

Why is a revolutionary party so important?

written by Melinda Butterfield
April 21, 2020



Cuban workers carry portrait of Lenin on May Day in Havana.

The Communist Manifesto was originally called the [“Manifesto of the Communist Party.”](#) When Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote their famous pamphlet, it was not just the worldview of two individuals. It was written as a program of action for a revolutionary organization called the Communist League, made up of German, French, English, Dutch and Spanish workers.

You can’t really understand the Communist Manifesto or the Marxist political program if you separate it from the revolutionary party.

Why is a revolutionary Marxist party so important?

The party takes in the big picture of the working-class struggle. It’s a bridge between the day-to-day struggles of the workers, on one hand, and the Marxist perspective of worldwide socialist revolution on the other. Marxism and the masses come together through the party.

Lenin described this relationship in his book [“What Is to Be Done?”](#)

He wrote: “Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only outside of the economic struggle, outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. ... The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships between all the various classes and strata and the state and the government — the interrelations between all the various classes.”

Lenin went on to explain: “Communism represents the working class, not in relation to a given group of employers, but in its relation to all class forces in modern society, to the state as an organized political force. We must actively take up the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness.”

Here are two examples. During the carnage of World War I, the Russian working class made a revolution. In March 1917, a strike by women garment workers set off an uprising that overthrew the czar, who represented the old feudal landowning class. A new government was formed representing the capitalist class, the bosses and bankers. But at the same time, workers and soldiers had begun to create their own bodies of self-government, which they called soviets (a translation of the word soviet is committee or assembly).

The new capitalist government made many promises to the people. They promised to end the war, to feed the hungry, to give land to the peasants. Lenin and his communist party — called the Bolsheviks — believed the government wouldn't live up to its promises. They said the soviets of workers, soldiers and peasants should take over and run things for themselves. But most workers were not ready to take this step. They wanted to see what the new government would do.

The communists proved right. The capitalist government did not, and could not, keep its promises. When the czarist general, Kornilov, threatened a counterrevolution, it was the Bolsheviks, not the government, that organized the workers to defend the gains of the revolution.

Over the course of several months, the masses learned through their own experiences — and with the guidance of the Bolsheviks — that the government would not give them bread, land or peace. So in November 1917, the working class, led by the communists, rose up and threw out the capitalist government.

The soviets took power and began a socialist transformation in Russia.

Without the slogans, leadership and Marxist clarity of the Bolsheviks, a successful working-class revolution would not have been possible.

Now for a current example. Jan. 1, 2020, was the 61st anniversary of the Cuban

Revolution. Many of us are inspired by the courage of the Cuban people, who are determined to maintain their independence and their socialist system in the face of continuing U.S. threats and blockade.

Many people wonder how the Cuban people have been able to stay so united, so revolutionary, during a long period of setbacks. After counterrevolutions in the USSR and Eastern Europe took away Cuba's main trading partners, the country's economy dropped steeply. Any capitalist government in such a situation would have fallen.

Cuba's secret weapon was the determined revolutionary leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). Comrade Fidel Castro and the PCC kept the consciousness of the masses high through this "Special Period" by explaining the phenomena that affected their everyday lives in the context of the global class struggle.

Every important economic and political decision is made with the direct input of the Cuban people, who meet regularly to discuss and debate how best to maintain the revolution in difficult times.

The vast majority of the Cuban people support the Communist Party and the revolutionary government because the leadership has maintained a high level of honesty about every crisis and setback, including the current tightening of the blockade by Donald Trump. Despite these difficulties, Cuban medical workers have deployed around the world to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

This is the power of a revolutionary Marxist party united with the working class. It can stave off counterrevolution and mobilize the people under the most trying circumstances — right under the nose of U.S. imperialism.

Some socialists say we don't need a revolutionary party here. They will admit that

Marx and Engels made a good analysis of capitalism. But they don't like the idea of a revolutionary party. These forces will try to convince you that a Marxist-Leninist party is "undemocratic," that you don't need a disciplined, united party in a "democratic" society like the U.S.

But the capitalist ruling class is highly centralized. Look how they unite their politicians whenever they want to get something done at our expense. Both Democrats and Republicans lined up behind the multi-trillion-dollar Pentagon budget, bailing out the banks and Wall Street, and continuing murderous sanctions against Venezuela, Iran, Zimbabwe, People's Korea and many other countries during a global pandemic.

The ruling class has the media, academia, the Pentagon, the CIA and huge armies of cops and fascist thugs at its beck and call.

The working class needs its own centralized, revolutionary leadership, a party that can see the bigger picture and can give clarity and decisive leadership to the working-class struggle.

