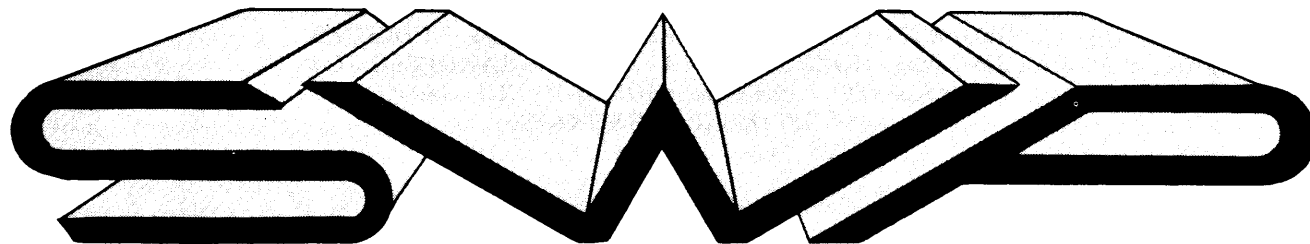


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EXCERPTS FROM 1972 SOCIALIST ACTIVISTS AND
EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE SPEECH ON THE
COLONIAL REVOLUTION: A REPLY TO MASSEY,
SHAFFER AND SMITH

by Tony Thomas, Lower Manhattan Branch, New York Local

In their "Letter to the Political Committee on the Formation of a Political Tendency," Comrades Massey, Shaffer and Smith make a number of serious charges in regard to our party's positions on the colonial revolution. Specifically they charge that in regard to Palestine, our position is "reminiscent of the two-stage theory of revolution of the Menshevik-Stalinists." They also state that the SWP's position in that regard was "uncritical support to Al Fatah," in regard to the strategy of the Palestinian revolution.

On Bangladesh, they state we share "the conception that democratic or nationalist struggles automatically develop into conscious revolutionary ones without intervention by the vanguard party."

In both cases these statements reflect a complete falsification of the party's position in relation to the two specific struggles and the overall colonial revolution.

To show how far these comrades' factional charges are from the real positions we have expressed in relation to the colonial revolution, I would like to introduce into the discussion several excerpts from the speech I gave on the colonial revolution at last year's Socialist Activists and Educational Conference, specifically in relation to Palestine, Bangladesh and the question of democratic and transitional demands.

I have made no changes in the text of the speech except grammatical changes.

Palestine

The main organization of the Palestinian resistance after 1967 was Fateh, which preached what it called the strategy of non-interference. This approach combined the weakness of simplistic guerrilla struggle with the weaknesses of the two-stage revolution theory—a combination not uncommon in the colonial world.

The defeat of the Arab regimes by the Israelis led to a disillusionment of the masses with the capitalist and petit-bourgeois governmental leaderships in the Middle East including the Baathists of Syria and Iraq and the Nasserites of Egypt. Large sections of the Arab masses recognized the refusal of the Arab capitalists to arm them, or carry out a war of resistance following Israel's initial advances in the six-day war. They wanted to continue fighting and were frustrated by the capitulationist policies on the part of the Arab capitalists that led to their defeat.

They were open for a leadership independent of the Arab capitalists, dedicated to continuing the fight against Israel. When the Palestinian resistance movement began to appear, it was the pressure of the Arab masses that forced the Arab regimes to grant them aid and allow them rights to organize.

Instead of seeing the power of the Arab masses of Egypt, Jordan and Syria as crucial to the creation of the post-1967 openings they themselves filled, the Palestinian lead-

ership overemphasized the armed struggle, separated politically as well as physically from the needs and organizations of the non-Palestinian Arabs. They did not raise a series of demands for the Palestinian and Jordanian workers and peasants as well as those of other nationalities, nor did they consistently criticize the Arab capitalist states nor seek to build an independent movement to support their struggle in countries like Egypt and Syria.

This left the "Arab progressives" of Egypt and Syria with an open hand. Instead of having to openly attack the Palestinians, they (the "progressive Arab" regimes) simply refused to take any real actions when the Palestinians were attacked. In both Egypt and Syria, during this period, with no organized leadership for the mass anti-Zionist sentiment independent of these regimes, the regimes shifted to the right in their attitudes toward the Palestinians and a settlement with Israel.

The resistance also attempted to separate the armed struggle with Zionism from the overall revolutionary class struggle in the Arab East, especially the necessity of taking power from the Jordanian monarchy. They thought that by avoiding the question, they would be able to also avoid a confrontation with the Jordanian and other Arab capitalists.

During the upsurges in Jordan in 1970 before the September civil war, the Palestinians continued to attempt to compromise with the Jordanian reaction. They backed these compromises relying on their own military power and the supposed good auspices of the Egyptian and Syrian regimes. Such compromises between a bourgeois regime and a rising, revolutionary-minded mass movement can only have a short duration. They face the alternatives of either the seizure of power by the working masses or a bloody counterrevolution.

The revolutionists failed to mobilize the masses during several big working-class strikes and other struggles in Jordan when they and the masses had the initiative. This enabled the Jordanian ruling class to gain time and with U.S. and Israeli assistance to strike in September 1970 during a lull in mass action. Egypt, Syria and Iraq refused to aid them, even though they had armed forces within or near Jordan.

Already there are signs that elements of the Palestinian and Arab vanguards have learned some of these lessons. During the most recent phase of the Jordanian offensive against the Palestinians and during the Israeli attacks on Lebanon, demonstrations took place in Egypt and Lebanon, as well as Iraq and Syria where there is severe repression, against the complicity of their governments with the annihilation of the Palestinian resistance.

The chief lessons these militants must learn is the necessity of carrying on a struggle independent of all the bourgeois Arab regimes and the necessity of building revolutionary

socialist parties in all the countries of the Arab East. . . .

Bangladesh

With the exception of Vietnam, the Stalinists of Moscow and Peking's biggest betrayal in the colonial world in recent years has been in Bangladesh. Both took their positions in this struggle due to military alliances with capitalist states against each other—an unprincipled bloc with capitalist states against workers states. Moscow supported India to the extent of sending arms, in its war with Peking in the early 1960s. Peking is aligned with Pakistan—the U. S.'s number one ally in the area. Neither side saw their interests allying with the Bengalis as an oppressed nationality or with the working classes of India, Pakistan or Bangladesh against the bourgeoisies.

The roots of this struggle were in the insistence on self-determination of the East Bengalis. Within less than a year, Bangladesh faced a general strike with demonstrations of over one million in Dacca, guerrilla warfare in which most of the country was liberated from the Pakistanis, at the cost of the murder of over one million Bengalis and massive destruction of towns and villages, and the Indo-Pakistan war. Following that war the Indian government and the Awami League government struggled to disarm the Bengali masses and demobilize whatever mass movement remained.

In this entire period, the socialist currents in Bangladesh were dominated by Moscow and Peking. They were incapable of playing an independent role. The many different Maoist groups were unable to win leadership of the struggle away from the bourgeois Awami League because they opposed the Bengali national movement. Even those Maoists who broke from this policy were tainted by their former Maoist positions. They simply transferred their two-stage theory from one of support to the Pakistani regime to one of support to the Awami bourgeois regime.

The pro-Moscow Stalinists had the same strategy. They wholeheartedly supported the Awami League and the Indian capitalists against the Bengali masses.

Much of Bangladesh's suffering could have been avoided if a mass revolutionary socialist party had stood at the head of the Bengali masses. They could have used the national general strike and the upsurge in Bangladesh to take power and to prepare the Bengali masses to resist any invasion by Pakistan or imperialism.

Without this type of leadership, the national independence gained from Pakistan was only partial and distorted. Indian troops occupied Bangladesh for months, seizing property and industrial materials. The very forces that fought the hardest for independence—the Bengali guerrilla militias—were disarmed and disbanded. Imperialist economic exploitation continues, as does the plunder of Bangladesh by the Indian and Bengali capitalists. This is despite the immense and heroic struggle of the Bengalis for over a year.

Bangladesh's other lesson is that guerrilla warfare in and of itself is insufficient to win political power for the colonial workers and peasants. In both Bangladesh and the Palestinian struggle, large sections of the masses were armed. In Jordan's confrontations with the Palestinians, there were tens of thousands of trained commandos and thousands more members of part-time militias. In both situations the masses were militarily armed and organized,

but were not politically armed with a revolutionary socialist leadership with a clear strategy for establishing proletarian power.

Politically arming the masses does not simply mean making a formal demand for a workers government. Politically arming the masses takes place by a prolonged period of political struggle which joins the revolutionary vanguard and its program with the masses. Such a perspective includes struggle during the times the masses lack the consciousness and confidence needed to understand the necessity of taking power, and when they lack the organized might to do this. The attempt to use guerrilla tactics in isolation from the masses is a shortcut across the path of revolutionary strategy that only isolates revolutionists from the masses and prepares new defeats for the colonial revolution.

Transitional demands

To capture power in the colonial world, what is needed is a strategy based on linking together democratic and transitional demands that relate to the needs of the masses of workers and peasants, that give the self-confidence, class consciousness and revolutionary socialist organization that alone guarantees a successful socialist revolution.

If revolutionists in the colonial world were to remove democratic demands from their programs they would be disarmed more effectively than after a confrontation with a stronger military force. The denial of democracy itself is one of the basic aspects of imperialism, and nowhere is this more obvious than in colonial countries. . . .

But these democratic demands must be linked with a program of transitional demands if they are to be fully secured. Demands such as the sliding scale of wages and hours, the opening of capitalist books, workers control of production, nationalization of industry and finance, and the formation of a workers and farmers government, remain central to the tasks of revolutionists in the colonial world.

It must be remembered that along with the most backward rural exploitation, these colonial countries face the existence of a growing proletariat based on imperialist and local capitalist industries. To mobilize the working class and prepare it for the struggle for socialism these demands are necessary and must be introduced into the working-class movement through mass struggle and propaganda.

These demands are crucial to the achievement of the major democratic demands, in any way but in a distorted and partial manner.

While Lenin and Trotsky recognized that these countries had not achieved the level of advanced capitalist nations, they called for a socialist revolution and not simply a national-democratic revolution as the only means to overcome backwardness. This not only means that the historical destiny of the revolution in colonized and underdeveloped nations is the complete achievement of socialism, but that it is also necessary to utilize socialist measures to defend the national and democratic goals. Again, the only way to carry out these measures successfully in the face of imperialist and "national" capitalist attack, is the preparation and mobilization of the working class around transitional and democratic demands and the building of a revolutionary Marxist party based on that program.

Any examination of this speech on the colonial revolution or any other exposition of our party's real views on this question as expressed in adopted resolutions, reports or major articles in our press show that Massey, Shaffer and Smith's charges on these points are based on either slander and/or factional overexaggeration. The party, as always, bases its analysis of the colonial revolution on the Leninist and Trotskyist positions as expounded in the

Transitional Program and the theory of the permanent revolution. To the extent that Massey, Shaffer and Smith have launched their attacks on the actual positions of the party from what appears to be a sectarian position, it is they that are attacking the classic revolutionary socialist position on these questions.

April 12, 1973

TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF "POLITICAL" ANTHROPOLOGY

by Jan Garrett,
Twin Cities Branch

The following article grew out of an attempt to criticize the methods of Evelyn Reed's anthropology. I do not find fault with her belief that there was a primitive matriarchy. Non-Marxists like Bachofen, Briffault, Robert Graves and Elizabeth G. Davis have held and defended this idea. It can be dispassionately discussed. And various hypotheses concerning it can be tested against the data.

What is inappropriate from a Marxist viewpoint, is Evelyn Reed's uniformly rosy picture of primitive society, her dogmatic statements about vast epoch about which we still know very little, and the implication of what she says that humanity has only gone downhill since the heyday of the matriarchy.

One problem with Evelyn Reed has been her isolation from others working on similar problems. In her case it has been transformed into a dogmatic defense of *her* interpretation of what Marx and Engels wrote.

Party writers on various topics of Engels' *Origin of the Family* have emphasized certain aspects of what Engels and Marx wrote; they have also neglected or dropped still others. Among those things they apparently at least defend, at least in George Novack's case, is Marx's and Engels' Germanophile bias in the interpretation of early medieval history. Marx and Engels tended to see the German invaders of the Roman Empire as essentially barbarian and thus less tainted by the bad habits of class society, while the Greek and Roman civilizations represent for them the absolute low point of class society's attitude towards women. The Germans may once have been all that Engels claimed, but they were not by the time they took over the Roman Empire as he seems to have thought.

Marx and Engels also were unable to see Christianity as a basic institution of society—the social glue of European feudalism—instead of a mere quasi-illusionary superstructure. Underestimating the active role played by Chris-

tianity in the construction of patriarchal culture, Engels was led to situate the general rise of patriarchy at a too ancient date and to make it appear more *abrupt* than it was.

This error makes it difficult to explain the rise of patriarchy simply by expanding on what Engels wrote. This is one reason why Evelyn Reed has not come forth with a coherent explanation of the actual transition to patriarchy.

The rise of patriarchy parallels the growth and perfection of class society; this was a gradual process, though not without violent jerks, over the last 5,000 years, till we arrive at the "perfected" class and masculist social structure—capitalism.

This article is my opening contribution on this question. I reserve for later a fuller discussion of the historical questions alluded to above, including a solution to the problems: (i) why Europe developed capitalism rather than Africa or Asia; and (ii) why it was the males rather than females who got the edge when social stratification originally developed in the ancient world.

To "loosen up" the atmosphere created by Evelyn Reed's rigid schema, I will present some rather materialist considerations gleaned from the work of some anthropologists whom Evelyn Reed lumps together with "bourgeois patriarchalists." Next I will present a counterargument to Evelyn Reed's contention that female power in all of pre-class society could have hinged upon male ignorance of their role in reproduction. This will *not* lead back to the patriarchalist *a priori* rejection of matriarchalist theories, but hopefully will set the stage for a more careful discussion.

Then I will deal with a few considerations of method: whether it is Marxist to "start at the beginning," that is, leap back to some indefinite early date to start your exposition; and whether Evelyn Reed believes in a "primi-

tive Golden Age."

I. Anthropological Considerations on Matriarchy

The division of labor on sex lines is one of the first facts that strikes a student of early society. Leslie White writes this in *Evolution of Culture*:

"In every cultural system, men and women are distinguished by differences of behavior. . . . Hunting may be man's work, while women gather food. An occupation that is assigned to men in one cultural system may be confined to women in another, or shared by both sexes in a third. Weaving, cooking, milking, hoeing, and so on, are masculine in some cultures, feminine in others, and the occupation of either or both in still others."

It is noteworthy that no matriarchalist, either from the Graves' school (Elizabeth G. Davis) or the Engels-Briffault school (Evelyn Reed) challenges this argument, although Evelyn Reed feels uncomfortable about it, because it cuts across her attempt to make preclass society look like socialism.

Engels explicitly states in the *Origin of the Family* that the division of labor between the sexes is the oldest division of labor in existence.

This division of labor is the first cultural relation between the sexes. How does it arise if not out of the biological difference between the sexes?

A fact which Marxists have always recognized is that a species must first of all reproduce itself if it is to survive in competition with other species.

Human social nature is intimately tied to cooperation in labor, as Engels argued in his article "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man." It grows out of and modifies human biological nature, with which it at first exists in close proximity. The earliest social division of labor was even, in a sense, copied from the sexual division of reproductive "labor." (But we should not put too much emphasis on this.)

Discounting those cultural aspects which have been created by centuries of patriarchal culture, we must still grant that women may be different from men in about two percent of their physical makeup. I am talking about the traits that correspond to the 46th chromosome whose development in women makes them what they are and whose apparent deformation in men makes them men. This does not make women inherently weaker or stronger, by two percent or any other factor.

Any group of animals, be they woolly mammoths, Tule Elk or human beings, must survive in a certain number or they will not survive at all. This is an ecological certainty. It was thus a necessity for survival of the group that primitive people reproduce. In a presocialist society, of course, the biological burden of this falls on the women.

In a society prior to the development of any kind of farming (and herding post-dated hoe-farming), the following facts would seem to determine the role of women in reproduction. Infantile mortality was high and an early death was probable, as it is in all precapitalist society. Secondly, before animal domestication, the only source of milk for infants was their mother's (or other new mothers'). I conclude from this (without drawing any inferences about "human nature" or the socialist future) that primitive women must have been pregnant and nursing more often than modern women.

And it stands to reason that pregnant women nursing

with small infants cannot maintain the same speed of travel as men.

In *The Mothers*, Robert Briffault shows that women in various societies have been active in hunting, fishing, war, building, pottery, medicine, primitive industry and trade, areas which some have thought to be exclusively the males' province.

But not even Briffault denied the fact that the participation of women in at least two fields of ancient labor has been rare: hunting and offensive warfare. And I think the facts I have mentioned above more or less explain why this was so.

Whatever the reason, the division of social labor along sex lines was a real one in ancient society; it continues to be so in class society. (I think socialism will do something entirely new in this regard; that is, it will abolish this division of labor simultaneously with male supremacy which has, in a way, grown out of it and grafted itself onto it. This is implicit in the cultural aspect of the new wave of feminism and I think the party should pay more theoretical attention to this fact.)

I propose the following hypothesis to explain at least some of the major trends in the social division of labor in preclass society. Insofar as the activity of a primitive society consists on the one hand of labor that involves a wide radius of travel in a short period of time and on the other hand of intensive localized work, the women will tend to be the internal agents of the community and concentrate on the latter, while the men will tend to be the external agents of the community and concentrate on the former.

* * *

Primitive human groups were made up of human beings who were related by the fact of reproduction and of spouses who were originally from some other group. This enabled the small group, which could not face competition with a larger one, to form alliances by marriage with other groups like itself.

An often very crucial pattern is formed by the way in which individuals of one sex marry out and live in another group. This pattern is called (patri- or matri-) locality, depending on whether the wife goes to live with the husband's group or vice-versa.

Elman Service, author of *Primitive Social Organization*, asks himself what determines this, and offers the following explanation:

"Possibly a horticultural tribe is virilocal (i.e. patrilocal) or uxorilocal (i.e. matrilocal) depending on the relative strength of these two factors, warfare as opposed to the collaborative raising, processing, storage and distribution of food."

In addition to warfare, in some societies hunting is so important that it also leads to patrilocality. Peter Farb writes about the Native Americans of Lower California in a chapter of *Man's Rise to Civilization*:

"The patrilocal band . . . is distinguished from other kinds of bands because rules clearly dictate that the married couple must reside with the husband's family. The male child therefore grows up in his father's geographical area. . . . The married woman is an outsider. . . . There are several explanations for these rules, among them that at this level of society the male is tremendously

important as a hunter. If the male hunter were to live with his wife's family after marriage, he would then be hunting in territory unfamiliar to him."

At a slightly more complex cultural level, the ethnographic evidence points to the widespread existence of matrilineal society. Members of these societies also trace their social relations chiefly through their female relatives. Insofar as authority or small items of property are handed down from one generation to another, this is done mostly in the "female line."

Service describes the location of these peoples and tries to explain the reasons for their social structure:

"One notes first the uxori-local-matrilineal tribes are widely scattered in the primitive world—in parts of North and South America, Melanesia, Southeast Asia and Africa—but also that they are found typically in one kind of socio-economic situation; rainfall horticulture with the gardening done by women and with a number of nuclear families forming a close-knit local kin group, sometimes an actual residential longhouse.

"The suggestion in this situation is that in matrilineal tribes the significant factor must be the collaborative activities of the women: tending gardens, having common harvest or food-processing labor and commonly shared food storage, and in many cases (the Iroquois are a well-known example), even common cooking for the whole longhouse. It may be that the cooperation of the women makes their continued existence as a group a sufficient reason for uxori-local residence, even though hunting and warfare may remain important collaborative activities of the males. With respect to this latter point, it should be remembered that horticultural tribes are denser than bands so that intermarrying kin groups are no longer scattered distantly."

The general conclusion which I draw from these observations is that the social patterns established in pre-class society are in large measure a function of the relative power relations and indispensability of the two major teams of social labor, the female and the male, and also the particular methods of ensuring continuity of knowledge across the generational gap.

This process is at work around 3,000 B.C. in West Asia. At the time of the rise of militaristic societies, the military teamwork of the males gave birth to the first elements of patriarchal power.

In certain less complex societies, on the basis of the cooperative work done by the women, at least certain groups of them were able to monopolize religious and economic practices and the right to make important political decisions. The rights of certain females in this latter respect does not imply that the decision-making processes were egalitarian or democratic. But one can say they were not the exclusive province of males.

The majority of the examples of female power cited by Robert Briffault in *The Mothers* derive from rainfall horticultural society, as do the most firmly established claims of female contributions cited by Evelyn Reed. While it is a good guess that most technical developments in such societies were made by women, it is not provable. Since women were the horticulturalists and their sodalities (clubs) controlled the cultivation cycle, they also controlled the meager surplus product. It was probably, therefore, up to them whether or not the orphan wild calves brought back by the hunters who had killed the parents

would be fed, thus laying the basis for domestication.

* * *

I wanted to avoid making any general assertions about the egalitarian or matriarchal character of preclass society until we had laid a certain groundwork. Much can be said about early society and the role of women vis-a-vis men without doing so. Now let us turn to the possible generalizations one might try to make about preclass society.

(a) It was male-dominated just like class society. This much was refuted by L. H. Morgan and nobody has been able to make much of a case for it since, though some would have liked to.

(b) It was egalitarian.

(c) It was gynarchical—that is, women ruled. The word "matriarchy" is generally understood to have the same meaning as "gynarchy."

Evelyn Reed, however, tries to combine the two last alternatives, which are logically incompatible. I recognize of course that a mild gynarchy need not be as full of social contradictions as class society. But if this is the case she is arguing for, she ought not to use the term egalitarian without qualification.

But there is another problem with claiming egalitarianism for preclass society. Egalitarianism does not mean simple absence of highly developed class antagonisms. It refers to the fight against and the conscious suppression of inequality, both in the dictionary and in the Marxist lexicon. In preclass society neither equality nor general inequality was institutionalized. Individuals were regarded partly for their own unique accomplishments, partly for their functional roles within the sometimes intricate kinship-labor network or the various clubs modeled on the kin-clans.

Evelyn Reed errs in foisting onto preclass society categories that only class society's culture has created. It took the rise of Christianity, or at least pre-Christian philosophies such as Stoicism, to introduce the principle of equality of all *men* (before God). The bourgeois revolution transformed this into the idea of social-political equality; Marxism's egalitarian thrust is an outgrowth of this tradition, also involving a negation of its limitations, such as class society's patriarchalism.

II. Could Female Power Have Hinged on Male Ignorance of Their Role in Reproduction?

Evelyn Reed does not like Elman Service's explanation of why women are central to certain preclass societies, because the sweep of his argument does not extend to all preclass society before a certain date. She would rather attribute the power of women to the ignorance of men regarding how conception takes place. Thus, women become apparent wizards because of their reproductive power.

This approach was refuted fifty years ago. Lucien Levy-Bruhl wrote about discussions which were "carried on regarding the way in which the lowest types of primitives are accustomed to represent the reproductive function in man and the ideas they form of pregnancy. But possibly it might not have been altogether unprofitable to examine first of all the preliminary question—Can the problem of conception be brought before the primitive

mind in terms which allow such discussions to have any determining value . . . ?"

I hope no one will be prevented by the imperialist-influenced terminology from seeing the ethnological point he is making. He is speaking of the occult causes which are attributed to virtually everything in preclass culture.

"If death is never 'natural' to primitives, it is self-evident that birth cannot be either, and for the same reasons. . . .

"The aborigines of Australia . . . had [before any relations with whites] indeed noticed some of the physiological conditions of conception, and of the sexual act in particular. But the cause . . . remains quite subordinate as far as they are concerned; the true cause [to them] is mystic in its nature. Even when they have noticed that a child does not come into the world unless impregnation takes place, they do not draw the conclusion which appears quite natural to us. They persist in thinking that if a woman is pregnant, it is because a 'spirit' (usually that of an ancestor awaiting reincarnation and among those ready to be born) has entered into her, which of course implies that she belongs to the clan, subclan and totem proper to that spirit."

Further, "a mind which . . . is indifferent to the law of contradiction will admit both that the sexual act is the ordinary condition of conception, and at the same time declare that conception may occur without it." (The quotes were from *Primitive Mentality*.)

So we see that belief in a prescientific notion of the cause of pregnancy does not imply that the real cause was unknown. And women's role in reproduction was not the whole of the matter, even in the mystical view, for spirits may be influenced by male as well as female members of the tribe. Thus, at least one of Reed's major arguments for universal matriarchy receives a rather stunning blow.

There may be others which fare better. But the claim of Reed, which she borrowed not from Engels but from Robert Briffault, that women somehow led the men across the Great Divide from hominid ape to homo sapiens is not one of them. About all that Bob Vernon could say in defense of it was that it was no less likely than the male chauvinist reverse. But both are preposterous.

III. The Error in "Starting At the Beginning"

"Let us not put ourselves," wrote Marx in 1844, "in a fictitious primordial state like a political economist trying to clarify things. Such a primordial state clarifies nothing. It merely pushes the issue into a gray, misty past. It acknowledges as a fact or event what it should deduce, namely, the necessary relation between two things, for example, between division of labor and exchange. In such a manner theology explains the origin of evil by the fall of man. That is, it asserts as a fact what it should deduce.

"We proceed from a *present* fact of political economy. . . .

Why did Marx insist on starting in the present, in the result of history? Because that is the reality with which we are all directly involved; that is the ground on which we can test any claim that is made; we can see for ourselves.

Marx's economic theory is not a bold generalization of neutral facts which happens to correspond to the needs of the proletariat. Rather it is a theory based on the living, verifiable present, to which historical facts perhaps offer

a horizon, a periphery of vision, but cannot substitute for the direct sense-information of the here and now.

He starts *Capital* with an investigation of the commodity, because in the commodity the most essential aspects of modern economic reality are experienced. The commodity is the epitome of capitalism and the nodal point of human relations in the present world.

But the commodity relation postdates the origin of humanity by hundreds of thousands of years. Its extreme development postdates not only the origins of class society but also Marx's own life.

Engels does not seem to have completely understood this aspect of Marx's thought—and Marx did not always stress it. For example, it is stressed in the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Political Economy* but not in the Preface which, unlike the "Introduction," was published in Marx's lifetime. One gets the impression Marx thought the world was not ready to follow this aspect of his method, linked as it was to Hegel's, since Hegel had fallen into general disfavor at that time.

In any case, in the *Origin of the Family* and in parts of *Anti-Duhring*, Engels adopted, more or less, this posture of "the political economist trying to clarify things" which Marx had earlier criticized. The harm caused by his doing this was, of course, less than that of the political economists of whom Marx spoke, because Engels had *some* observational data, while the political economists had next to none to back their speculations.

I shall spare you a description of what happened to this posture in the hands of the theoreticians of the Second International. They became "prisoners of time"; they assumed that a historical method consisted in always "starting at the beginning" instead of starting from the most secure information and working towards the less secure.

If I were to attempt to describe the evolution of sexism down through the ages, I would first have to reconstruct history backwards, or unravel it, to peel off layer after layer like one might peel an onion, with the difference that each layer brings to the fore distinctly new questions which can be answered only by peeling off another layer, going farther back in time. In other words, we really have to have a good idea how modern sexism evolved out of feudal society before we can ask the questions about ancient society intelligently.

This is the only way we could avoid an arbitrary starting point, for the present situation gives us that.

Evelyn Reed appears to commit the error of the Second Internationalists I have just discussed. But it isn't her worst. That is yet to come.

IV. Evelyn Reed's Myth of the Golden Age

Mary-Alice Waters at the last Socialist Activists and Educational Conference correctly reminded us not to impose our concepts of the 1970s onto the times of the founders of Marxism and Leninism (i.e., 50 to 100 years ago) and judge them thereby. Evelyn Reed, on the other hand, suggests that we should impose today's ideas of the socialist future onto our preliterate ancestors of 5000 or more years ago!

Some of Reed's defenders will say that I am overcritical, that all she is trying to do is show that women can be political leaders, industrial innovators, and so on, and that such exploits are not solely the province of men. Her interest in ethnology is justified on that account.

If that were the sum of her claims for her theory of primitive society, one might not be as critical as I have been, although I would still raise the question as to how we can claim value for such a study when the intervening history is so fuzzy in our minds.

But the fact is, Evelyn Reed treats preclass society as a Golden Age. Her response to this charge is, "I never said it was a 'Golden Age'; that's a term thrown around by patriarchal academic anthropologists."

Of course she didn't; things do not stalk about with labels on them, announcing what they are in two words. Nevertheless, if you read Reed, and if you think, it will be clear that that is her basic attitude.

She wrote in Vol. 29 No. 12 of the Discussion Bulletin (June 1971): "What most people want today is a society freed from all domination, whether it is class, racial or sexual domination. And that is precisely [not even just "approximately," but "precisely"] what in its day the matriarchy was. It was a communal society based upon communal social relations and therefore upon complete equality between the sexes. That is why we can learn something from the prior existence of such an organization of society. For, *if equality between the sexes could exist in the communal society of the past, cannot we achieve the same thing in a socialist future?*" (Reed's emphasis.)

Is this not all unambiguous? We have not been evolving towards communism, albeit by an irregular route, but rather degenerating, evolving away from it. If we are to attain communism, we do it not as a revolution, built upon the positive supercession of private property and alienation, but as a counterrevolution, a return to a previously existing situation.

According to Reed, the argument for the Golden Age becomes a major pillar of feminist and Marxist consciousness. Actually, it would be a psychological crutch, exactly because of the reasons Reed cites in its favor. By arguing for a solution to humanity's problems that *repeats* what has already been done, when our material culture and historical experience were minimal, Evelyn Reed tends to cloud over the need to attend to the many detailed problems of *creating* a far more complex and essentially different liberated society in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Just because there is a lack of evidence for institutionalized oppression in preclass cultures, we are not automatically entitled to call it egalitarianism. It is a far cry from the supercession of the sexual division of social labor, a division of labor found in all preclass societies. But this supercession is a basic plank of modern feminism.

That Reed's theory is a Golden Age theory can be established on the evidence of another of her articles, the introduction to the new edition of Engels' *Origin of the Family*: "Savage society was founded upon the cardinal principles of liberty and equality for all." (P. 72, April 1972 *ISR*.)

She makes it appear as though primitive society was founded by some sort of social contract, instead of naturally arising as a mode of cooperation and division of labor to meet human needs. If this is not her meaning, is she trying to say that it is possible to have a society embodying *principles* of liberty and equality that came into existence spontaneously? Does she then wish to say that the 5000 years of agony under class society—that unfortunate interlude—was necessary only to add to this liberty

and equality a vast quantity of material goods? (What a gift to the anti-Marxists who declaim our supposed (vulgar) materialism!)

Reed goes on, a bit later in the same article:

"The aversion to Morgan's sequence [of savagery, barbarism, civilization] is primarily directed against the most ancient epoch of savagery, which is not surprising since this was the period of the rise and development of the matriarchal commune."

Comrade Reed sees not in the present or even the near past, even "relatively near" past (barbarism, the neolithic age), a treasurehouse for socialism and feminism, but rather in the "gray, misty past"!

To handle her critics who raise this point, however, she has a technique. She amalgamates those who oppose her theory out of a concern for historical accuracy with those who oppose it from a sexist point of view.

"They deny that there has been a period of equalitarian communal relations, deriding this as an imaginary 'Golden Age.' They suggest, where they do not assert, that the private property system has always existed. They do not acknowledge the former high position of women in the maternal clan commune and scoff at the term 'matriarchy' as a figment of the imagination. In their eyes, the position of women has been the same through the ages—inferior to the male sex."

Reed seems to combine, on a provisional basis, certain kinds of sentiments that have been expressed among the movements of the oppressed for centuries: the Rousseauian image of the "noble savage"; a sort of female version of the mythology of the Nation of Islam, if you change what has to be changed. Remember, Elijah Muhammed also had historical data (the former power and eminence of African empires) to back his theory up; his "failure" appears to be that he never got his theory mixed up with Marxist theory and terminology.

The myth of the Golden Age is deeply interwoven with our culture. Christmas gift-giving recalls the age in which providing use-values for another was not done on a money basis. Christmas itself supplanted Saturnalia, the Roman holiday which recalled the "Golden Age of Saturn" before there were masters and slaves. At that time of year, master and slave would reverse roles.

Marx noted that every presocialist movement of the oppressed has attempted to recall (i.e., to call back) an epoch when oppression, at least the oppression they were rebelling against, did not exist. Luther and the English Levellers "recalled" early Christianity. The French Jacobins "recalled" the Roman Republic. Marx thought that the modern communist movement should not do this. So he wrote:

"The social revolution of the 19th century cannot draw its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead. There the phrase went beyond the content. Here the content goes beyond the phrase." (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.)

Every step in humanity's progress so far has been accomplished in a partial manner. Each of them, while necessary for the total revolution in culture (including politics

and social relations) yet to take place, but now in preparation, has left the human being divided inside—still with the needs of the whole being, but divided in practice. The needs of the whole being are not met even formally as they were in preclass society. They cry out against the fragmentation of our present life. Uninformed by the total revolutionary philosophy, they do not look forward, but back to the least bits of evidence.

If it appears to us that our revolution requires in the slightest way that we "drug ourselves" with the past concerning its content, we should stop and think: perhaps our theory requires something in addition to blunt and ragged "clarity." It may also require a deeper theoretical content. Someone asked at a convention workshop some years ago, "Where is the American Marxist who can write

like Marx did in the *18th Brumaire*?" Where, indeed?

Evelyn Reed is more interested in staking a claim for preclass society's virtues than in filling in the study of how in fact social progress (or social degeneration) is made. Because of this she has been unwilling to lay before us her theory of the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. How many times have the comrades asked her? No, wait until her book comes out, we are told again and again. We are still waiting. I predict that when or if it does come out, it will be very unpersuasive. Marx never told people to wait for *Capital* for his labor theory of value; they could have read *Value, Price and Profit*, an inexpensive pamphlet, several years earlier.

April 27, 1973

P.S. I have done my part to make available to the membership my criticisms in three areas. If anyone wishes to reply to them, let that person do so promptly so as to leave open the chance for further exchanges, at least once more before the bell is rung on the internal discussion. *One*

statement and one attempt to refute it does not amount to a discussion, especially when (as I think even my opponents must agree) the arguments are not ones that have been dealt with in the political lifetime of 95 percent of the membership.

THE REAL MEANING OF THE DRAFT THESIS: THE BUILDING OF REVOLUTIONARY PARTIES IN CAPITALIST EUROPE

by Ninure Saunders, Chicago Branch

In the draft thesis "The Building of Revolutionary Parties in Capitalist Europe" we are told that the "central task for revolutionary Marxists in the stage that opened in 1967-68 is to win hegemony within the new mass vanguard in order to build relatively stronger revolutionary organizations than in the preceding stage." (Sec.6, p. 13.)

What is this "new mass vanguard?" We must define this "new vanguard," what its class nature is, in order to decide if our "central task" is to "win hegemony" within it.

We are fortunate in that we need go no further than the draft thesis for our much needed definition. The draft thesis says the following about this "new mass vanguard":

"Because of its very origins the new mass vanguard harbors within it numerous elements with a petty-bourgeois consciousness and ideology who . . . can at best play a secondary role in the unfolding of these struggles and at worst profoundly prevent the forms and the results of these struggles. . . .

". . . It can be bypassed by events, buffeted about by partial and temporary setbacks, and vacillate impressionistically between an opportunistic adaptation to the traditional workers movement and sectarian absentism and defeatism." (Sec.5, p. 13. Emphasis added.)

So it would seem, comrades, from the following description of the "new mass vanguard," that this "vanguard" suffers from many of the faults of the petty bourgeoisie. Would it be possible, comrades, to say then that this "new mass vanguard," far from having a working-class character, has an inherently petty-bourgeois character?

Just how do we go about winning hegemony in this petty-bourgeois "new mass vanguard"? Once again we may turn to the draft thesis for an "answer." One of the best ways to win hegemony in the "new mass vanguard," the draft thesis proclaims, is by "organizing national political campaigns on carefully chosen issues that correspond to the concerns of the vanguard, do not run against

the current of the mass struggles. . . ." (Sec. 17, p. 24. Emphasis added.)

This then, says the draft thesis, is its central thrust. Well, since it's really difficult to win "real" workers, let's do something easier. Let's see if we can win hegemony among this petty-bourgeois "new mass vanguard" by orienting towards their concerns and their needs, as long as they do not run too strongly against those of the working masses, and maybe the "real" working class will follow.

We must reject this line, for it will lead to nothing less than the abandonment of the working class. We must not be swayed by the argument that because this "new mass vanguard" contains a *few* young workers, or perhaps a *few* leaders in the mass struggles, that it is anything

but petty-bourgeois in character.

A task of the movement is not to win hegemony within the "new mass vanguard," but instead to smash it politically, break it up politically, and recruit its best elements to a revolutionary Marxist perspective, on the basis of a working-class program.

However, in rejecting this line which is contained in the draft thesis, comrades should avoid running blindly with open arms to the International minority. Remember comrades, incorrectness on the part of one tendency does not imply inherent correctness on the part of another.

May 7, 1973

THE BASIS OF THE INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION ON VIETNAM

by Stephen Bloom, Brooklyn Branch, New York Local

At the last meeting of the International Executive Committee, differences arose over the character of the accords between the United States government and the DRV and the PRG, and over the character of the leadership of North Vietnam and of the NLF. This debate, as comrades were quick to realize, raised anew the questions which had been under discussion at the time of the last world congress with regards to the Chinese "Cultural Revolution" and the character of the Mao regime.

The failure of some comrades to understand that the Chinese and North Vietnamese parties are Stalinist is the result of a formal-logical understanding of the character of Stalinism. The argument runs like this: As Trotskyists we know that Stalinism is counterrevolutionary through and through. But Mao's Chinese CP and the North Vietnamese Workers' Party not only participated in, but were at the head of, revolutions in their countries. Therefore it only follows logically that they are not counterrevolutionary, and cannot be Stalinist.

Such an argument simply does not take into account the contradictory nature of the degeneration of the Russian revolution, and the historically distorted development of the world revolution resulting from the crisis of revolutionary leadership.

The Trotskyist position that a revolutionary party is necessary for the successful development and culmination of a revolutionary situation is a general historical truth, not a dogmatic scripture. Likewise, our characterization of Stalinism as a counterrevolutionary force is a general prediction, based on our historical analysis of its development and social roots. To view this characterization as mean-

ing that there are certain sets of activities within the purview of "Stalinism," and that any variation means that we are dealing not with "Stalinists," but with something else, would, if followed through, turn the Fourth International into sectarians on the same order as the Healyites.

It is absolutely essential that we foresee the possibility of exceptions and variations to the general course of historical developments as we understand them. This is a basic concept of Marxism. The Russian revolution itself was an example of just such a historical variation on the course most Marxists had foreseen. The ability to understand how and why the revolution first took place in the most backward, rather than the most advanced, part of the imperialist world was the test of revolutionaries in the 1920s. Our understanding of historical events must first of all be based on reality, not on preconceived formulas.

The Chinese revolution and the pre-1952 Vietnamese revolution were the result of exceptional circumstances allowing for victory despite the counterrevolutionary character of the leadership. That this is possible need not change our characterization of the leadership as Stalinist. If we acknowledge that such a leadership acts as a brake on the revolutionary process, it is not necessarily a corollary that this brake must stop the motion of the vehicle entirely. In some cases it might merely cause a slowing or distorting of the revolutionary motion, without causing it to lose its momentum completely. Faced with unusually ripe conditions for revolution, even this lesser momentum could be enough to create a social transformation.

Trotsky himself recognized the possibility of the working class taking power despite a bad (i.e., counterrevolutionary) leadership. In a 1932 essay entitled "The Spanish Kornilovs and the Spanish Stalinists," reprinted in *The Spanish Revolution 1931-39*, pp. 181-186, he wrote, "Under exceptional and favorable conditions, the working class can triumph even with bad leadership. But exceptionally favorable conditions are rare. The proletariat must learn to win under less favorable conditions." The fact of its participation in such a working-class triumph would certainly not have changed Trotsky's characterization of this leadership.

Exactly such favorable conditions were what allowed the victory of the revolutions in China and Vietnam. The Stalinists were virtually forced to take state power in China because of the complete collapse of the bourgeois regime and the refusal of Chiang to take advantage of the popular front policies of Mao. In Vietnam there was an unprecedented mass mobilization. And in both cases there was a weak intervention by world imperialism.

It is true that in most cases where Stalinist parties have power thrust into their hands, a revolutionary transformation does not result. The natural reaction of these fakers is a far different one, which has also been described by Trotsky: "The reformist parties of Germany, Austria, and Spain did not prepare the revolution, but suffered it. Frightened by the power that had come into their hands against their own will, they benevolently handed it over to the bourgeoisie" ("The Consequences of Parliamentary Reformism," *ibid.*, pp. 202-205). Doesn't this description also fit quite well the events in Vietnam and China? The only difference is that in the former case, the amount of the country which could be handed over to the bourgeoisie was limited by the mass upsurge, and in the latter case the bourgeoisie steadfastly refused to accept the bequest. (This pattern also fits the developments of the nationalizations in Eastern Europe, where there was, quite literally, no bourgeoisie to hand the power back to.)

The role of the Stalinists in these situations was completely consistent with Stalinism. It was the defense of a narrow, nationalist, bureaucratic interest rather than the interests of the world revolution. This is what determines Stalinism's counterrevolutionary role. This is what caused the distorted and deformed revolutions that resulted in these countries.

We can understand this phenomenon further if we extend the popular analogy of the Stalinist bureaucracy to a trade-union bureaucracy which has taken state power. Certainly everyone would agree that it would be correct to characterize the labor aristocracy as essentially anti-union and against the interest of the workers. But just as certainly, no one would deny that given a militant upsurge of the workers' movement, a mass organizing campaign, this same bureaucratic apparatus would attempt to channel any new unions which were organized into a bureaucratic mold, and further, if they were placed in the leadership of these new unions because of the illusions of the masses, they would quite possibly find it necessary to defend and consolidate these new organizations of the workers. None of this would change in the slightest our characterization of this "bad" leadership.

A Generalized Historical Variant

For the preconvention discussion in 1971, I submitted

a contribution to what was then the discussion on China. The main thesis of the article was that all of the social transformations which have taken place since World War II were not merely individual exceptions which should be analyzed in isolation, but part of a general historical aberration of the revolutionary process brought about by the crisis of leadership. Each of these was characterized by two basic developments: (1) the non-intervention of the full force of imperialism, caused by a lack either of ability or of consciousness, combined with the complete collapse of the native bourgeois state apparatus (exceptionally favorable circumstances); and (2) a leadership which was impelled more by the dynamics of the permanent revolution than by its own conscious program or subjective desires. If we look at the course of developments in Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, and Vietnam, I think that this thesis will be borne out.

There were, of course, major differences between each of these revolutions. Nevertheless, an understanding that they were all a part of a particular epoch in the history of the world revolution and therefore must be analyzed together rather than separately, will be basic to resolving the differences in the International concerning China and Vietnam.

The fact that the Soviet bureaucrats were forced to overturn capitalist property relations in Eastern Europe because of the threat of the Cold War, that Mao nationalized the industry in China as a result of the U. S. threat to Korea, or that the Vietnamese Stalinists, despite all of their attempts to return Vietnam to the imperialists were forced into battle by the inexorable upsurge of the Vietnamese people, need not and cannot change our characterization of them as not representing the interests of the world revolution. In fact, it was in order to defend their bureaucratic interests that these transformations took place in the way that they did.

A Basic Lesson

These concepts may seem elementary to some, but discussions with comrades and reactions I received to my last document, convinced me it was true that there is no generalized understanding of this historical process within our party. It also does not exist within the International. Nowhere are these events analyzed as a collective in any educational bulletins, documents, books, etc. Although the last Socialist Activists and Educational Conference, which concentrated on the Eastern European, Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions, was a step in the right direction, there was still no discussion of the interrelationship between these events. Each was presented independently. Such an empirical and individual analysis of these social transformations can only lead to confusion as new events take place (witness the discussion on Vietnam).

The second Vietnamese revolution, which is still in progress, has much the same character. The most important factor, which I have mentioned before, is the unprecedented fortitude demonstrated by the people of that tiny nation. The intervention by the U. S., despite its massive proportions, was, nonetheless, limited by the international antiwar movement and especially by the opposition in the U. S. itself and within the imperialist army, which limited its options and maneuverability. In this situation it is possible, because of the pressure of the dynamic of the permanent revolution, that despite the reformist leader-

ship of the struggle, a revolutionary transformation could take place in South Vietnam. If it does, and it is certainly not assured, it will clearly fit, despite all of its differences, into the general pattern set by the other social transformations since the Russian revolution.

Vietnam and the Other Disputed Questions

At the last convention of the SWP, the general consensus was that the differences in the International over China, guerrilla warfare, the youth radicalization, etc., were separate and distinct discussions. However, the development of disagreements over Vietnam and the European perspectives document, as well as the continued discussion concerning guerrilla warfare, show that all of these differences stem from the same causes: an attempt by some comrades to find substitutes for the responsibility of building a revolutionary party, and an adaptation to the pressures of the impressionistic analysis put forth by the "new mass vanguard." Where does the idea come from, after

all, that the North and South Vietnamese Stalinists, who are responsible for the murder of countless of our comrades, and who have followed a consistent policy of class collaborationism at home and of apology for the Kremlin and Peking bureaucrats internationally, are a revolutionary force? Or that the Chinese regime is more revolutionary than Moscow? Or that guerrilla warfare is as important a tool in the Marxist arsenal as mobilizing the masses—or even more important? Or that opposition to an imperialist war is a lower level of consciousness than support to trade-union movements?

It is to be hoped that the continued international discussion on these questions can lead to a clarification of the issues involved and of the basic methodological problems at their roots. Both the newer comrades, just being won to the banner of Trotskyism and the older sections of the Fourth International stand to benefit.

May 6, 1973