

Discussion Bulletin

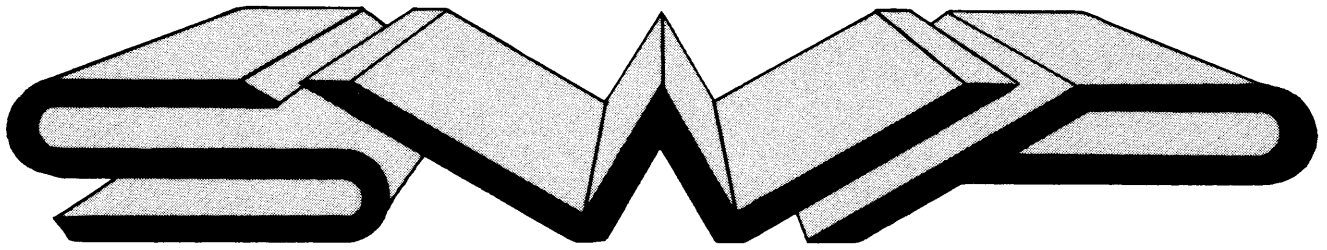
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Some Comments on Party Policy and Tactics
in the Antiwar Movement

By Tom Kerry

In a remarkable virtuoso performance entitled: "Remarks on the Antiwar Movement," by Comrade David Fender, the party is admonished, not once but repeatedly, to proceed in all matters concerning theory, strategy, tactics, organization procedure and especially, terminology, with "clarity, precision and firmness." Excellent advice and greatly appreciated, I am sure, but obviously intended for others. For, while no one can easily quarrel with the author's manifestation of the granite-like quality of the latter of his prescribed triad, numbers one and two are sadly conspicuous by their absence.

Following a recent brief visit our critic has emerged as a self-proclaimed authority on party procedure. He takes the party to task for not having exercised the necessary firmness in calling to order a group of comrades who had introduced a counter-resolution prior to the last YSA convention embodying a line contrary to that of the party. This dereliction, he complains, is not the first but the fourth of a series of similar defaults. His solution? That the party promulgate a set of rules, "in writing," setting forth "the correct procedure for party YSAers to follow, or any party member working in an outside organization."

Such sterile schematism is characteristic of Fender's whole methodology. To begin with, we do not equate the YSA, with other "outside" organizations. At least up to now, party members working in outside organizations, constitute a minority (and most often a very small minority) of the membership. Under the circumstances they operate as a "fraction" under the direct supervision, direction and control of the appropriate party political unit.

Does Fender suggest that party members in the YSA be organized into a fraction and operate under the direct control and discipline of the party? Given the present composition of the YSA, the relationship between party and non-party members, it would not only be stupid but self-defeating.

Party organizational principles, practices and procedures are designed to serve political ends. Our aim is to build a mass revolutionary youth organization not a junior replica of the party. If we succeed, and I believe we will, we can anticipate that party members will probably be a minority in such a mass organization confronting other tendencies in a struggle for political hegemony. Under such circumstances it may become necessary to operate as we do in other "outside" organizations as a disciplined fraction under the direct supervision and control of the party. But that is music of the future.

Our present task is to develop, train and educate a youth cadre capable of providing leadership to a mass revolutionary youth organization. A leadership able to stand on its own feet, working in close collaboration with the party leadership, to achieve a most important political goal. And we consider that the worst possible course in the carrying out of this task is to stand poised, like a harsh schoolmaster, ready to rap over the knuckles any young comrade guilty of committing the "error" of violating established party procedure.

Which brings us to the specific question under consideration: the nature of the "errors" in the situations cited by our critic and whether the party leadership acted correctly in refraining from direct intervention. To begin with, it may come as a surprise to comrade Fender to learn that the party leadership acts in accordance with the principle that political considerations take precedence over questions of party organizational procedure. That is why we have never tried to codify a set of "rules" applicable on all occasions without regard to time, place and circumstance. Nor is it possible to do so. We proceed according to a set of general principles, historically evolved and refined through long experience, into the theory and practice of democratic centralism.

Democratic centralism is a dialectical concept embodying a unity of opposites. Again, depending on time, place and circumstance, one or another side of the unified concept comes to the fore. For example: in periods of pre-convention discussion, when all questions are up for consideration and decision, the emphasis is on the "democratic" side of the unity. When the convention meets and makes its decisions the emphasis is on the "centralist" side; i.e. all party members are required to carry out the decisions of the majority. (Needless to say this one example hardly exhausts the very rich content of the concept but is intended merely as an illustration.)

We can now proceed to consider the nature of the error committed by the comrades whom Fender chides for violating party procedure. As party members they were obligated to carry out the line adopted by the party in its antiwar activity. Correctly understood, the resolution they submitted to the last YSA convention embodied a line contrary to that adopted by the party. This was an error.

The error was compounded when they formed a grouping and demanded equal time to present their views to the convention. Equal time is normally accorded, not to criticisms or amendments, but to line documents. Despite their disavowal of intention to challenge the line of the convention resolution their actions appeared to bolster the suspicion that they were bent on utilizing the YSA convention as a vehicle for overturning the line of the party governing a very important area of activity.

Was the party leadership warranted in intervening and calling the comrades to order? Formally, yes. It would be an absolutely intolerable situation, given the present composition of the YSA, for the party to have one line and the YSA a diametrically opposite position. However, there was no question in our minds, but that the comrades involved were absolutely loyal to the party and that it was not their intention to convert the YSA into a battleground over party policy in the antiwar movement. Their "error" was in not having thought through the implications of what was an untenable position.

Therefore, political considerations were given precedence over organization procedure, and in the course of further consideration and discussion the comrades became convinced they were committing an error and withdrew their resolution, reserving the right to present their criticisms over policy implementation to the convention. I believe the entire organization, with perhaps a very few exceptions, learned a great deal by going through the actual experience. In this instance, the process of education was best served by foregoing procedural "firmness" for the sake of political "clarity." In this case, intervention by the party leadership could well have diverted the necessary political discussion into a wrangle over organizational procedure.

The "errors" cited in the other cases, that of the Robertson and Wolforth cliques and young Fox, were of an altogether different order -- although to a formalist all colors and shadings tend to assume an identical hue. In these cases we were obviously dealing with disloyal individuals and groupings bent on splitting from the party. Does Fender really believe that any amount of "education" on correct procedure would have influenced or altered by one iota the factional frenzy which preceded their expulsion from the party? It is hard to believe that even a confirmed formalist could be so naive. In any case, there was no need for the party leadership to intervene as we had the utmost confidence in the ability of our youth cadre to handle this problem -- which, I must say, they proceeded to do with neatness and dispatch.

We need not be too much concerned about the "errors" made by our young comrades so long as they learn from their mistakes, do not persist in them and avoid repeating them. It is a vital and indispensable part of their education. And no set of procedural rules, no matter how elaborate or systematized, will provide a guarantee against the commission of procedural -- and even more serious -- errors. As witness, for example, the innovation introduced by Fender into our pre-convention discussion.

Under the guise of teaching the comrades functioning in "outside" organizations how to go about presenting their differences with party political policy, he engages in a belated

polemic against individuals, resolutions and documents, which were part of the pre-convention discussion in another, "outside" if you please, organization. Were the party leadership to proceed with appropriate Fenderite firmness we should declare this whole section of his contribution out of order. Instead, with the permission of the YSA, we make these documents available so that the comrades will at least have some idea of what he's talking about.

I sincerely trust that our procedural dereliction in this instance is not interpreted as a license to stage a rerun in party pre-convention periods of YSA pre-convention discussions.

Our critic introduces us to yet another innovation which, I confess, is without precedent in our movement. He starts out with the laudable aim of teaching the comrades how to go about presenting their differences with party policy. In the guise of "criticisms" he proceeds to attack the political line of the party, in toto, and in the process advances a diametrically opposite line, and concludes -- by calling upon the party to "reject the position of the PC draft as totally unacceptable." And what line is to be substituted for that of the PC draft resolution? Fender's "criticisms" perhaps? No, in place of the line embodied in the PC draft resolution, the "party" must "begin to work out a new one." (My emphasis)

Meanwhile? Meanwhile, the party will remain suspended in mid-air, having rejected one line to begin working out another. I submit, comrades, so awkward a posture is conceivable for a procedural innovator but not for a serious political party.

To pursue the subject a bit further. The party, as an entity, does not formulate, compose or draft, convention resolutions. That is the responsibility of the leadership, and of such individuals or tendencies who differ with the line of the leadership.

The party leadership is elected by the convention on the basis of its political line. Assuming for a moment, that the convention responded to Fender's clarion call to reject "as totally unacceptable," the line of the PC draft. Upon what basis would the convention proceed to elect a party leadership?

The problem, as our young critic puts it, is to put the party "back on the proletarian revolutionary road." And the "one question" that remains to be answered, as he phrases it is: "How has a petty bourgeois tendency been able to reflect itself in the party?" The "question," you will note, is no question at all, or, it is what is sometimes referred to as a loaded question. Not "has" but "how." (Can't you imagine how the members of a YMCA debating society would just swoon at so clever a display of forensic dexterity?)

So...the leadership has derailed the party from the "proletarian revolutionary road," and, in addition, has aided, abetted and fostered a pernicious "petty bourgeois tendency" in the party. Certainly Fender could never agree to permitting such a leadership to undertake the chore of beginning to draft another resolution. What then is the solution? It really is very simple and one that has proven most effective up to now. Why didn't Fender and/or his co-thinkers, if any, proceed to incorporate his line in the form of a resolution for discussion by the membership and action by the convention; a resolution endowed with all of those indispensable attributes in which the PC draft is so lacking, namely: "clarity, precision and firmness." But that is not his method.

Comrade Fender casually informs us, for example, that during the pre-convention discussion in the YSA, he wrote a letter taking issue with the documents submitted by the leadership. "My conclusion," he opines, "after reading these two documents, was that they were completely inadequate to prepare our organization for the coming period and that it was necessary to write two new resolutions." (My emphasis) For who to write "two new resolutions?" Obviously, the authors of the resolutions felt that they were eminently adequate to prepare "our organization for the coming period," otherwise they would not have submitted them.

* * *

Our young critic's political lucubrations are no more enlightening than his procedural innovations. He begins by summarily rejecting the basic premise upon which our entire policy in the antiwar movement is based. Once having rejected our fundamental premise what earthly sense does it make arguing about tactics? If our participation in the antiwar movement is a violation of principle why bother to expatiate about the horrendous tactical blunders the party is making in its antiwar work? Let us follow the rather tortuous logic which leads to a somewhat startling conclusion.

The basic premise upon which our antiwar policy is based rests upon the fact that for the first time in this country an antiwar (pacifist) movement arose in opposition to war while the armed conflict was actually in progress. It is this fact that endows it with its unique quality. It is this that makes it something new and different from pacifist movements of the past, or what is commonly referred to as "classical" pacifism.

In the past, Lenin and especially Trotsky, bitterly flayed organized pacifism as a delusion and a snare. They repeatedly underscored the role that it played as a betrayer of the wholly progressive pacifist (antiwar) sentiments of the masses. The professional pacifists, they taught, the pacifist leaders, fulminated and thundered against war and

for peace prior to the outbreak of armed conflict, only then to utilize the prestige and authority acquired as "fighters against war" to dragoon the masses into the slaughter. The characteristic trait of the pacifist leaders, Trotsky pointed out, was to speak out against war in times of peace, to declare themselves against war in general, while always finding "exceptional" reasons for supporting the particular war in which the capitalist ruling class was engaged.

This was an historical fact, easily recognized as such, without the need of having recourse to "sociological" embellishments about the nature of the petty bourgeoisie, etc., etc. It was the historical truth as they knew and recorded it in their time. Lenin and Trotsky were the foremost Marxist thinkers of the 20th century. Yet they did not, nor could they be expected to, anticipate the actual course of historical development in this century. Neither ever pretended to "speak the last word," or did they ever suggest that those who came after them would be relieved of the necessity of thinking, analyzing and acting on the basis of concrete, historically evolved, phenomena.

Comrade Fender proceeds the other way around by dissolving the concrete in abstract flights of verbal pyrotechnics. He rejects the fact that there has been any "qualitative" change in the role played by the pacifist movement. What has really changed, he avers, is the character of the war. "The war in Vietnam," he instructs us, "is not a classical war." It is not an interimperialist war "for a re-division of the world's markets as was WWI and WWII." So far, so good. What then is it?

"The war in Vietnam," we are told, "represents the focal point of the international class struggle -- the workers states on the one hand and the U.S. capitalist class on the other." Ergo? "Only by understanding that this war represents class struggle can we begin to understand that the petty bourgeois peace movement in the U.S. and the split in the pacifist ranks are not unique or unprecedented phenomena. These two phenomena are indirect and direct reflections of the heroic and strong resistance of the Vietnamese freedom fighters representing the interests of the working class."

This valiant resistance, we are told, has created doubts in a certain section of the capitalist ruling class with some of them having concluded "that the present tactics are harmful to their interests." And it is this, we are lectured, that "has provoked a split among the capitalist class of which the petty bourgeois peace movement is only a reflection." (My emphasis)

The "petty bourgeois peace movement," then, is merely a reflection of the tactical differences between sections of the capitalist ruling class and is directly dependent on such

existing differences not only for its origin but for its continued viability. You know, the "hawks" and the "doves."

Let us now summarize. The war in Vietnam is not a "classical" imperialist war but a class war. In fact, it is the "focal point" in the international class struggle in which the workers' states are pitted against U.S. capitalism in a struggle for survival. In this showdown the U.S. capitalist "doves" have enlisted on the side of the angels, dragging in their wake the "petty bourgeois antiwar movement." Because, you see, the petty bourgeoisie "cannot play an independent role." They must either support one of the two decisive class forces, the working class or the capitalist class. And, in view of the fact that the American working class is involved only peripherally in the antiwar movement the petty bourgeoisie have no alternative but to hook on to those representatives of the U.S. capitalist class who oppose Washington's war policy and who thus become unwitting allies of the working class camp. Make sense of it those who can!

Let us pursue the matter a little further. Fender's caricature of Marxist sociology leaves out of consideration the cornerstone of his thesis, namely: that the war is the "focal point of the international class struggle." (My emphasis). Measured on that scale the relationship of class forces appears altogether different. The choice is not so narrow as our critic would have us believe. The question of an "independent role" is not involved. And, most important of all, "scientific Marxist nomenclature" is preserved intact.

Measured on the scale of international class struggle on what grounds does our critic exclude the American antiwar movement from engaging in the struggle as allies of the working class camp? Leaving aside "Marxist nomenclature" for the moment, which side -- the petty bourgeois, pacifist, antiwar movement -- is it on? The Vietnamese freedom fighters seem to think that the American antiwar movement is on their side -- are they wrong, have they been deceived, is it all an optical illusion?

But, our critic plays his trump card, it is not an anti-imperialist pacifist antiwar movement, and unless we proceed forthwith to transform it into that we should wash our hands of the whole business, or -- as our intransigent critic puts it -- split the movement "every day of the week if need be" and, I presume, twice on Sunday. After a while such uncompromising "firmness" becomes downright frightening!

Is the antiwar movement "anti-imperialist?" It all depends upon what yardstick is used in defining the term. Insofar as the antiwar movement engages in struggle against the war in direct opposition to the policy of the capitalist government it is objectively anti-imperialist. Insofar as the movement is not subjectively anti-capitalist it is not.

Our young tutor obliterates the distinction and comes up with an amazing maxim: "Anti-imperialism," he asseverates, "is a trait of the working class while pacifism is a trait of the middle class, and to cross the two is to make a mockery of scientific Marxist nomenclature." Are these remarkable "traits" acquired or inherent? Our critic doesn't tell us. If inherent, there is nothing we can do about it. If acquired, there is some hope.

In both instances, though, what is involved is the matter of consciousness (subjective) "traits." Our critic does speak at some length about the pacifist "trait" of the petty bourgeois middle class. The typical petty bourgeois, he tells us, "does not want to send his son to war or go to die himself. He does not want to pay the higher prices and taxes caused by militarism. Therefore," he concludes, "the petty bourgeoisie is susceptible more than anyone else to all gimmicks and solutions which promise him 'peace,' because above all, he is a pacifist and wants peace."

And the typical proletarian? Presumably he dotes on sending his son to war, delights in going to die himself and just drools over the prospect of paying higher prices and taxes to support the wars of his capitalist masters. What rubbish!

And is it true that "anti-imperialism" is a proletarian trait? I sincerely wish it were so. As a matter of fact the majority of the American working class are not anti-capitalist, in their overwhelming majority they are not even class conscious, let alone being politically conscious enough to be "anti-imperialist." Unfortunately, they have not yet progressed beyond the stage of trade union consciousness. But this much we can say, when they do, even our critic will not long remain ignorant of the fact.

Comrade Fender reduces the whole question of imperialism to what he views as a dichotomy between economic gain and political aim. The war in Vietnam is not an imperialist war for economic gain, he says, because U.S. capitalism, far from profiting by the venture, is actually losing money on the deal. Its aim is "political" not economic, and therefore does not fall into the category of a "classical" imperialist war. But politics, what Lenin defined as "generalized economics," still serves economic aims and vice versa. What is involved in the war of U.S. capitalism in Vietnam is not only the exploitation of that country alone but the whole of Southeast Asia; and not alone of Southeast Asia but of the entire "underdeveloped" world. Vietnam is today truly the focal point of the world revolution. The stakes are enormous and cannot be reckoned by casting up a balance sheet, a profit and loss account, of how much is being spent and of what the prospects are of a profitable return on the monetary investment. That is the method of a petty bourgeois bookkeeper and not of a revolutionary politician. If

the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam is not a genuine imperialist war, then it will have to do until a real one comes along.

* * *

I refrain from pursuing Fender's tactical ruminations anent the proper use of slogans, withdrawal vs. negotiations, etc., etc. That cud has already been chewed to death. And, as I remarked above, there is no profit in arguing about subordinate tactical matters when questions of political principle are involved. There is, however, one exception which deserves some consideration as it has been raised in the past a number of times during the course of our participation in the antiwar movement: the tactic of the united front.

Just what is the character of the formation that has arisen in the course of development of the antiwar movement and what is our relation to it? It can be said at the outset, that even if we grant there is nothing unique about some aspects of the antiwar movement, the formation itself is decidedly unique; i.e., nothing like it has been seen before in this country. When comrades cast about to find some analagous experience in the history of the party they find none to serve as a secure mooring upon which to anchor our tactical approach.

Obviously, the so-called "classical" form under which the united front tactic was applied in the past does not appear relevant to the existent formation. If not a united front then what is it? A coalition, a bloc, an alliance, a confederation, or some combination of these, just what is it? Unfortunately, like with some other things, language does not keep pace with the historical development. There just is no new word, that I know of, to adequately define this new phenomenon. It would certainly simplify matters if there were, terminologywise (in Madison Avenue jargon) if not otherwise.

For the simon-pure sectarian this poses no problem. Looking back in history he "discovers" that the united front tactic as projected by the Bolsheviks was intended to apply to agreements between mass organizations. Finding no replica of the past in present day reality he washes his hands of the whole mess and takes refuge in the limbo of infantile leftism there to await the day when history finally catches up with doctrinaire prescription. A prime example of this type of sectarian approach is Gerry Healy, general secretary, of the British Socialist Labour League.

Writing a series of two lengthy articles in The Newsletter, Jan. 7 and Feb. 11, 1967, under the general title: "The Real Meaning of the United Front," Healy explains why the SLL will have no part of any "united front" antiwar movement in Great Britain. "The united front tactic," he affirms,

"was developed in order to deal with a situation where you had a mass communist party and a mass reformist organization." Here we have stated the alleged "classical" formula for the united front tactic. (I say "alleged" because it is an extremely oversimplified definition, but let it pass for the moment.)

Healy then proceeds to elaborate on this theme. The united front, he avers, "was essentially conceived of as a tactic governing relations between mass organizations and not groups or small parties who did not represent the mass of the working class." As the Labor Party, which includes the trade unions, is the only mass working class organization in Great Britain, you can readily see how this effectively rules out any "united front" antiwar action. A rather dreary outlook. But hold, there is yet hope! In a second article in The Newsletter, under the title: "How NOT to Defend the Vietnamese Revolution," (a very appropriate title, I thought) Healy offers a straw to cling to:

"If," he blandly assures his constituents, "the Socialist Labour League was a mass organization it would endeavour to involve the Labour Party in a joint campaign against the war in Vietnam, but this is not the case." And in the meantime?

"The Socialist Labour League," he concludes, "is, therefore, forced to confine itself to a propaganda political preparation for the struggle in defence of the Vietnamese people." If everyone will just be patient enough to mark time until Healy's SLL develops into a mass communist party so that he could then enter into a united front pact with the mass reformist Labor Party the whole problem will be neatly solved. What tripe! We expect the Vietnam war to go on for a long time -- but not THAT long!

Meanwhile, the British working class is not reconciled to waiting for Healy's "mass communist party" to materialize. Their impatience was expressed at the recent Labor Party conference, voting a resolution, 2,752,000 to 2,633,000, calling upon the Labor Government to "dissociate itself completely," from U.S. policy in Vietnam. The N.Y. Times, Oct. 7, reports that: "The audience cheered a number of highly critical speeches on Vietnam. Alan Campbell McLean, a Scottish delegate, compared the United States action in Vietnam to the German bombing of Stalingrad in World War II. He said that American troops had 'no legal or political or moral right' to be in Vietnam."

The vote is indicative, but not truly representative of the feelings of the British working class who, in their overwhelming number support the sentiment expressed by the majority resolution voted by their representatives at the Labor Party conference. This is good so far as it goes. True, it is no substitute for effective action. But it does

present the antiwar forces in Great Britain with an opening to press for implementing actions by the trade unions and Labor Party constituency groups. And it is at least one thousand times more effective "propaganda" than all of Healy's ultra-leftist gibberish.

Healy's defense of the "classical" form of the united front against "revisionist" corruption is a prime expression of the tendency of infantile leftism to use the cover of "Marxist nomenclature" to cloak a policy of abstention from the real struggle. Or, as Lenin put it: "The surest way of discrediting and damaging a new political (and not only political) idea is to reduce it to absurdity on the plea of defending it." This is precisely what Healy does to the idea of the United Front.

Let us examine the idea of the united front from the viewpoint of "terminology" or "nomenclature" if you will. It may come as a surprise to many comrades to learn that the "nomenclature" came some time after the idea had been long in practice. In a speech to the Executive Committee of the Communist International held in November 1922, Zinoviev pointed out that: "The slogan of the United Front [was] first formulated by our Executive in December, 1921," when a united front campaign was launched on an international scale.

The theses on the united front were formally adopted by the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. (Comrades will find the text of the theses, which were drafted by Trotsky for consideration by the Feb. 1922 plenum of the ECCI, on page 91 in volume 2 of "The First Five Years of the Comintern.") But, as pointed out above, the idea of the united front had been part of the tactical arsenal of Bolshevism for some time before.

Lenin's important treatise on communist (Bolshevik) tactics, "Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder," published in 1920, never once employs the term, united front. Yet, in this classical polemic against the disease of ultra-leftism, is contained a rich exposition of the united front idea as applied throughout the whole history of Bolshevism dating back to its very inception at the turn of the century. Consistent with his whole method, Lenin pinpoints those social, class and political divisions which capitalism engenders, which make necessary the application of the united front tactic, although he does not call it that:

"Capitalism would not be capitalism if the 'pure' proletariat were not surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types intermediate between the proletarian and the semiproletarian (who earns his livelihood in part by the sale of his labor power), between the semiproletarian and the small peasant (and petty artisan, handicraft worker and small master in general), between the small peasant and the middle

peasant, and so on, and if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata, if it were not divided according to territorial origin, trade, sometimes according to religion, and so on. And from all this follows the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the vanguard of the proletariat, for its class-conscious section, for the Communist Party, to resort to manoeuvres, agreements and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small masters.

"The whole point lies in knowing how to apply these tactics in order to raise, and not lower, the general level of proletarian class consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win. Incidentally, it should be noted that the victory of the Bolsheviki over the Mensheviki demanded the tactics of manoeuvres, agreements and compromises not only before but also after the October Revolution of 1917, but such manoeuvres and compromises, of course, as would assist, accelerate, consolidate and strengthen the Bolsheviki at the expense of the Mensheviki. The petty-bourgeois democrats (including the Mensheviki) inevitably vacillate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between bourgeois democracy and the Soviet system, between reformism and revolutionism, between love-for-the-workers and fear of the proletarian dictatorship, etc. The proper tactics for the Communists must be to utilize these vacillations, not to ignore them; and utilizing them calls for concessions to those elements which are turning toward the proletariat -- whenever and to the extent that they turn towards the proletariat -- in addition to fighting those who turn toward the bourgeoisie. The result of the application of correct tactics is that Menshevism has disintegrated, and is disintegrating more and more in our country, that the stubbornly opportunist leaders are being isolated and that the best elements among the petty-bourgeois democrats are being brought into our camp." (All emphasis by author.)

In another section, Lenin declares that "the whole history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is full of instances of manoeuvring, making agreements and compromises with other parties, bourgeois parties included.

"To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted and complicated than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to refuse beforehand to manoeuvre, to utilize the conflict of interests (even though temporary) among one's enemies, to refuse to agree and compromise with possible (even though temporary, unstable, vacillating and conditional) allies -- is not this ridiculous in the extreme?" (Emphasis by author)

Lenin uses the terms bloc, alliance, agreements, etc., interchangeably throughout his work, in content synonymous

with the tactic of the united front, though the latter term had not yet come into common usage. And nowhere does he suggest that the tactic was intended to apply only where there existed rival mass communist and mass reformist parties. In fact, prior to 1917, there were no such mass formations in Russia. Further, even in the early 1920's, after the first spontaneous revolutionary surge in Western Europe failed to conquer power and the Comintern, under the prodding of Lenin and Trotsky, was constrained to sound the call for a temporary retreat, such mass formations existed in only a few countries.

Yet, when the Comintern launched its campaign for application of the united front tactic, it was specifically designated as an "international campaign." For example, in the above mentioned speech by Zinoviev to the Nov. 22, 1922 meeting of the ECCI, he declared: "The United Front was really the first international campaign which the International attempted on a large scale." As such it was to be applied in consonance with the relationship of forces in each country, taking all subjective and objective factors into consideration.

Tactics are always concrete. Or, as Lenin observes in his work on "Left-Wing" Communism: "Tactics must be based on a sober and strictly objective appraisal of all the class forces of the particular state (and of the states surrounding it, and of all states the world over) as well as of the experience of revolutionary movements." (Emphasis in original)

So much for Healyite historiography. To return for a moment to our young critic from afar. He is upset no end about the interchangeable application of the terms, "coalition, united front and bloc," and what is worse, of "even combining them -- 'broad united front type coalition' (!)." (The paranthetical bang is his, not mine.) He considers it highly improper to take such liberties with "traditional" Marxist nomenclature. The word "coalition," we are scolded, is "traditionally" applied exclusively to "coalition politics." Does this mean that we are no longer opposed to coalition politics? Or as he puts it with another of his loaded "questions:" "Is it still proper for us to denounce coalition politics?" Off hand, I would say yes, it is. For, if memory serves me, it seems that The Militant does just that in almost every issue and no one, to my knowledge, has yet registered an objection.

Where is it written that the word "coalition" must be expunged from our political lexicon unless it applies exclusively to "coalition politics?" Why this ritual genuflection to linguistic dogma? According to my copy of Webster's Collegiate dictionary, the word coalition is defined as, "a temporary alliance for joint action." The same can be said of our "traditional concept," the united front. It

seems to me that the word "coalition" as defined by Webster, an acknowledged authority on such matters, is quite appropriate.

I am afraid that our critic suffers from the affliction that Trotsky once diagnosed as "philological scholasticism." What a dismal method, this juggling of words, this twisting and distorting of words, phrases and sentences to laboriously set up spurious straw men to serve as a substitute target for the real thing; this use of the loaded question which is no real question but is designed to absolve the questioner of responsibility for an affirmative statement; etc., etc., etc. And all in the name of "clarity, precision and firmness."

Which of these terms shall we employ in defining our tactic within the antiwar movement? Any and all, either separately or in combination, interchangeably or together, so long as we are certain that our objective appraisal of the phenomenon is correct. The forms it assumes are complex because the movement is unique. There does not exist in this country a mass communist party and a mass reformist party so the so-called "classical" form of the united front tactic obviously does not apply. That is, it is not based on formal agreement between formally constituted organizations, mass or otherwise.

The antiwar formation is composed of diverse organizations, groups and individuals, always shifting, rarely the same, knit together at moments of action in a temporary coalition for a limited objective. After each major action the centrifugal tendency inherent in so heterogeneous a formation threatens to make it fly apart. The cement that holds it together is common opposition to U.S. administration policy in the Vietnam war. How long it will endure in its present form is anyone's guess.

Neither of the two "major" contending working class tendencies, Stalinism and Trotskyism, are in a position to establish their unchallenged hegemony over the movement. The organized Social Democrats remain outside and hostile. It is this "stalemate" which permits accidental figures with little or no organization following or support to play so prominent a part in the leadership of the movement. What is amazing about this patchwork formation is that it is held together at all. I believe that the SWP-YSA can claim a large part of the credit for this achievement. For despite the meagerness of our forces, our influence has exercised an important and often a decisive role in holding it together. And I speak of our influence not only in the organization but in the political sense, which is testimony to the correctness of our general line, both as regards slogans advanced, single issue character, and thrust toward massive national demonstration actions in the streets.

And so far as tactics are concerned, it is our concept of the united front tactic that has prevailed, as against those who sought to narrow and cripple the movement by imposing a programmatic character upon it. For when it comes to that question there is no one with whom we can come to agreement outside of a narrow circle of our sympathizers and supporters. The correctness of our line has been abundantly confirmed by experience. There is no reason to alter it in any of its basic essentials -- let alone throwing it overboard as our philological critic exhorts us to do. And I have not a single doubt that we will have the necessary tactical flexibility to meet whatever exigencies may arise in the future.

New York City

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For Another Revolution in Marxist Theory

By Jan Garrett

We too often forget that the Marxist method has never thoroughly triumphed in the socialist movement. After the recession of the 1848 revolution, Marx and Engels came to the conclusion that they would continue for a long period to stand scientifically above even those who came closest to agreeing with them. The long-term result of the same conditions led to the degeneration of the Second International; when Lenin's followers broke with its heritage, they did so on the basis of its worst political habits and only had begun to struggle against the less obvious, therefore more insidious, theoretical and pseudoscientific misconceptions of "official Marxism." The international Trotskyist movement has picked up this task, as part of its struggle with the worst bastard the workers' movement ever produced, Stalinism.

Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was the cornerstone of a struggle against theoretical sloppiness contained in the bastardized "Marxist" theory of stages.

In the history of Marxist theory, the permanent revolution will stand out as a qualitative leap, a revolution, in the struggle against revisionism. Yet this "revolution" was not permanent; the struggle goes on. And we must recognize that another (and perhaps more than one) "revolution" is required. Why?

1. Many of the best sources now available for the study of history are written by people under the influence of an adulterated Marxism.

2. Even the "classics" are now revealed to have certain serious defects. (For example, the "Communist Manifesto" not only failed to foresee numerous developments in capitalism such as the rise of imperialism and the national question, as Trotsky pointed out in "90 Years of the Manifesto" but it totally omitted the story of the slave trade in primitive capitalist accumulation and painted a too glorious picture of the sweeping rise of the capitalist system.)

3. Many brief insights in Marx have now come to be such fundamental principles in the world social organism that the worst thing we can do in the memory of the founder of scientific socialism is to maintain his theoretical proportions. One such insight was the permanent revolution. Another, which he did not even give a name, is the effect that distorts the normal production of value according to labor-time expended. Ernest Mandel has called this the productivity differential.

The next revolution in Marxist theory will be the integration of scientific socialism around this conception as well as the conception of surplus value production expounded in Vol. I of "Capital." Until this theoretical adjustment takes place, our (correct) analysis of the colonial revolution and the black struggle will be left suspended in air, without a dialectical unity with the well-thought out historical foundations of occidental Marxism. (The theory of permanent revolution, however much it is stretched, has never given an economic analysis of the origins of the colonies-metropolitan divergence.)

The industries of the world economic organism develop unevenly; those involved in the extraction of raw materials and in agriculture have a much lower ration of machine to manpower than those in so-called industrial production. Likewise, within the latter, certain tasks (janitors, stock "boys," porters, restaurant workers, etc.) are less machine-intensive than others. It is not, however, the simple product of the organic development of the economic organism which led to the concentration of the colored peoples of Africa-Asia-Latin America in raw materials and black people in service (or unskilled labor) tasks. History shows that capitalism, insofar as it has ever done anything consciously, has carried out this concentration consciously. (E.g. Africans and East Indians were hijacked and forced to work in the Americas in raw-materials-producing areas thousands of miles from their places of origins; India's superior dyed cotton fabrics were prevented by the British from being sold on the world market until the village handicrafts that underlay the former were destroyed: the skilled black plantation hands following the American Civil War were systematically discriminated against until they had been totally driven out of the skilled trades.)

A few men with control over complex machines have as much economic power as many who work with their muscles and simple tools. Highly productive and/or skilled labor was the first to unionize, not because it was the most oppressed but because it had the most economic leverage and could force the bourgeoisie to grant concessions. Unionization, in turn, led to the further rise in productivity, because the capitalists found mechanization a cheaper means to raise production than putting on more men at union scale. The productivity differential thus established between the union and non-union world, between the imperialist and colonial world tends to grow rather than diminish with time.

To the extent that the division between white and black labor coincides with the division between union and non-union populations, this same divergence is destined to grow. Even when we assume that there is a section of the population (mass-unionized industries such as Auto and Steel) where factory workers black and white share the same economic conditions, that does not destroy our observation that outside

this section, and thus in the class as a whole, the divergence between black and white workers is growing.

Because of the presence of the most oppressed sector of black people in the less productive spheres (those which color their psychology differently from factory workers), they are least capable of bringing economic pressure to bear against the system. There is, therefore, no hope of reform for them. They have to destroy the system -- make it unfunctional to such an extent that the whites either acquiesce or cooperate in its destruction. For the black man more than any other section of the American population, improvement in his condition is out of the question under the present structure.*

*(High productivity of skilled white workers makes it possible both to get wage concessions and still produce increasing profits for the boss.)

This gives rise to alternate moods of extreme militancy and despair.* We Marxists have no cause to contribute to this despair. If the industrial proletariat is best situated technically to reorganize the economy on a socialist basis, does this mean that we think it will do so without prodding? Even in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the social layer best suited to reorganize society on the new basis did not appear extremely willing to do so. It had to be prodded into action by the least economically prepared of all classes, the propertyless sansculottes. So also with the socialist revolution: That social layer best prepared technically for the socialist economy is not that best prepared psychologically for the break with, and death-struggle with, capitalism. Radical black masses will have to show the rest of the class just as the sansculottes showed the mass of the hesitant French bourgeoisie that life under the old system, however well one may have adapted himself to it, will be far more painful than constructing a new system.

*(The Chinese cultural revolution, the product of the productivity differential between China and the USSR as well as between China and the West, exhibits a combination of militancy and despair in another context. Moreover, the relatively high productivity of Soviet industry helps to explain the psychologically reformist opposition of working-class currents in Russia against the bureaucracy and of the bureaucracy against imperialism -- as contrasted with the Chinese ultra-leftism.)

The American Revolution will take place on the basis of the same relationship of forces, both in terms of the objective distribution of laborers in the economy and in terms of relative militancy, that exists today within the working class. A decisive struggle will take place in the presently unionized factories when revolutionary unionists fight the bureaucrats for leadership in the unions;

but the struggle for the right to strike and to organize new plants on the one hand and the fight for workers control on the other will both be merged with the fight for leadership, a political struggle for the allegiance of the class much more than a military confrontation with the bourgeoisie.

The "final conflict" -- the military-political one -- will look more like the rising of July 1967 writ large than the Flint sit-down strikes of 1937. White participation will be much larger and more genuine than last summer's, but the likelihood is that the participation of the black youth and workers will assure the bulk of the shock troops of the Revolution.*

*(I believe that by the unheard-of political and theoretical backwardness and the unheard-of economic advance the awakening of the working class will proceed quite rapidly. The old ideological covering will burst, all questions will emerge at once, and since the country is so economically mature the adaptation of the political and theoretical level to the economic level will be achieved very rapidly. It is then possible that the Negroes will become the most advanced section. We have already a similar example in Russia. The Russians were the European Negroes. It is very possible that the Negroes also through the self-determination will proceed to the proletarian dictatorship in a couple of gigantic strides, ahead of the great bloc of white workers. They will then furnish the vanguard. I am absolutely sure that they will in any case fight better than the white workers..."
Leon Trotsky on Self-Determination and Black Nationalism, p.18.)

Inasmuch as black people have suffered channelization into the sectors of productive life which gives the least economic power, they will have to hold onto their arms for a period after the taking of power to ensure that, together with their strategic position in the centers of commerce and communication, their military strength will enable them to assure the preferential job placement, educational opportunities, etc. which will bring about true equality of the black masses with the white masses in terms of productive power.* We might even speak, for a period, of the "dictatorship of the black proletariat in alliance with the civilized white workers."

*("...not even a socialist revolution can immediately destroy the accumulated memories, mistrust and suspicions of centuries, and, today, in this period of capitalist decline in America, the racial prejudices are more than ever based on economic privileges, possessed by one group of workers at the expense of another." -- 1939 SWP resolution on the black struggle.)

Postscript

I felt it necessary to submit these thoughts to the discussion, despite their lateness of development, because the "On the Convergence" bulletin had taken the unsatisfactory form of an abstract outline. It is better to stir dialectic in which comrades may hotly contest new ideas than to put off bringing our theory up to the requirements of our time. We are no farther from our revolution, the most important, than the Bolsheviks were from theirs in 1907, only a few years . . . and we cannot be successful with partly adequate revolutionary schemas any more than we can with a partly adequate party.

Detroit

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