

A Dangerous Tendency: Opportunism

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such issues is, and must be, completely different. All big revolutionary leaps forward are achieved thanks to a daring revolutionary class attitude which does not hesitate to experiment and let being intimidated by challenges.

In fact history moves forward through ups and downs in every respect. In certain historical conjunctures the overall environment may not seem appropriate for the solution of certain important problems. But eventually everything changes in life and conditions are maturing for the solution of this or that problem. These general truths are also valid in relation to the international organization of the working class. We believe that in the future progress of the struggle there will be many changes on the international scale and that, although it seems as if impossible today, new combinations will take place on the basis of elements with revolutionary substance which come from different roots. To think in the opposite way means the petty-bourgeois pessimism proper in our opinion.

Revolutionary workers struggle always demands giving priority to the international interests of the working class and not falling into nationalism. But unless the communists strive to build the revolutionary organization of the working class in the countries they live in, the revolutionary international organization of the proletariat will never be realized. Because the international organization is not an external bureau independent from the actual efforts of the communists in various countries. International organization cannot spontaneously be born by putting forward seemingly brilliant political ideas on the international arena. Actually in no field of life a significant success can be achieved without sparing real labour along a correct line and defying wrong practices. No matter how revolutionary, right and satisfactory the ideas seem, they do not turn into a material force and change life spontaneously in the absence of a proper organization.

The struggle for the creation of the international organization of the working class requires intransigence in principles and flexibility in tactics. Neither opportunism pursuing short term so-called political achievements nor sectarianism unwilling to see and accept anything other than its own small organization can be of any use for this struggle. The reality we face today in the issue of building the revolutionary international organization of the proletariat puts very important responsibilities and tasks over the shoulders of the internationalist communists. Those who are self-confident will continue revolutionary efforts in every field undertaking these responsibilities and tasks. Those who are not intimidated will move forward. All big problems in history have been resolved this way.

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of the working class will only be created by the unity of similar groups coming out of those who have been tirelessly striving to create it. What is important is not to abstain from reasonable experiments in order to create the components of such a unity. And one more thing: political similarities or dissimilarities should definitely be measured in the scale of revolutionary Marxism.

Defending the unity of revolutionary cores which agree on organizational issues and basic principles of revolutionary Marxism preserves its importance today as it did yesterday. However the desire for such a unity to boost the revolutionary struggle of the working class should not be turned into a play word. Issuing “calls for unity” all the time is an act of simply saving the day, which is by no means compatible with the revolutionary Marxist way of tackling problems. While it is right to desire and put effort for healthy unities, it is equally wrong to exaggerate the issue of unity and make concessions on questions of principle. If the degree of differences on ideological and organizational questions is such that would mean breaching principles and signify diverging courses in the concrete political struggle, then unity should not be defended and accomplished.

Undoubtedly creation of a new revolutionary international is not an easy task. In every period of history this difficult task has always required a serious preparation work and sacrifice. Especially when the deep shocks of the recent history are considered, it will be understood that there isn't any readymade prescription for the success towards this target. In the concrete conditions we live in there is not any other choice but learning the new way to the target through actual struggle. Besides, as Lenin had said for a similar situation, one cannot get to know along this way without mistakes and setbacks.

Therefore it is inevitable to experiment in the way to achieve international unity. It is out of question that the communists who have faith in the creation of the revolutionary international of the working class will not hesitate to intervene any occasion where they see a spark. Some political relations begin and some end within this context. The important question is this: Do the experiences leave important lessons and a positive accumulation behind? However, let us tell at first hand that there will be two different class approaches related to such issues. The first one is the approach of the petty-bourgeois who is unable to understand the dialectical nature of moving forward. The petty-bourgeois has no tolerance to experiment; he/she wants immediate success as soon as a step is taken. As it requires a sweating effort to resolve difficult political problems and that there are ups and downs turn the petty-bourgeois away from this effort and make him/her skeptic of it. As opposed to this the revolutionary proletariat's attitude towards

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Being one of the frequently used concepts in the Marxist literature, “opportunism” literally means practice of seeking opportunities. We know that opportunistic attitudes constitute a very widespread tendency which we particularly face in capitalist society in various fields of life and in various forms. As for the political struggle, the term opportunism means the kind of a persistent self seeking politics without any regard for principles which can be observed in all political structures from bourgeois parties to the leftist organizations. Because of their class nature, bourgeois parties and petty bourgeois political organizations exhibit an opportunistic political style, which is no extraordinary thing. However, when opportunism appears in the field of revolutionary organization of the working class, it becomes a serious problem. This is the main aspect of the matter that must be dealt with.

It is well established that opportunist attitudes in the workers movement have always created important weaknesses and caused extremely destructive results in some circumstances. Many examples can be given. It would be enough for us to remember the cases of Bernstein and Kautsky. Bernstein and Kautsky were the assistants of Engels who was trying to pick up and edit the works of Marx after his death. But in sharp contrast to revolutionary Engels whose heart was beating for the emancipation of the working class till his last breath, they headed towards the marsh of revisionism and opportunism.

In these examples the problem is not of having or not having the knowledge of Marxism. Both Bernstein and Kautsky were sufficient in the field of Marxist theory. Furthermore Kautsky was accepted as the greatest authority of Marxism for a very long time after the death of Engels. But in the final analysis what was im-

portant for these pedantic “authorities” who wrote a lot on Marxism and political struggle, was not the revolutionary organization of the working class. Today, as was yesterday, the most important thing for this kind of “Marxist” theorists and politicians is their political careers and political achievements. This point must never be forgotten.

The Character of Opportunism

Opportunism in the workers movement means sacrificing the fundamental historical interests of the working masses for the sake of sectional interests and short-cut political gain. The basic feature of opportunism reveals itself at decisive moments of class struggle as shrinking from taking the revolutionary way perceived as difficult and seeking within-the-system political solutions. Therefore despite opportunism strives to hide itself behind a Marxist rhetoric in normal times, its inherent character, namely class conciliationist character seeking conciliation between the bourgeoisie and the working class comes out at times of revolutionary upheaval. Opportunism has always been a serious political problem both on a national and international level and required a hard struggle against it on the part of revolutionary Marxists.

When historical examples are examined, it will be seen that opportunism has various appearances, from its rather innocent looking versions to the most explicit collaborator ones. Social-chauvinism that dragged the Second International into the marsh of betrayal during the first imperialist war of division is an extreme and perfectly mature example of opportunism. These opportunists who were the ancestors of the existing current of social-democracy rejected socialist revolution for the sake of bourgeois reformism. Social-chauvinists totally avoided the necessities of class struggle. They rejected to transform the imperialist war into a war of workers against bourgeois system in their countries and followed the line of class collaboration. The Second International opportunists idolized bourgeois parliamentarianism and legality and denied the issue of illegality required by revolutionary struggle.

Political figures and organizations are not dragged into opportunism as a result of some kind of unfortunate occasions. This problem is deeply related to class attitudes and manners adopted in political struggle. Lenin points out that opportunism is a social product of the flow of history and that it feeds on legalism. In the case of Second International, opportunism was the product of the relatively “peaceful” conditions of the period of 1871-1914. The opportunist leaderships of

possible to differentiate the revolutionary and opportunist policies.

The revolutionary situations developed in Latin American countries could not grow into revolution because of the absence of revolutionary leadership. Hence the illusions among the masses could not be eliminated. In almost each of them the rebellious masses were taken under control by the leftist presidents and bourgeois election mechanism. These leftist presidents calmed the masses by promises of reforms some of which were delivered to some extent. Applauding left populism instead of exposing these realities is opportunism. While opportunism hides itself behind revolutionary words, every issue is being indexed to the reforms and election processes within the existing order. On the one hand there is a rhetoric about general revolutionary targets in order to save the appearances, on the other hand the illusions among the masses that the revolutionary process could be advanced thanks to presidents like Chavez are being raised. The support given to Chavez is justified with the excuse that the masses support him. This is not revolutionary politics, but tail-ending the masses. We must state that the criticisms made by revolutionary Marxists on such issues are not received well by the Stalinist, Trotskyist or centrist groupings. Is it a revolutionary approach to hide the realities from the working masses, and worse, strengthen their illusions?

In conclusion, a clear line of demarcation must be drawn between those who adopt the internationalist communist tendency with its requirement of the proletarian revolutionary organization and those who insist on looseness, legalism and opportunism. It is very obvious that a revolutionary International defending the international revolutionary interests of the working class will not be granted readymade from above. Creating such an International depends on the efforts of communists from different countries trying to make revolutionary Marxism dominant throughout the world and waging a struggle against reformism, opportunism and centrism.

There is no easy solution

In order to achieve an ideological and organizational unity on the basis of revolutionary Marxism on an international level, we need not only effort but also patience and time. It is clear that creation of an International organization is a difficult process. Within the progress of this process, political views and attitudes should be clarified through major theoretical discussions. It is also important to carry on common works in order to make progress in the world workers movement in a revolutionary direction. The revolutionary international organization

This is not a casual claim we put forward. It is proven by developments in life itself. The attitudes towards some important problems on the agenda of the world working class (such as the character of the regime in Cuba or of the Latin American left or the imperialist war in the Middle East) are clear as day. Although the centrists coming from Stalinist and Trotskyist traditions remain organizationally separate, they meet in terms of theoretical analysis and political views. The place where they meet is a wrong place where national developmentalist statism is identified with socialism and defence of national interests with anti-imperialism.

Therefore it is of great importance to develop political analyses in the revolutionary Marxist lines pertaining to these actual developments and questions. In fact there is some differentiation/decoupling going on based on these problems on the international level, though they are not mature yet. It is not by chance in our writings we stress on these subjects and bend the stick to make differences clear. We are aware of the fact that those who cannot reach a clear position and are not determined cannot help to strengthen revolutionary Marxism.

We should explicitly express that today those following a political line which benefits revolutionary Marxism constitute a very small minority. The heap of problems and difficulties accumulated for years in the field of revolutionary politics drive majority to the subterfuge of jumping over these problems, which means opportunism. Therefore the tendency to be dragged behind political fluctuations dominates instead of taking a hard but correct course about the imperialist war or the developments in Latin America. And for this reason very much effort is being made to confine anti-capitalist opposition to bourgeois left limits, while little is being done to advance the independent revolutionary line of the world working class. This situation is a political reality which we witness both in individual countries and on the international level by and large. Hence grasping the nature of opportunism in the world workers movement and struggle against it is a revolutionary task that cannot be postponed.

Today because of the fact that the working class does not have a revolutionary leadership on the international level, many important political developments can be controlled by the bourgeois order. The fact that the rising mass movement against the imperialist war started by the USA in the Middle East was dragged towards the bourgeois left line and made flaccid is an example of this situation. Likewise, while the left winds in Latin America present various opportunities for the progress of the revolutionary workers movement, the rise in the mass movement could be controlled by the “saviours” like Chavez. A careful assessment of the political lines followed in cases of such important developments will make it

the workers’ parties, which were integrated into the bourgeois democracy and parliamentarist system in European countries, took refuge behind the justification of the use of legal opportunities and developed a current of conformist socialism worshipping legalism. These leaderships deceived workers by telling the lie that this political manner serves better to get wider masses around revolutionary ideas.

Extraordinary conditions revealed the real face of this opportunist tendency which was strong enough to influence the left movement of various countries through the international organization for a long time. Imperialist war proved the general fact that opportunism could not stay at the beginning point, would mature as time passes and that the concessions made for the bourgeoisie would finally drag the opportunists to the camp of the bourgeoisie. Despite other important historical events happened since then, this historical example still preserves its importance. Because a socialism concept similar to the Second International opportunism is still influential particularly in European countries, shaping the workers parties and showing itself off on an international level.

The experience of the official communist movement (TKP - The Communist Party of Turkey) before the 12th September 1980 military coup in Turkey demonstrates the inauspicious role of opportunism. In this period when fascism was rising step by step, the leadership of TKP held the working class back from struggle and forced it to follow the reformist bourgeois party (CHP - Republican People’s Party). And it continued to play its inauspicious role after fascism came to power. This example is a perfect vindication of what Lenin remarked. Lenin said that the immense power of opportunists and chauvinists was based on the alliance they established with the bourgeoisie, governments and military general staffs. He emphasized the fact that the existence of opportunists in the workers’ parties could not deny the fact that they constituted a political section of the bourgeoisie, were implanters of bourgeois influence and agents of the bourgeoisie within the workers movement.

For the well-being of revolutionary struggle it is also necessary to differentiate between the explicit type of opportunism and the one which can hide itself for a long time. As experienced in the history of class struggles there is secrecy and cunning in the character of this latter type of opportunism. This “cunning” opportunism always claims to be “Marxist” but kills its revolutionary spirit in a sneaky way. It betrays revolutionary Marxism creating a type of “Marxism” which moves away from a kind of revolutionary work to prepare the working masses for revolution, from revolutionary education, propaganda and revolutionary tactics.

The sneaky type of opportunism does not apparently reject the revolutionary ideas, but debilitates the revolutionary working class struggle particularly by liberal attitudes on organizational problems and the political manners it implants, thus being still a serious source of danger today. To be frank, for a deal of the self-claimed Marxist groupings, there are various opportunist defects in the approach towards organizational problems and the way of doing politics. The more such groupings appear in a revolutionary guise the more they can attract the militant elements but also the more misleading they become. Those who do not believe in the revolutionary way of building the working class party and do not engage in such an effort lead the proletariat to a position of getting caught unawares for revolutionary situations. Giving revolutionary speeches without creating a political organization such that would serve the revolutionary cause is not a useful effort for the working class. Preaching revolutionary tactics in the absence of an organization to lead the revolutionary upheavals does not move forward the struggle either. It goes without saying that revolutionary tactic is nothing without revolutionary organization.

In order not to fall in a parrot's position in vital issues related to the revolutionary workers struggle (i.e. "the only shortcoming is the absence of the revolutionary leadership"), it is crucial to assimilate Lenin's educative example. This revolutionary leader of the working class, working under heavy conditions of oppression of the Tsarist Russia, managed to create a revolutionary organization out of nothing by his correct attitude especially on organizational problems. The Bolsheviks could concentrate themselves on the target of revolution thanks to their conception of revolutionary organization and revolutionary preparation. For a long time they remained an organization of revolutionary minority and were always regarded as "adventurists" by the opportunist and reformists. And this was not the case only in Russia, the leaders and members of the international organization of the time (The Second International) also found the Bolsheviks generally as "ultra left". Nevertheless the revolutionary process from February to September in 1917 revealed what kind of an organization the revolution demanded. The life itself raised the Bolsheviks, who had been trying to organize the vanguard of the working class on the basis of revolutionary ideas for years, to the position of leading the revolution. In this way historical experience also revealed the example that should be pursued.

No matter which historical episode we examine, it is clear that one of the areas in which opportunism reveals itself in a striking way is the area of organized struggle. It is clear that all the workers parties and left organizations which have a le-

had criticized Stalinism for years. On the contrary, this situation revealed the weaknesses of Trotskyism which had taken a wrong course escaping to question some wrong analyses (for example, the thesis of "degenerated workers state" and the thesis that "the bureaucracy is not a class in the Soviet Union") of Trotsky. As a matter of fact, the collapse of the Stalinist regimes drew Trotskyism into a deep crisis as well. But until today no serious effort has yet been made by the Trotskyite movement to recognize this fact and face the reasons behind it.

For these reasons the worldwide confusion and chaos on the part of the left still prevails. At present, most of the existing national and international political structures – no matter they follow the Stalinist or Trotskyist lines – are repeating their old discourse as if those historical events had never been lived. Those who did not learn the revolutionary lessons of the historical events, through which they could head towards new beginnings, are trying to jump over the crisis as if there is not such a problem. However, it is not possible to overcome deep crises by trying to ignore them.

Let us repeat here what we have been voicing for long. Everyone should learn from the deep historical convulsions lived in order to overcome the crisis. Everyone needs to grasp those aspects of their political tradition which do not fit revolutionary Marxism and come to terms with this situation. It is an urgent need that the cadres who pass this historical test start to move forward to a healthy point of convergence and that the new generations be won over to Marxism on the basis of this effort. Although some people may not find these findings of us realistic, for us they represent the existing situation. The fact that many years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union or that the delusive conditions of balance created by those who behave as if there is no crisis, or it has been overcome, cannot invalidate the existing reality.

The tendency to save the day instead of setting out to solve the crisis has created and fostered a centrist political current both in Turkey and all over the world. As it is observed in every period of upheaval in history, the vacuum of authority and chaos conditions fostered centrism again. And this centrism is similar to previous ones in its essence, vacillating between reformism and revolutionary Marxism. As it has always been the case, centrist spectrum today is fairly wide and heterogeneous in terms of the political roots of its components. In today's conditions the centrist spectrum contains elements coming from both Stalinist and Trotskyist traditions. The ones who avoid facing the mistakes of their own political traditions or stop making a political account in the half way begin to take similar attitudes in the practice of politics.

everyone in the absence of an agreement over a common policy. The manner of this kind of political leaders is as if it was built on a political opportunism avoiding any discomfort to themselves. The watchword of this political conformism is, to use Lenin's short and to the point expression, "live and let live". This manner which the opportunists carry into the workers movement is in fact a conformism that suits only the narrow-minded persons and inevitably leads to an unhealthy diplomacy of unity. Hiding the essence of the problems, the reconciliatationist phrase-mongering tries to establish unfounded and half-hearted unities. By doing so, it prevents probable convergence between those that can and should unite.

There is a fact pointed out by revolutionary leaders on various occasions. Political honesty comes from strength whereas hypocrisy from weakness. Although there are people trying to market conformism as political elasticity, the main characteristic of revolutionary politics remains to be uncompromising attitude on matters of principle. This was what marked the Bolshevism lead by Lenin. As Trotsky already stated, in the final analysis the morals of each party take root from the historical interests it represent. What determines the morals of a revolutionary workers organization which is to wage a principled fight against opportunism must be its revolutionary intransigence put at the service of the oppressed.

Opportunism in the international field

The problem of opportunist approaches in today's socialist movement is a serious problem not only on the national but also on the international level. Despite there are various Marxist groupings around the world, trying to create an international organization, what is prevalent in this field is yet a mess and a complete vacuum of authority. These concrete conditions make it possible for opportunism to easily grow and create a wider field of movement for itself. Therefore the struggle against opportunism on the international level makes it also a must to grasp correctly the concrete conditions existing in this field.

As it is known, the great periods of upheaval in history are not immediately followed by a new rise on proper pillars and there are not readymade recipes on hand to bring such a rise either. The collapse of the Stalinist regimes created a big disorder in the workers movement of the world. This historical earthquake left behind a wreckage for those who followed Stalinist traditions for years. But this situation has not yet brought a radical effort to break from Stalinism. On the other hand the collapse of the Stalinist regimes did not justify Trotskyism which

galist and reformist essence always change directions toward liberal bourgeois politics under the pretext of carrying on a mass politics. When this kind of left political parties or groups state that they are against illegal struggle, what they are in fact against is the essence rather than the form, i.e. the revolutionary politics of the working class. Because the illegal revolutionary struggle of the proletariat is not a mere organizational form but in essence a genuine stand and a policy of revolutionary rebellion against capitalist order. This is the very self of the revolutionary Marxist politics which will make sure the emancipation of the working class its own work. Any effort to reduce the concept of Leninist Party to a bare "model" separating it from its much broader meaning would serve the ends of those who explicitly reject it and those who empty its essence while pretending to accept it. The systematic attacks against the concept of revolutionary organization nowadays necessitate a very careful study of these issues. The zeal to load the sins of Stalinism to Lenin and the effort to discard the concept of Leninist organization by disparaging it, is a serious source of danger.

The issue of fighting opportunism is as much important as its character, historical roots and variations. As Lenin pointed out the working class cannot play its revolutionary role unless it wages a hard struggle against looseness, faintheartedness, subservience to opportunism and distortion of the theories of Marxism. Unless a decisive attitude is taken against opportunism, it is not possible to create and strengthen the revolutionary organization of the proletariat in various countries and create the revolutionary international union of the proletariat. It is a must to be equipped with Marxist theory in order to take a revolutionary attitude against opportunism. Otherwise, it will not be difficult to be deceived by the opportunists who are skilled in creating various illusions. Even if one acts in good faith, the kind of "good faith" which is not strengthened by the power of revolutionary theory can easily be made to serve opportunists.

Close Relatives of Opportunism

There is a close relationship between political tendencies such as opportunism, revisionism, reformism and conciliationism all of which weaken the revolutionary worker struggle. This should be self-evident. Because it is clear that opportunist policies would lead to conciliation with the bourgeois order somehow or other and that conciliationist policies would lead to reformism and revisionism.

Insofar as it concerns the struggle of the working class, revisionism means altering Marxist theory through revising, in other words emptying its revolutionary

essence and making it suitable for the bourgeois intellectuals' taste. The main feature of revisionist politics is to follow an unprincipled political attitude changing with the conjuncture and develop theories adapted to the rises and falls in the political circumstance. The followers of revisionist politics sacrifice fundamental historical interests of the proletariat for the sake of some benefits (reforms) that do not end the bourgeois order. As it is seen, the features mentioned for the revisionism are in conformity with the content of the opportunist and reformist policy.

Similar examples can also be given for reformism. Reformism is a political current preaching that a fairer social order (could be even "socialism"!) can be established through some corrections in the life and working conditions of the working masses. Despite the fact that reforms may create some small improvements in the unbearable consequences of capitalism, workers will keep being exploited and wage slaves. For this reason, to the extent reformists show themselves as sincere and people-friendly "saviours" to the poor masses, they move them away from the target of revolution and make revolutionary situations become flaccid. The experience in various countries proves the fact that workers are betrayed every time they believed and trusted the reformist socialists.

However logical the line of "realism" a reformist follows when trying to make his/her way in politics seems to himself/herself, this is totally a different course from revolutionary realism. Let us remember an important example: It is known that the ones pursuing opportunist or reformist policy find revolutionary Marxists a little bit far "left" and accuse them of being ultra leftist. Such accusations are not surprising. Because the "revolutionism" of the opportunist has the intrinsic character of being disabled by realism within the existing order and having a tendency towards right, i.e. reformism. Therefore the position which an opportunist (or a reformist) occupies in the field of political struggle, his/her line of horizon and point of view is completely different from the revolutionary position of the working class. Hence while reforms are perceived as revolution by the opportunist persons and organizations, the revolutionary line and the revolutionary excitement this line produces is seen as a kind of extremism or irrationalism.

This important difference between revolutionary and opportunist attitudes has become the subject of important political arguments since the time of Marx. For instance while Marx and Engels were getting excited with the sense of a coming revolutionary wave, the "sensible" reformists criticized this excitement. In the following years these different approaches made themselves felt occasionally. Lenin fought opportunism in the Russian workers movement. Lenin's at-

titude against the labelling of revolutionary excitement and passion (which the Bolshevik line contains) as adventurism by opportunists is extremely instructive. Lenin sharply exhibits the opportunism of "the Russian Marxist intellectuals, who are debilitated by scepticism, dulled by pedantry, have a penchant for penitent speeches, rapidly tire of the revolution, and yearn, as for a holiday, for the interment of the revolution and its replacement by constitutional prose." The history of the Russian revolution proved how rightful the attitude of Lenin and Bolsheviks was in terms of the revolutionary interests of the proletariat. However the opportunism in the workers movement kept its existence and continued to produce and reproduce itself.

What is important today, as was yesterday, is to have revolutionary faith and revolutionary enthusiasm even in seemingly calm periods or when reaction heavily dominates. If there is no revolutionary enthusiasm then it is clear that Marxism will turn into nothingness. When a revolution will break out is never known. But by setting out to build a revolutionary organization beforehand, the organization which will lead the masses towards revolution when revolutionary situations break out, can be made available to a certain extent. But the revolutionary organization can only be built with devotion to and faith in the revolution under every condition, with revolutionary passion, a determined and patient work, propaganda and organization for the revolution. This is where one of the fundamental differences between revolutionary and opportunist approaches becomes evident. In normal periods opportunism avoids organizing and propaganda for the revolution with the justification that this way of struggle is inconvenient for the circumstances. It relies nearly completely on bourgeois parliamentarianism. This adaptation to the bourgeois order drag opportunists to a tendency to conciliate with the bourgeois left and thus curb the revolutionary surge as much as possible when a revolutionary situation breaks out.

Another close relative of opportunism is the conciliationist policy. Revolutionary Marxism proves the fact that a unity able to strengthen the struggle can only be built on the basis of ideological unity and an agreement on the organizational principles. On the other hand the conciliationist "Marxists" tend to plug the points of disagreement. On the contrary the Bolshevism defends making points of disagreement clear over important matters, and not to hide them. There are certain important elements of conducting a principled policy. For instance it is necessary not to pass over the matter of differences or try to reconcile the conflicting tendencies by silence. However for those who have made conciliationism an art are addicted to interpret politics in such a way that it can be accepted by