are resolutely opposed to unions [Blow for Blow, 1969]." If there has to be a general slogan, it should be organize the unorganized, defend the trade union movement from the labor aristocracy, and unite for the seizure of power, not "get people to show up for the fight".

RSCO's centrism can be summed up with the following passage: "They [SNELC] raise the false contradiction between 'educating the workers in class struggle and forging the advanced workers into the bones of an independent and class-conscious workers movement,' and '[building] an 'army' of petty-bourgeois professional organizers and have them go among and organize the workers and attempt to expand the reach of the establishment state unions.'" If RSCO accepts the thesis of state unionism, then they have to admit that to "expand the reach of the establishment state unions" *directly contradicts* the very notion of "educating the workers in class struggle" (as the state unions are simply not vehicles for class struggle, or only function as such in exceptional cases) and that by no means can the state unions be considered part of "an independent and class-conscious workers movement". The question for the proletariat is, *either* the state unions and class collaborationism *or* independence and class struggle. The fact that some parts of the middle classes are able to sidestep this question only introduces a secondary aspect into the contradiction.

It's not syndicalism to want trade unionists to break with the Mussolini slogan of "nothing outside the state" which currently dominates the labor movement. This is how centrism functions as a shield for the right. Instead of criticizing the abomination that is American communism and the labor movement, the centrists have set up a left bogeyman, in this case a purely fictional syndicalist deviation, and in doing so brought grist to the mill of rightism. Think about the picture the centrists' documents paint. The *reality* is that the proletariat is overwhelmingly unorganized, with a minority of essential workers in crucial industries (logistics, manufacturing, building trades) being under the legal guardianship of fascist gangs sanctioned by the Democratic Party. The Maoists are in a state of complete disorganization and there isn't a single "Maoist" group not firmly gripped by idealism or rightism of one or another type. The *impression* given by the centrists is that the labor movement is proceeding apace as more people take up state union work, albeit with minor right (as in not militant enough) and left (the New Labor-ists allegedly) deviations—but the state syndicalist system is not a particularly major issue and in any event breaking with it is not the order of the day. On the basis of the "practice" of the state syndicalist system the Maoists are—supposedly—developing subjectively, and thus the party is being built. The pleasant image of the labor movement and Maoism drawn up by the centrists is downright ludicrous. Both are at rock bottom after decades of nothing but garbage excuses for personal profiteering and factionalist scheming. Revolutionary theory has been reduced to base demagoguery. Anyone *not* proposing drastic changes is just not living in reality.

RSCO talks about "the broad sections of the working class currently organized in the state unions" but comes out against "mobilization of a revolutionary political movement of millions of workers to smash the state unions" even after acknowledging their counter-revolutionary role. They lament the labor movement's limitations while expressing nihilism that they can be overcome: "so long as it remains a union movement rather than a revolutionary political movement, [it] will always be proscribed by trade union consciousness" but also come out against the idea that communists should "develop their political base through the generation of new mass organizations that can 'revolutionize' the struggle is fundamentally economistic—relying on the 'politicization' of economic struggle". (Which in turn is negated by their call for independent organizations to group people around advanced politics.) RSCO accepts the analysis of the state unionist thesis but apparently does not see the political ramifications of the state unions or their refusal to do basic trade union work among the proletariat and builds a logical fortress of centrism on this basis.

There is a difference between arguing that trade unions can **lead** the revolutionary process and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is syndicalism, and arguing that trade unions, and our work as revolutionaries among them, can **serve** a key role within the revolutionary process which is definitively lead by the proletarian vanguard party, the Communist Party. As the Communist Party of Peru argues, all communist mass work and united front work must serve the conquest of political power by the proletariat, and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. For example, in their incredibly relevant piece *El problema de masas, reivindicaciones y guerra popular* they state:

“This relationship has to do with the united front to conquer power. What does the communiqué for the masses of the shanty towns state to us? Wage and salary increases, that’s good. Should we fight for that? Of course, how can we not fight for that! Discussing that we have to fight for salaries is useless, however, how can we carry out guerrilla war on the trade union level, how can we prepare the class for the conquest of power? How can we form new unions, creating class conscious unions or readjusting others?

[...]

We insist on the fact that the question is to link the struggle for the daily demands in service of seizing Power, and on the other hand, that these [state] organizations have created this or that revisionist or reactionary apparatus, that are firstly false and secondly have hitched onto the needs of the masses to traffic in their interests and ride on them, to use them in their electoral endeavors, in their parliamentary cretinism, and above all to contain their explosiveness and to sustain the [old] order, not to educate the masses to destroy the [old] order and to conquer the power that belongs to them through war. “

Thus, the state unionism line is in many ways an attempt to begin to correctly re-orient the current labor work of the revolutionary circles and spontaneous revolutionary labor activists and workers in a way that applies Marxism by linking them to the historic and eventual struggle for political power by the proletariat, rather than taking a “neutral” or even openly class collaborationist position on the question of political power for the masses and proletariat. This position that the New Labor Press has taken occurs simultaneously and reciprocally with the clandestine and patient struggle for ideological, political and organizational unity between the conscious elements of the proletarian movement, the revolutionary circles. This is not syndicalism, it is Marxism, and in fact to attempt to claim that the struggle for political power is not centrally linked to the spontaneous movement of the proletariat, as expressed through the trade union struggle, runs directly counter to principles inherent to our ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

## **UPS and Strata Among the Working-Class**

In large part much of the centrism of RSCO’s line seems to flow from the fact that they don’t fully consider that because of the size of the workplace, nature of the work, and class makeup of the people being organized, that their state union imposed very different limits on their work than is typical of the

large majority-proletarian workplaces. In fact, the state union directly facilitated RSCO's trade union struggle, which completely contradicts state unionist practice among the industrial and semi-industrial proletariat.

Both RMC, in a footnote to their original publication of our State Unionism line, and RSCO have put forward the position that nurses, journalists, and presumably many other white-collar workers, are members of the proletariat. The question of the exact class nature of teachers, nurses, media workers, etc. is a complicated one that we cannot fully cover for the purposes of this response. However, we hope it is abundantly clear and accepted by all parties that, whether or not these workers are members of the lower petite bourgeoisie or members of the working class proper, these white-collar workers form an incredibly intellectualized, professionalized, and privileged strata in comparison to the tens of millions proletarians in the industrial, logistics, service, and agricultural sectors. It feels absurd we have to point this out in a struggle between "communists", but trade union work among journalists and trade union work in a warehouse or factory will obviously have very different characteristics, even if there are certain basic principles of Marxism and industrial unionism that remain universal.

Furthermore, as Marxists, our theoretical and practical work should always base itself within what the PCP called the "deepest and most profound" sections of the masses. In the case of labor and trade union work, our theory and practice must ground itself in the material realities and daily demands of the industrial and semi-industrial (logistics, extraction, etc.) proletariat. Communists have always done important work among education, medical and media workers. But the broad lines of their theoretical work and practical prescriptions always came from their work among the miners, the dockworkers, the railroad workers, the textile workers, steelworkers, the deep industrial and semi-industrial international proletariat. It is from this strata of the proletariat we must base our theoretical and practical work, as the state unionist camp seeks to do.

In this way, the real reactionary nature of the centrist line put forward by RSCO and Saoirse is absolutely undeniable if it is examined in light of the state unions' structure and activity among the industrial and semi-industrial proletariat. For example, let us use the recent events at UPS due to our own familiarity with them and the central role the struggle at UPS has played in the broader two-line struggle within the revolutionary movement on the labor question. The 2023 UPS-IBT agreement, and the events leading up to it and following ratification, saw a number of organizations implementing a number of bogus lines and slogans there. Everybody in "the labor movement" was trying to stick their hand into the UPS Teamsters pot with no regard whatsoever for the objective interests of the UPS workers, and in reality "boring from within" was the number one excuse used by "communists" and "socialists" in this endeavor.

Consider all this centrism from the standpoint of the a "rank and file" UPS proletarian. You have zero contact with your "union" other than obligatory dues which are deducted from your paycheck and occasional gossip about supervisors, grievances, and job bids. Maybe someone asked you to sign up for DRIVE, which means an additional deduction from your wage that goes into a political fund run by the IBT. The union has had a number of high profile investigations and scandals. A contract which maintained the status quo was negotiated and imposed behind your back. Several groups, all purported socialists, took various stances throughout. Some were intimately involved in the contract process or

were praising it. (Aka the extreme chauvinist and social fascist elements, mainly DSA, CPUSA, PSL, the Trotskyist sects—the usual suspects.) Some came out against the contract (on the economist grounds that "more could be won" but that this could be done by egging on the IBT/"boring from within" it—some Trotskyists and some Maoists), and of this, a minority came out against the contract on the grounds that the IBT couldn't be trusted at all (the WSWS and New Day at UPS), and of this, a singular group claimed to be actually organizing on the shop floor for economic action, New Day.

At the same time, there are myriad groups outside UPS, all purportedly Maoist or Marxist, declaring for themselves a vanguard "advanced" position within the movement of the proletariat and taking various attitudes towards the UPSers. Some of them are taking an ignorant and amateurish approach by simply cheering on the IBT. Some of them are, correctly, pointing out that the contract is objectively not a win. Of this group, some are pointing out that objectively the IBT does not represent the UPSers in any sense but legally, and of this group, only a tiny minority are actually working hand in glove with the "advanced detachment" at UPS in promoting their work among the UPSers, joining their organization if the possibility of employment at UPS arises, and generally aligning their politics with those of the advanced detachment. That "the union" has nothing to do with improving your day to day life, and even less to do with your own political opinions (whatever they may be), is self-evident. Meanwhile the activist machinery (which is virtually indistinguishable from the public relations firms hired by and business advertisements sent out by "the union") churns out think-piece after think-piece with no regard to your problems, instead focusing entirely on the prospects of "the union" and maybe its relationship to the existing political machinery.

Considered from this standpoint, "boring from within" the IBT and working in coalition with its state unionist machinery as part of a larger program of improving the conditions of the workers and conquering political power is nothing short of ridiculous.

UPS workers represent about 0.1% of the American population, yet they are responsible for moving 6% of the American economy. (In reality, the impact is far greater than numbers can show, since UPS transports essential consumer goods as well as capital, and was the only way to get a lot of basic goods during the peak of the COVID19 crisis.) Only a completely naive person or a deliberate liar would think the United States government would facilitate, or even allow, the tiniest expression of rebellion there. To expect the IBT—an organization that originated in organized crime, developed through close collaboration with regulatory and intelligence agencies, whose officials occupy important posts in the state including the White House and Department of Transportation, which shamelessly follows the dictates of the companies and promotes the worst elements of both bourgeois parties, has zero internal democracy, rampant corruption and plain sloppiness in basic bureaucratic tasks, negotiates everything in secret and cuts deals so as to negate even basic legal rights of the members—to function as a trade union for the UPS proletarians is just fantasy. The IBT in the logistics industry has nothing to do with trade-unionism or socialism and exists as a bulwark against both. This cannot be emphasized enough and it is a great shame that American communists continue to collude with this organization and similar state unions in the logistics, manufacturing, and extractive sectors.

UPS is unique in how obviously demarcated and how narrow the limits on trade union activity imposed by a state union are there. The fact that these limits exist and communists should be preparing the trade union masses to overcome them is universal. This has been the historic task set for the communists by the development of imperialism. The existence of alliances between the bourgeoisie and sections of different classes is not new. What state syndicalism means in the trade union movement is making these alliances the entire basis of trade union activity; in practice this means renunciation of all trade union activity not permitted by the bourgeoisie and surrendering political leadership of the trade union movement to the bourgeoisie. A vanguard party of the proletariat can't have boring-from-within such a system as its policy because it means disintegrating the party by allowing cadre to be state labor bureaucrats. It amounts to abandoning the trade unions to the state-backed gangster and reformist demagogues, renouncing the party as the leader of the revolution, and trading Marxism for whatever petty bourgeois trend happens to be prevailing in the labor movement.

The New Labor Press has pointed out a number of times that the “unions” in the US have little in common with each other except for endemic corruption (publicly acknowledged by the government, which does not consider this an obstacle to legal recognition), class collaborationism, gangsterism, anticommunism and unwavering obedience to the Democratic Party, and that their agreements are largely *below* market standards. UPS is in some ways special but the social relations that predominate there are completely ordinary. There is a highly exploitative and oppressive corporation which takes advantage of a corrupt gangster “union” to maintain labor peace. UPS is able to violate legally recognized bargaining unit agreements and even just the law on a daily basis with the consent of the IBT, which puts up zero fight against UPS but throws every obstacle in the way of the rank-and-file for their own benefit, even failing to carry out basic tasks relegated to it by the government and company just because they don't feel like it or because they would rather take the concessions they are supposed to distribute to the rank-and-file for themselves. The IBT has nothing to offer the rank-and-file and is little better than a human resources department mixed with an old boys club—and this is completely standard for the “organized” majority-proletarian shops in all industrial and semi-industrial sectors of the economy, and even in many “white-collar” shops in the education and healthcare sectors.

While the IBT is particularly nefarious, it is not alone in its open counter-revolution and reactionary practices, much less its class collaborationism. The state unions in the industrial and semi-industrial sectors, such as the building trades unions, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, the Laborers Union, the United Steelworkers, the UAW, etc., are marked by an almost endless chain of rank-and-file intimidation, corruption, backroom-dealing, complete inactivity on a shop floor level, and full support for American imperialism and racist “patriotic” “America First” unionism. They are actively complicit in a thousand daily crimes against the working class and openly view their role as that of securing US “national security”, social peace between the workers and owners, and limiting “disruptions” in capitalist production.

It is important to point out that Saoirse completely misunderstood the significance of what actually happened at the auto companies and UPS, what the “spontaneous movement” actually looked like

there, and what drove it. What actually happened was decades of sellout agreements were partially walked back; these “bare minimum demands” were the product of an extremely small spontaneous movement against the union bureaucracy; but as this movement only achieved a very limited level of trade-union consciousness, it never went beyond voting against the sellout deals except at UPS where the New Dayers tried to organize an actual strike.

What practically differentiates the line of the labor centrists from the left wing of the DSA? Literally nothing. They are even adopting the same slogans verbatim to justify the exact same kind of opportunism. In fact, they aren't even the first Maoists to do this: the Revolutionary Marxist Students' members were the ones doing Marxist gymnastics justifying Teamsters Mobilize in Cosmonaut. All that has happened within Maoism as regards UPS is the three main trends in the labor movement have appeared within Maoism: the extreme conservatives who unconditionally ally with/are union bureaucrats, the labor-liberal state union reformists (aka alternative bureaucrats), and the rejectors of state unionism. RSCO and Saoirse are centrists in that they erase the distinction between the latter two, equivocate on which is correct and argue for both. *On a fundamental Marxist level, the slogan of boring-from-within cannot be justified in a situation where the "union" is simply a state-led bureaucracy for restricting the trade union and political rights of the proletarians.*

It must be noted that everything that has been said, including some of the criticisms leveled against the New Labor-ists, was learned through the tough experience of organizing at UPS and other industrial or “poorer” workplaces. The low level of education of the workers, the systemic racial, national and gender discrimination (enabled and enacted by the state union officials), the language barriers in many cases, the lack of basic trade union consciousness, the lack of cross-rank-and-file communication channels, the literal physical obstacle of the state union bureaucrats in the rare situations where some of the rank and file are gathered for trade union affairs, the high turnover, management and rats, the physical and mental toll of the job, all these constitute massive obstacles for revolutionary workers to overcome in the technical process of organizing. These issues are not as bad or nonexistent in the smaller, white collar workplaces. At the same time, our camp’s original labor work was extremely limited in its political outlook in the sense that it had put forward no political program for the trade union masses. We never renounced politics, and opposed tailing the labor liberals, but put forward no concrete step the trade union masses could take forward politically and in actual fact were trailing the liberal bourgeoisie even while heatedly calling for an intensification of the class struggle. In fact, RSCO was correct to raise the specter of “left-economism”. For example, in its early days, New Day conceived of an independent organization only on the grounds that it was needed to drive the economic struggle forward. It was only later that the tasks of industrial unity and political independence from the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus, both of which necessitate independence from the state unions, were fully grasped as integral aspects of the trade union struggle.

Party-building cannot base itself off theoretical and practical work among the petty bourgeoisie and the upper privileged elements of the working class. The middle classes look down on the proletarians, who owing to their conditions of life are often perpetually ignorant and disorganized, even the advanced ones. Instead of trying to remedy this, as is our historical task, the middle classes “discover” the theory

that either there's nothing that can be done (at least not at this "conjuncture" or not without further "articulation") or nothing that should be done. If Maoism in the US is to move forward it must step out of its own petty-bourgeois shadow and actually organize the proletariat in a way that theoretically and practically answers both their political and economic demands. It's a characteristic of the swollen American middle class, which has spearheaded many "party-building projects" over the last half-century in the US, to think that their circle is the advanced detachment of the proletariat on account of its own subjective "militancy" and "ideological development" and not its actually correct theoretical and practical work in the midst of hard class struggle against the bourgeoisie/bourgeois state.

The party, for its part whenever it is reconstituted, must pursue a policy of uniting the trade union struggle with the rest of the people's struggles all in service of the armed conquest of Power by the proletariat. The conscious elements of the movement of the proletariat must put forward a correct materialist analysis of the bulk of the trade union movement, which the line of state unionism is an embryonic attempt at. The line of "boring-from-within" hinders party-building in the current moment by denying the relationship between the struggle for proletarian political power and spontaneous mass movements such as the trade union struggle and by denying the need for the isolated and disparate mass work currently conducted by revolutionaries to be openly coordinated and unified, parallel and reciprocal to the development of the simultaneous and closed struggle for unity between revolutionary circles. Its defenders mistake the New Labor-ists as syndicalist because they appear to demand too much politically from the trade unions. In reality, it is life that compels the proletarians, and the industrial and semi-industrial proletarians more than anyone, to pin the development of their trade union struggle to the proletariat's political struggle for state power, because of the vice grip the bourgeois state has over their "trade unions."

## Conclusion

In the modern US context the theory of "boring from within" cannot be the basis for the vanguard party or even a pre-party formation's trade union policy. It is a theory aimed at justifying *not* doing communist work in the trade unions and perpetuates the decrepit state of shop-floor machinery among the proletarians in the state unions. It is a theory that accommodates the middle classes, specifically the professional class and the labor aristocracy, in the ranks of the Communists. The line of state unionism, in contrast, calls for building (or rebuilding) the basic trade-union apparatus in the shops, and where it already exists and functions, calls for new non-legal organizations aimed at breaking this machinery off from the bourgeois state and uniting it with other trade-union organizations. The line of state unionism is the basic line that should be guiding aspiring US communists right now in the trade union struggle. The need for broader class unity, deepening the trade-union activities of the masses, tying our theoretical and practical work to the conquest of political power and thus enhancing the political consciousness of the trade union masses, as well as the objective state of the contemporary labor movement in the United States, must be the cornerstone of Marxist policy in the trade-unions in our context, and only the line of state unionism begins to adequately explain and advance a solution to the problems faced by the proletarians right now.

The New Labor-ists have no universal plan for overcoming these problems and it would be ridiculous to expect an embryonic theoretical organ aimed at the labor movement to have such a solution.

*However*, part of overcoming these problems is establishing a central organ in each struggle aimed at uniting the advanced elements in them behind Maoism and working out the correct theory and practice for the proletarians in each struggle, and in this sense, the New Labor-ists could be considered contributors to party-building in the key sector of labor and the trade union movement. Maoists should be explaining how each struggle relates to the struggle for the seizure of political power, demarcate Marxist principles and methods from bourgeois/revisionist principles and methods in each struggle, what organizing the struggle looks like and what is needed to bring together all the masses' struggles to smash American imperialism once and for all (the reconstitution of the Communist Party and the initiation of people's war). The proletariat and labor movement are fundamental to Marxist theory of revolution, but really this should be happening all over, and in no struggle can the policy of "boring-from-within" the decrepit imperialist-controlled organizations be accepted as the basis of communist activity.

It did not occur to RSCO that the New Labor Press is aimed at providing "higher level coordination and national leadership" in the labor movement—not by declaring for itself the vanguard position, but by undertaking the tedious but necessary work of struggling with and educating revolutionary circles in trade-union organizing, organizing the trade-union masses within the class struggle, and uniting those advanced elements in the labor movement on the basis of applying a correct labor line.

In fact, it seems like the NLP is the only organ set up with the aim of uniting all the disparate labor work on the basis of correct class politics. Who else is doing this? Not even just labor work, where is the organ for uniting the tenant work, the antifascist work, neighborhood defense, etc? They don't exist. Not only do they not exist, but are any of the "militant" organizations in these struggles even *gesturing* towards some policy capable of uniting all the organizations in the class struggle? On that note, RSCO is undeniably correct when they lament the subjective underdevelopment of the Maoists. Theoretical backwardness is narrowly understood by RSCO as not reading *Capital* (and that *is* an expression of theoretical backwardness) but copying the strategy of a century-old rightist which has been exploited mainly by out and out revisionists over the last few decades is not considered relevant. The *actual* subjective underdevelopment lies in the extreme dearth of publications applying Maoist theory to the concrete struggles of the masses and the complete disinterest in formulating policies aimed at broader class unity in these struggles. It lies also in those people clinging to past policies without using Marxist theory to evaluate if they still apply, including "boring from within" but definitely not limited to it. And lastly it lies in those people who eschew the fundamental task of studying theory, but compared to the first two, reading *Capital* is child's play.

On the other hand, many American Maoists continue to diminish or even ignore the critical question of organizing the class for the seizure of power, which as a key part of it means organizing the proletarians into trade unions led by the class' vanguard party and united with the armed struggle. Or worse, they argue this can be done in an alliance with the bourgeoisie through the medium of the state labor bureaucracy. This basic precondition for successful class struggle has been evaded and replaced with purely subjectivist talk ranging from "militancy" (and everybody is suddenly now a trade union

militant, even though strikes are at historic lows—RSCO even refers to their state union organizer as a militant) to post-leftist dismissal of the historical significance of trade unions. Is there a *single* Maoist group in the United States that has specifically listed the most crucial workplaces in key industries, for instance Amazon, UPS, and USPS in logistics, and tried to organize and bring up workers within those industries a part of the larger process of Marxist party-building? *That* is where the real backwardness lies, not in failing to read *Capital* as RSCO says, which is comparatively a pretty simple task. The dearth of actual plans and programs beyond vague gesturing to proletarian political power, the obsession with totally subjective criteria combined with disinterest in everything concrete, and the omnipresent failure to integrate theory into practical mass work has essentially put the development of Maoism in the US on a tailist footing. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the trade union struggle, where Maoists continue to tail the state union system if not actively strengthen its grip on the proletariat. Collaboration with the bourgeoisie through the state labor apparatus is a cancer eating away at the labor movement and Maoism. If the Maoists are just going to continue the same one-foot-in-one-foot-out dance with the labor bureaucracy that they have been doing for decades, they might as well just give up now on political power.

It would be ridiculous, if not libelous, to act like RSCO or the rightist “boring-from-within” camp in the RMC are uniquely bad or counterrevolutionary for their centrism. They are only building on what American Maoism bequeathed them—which is basically nothing. If one looks back at the Mao Zedong Thought groups, the Hoxhaists (during the period of Sino-Albanian alliance), and the “Maoists”, there is very little analysis of the state unions and even the most well-developed critiques rarely put forward an alternative. Why shouldn’t Saoirse believe trade unions are reformist when even at the peak of the Communist Party (USA) their labor organizing was dominated by economism? If someone was to look solely at the American labor movement, they would be completely justified in thinking unions are simply reformist groups aimed at redistributing some of the spoils of imperialism. But communists have to think about what should be, not just what has been. If the state unions are reactionary pillars of imperialism, then they have to be knocked down sooner rather than later and replaced with genuine trade unions through which the laboring classes can advance their interests. The fundamental law of bourgeois democracy, that “The more highly developed a democracy is, the more imminent are pogroms or civil war in connection with any profound political divergence which is dangerous to the bourgeoisie,” [Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*] has been systematically replaced with the theory of American exceptionalism in the labor movement. American imperialism is the most brutal and powerful reactionary force in the world today—the Maoists admit—but for some reason an exception is made for the labor movement, where collaboration with the government and bourgeois parties is simply accepted by default.

Stalin, speaking directly to a delegation of American trade union activists, pointed out that, “But it is the skilled workers mainly whose material conditions are guaranteed. There is a contradiction here. On the one hand it would appear that there is no necessity for organization because the [skilled] workers are provided for. On the other hand it is said that the more secure workers, the skilled workers, are organized in the trade unions. Thirdly, it would appear that the unorganized workers are those least provided for, namely, the unskilled workers who most of all stand in need of organization. I cannot

understand this at all." [*Questions and Answers to American Trade Unionists*] The game RSCO is playing, that of organizing a tiny and relatively privileged strata of wage workers, and from there justifying a trade union policy that accommodates the bourgeois state's labor regulatory apparatus, is one that has been played by communists and the labor movement for a century now. "Boring from within" organs of state repression in the labor movement is just not a correct Marxist policy, even if these organs are willing to make significant allowances for unessential or skilled middle class wage workers.

Perhaps the final objection to the line of state unionism, and the most degrading argument of all, would be that organizations such as New Day at UPS or similar trade union committees and trade union propaganda groups and workers circles hold no legitimacy on account of their lack of legal authority. This is not outright said by either RSCO or Saoirse but it is implied by their conception of class legitimacy and apparent recognition of the state unions as the rightful guardians of the workers in their bargaining units as opposed to the "sectarian" "misunderstanders of Marxism" they presume the New Labor-ists to be. Marxists recognize authority based on class and correctness, not the certificates handed out by the bourgeois state. In fact, the bourgeoisie grants certificates almost exclusively to those "trade unions" which are rife with organized crime and deeply corrupt appendages of management that have absolutely no connection to the workers and are outright opposed to trade union struggle. This type of thinking is unfortunately endemic among American communists, who are mainly coming out of the middle classes and consequently are only capable of thinking in terms of formal bureaucratic lines, not politics. Too many people see that the AFL-CIO technically has millions of members, and take for granted that those millions actually have some level of trade-union consciousness and are participating in mass struggle. The reality is that the proletariat has essentially no trade union consciousness and no trade union struggle, least of all in "militant" unions like the IBT. The IBT, the state craft unions at USPS, and the AFL-CIO affiliates in the logistics industry are not centers of class struggle. They are organs of class collaboration. Therefore the "militants" within them must be understood to be "militant" class collaborators. Wanting more privileges or money for oneself is not trade union or class consciousness, it is the opposite. If the Maoists can't understand this then they will not be able to lead the logistics proletarians anywhere productive and certainly don't deserve the label of "advanced" or "vanguard".

What is the correct line the New Labor-ists have worked out? It is that the trade union organizations in this country have so thoroughly degenerated as to be mere adjuncts of the bourgeois state that are blatantly hostile to the industrial proletariat. Even the "progressive" unions function as industrial splittists and as a propaganda arm of the liberal bourgeoisie. In order to seize power and take production into its hands, the proletariat needs to be organized at the point of production and from there kept in close contact with its vanguard party. Consequently, the advanced detachment of the proletariat (not yet formed into a party) has the immediate task of exposing these reactionary institutions and preparing the trade union masses in them for a "split" that is in actuality not a split at all but initiating basic trade union work, keeping in mind the need for a leap beyond the state union and narrow craft trade union organizations. Convincing the trade union masses of the correctness of the line of industrial unity (which implies independence from the bourgeoisie in every trade union organization) which the

state unions are objectively hindering, not to mention convincing them of the necessity of seizing political power for themselves, requires the creation of independent organizations capable of educating and mobilizing (depending on the union) the trade union masses. Now there lies ahead a period of unknown length of convincing the masses of the correctness of this line as well as implementing it wherever Maoists are involved with the trade union activities of the masses.

Where the party-building efforts and the labor movement will go is hard to predict. There is a lot that is favorable to both, but both are rife with contradictions and the immense shadow of American imperialism looms over them. The proletarians' trade union consciousness has been reduced to an absolute minimum over the course of decades. There effectively is no "labor movement" in the United States among the hardcore proletarians, there is only class collaboration and corruption in the state unions and unbridled exploitation in the vast majority of the workforce that remains unorganized. Hopefully, the correct line wins out in the struggle for unity within the revolutionary camp, and a new era in the labor movement and US Communist movement can be ushered in under the banner of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.