

The Vanguard

A quick round-up

In **French**, it is “*Avant garde*”: the forefront.

From the **Communist Manifesto** (but without mentioning the word “vanguard”):

"In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole? The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties.

"They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

"They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mold the proletarian movement.

"The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only:

(1) In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.

(2) In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

"The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the lines of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

"The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: Formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

"The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

"They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of communism.

"All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.

"The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favor of bourgeois property."

Later on, the Communist Manifesto says:

"In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

"In all these movements, they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time.

"Finally, they labor everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.

"The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

"WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!"

From the **SACP Constitution** (3, AIMS):

3.1 The SACP strives to be the leading political force of the South African working class whose interests it promotes in the struggle to advance, deepen and defend the national democratic revolution and to achieve socialism.

3.2 The SACP shall pursue this by means of educating, organising and mobilising the working class and its allies in support of our Party and its objectives of completing the national democratic revolution and achieving socialism.

3.3 The SACP shall strive to win acceptance as **a vanguard** by democratic means and in ideological contest with other political parties.

From the Communist University (1):

In politics, the word “vanguard” means the professional force, human framework or “cadre” which can lead the mass movement of the people on a revolutionary path.

The relationship of the revolutionary vanguard to the mass organisations of the people is similar to the relationship of a doctor to the people, or of accountants and lawyers to businesses, or of an architect or an engineer to builders and their clients.

The vanguard is made up of professional revolutionaries.

The revolutionary vanguard is a servant, and not a master. The vanguard party of the working class serves the working class, and does not boss it. Nor does it substitute itself for the working class.

The working-class vanguard party, which is the communist party, is not separate from the mass movement. It is intimately involved with the mass movement at all times and at all levels. The vanguard party educates, organises and mobilises. As a vanguard, it must have expert knowledge about how mass movements in general, and especially about how the primary mass organisations of the working class which are the trade unions, work.

The text from the Marxists Internet Archive’s Encyclopaedia of Marxism, written by Brian Basgen and Andy Blunden, two comrades who clearly have vast experience of what they are writing about, says:

“Unions are mass organisations of the working class whose primary role is to achieve the common demands of their members. They are fundamentally *defensive* organizations.”

Trade unions arise out of the existing consciousness of workers as it is found under capitalism. In many ways, workers emulate capitalist forms of organisation. Their initial purpose is to get a better money deal in exchange for their labour-power in the capitalist labour-market.

Trade unions are in the first place reformist, not revolutionary. Nor can trade unions become revolutionary without the assistance of professional revolutionaries, organised separately as a communist party. Lenin dealt with this relationship in his book “What is to be Done”.

Trade unionists who think that they can dispense with the assistance of a communist party - the ones known as “economists”, “workerists” or “syndicalists” - are on a road to ruin.

From the **Communist University** (2):

In “What is to be Done?”, Lenin was concerned to oppose what he called “economism”, which is also called “syndicalism” and in South Africa in the past and still up to now, “workerism”.

Lenin was concerned to show (following the publication of Eduard Bernstein’s gradualist “**Evolutionary Socialism**” and Rosa Luxemburg’s “**Reform or Revolution?**”) that a revolutionary transformation of society was not possible without a professional, revolutionary, political party of the working class. Trade union organisation of the working class was never going to be sufficient.

In the process Lenin was moved to denounce demagoguery in the severest terms (see the quote above, which is taken from the text that we are using today). One reason that Lenin denounced demagogues so emphatically is because they misrepresent themselves as being “left” or revolutionary, when in fact they are “right”, and in particular gradualist, reformist and class-collaborationist.

Worker’s Control?

Sometimes syndicalism arrives at a point where it proposes, demagogically, “worker’s control” under capitalism. Marx and Lenin both denounced such tomfoolery – see, for example, Marx’s “**Critique of the Gotha Programme**”

Lenin showed that the worker’s political party, the communist party, remains a “must-have”. To achieve its goals the working class must combine in a vast association of the whole nation; whereas the syndicalism of individual factories or isolated mines is nothing more than a reversion to petty-bourgeois consciousness, in conditions where such petty-bourgeois behaviour is hopelessly subordinated to a bourgeois market that it cannot possibly control.

How will they sell their products, unless on the terms of the Imperialists? This is why we say that demagoguery is nothing but the class enemy’s message, dressed up and re-sold in fake-revolutionary clothes. Demagogues will even be found denouncing the real revolutionaries as fakes.

When in doubt about such things, it helps to study Lenin. Lenin opposed syndicalism, workerism, gradualism, reformism and economism, all of which still exist today. “What is to be Done?” is the book where Lenin most clearly differentiated the reformist mass organisations from the vanguard political party of the working class, which is the communist party.
