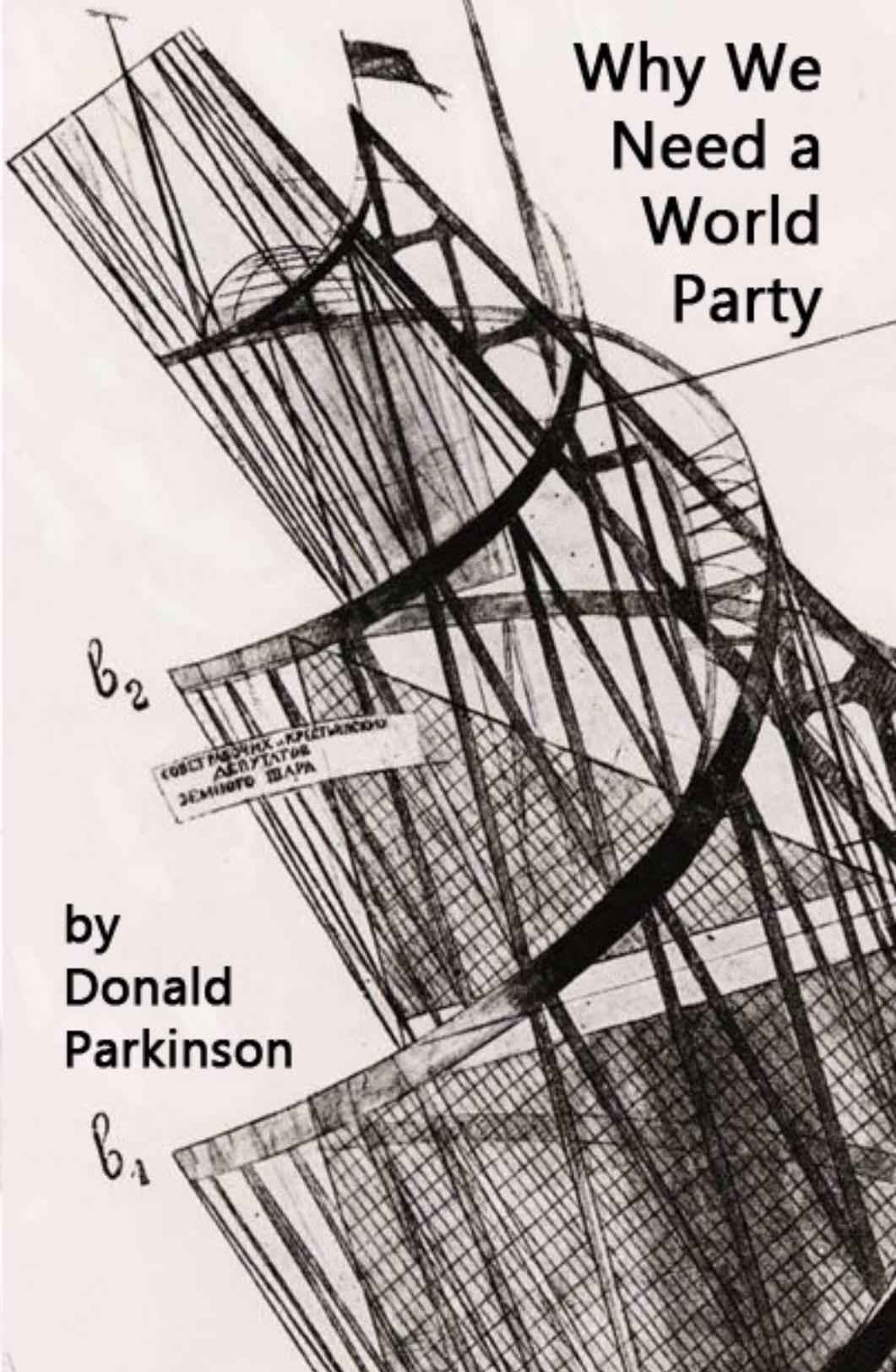




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# Why We Need a World Party

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circumstances of today. There is no perfect past model for us to mimic, no ideal form of proletarian organization that we can resurrect for today's use. Yet there is also no reason we cannot learn from the whole past of revolutionary organizations, from groups like the early SPD and Bolsheviks, the KAPD, the PCInt and even syndicalist organizations like the old IWW or FORA.

Forming a world party is not the immediate task at hand. First we must develop the "raw material" that can form the basis for such an organization. An organization with membership dominated by a single locale or country cannot declare itself a national or world party in good faith. Such an organization would merely be a sect masquerading as a party. First we must build our local committees and organizations around revolutionary politics. Yet we cannot do this in isolation. It is essential that we stay in contact with other communists around the world, engaging in collective discussion on long-term strategy, co-ordinating our activities and organizationally centralizing as necessary.

*As a long-term goal communists should work towards a world party organized around a minimum/maximum programme that can tolerate factionalism while maintaining independence from bourgeois and reformist parties.*

"...it is inevitable that the growing proletariat should resist exploitation, and that it should organize industrially, co-operatively and politically to secure for itself better conditions of life and labor, and greater political influence. Everywhere the proletariat develops these phases of activity whether it is socialistically minded or not. It is the mission of the Socialist movement to bring all these various activities of the proletariat against its exploitation into one conscious and unified movement, that will find its climax in the great final battle for the conquest of political power." – Karl Kautsky, *The Road to Power*, 1909

"There are therefore no bodies which are revolutionary because of their form; there are only social forces that are revolutionary through the direction in which they act, and these forces are organized in a party that fights with a program." – Amadeo Bordiga

Do Communists need a party? If so, what kind do we need? Can revolutionary syndicalism or councilism serve as an alternative to forming a party? While the Communist League of Tampa is not a party formation the question of proletarian political organization is raised in our Points of Unity which states: "the proletariat must form its own political institutions independent from other classes and develop the capacity to rule as a class and abolish capitalist relations."



It is my view that political organization inevitably takes the form of a party of some kind if it is effective, so communists undeniably need to form a party as a long term goal. Right now the conditions for forming a party aren't viable. This does not however mean that there isn't work in the current circumstances we can do to change these conditions. We can still form political groupings, build those groupings, merge with others, intervene in mass struggles and run educational efforts without being centralized as a single world party. Instead we have to develop the basis for such a party to exist.

To clarify, a party is simply defined as a formal organization unified around a programme, which is in the broadest sense a series of political demands and basic principles of operation as well a long term vision of social change. This programme is the basis around which it organizes, agitates and educates. It is these characteristics that define a party rather than precise organizational structures, which can vary. A party doesn't necessarily mean standing in elections; nor does it always mean a "vanguard party" where a small cadre with strict ideological unity proclaims itself the leaders of the working class. Neither does it mean an organization which will substitute itself for the working class by establishing a monopoly on political power.

The kind of party we need is first and foremost a world party, an organization where (to use a rather militaristic metaphor) each national section is essentially a battalion in a worldwide army. Our revolution will be international, hence there must be organization at an international level to coordinate it. Before the question of seizing power is even on the table some kind of world party that can pursue the internationalization of revolution must exist. Such an organization must have a balance of centralization and decentralization so as

To emphasize the role of the party is not to deny the role of spontaneous mass struggle. There is a mutually reinforcing relation between the spontaneous mass movement (where action precedes consciousness) and the planned efforts of communists organized on the basis of programme (where consciousness precedes action). Mass action and party together comprise the totality of the class struggle, the former bringing the largest masses of workers into the battle against capital with the latter working to merge this mass movement of the class with the communist programme. This doesn't mean class consciousness is injected into the class "from without" through the bourgeois intelligentsia, but it doesn't mean it will develop spontaneously into a movement to topple class society without the conscious efforts of communists either.

Today there is much hope amongst ultra-left tendencies like Endnotes that spontaneous class struggle will bring forth completely novel forms of organization that are adequate for our times. While this is possible there is reason to believe that as long as politics exists the party (defined as organization centered around programme) will be invariant as a necessary means of intervening in politics (any collective project of changing society). Politics means a clashing of social visions which are products of class interests, and to contest these social visions classes and factions within classes form programmatic organizations. Some would claim that the party is a 19th century form of organization that is outdated by changed conditions. There is no doubt the 21st century won't bring us organizations identical to German Social-Democracy or Bolshevism; to attempt to recreate these models would be foolish. Conditions have certainly changed, but how they have changed to make the party in general irrelevant is never made clear by those making this claim. A party for today will obviously look different from those of the past, operating under different structures and formalisms. We need organizations that can adapt to the novel

Rather than taking power through a coup the party gains sufficient support for its minimum program and mobilizes the population to enact it. If properly applied the minimum programme will expand political power to the entire proletariat rather than confine it to a single party. The party doesn't rule with a monopoly on power in the name of the class; it secures the institutional means for the class to rule as a whole and abolish itself along with all other classes. We have no patience for conspiratorial Blanquist fantasies, yet at the same time we reject that taking power must mean majority support in bourgeois elections. How we determine sufficient support depends on specific historical circumstances. There are no formalistic procedures, especially not success in bourgeois elections, that can measure this. We should of course aim for majority support of the working class, but even then measuring whether or not we have a true majority is difficult.

This proposed party would be organized around an invariant minimum/maximum programme as detailed above rather than transitional demands or a "mass line" that tails the spontaneous demands arising from immediate struggles. It would have to patiently build up mass support for its politics rather than hoping to be the "spark that lights the prairie fire". This entails not softening our politics in hopes of "chasing" the masses to gain popularity or sacrificing our political independence through united fronts with bourgeois or reformist parties. The party must be a party of opposition to the entire bourgeois order, one that stays hard and fast to its programme without embracing reformist coalitions as a shortcut to power. This doesn't mean refusing to fight for reforms short of proletarian dictatorship, but it does mean rejecting the notion that we can 'trick' the working class into taking power by mobilizing it to fight for reforms.

to prevent a single national section from asserting specific national interests over the whole organization while also allowing for the autonomy that separate sections need to meet their specific conditions. This was one of the problems of the Comintern: its domination by Russian national interests. To paraphrase Bordiga, the Comintern should have run Russia rather than the other way around.

This party should be a mass party rather than a vanguard party in the following sense. It should welcome all workers and intellectual allies that are willing to follow the programme and collectively work to actualize it. There should not be a tight ideological/theoretical line imposed on members, which constrains the ability of an organization to adapt to new conditions and have open debate without splitting or needlessly expelling members. Unity should be based around the broader programme, with debate open within all layers of the group on policy as well as theoretical issues. There must be internal democracy, accountability and transparency. Like a proper proletarian government it must be run on principles of delegation and egalitarianism rather than through a caste-like hierarchy. Leadership responsibilities should be formalized to ensure accountability, though recallable by constituents if necessary. The party also should not associate itself with the vanguard of the class struggle itself. The vanguard is not a single organization but a layer of the class that exists both within and outside party organizations. To say otherwise would be making the untenable claim that class struggle only occurs under the control of the party.

The kind of centralism we desire is one that is based on a true unity of the group around programme and action. This kind of centralism is a goal to be worked towards, not something to be forced by a clique in the leadership when the conditions for it don't exist. Therefore the banning of factions as such is not a tolerable policy, as factions are an expression of real divisions in the organization that cannot be 'cured' with mere suppression. The ability to form factions and oppose leadership is part of a healthy organization that develops itself through debate rather than blind conformity to the central committee. This isn't to say any and all factions should be tolerated; some positions will fall completely outside what can be tolerated in a communist organization. That said a healthy organization must be able tolerate factionalism, as it will be inevitable in any kind of mass party.

Bolshevism, before the Russian Civil War, operated on these principles for the most part. The party contained multiple factions and would publish internal debates in their public press. Much of the attempts to mimic Bolshevism today are based more on how the Party and Comintern developed after the Russian Civil War rather than pre-1918 Bolshevism. The point is not much that we must mimic their example, but that mass parties based on these principles can be formed and that a party like the Bolsheviks became successful organizing with them. The notion of an "iron-law of oligarchy" where all political organization of a considerable scale will lead to authoritarianism should be avoided for the conservative notion that it is. Of course any party will have tendencies towards deformations due to operating under the pressures of capitalist society. But these tendencies can be fought against; they are not impossible to overcome.

their basic interests are of importance. Another consideration to make is that the regime which developed in 1920s Russia primarily represented petty-proprietors (professionals, state bureaucrats, peasants) rather than the proletariat. With a ban on factions in the party and the soviets being shells of what they once were there were no institutional means for the proletariat to challenge this, leading to a sort of 'red bonapartism'.

When the party takes power it doesn't install itself as the sole source of authority but rather secures the basis for its minimum program to be put into practice. The minimum program is a set of institutional and political measures that destroys the bourgeois state and raises the entire working class to take hold of the 'general means of coercion' (Marx). This includes but is not limited to rule of the commune-state (based on free elections, recallable delegates, political egalitarianism, self-government of localities), the arming the workers, the abolition of police and military, reduction of work hours, banning of bourgeois/reactionary political parties, and empowerment of workers at the point of production. In other words it secures the dictatorship of the proletariat and enables class struggle to ascend to a new level without the constraints of the bourgeoisie state. This minimum program, as it becomes universalized internationally, provides the basis for enacting the maximum program which is composed of measures to transition into communism. If the minimum program cannot be actualized due to insufficient support then the party must wait; there is no shortcut into power through coalitions with bourgeois parties unified around a more reformist and tame programme that isn't blatant opportunism.

Practically every mass upsurge of the working class has involved agitation, organization and education from conscious militants, both during and preceding the uprising.

Without a party with a mass base in the working class that develops a plan for an alternative to the current regime workers councils will simply give power back to the existing state or give way to other reactionary or reformist forces. There must be organized political opposition to reformist/reactionary groups that can organize an alternative center of authority and coordinate an overthrow of the state and formation of a new revolutionary regime. This means more than just loose networks of individuals who circulate information and theory who will either be completely ineffective or unaccountable. The hope that councils on their own will rule without political parties simply has no real basis in history. It is an idealistic fantasy. The workers who make up councils are themselves part of political parties, and the delegates they elect and decisions they make will reflect this. The alternative would be to ban political parties, which of course then raises the question of who enforces this ban.

The question of substitutionism raised by councilism is still an important one however. What will prevent a party from taking power and substituting itself for the proletariat, becoming a bureaucracy separate from the class that sets up an exploitative state? The simple answer is that the party doesn't rule as a single party with complete monopoly on power but shares power with the entire revolutionary mass movement, as well as other revolutionary tendencies it may be in alliance with. Through political struggle within and outside the party the class keeps it on track and accountable to mitigate the development of internal counter-revolution. For this purpose the ability to form factions and for workers to have institutional channels outside the party to defend



***The Bolshevik Party before 1918 was hardly a bureaucratic centralist organization that stifled internal debate.***

Attempts to replace the party as a central organ of revolution such as syndicalism and councilism have provided interesting movements and critiques but ultimately have failed to provide a realistic alternative. Syndicalism counterposes party organizations to workers in industrial unions that will prepare a revolutionary transformation through general strikes that seize the means of production to institute workers self-management. One basic problem with this strategy is the general tension between the roles of trade unions and political organizations. Syndicalism aims to essentially combine the two, forming trade unions that are based on a political affinity to a general vision of seizing means of production. This model of organization had much appeal to workers who were skeptical of social-democracies parliamentary tactics, seen as avoiding the mediation of politics altogether in favor of direct action on an economic basis. Yet a vision of seizing the means of production and self-managing them is still a political vision that must grapple with social problems beyond the economic.

Unions, to most effectively perform their function of protecting the basic economic interests of the workers they represent, must gain membership from as many workers as possible in a given trade or sector regardless of politics. However political organizations are based on the exclusion of those who don't follow the groups political line. As a result in syndicalism there is a constant tension between maintaining the political vision of the union and operating as a functioning union that can mediate the relation between laborers and employers. Syndicalist unions therefore tend to either give up on radical politics and become reformist unions like the French CGT or essentially become parties that run workplace committees, albeit confused ones that refuse to recognize they are essentially parties. This isn't to say revolutionary or 'red' unions never have existed or can't exist at all, but they tend to not last for long or have trouble sticking to their politics and therefore on their own have trouble developing the kind of long term strategy

and base that can provide a basis for revolution. Revolutionary unions have a place in a broader communist movement, but by themselves they are insufficient.

Another alternative to the party that is raised by some communists is councilism, which argues that the only legitimate revolutionary organs are workers councils formed by the workers themselves through mass strike actions. Councilism argues that political parties are an essentially bourgeois form that will inevitably substitute themselves for the proletariat as a class and therefore must be avoided at all costs. Generally its adherents argue that rather than organizing as a party communists should simply educate others and circulate information. Most councilists therefore take a very fatalistic attitude to revolution, arguing that only intense economic crisis will inspire the proletariat to form councils without any kind of prior organizing from conscious militants. The hope is that workers will spontaneously realize the need to seize the means of production and form workers councils on their own without guidance from conscious organized militants.

Councilism is based on a historical fantasy, because the actual historical experiences of workers councils have all been connected to political parties. The Soviets of 1917 were formed by Mensheviks, while the workers councils of the German Revolution were all connected to whatever political parties the workers who participated were involved in. Council rule is still essentially party rule, just the rule of whatever party dominates in the councils. In Germany 1918 this was the SPD. In Hungary 1956 the councils backed a social-democratic left nationalist Imre Nagy. On their own workers councils have never been able to act as an alternative centre-of-authority to the bourgeois regime. They have functioned more so as united-front organizations of the class in struggle that rarely stand as permanent decision making apparatuses.