

July 7, 1978

To the Political Committee and National Field Organizers

Dear Comrades,

The enclosed is a translation of an excerpt from the article, "Latin America in the Course of the World Revolution," by Etienne Laurent, which appeared in La Verite, the theoretical magazine of the OCI (issue no. 580, February, 1978). The article was presented by the editors of La Verite as a discussion article for the OCI and for the Third Latin American Conference of the OCRFI.

Comradely,


Gus Horowitz

[TRANSLATION]

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"Latin America in the Course of the World Revolution," by
Etienne Laurent

EXCERPT

The Cuban Revolution Must be Analyzed in its International Context

But the crushing of the revolution in Guatemala did not decisively change the political relations between the classes, which were marked throughout the 1950s, independent of the ebbs and flows in the class struggle, by the initiative of the working classes and the masses.

This situation cannot in any case be abstracted from the world class struggle of the period and the priorities U.S. imperialism was forced to set itself in face of the revolution in Asia and Europe.

In setting off the invasion of South Korea, Stalin provoked the casus belli which would permit the massive intervention of American imperialism in Korea, force China to become involved in the war and create the beachhead U.S. imperialism needed on the flank of this revolution. U.S. imperialism needed to set up a barrier to the extension of the revolution in Asia after the victory of the Chinese revolution. It had to support French imperialism, which was headed for defeat in Indochina, support Chiang Kai-shek in Formosa, prop up all the reactionary governments of Southeast Asia, put Japanese imperialism back on its feet, and organize a vast system of military and political encirclement of China. But American imperialism very quickly had to take into account the crisis of the Kremlin bureaucracy, which was precipitated by the cold war and unleashed by Stalin's death, inasmuch as it was linked with the crisis of one of the weakest links of the imperialist system, which had barely been rebuilt after the war--French imperialism. In June 1953, for the first time in the history of the proletariat, the proletariat in East Germany rose up openly against the Kremlin bureaucracy and its agents. The first chapters were soon written in the history of the political revolution which will sweep away the parasitic bureaucracies--in Poland, in October 1956, and above all in Hungary of the same year. In France, a spontaneous general strike broke out in August 1953. A few months later, French imperialism was dealt the historic defeat of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. On November 1, 1954, the revolutionary war broke out in Algeria. All these events together may be considered today as forerunners of a new period of the world revolution, which opened in 1968. The Geneva agreements of July 1954 saved French imperialism from disaster, established the partition of Vietnam and allowed U.S. imperialism to set up and strengthen the comprador state of South Vietnam.

What was the situation in Latin America in 1955-58? In Argentina, Peron fell in 1955. This was brought about by the inability of Peronism to contain the social contradictions inside the framework of bonapartist institutions, reflecting the powerlessness of bourgeois nationalism in the epoch of imperialism, and in particular by its inability to contain the class struggle within the limits of the CGT, which was integrated into the state apparatus (a masterpiece among bonapartist institutions).

Two successive military regimes saw themselves put out of commission by the effects of the class struggle. Outlawed at the end of 1955 the Peronist CGT had to be hastily reestablished in 1957 before the election of Frondizi could be assured in 1958.

In Chile, the year 1958 saw the first campaign of Allende for the presidency of the republic. It marked the end of the ebb which the defeat of 1957 signalled following three popular-front governments, at the same time as it prefigured the popular-front policy later to be carried out by the Popular Unity, the only means for erecting a counter-revolutionary barricade against the proletariat.

The limits of this article do not permit us to proceed to an analysis of the political situation of around 1955-58 in all the countries of the continent; it would be necessary to discuss the significance of the Vargas experience in Brazil, explain the situation that opened up in Venezuela with the fall of the dictator Perez Jimenez in 1958 and with the fall of the military regime in Colombia. The elements noted above are sufficient to show that the Cuban revolution was an integral part of a general process which extended far beyond the shores of the island.

The Internal Dynamics of the Cuban Revolution

The Cuban revolution was the culminating point of the revolutionary wave which began with the Bolivian revolution of 1952. (We are speaking of the period before the Cuban government and the Castroist movement had shown themselves in different ways as political forms hostile to the revolution in Latin America, and had contributed in their own way to its retreat.)

In various documents the 'Trotskyists took stock in an understandable way of the movement through which the masses poured into the breach opened up by the fall of Batista to put forward their demands, to deal direct blows to the bourgeois state apparatus that was identified with the dictatorship, and partially to dismantle it.

Tens of thousands of people attended the rallies that accompanied the trials of the personnel of the dictatorship's repressive apparatus. The direct action of the masses dismantled the army and the police corps in the days following the fall of Batista and forced the official dissolution of the two forces by the first government. It was the pressing demands of the masses that forced the passage of the urban reform law putting an end to the grip of the Cuban oligarchy and foreign capital over the housing sector. It was the mass upsurge that later broke the framework of the first agrarian reform and led to the creation of state farms.

The ambitions of the July 26 movement in the guerrilla struggle were limited to the realization of the agrarian reforms and national independence. The flight of Batista immediately confronted it with a situation which it had neither foreseen nor sought. In effect, if the collapse of the dictatorship's ultra-comprador state opened the way for Castro and put him in complete power, this collapse at the same time opened the way for a profound mass upsurge. In the interaction between this mass upsurge and the succeeding acts of political and economic aggression (the embargo aimed at choking the island's economy) by North American imperialism against the Castro government and the Cuban

revolution, the "exceptional" conditions were born which obliged Castro and his movement to go much further than they had ever imagined on the way to a break with imperialism.

Caught between the demands of imperialism and the movement of the Cuban masses, the team of Fidel Castro was led--at the price of dissensions and serious internal crises--to seriously encroach on the positions of Cuban and imperialist capital, to expropriate the basic sectors of the economy, to collectivize agriculture to a large extent, and finally to dissolve a large part of the institutions of Batista's bourgeois comprador state.

Beginning with this assessment, the OCI quickly came to the conclusion that the Castro government had acquired the essential characteristics of a "workers and farmers' government," not in its governmental usage synonymous with the dictatorship of the proletariat, but in that defined by the Transitional Program, in the passage where Trotsky pointed out:

"However, one cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.), the petty-bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists, may go further than they themselves wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie. In any case, one thing is not to be doubted: even if this highly improbable variant somewhere, at some time, becomes a reality and the workers' and farmers' government in the above-mentioned sense is established in fact, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat."

The counterrevolutionary force of the Stalinist apparatus worldwide contributed to "greatly prolonging the episode." But this fact does not invalidate the characterization of the Castro government, which in turn does not decide the question of the nature of the Cuban state (on which discussion must resume).

In the course of the particular period in which these overturns took place and at the time of the most direct confrontation with imperialism, the profound mobilization of the masses and the presence of organs like the workers' militias signalled the existence of a revolution in Cuba which in its development could lead to the total destruction of the bourgeois state and the establishment of working-class organs of power, councils of workers and peasants.

But in the absence of any revolutionary organization in Cuba, and with the deepening of the crisis of the Fourth International on a world scale, the process was unable to reach its culmination; Castro had his hands free to block the process and to prevent the working class from equipping itself with the instruments assuring its class independence.

On its side, the Kremlin bureaucracy did all it could to allow Castro to block the movement of the masses toward workers' power. In the particular conditions of the Cuban revolution, it played its role as it does everywhere as a prop of the capitalist order on a world scale and it was able to intervene to prevent the working class and the masses from consolidating and pursuing the construction of their own organs--

committees and militias.

This intervention was carried out on several levels, the first being the pressure operation of the Cuban Stalinist apparatus on the July 26 Movement. The creation of the single party in 1961 led to the rapid dissolution of the militias and the reconstitution of a regular army endowed with significant privileges. In another area, the unions were transformed from independent organizations of the class into docile transmission belts for Castro's policy. The existence of a single party reduced political life to the activity of Castro and his team and the official propaganda. In all areas and by all means, the working class was reduced to an absolutely passive role and its right to independent organization was liquidated. This is the framework in which the OCI at the time politically assessed the banning of the small organization in Cuba adhering to the Latin American Bureau of the Fourth International, led by Posadas.

The relations Castro established, in collaboration with the Cuban Stalinist apparatus, with the proletariat and the masses in Cuba are inseparable from the relations he established, on one hand, with the bureaucracy (and through it, with imperialism), and on the other, with the proletariat on a world scale. The situation in which Castro was all at once forced to place himself, and where he placed himself in basing himself on the Stalinist bureaucracy, made him more and more, in the course of the 1960s, a playing-piece in the counterrevolutionary array of the Kremlin bureaucracy in Latin America.

Only Castro Himself Could Deflect the International Impact of the Cuban Revolution

The OCI never questioned the fact that Cuba, as a result of the imperialist boycott, found itself obliged to sell its sugar and to provide itself with oil, or that the conditions in which this occurred were of the greatest importance.

The crux of the question was always elsewhere: it was necessary to understand that the relations which Castro established with the Kremlin bureaucracy were based on a political agreement under the terms of which the bureaucracy--to the degree it chose, of course--lent its political support to Castro, in exchange for services which he alone, in the 1960s, was in a position to render on a Latin American scale.

There is no doubt that, in face of the international Stalinist apparatus, Castro often found himself obliged to vigorously defend his own interests, largely legitimate on this level, and in one case, the missile crisis, his very existence. His integration into the international apparatus of the Kremlin was a slow process and took place in steps. For a long time Castro sought, and still seeks to some extent, to play his own cards and his own game. But his overall policy, like that of the Kremlin bureaucracy in opposition to the proletarian revolution, falls within the framework of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism.

To carry it out, it was necessary to begin by deflecting the international impact of the Cuban revolution throughout Latin America.

The situation of the class struggle in Latin America must again be put into its international context. The beginning of the 1960s was marked first by the Khrushchev-Eisenhower meeting at Camp David and, later, by the election of Kennedy to the U.S. presidency. In Europe, the situation was dominated by the results of De Gaulle's coming to power in 1958. In Asia, the counterrevolutionary maneuvers of the Kremlin bureaucracy against the Chinese revolution had the effect of opening the way to a qualitative advance for the American offensive against Vietnam, viewed as a springboard for a future attack against the Chinese revolution.

In this framework Castro, the Cuban government, and the Castroist movement occupied their place, accomplishing a task in Latin America which no one else could accomplish: counteracting and deflecting the international impact of the Cuban revolution.

This is because from the first, the Cuban revolution strengthened and prolonged the impact of the Bolivian revolution of 1952 and gave a new push to the revolution throughout Latin America. Despite the crises of international relations, the situation was marked in Argentina (the crisis of the Frondizi government) and in Venezuela by the upsurge of the working class and the masses and the crisis of the forms of political domination of the bourgeoisie. In Bolivia, the Paz Estenssoro-Lechin government was likewise inadequate to the needs of imperialism at a time when a new upsurge of the working class was taking place.

The Tricontinental Conference, the beginning of guerrilla warfare, the increasing theorization of the "foco" as a revolutionary method opposed to the forms of struggle of the working class, the founding conference of OLAS, the international support--endorsed by Pabloism--given to a mythical interpretation of the Cuban revolution itself, the slanderous attacks on Trotskyism, and the Bolivian working class and the POR of Bolivia in particular, all marked the stages of a policy which throughout the 1960s contributed to setting up a barrier in collaboration with Stalinism against revolutionary action of the masses in Latin America. The theses of the Tenth World Congress gave Pabloism's total support to this policy.

In regard to the absolutely destructive results of the "foco" policy, the so-called "self-criticism" document published by the international majority in the United Secretariat cannot be considered sufficient. It recognizes that an erroneous interpretation of the internal forces of the Cuban revolution was made and spread around the world. In this interpretation, the role of the masses was eliminated or limited to very little; the revolution was reduced to the action of the Castroist foco. It speaks of an erroneous "estimate" of the evolution in Cuba and an "underestimation of the consequences of increased dependence of the Cuban economy on the Soviet Union" on the orientation of Castro's policy. It speaks of serious underestimation in many countries, of the role of the working class and the validity of the classical methods of struggle of the proletariat in the class struggle, and hence of errors of appreciation on the relative weight of guerrilla struggle. But what is involved is much more than that, and of a different kind.

The problem is that it was necessary to characterize Castro and his movement as a petty-bourgeois current, allied to Stalinism beginning in 1961-62 and called upon to take its place more and more closely, well before 1967-68, in the counterrevolutionary policy of the Kremlin bureaucracy. From this standpoint, what is involved is nothing less than the characterization, by the United Secretariat as a whole, of Castro as a natural Marxist and of Cuba as a country where the dictatorship of the proletariat had been established, where a workers state existed and where it was not necessary to build a revolutionary party, a section of the Fourth International.

As regards the tactic of the "guerrilla foco," moreover, it is necessary to characterize it first of all as a method of struggle of the petty-bourgeoisie related to the theory of "new vanguards," outside the working class and at no time "complementing" the action of the masses. But it is also necessary to say that its use served, beginning in 1961-62, as a weapon against the exploited masses and the youth; to cut short the movements of the working class against the bourgeoisie and imperialism on its own ground, following the processes and rhythms of the class struggle in each country; to deflect hundreds of militants awakened to political activity by the indisputable international impact of the Cuban revolution into an absolute impasse.

The balance sheet was particularly heavy in Bolivia, Venezuela, and all the countries where urban guerrilla movements were created: Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina. The guerrilla struggle was waged there as a factor foreign to the working class, hindering, in Brazil and Argentina, the struggle for the political class independence of the workers' organizations, and in Uruguay the struggle for the workers united front and the government of the workers organizations united. Hundreds of militants paid with their lives for a policy contrary to the needs of the working class.

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