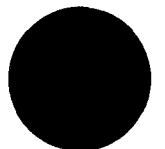


# **Marxist Bulletin 8-**

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## **CUBA AND MARXIST THEORY**

**Selected Documents on the Cuban Question**



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## PREFACE

This Marxist Bulletin opens with a reprint of the document which marks the first expression of what was to become the revolutionary left-wing of the SWP. Shane Mage wrote "Cuba and Marxist Theory" in the summer of 1960. It was then slightly revised and extended by Wohlforth and Robertson who also signed it before submitting it to the SWP intending it essentially as a mere protest against the developing capitulatory line of the SWP toward Castro. Six months later the SWP central leadership forced the issue at a plenary meeting of the National Committee, challenging the left critics to either vacate or defend their views. The plenum struggle hardened the lines of division. Thus half involuntarily a left opposition was then crystallized.

# #

This document collection centers upon that current of thought within the original left-wing which went on to characterize the Cuban Revolution as having led to a deformed workers state. The principal presentations of other anti-revisionist opinions are advanced, explicitly or otherwise, in the following documents:

Resolution on the Cuban Question, by Shane Mage, 29 May 1961. SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 22, No. 14. (The major document of the left-wing as a whole for the June 1961 SWP National Convention, presented however by the minority without significant discussion within its own ranks is based upon a "Transitional State" interpretation.)

Position on the Cuban Question, by the French Section of the International Committee, December 1961. SWP International Information Bulletin, April 1963. (Argues that Cuba is a "phantom-capitalist" state.)

Trotskyism Betrayed -- The SWP Accepts the Political Method of Pabloite Revisionism, by the National Committee of the Socialist Labour League, 21 July 1962. SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 24, No. 1, January 1963. And: Opportunism and Empiricism -- A Reply to Joseph Hansen, by the NC-SLL, 23 March 1963. SWP International Information Bulletin, July 1963. (Writings from the standpoint that Cuba is still capitalist.)

# #

This public bulletin is an outgrowth of a "Spartacist Pre-Conference Discussion Material" bulletin, November 1964, consisting of only the third and fifth items printed here. The continuing importance of the Cuban question and general interest in our views outside the organization has led us to greatly expand what had initially been intended as only a reprinting of the earlier discussion bulletin.

# # #

11 June 1966

With the passage of time, a slow drift in the appreciation of old events occurs in the Marxist movement, leading at certain points to sharp departures from what had been previously taken for granted. Sometimes what is in essence a higher and more comprehensive synthesis is arrived at with only incidental loss of particular detail known in an earlier period; and sometimes an essential grasp of reality is dissipated. Which predominates depends on considerations larger than and sometimes remote from the event under consideration.

### Haston/Vern Thesis

Certainly the massive enthusing over Fidel Castro by those with pretensions to revolutionary Marxism has been today largely dispelled, or more generally, displaced. But the explanations, rationalizations and substitutes of all the centrist, revisionist and reformist currents have been no improvement. For example, miscellaneous leftist elements presently or recently in the Socialist Workers Party have lately rediscovered in old SWP bulletins the writings on Eastern Europe from the early 1950's of the Vern-Ryan tendency, a faction in Los Angeles long since dissolved into Max Shachtman's Independent Socialist League (itself long since dissolved into the Socialist Party/Social-Democratic Federation). Dennis Vern had in turn borrowed the core of his outlook from the British Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party's majority faction led by Jock Haston, until the Hastonites liquidated essentially into right-wing Labourism. What is not necessarily appreciated today is that the Haston/Vern thesis--that wherever the Red Army arrived at the end of World War II, by that fact that piece of land was a deformed workers state--was a felt liquidation of Trotskyism, not as logic would indicate to the Stalinists, weak in Britain and the U.S., but ultimately into the reformist reflections of one's own bourgeois order.

But Haston and Vern did see one aspect of the social transformation in Eastern Europe which was largely lost on the perplexed Trotskyist theoreticians of the time, such as Hansen and Germain-Mandel--namely that account must be taken of the existent armed force as an elementary consideration in seeking to understand what process is going on. But Haston and Vern stopped at only the beginning of wisdom. And they skewed that piece of wisdom besides. The given class character of the state until or unless overthrown certainly determines the direction of social development within the society which that state protects. However, in Eastern Europe the core of the state was a Russian army, agent of the Russian Stalinist degenerated workers state.

In the short run the Russian Stalinist leadership could and did exercise choice (choice not freely arrived at) as to the social outcome--hence the elementary error in the Haston/Vern syllogism "class character of the state equals domination of that class in the society" when the state (army) is Russian and the society is, for example, Austrian or Hungarian. The Russians evacuated the areas they controlled in Austria and Iran but directed the transformation of the bulk of Eastern Europe into social and political counterparts of the Soviet Union--i.e., consolidation in the wake of Russian conquest.

An exception was the particular but at the time not obviously noted case of Yugoslavia, whose social transformation was essentially internally arrived at. Despite the Tito-Stalin split the significance of Yugoslavia only became fully clear in the light of the Chinese and also the Cuban revolutions.

### Wohlforth

The Yugoslav, Chinese and Cuban revolutions can in no way be explained in terms of a direct imposition of Russian rule--by anybody to the left of the John Birch Society, that is, with the exception of Tim Wohlforth of the Workers League/"International (Healyite) Committee." And even Wohlforth's tortured dogmas--that trivial parody of Marxism entitled "The Theory of Structural Assimilation" (a Bulletin publication of 1964)--manifestly collapsed with the author's inability to incorporate Cuba in his schema. As Wohlforth noted in his preface:

"In the summer of 1961 I wrote a preliminary draft document on the nature of the Cuban state and the theoretical implications flowing therefrom ["Cuba and Marxist Theory" (reprinted in Marxist Bulletin #8)--SL note]. The first discussions of this document immediately convinced me that I was utterly and totally on the wrong track. Like the SWP leadership itself, I was simply throwing together scraps of theory to 'explain' an impression of reality in Cuba and to justify a political conclusion--one of course far more critical of the Cuban leadership than that of the SWP majority. If I was to get to first base in understanding Cuba it became clear that I had to fit Cuba into a general theoretical understanding of postwar developments as a whole. Thus first I had to wrestle with the theoretical problems raised by East Europe, Yugoslavia and China before I could expect to get anywhere on more current developments. Ironically, the more I reached an understanding of these events the less I found them related to Cuba. So a document, which started out as an analysis of Cuba, does not even deal directly with that question. We are issuing an analysis of Cuba separately."

Wohlforth's "theory" boils down to the following: first, absorption of adjacent states into the Russian degenerated workers state; second, social transformation of the newly acquired region; third and finally, its release as a separate deformed workers state --all because of a "defensive expansionist" drive by the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy in response to the urgent threat from capitalist imperialism. Wohlforth even explained North Vietnam's becoming a deformed workers state by his own version of the "domino theory": first China was absorbed by Russia and regurgitated, then North Vietnam likewise by China.

But looking at his map Wohlforth noticed that Cuba is rather distant from Russia and an island to boot! Thus was Wohlforth left holding the position which the Workers League still, more or less shamefacedly, advances today--that the Cuban state led by Fidel Castro is capitalist. And this is presumably why the so prolific Wohlforth has left us still waiting in 1973 for the promised

"separate analysis of Cuba." (Come to think of it we haven't noticed any recent reprinting of "The Theory of Structural Assimilation" either.)

\* \* \*

In opposing the SWP Majority's revisionism, our original tendency came into existence and fought for three main programmatic points in orienting to the Cuban revolution and its defense: insistence on the Permanent Revolution, i.e. the view that no essential task of the revolution could be achieved short of the victory and consolidation of a workers state; and, correspondingly, insistence on the struggle for hegemony of the working class in the revolution; together with the necessity for a conscious Trotskyist party as the proletarian vanguard to lead that struggle.

### "Transitional State"?

As noted in our earlier preface, in 1961 Shane Mage--with the agreement of Wohlforth and with the disciplined support of others in our then common tendency--had advanced a politically principled but theoretically yet vague and indefensible position: that the Cuban state had no yet defined class character, that it was a "transitional state." This viewpoint, together with the way it was imposed upon the tendency, was one of the early frictions in what finally resulted a year and a half later in the split of Wohlforth from what became the Spartacist tendency. Mage's 1961 resolution on the Cuban question was brought, previously entirely uncirculated among the tendency, into one New York tendency meeting with the statement by Wohlforth that in any case it had to be submitted to the SWP internal bulletin the following morning. Since a possible majority of the tendency in New York and nationally considered that Cuba had already become a deformed workers state, many of us went along only out of a strong sense of tendency discipline demanded by the programmatic struggle in the SWP.

For the next immediate period the disputed question of what was presently the class character of the Cuban state--Mage's "transitional state," the bulk of the tendency's "deformed workers state," or (after leaving Mage's position and a brief fling with the tendency majority's view) Wohlforth's "capitalist state"--tended to leave certain theoretical aspects in the shadows, in particular a precise analysis, chronologically specific, of the earlier periods of the Cuban revolution. These differing interpretations, while all conjuncturally consistent with our common programmatic basis, were nonetheless a source of tension within the tendency.

Then in November 1962 Wohlforth, abetted by A. Phillips and Gerry Healy, split from the tendency essentially over whether to seek a bloc with the SWP Majority to head off its threatened unification with the European Pabloists--a policy which Wohlforth/Healy sought to foist on the tendency in the guise of a debate on the nature of the SWP (see Marxist Bulletin #2). Our political struggle around the issues raised for the SWP's 1963 Convention and our unsuccessful fight against expulsion from the SWP (precipitated by Wohlforth's fabricated "revelations" about us to the Majority) preoccupied our tendency for a year.



In 1964 extensive oral discussion in the New York section of the tendency led to Mage's pretty much vacating his position and to an arrival by consensus at the following central proposition: Cuba became a deformed workers state with the pervasive nationalizations in the summer and fall of 1960, which liquidated the bourgeoisie as a class.

Since most of our argumentation was directed against the SWP majority, which saw Cuba as evolved from "a workers and peasants government" into a "healthy" workers state "though not yet possessing the forms of workers democracy" and led by "the unconscious Marxist, Fidel Castro" (the Joseph Hansen position), most of our verification centered upon the qualitatively deformed, i.e. Stalinist, character of the Cuban worker's state: the compulsion for Castro to discover and declare that he was a "Marxist-Leninist" and for the Fidelistas to fuse with the pre-existing Cuban Stalinist party while purging it of its loyalty to the Russian bureaucracy; the existence of a powerful state apparatus of repression, and separate from the masses, as revealed in the massive (and quite justified) incarceration of suspect sections of Cuban society during the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion; the self-admitted bonapartist role of Fidel Castro personally in arriving at the crucial decisions in the missile crisis, a life or death matter for the whole Cuban people.

#### A Petty-Bourgeois Government

We took it as incontestable that the Cuban armed rebels who had originally come ashore from the Granma were in every way a petty-bourgeois formation. Their militarily marginal struggle was the last straw for the Batista regime, which was hated by the masses, increasingly isolated from the upper layers of Cuban society and finally abandoned by Yankee imperialism. The rebel army which occupied Havana on 1 January 1959 continued as a politically heterogeneous petty-bourgeois formation possessing massive popular support.

Its initial coalition government with authentic liberal-bourgeois politicians took place in the context of a shattered old bourgeois state apparatus. In the course of the earlier guerilla struggle--a species of civil war--the commanders of that rebel army had had their previous direct connections with oppositional bourgeois-liberal elements broken and had become episodically autonomous from their class (and in many cases biological) fathers, the Cuban bourgeoisie. After taking power, they were confronted by U.S. imperialism's clumsy and mounting attempts to bring them to heel through brute economic pressure upon Cuba without corresponding attempts by the contemptuous Eisenhower administration to create the conditions and connections to reknit the new rulers to the old social fabric in order to facilitate accommodation to the brutal demands of the imperialists.

No less crucial than the estrangement created by the civil war conditions between the petty-bourgeois guerilla fighters and the bourgeois order was the absence of a class-conscious combative proletariat which would invariably have polarized these petty-bourgeois militants, drawing some to the workers' side and repelling others back into the arms of the bourgeois order. Hence the exceptional

latitude available to this petty-bourgeois government in the face of the escalating tit-for-tat economic struggle with the American government in that period and under the enormous popular, patriotic upsurge of the undifferentiated Cuban masses.

### Deformed Workers State

But when the end was reached with the economic liquidation of the Cuban bourgeoisie (far more systematic and complete than the Chinese Maoists have instituted to this day--even including nationalizing the street ice cream vendors), this petty-bourgeois government even under these most favorable conditions was unable to find a third way between labor and capital to characteristically organize a society, and by virtue of its newly acquired social position--holding a political monopoly at the head of a nationalized economy--was compelled to embrace that ersatz Marxism which is the necessary ideological reflection of a Stalinist bureaucracy, however newly fledged.

To be sure, the existence of the Russian degenerated workers state presented the encouragement of a model and, more important, the material support which made the outcome a practicality. But in no way did the Russians or their domestic enthusiasts directly create the actual process within Cuba itself. The alliance with the Russians was an outcome of, not the precondition to, the formation of a deformed workers state in Cuba.

At no point was there a classless "transitional state" in Cuba. To repeat, in the intervening period between the shattering of the old capitalist Batista state, the compradors of American imperialism, and the consolidation of a deformed workers state, there was a petty-bourgeois government--not a class-neutral one--with the core of its power being the petty-bourgeois Rebel Army. This regime had temporarily become autonomous from the bourgeois order through the violent polarization of the guerilla struggle, moving through a period of great popular (not specifically proletarian) mass upsurge, but as yet not locked upon a nationalized economy. Moreover its existence episodically apart from the fundamental social classes--the bourgeoisie and the proletariat--was made possible by the failure of the working class to itself pose a challenge to capitalist rule.

Hence this regime possessed the indeterminacy in outcome and tension of either the potential to regenerate and consolidate a capitalist state or for a section of that regime to lock on to the form of nationalized property and thus verify through a living process the validity of the earlier Trotskyist characterization that, viewed from a most general standpoint, the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy is in one of its central contradictory aspects--i.e., the transmission belt for the pressure of the world bourgeois order on a workers state--a petty-bourgeois formation. The decisive section of the Castroites could make the transition to the leadership of a deformed workers state because in the absence of the egalitarianism and proletarian democracy of a state directly won by the working people, they never had to transcend or fundamentally alter their own radical petty-bourgeois social appetites, but only to transform and redirect them. And parenthetically, in this is both the deci-

sive significance and the necessity of the political revolution, approached from the Cuban experience, i.e., from a different aspect than that of the long, losing rearguard action that Trotsky fought in Russia in the 1920's.

\* \* \*

from Political Bureau Minutes No. 7, 8 July 1973:

"Motion: To adopt the political thrust of the addition to the preface to Marxist Bulletin #8. Passed

Extensions and corrections made, 8 August 1973.



## THE CUBAN REVOLUTION AND MARXIST THEORY

(As submitted to the January 1961 Plenum of the SWP)

The Cuban Revolution, as it has developed in the last 19 months, poses some uncomfortable theoretical problems for Marxists. Of course these are problems that should fill us with delight, for they stem from the fact that the Cuban Revolution has gone farther, faster and deeper than any of us had anticipated; has, in fact, become a profound social revolution. Nevertheless, the paradoxes and problems remain and can even pose certain dangers for us.

What is so shocking about Cuba is this: that a revolutionary movement stemming from the urban middle classes and winning the support of the peasantry, which gained power when the U.S. finally decided to dump its former puppet, Batista, proceeded once in power to follow an authentically revolutionary course. It broke up the old army and police forces and armed the workers and poor peasants, expropriated the major economic holdings of U.S. capital, broke with the representative political leaders of the Cuban liberal bourgeoisie. And all this without the existence (not to speak of the intervention) of a revolutionary socialist party and without any autonomous action on the part of the working class!

The inconsistency of all this with certain of our expectations deriving from the Theory of Permanent Revolution is only too obvious. If we rightly believe that every revolution in our time must go beyond "bourgeois-democratic" bounds in order to achieve real success, and can find full vindication for this aspect of the theory in the Cuban Revolution, we also have believed that this process can take place only under the leadership of the working class and with the guidance of a Marxist party!

Some comrades have sought to conjure away this difficulty by slapping a ready-made label onto the Cuban Revolution. Cuba, we are told, has become a "workers' state" or, alternatively, is ruled by a "workers' and farmers' government." Alas, to substitute a system of ready-made categories for Marxist analysis, far from solving any theoretical problems, merely generalizes them, gives them an urgency and importance far beyond their present status. Cuba is to be called a "workers' state"? Then isn't it necessary to answer the general problem of the conditions under which we can expect proletarian revolutions to be victorious under middle class leadership and without even the participation of the working class or a working class party? The Castro regime is a "workers' and farmers' government"? And what, then, is the nature of the Cuban state? If anything, the social composition of the state apparatus, of the armed forces and militia, is more proletarian than that of the government--and thus we are back with our previous problem. Even dodging that undodgeable question, we are still confronted with a very queer animal--a "workers' and farmers' government" in which there are no workers or farmers

and no representatives of independent workers' or farmers' parties! Surely neither the Fourth Congress of the CI nor the Transitional Program envisaged such a phenomenon.

We make no contribution to Marxist theory or to an understanding of the Cuban Revolution if we start from the idea that before we can support a revolution we must baptize it "proletarian", or if we are looking for non-working class shortcuts to socialist revolution. Above all must we abjure the tendency to think in abstract categories, to seek before all else for a tidy ideological pigeonhole into which to cram an unruly reality. A scientific theory is perpetually on trial before the facts and every failure to correctly predict and explain the facts points to the possibility of an inadequacy in the theory. Concretely, if in certain specific countries at the present specific historical conjuncture our theoretical expectations as to the need for working class leadership in order to achieve the main goals of the bourgeois-democratic revolution are contradicted by reality we must recognize that, although this does not require a general theoretical revision, it most certainly does require a reexamination and modernization of these specific aspects of the theory.

In this brief paper we do not intend to carry out such a reexamination, nor have we any intention of here setting forth a developed theoretical analysis of the Cuban Revolution; rather, we will try to lay out a theoretical framework within which such an analysis can eventually be developed.

Our starting point must be the immediate historic task confronting the Cuban Revolution: overcoming the backwardness and impoverishment of the masses imposed by centuries of colonialism and most particularly by the past 50 years of sugar monoculture inspired by and benefitting only the U.S. capitalists. To do this required one absolute precondition--a radical land reform. But since the great sugar estates and sugar mills were largely U.S. owned no step could be taken without an immediate clash with U.S. imperialism, and no thoroughgoing reform could be carried out without an end to U.S. economic domination of the island.

Now these aims--modernization, land reform, national independence--most assuredly are not socialist tasks. They merely lay the foundation upon which the Cuba of the future will be built. But will that Cuba be capitalist or socialist? Posing this question indicates one essential aspect of the Cuba problem --that the answer will not be found in Cuba. An independent, isolated, socialist Cuba standing against the enormous power of the U.S. is an obvious absurdity. But no less absurd is the idea of an independent development of Cuban capitalism. It is therefore false to argue that Cuba must be either a "capitalist state" or a "workers' state"; either a "capitalist government" or a "workers' and farmers' government." We are dealing with an extremely dynamic and contradictory process whose fate is bound up with that of the entire Latin-American revolution.

The U.S. State Department, for so long so brutally blind in its Latin-American policy, has awakened abruptly to this fact. The sharp switch in 1959 from a pro-Castro to a violently anti-Castro line was scarcely motivated by considerations restricted to Cuba; the essential was that by expropriating U.S. property and above all by reorienting its trade from the U.S. to the Soviet bloc, Cuba had taken a decisive lead in the Latin-American revolution and was leading it in an exceedingly dangerous direction.

The aim of U.S. policy has finally become perfectly clear: to prop up, at whatever cost, the more-or-less "democratic" bourgeois regimes while gradually liquidating the old-style dictatorships; and at the same time to intensify to the breaking point the economic pressures on Cuba. After a certain time the Castro regime, out of pure economic necessity, would be forced to come to terms with the State Department. The alternative of complete economic dependence on the Soviet bloc is, in fact, no alternative; as the New York Times put it in a recent editorial, "Castro is in danger of becoming a Soviet pawn and he should remember that the fate of pawns is usually to be sacrificed." Who can doubt that Cuba would be on the bargaining table at any future Summit?

This is not an unreasonable strategy; far from it. It can be upset by only one thing--a dramatic spread of revolutionary unrest which would break through the solidarity of the Latin-American bourgeoisie with U.S. imperialism and open a real perspective for Cuba. Although "Castro-type" revolutions remain a possibility in the most backward countries, such as Guatemala and Paraguay, the decisive countries of Latin America are those which have already experienced the initial growth of capitalism and in which there exists an already sizable industrial working class: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela, Mexico. In these countries a "classless" revolution is impossible--the task of leadership is already on the shoulders of the proletariat.

Thus we see the two possibilities open to the Cuban Revolution--to return to subordinate status in a U.S.-dominated capitalist Western Hemisphere, or to be taken up and carried forward by a Latin-American socialist revolution.

In this context is there anything concrete to be said about the nature of the Cuban government and state? It is clearly too early to answer in terms of finished categories, for the nature of the Cuban Revolution itself is not yet decided by history. Given the enormous prestige of Fidel Castro and the influence within the government of the Cuban Stalinists a deal between Castro and Kennedy/Nixon, with the tacit blessing of Khrushchev, would require no political counter-revolution within Cuba. Similarly, if successful proletarian revolutions were to break out in the main countries of Latin America no additional revolution would be required to bring Cuba into a socialist federation of the Americas.

Our emphasis must therefore be on the transitional and open character of the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban state is a developing state, scarcely more than a year old: its class character will be determined by the development of the revolution. The Cuban government is a democratic middle-class regime basing itself on, and under continual pressure from, the workers and peasants. Is this self-evident description any less useful than the abstract, arbitrary and false label "workers' and farmers' government"?

It is precisely because the Castro government is so clearly not a workers' government that it is so important not to hastily label the state a "workers' state." If a workers' party were in power it would little matter how quickly nationalization of industry proceeds. In the present fluid situation the middle class leadership of the Revolution presents the greatest internal danger to the advance of the revolution. This makes it mandatory that we advocate the creation of a genuine revolutionary working-class party in Cuba today.

If we say that the final decision as to the Cuban Revolution will be made on a Latin-American scale, this is not to counsel passivity upon Cuban Marxists. The Cuban Revolution has still a lot of room for progress toward the establishment of an authentic workers' democracy, with its own institutional forms of workers' and peasants' power and with a functioning system of workers' control of production on all levels. Tendencies toward authoritarianism, paternalism, bureaucratization, and thus eventual bourgeoisification are obviously present and strong; the status of the Stalinists in the government and unions, the suggestion of the need to restrict the right to strike, are ominous signs. As American Marxists, our obligation, as the most outspoken and militant defenders of the Cuban Revolution against our own ruling class, is at all times to discuss it clearly and critically, and without any fetishism.

17 August 1960

Shane Mage  
 Tim Wohlforth  
 James Robertson



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

to "Cuba and the Deformed Workers States"

The document which follows was written in July 1961 by Tim Wohlforth who broke in November 1962 from the tendency which became the Spartacist group. Wohlforth held the position reprinted here for only a few months, afterward reverting to variants of the views of the British Socialist Labour League. Nonetheless, Wohlforth left behind a valuable contribution in reducing to literary form the understanding of how the Cuban Revolution led to a deformed workers state.

Wohlforth's subsequent and presumably still current views are summarized here from later documents. In his letter to James Robertson, 12 August 1964, presenting objections to Robertson's proposal for reunification of the two groups, Wohlforth states:

"We must begin with an understanding of the process going on in Cuba. Once we understand that process within the framework of worldwide social processes then we should not have any difficulty placing a proper label on Cuba.

"We have gone into this process in considerable detail in our article "The Cuban Way--A Pattern for the Future?" in the SWP discussion bulletin in 1963. A more current exposition can be found in the article by Ed Stillwell in the July 18th Newsletter. At no time in the revolutionary process in Cuba has the proletariat achieved its dictatorship in a distorted or any other form. The process from beginning to end was carried out with the petty bourgeois Castro formation in control of the state. Therefore under no conditions can we consider Cuba to be a workers state of any kind. The current moves of Castro aimed at reintegration with the capitalist market fully confirms our position.

"It should be clear from our own analysis that we do not see a social revolution as having taken place in Cuba. Therefore, obviously, we must continue to struggle for a social revolution in Cuba which will bring the working class to power. How can you claim to have a convergence of views with us on political tasks in Cuba?"

The other expositions of his views to which Wohlforth refers above present the following central points:

"The Cuban Revolution had in its first stage a capitalist state apparatus, weakened, yes, but still capitalist....This state apparatus has under-gone a deep process of erosion under the impact of profound revolutionary developments....Thus we must characterize this state as a decomposed, partially eroded capitalist state

susceptible to the pressure of the working class as well as other social forces but not under the control directly or indirectly of the working class." ["The Cuban Way--A Pattern for the Future?", 17 April 1963.]

"Cuba can and will be defined as a workers' state only when a revolutionary party based on the programme of the Fourth International has successfully overthrown the capitalist state--at present represented by the bonapartist dictatorship of Castro--and replaced it by the dictatorship of the working class." ["Bankrupt Middle-Class Programme Leads Castro into U.S. Hands," Newsletter, 18 July 1964.]

Robertson replied for the Spartacist Editorial Board to Wohlforth's 12 August 1964 letter, stating:

"While no immediate programmatic clash between us is engendered by this recent and much harder position of yours (since you continue to stand for the defense of Cuba against American imperialism on other grounds), the direction of your motion on the question does disturb us considerably since it constitutes such a gross denial of reality in dealing with the development of the Cuban Revolution. Further, your position is but a short step from challenging the underlying working-class character of the present Chinese state as well.

"We would like to draw your attention to our own views on the Cuban Question. We believe these views to be a major contribution to the necessary theoretical rearmament of the Trotskyist movement in the period since the Second World War in the struggle against Pabloist revisionism and against sectarian reactions to such revisionism. We note that in line with the rest of your 12 August letter you chose to characterize our approach to the Cuban Revolution as one of static, external labelling. You are within your rights to believe, if you like, that we err in our conclusions on the Cuban question. But you yourself participated in our then-common effort to understand the internal class dynamics of the revolution leading to a deformed workers state. It was with considerable inspiration from me personally that you then actually wrote a substantial draft document ["Cuba and the Deformed Workers States"] outlining the course of the revolution and its implications for proletarian revolutionists. You can therefore understand why we are led to believe that your characterization of our approach was deliberately designed to deceive the unwary and unaware. What particularly bothers us in the present context over your procedure is the doubt it reinforces as to your seriousness about unity." [22 December 1964.]

Wohlforth's group responded in a letter of 25 January 1965 admitting Wohlforth's earlier adherence to the deformed workers state view: "We have proceeded in a different manner after of course first sharing with you your incorrect methodological approach." They then showed their own underlying fear in stating that: "In truth your theory leaves no role whatsoever for the proletariat in social overturns in backward areas and like Pabloism opens the way for the erosion of the role of the proletariat in the advanced countries." Wohlforth here commits a willful misunderstanding. He knows well that our recognition of the fundamental deformation of a developing social revolution kept within Maoist bounds leads not to our passive support of armed struggle by peasant-based Stalinists, but to the exact opposite. Our position gives a theoretical foundation for the urgent necessity, as in Vietnam today, for the proletariat to be regrouped under its revolutionary vanguard and intervene to take command of the struggle, thus realizing the perspective of the Permanent Revolution.

At bottom what this assertion of Wohlforth's means is that he believes or fears that the state of Lenin and the state of Stalin are identical as regards their ability to move forward to socialism. Thus Wohlforth's current views are methodologically identical to those of the SWP's Joe Hansen whose contribution to the theory of the Cuban revolution was to argue that workers' democracy is merely normative in character. Consequently workers' democracy would vary only quantitatively: from a large amount in a very good workers state (like Lenin's Russia) to very little in a bad one (like Stalin's). Thus Hansen sought to deny the qualitative difference between the exercise of political power by the working people themselves or by a Bonapartist bureaucracy. In this way he tried to pass off Castro's Cuba as a very good workers state "though yet lacking the forms of workers' democracy." History has now rendered her judgment against Hansen's Pabloist theorizing. In method Wohlforth tail-ends Hansen with only his conclusions turned inside-out.

The basic justification for the political revolution projected by L. D. Trotsky is for Wohlforth non-existent. Otherwise how could Wohlforth assert that Cuba's becoming a deformed workers state (like China) wipes out any role for the working class? We insist that the regimes in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, etc., require by their nationally limited and bureaucratically deformed character such a political revolution by the workers just as does Russia. The Stalinist bureaucracy must be smashed in order to open the road to socialist development.

J. R., 9 June 1966

Preliminary Discussion Draft:CUBA AND THE DEFORMED WORKERS STATESTheir Method and Ours:

Ever since the beginning of the discussion of Cuba in the Party, the majority has sought to stampede us into coming to an immediate position on the nature of the Cuban state. For the party majority there was little difficulty in arriving at a position. Their method was that of impressionistic empiricism. They simply described what Cuba appeared to be at the moment and called this description--a theory!

We properly rejected this whole method. We said that Marxists must do more than describe what appears at the moment. It is our task to view political and social developments in process, in motion. We must study them as they evolve and put this evolution within the framework of the whole world situation and of our whole theoretical outlook. Thus we stated that it is impossible to understand what is at the moment unless we understand what had been and what will be.

We urge those who reproach us for 'not seeing the new reality quickly enough' to study the history of our world movement and to see what happened to others who earlier grasped the 'new reality' so quickly, embraced bureaucratic regimes so lovingly. These comrades embraced the new bureaucratic regimes in the hopes that these alien forces, rather than us, would carry through the socialist revolution. We will not be stampeded into junking Marxist method. We will take the time necessary to study the evolution of Cuba and to define the nature of the state on the basis of an understanding of this evolutionary process.

The Evolution of Cuba:

Most of us are quite familiar with the evolution of Cuba. Let me just sketch briefly those highlights of this evolution that are relevant to an understanding of the nature of the Cuban state. The Cuban Revolution was carried through by a radical petty-bourgeois nationalist group whose primary social base was a petty-bourgeois class--the peasantry. (In passing it is important to note that Che Guevara has specifically repudiated the Hansen-Sweezy thesis that the 26th of July Movement based itself on the rural proletariat in its earlier stages. He noted that in the mountains no such proletariat existed and that the organization based itself on the local peasantry.) Organizing itself in military fashion and utilizing the techniques of rural guerrillas, Castro was able to give cohesiveness to this otherwise unorganized peasant force and with this social grouping to topple a decaying capitalist regime.

Upon coming to power, Castro almost immediately destroyed the old Batista state apparatus and the army upon which it rested.

He created a new administrative apparatus composed of the radical petty-bourgeois elements and based on the Rebel Army. From the very beginning, the relations of this new bonapartist state to capitalist property were quite contradictory. While this new state apparatus based itself for at least a year and a half on these capitalist property relations, the force of the revolution and the opposition of imperialism to the democratic demands of the revolution forced the government to move against capitalist property relations--though in a sporadic, empirical way. However, the ability of the government to so act was at least in part attributable to the fact that the new government had broken up the old state apparatus and was therefore able to act in a bonapartist fashion partly independent of the capitalist class in Cuba.

This process, spurred on primarily by the hostility of U.S. capitalism, reached its culmination in the nationalizations of September, October 1960 which brought at least 80% of industry, all significant industry, and the entire banking system, under direct government ownership. The agrarian reform, carried out in the previous spring, was not socialist but it was far more extensive than that in the USSR or Eastern Europe. This series of expropriations clearly wiped out of Cuba the national bourgeoisie. Further, the government established a complete monopoly of foreign trade and began a rudimentary form of economic planning.

The September-October nationalizations raised the question of whether the bonapartist governmental apparatus, continuing to be free of control by the working masses, would firmly base itself on the new property forms in Cuba or whether it would seek to return Cuba to essential capitalist relations. We can say that while the sweeping nationalizations of the September-October period laid the basis for Cuba becoming a deformed workers state, it was not automatically determined that the petty-bourgeois state apparatus would defend and develop these property forms. It was therefore incorrect, in my opinion, to characterize Cuba at that time a deformed workers state.

It was the invasion of April 17th which clearly showed that the Castro regime, for all its weaknesses, was definitely committed to the defense of the new property forms. This was shown first of all in the defense of the revolution which Castro carried through so well. More important, the invasion made it perfectly clear that imperialism was not interested in an accommodation with Castro. The imperialists were seeking first of all to overthrow the regime if at all possible. Should this not be possible, as I am sure they now realize, the imperialists wish to force Castro precisely into the arms of the USSR--into becoming a Stalinist country. For this way the imperialists are able to limit the appeal of Castro and contain the revolution. The policy of the U.S. State Department only makes sense if interpreted in this way (and believe it or not, there is

a bit of method in their madness!)

Regardless of how we interpret the meaning of the invasion, it was immediately clear that Castro interpreted it as meaning that he must definitively base himself on the new property forms and on his relations with the Soviet Bloc if his regime was to survive at all. This is the real meaning of his declaration that Cuba is a 'socialist' country. That Castro meant business and that this was no mere passing reference was soon made absolutely clear. A heavy drive towards the Stalinization of the country has been in full force since this declaration. In this respect it is important to note: (a) the Cuban press is now almost exclusively devoted to praise of the Stalinist countries and puts forward an essentially Stalinist political line; (b) economic relations have been stepped up with the deformed workers states; (c) the wide-scale net of arrests during the invasion revealed a highly developed secret police set-up which portends to be dangerous in the future because it is not under the control of the working class; (d) the drive for 'a single party of the revolution' which in the context of these other developments appears to be the setting up of the traditional Stalinist one-party rule, has been underway at fever pitch; (e) the moves against the Trotskyists are the final sign of the deformed nature of the regime.

#### Workers States and Deformed Workers States:

Our insistence from the very beginning of the discussion on the recognition of the qualitative difference between workers states and deformed workers states was perhaps the most important contribution we made in the whole discussion. Over the past fifteen years an unbelievable amount of theoretical confusion has been generated in all sections of our world movement because of lack of clarification on this central point.

Workers\* and deformed workers states have two essentially different and mutually contradictory political systems even though they both rest on a foundation of nationalized property --of working class property forms. The deformed workers state is characterized by the rule of an uncontrolled petty-bourgeois bureaucracy which suppresses the working class and which has a

\* There has been a certain tendency to refer to workers states per se as 'healthy workers states.' This is because the term 'workers state' has been so freely applied to both workers states and deformed workers states. However, I feel this is an unhappy choice of terms, for many workers states are not too healthy but still are not deformed workers states. Therefore, I prefer to continue to use 'workers states' to refer to what Lenin called 'the soviet or commune type of state' and to never use this term also to refer to deformed workers states.

counter-revolutionary outlook. This social stratum finds itself at all times to be in contradiction to the very property forms upon which it must base its rule. The real development of these forms requires the total destruction of this parasitic formation and the creation of a whole new state structure based on the direct rule of the working class. Therefore it takes a political revolution to transform a deformed workers state into a workers state.

Conversely, in a workers state the working class rules directly through its own representative organs and its own party. The political regime is in consonance with the property forms upon which it is based and therefore the possibility of the advance of society as a whole to communism is opened up. The transformation of a workers state into a deformed (or more precisely degenerated) workers state is a political process so profound that a thermidorian political counter-revolution, what Trotsky called 'a preventative civil war,' which literally removes the working class bodily from all ruling positions and turns power over to a counter-revolutionary petty-bourgeois bureaucracy, is necessary to complete the transformation.

Not all workers states are uniformly healthy nor are all deformed workers states uniformly sick. Within the general framework of each different type of formation there are varying degrees of sickness and health. Thus, the USSR contained within it serious sicknesses or deformations almost from the beginning but it was not a deformed workers state until it had gone through a profound thermidorian counter-revolution which ultimately literally annihilated the former working class leaders. And it is possible also to have a deformed workers state where a clearly defined bureaucratic privileged caste does not as yet exist.

While recognizing these variations we must not fall into the trap of refusing to recognize the qualitative difference between these two forms of political rule. One of the most marked characteristics of the confusionist thinking of the liberal is a tendency to break down qualitative differences and turn everything into what Marx used to call a 'mish-mash.' Thus, since there are some workers who are quite poor and others who are relatively well off, and there are some capitalists that barely make a go of it with their candy store, etc., and others that are very rich--therefore there are no qualitative differences between workers and capitalists--there are no classes. Likewise the same methodology is applied on occasion in our movement to the theory of the state. (Joe Hansen is an expert on this.) You see there exist many different forms of workers states--degenerated, deformed, peculiar, abnormal, yet even healthy ones--all of which more or less approximate the ideal form of the workers state conceived of by Lenin. Suddenly, the qualitative difference between workers states and deformed workers states dissolves into gradations

of quantitative differences. Suddenly all Trotskyist theory is destroyed and Joe Hansen sinks comfortably into that odoriferous ooze in which centrists are so happy.

A complete understanding of the qualitative differences between a workers state and a deformed workers state is precisely the basis of our whole theoretical conception of Cuba and of the other deformed workers states. The rest of the theoretical conceptions in this essay are derivative from this basic starting point. If this past political struggle in the party only accomplished this one thing--if it etched in the minds of our comrades this one concept--then the whole wearying struggle was worth it.

### The State in Transition:

I feel we were essentially correct in emphasizing the transitional nature of the new Cuban state apparatus. This particular concept has been under the strongest attack. It is said to be in contradiction with the Marxist conception of the state as at all times the instrument of the ruling class of a particular society. But those who have attacked our concept of the Cuban state have been unable to come up with any substitute for it! Shane properly challenged the majority to define the nature of the Chinese state between 1949 and 1952-53 when the party claimed it to be a deformed workers state. Joe Hansen, in his polemical article, simply sidestepped the question, and not one comrade of the majority has answered it to date.

I will expand on the challenge, and state categorically: all the emerging deformed workers states--Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Cuba--went through transitional periods of more or less extended periods of time during which a Bonapartist state apparatus administering a capitalist economy was transformed into a state apparatus, still Bonapartist, administering a nationalized economy. This is simply the reality, and we must face up to it. The Marshall Plan forced the USSR to wipe out the last vestiges of capitalist property in Eastern Europe, but it did this without changing essentially the state apparatus which had originally administered a capitalist economy in these countries. The Korean War forced China to carry through its final expropriations and to definitely become a deformed workers state, but, once again, the state apparatus did not change from that which had come into power in 1949. In Eastern Europe, in China and in Cuba, a strikingly similar pattern emerges: the old state structure and the army upon which it is based are destroyed (in Eastern Europe by the Soviet Army, in China and Cuba by the culmination of a civil war); a new petty-bourgeois apparatus emerges free from direct entanglements with the old system; finally imperialism forces the new state apparatus to consolidate its rule on the basis of new property forms (the effects



of the Cold War on Eastern Europe, the Korean War on China, the economic blockade and the April 17th invasion on Cuba).

Does a recognition of this reality demand that we revise the essentials of the Marxist theory of the state? I think not. I feel the problem the comrades have in comprehending this process flows from two errors: (a) a formal rather than dialectical approach towards social change, and (b) not fully comprehending the contradictory nature of a deformed workers state.

We should take note of the fact that the development of deformed workers states in the post-war period dramatically confirms the Marxist concept of the state in one important way. In all these countries a new state apparatus emerged to replace the former capitalist state apparatus and which based itself on an essentially new and different army. In Eastern Europe the governmental apparatus was from the very beginning completely dependent on the Soviet Army and on no other significant social force in these countries.\* In China, Yugoslavia, and Cuba, this pattern becomes even more clear. Here the new state apparatus bases itself on an essentially peasant army which comes to power after defeating in battle the old capitalist army. In all these countries the emerging state, from the very beginning, had a base at least in part independent from the old capitalist structure in the country. In none of these countries does the new state emerge without in reality breaking up the old apparatus and the old army upon which it rested.

It is also important to note that the relations of the new state apparatus with the capitalists in the country was

\* While in this section I mainly emphasize the similarities between all the deformed workers states which were formed after World War II, I would like to take note in passing of the differences in historical origin of the East European regimes (excluding Yugoslavia) and China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Cuba and in large part Yugoslavia. In these former regimes the transformation into deformed workers states was carried out, not on the basis of any indigenous revolutionary process, but was imposed through the Red Army. Thus the character of the governing regime was least important in these countries because the real government was the USSR through the Red Army. The emerging deformed workers states tended (and still tend) to have less of a mass base and to express more profoundly the contradictions inherent in all the deformed workers states. The other deformed workers states emerged from civil wars with a certain mass base. Therefore the nature of the ruling party and state apparatus, as well as the army, are important in understanding the evolution of these countries.

always an uneasy, unnatural one. While on the one hand the petty-bourgeois leaderships of these new states sought the cooperation of the capitalists, the capitalists feared and distrusted the new state power--they recognized that it was not wholly theirs--that it could move decisively against the capitalist class as no previous state could. Thus the fleeing of capitalists was a regular part of the revolutionary process in all these countries.

There is, however, something new involved here which does require a minor modification of our approach to the state--a modification which is consistent with the theory as a whole and with our essential dialectical method. The state which was established in these countries had replaced the old capitalist state apparatus, but its real nature only becomes clear after it goes through a process of transformation. The change in the nature of the state under these particular historical circumstances is not a formal categorical event which can be pin-pointed to a particular week, a particular day, a particular second. It was a process of a truly dialectical nature. Dialectics teaches us that in order to get from point a to point b one must at one and the same time be at point a and not at point a; at point b and not at point b, etc. The new states in these countries both are and are not capitalist states; and are and are not workers states. They go through a transition which, because of particular historical circumstances, is more or less drawn out. But, it must be kept in mind at all times that it is only their original break with the old capitalist state apparatus which frees them so that they can undergo this transformation. (That is, that by breaking with the old capitalist state apparatus the new apparatus has already partially left point a --has already partially reached point b.)

We must keep uppermost in our minds at all times the peculiar historical circumstances which have produced these highly contradictory phenomena and the contradictory result of this process--the deformed workers state itself. The essential contradiction which produces the objective conditions which nurture these deformed workers states is the contradiction between the over-ripeness of the conditions for the overthrow of capitalism and the weakness of the revolutionary vanguard. (The over-ripeness of the objective factor and the under-ripeness of the subjective factor.)

The lack of working class leadership forces horrendous distortions on this revolutionary process--distortions which halt the process part way and prevent its spread on a world-wide scale. These distortions primarily take the form of the creation of a bureaucratic state apparatus which stands in contradiction to the property forms upon which it is based and which prevents the working class from assuming its rightful place at the helm of the state. The governmental apparatus

which runs the state thus represents a counter-revolutionary force. Thus this state apparatus represents, in the ultimate sense, the influence of the bourgeoisie within the new deformed workers state.

It is therefore understandable that such a state apparatus can undergo the type of transformation described earlier--can administer essentially both a capitalist and a workers state. It is precisely this similarity it has to a capitalist state which necessitates a political revolution to destroy this state apparatus and erect in its place a truly soviet state apparatus. And this is the crux of the whole theoretical problem--it is precisely because a political revolution is essential to change a deformed workers state into a workers state that a political revolution is not essential during this peculiar transitional period, during which a state apparatus administers first a capitalist and then a deformed workers state, characteristic of all deformed workers states. What is essential for this latter process is a social revolution which wipes out capitalist property but which is not completed in precisely the political or governmental sphere and which must therefore be completed at a later date by means of a political revolution.

Thus the state apparatus which can administer both capitalist and workers property forms is a state apparatus which is in contradiction to both--which is by its very nature unstable, temporary, passing.

### The Role of the Working Class:

So far we have stressed what Cuba has in common with all other deformed workers states. We can sum up these characteristics as follows: (1) the revolution was led by petty-bourgeois strata who were forced to go beyond capitalist limits; (2) basing itself on the new army, the old army and the old state apparatus are destroyed and replaced with a new state apparatus free, at least in part, from direct capitalist control; (3) after a period of cohabitation with capitalism, under pressure from imperialism and from the masses, all capitalist holdings of any real significance are taken over; (4) the new state apparatus exhibits a determination to defend these new property forms from imperialism but at the same time rules in a Bonapartist fashion free from the control of the masses; (5) the new government tends to base its outlook on a nationalist rather than a proletarian internationalist outlook.

But Cuba is very significantly different from China in many important ways. Through an understanding of these differences we can arrive at different tactics than those we would apply in China today. Furthermore, I feel that it is through an understanding of these differences that we can get a deeper insight precisely into the essential identity of Cuba

with the other deformed workers states. Above all we must assess the full meaning of the fact that Cuba is the first deformed workers state to be formed not under a Stalinist leadership, which lacks a fully-developed bureaucratic caste, and which is not geographically contiguous with the USSR or other deformed workers states.

I have noticed a certain tendency among Trotskyists to read into the political developments which led to the formation of deformed workers states a greater role for the working class than it actually played. Let me state my own view absolutely clearly, for on this I feel the events in Cuba have confirmed this outlook. The motive force for the transformation of the Eastern European countries (excluding Yugoslavia) into deformed workers states was the Soviet Army. The working class played essentially a dispersed, passive role in these events. The motive force behind the Chinese Revolution which deposited Mao and Co. in power was primarily the peasantry. In the major events which led to the CP coming to power, the working class played essentially a passive role not having recovered from the defeats of the 1927 period. The transformation of China into a deformed workers state was instituted, not by the working class of China nor primarily because of great pressure from the working class--it was carried through on top on the initiative of the Maoist bureaucracy itself as a defensive act against imperialism.

It is now quite clear that Cuba has followed the model of China quite closely. It was primarily the support of the peasantry which pushed Castro into power. The extensive nationalizations were primarily initiated by the regime itself in response to imperialist provocation and not by the working class which generally tailed these events.

Cuba makes this process all the more clear precisely because of the central unique feature of the Cuban revolution--that the transformation into a deformed workers state occurred under the leadership of a party which was not even ostensibly 'working class,' by a non-Stalinist petty-bourgeois formation.

Thus the Cuban experience not only illustrates the small role the working class plays in these transformations; it also suggests that the so-called 'working class' nature of the Stalinist parties in many of these colonial countries has been given too much emphasis as well. The fact that Castro's 26th of July Movement was able to carry through a social transformation in an almost identical manner as Mao's CCP reflects, in my opinion, the essential identity in nature of the CCP and the M-26. Both parties were essentially petty-bourgeois formations--petty-bourgeois in the class nature of their leadership, their membership, their mass base, and their ideology.

While the ideology of the Stalinists contains certain socialist elements within it and in this respect is different

from that of the M-26, it is questionable as to whether these elements essentially changed the nature of the movement. This is especially doubtful when one realizes that the Stalinist perversion of socialist ideology is precisely in the direction of petty-bourgeois nationalism. Thus these parties must be viewed, in my opinion, as essentially the instruments of the petty-bourgeois classes in society--not as even distorted instruments of the working class.

Here we must understand the difference between a working class party--a party with a broad working class base--such as the Labour Party in Britain or the CP in France, both of which have a petty-bourgeois program and leadership, and these Stalinist parties in a country like China which lack precisely this working-class base. The former is a working class party with a petty-bourgeois program while the latter is a radical petty-bourgeois party with perhaps even a touch of a working-class ideology. The same approach should be taken to the so-called social democratic parties in colonial areas. Except for a few cases where there exists a sizable working class upon which this party bases itself, most of the so-called social democrats in these countries are in reality radical petty-bourgeois nationalists (and some are not so radical). Just ponder over the nature of U Nu's party or the Praja Socialist Party of India. As Marxists we must seek to determine what social class a particular party actually represents in a particular country--in so doing we must probe a bit deeper than the surface manifestations of ideology. What self-respecting bourgeois nationalist isn't a 'socialist' these days?

To sum up: we must reject as a distortion of reality a view which gives undue weight in the process of forming deformed workers states to the working class or to the 'working class character' of these Stalinist parties in such countries as China, North Korea, and North Vietnam.\*

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\*Of course, once the social transformation is completed these parties become the spokesmen for a new social stratum which rests on working class property forms. Since this social stratum must, in part, defend these property forms and therefore defend, in part, the interests of the working class, it is correct to consider the political arm of this stratum to be within the proletarian camp. This goes both for whatever party Castro is in the process of forming as well as for the CP's. However, the working class character is not so much in the party itself but in the social base it must defend. This is an important political distinction. I have been discussing only the nature of these parties before and during the process of the formation of these deformed workers states, not after they have been formed. In other words, it is not that deformed workers parties transform the property forms but that the property

Both the Chinese Revolution and the Cuban Revolution are essentially revolutions led by petty-bourgeois movements whose social base is primarily the peasantry and a section of the middle classes rather than the working class. Because of the extreme crisis of capitalism together with the crisis of leadership of the working class, these essentially intermediate social classes have been able to play an extremely radical role which the Marxist movement earlier had not foreseen--they were able to break with capitalism itself. However, their very radical actions proved the essential weakness of these social strata--while they were able to negatively smash the capitalist system they have been unable to positively substitute their own rule for the rule of the capitalists. Rather they are forced to lay the economic basis for the rule of another class, the working class--a class which they in reality distrust and despise. While on the one hand their very historical weakness as an intermediate social class forces them to create property for another class, the crisis of leadership of the working class allows them to consolidate a political rule inimical to the working class. Thus the development of a bureaucratic caste and the necessity of political revolution.

The above is frankly crediting to the petty-bourgeois strata in society far more independence than Marxists had previously felt possible. However, to refuse to so credit them or to pretend that these intermediate classes are somehow 'working class' leads immediately to serious political errors (it logically leads to the Sweezy-Pablo-Swabeck school of illusions about China). Further it distorts the reality and thus is theoretically untenable. Trotsky said somewhere in his Germany writings that 'All great theoretical questions come home to roost.' One simply cannot get away for long with a sloppy or incorrect theoretical conception, for if its political implications are not dangerous at first--they soon will be. Thus unclarity over China must be cleared up before Cuba makes any sense at all. An understanding of Cuba straightens out in retrospect our theories of all the deformed workers states.

If looked at in its proper perspective these new social processes dramatically confirm the Marxist concept of the petty bourgeoisie. A series of extraordinary circumstances in the postwar period literally thrusts power upon these strata with the capitalist class almost melting away right from under them.

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forms transform the petty-bourgeois parties. Whatever theoretical problems this transformation may raise are simply derivative from those posed by the transformation of the state.

Given state power, freed from capitalist domination, not threatened by an active working class, history is saying to these social strata: 'Now is your chance. Seize the opportunities I have provided you and create your own new society.' But the petty bourgeoisie has flunked the ultimate test--it simply could not create new property forms. The forms it created are those of its grave diggers, the working class. Its rule is unstable and transitional. Only terror holds the operation together. The petty bourgeoisie is shown to be definitely an intermediate social class.

It is therefore clear that we must reject any view of these deformed workers states as a general stage in the development of society as a whole. This view was implied in Pablo's 'centuries of deformed workers states' theory and this outlook is also implicit in many of the views that have been half-formulated in the general political confusion which reigns in our party. These deformed workers states only occur under very specific circumstances: (a) in economically backward countries with a weak national bourgeoisie and with crass imperialist exploitation; (b) where the working class is relatively backward and small or where it has been crushed and demoralized (it is of extreme importance to note that the development of a deformed workers state required the crushing of the working class in both China and Vietnam); (c) where the petty bourgeoisie has taken the military road of struggle, civil war, and carries this struggle to the point of destroying the old capitalist army and state apparatus; (d) where direct military intervention by imperialism is difficult to carry through successfully. Even if all these conditions exist in a country, it is by no means automatic that the petty-bourgeois force will succeed.

It is therefore possible for deformed workers states to come into existence in more countries. Yes, it is possible--in fact it is quite probable during the interim period before the world working class once again seizes the revolutionary initiative. This is precisely why it is so important for us to understand the Cuban experience.

It is extremely important, however, for our movement to pay special attention to the central contributing factor to these deformed revolutions--the general weakness of the working class. Whenever the working class exists as a conscious organized force, such petty-bourgeois formations simply split wide open if they are unable to crush the working class first. (In this latter respect the Vietnamese experience is of special importance. There the Stalinist-led forces literally exterminated the working class movement in the cities of Vietnam, including our comrades. This was a necessary precondition to the development of a deformed workers state in Vietnam at a later date. This is the significance of the present moves against the POR in Cuba. If a working class vanguard is not

crushed, then the intervention of the working class could rip apart the petty-bourgeois movement posing immediately the possibility of proletarian leadership of the struggle--and of the development of a real workers state--one we could truly embrace and be at one with.)

It should therefore be absolutely clear that these deformed revolutions are not wholly ours. This is simply another way of saying that they are not wholly the working class's. These petty-bourgeois strata carry through only the most minimum social transformation consistent with the continued rule of the strata itself. At every point in the transformation process they seek to minimize, to control, the intervention of the working class. They are forced to exterminate the working class vanguard or any potential vanguard; they seek to contain the revolutionary development within the boundaries of their own country; and they produce a society so disfigured by bureaucratic deformations as to be unattractive to the working classes. (What attractive pull does East Germany have on the West German workers? Why is the Stalinist party in Japan, which is so close to China, so small?) In fact we must frankly admit, as Trotsky did before us, that these deformed workers states give the working class less freedom to function and develop its own vanguard than do many of the capitalist societies. The reason for this is clear--it is precisely because the bureaucratic caste is less stable and more vulnerable to working class overturn than the capitalist class that it feels a greater necessity to suppress the working class.

There is now a certain tendency among those who call themselves Trotskyists to interpret the Cuban experience to mean that we, too, must go into the mountains and build a movement based on the peasantry. The Pabloites have actually formulated this in their Sixth World Congress documents, even suggesting that their comrades set up schools in guerrilla warfare. We completely reject this whole approach. We can only come to power on the basis of one class--the working class--and no other. The defeats of the working class are our defeats; the victories of the working class are our victories. This is our only identity, our only reason to exist. Were we to build a movement based on these petty-bourgeois strata, we, too, would be transformed into a petty-bourgeois party and the revolution would likewise be deformed from the very beginning. No--our place is first of all in the cities, in the factories. Then, with the working class, as the most advanced section of it, we will reach out to mobilize the peasantry also--to precisely break up any independent formations of the petty bourgeoisie and to win to our banner the most radical section of the intermediate class.



The Political Revolution in Cuba:

We must recognize that precisely because Cuba developed in its initial period without the direct control of a Stalinist party, the revolutionary regime was far more open to the influence of the working class, and the possibilities of developing a true working class revolutionary party in Cuba were far greater. This is shown graphically in the fact that Cuba is the only emerging deformed workers state which has allowed, until recently, a Trotskyist party to legally exist.

Conversely, we must recognize that the growth of Stalinism in Cuba both as an ideology and as an organized movement, is an expression of the bureaucratization process--of the beginnings of the development of a separate ruling bureaucratic caste in Cuba. Stalinism is still the ideology of bureaucratic rule, and the spread of this system of thought, not only through the PSP, but within the Castro ruling group itself, is simply an ideological expression of the deeper bureaucratization process. The fact that Stalinism is emerging so strongly in Cuba today is the final proof that Cuba is a deformed workers state.\*

In fact the development of a Stalinist ideology in Cuba today gives us a deeper understanding of what exactly the Stalinist ideology is. It is not simply a matter of the ideology of the USSR and of those CP's directly controlled by the USSR. This is what Swabeck suggests when he claims that for Mao to break with the USSR is the same as for Mao to break with Stalinism. Again elements of this approach can be found in the thinking of most of the majority comrades. Stalinism is the ideology of bureaucratic rule which is based on proletarian property forms--it is this and nothing else. Thus the transformation of Cuba into a deformed workers state forced upon the Castro leading group the necessity to transform its ideology so as to be able to defend these new property forms and to defend its own uncontrolled rule. Castro did not create an ideology from new cloth--he is simply taking over wholesale the already existent ideology of bureaucratic rule--Stalinism.

\* This is not to say that we are predicting that the Russian agents that run the PSP are destined to take over in Cuba. It is possible that the Castro regime can maintain a certain independence from the USSR comparable to Yugoslavia or China. In which case we should not rule out a showdown battle of some depth between the Blas Roca Russian agents and the 'independent Stalinists' around Castro. Should Castro launch such a struggle, that would no more free him from Stalinism than it freed Tito when he took a similar step.

Cuba's geographical position will help it maintain a certain level of independence from the USSR. In fact it may very well require this to maintain the Cuban economy which needs trade relations with the capitalists much more than the other deformed workers states. However, it is clear that whatever economic relations Cuba works out in the foreseeable future, they will be based on the maintenance of its planned economy and monopoly of foreign trade. Again the weakness of imperialism forces it to deal with these deformed workers states since it is incapable of overthrowing them without releasing social forces which could well overthrow it.

Is it proper to characterize Cuba as a deformed workers state when it does not as yet have a clearly defined bureaucratic caste and if we so label it, is it proper for us to call for a political revolution in Cuba? Yes, I feel it is proper to so characterize Cuba, for Cuba has the essential characteristics of a deformed workers state: (a) a nationalized economy; (b) a ruling stratum which is not under the control of the working class. However, it is highly important to understand that Cuba is a developing revolution and that the bureaucratic caste is in the process of formation right at the present moment. A recognition of this reality allows for the working out of a considerably different strategy and tactics than that which we would apply in a more stable (relatively) deformed workers state such as China. Because of this fluid situation, the intervention of the working class to counteract this bureaucratization process is not only possible but essential. In Cuba the possibility of establishing the direct rule of the working class is far greater than in any other of the deformed workers states, and Trotskyists in Cuba must work energetically towards this end despite the persecutions against them. We must counsel the Cuban Trotskyists to neither write off the Cuban revolution and act as if this bureaucratization process is completed nor to rely upon the bureaucrats themselves to counter it. Only the conscious intervention of the working class into Cuban politics can save the situation. The achievement of this intervention must be the central strategic goal of our movement in Cuba. All tactical questions, such as our attitude towards conflicts between Castro and the PSP, must be judged according to whether or not they further this strategic goal.

Since there is no clearly defined bureaucratic caste in Cuba is it proper for us to advocate a political revolution in Cuba today? My answer to that is also emphatically, yes! The establishment of workers rule in Cuba today would be a profound political change. It would necessitate the creation of a revolutionary Marxist party with a mass base and the formation of representative institutions of the masses. These institutions would have to replace the present administrative apparatus in Cuba, infusing all governmental levels with working class elements. The Marxist party would have to replace the present petty-bourgeois Castro leadership in

Cuba. Such changes can only be described as revolutionary changes in the political structure of the country. That is, that what is involved is more than mere quantitative changes (the amount of working class democracy as the majority likes to put it)--what is essential is a qualitative change in the political structure of the country. It is a matter of replacing the rule of a petty-bourgeois apparatus with the rule of the working class itself. Changes in the economic structure would not be so profound, and that is why we characterize such a change as a political as contrasted to a social revolution.

It is possible that someone may suggest that instead of applying the concept of political revolution to Cuba we should follow Trotsky's approach to the USSR before 1933 and work for political reform. I feel that this would be an incorrect approach and would reflect a lack of understanding of the only real difference between the degenerated workers state in the USSR and the postwar deformed workers states--that is, its unique political evolution.

The USSR was established as the first workers state led by a genuine revolutionary working class party. The evolution of the USSR was the evolution of the decay of this working class party under conditions of isolation, etc. Thus revolutionists must take a different attitude towards the process of decay within a working class party than we would towards a petty bourgeois party which never was a working class party in any real sense. We must never write off too quickly the possibility of reform from within the former and never count on reform from within the latter.

An even clearer understanding of the important theoretical distinction between the process of political revolution and the process of political reform can be gained if we refer to the distinction made earlier between a workers state and a deformed workers state. It is possible to discuss reform, that is, a quantitative change, within a workers state which is seriously sick. In a deformed workers state, no matter how much it may be in flux, only revolution, a qualitative change, can bring about the leap of society to a new form of rule--that of the working class itself. To raise the question of reform in a deformed workers state, even like Cuba, is to break down the qualitative difference between a deformed workers state and a workers state--that is to bring into question the very concept of a deformed workers state. Thus raising the question of reform automatically raises the question of whether or not the society in question is a deformed workers state. But there is one thing that is certain--Cuba is not now nor has it ever been a workers state, sick or not, for the working class has never ruled in Cuba!

While it is possible for comrades to question this approach in general, it is unquestionably correct, in my opinion, once we approach it within the framework of the concrete reality of Cuba itself. Castro rules with a governmental apparatus alone, while the Stalinists always rule through a disciplined party. Thus what is at issue here is not calling for the reform of a party--but of the governmental apparatus itself. Thus we immediately begin to orient towards this or that section of the governmental apparatus and lose sight of--the working class. Since the governmental apparatus has virtually no working class elements within it, it cannot be reformed from within. Only the independent mobilization of the working class can push forward the revolutionary process in Cuba. We, of course, expect that such independent intervention will swing to the side of the working class a section of those who support Castro including people in the Government. But this is a by-product of the independent struggle, not the central axis of our strategy.

Does this mean that we are stating that we would approach the political revolution in Cuba as we do in other deformed workers states--that is, that we would in effect organize an armed insurrection? Not at all. It is precisely because of the fluid state of things in Cuba today--that the bureaucratization process has not been finalized--that we can hope for the possibility of a non-violent political revolution. (Or more accurately one of limited violence, for it is my conviction that our relations with the Stalinists will be settled one way or the other violently.) Marx held open the possibility of a non-violent revolution in the U.S. because he felt that the bureaucratic apparatus and the standing army were not developed on the scale of the European capitalist countries. Lenin ruled this out on the basis of the later evolution of the U.S. Today, if there is any government which fits Marx's description of one where its overturn could be carried through without an armed insurrection, it is the Castro regime in Cuba.

However, as recent moves against the POR show, time is fast running out in which the political revolution can proceed with little violent disruption. The party majority, of course, is interested in none of this. It has completely deserted the methodology of Marxism in its knovtist urge to wipe Castro's rear. The development of Marxist thought in our movement here rests now with us. We, at least, will give these questions the serious attention they deserve.

Tim Wohlforth  
July 20, 1961

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

(Minority resolution to the 1961 YSA Convention, as reprinted from SPARTACIST #2)

"The following document, presented in 1961 to the Young Socialist Alliance by our tendency, has since received impressive confirmation.

"The prognoses it sets forth--for example, the counterrevolutionary aims in Cuba of the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy--have met the test of later events: the missile crisis; the Moscow sugar deal (see SPARTACIST #1); and most recently Castro's offer to arrive at an understanding with American imperialism.

"The resolution also states that 'Taken as a whole, the process going on today in Cuba is that of the formation of a deformed workers state--that is, the creation of a society like that which exists in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China.' It has been our opinion for more than a year that this process has reached a point of consolidation such that Cuba has become a deformed workers state."

1. The Cuban revolution constitutes the highest point of revolutionary development hitherto attained in the Western Hemisphere; it is potentially the commencement of the American socialist revolution. Realization of this potential is possible only if the Cuban revolution once more surges forward, internally and externally, to the establishment of workers democracy in Cuba and the spread of the revolution to at least the decisive countries of Latin America.

2. Despite enormous accomplishments, Cuba remains economically backward and isolated in a Western Hemisphere under the domination of U.S. imperialism. This situation is the direct cause not only of the obstacles to the further progress of the Cuban revolution but also of powerful tendencies toward degeneration.

Social Upheaval

3. For the masses of Cuba the most significant economic achievement of the revolution has been a substantial increase in living standards. This has been accomplished through a radically egalitarian redistribution of income and wealth, and a reorientation of the pattern of investment to give priority to the construction of schools, homes, and cultural and recreational facilities. At the same time, a start has been made toward diversification of Cuban agriculture. The direct action of the working class in seizing industry and in many cases, in exerting democratic control over this industry; the organization of the peasantry into democratically run cooperatives; the arming of the masses with the formation of the militias--all this, while it was

not consummated in the actual control over the state by the working class, did give the masses a very real weight in the political life of the country. This was an important acquisition of the Cuban masses and marked the Revolution as a profound social upheaval which brought the Cuban masses for the first time in history into partial control of their own destiny.

4. The revolution has basically over-turned the previous Cuban property forms. The U.S. and Cuban owned latifundia have become the property either of the working peasantry or of the state. All U.S. owned industry has been confiscated and the properties of a considerable portion of the Cuban bourgeoisie have likewise been expropriated. Since Cuba remains free from the burden of meaningful compensation and indemnification payments, these measures can provide the structural basis for a non-capitalist type of planned economy.

5. The speed and depth of the property overturn has been essentially a response to the actions of U.S. imperialism. Although the Cuban revolution began with purely bourgeois-democratic aims (agrarian reform, overthrow of the Batista dictatorship, national independence) these could not be achieved without a fierce struggle against U.S. imperialism and its Cuban bourgeois retainers. The refusal of the Castro regime to back down before U.S. blackmail and economic aggression led it to mobilize the Cuban masses and strike against the economic bases of imperialist and bourgeois rule. Its very survival compelled it to destroy the old army and police which had been the bulwark of the "democracy" of Grau and Prío as well as of the dictatorship of Batista, and replace them with a new revolutionary army and a vast popular militia.

#### U.S. Imperialism

6. The main concern of U.S. imperialism in its vicious hostility to the Cuban revolution has been to safeguard U.S. economic positions throughout Latin America. The U.S. has been held back from a military invasion of Cuba only by the probability that such action would spread the revolution instead of suppressing it, and the certainty that a U.S. attempt to occupy Cuba would be met by the Cuban people with resistance of the utmost ferocity. U.S. policy toward Cuba therefore has attempted to strangle and distort the Cuban economy through a combination of military and diplomatic pressure with naked economic aggression.

7. The Cuban economy has been able to continue functioning under these blows only because the Soviet Union came to its aid by taking Cuban sugar in return for oil, munitions, and essential industrial products. Far from being altruistic, this action is entirely to the economic and political advantage of the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy which rules in the Soviet Union and the other countries of the "Socialist Camp." It is aimed at bringing the Cuban revolution under control and using it to put pressure on the U.S. in order to gain more concessions

in an eventual "peaceful co-existence" deal.

8. The political development of the Cuban revolution has throughout been marked by the absence of a sizable revolutionary-Marxist political party and the total lack of democratic structures whereby the government would be responsible to and controlled by the workers and peasants. For a considerable period these factors were overshadowed by the revolutionary actions of the Castro regime and its responsiveness to mass pressure. Nevertheless, the fact remained that the Cuban state and economy were in the hands of a separate administrative apparatus independent of the workers and peasants because not subject to election and recall by them. Even the most democratic of institutions, the popular militia, was deprived of the essential democratic right to elect its own officers.

### Bureaucratism

9. Even in the period of revolutionary upsurge there were strong tendencies towards the imposition of bureaucratic structures upon the revolution. This was most clearly evident in the case of the Cuban Trade Unions whose democratically elected leadership, whatever its vices, was composed of Fidelistas who had ousted the old pro-Batista bureaucrats in 1959. During 1960 this leadership was arbitrarily and undemocratically removed and replaced by a new leadership, largely Stalinist in origin, subservient to the government. Subsequently the structure of the union movement was revised to eliminate the autonomy of individual unions, placing centralized control in the hands of a small bureaucratic group.

10. Since the April 17 invasion there has been a real intensification and acceleration of the trend toward bureaucratization and authoritarianism. Most agrarian co-operatives, theoretically controlled by their peasant members, have been transformed into "People's Farms" under centralized state administration. Tentative forms of workers control in industry, the "Technical Advisory Councils," have been allowed to lapse into inactivity. Government policy, as represented by Che Guevara, is specifically opposed to workers control and assigns to Cuban Trade Unions the exclusive role of increasing production, not defending the specific class interests of the workers.

11. As the Cuban regime develops political structures these likewise tend to be bureaucratic and authoritarian. After April 17, under cover of phrases about the "socialist revolution," a single-party system has been developed through the amalgamation of all remaining political groups into the "Integrated Revolutionary Organization." The Stalinist apparatus of the former "Peoples Socialist Party" plays a major role in the ORI which was represented at the recent "National Production Congress" by the veteran Stalinist leader Carlos Rafael Rodriguez.

12. Far from guaranteeing freedom of speech to all tendencies supporting the revolution, the Cuban government since April 17 has begun major repressions. Most important has been the suppression of the Trotskyist paper "Voz Proletaria" and the book Permanent Revolution by Leon Trotsky. Political censorship has been imposed on films, and the independent cultural publication "Lunes" forced out of existence. The arbitrary arrests and long detentions without charges of North American revolutionary socialists strikingly indicate the existence of a well developed secret police apparatus free from legal or democratic restraints.

### Deformed Workers State

13. Taken as a whole, the process going on today in Cuba is that of the formation of a deformed workers state--that is, the creation of a society like that which exists in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China. By minimizing the influence of the working class in the revolution, by limiting the appeal of the revolution to workers in other lands, by tending to give power to an uncontrolled bureaucracy, and by subjecting the future of Cuba to the counterrevolutionary diplomacy of the Kremlin, this process raises the danger of capitalist restoration in Cuba. However, this does not signify that in Cuba today the bureaucratic apparatus is as consolidated or dominant as in the countries of the Soviet Bloc. The democratic mass mobilization and participation in the revolution of the workers and peasants has been so powerful and far reaching that at all levels significant resistance to the process of bureaucratization occurs.

### Workers Democracy

14. The Cuban workers and peasants are today confronted with a twofold task: to defend their revolution from the attacks of the U.S. and native counter-revolutionaries, and to defeat and reverse the tendencies toward bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution. To confront this task they crucially need the establishment of workers democracy.

15. Workers democracy, for us, signifies that all state and administrative officials are elected by and responsible to the working people of city and country through representative institutions of democratic rule. The best historical models for such institutions were the Soviets of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Workers Councils of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The Cuban workers and peasants can, no doubt, develop their own original variants of these forms. There is only one essential attribute without which any democratic form is but pretense and mockery: there must be full freedom of organization and expression for all political groups and tendencies that support the revolution, without any concession to the Stalinist monolithism of the one-party system.



### Revolutionary Party

16. The full victory of every modern revolution, the Cuban revolution included, requires the emergence in a leading role of a mass revolutionary-Marxist party. The small Trotskyist groups, in Cuba and elsewhere, have a vital role as the nucleus of such parties. They can fill this role only if they continually preserve their political independence and ability to act, and if they avoid the peril of yielding to non-Marxist and non-proletarian leaderships their own ideological responsibilities and the historic mission of the working class.

### Defend the Revolution

17. In its relation to the Cuban revolution the YSA, like every revolutionary group, has two principal tasks:

(a) To exert the utmost effort to defend the Cuban revolution not only against the military and other attacks of U.S. imperialism, but also against the political attacks of the social-democratic agents of imperialism.

(b) To struggle for the development and extension of the Cuban revolution and against the attempts of counter-revolutionary Stalinism to corrupt the revolution from within. We seek to further this development and extension both by supporting revolutionary actions of the existing leadership and by constructively criticizing, openly and frankly, the mistakes and inadequacies of that leadership. Both to develop the Cuban revolution and to extend it throughout the Hemisphere, we base ourselves on the imperative necessity for the establishment of workers democracy and the formation of the mass party of revolutionary Marxism.

Shane Mage  
December 21, 1961

NOTES ON THE CUBAN DISCUSSION WITHIN THE  
REVOLUTIONARY TENDENCY

(Summary of remarks made in oral discussion)

(1) The spawning since 1943 of a whole series of anti-capitalist states in various of the more backward portions of the world has impaled the world Trotskyist movement on assorted dilemma horns. The theoretical impasse and political crisis for the movement arises through the apparent absence of either proletarian base or Bolshevik leadership to the revolutionary civil wars waged in Yugoslavia, China, Indo-China, or Cuba. An additional consideration involves the Cuban revolution whose victorious leadership was not Stalinist in its origins.

Trotskyists have reacted in four kinds of ways in measuring this twenty-year development and in assigning plus and minus signs from the standpoint of the road to socialism: (1) Some, currently Swabeck over China, come to convince themselves that the revolutions in question are clearly proletarian and with a Marxist-Leninist leadership to match. This position continually eliminates itself by the defection from the Trotskyist movement of its supporters and indeed is nothing but an overt writing off of authentic revolutionary working class struggle of which Trotskyism is nothing other than the consistent program in historic depth; (2) The SWP Majority and the European Pabloites have come, by and large and with certain formal pretense to the contrary notwithstanding, to view the revolutions as basically sound, but with any flaws present to be located in the leaderships which are insufficient, unconscious or absent. (Once holders of this view find the leaderships to have become generally sufficient, conscious and present, centrism becomes galloping revisionism rapidly leaving the arena of alleged Trotskyism.) (3) Those who hold the views expressed in these notes look upon the revolutions as fundamentally defective, limited, and moreover with leaderships to match; (4) Finally those who share the stand of the SLL as expressed in Trotskyism Betrayed generate an approach that in large measure either denies that social revolution, solid or defective, has taken place at all and correspondingly that the leaderships are capitalist-bonapartist; or else as over China leave inexplicable the admitted fundamental transformation.

Several observations about this spread in approach are evident. (a) The symmetry between our and Swabeck's positions flows from our both seeing the revolutions and their leaderships as in consonance with one another. (b) The basis for a common stand between ourselves and those such as the SLL exists at this juncture because the same programmatic points flow from each approach. (c) The position of the French IC group is one of straddling the last two basic viewpoints--

thus the amorphousness of 'phantom-like capitalist' or of 'transitional' states.

(2) More specifically, the position of the French IC'ists suffers from the central weakness that it views the Cuban revolution as analogous to the Spanish experience of the 1930's in which the Stalinist forces propped up the 'Loyalist Government'--an insubstantial capitalist regime--in the face of a raging proletarian revolution and by repression and terror smashed that revolution. The analogy is not merely defective--it emphasizes exactly what is not in common between Spain and Cuba--a bona-fide workers' revolution!

Moreover the French comrades make sweeping denials of the significance or applicability of all elements in the Cuban situation which might be deemed to have led to a fundamental and decisive break from internal and world capitalism. But the depth and extent of the denials are too great. The Chinese revolution, a true analogue to the Cuban, falls under this ban as well. Thus the interpretation 'proves' too much; that is, it does not accurately reflect the true structure of reality.

The phrase 'structural assimilation' and the nebulous but 'magical' qualities attributed to it by some Trotskyists are irrelevant to the Cuban discussion. The phrase was a way for the Trotskyist movement to convince itself that, following the victory of the Soviet Army in Eastern Europe, in certain cases the Kremlin was actually sufficiently unconciliatory to capitalism as to consolidate economic and state power in the wake of military conquest. What is presently under discussion is the creation of those states which came into existence essentially independent of any immediate or direct role of the Soviet Union.

(3) The entire structure of the French IC theoretical viewpoint flows from the initial premise which is treated as axiomatic that any kind of workers state must originate in a workers revolution.

Hence (a) the class nature of the state issuing out of the Cuban revolution is not determined by indigenous events--likewise for China, Yugoslavia, Indo-China--since manifestly the working class was not essentially involved in the domestic revolutionary processes.

And (b) 'structural assimilation' is the way in which these states have had transmitted to them the workers state quality of the only workers revolution still extant, the Russian October of forty-five years ago.

And (c) the proof of 'structural assimilation' as the decisive link in the change in the class character of these new regimes is that they have become in every way in essence identical

with the Soviet Union, hence must have been 'structurally assimilated.'

As an aside (d) it is suggested that there are capitalist states (Burma, Egypt, etc.) which have pretty much the same formal economic structure as the emergent anti-capitalist regimes, but which lack the vital sharing in the Russian 'original good' and so cannot transcend state-capitalism.

Sad to say, this example of pure scholasticism is the central core of such a theoretical insight. A critical way of putting its substance is to suggest that in this view 'the class character of a state is determined by its foreign policy'!

(4) In the present discussion it has been proposed that we base our position upon our 'Draft Resolution on the Cuban Revolution,' a three-page YSA document printed in Young Socialist Forum No. 15, December 1961. The most serious criticism of this document arises out of its very excellence at many points. As presented, the resolution only makes sense in the context of its viewing Cuba as a deformed workers state; but nonetheless, the characterization is withheld. With the passage of another year and a half, it is high time to grant it! For example, all of the shortcomings and weaknesses of the Cuban revolution as cited in the resolution and all of the measures and demands proposed to combat them are consistent only with the view of Cuba as a variety of deformed workers state. No suggestion is offered at any point in the draft resolution that capitalism still needed to be eliminated in Cuba! (Except that basic consideration common to the entire Soviet bloc that a bureaucratic ruling stratum is itself a reflection of the dominance of capitalist imperialism in the world.)

(5) There is no need among partisans of the deformed workers state interpretation to be excessively modest in upholding the position. There is sometimes encountered a feeling that this view is perhaps the best around--but the best of a bad lot. Essentially this deprecation arises from the circumstance that the theory explains events deeply repugnant to genuine Trotskyists--non-proletarian leaderships and bases in mass struggles--and some of the feeling rubs off. But the dissatisfaction and the ambiguities are lodged in the realities of the interval since the Second World War, not in a now adequate theoretical interpretation and guide to action. The theory has the necessary values of a simplicity to the extent reality will allow, predictability (thus in knowing how the movement should intervene in colonial situations so as to break up the peasant-based military formations by a polarization process through working class activity and in direct opposition to, e.g., section 13 of the SWP Majority's 'For the Early Reunification of the Fourth International'), and as a sharp tool for historical analysis, e.g., as in recognizing the decisive points in the chronology of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, i.e. focusing on the pivot point at the

end of the year 1923 over who ruled, for what aims, and by what method.

(6) The fullest and best available document analyzing the Cuban revolution as having led to a deformed workers state is Wohlforth's draft of July 1961, 'Cuba and the Deformed Workers States.'

This document is divided into six sections:

1. Their Method and Ours
2. The Evolution of Cuba
3. Workers States and Deformed Workers States
4. The State in Transition
5. The Role of the Working Class
6. The Political Revolution

Of the material covered in these sections, there are two points about which some reservations should be made. Section 4, the State in Transition, has throughout a rather superficial quality. At one point Wohlforth was reduced to taking refuge in some dubious 'dialectics' to slide over difficulties in his explanations. These difficulties arose out of not paying sufficient attention to the prior history and nature of the newly victorious states which had won in geographically separated dual power situations, i.e., civil wars.

In Section 6, the Political Revolution in Cuba, the call is made 'for us to advocate a political revolution in Cuba.' Yet it is asserted to be one which could be consummated without organizing 'an armed insurrection;' thus hope is seen for the possibility of a 'non-violent political revolution.' Particularly for Cuba this tactical outlook gets matters twisted. The reasons for this approach seem to be taken in large measure from dubious formal definitions contrasting Cuba with pre-1933 Soviet Union.

These criticisms should not be allowed to obscure the general correctness and clarity of the document in systematically presenting the deformed workers state interpretation of contemporary Cuba.

(7) Both the delineation of a more considered approach to the political revolution in Cuba and a useful summary for these notes as a whole is found in the letter of 24 February 1963 from J. Robertson to B. Martin, which formally proposed opening a Tendency-wide Cuban discussion in preparation for the party convention:

"As you probably know, I hold that Cuba is a 'deformed workers state,' more precisely expressed by me as a 'workers state of the second kind,' or to put it empirically, as a 'state resulting from the same kind of revolutionary process as won in Yugoslavia and China.' Further, I think that the program of political revolu-

tion for Cuba ought to be given a transitional formulation (e.g., 'Make the Government Ministers Responsible to and Removable by Workers' and Peasants' Democratic Organizations'). Not only has the Cuban regime issued out of a revolution like China and Yugoslavia (and unlike Stalin's Russia which was created in a political counter-revolution), but in addition in Cuba the lack of a prior formed bureaucratic party and system of rule, i.e., full-blown Stalinist practice, left an initial 'openness' to the undeniable rule from above. While this advantage for proletarian intervention is, or more likely was, transient, it should not just be written off but tested out in practical agitation as the Cuban BLA'ist Trotskyists were doing in their press up to the time it was closed down."

(8) Therefore I stand for the adoption by the Revolutionary Tendency of the general line of the viewpoint developed in 'Cuba and the Deformed Workers States.'

James Robertson, 30 April 1963

(expurgated version for use in class on 'The Russian Question-- from the October Revolution to Cuba', 24 November 1964.)

### THEORETICAL CLARIFICATION

(a section from the remarks on behalf of the Spartacist to the International Committee Conference in London, as reprinted from SPARTACIST #6)

The experiences of the Algerian and Cuban struggles, each from its own side, are very important for the light they shed on the decisive distinction between the winning of national independence on a bourgeois basis, and revolutions of the Chinese sort, which lead to a real break from capitalism, yet confined within the limits of a bureaucratic ruling stratum.

Two decisive elements have been common to the whole series of upheavals under Stalinist-type leaderships, as in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam: (1) a civil war of the peasant-guerrilla variety, which first wrenches the peasant movement from the immediate control of imperialism and substitutes a petty-bourgeois leadership; and then, if victorious, seizes the urban centers and on its own momentum smashes capitalist property relations, nationalizing industry under the newly consolidating Bonapartist leadership; (2) the absence of the working class as a contender for social power, in particular, the absence of its revolutionary vanguard: this permits an exceptionally independent role for the petty-bourgeois sections of society which are thus denied the polarization which occurred in the October Revolution, in which the most militant petty-bourgeois sections were drawn into the wake of the revolutionary working class.

#### Political Revolution

However, it is apparent that supplemental political revolution is necessary to open the road to socialist development, or, in the earlier stages, as in Viet Nam today, the active intervention of the working class to take hegemony of the national-social struggle. Only those such as the Pabloists who believe that (at least some) Stalinist bureaucracies (e.g., Yugoslavia or China or Cuba) can be a revolutionary socialist leadership need see in this understanding a denial of the proletarian basis for social revolution.

On the contrary, precisely, the petty-bourgeois peasantry under the most favorable historic circumstances conceivable could achieve no third road, neither capitalist, nor working class. Instead all that has come out of China and Cuba was a state of the same order as that issuing out of the political counter-revolution of Stalin in the Soviet Union, the degeneration of October. That is why we are led to define states such as these as deformed workers states. And the experience since the Second World War, properly understood, offers not a basis for revisionist turning away from the perspective and necessity of revolutionary working-class power, but rather it

is a great vindication of Marxian theory and conclusions under new and not previously expected circumstances.

### Weakness and Confusion

Many statements and positions of the I.C. show theoretical weakness or confusion on this question. Thus, the I.C. statement on the fall of Ben Bella declared:

"Where the state takes a bonapartist form on behalf of a weak bourgeoisie, as in Algeria or Cuba, then the type of 'revolt' occurring on June 19-20 in Algiers is on the agenda." [Newsletter, 26 June 1965.]

While the nationalization in Algeria now amounts to some 15% of the economy, the Cuban economy is, in essence, entirely nationalized; China probably has more vestiges of its bourgeoisie. If the Cuban bourgeoisie is indeed "weak," as the I.C. affirms, one can only observe that it must be tired from its long swim to Miami, Florida.

The current I.C. resolution, "Rebuilding the Fourth International," however, puts the matter very well:

"In the same way, the International and its parties are the key to the problems of the class struggle in the colonial countries. The petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders and their Stalinist collaborators restrict the struggle to the level of national liberation, or, at best, to a version of 'socialism in one country,' sustained by subordination to the co-existence policies of the Soviet bureaucracy. In this way, all the gains of the struggle of the workers and peasants, not only in the Arab world, India, South East Asia, etc., but also in China and Cuba [our emphasis: Spartacist] are confined within the limits of imperialist domination, or exposed to counter-revolution (the line-up against China, the Cuban missiles crisis, the Vietnam war, etc.)."

Here Cuba is plainly equated with China, not with Algeria.

The document offered by the French section of the I.C. several years ago on the Cuban revolution suffers, in our view, from one central weakness. It sees the Cuban revolution as analogous to the Spanish experience of the 1930's. This analogy is not merely defective--it emphasizes precisely what is not common to the struggles in Spain and in Cuba, that is, the bona fide workers' revolution in Spain which was smashed by the Stalinists.



Overcoming Bad Method

The Pabloites have been strengthened against us, in our opinion, by this simplistic reflex of the I.C., which must deny the possibility of a social transformation led by the petty bourgeoisie, in order to defend the validity and necessity of the revolutionary Marxist movement. This is a bad method: at bottom, it equates the deformed workers state with the road to socialism; it is the Pabloite error turned inside out, and a profound denial of the Trotskyist understanding that the bureaucratic ruling caste is an obstacle which must be overthrown by the workers if they are to move forward.

The theoretical analysis of Spartacist concerning the backward portions of the world strengthens, in our estimation, the programmatic positions which we hold in common with the comrades of the I.C. internationally.

James Robertson  
6 April 1966

