

# Progressive Labor Party Forged in Struggle 1960-1964 (Draft)

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For nearly four centuries the capitalist system has destroyed the lives of billions of workers. Among its many evils it has waged unceasing wars for profit; exploited the workers in its factories mercilessly; caused mass unemployment; used racism to super exploit targeted groups of workers and encouraged cultural prejudices that increased profits by the special oppression of women and child workers and the outright slavery of tens of millions; ignored the huge death toll from malnutrition, curable diseases and lack of health care generated by its policies; destroyed massive areas of the global environment. These actions and more have created the worst mass poverty in world history.

To combat these horrors, communists have put forward certain fundamental principles, beginning with the Communist Manifesto published by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in 1848, which launched what has become a 160-year-old communist movement. The Progressive Labor Party did not materialize out of thin air. We have drawn on many of these principles and have combined them with a critical analysis of the theory itself and how that theory was put into practice by the struggles of communist-led workers around the world, to advance both theory and practice to a still higher level.

The fundamental principles that PLP has taken from the past communist movement include:

The necessity for a revolutionary party, guided by the science of dialectical materialism\*.

Marx's analysis of capitalist exploitation through his discovery of surplus value\*\*.

The necessity for armed revolution to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and destroy the dictatorship of the old ruling class.

The open advocacy of communism ("communists disdain to conceal their aims" stated the Communist Manifesto).

Internationalism, anti-racism, and democratic centralism\*\*\* as the guides to party practice.

Recognizing that class struggle is the motor force of history; the working class is the revolutionary class; the state (government) is not neutral but represents the interests of the ruling class.

The abolition of the wage system.

Marx defined "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat" as the communist antidote to the nature of society under capitalism, which is "The Dictatorship of the Capitalist Class". Proletariat means (narrowly) the industrial working class, but more broadly the working class as a whole. To establish workers' rule, the capitalist state must be smashed and a new ruling class established---a dictatorship of the working class, a workers' state--until such time as all remnants of capitalism are eradicated.

## **NEW PRINCIPLES**

Grounding itself in many of these fundamental principles, PLP was born from the understanding that the international communist movement—including the U.S. communist party (CPUSA) had abandoned nearly all of them and essentially accommodated itself to capitalism. Over five decades of experience, PLP has developed some new communist principles, including:

- There must be one international communist party leading the world's working class, which has one universal class interest, not individual parties representing capitalist-created countries each of which pursues its own road to communism, such as the "American road to socialism" espoused by the CPUSA. Building that one international party is the key to making a revolution to emancipate the working class.
- The Party and the working class must fight directly for communism rather than moving first through what Marx and others defined as a "transitional" phase of socialism. That transitional phase, developed in the Soviet Union and China, retained much of the bag and baggage of capitalism, with its income differentials and maintenance of a higher-paid class of managers, administrators and cultural figures.

The Soviet and Chinese parties did accomplish tremendous feats. Under Stalin, the USSR developed a modern industrial society and smashed the Nazis in World War II. The Chinese Communist Party defeated the Japanese fascists and wiped out mass starvation, Yangtze River floods and prostitution, among other reforms. But eventually a full-blown profit system emerged in both nations, initially as state capitalism and eventually as privatization of the means of production. The parties in both countries failed to trust that workers and peasants have the understanding to jump directly from capitalism to communism and the abolish money and the wage system.

- The concept of class, of two opposing classes—workers against bosses—is fundamental to destroying capitalism and establishing communism. All societies—slave, feudal, capitalist—are divided primarily into two classes, the oppressed and the oppressors. What unites workers as a class is their relationship to the means of production. Workers produce all value. Bosses appropriate that value and pay the workers as little as workers let them get away with. All workers, no matter what their color, gender, "race," ethnicity, religious beliefs or capitalist-created nationality, are exploited by the profit system. This is our unifying characteristic. Anything that negates this class concept, that puts workers in alliance with "their bosses" against another set of workers and bosses, weakens the struggle to combat and overthrow the entire ruling capitalist class.

- Internationalism trumps the concept of nationalism, which divides the working class. Workers must unite across all capitalist-created borders and not defend its "own" bosses against workers in other capitalist countries. There is no such thing as "progressive nationalism." "National liberation" movements merely exchange one set of bosses (the colonial ones) for another set (local bosses) and retain the profit system,

working with world capitalism in one form or another. The working class cannot share power with nationalist bosses. Such so-called sharing keeps the capitalists and their system of exploitation in power. (In Indonesia in the 1960's, capitalist rulers eventually murdered a million communists and workers who were "sharing power" with them.)

The rulers use nationalism to divide the working class within a capitalist country. Black nationalism attempts to win black workers to unite with black bosses and separate them from white workers. It turns the struggle of oppressed vs. oppressors into a struggle of black against white. "Black capitalism" is based on the same exploitative foundation as capitalism in general and will oppress black workers in similar fashion. Black nationalism is also used to win black workers to demand more black cops, more black school principals or more black supervisors, as if this would ease their oppression. But the role of these groups is the same no matter what the color of their skins. Cops, principals, business owners and supervisors all enforce the profit system, and use every opportunity to divide black and white workers. All of the above holds true as well for Latino nationalism.

- Fighting racism is strategically important in the fight to overthrow capitalism. Separating black workers from white workers denies the entire working class the potential of black workers' leadership in the fight for armed communist revolution. Drawing from their super-oppression historically in the U.S., black workers have been in the forefront of the battle against slavery, in strikes, in the fight for jobs and in other attacks against the system. Similarly, ever since black slaves were first brought over from Africa right through to their use by the capitalists as a pool of low-wage labor, racism has become the foundation stone of the capitalist system. It is used to divide the working class and weaken the struggle against the bosses. It devalues human life by claiming that one group of workers is inferior and another is superior. No revolutionary party can grow, nor can a communist revolution be mounted against the capitalist class, without placing the fight against racism and for multi-racial working-class unity front and center.

- The communist party must be a mass party based on the concept that every worker can be won to being a communist. The successful party will not be a "cadre" party in which a small group of communists claims to lead the rest of the working class.

- Communists will not permit the existence of any "cult of the individual". The glorification of individuals (as built around Stalin and Mao) leads to slavish followers rather than to building the practice of leadership and critical thinking by masses of workers.

- A communist society does not separate the party and the government. The party, composed of tens and hundreds of millions of workers, will govern society based on democratic centralism and practice communist principles at the workplace and in workers' communities, following the example of the Cultural Revolution in China.

- Communists must smash the instruments of the capitalist state once and for all — no “independent” judiciary, no ballot box elections, no lesser-evil bosses or politicians.

- Communists must make revolution the primary focus of action—not the reform of capitalism. Capitalism cannot be reformed. Communists work in reform movements in order to turn them into schools of communism.

## **THE CPUSA TAKES THE CAPITALIST ROAD**

To understand what brought the Progressive Labor Party into existence, one needs to examine the nature of the communist movement that preceded it. By the late 1950s, the CPUSA had abandoned virtually all of the principles defined above. It had given up on the necessity of armed revolution and was advocating “peaceful transition to Socialism” via the capitalist ballot. Its constitution said that private property could be abolished by an amendment to the U.S. constitution, citing the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment that abolished slave property. It ignored the fact that chattel slavery was ended by a violent Civil War in which 600,000 died.

The CPUSA also discarded the idea that the ruling class actually controlled the government—the state apparatus. It urged members to “push the Democratic Party to the left” rather than recognizing that it was merely one of the two parties that represented the interests of the ruling class. It completely adopted class collaboration with the bosses.

Rejecting “open advocacy” of communism, the CPUSA told its members, especially those in the basic industries, not to tell their co-workers that they were communists, on the theory that doing so would “isolate them from the masses.” This practice revealed the party’s complete lack of confidence in the working class and, among other things, made it harder to recruit principled and vigorous new members.

Probably the single event that triggered a movement among left members of the CPUSA to challenge the party’s abandonment of basic communist principles was the 1956 speech of USSR prime minister and communist party chairman Nikita Khrushchev to that country’s 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. In it he attacked Stalin’s role in leading the Soviet Union through its defeat of the foreign imperialist invasion of the 1920s; the massive industrialization of the 1930s which prepared the Soviet people for the inevitable Nazi invasion; and the routing of the Nazi army in World War II in the biggest military battles in world history. (Even the arch imperialist Winston Churchill admitted that a society that could move from “the plow to the atomic bomb” in barely 30 years was remarkable.)

Khrushchev’s speech revealed how far the USSR party had abandoned basic Marxist-Leninist principles. He advocated “the state of the whole people” instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He advanced the concept of a “peaceful transition to socialism,” thereby abandoning the principle of armed revolution which prepares the working class for the inevitable struggle to defeat the old ruling class’s armed defense of its system.

This speech sparked tremendous turmoil throughout the international communist movement at the time. In the U.S., Marxism was up for grabs. The CP's newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, was filled with anti-communist apologies for capitalism, attacks on 40 years of socialism in the Soviet Union, and abandonment of the most fundamental communist principles. Many party leaders quit, implying or saying outright that they had wasted their lives in the communist movement.

This left a huge vacuum in the party's leadership. In Buffalo, Milt Rosen, an industrial worker and leader of the party's industrial section there, emerged as the upstate NY organizer. In 1957, the House Un-American Activities Committee (the infamous HUAC) descended on Buffalo to try to finish off the party's left-wing industrial base. Reactionary union leaders cooperated fully with HUAC. Many party members lost their jobs, especially those who had hidden their communist views from the workers. However, those who were known to their co-workers as communist fighters were defended by them and, in most cases, did not lose their jobs. Milt Rosen was elected to head the NY State party's industrial section.

All this taught a profound lesson — that communists must rely on and trust their fellow workers. It was out of these kinds of experiences that a vibrant left force was emerging. This industrial section formed the basis for the eventual birth of the PLP.

Meanwhile a schism developed in the international communist movement, with China's CP opposing the Khrushchev revisionism. Comrade Rosen, together with another upstate NY CP leader, Mort Scheer, and others began circulating Chinese CP documents such as "Long Live Leninism" and "On the Historical Experiences of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", which exposed Khrushchev's rejection of a class analysis of the state. They were immediately attacked by the revisionist CPUSA leadership which completely supported Khrushchev.

CPUSA Chairman Gus Hall excluded comrades Rosen and Scheer from the 1960 party convention, although those two represented the heart of the Party's industrial work in a state that held half the national membership. It was at this convention, during the Kennedy-Nixon presidential campaign, that Arnold Johnson, head of the NY State CP, rose to say that, although the party was not endorsing either presidential candidate, he himself was "voting for Kennedy." This was an obvious signal to the membership to do the same—which amounted to support of a bosses' party that represented the main Rockefeller-led wing of the ruling class.

One of the crassest examples of the CP's accommodation to capitalism occurred during the NY-NJ railroad strike in January of 1961. When militant CP members organized to shut down the railroads' waterfront operation to save the jobs of 660 railroad tugboat workers, Chairman Hall called in comrade Rosen and ordered him to tell the railroad comrades to stop the strike! Taken aback, Rosen asked why. Hall replied that the ruling class knew that "communists were behind the strike" and that if it continued he and other leaders would be thrown in jail.

Comrade Rosen told the railroad members no such thing. The strike continued until the Kennedy Administration was forced to re-start negotiations and allow the tugboat workers back on the job.

These kinds of attacks convinced the left group in the CPUSA that it was hopeless to fight to reverse the revisionist trend within the party. Accordingly, they called together a small group of CP members to begin organizing a true communist party. The Hall leadership soon expelled many of these industrial party members.

In the fall of 1961, first a group of 12 and shortly afterwards a larger group of 30 met to discuss launching this new movement. At a December 1961 meeting, Milt Rosen gave a political report advancing the perspective of building a new communist party in the U.S. with a working-class base. Towards that end we decided to publish a new magazine, *Progressive Labor*.

In this period, the Hall leadership suspended the railroad section organizer for his association with the left group. When the remaining nine railroad members (of the 65 who originally constituted the section prior to Khrushchev's speech) demanded to know why they were not consulted about this suspension, three members of the seven-member CP Executive Committee were sent to "explain" that the leadership had decided the section organizer was following a "left-sectarian, right opportunist, social-democratic, Trotskyite line" The workers were told the decision was made and the railroad members had no say in the matter." At that point the railroad comrades voted 8 to 1 to quit the CP and join the new group, thus depriving the party of one of its few remaining industrial sections.

The first issue of PL Magazine, a 12-page publication, appeared in January 1962 and was distributed in NYC, San Francisco, Buffalo and a number of other cities. During its first six months of existence it began attracting workers and students which became the basis to call for a conference in New York City in July. There 50 workers and youth from 11 cities met to launch a new organization: the Progressive Labor Movement (PLM).

The PLM stood for anti-imperialism, anti-racism, based itself in the working class and supported China's CP, which, at that time, was exposing the Khrushchev leadership and was still a vanguard in the fight against U.S. imperialism. There were millions of workers to be won. The new group determined to become involved in workers' and students' struggles and to draw in new members from those struggles rather than raid the CPUSA.

PLM members felt that by gaining experience around the fundamental communist principles abandoned by the old CP and much of the international communist movement, it could look forward to the formation of a new communist party. It still had to develop this experience, however. It still had to gain enough experience and commitment to warrant the kind of communist discipline necessary to follow democratic centralism in shaping the organization's line, which members were duty-bound to carryout to test the line's correctness.

## PLM'S EARLY STRUGGLES

Soon the new organization hit the streets with public rallies. It opened community headquarters in working-class neighborhoods and developed struggles against slumlords, racist police brutality and unemployment. It directed its main fire at liberal bosses and the Kennedy Administration. Between 1962 and 1964, PLM played a leading role in five national campaigns--directly confronting the rulers' anti-communist attacks.

The Hazard Miners Solidarity Campaign. In the winter of 1962-63, rank-and-file black and white miners in Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia were engaged in a bitter wildcat strike, rebelling against inhuman working conditions and starvation wages (the average weekly wage was \$25). The mine owners, police and local officials had initiated a campaign of terror and scabbing to break the strike. Five hundred miners armed themselves, roving from mine to mine, dynamiting bridges and blowing up scab mines. This was a working-class battle in which PLM decided it had to become involved, despite its lack of a base among these miners.

It organized the Trade Union Solidarity Committee to Back the Hazard Miners, led by one of PLM's railroad comrades, a local union official. The TUSC collected food, clothing and funds in working-class communities across the country and raised the Hazard miners' issue in local unions. Workers responded enthusiastically. Truckloads of food were shipped to the miners, along with PL magazines that exposed communist ideas to the strikers. A mass meeting in New York City drew nearly a thousand workers and students in zero-degree weather to hear the miners' rank-and-file leader, Berman Gibson, and the TUSC chairman speak.

The bosses went crazy. Their local rag, the *Hazard Herald*, announced in a front-page, 8-column banner headline that "Communism Comes to the Mountains!" The Kennedy liberals realized they had a dangerous situation on their hands: armed miners, black and white, were uniting with communists to fight the bosses. They launched a huge red-baiting campaign backed by big bucks to break this unity and used social-democrats to take over the Solidarity Committee.

Initially the miners resisted the anti-communist attack but, as it mounted, Gibson, and others retreated and turned to the liberals. The result: the strike continued for many months but ultimately petered out. PLM learned vital lessons from this campaign:

- Workers will arm themselves to defend their fundamental class interests when it is clear to them that armed struggle is necessary.
- Strike solidarity is a crucial issue for all workers and they will respond enthusiastically when bold leadership is given;
- The bosses never hesitate to use violence to break a strike or rebellion, but anti-communism is their key weapon, especially when racism fails to break the fighting unity of black and white workers.

- Red-baiting cannot be defeated from the outside. Success requires a solid communist working-class base within the ranks of the workers. Such a base can only be established through protracted class struggle in which communists give active leadership. This activity enables workers to shed their boss-fed anti-communist notions and recognize that communist ideas are in their best class interests.

The Student Trip to Cuba. Although Cuba was eventually to turn into a state capitalist country, in the early 1960s the Cuban Revolution had great appeal to youth in the U.S., especially to black and Latino workers. U.S. imperialist rulers feared it would spark similar uprisings throughout Latin America and radicalize U.S. workers and students. Kennedy's CIA-directed Bay of Pigs invasion had failed miserably.

Prior to that invasion, PLM distributed tens of thousands of leaflets and held streets rallies warning about Kennedy's plans. It even unfurled the first "Hands Off Cuba" banner in the galleries of the United Nations during the UN debate over the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba, a crisis that aroused fears of a nuclear war.

After Cuba confiscated a billion dollars worth of U.S corporate property, the Kennedy Administration instituted an economic boycott of Cuba and established a ban on travel there. While other pseudo-left groups merely reprinted Castro's speeches, PLM boldly announced it would break the travel ban, even while it was still active in the struggles of the Hazard miners.

Over 500 students applied to the PLM-led Ad Hoc Committee to Travel to Cuba to defy the U.S. State Department. Seventy-five were selected. After receiving an invitation from the Cuban Federation of University Students, they entered Canada to fly from there to Cuba on a Cuban plane. But the Canadians prevented the Cuban plane from landing.

Then, in the summer of 1963, the Committee publicly announced it would fly to Havana via Mexico. The real plan, however, was to fly to Czechoslovakia and then back to Cuba. The trip was successful and 50 students broke the "Kennedy curtain."

Upon returning to New York, immigration inspectors began marking their passports "invalid," but the students refused to turn them over. Within weeks, over 50 PLM leaders and Committee members were either cited for contempt or indicted for "conspiracy" to break the ban, despite the fact that they had publicly announced their intention for more than a year.

Some faced 20-year prison terms, but the government's attack failed miserably. A national campaign to defend the students won widespread support. Most of the young PLM comrades and friends held firm and grew stronger in their commitment to fight the rulers. They announced they were organizing another trip to Cuba! Almost a thousand students applied; 84 were selected and again broke the ban.



After a fight that went all the way to the Supreme Court, the charges were dropped. The ban had been beaten. Many students who had participated in the trips or supported them joined the PLM, which emerged as a vigorous force in the emerging New Left in the U.S. This struggle's lessons proved that:

- It is necessary to anticipate the ruling class's attacks and develop alternative plans to defeat them;
- Many different avenues of struggle must be employed to smash the bosses;
- Dare to struggle!. Dare to win! Be bold! Always be guided by the principle of acting in the best interests of the working class;
- Grow stronger through struggle. Ruling-class terror will never destroy the communist movement.

The May 2<sup>nd</sup> Anti-Vietnam War Movement. In March 1964, a conference on socialism was held at Yale University attended by many pseudo-Left organizations, including the CPUSA and various Trotskyite groups. PLM was also invited and accepted.

The conference was geared for a "scholarly" debate on theory, without practical proposals. Only PLM broke through these bourgeois academic ground rules which separated Marxist principles from working-class action.

PLM spokesman Milt Rosen electrified the audience of 500 students and faculty by focusing on the efforts of U.S. imperialism to crush the revolutionary movement in Vietnam. He proposed that the conference support a nation-wide mobilization on May 2<sup>nd</sup> to protest U.S. aggression there.

The proposal was approved overwhelmingly and a May 2<sup>nd</sup> Committee was organized under PLM leadership. On May 2<sup>nd</sup> thousands of students and workers marched and rallied in many cities all across the country demanding that "U.S. Get Out of Vietnam Now!" It was the first national demonstration against the U.S. imperialist invasion and the forerunner of millions of protestors marching against U.S. rulers in the years ahead.

To maintain this momentum, the Committee decided to become a national membership organization called the May 2<sup>nd</sup> Movement (M2M). Hundreds joined. Many Cuba travelers became its leaders. M2M played a major role in popularizing the struggle against U.S. imperialism's war against Vietnamese workers and peasants. It issued hundreds of thousands of leaflets, buttons and pamphlets; initiated numerous university teach-ins; organized rallies and marches; and developed "Free Universities" as an off-campus alternative to the rulers' educational system.

However, M2M was infected with several fatal weaknesses preventing it from emerging as a powerful anti-imperialist mass movement: drugs, sectarianism and racism.

(1) DRUGS: It was no accident that the drug culture developed rapidly in the 1960s. Drugs were pushed by the U.S. ruling class then to divert young people from struggling against them. The bosses' media told youth to "tune in" (to bourgeois culture); "turn

on” to drugs; in order to “drop out” of the anti-war and civil rights movements. Billed as “anti-establishment,” it was just the opposite. PLM vigorously opposed drug use, which was widespread inside M2M and even attracted some in the PLM. Many fine young fighters degenerated politically by becoming drug users.

(2) SECTARIANISM. Reacting to the Lyndon Johnson Administration’s stepped-up aggression in Vietnam after the assassination of John Kennedy, many new anti-war forces and organizations flourished, alongside M2M, including the newly-organized Students For A Democratic Society (SDS). Instead of seeking unity with these forces, many in M2M and some in PLM developed a sectarian attitude towards them. They accused them of not being “as radical as we are” or of being influenced by phony liberals and revisionists.”

Following SDS’s massive Washington, D.C. anti-war rally in the spring of 1965, it had become the major center of radical student activity. PLM’s leadership fought inside M2M and within its own ranks against sectarian isolation from the new, vast anti-war forces developing nationwide. Out of this struggle, the overwhelming majority supported dissolving M2M and joining SDS. A small group of PLM members quit PLM over this tactic and tried to maintain M2M as a viable alternative to the actual mass movement, but it rapidly evaporated.

(3) RACISM. M2M’s most serious weakness was a failure to develop the struggle against racism and to link the anti-racist struggle with the anti-war movement. We failed to understand the class nature of racism, that it was a life-and-death question for white workers as well as black workers.

Racism weakens the working class in two ways. It divides workers and pits one group against the other, diluting working class strength in battles against the rulers. Racism also allows the bosses to use lower-paid black and Latino workers as a threat against white workers struggling to improve their wages and working conditions by saying that black and Latino workers are ready to work for less and take their jobs.

In this way, racism reaps super-profits from the victims of racism, who are forced to settle for lower wages and worse conditions. The difference in family income of black and Latino workers as compared to white workers nets the bosses an estimated \$250 billion a year. Plus the bosses reap greater profits from white workers’ labor since they end up accepting less than they might win from a militant, united fight.

This weakness also stemmed from PL’s wrong line at that time on nationalism. We failed to understand that all nationalism is bad for the working class. There are no “good bosses”. The ones who fostered “Black Liberation” struggles in the formerly colonial world were not fighting for the working class in those countries but for the right to exploit “their own” workers by gaining a piece of the pie that the imperialists had monopolized. These “anti-imperialist” nationalists were still capitalists and were aiming to maintain the profit system. They even showed themselves as willing to rely on aid and arms from the former colonial powers to put down “their own” working class if necessary.

This lack of a class understanding permeated the growing anti-war movement. PLM's own weakness on these questions worked against building a united working class prepared to use its power to fight the ruling class's imperialist wars. The anti-racist (and anti-nationalist) fight was never a central part of M2M. Consequently it failed to build a base among black youth or unite with the efforts of the growing militant black student organizations, such as SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee), or attract workers to the idea that the same ruling class that waged imperialist wars abroad also oppressed workers in the U.S.

M2M did, however, play a vanguard role in opposing U.S. imperialist aggression in Vietnam and successfully broke with the old pacifist "peace movement" dominated by the CPUSA. That movement was never anti-imperialist but rather championed ruling-class collaboration behind slogans like "Ban the Bomb"; "Peaceful Co-existence"; and "For A Sane Nuclear Policy."

M2M helped move the new emerging anti-war forces in a Left, anti-imperialist direction, especially in SDS. Many youthful fighters joined PLM, coming out from their mass struggles in M2M. We also learned that:

- The Left must never isolate itself from the mass movement, content to be mere agitators. We must be an integral part of the mass struggle, give it leadership from within and raise our communist ideas as we fight alongside those who disagree with us.
- No mass organization can sustain a progressive course without making the struggle against racism a top priority.

Wiping Out HUAC. In 1963, when the first group of students returned from Cuba after breaking the travel ban, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) launched an anti-communist attack by summoning many of them to hearings in Washington in an attempt to intimidate and possibly jail them. Heretofore, the Committee had hauled Hollywood stars, leaders of the Communist Party and others to public hearings to ask them if they were communists. Virtually all took refuge in the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment, citing their constitutional right to refuse to answer. HUAC's strategy was to then cite them for contempt and threaten jail terms. The famous "Hollywood Ten" were imprisoned for up to a year.

CPUSA leaders "took the 5<sup>th</sup>" posing as great "defenders of the Constitution and of democracy." No one ever actually answered the question directly. If they said "no," the Committee would haul in some stoolpigeon to testify that they were communists. If they said that they had been communists, but had quit, the Committee would then ask them to name others who they knew to be communists. PLM members changed all that.

While hundreds picketed outside, PLM'ers took the stand and answered by declaring: "Yes. We are communists and proud of it!." This set HUAC members back on their heels. They were not prepared for those who said they were proud to be communists.

This was the first nail in HUAC's coffin. And it represented PL's principle of openly advocating Socialism (the term used prior to PLP's later proclaiming its goal of communism).

Then in April 1964, HUAC descended on Buffalo (where PLM had established an industrial and campus base) prattling that there was a "threat of a new communist movement" which "needed to be dealt with." The headline in the Buffalo *Courier-Express* left no doubt about whom HUAC was after: "New Communist Operation Here A Prime Target."

But in sharp contrast to the CPUSA's defensive stance, PLM launched an all-out offensive; 1,500 pickets greeted the anti-communist red-baiters. The University of Buffalo Student Senate appropriated funds to support the protest. Buffalo was in an uproar. Front-page headlines screamed: "Red Probers in Buffalo Hear the Sound of Fury"; "Witnesses Spark Uproar, Grapple With Marshals"; "UB Instructor Ridicules HUAC"; "Rain-Soaked Pickets' Chants Echo Outside HUAC Session." The demonstrators were supported by various mass groups, some printing full-page ads in the Buffalo paper. Clerics joined the picket line.

The hearings were completely disrupted. The Committee abruptly ended the witchhunt. PLM had driven them out of town. It didn't take too long after that for HUAC to disappear as an official Congressional committee. PL's principle of confronting anti-communism directly and organizing mass support rather than hiding behind the bosses' Constitution—proved decisive.

The Harlem Rebellion. On February 1, 1960, black students sat down at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, challenging the ban on black people in white-only establishments. Within a month there were 33 sit-ins across the South. This bold confrontation with racism was followed by the 1961 Freedom Rides of volunteers from across the country traveling to join the sit-ins in restaurants, wade-ins at beaches, swim-ins at public pools and lie-ins at construction sites.

In the 10-week period during the spring of 1963, following massive demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, the U.S. Department of Justice reported 758 different mass demonstrations and 13,786 arrests. No figures were given on the killings, beatings, bombings, police dog attacks, fire hoses and other brutalities. In August 1963, 200,000 people came to Washington, D.C. to hear Martin Luther King's "I-have-a-dream" speech.

Two main tendencies dominated this eruption of struggle against racist oppression: the integrationists, led by King, and the nationalists led by Elijah Muhammad and later by Malcolm X. The latter two criticized the integration movement's collusion with racist liberal politicians and its "turn-the-other-cheek" philosophy. King's advice had been, "If there is blood to be shed, let it be our blood." The nationalists believed in self-defense units and fighting back when attacked by the cops.

Both movements reflected the anti-racist mood of the masses. They seemed like opposing forces — integration with whites vs. a separate state for blacks. But in reality both movements were devoted to capitalism. The integrationists wanted to join the capitalist structure on a par with whites-- a pipe dream. The nationalists wanted black bosses. For the black masses the choice would be exploitation by white bosses and their black lackeys vs. exploitation by black bosses directly.

Early on, PLM held to Mao's two-fold understanding of nationalism: revolutionary (if it attacked the bosses of the imperialist nations) and reactionary (if it attacked the workers of the imperialist nations). While PLM sided more with the nationalists than with the King forces (who were openly allied with the Kennedy-Johnson administrations towards whom we directed our main fire), we were critical of both, believing that ultimately only communist revolution could end racism.

Within this rising anti-racist movement and despite a weak class analysis, the young PLM played a leading role in the historic Harlem Rebellion of June 1964. The year before we had established a PL center in Harlem and were holding weekly street rallies, exposing case after case of police brutality and organizing demonstrations in front of local precinct headquarters.

Amid this activity, on June 11 a Lt. Gilligan murdered a black youth, 15-year-old James Powell, in cold blood. The anger of the black masses boiled over and erupted in open rebellion. Thousands of militant black youth took to the streets, directing their anger at the cops and at price-gouging store owners protected by the cops. Molotov cocktails were hurled at police cars and stores. Thousands of cops were rushed to Harlem to quell the revolt but it continued to spread. Thousands of shots were exchanged.

The Mayor and Police Commissioner put the community under virtual martial law, outlawing demonstrations, rallies and marches. All the civil rights leaders called on the masses to cool it, but were ignored. The revisionist CPUSA backed these reformist pleas for peace at any price. The only force that had the guts to give political direction to the spontaneous rebellion was PLM.

Thousands of posters declaring, "WANTED FOR MURDER, GILLIGAN THE COP!" were circulated throughout Harlem and beyond. Thousands of copies of the PL newspaper *Challenge* were distributed (its first issue had just been published a few weeks before the rebellion). Rebels marched down the streets holding up the paper's front page as their flag. Hundreds of young rebels came to PL's Harlem center for leaflets and posters.

PL pointed out that the rebellion was also directed against Harlem's racist conditions: triple the unemployment rate of the rest of the city; half the family income; triple the sub-standard housing; nearly twice the infant mortality rate.

The bosses' media violently attacked PL for "inciting riots." The CPUSA attacked PL as "adventurists." PL's leaders' lives were threatened and they were tailed by the cops'

Red Squad 24 hours a day. They were arrested for defying the rulers' bans on demonstrations and for "inciting to riot," facing 20-year jail terms.

PLM was specifically enjoined from organizing marches between 110<sup>th</sup> St. and 155<sup>th</sup> St. and from river to river in Manhattan. PLM defied the ban, organizing a demonstration in the heart of Harlem. Bill Epton, then the leader of the Harlem PL chapter, was convicted and jailed for "inciting a riot." The PL printers who made the Gilligan poster were jailed. Dozens of PL'ers were subpoenaed before a Grand Jury and threatened with contempt citations. Several were convicted and served prison time. An international defense campaign was launched and Bertrand Russell and Jean Paul Sartre, among others, spoke out on behalf of those convicted.

While the rebellion subsided after a few weeks, PL's prestige soared in the black communities. In San Francisco, where PLM was virtually unknown in the black neighborhood, nearly 500 black militants turned out to hear a PLM black leader give an eyewitness report of the Harlem struggle.

PLM, however, was unable to maintain a leading position in this struggle because:

- Swept up in organizing the immediate struggle, we ignored the fundamental task of getting names, addresses and phone numbers of hundreds of youth who had come to our Harlem center and joined our rallies and marches. Although we did recruit a few of the rebel fighters, we didn't really organize for the long war ahead to destroy capitalism. It is not enough to organize the immediate tasks and seize the moment to give leadership to an immediate battle, no matter how sharp. Out of such struggles we must organize study-action groups, sell Party literature, and involve the new forces in collective political discussions on the strategy and tactics of the fight to help train them, as well as ourselves, as revolutionary leaders.

- We were influenced by an incorrect understanding of nationalism. We even had white comrades working among white workers and black comrades among black workers. This made for disunity in the fight against racism and undermined the collective responsibility to develop the strategy and tactics to lead all aspects of the class struggle.

As a result of these errors, we failed to raise the revolutionary consciousness of hundreds and thousands of young militants who admired PLM for daring to give some leadership to the rebellion.

But given these weaknesses, our experience proved to us that we were correct in understanding that revolutionaries must rely on the masses, not on alliances with class enemies who sell out the working class as soon as possible. We dared to give leadership and created the potential to emerge as a real workers' revolutionary vanguard.

The Harlem Rebellion marked a new stage in the fight against racist oppression, raising it to a new level, exposing the role of the black reformist leadership. Following

Harlem, more than 100 cities nationwide felt the torch of rebellion, not content with “cooling it.”

## **Endnotes**

\*Dialectical Materialism is a science explaining the laws of development of nature, society and thought. It enables us to recognize reality by understanding that things are always in motion, interconnected and interdependent. It is the science that is a guide to collective action that can emancipate the working class.

\*\* Surplus value refers to the following: In production the workers create all value but much, if not most, of that value is appropriated by the capitalist. That is, the owner of a capitalist enterprise pays each worker a wage (as little as possible) equal to only a small part of the value the worker creates. For instance, the value a worker produces in the first two hours of the work-day may equal whatever wage he or she may receive; the value created in the remainder of the work-day goes to the capitalist. That is what Marx called surplus value. From surplus value capitalists take their own profits and make payments to other groups of capitalists: interest on loans to banks (the banker's profits); rent to landlords; payments for raw materials, and so on. Thus, most of the surplus value created by the worker becomes profit to all the capitalists involved.

\*\*\* Democratic Centralism is the principle which guides Party actions and eventually communist society. Lenin defined it as “the freedom of discussion leading to the unity of action”. Once the majority collectively decides on a course of action, every Party member is duty-bound to carry out that decision and to test it in the real world. If it is found wanting, the group can then re-evaluate it and decide on a better course of action, but all in the interests of the international working class.