

Challenge 1971-1979 (Draft)

1971 through 1979 – a review of Challenge in the 1970's

Posted on PLP web site, Friday, March 24, 2012

Introduction

How to characterize this decade? If we are now in a “dark night”, the 1970's might be considered the “twilight”. The bright hope of the early decades had faded –both nationally and internationally. Internationally, by the 1970's the reversal of the communist revolutions in the USSR and China was complete. The murder of hundreds of thousands in Indonesia destroyed the third largest communist party in the world. Cuba had ceased being a beacon for revolutionaries. In the US, the CPUSA had abandoned its revolutionary ideology. SDS and the student movement had lost its focus and militancy. The trade union movement continued to shrink in number and militancy.

What about PLP in this decade? The fact that we put out a “Revolutionary Communist Newspaper” bi-weekly and then weekly throughout this decade was a major accomplishment. In the “twilight” of the 70's, we held high the banner of communism, committed ourselves to a culture of resistance and identified the fight against racism as a key element in our program. Challenge sales rose to an all time high. On the positive side, this decade can be characterized by positive quantitative and qualitative aspects of Challenge as well as many militant fights, activities and programs. On the negative side, we still carried with us throughout the decade of the 70's some revisionist baggage from the old communist movements which will be discussed below. We would not dump this baggage until the 1980's and Road to Revolution IV.

The Report

As part of a history of PLP, we reviewed Challenge from 1971 through 1979.

Highlights of the contents include:

1. Editorials explaining the need for revolution, to destroy capitalism, to join PLP and to build socialism
2. Multiple articles about the fight against racism
 - CAR/InCAR
 - KKK and Nazis
 - Sociobiology
 - Immigration
 - Multiple struggles in the shops, hospitals, schools and communities against racism
3. Reports on and support of workers' struggles
 - 30 for 40
 - WAM
 - Multiple articles on the class struggle with reports on many strikes and

workers' fight-backs, nationally and internationally
attacks on union sellouts

4. A commitment to internationalism
5. Celebrations of many May Days
6. A "Cultural Page" (for a while)
7. Articles on history, political theory, economics, current events (Iran), sexism, religion
8. Work in the military "Win soldiers – turn the guns around"

An Analysis and Critique

In the first half of the decade Challenge mainly presented a militant reformist position. Papers were sometime devoid of any revolutionary politics, just expressing militant reformism and filled with reports of strikes. We wrote "Unions are weapons of revolution." Some communist programs that we put forward in specific situations were also devoid of our politics. We argued over and over again that 30 for 40 was the road to revolution. However, in the second half of the decade the newspaper became increasingly political with our socialist/communist line ("Bring communism to the miners").

Challenge during this time did reflect remnants of revisionist practice, our inheritance from the old movement. Two weaknesses dominated our writings and our practice in the 70's.

1. In contrast to Challenge with its predominant militant, reformist character, PL magazine contained more theoretical, revolutionary and sophisticated articles. Although never explicitly stated, it is as if we produced Challenge for the masses, PL magazine for the cadre.
2. In a somewhat analogous fashion, much of our practice during this decade, in particular WAM and InCAR, reflected the "two stage theory" of revolution. By the end of the decade the two stage theory of revolution is rejected. WAM disappears from the newspaper.

Our review of Challenge revealed some other weaknesses. Our prediction about World War III growing out of the clash between the USSR and the US was wrong. Our position on fascism was overstated and confusing – too many things were called fascistic when in fact they were everyday capitalism. The fight against the KKK and the Nazis dominated many Challenges towards the end of the decade. However, we did not always make clear how fighting the KKK/Nazis would build a revolutionary movement, not just an anti-fascist movement. We did not explain an apparent contradiction in our line: if the liberals are the main enemy and will lead this country to war and fascism, then why are we fighting the KKK/Nazis?

Some (minor) bad statements:

"Schools need more minority teachers."

"The primary task of revolutionary forces is to fight racism."

"Psychiatry is a fraud. There is really no such thing as mental illness."

