

SWP

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OUR CHINA POLICY

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL THE MEMBERS

of the

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

by

John Liang

Dear Comrades:

I am using the form of a letter, rather than an article, to present to you, as forcefully as I can, my thinking on the question of China which is now being debated in our ranks. It is my conviction that the party is required by well-established facts as well as by theoretical considerations to alter its attitude toward China: to abandon the call for a "political revolution" and to go over to a policy of critical support to the Peking government. For convenience in further discussion, I am numbering the paragraphs of this letter.

1. A revolution occurs in obedience to objective social laws which Marxists long ago defined. These laws comprise, in the main, the complex of class relationships and the inevitability of change inherent in them. Revolution occurs, generally speaking, when the oppressed and exploited classes, or a decisive section of them, will tolerate no longer the rule of the oppressors and exploiters.
2. However, the revolution unfolds and develops in each case, not alone on the basis of general social laws, but also in conformance with the special features of the society in which it takes place: historical and cultural, economic and political. It is these "peculiarities" that give to each revolution its specific character or uniqueness. These peculiarities, moreover, largely determine the type of institution the revolution will create to carry through the ensuing social transformation.

3. Forgetting that the Bolshevik revolution was born in, and shaped by, peculiarly Russian conditions at a particular historical juncture, we have tended to make of it an idealized stereotype to which all future social revolutions are required to conform on pain of being branded "Deformed." Such a mechanical and inflexible view of the historic process is contrary to both the substance and the spirit of Marxism. Need I add that the great leaders from whom we tried to learn the lessons of revolution would condemn all attempts to convert the features of Bolshevism into an absolute historical imperative?
4. We have long prided ourselves on our freedom from sectarian dogmatism. Yet in the case of China (and almost in the case of Cuba) we have insisted that the ruling party, and the institutions and practices of government, must imitate the patterns created by Russian Bolshevism. We have anathematized the Peking regime because of the absence of Soviets or equivalent forms of workers' democracy, ignoring or down-grading the actual institutions of a popular democracy, such as the gigantic armed militia and Commune councils. Not finding Soviets or any other formal organs of democratic control in Cuba, we hesitated a long time before giving our endorsement to the Cuban revolution. Now there are indications of a tendency to down-grade the Algerian revolution for like reasons.
5. In our 1955 resolution on China, we proclaimed our endorsement and support of the revolution -- six years after the great overturn took place. But almost everything we have said or written since then has negated this support -- unless, of course, we consider the revolution as some sort of disembodied abstraction, separate and apart from the party that led and still leads it. We have condemned the leaders of the revolution as Stalinist and the Peking regime as Stalinist-bureaucratic. We have criticized or condemned almost every policy and program of the revolutionary government. For us, these policies and programs were either too late or too early, too slow or too fast, too little or too much. We lectured China as if we were experienced experts in the construction of a new society. We charged China's failures to "bureaucratic bungling." In this we have closely paralleled the capitalist press.

6. We have refrained from reporting, much less rejoicing in, China's immense revolutionary progress. Never have we praised China's heroic efforts to build a new and better society. Always we are quick to notice the breakdowns and to attribute them, with monotonous regularity, to blunders by the Peking regime. One of our top leaders went so far as to accuse Peking of faking statistics of food production, although the government itself was the first to admit that over-eager cadres had reported crop estimates as crop returns. This comrade said: "They fooled me once. They won't do it again!" Such censoriousness is unworthy of a party that considers itself a partisan of the revolution.
7. Because of our contention that the Peking regime is "Stalinist," we disdain to notice the anniversaries of China's revolution. We even ignored the 10th anniversary in 1959. While the whole socialist world celebrated, we stood silently on the sidelines. In other words, our "support" of the Chinese revolution is embalmed in the faded 1955 document. Need it be said? -- such support is formal and ritualistic and politically worthless.
8. Looking back over more than 40 years spent in the socialist movement, I recall only too well Soviet Russia's retreat to the New Economic Policy (principally a return to private trading) and the attitude my generation took toward it. Did we stand aside and snipe at the young revolution which was striving might and main to overcome its immense difficulties and preserve the first great bastion of socialist power? Did we accuse Lenin and Trotsky and the Russian Communist Party of "bureaucratic bungling" because the blockaded revolution was literally starving to death? On the contrary, the retreat to the NEP was for us, the revolutionary socialists of that era, a call to arms in defense of the revolution. I know whereof I speak. I was the treasurer of a committee that raised large sums of money and collected thousands of tons of foodstuffs to help save the revolution. We defended the Russian revolution both in words and in deeds. We had little patience with censorious critics.
9. Compare this with our attitude toward China today. We have -- and I record this with deep regret -- almost

gloated over China's immense economic troubles in company with the enemy press. We jeered at the "backyard furnaces" set up to supplement the acutely short steel supply. We stopped just short of hailing a reported retreat from the People's Communes -- prematurely predicted, in fact, for the communes are still in existence and look more and more like permanent institutions. Always we have been concerned to show that the Peking regime is "Stalinist," a police state, or a totalitarian dictatorship that enjoys little popular support, that commits nothing but blunders in every field of economic endeavor. What, comrades, has such censoriousness in common with revolutionary partisanship?

10. To prove that the Peking regime is a bureaucratic dictatorship of the Stalinist type, we have cited the imprisonment of some of the Chinese Trotskyists, several of whom are still confined. I feel very deeply for these valiant revolutionists, among them my close friends and political colleagues for a number of years. Does not a democratic regime permit political opposition? we ask. Then why are the Chinese Trotskyists in prison? It is necessary here to state an unpalatable truth. Many of the members of the Trotskyist tendency in China, blinded by anti-Stalinist factionalism, failed to recognize the revolution when it arrived. One, living in emigration, even described the new order as worse than slavery. In line with our own position, inscribed in the 1955 resolution, Chinese Trotskyist spokesmen proclaim the program of the political revolution against "Stalinism," meaning the armed overthrow of the government. No regime permits the legal existence of a political organization avowing such an aim. The Soviet government in the time of Lenin and Trotsky arrested the Social Revolutionaries and the Anarchists when they insisted on calling for the overthrow of the government and implemented their words with terrorist deeds. We want our comrades set free. In my judgment this requires their political reorientation, a renunciation of the false political course they now pursue. It is quite useless for us to make demands for their liberation. Instead, we must do what has to be done: drop the program of the political revolution and advise our Chinese comrades to do likewise. For them and for us it is high time to stop being guided by fictions and accept realities.

11. In the institutions and organizations through which state power is exercised, the Chinese revolution is altogether different from the Russian revolution. Diversity and infinite variety are characteristic both of Nature and human society. History cannot be forced into an arbitrary mold, even if that mold be the pattern of the Russian revolution. We must face up to the fact that there will never be another Bolshevik revolution; never another Bolshevik party led by a Lenin and a Trotsky; never again Soviets of Workers and Peasants Deputies in their original Russian form. And let me add: Neither will there ever again be Stalinism, the vile excrescence that flowed from the revolution in retreat. All these phenomena were reflections of the "peculiarities" of the Russian situation that will never be repeated.

12. Of course, more revolutions will occur and are occurring. Let us not fail to recognize them! Each will have its own unique characteristics, but the direction will be invariably the same -- toward Socialism. All of us wish most ardently to become part of this great historical mainstream. For this, we need to shed the prejudices (Not the principles) that we have acquired during our long isolation. We rallied to a proud standard. We have an honorable record. But this relates to our past. We must now decisively reject every tendency toward sectarian dogmatism. This means reorienting the party, first of all in relation to the Chinese revolution. We must attach ourselves to, and strive to merge with, every living revolutionary current. This, I am convinced, is the road of life for the Trotskyist political tendency. The road of separation and isolation spells death.

Fraternally,

John Liang

October 14, 1962

CRITICAL NOTES ON THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE DRAFT "PROBLEMS
OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL -- AND THE NEXT STEPS"

by Shane Mage

(These notes express my political criticisms of and reactions to the PC draft. My general evaluation of the political course of the party is stated more fully in the document "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective" submitted by twelve comrades, myself included.

If, therefore, these polemical notes raise more questions than they answer, that is exactly their purpose. The revolutionary movement is entering a phase of theoretical discussion and re-evaluation absolutely essential to uncover the real meaning of past errors and weaknesses and thereby to lay a sound foundation for the rebuilding of the Fourth International. Notably, as the French comrades have stated ("Projet de rapport sur La Revolution Cubaine," p.2), "We will undoubtedly have to revise the analysis of the new working class states of Eastern Europe as carried out in 1948, and the re-opening of this discussion will disclose how it was at that period that viewpoints alien to Trotskyism were introduced into our working method, viewpoints which took the form of 'Pabloism' as an organized tendency, but which today remain present in a number of parties professedly in agreement with the International Committee." In their own way, therefore, these negative points may contribute to the preparation of the positive theoretical work confronting our world movement.)

Page 1.

"the fracturing of Stalinist monolithism and the growing differentiations among the Communist states and parties" - these are not two different things but two ways of saying the same thing. It is also dead wrong to talk of "differentiations" without recognizing that these "states and parties" are in no sense "Communist" but remain exclusively on the terrain of Stalinism in their monolithic internal organization and reformist political line.

2 different aspects
of a general process

"Communist" is a
proper noun, not
an adjective

some CP's, eg. Italian
not so monolithic
any more

Page 2.

The Cuban Revolution is called "a victorious socialist revolution" - this means, if it means anything, that the Cuban revolution is essentially completed, has attained all its essential goals.

Russian rev. was a
"victorious socialist rev."
* it still hasn't achieved
all its essential goals

Page 3.

(a) Cuba "has given fresh confirmation to the correctness of the theory of permanent revolution" - but the cardinal point of the theory of permanent revolution is the necessity of the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to complete even the bourgeois-democratic revolution. We have just been told that the Cuban revolution is a "victorious socialist revolution" without having established the proletarian dictatorship (i.e. "a state of the Paris Commune type.") If true this is nothing else than a refutation of the permanent revolution. The contradiction is "resolved" through the verbal sleight of hand trick of calling Cuba a "workers' state."

an important point not clearly answered by majority

(b) The "bypassing of Stalinism" is presented as an accomplished fact - but if such a term has any validity it is only in reference to a past stage of the revolution - the merger of M26 and PSP, Guevara's explicit praise of Stalin as a great Marxist, Castro's discovery that his past differences with the Stalinists were merely based on his own "petit-bourgeois education" - these are irrefutable proofs that the Cubans are far from having by-passed Stalinism.

ignores anti-Escalante struggle

(c) The Stalinist states are referred to as "states deformed by Stalinism" and Cuban foreign policy is distinguished from Soviet as "more consistently revolutionary." This language is an expression (probably subconscious) of a perfectly centrist thought process. Stalinism is merely a "deformation" on the basically sound Soviet and Chinese states? Then what becomes of the Trotskyist program calling for the violent overthrow of all the existing Stalinist states, for the political revolution? (Answer: it is simply dropped in the SWP International Resolution and the present PC draft - all that is to be found are ambiguous references to "anti-bureaucratic movements.")

maj. has not given a clear statement on this

Cuban foreign policy is "more consistently revolutionary" than Soviet foreign policy? This is identical, isn't it, to saying Soviet foreign policy is "less consistently revolutionary" than Cuban foreign policy? Trotskyism, however, has always contended that Stalinism is essentially and consistently counter-revolutionary (the SWP majority used to insist on the imprecise but politically justified phrase "counter-revolutionary through and through and to the core"). The proposition that the foreign policy of a Stalinist state is revolutionary, even though "inconsistently", is absolutely alien to Trotskyism. It is the statement of a centrist, not a Marxist, tendency.

good point

Page 4.

(a) The Cuban economy is "planned" - by whom and how? In reality, as Guevara has admitted, economic planning in Cuba simply does not function, in fact no "plan" has even been drawn up. This is not a reproach to the Cubans - only to comrades who profess a respect for facts but in the fulsomeness of their paen to Castro do not hesitate to "improve" reality.

attempt to plan for socialist ends

(b) "The institutions of proletarian democracy have yet to be worked out and stabilized" - A correct statement would be that the institutions of proletarian democracy - workers' councils, internally democratic trade unions, several worker and peasant political parties - do not "yet" exist in Cuba. Nevertheless the Cuban "state" has displayed "profoundly democratic tendencies", as "certified" by Castro's denunciation of Escalante.

Shane's position is shown here to be based mainly on distrust of Castro, i.e. of any leadership not outspokenly Trotskyist - this is a sectarian element in Shane's analysis

But if this episode shows anything at all it is the undemocratic methods and functioning of the Castro regime. Escalante (for whom, of course, we have no more sympathy than for Molotov) was simply gagged, abused, and shipped out of the country, the charges against him being echoed by the Stalinist press from Hoy to Pravda. What Cuban worker or peasant, what rank and file member of Castro's new party, had the right to hear Escalante's side of the matter? But if this right does not exist, there is no workers democracy.

The true meaning of l'affaire Escalante remains highly unclear. Was it a factional settling of accounts within the PSP? Or a reflection of the Moscow-Peking vendetta? Was Escalante made a scapegoat for mass dissatisfaction with bureaucratism and economic hardships? Was it a staged attempt to restore the gravely damaged image of Castro's "independence" from the Stalinists? Or was it part of a genuine fight between Castro and the Stalinists? (And if so, why did the Stalinists leap to the side of Castro?) But one thing it was definitely not: a break with Stalinism in the name of workers' democracy. Workers' democracy cannot be defended by silencing opponents, as Castro did, nor can Castro combat Stalinist bureaucratism by putting all the blame on an Escalante (or a Stalin) while maintaining silence on the essential nature of the Stalinist bureaucracies and expressing solidarity with their representative leaders, Khrushchev and Mao Tse-Tung.

(c) What does it mean for Latin Americans "to take Cuban experience as the point of departure for the revolutionary struggle in their own countries"? Is the SWP advocating initiation of a guerilla as the "point of departure?" If so, the phrase suicidal adventurism would be too mild. The capitalists have learned something from Cuba, and will no longer play around with

it means uncompromising revolutionary struggle - permitting more than one strategy or tactic

such movements. In the last few weeks adventures of this type were snuffed out in Venezuela and Ecuador, countries which, Comrade Hansen had assured us, were virtually in revolutionary situations. At any rate our "point of departure" as Trotskyists can only be the independent class action of the proletariat led by its Marxist vanguard. And this is not to "underestimate the peasantry" - the agrarian revolution can only succeed if the peasants also take this as their point of departure and accept the leadership of the proletariat. So, at least, says the theory of permanent revolution.

Page 5.

The statements on Cuba in the 1961 SLL resolution are presented in this draft as the alternative to the SWP majority position on Cuba. It is easy but of no value to latch on to the erroneous aspects of this position - while not confronting or even admitting the existence of the position held in common by the SWP minority and the French Trotskyists, against which the same type of argument could not be used. But even with this advantage their case is feeble. The draft cites three "essential points" on which the SLL position supposedly "conflicts with the facts" - however this accusation can be made to stick only on no. 2, the description of the Castro regime as, on all important points, "on the side of capitalism."

On points 1 and 3 the opposite is the case - it is the SLL that is right, and the SWP majority that is out of contact with the "facts".

Thus point 1 is that the agrarian reform in Cuba "in its content and motivation remains a capitalist reform." But what else could be said by someone who has any acquaintance with the Cuban land reform law of 1959? That law enacted the principle of compensation for all seized property, and applied only to property beyond the first 900 acres. What is non-capitalist about such a reform? The land reform adopted by the Soviets in 1917 was openly declared to be a bourgeois-democratic measure - yet it included nationalization of the land, no compensation, and basically equal division of the land under control of peasant committees, features absent from the Cuban law. But it is a "fundamental error" to say that this more moderate Cuban law remains a bourgeois-democratic reform.

And now point 3 - the SLL foolishly persists in seeing limitations to the Castro government's carrying through of the democratic revolution revealed by its attempt to form a single party, its refusal to convene a constituent assembly, its repressive measures against the POR. But aren't all these things facts? And aren't facts "stubborn things"? And the freedom of workers and peasants to form their own parties; the right of such parties, even if they are anti-Stalinist, to full

main point is missed while arguing over definitions - Cuban agrarian reform hit capitalist-imperialist interests in its vital spot - the sugar industry - which is not run today for private profit

freedom of expression; and the decision of the people themselves through their elected representatives as to their government and political institutions - aren't these essential aspects of any democratic revolution? Does "blindness" consist in recognizing this reality, as the SLL does, or in refusing to see it?

Page 6.

(a) "It is a fact," the PC draft reiterates, "that capitalism was eliminated in 1960." What a splendid method of argument, to state a theoretical conclusion as "a fact" and then attack one's opponents for "blindness" to "facts"! It is a fact, which no one denies, that in 1960 the decisive sectors of Cuban industry were nationalized. Under its peculiar and totally fallacious conception of the "Marxist standards for determining the character of a workers state" the PC majority may believe that this turned Cuba into a workers' state. But they should at least recognize that there are comrades who hold that a workers' state is defined by its historic origin in a proletarian revolution; that nationalized property in such a state is a non-capitalist and progressive property form because it was established by that revolution; and that the bureaucratic, anti-working class establishment of "deformed workers' states" has taken place through the structural integration of formerly capitalist states into the economic and political system deriving from the proletarian revolution, a process in which nationalizations are a part, though not a decisive part. This is a theoretical position, and no one should be taken in by the circular counter-argument that the existence of a workers' state in Cuba is a "fact" and not itself a theoretical position that needs to be proven.

an essential point in Shane's thinking as in Art Fox's - i.e. workers democ. & a rev. of the October type is the most important criteria.

(b) More "facts": "Cuba could not logically be defined as anything but a workers' state even if its political structure were not democratic and its leadership non-Marxist." What a brilliant perception of reality! Evidently Cuba's "democratic political structure" is proven by the total absence of representative institutions, just as Castro's and Guevara's "Marxism" is proven by their professed political solidarity with the counter-revolutionary Stalinists.

majority says only cap. or workers states can exist - Shane has said "transitional" or "no class" states can exist, e.g. Cuba

Page 7.

Is this an answer to our discussion of the methodology of Marxism? :

"The leadership cannot be converted into the sovereign ruler of history...to view the progress of the class struggle as dependent first and most of all upon the presence or absence of an adequate Marxist leadership is to stand social reality on its head and not on its feet."

What is being argued against, in any case, is not our position, nor that of the SLL. The method of argument, however, betrays a total alienation from the dialectical method. The entire historical process, from the very origins of humanity, is essentially to be understood in terms of a dialectical "conflict" between the "opposite" objective and subjective "factors." In this process each term continually passes into its opposite - what is "objective" for the individual is "subjective" for the human society, and what is "objective" for society, including natural conditions, has itself been shaped and transformed by "subjective," conscious, human activity. Consequently there can be no question of one or another "factor" being a "sovereign ruler" or having "first place."

more metaphysical than Marxism

The Marxist view of the revolutionary process, therefore, is based on the proposition that in the concrete historical conditions confronting humanity, the crucial objective factor determining the success or failure of the revolution is the consciousness of the proletariat; and the vanguard party is in essence the necessary form and expression of this consciousness in the unity of theory and action.

If this party does not already exist, it can and must be created in the course of the revolution itself - but if this is not done the revolution must fail, since objectively the proletarian class consciousness has proven inadequate. Therefore, in the absence of a leading Marxist vanguard, other "objective circumstances" may indicate many things - but a successful socialist revolution is not among them.

the whole point that Shane doesn't understand - building leadership in the struggle

Can the Marxist theory be saved by baptizing the party that Castro is creating two years after the establishment of an "uncorrupted workers regime" a "Marxist-Leninist Party" despite its pro-Stalinist politics? This absurdity is, in its own way, proof of theoretical insolvency.

Page 8.

(a) How, on this basis, can the SWP leadership argue against the "New Lefts" who use Cuba to "deny the need for a Marxist party"? After all, this draft correctly recognizes that the Cuban revolution "cannot be regarded as a purely particular and peripheral case without departing from the dialectical method." But if in Cuba "facts" proved a Marxist party not to be necessary before and during the revolution, and a pseudo-Marxist party in no way politically superior to the "New Left" groups to be sufficient after that, why shouldn't this experience be generalized in accordance with "the dialectical method?"

turning an implication (not a valid one either) into a main point

(b) "the ultimate determinant in the outbreak, course, and outcome of a revolutionary struggle is the relationship of class forces on a national and world scale, and not the subjective political factors alone." Here the methodological incoherence reaches its apogee. By definition there can only be one "ultimate determinant." If this "determinant" is "the relationship of class forces" it is nonsense to conclude with "and not the subjective political factors alone" - the word "alone" contradicts everything said before. Without that word, however, "subjective political factors" are excluded and we have a naked statement of the objectivist method - the "objective" relationship of forces is sufficient for revolutionary success. If, on the other hand, these "subjective political factors" are, as Marxists hold, themselves part of the "relationship of forces" the two cannot possibly be counterposed.

The PC draft continues: "In this period of the ascendance of the world revolution Cuba has provided positive proof of a lesson illustrated in a negative way during the previous period of world reaction." With this, the objectivist argument completes the ingestion of its own tail. The Cuban revolution is "a victorious socialist revolution" despite the lack of a Marxist leadership because of "the relationship of forces." And for the contention that this "relationship of forces" in the absence of Marxist leadership is sufficient we have "positive proof" - in the form of the "fact" of a "victorious socialist revolution" in Cuba.

Note well, moreover, the contention that we are now in a "period of the ascendance of the world revolution" in which the "relationship of forces" is basically different from that of the "previous period of world reaction."

Page 13.

After all this how can it be blandly asserted that "There is no argument between us that the success of the colonial revolution requires leadership from a Marxist party." This is precisely where there is no agreement. Are we being told that in Cuba the colonial revolution is not yet "successful" even though the socialist revolution is already "victorious"? Obviously not. Then the Cuban revolution in 1960 must have received that "required" leadership from a Marxist Party. But we have just been told that only now, in 1962, are the Cubans "proceeding to organize a Marxist-Leninist party." In no way can the phrase "requires leadership" be reconciled with the rest of the PC draft -- it is a virtually classical instance of the use of a revolutionary phrase to disguise a non-revolutionary political line.

It means what
Trotsky said, i.e.
the success of the
colonial rev. depend
on its transformation
into a socialist
rev. - Cuba
thoroughly confirms
this.

Section 3 (pages 14-18)

This entire section is designed to establish that the SWP leadership has not abandoned the Trotskyist view of "the central role of the industrial workers of the imperialist countries in the struggle for socialism." But no one has accused the SWP of abandoning this phrase - what we did state was that "this correct proposition, far from being central to the /1961 International/ resolution and its perspectives for revolutionary strategy, was in fact inserted only after the rest of the document had been written." And in the present PC draft this formula has an even more eccentric position - indeed is in blatant contradiction with the political essence of the document.

This contradiction is only slightly obscured by several arguments serving as a sort of smoke-screen. There is a polemic against the idea, ascribed to Sweezy, of "the permanently paramount role" of colonial revolutions in "the struggle for socialism." But surely the relevant issue here is not whether the "primacy of the colonial revolution" is permanent, but what, if any, inner limits this so-called "primacy" imposes on the colonial revolution, and whether it can be expected to last for a definite historical period. Another idea rejected by the draft is Khrushchev's thesis that socialism is "bound to spread to the rest of the world through the economic, diplomatic, and military ascendancy of the Soviet states."

The counter-argument to this is alarmingly weak - conceding improperly that "The Soviet advances are undeniably an immense component part of the drive toward socialism" the PC draft nevertheless concludes: "But however impressive their proportions, however fast they accumulate, and however far-reaching their influence, these achievements, limited to the less developed sections of world society, cannot decide the destinies of either(?) capitalism or socialism." But the whole point of the Khrushchev line is that the Soviet sphere will not remain "less developed" - the meaning of the perspective of "economic, military, and diplomatic ascendancy" is that "socialism" will become more developed than capitalism, will peacefully concentrate in its hands the "material requirements for the superior social system." An adequate answer to Khrushchev must be grounded on the Trotskyist thesis of the consistently counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism, which makes Soviet-bloc "ascendancy" impossible without the overthrow of the entire bureaucratic caste through proletarian political revolution. But as we saw at the outset, this fundamental viewpoint has been jettisoned by the PC in favor of the notion of an "inconsistently revolutionary" Stalinism.

this thesis, (as you put it) cannot explain China, & so must be altered, i.e. reapplied to current conditions

A further argument is advanced - the threat of nuclear annihilation if capitalism remains in power in the West. But this is an obvious evasion of the problem, substituting an alleged ultimate "urgency for the survival of humanity"* in place of the practical question of whether the political role of the working-class in the advanced countries is decisive in the present historical situation.

Thus, having penetrated this smoke-screen, we come to the real issue: the place of the workers of the advanced countries in our conception of the world balance of forces. And here the PC draft contradicts itself at every turn.

On page 16, the draft states the two "fundamental features of world politics for the past 15 years" as "the advances of the revolution" in the backward countries and the failure of the workers in the advanced countries "to challenge...capitalist rule," and concludes that "The second of these factors has been more decisive in determining the channels(?) of current world history than the first."

Since, according to this, the reactionary "factor" has been "more decisive" than the revolutionary one, it would follow that the world balance of class forces could have shifted only in favor of imperialism, in no case against it. However, only three paragraphs earlier (p. 15,) we were told that

"The impressive successes of the Soviet bloc in many fields and the advances of the colonial revolution have considerably weakened imperialism and shifted the balance of class forces on a world scale to its detriment."

Which of these two diametrically opposed positions really represents the opinion of the PC majority? Perhaps a clue is provided by that odd word "channels" - if so, then it appears that the role of the proletariat is "decisive" only in respect to the "channels" through which the world balance of forces operates, while that balance of forces itself is decisively determined by other factors.

Shane doesn't understand what is meant by primary in the long historical sense, & so finds an appearance of contradiction

In a self-righteous proclamation designed to "dispose of any allegations that the SWP has changed its fundamental position" the PC draft quotes that

(*) Theoretically speaking, this argument is completely invalid if the possibility of Soviet military ascendancy is granted, since a militarily inferior capitalism would be at the least unlikely to destroy itself without hope of victory.

portion of the SWP 1961 International Resolution which stated that the "chief problem" is to overcome the "passivity" of the workers in the advanced countries, and that "Until this is done, there can be no decisive change, no qualitative transformation in the world-wide relationship of forces."

Brave words! But how does this square with the previously discussed argument on page 8 which derived the "proletarian character of the Cuban state" from the contention that "the ultimate determinant in the outbreak, course, and outcome of a revolutionary struggle is the relationship of class forces on a national and world scale" - and described this relationship of forces as a "period of the ascendance of world revolution" which has replaced "the previous period of world reaction"? The contradiction here is complete and irremediable: If a "period of world reaction" has given way to a "period of the ascendance of world revolution" this means precisely that there has been a "qualitative transformation in the world-wide relationship of forces."

Shane doesn't understand that "the struggle decides"

For him, the formal categories decide, must be harmonious, etc.

Thus once more we see that in the hands of the PC majority even a correct proposition is emptied of all content and made to serve as camouflage for a practical political line essentially contradictory to it.

Page 18.

Finally, the draft claims to confront directly the arguments of the tendency "led(sic) by Tim Wohlforth and A. Phillips" (incidentally, who gave the PC majority the right to appoint "leaders" among the signers of our document?) At once is brought to bear the crushing argument that "The notion that all other social forces form one reactionary mass counterposed to the working class is not Marxist." Indeed it is not - and therefore neither hide nor hair of it can be found in our document.

They are your only NC member reveals your split

Nevertheless we are reproached with the phrase "we look to the working class and only the working class as the revolutionary force in modern society," even though this differs not an iota from what Marx and Engels wrote 114 years ago: "Among all the classes that confront the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is really revolutionary." To state that "The lower middle classes - small manufacturers, small traders, handicraftsmen, peasant proprietors" can play a revolutionary role only if they accept the political leadership of the party of the proletarian vanguard, thus "forsaking their own standpoint in order to adopt that of the proletariat," is far from consigning them to "one reactionary mass"!

On the same basis we are charged with under-

estimating the peasantry, with denying in effect that "the armed struggle of the insurgent peasantry has played and will play a colossal role." No - all we deny is that such armed struggles, however "colossal," can result in the formation of revolutionary workers' states unless the peasantry "forsakes its own standpoint to adopt that of the proletariat." If this "sociological premise" is "one-sided," then indeed are our political conclusions "sectarian"!

Pages 19-20.

The author of this section has another powerful argument: "with these critics it is perhaps(!) advisable to call attention to the 34 year history of the SWP and the career of its central cadres...in the movements of the Second, Third, and Fourth Internationals." It is hard to believe that this comrade is so unsure of his own position as to be compelled to resort to this level of disputation! Strangely enough, "such objective proofs from a long and honorable record* fail to satisfy our newly arrived critics," who stubbornly persist in maintaining that the leadership of a Marxist party is to be chosen and judged on the basis of its politics, and not through a seniority system like that of the U.S. Congress. Something else must be involved - and sure enough, the shades of Oehler(!) and Marcy(!) soon appear in order to testify that our views are merely a "belated echo" of these ancient heresies.

good rejoinder -
but the history
lesson is not for
your benefit, but
for newer people

Page 21.

(a) Since so much respect has been expressed for "facts," a more factual assessment of the regroupment experience would seem to be in order. It is, unfortunately, false to say that "The SWP alone of all the political groups on the left gained influence, numbers, and prestige during this period which witnessed the disintegration of the CP and the dissolution of the Shachtmanites and Cochranites" - the fact is that, absolutely and relatively to us, the SP is much stronger than it was at the outset of regroupment. Compare the situation in the youth field. In 1957 we already had a strong and viable youth cadre (on a par with the Shachtmanites,) while the YPSL was literally non-existent. Today the YPSL is several times as strong as the YSA in membership and campus influence.

It is, unfortunately, misleading to end with a reference to the 1960 Presidential campaign. The 1957

(*) "Perhaps" we will someday be vouchsafed an explanation of how comrade Swabeck, despite a record genuinely second to none in length and honor, managed to wind up with a completely pro-Stalinist, liquidationist political position on China?

sarcasm will
get you
nowhere

and 1961 New York City mayoralty campaigns provide all too clear an indication of the results of regroupment: in 1957 comrade Cowley received over 14,000 votes, but in 1961, despite the impact of the Cuban revolution and intensified public disgust with Wagner, comrade Garza received barely 7,000 votes, only 50% of our previous total. In Britain the SLL was able to multiply tenfold its membership and mass influence through regroupment, while the SWP was at best making minor gains. The difference in accomplishments cannot all be explained by the difference in political approach, but in any event it ill becomes the SWP to dismiss the SLL's provenly successful approach as that of "scholastic sectarians and infantile leftists."

(b) A minor, but characteristic, historical point: it is false to say that in 1917 the Bolsheviks "merged with Trotsky and his Inter-District group" as if this was a merger of two separate groups into a new one. The fact is that Lenin rejected Trotsky's proposal for a merger into a new party and instead accepted the entire group as members of the existing party (c.f. Deutscher, "The Prophet Armed", pp. 257-9)

The significance of this is that in contemplation of eventual unity with other "revolutionary" groups, as opposed to an "entry tactic", the question of program is decisive, not necessarily in the sense of complete acceptance of a Marxist program, but in the sense of its revolutionary essence, as demonstrated in our 1934 merger with the AWP, or in our original regroupment approach of 1957.

Page 23.

(a) "It would be ridiculous of us to refuse to grant others the right to come to revolutionary Marxism in their own way." Absolutely true - the only thing more ridiculous is to grant the appellation of "Marxist" to those who rule by decree without workers' democracy and who refuse to declare themselves open and principled opponents of the counter-revolutionary Stalinist leaders of the Soviet Union, China, etc. This applies above all to such figures as the heads of the Cuban July 26 Movement.

(b) Certain of the "leaders" of our tendency were beneficiaries of the "flexible and open-minded approach" they would deny to others, even though "they were far from being orthodox Trotskyists." Speaking personally, and without going into the details of an evolution in which the approach of the SWP leadership was often far from "flexible and open-minded," I can at least indicate the facts about my then "distance" from the positions of the SWP. During the period 1952-1956 I strongly disagreed with the policy of the SWP on

three and only three significant points: (1) the SWP's original adhesion to the Pabloite line of the Third World Congress, paraded by the magazine "Fourth International" as the "Rearmament of World Trotskyism," and the original refusal of the SWP to support the struggle of the French majority against Pabloism; (2) the political approach and campaign of the SWP on the theme "McCarthyism is the American Form of Fascism"; and (3) the sociological evaluation of the Soviet Union as a "degenerated workers' state," a question on which I then had a "state-capitalist" position. By 1957 the SWP leadership had in practice reversed its policy on the first two issues, and I had changed my position on the third.

(c) If I do not quarrel with the idea that I was not then an "orthodox Trotskyist," it is because neither for then nor for today do I request or accept that appellation - the noun, yes, the adjective, no. "Trotskyism," "Leninism," "Marxism," are today identical terms, defined by consistently revolutionary activity and theory. And "orthodoxy"? If some Trotskyists are "orthodox," then other Trotskyists are not. But why, why, is "orthodoxy" preferable to "heterodoxy," provided it is Trotskyist heterodoxy?

In the first decade of this century there was an established, recognized, "orthodox Marxism." Its leading, authoritative, exponent was Karl Kautsky, the literary and political heir of Marx and Engels. On the issues which opposed them to Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky were rank heretics. Nevertheless no revolutionary after 1914 could deny that it was Luxemburg and Trotsky who were the Marxists - Lenin himself, in order to maintain a revolutionary perspective, had to repudiate his former "orthodoxy" and recognize that Luxemburg was right to consider Kautsky "a servile theoretician," that Trotsky was right to advocate the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in backward Russia. He had to consign ideas once regarded as "orthodox" to "the museum of the Old Bolshevism."

Orthodoxy is defined as "conformity to formulated doctrine." Marxism above all is method, "revolutionising practise." Orthodox as an adjective fits religion. But in apposition to Marxism it is suspect. At best it expresses an attempt to preserve a revolutionary perspective by mere adherence to revolutionary formulae. At worst it is the hallmark of "servile theoreticians" who use the established revolutionary formulae to conceal and justify a non-revolutionary political course.

I have never opposed Pabloism because it is not orthodox - I have always opposed it because it is

not revolutionary. I believe it is high time that "orthodoxy" be returned to the churches, where it belongs.

Page 24.

The only political reason given for the 1953 split with the Pabloite movement is "an apparent tendency ...to conciliate with Stalinism and look upon the Soviet bureaucracy as capable of self-reformation." Only an "apparent" tendency? If this "appearance" did not conform to reality, and the PC draft nowhere affirms that it did, this is indeed a striking admission of political irresponsibility. Whatever the facts about Pablo's "regime" in the International, a split could be justified only by profound political differences.

We were not so unsure about the reality of political differences in 1953 when, in the "Open Letter," we characterized Pabloism as "revisionism" and affirmed that, "politically," the lines of cleavage "are so deep that no compromise is possible."

Page 25.

Without even admitting that these "lines of cleavage" ever really existed, the PC draft affirms nonetheless that the political differences have in fact disappeared. We are told that since 1956 the IS has no longer acted as it did in "the East German uprising and the French General Strike of 1953."

These are exceedingly unfortunate examples to cite! What was wrong with the Pabloite position on the East German uprising was not that they did not support the workers' rebellion (in fact they supported it) - but that they did not advance the slogan of withdrawal of Soviet troops, thereby contributing to the Stalinist alibi that the "Western menace" was more important than the bureaucratic counter-revolution.

If you ask Germain or Pablo, they will not admit the slightest difference in their response to East Berlin and to Hungary. And they are right! In 1956 their contribution to the Stalinist bureaucracy was merely different in form. At the beginning of November, at the moment of the second Russian intervention, the French CP sought to create a diversion by playing up a fascist attack on its Paris headquarters, an attack at which it obviously connived. At this point, while the Hungarian workers were being massacred by the Kremlin's police, the French Pabloite paper "La Verite des Travailleurs," ran a banner headline calling for - defense of the French CP against the fascists! The Hungarian revolution, defended in words, was in deeds buried inside the paper. No more than in 1953 was this a minor detail of form: again the Pabloites contributed to the Stalinist alibi, this time

that the "fascist menace" was more important than the bureaucratic counter-revolution.

And as to the French General Strike of 1953! Perhaps some comrades remember what the Pabloite position on that was - to defend the policy of the CGT leadership on the grounds that the situation was not revolutionary and that the strike wasn't really "general" anyhow. Now compare the Pabloite policy in the Belgian General Strike of 1960-61. Using exactly the same arguments as in France in 1953, (among them, that the strike was not "general",) the Pabloite group in Belgium capitulated to Renard and the FGTB leadership. Where is the difference? (Those comrades who are not aware of the Pabloite policy in Belgium, which is not even mentioned in passing in the current document, would do well to read the articles by Gerard Bloch in nos. 522 and 523 of La Verite.)

Page 26.

(a) The Pabloites, we see, are justified in their assertion that their politics have not fundamentally changed since 1953. This political position, which we correctly termed "revisionism," has thus been maintained and developed. Its essence is to convert Trotskyism into a left-wing satellite of the existing labor and colonial-revolutionary leaderships. Under the formal label of Trotskyism what we see in Pabloism is thus not at all a "heterodox" variety of Trotskyism but on the contrary a specific form of centrism.

Nevertheless the PC draft finds that "on most of the vital issues of the day" the positions of the SWP and of the IS "are so close that they are indistinguishable." Following a discussion of the conflicting positions of the SLL and SWP on these same "vital issues," this amounts to nothing less than an open declaration of solidarity with Pabloism as against the majority position of the International Committee. Can there be a clearer proof that the real "diminishing of divergences" between the SWP and the IS is simply an indication that the SWP majority, abandoning its previously-defended positions, is passing with arms and baggage into the camp of "Pabloite revisionism"?

(b) If we consider Pabloism to be a centrist tendency, how can we be for unity with it? Doesn't this show that the IC has proposed unity discussions merely as a maneuver "in order to produce new splits and splinters"?

Such a charge would be absolutely unjustified. Trotskyists have never rejected on principle organic unity with a centrist group. On the contrary, the

first years of the international Trotskyist movement were marked by a struggle to gain recognition as a tendency within the Third International which, before its irredeemable degeneracy in 1933, our movement considered to be a centrist party. A vital stage in the construction of our own SWP was the membership of the Trotskyists in the centrist Socialist Party U.S.A. The essential conditions for such unity are that in our judgment it contribute to the growth of the revolutionary cadre, and above all that the revolutionaries retain full freedom of political expression within the party, full freedom to criticize and oppose the centrist tendency, whoever is in the majority temporarily. Although we have no illusions about the permanence of our membership in and acceptance of the discipline of a centrist party, if the concrete conditions require it Trotskyists are justified and indeed compelled to work within that party.

Today unity of those tendencies calling themselves Trotskyist, whose present organizational division, in the absence of political clarity, unquestionably confuses and disorients potential revolutionaries, would be a forward step. But such unity has definite preconditions: the political program of the merged organizations must not be a revisionist one, and in those countries, such as France, Britain, and Japan, where the revolutionary tendency would be the majority in a merged organization, it must be free to define and implement a Trotskyist political line for the entire national movement.

These concrete preconditions for unity with the Pabloites are clearly much "stiffer" than the minimum on which revolutionaries can choose to operate within a centrist movement. The difference is that qualitatively the balance of forces is in favor of the revolutionary tendency, which has wide predominance in most of the decisive countries.

Under these conditions the initiation of a genuine and sincere international discussion of the political bases of unity, throughout whose course "ample room should be afforded for the expression of all tendencies," would indeed be "a good beginning." Even if such a discussion should fail to establish the existence of enough political agreement to allow revolutionaries and centrists to co-operate in a common International with a common program, the clarification of political differences would at least and at last allow the reconstruction of the Fourth International, which has been postponed since 1953 and is thus almost a decade overdue.

Page 27.

"Some (which?) of the differences of the past must be left for later discussion or historical adjudication." Does this mean that certain questions are to be excluded from the discussion of the political basis for unity? If so, a speedy redivision would be inevitable. Our whole approach to unity is shaped by our answer to the question: was the split of 1953 politically justified? The Pabloites categorically deny it, and thereby put the whole movement on formal notice that their basic political outlook has not changed. Therefore only if the respective evaluations of the past are clear and mutually understood is there even the slightest hope of successful unification.

Postscript

This criticism of the PC draft has taken up many different issues and formulations. Some comrades may feel that I have been unjust, that I have drawn unintended conclusions from merely ambiguous statements. This may well be true - indeed I sincerely hope it is. The test will be provided by this NC plenum which will have the ability to amend or amplify the PC document at all those points where it has been criticized. Conversely, by failing to modify the document submitted to it on any given point, the NC would confirm the correctness of my interpretation of the PC text at that point.

June 2, 1962