

Los Angeles, Calif. June 2, 1967

Gerry Healy
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Dear Gerry:

Please accept my congratulation to you and the comrades of the Socialist Labor League on the stand taken in critical support of the Chinese Red Guards, and critical support of the struggle carried on by Mao Tse-tung and his collaborators in the Chinese socialist cultural revolution.

This is a welcome development indeed. It should bring a ray of hope and renewed confidence to those who have remained steadfast on the proletarian revolutionary position; for one must assume that there still are some of those among the presently fragmented movement of Trotskyist groups and tendencies.

To say this does not mean an attempt to impart the conviction that all these groups will be able to reorient their position on the important and complex question of the Chinese revolution. That could too easily become mere wishful thinking. After all, the centers of imperialism in Europe and North America are strewn with the wreckage of parties, groups and tendencies which were once revolutionary but later turned into the opposite.

Nevertheless, the stand taken by the SLL deserves to be greeted in the sense of the inspiration that it does provide for revolutionary workers.

This action is so much more important since it emerges out of the lessons of a great revolution. The working class parties, groups and tendencies which fail to rise to the occasion and assimilate its lessons will be relegated to the dustbin of history.

During the first half of the twentieth century the Russian revolution formed the central axis of world politics. It drew a sharp dividing line through the labor and socialist movement of all countries. Under Trotsky's guidance we studied and attempted to assimilate its lessons; both its triumph and its degeneracy. This was a salutary development in which the Trotskyist movement matured. However, as you well remember, many members floundered and failed to pay heed to these lessons.

In the second half of the twentieth century the Chinese revolution, and its uninterrupted development, has become the central axis of world politics. In this case also a sharp line of division has been drawn through the working class movement of all countries. It has hit the Communist Parties most directly, but affected the Trotskyist movement as well.

What is the attitude now among Trotskyists to this development? Its great importance for world revolutionary perspectives no one can deny. And yet, as you are well aware, many more, who claim the Trotskyist heritage, are now floundering and failing to assimilate, or even to pay heed to its lessons.

Most glaringly at fault in this respect, if not entirely derelict of duty, are the leaders of the SWP. The Chinese revolution presented an acid test in which they have been found wanting; for there can be no greater error than that of failing to recognize a revolution that is unfolding before their very eyes. They still adhere stubbornly to a course that defies reality and is bound to end disastrously. Their basic policy is still aimed at the overthrow of the Mao Tse-tung regime; and this at a time when virtually the entire radical milieu throughout the world, outside of the Moscow oriented parties, recognize that the only force ready to follow this policy would be those of the bourgeois inspired counter-revolution.

But the present position of our co-thinkers in the United Secretariat is not much different. It represents a revision in principle of an earlier basic policy.

Viewing the early stage of the Chinese revolution in May, 1952, the International Executive Committee plenum characterized it as "the beginning of a process of permanent revolution," and it decided that: "The Fourth International and the Chinese Trotskyists will give critical support to Mao Tse-tung's government."

No objection can be made to a revision of policy if necessitated by subsequent developments of the Chinese revolution. In such a case, however, the need for revision would require thorough explanation and adequate documentation. But no such necessity has arisen. Quite the contrary. The early anticipation of "the beginning of a process of permanent revolution" has found further confirmation -- and confirmation under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung and his collaborators.

The fundamentally false SWP policy on China is not an isolated phenomenon. It interlinks with and has its logical corollary in the general reformist inspired and opportunist attitude, outlook and practice that has become predominant in leading party circles. This is reflected most clearly in

the policy pursued in the anti-war movement.

More than a year ago I urged the SWP leadership to base its anti-war policy on the Leninist conception of revolutionary defeatism, and to take the necessary steps that such a policy entails. In the first instance, that would mean to favor the victory of the National Liberation Front, to say so publicly and declare that its struggle is just. Lenin considered the policy of revolutionary defeatism entirely justified in regard to the Czarist armies. It is many times more justified in the case of the American imperialist assault on Vietnam.

Lenin said that the policy of defeatism is the logical conclusion from the class relationships of imperialist wars. He insisted on the necessity of this policy as a means of preserving the revolutionary quality of the party. Trotsky taught us that "the renunciation of defeatism under the conditions of imperialist war is tantamount to the rejection of the socialist revolution." And yet, this is precisely the position of the party leadership. It never accepted, much less practiced, the policy of revolutionary defeatism.

I was happy to notice that the SLL takes its stand squarely for the victory of the NLF.

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Permit me now to make some comments on the elucidation you comrades have made of your position on China.

In Banda's speech "Hands off the Chinese Revolution," I notice the statement that the "movement in China remains tied to the old doctrines, to the sanctified dogmas and completely bankrupt fetishes of Stalinism; the theory that Stalin was right against Trotsky..."

The first part of this statement is an error; the last part is correct. On this point of Stalin vs. Trotsky the Chinese still have some important lessons to learn. When the Soviet workers get ready to settle accounts with their bureaucrats, they will be able to provide real assistance. Here in the SWP and among our co-thinkers internationally I have been fighting since the rise of the people's communes, in 1958, for a rational revolutionary attitude toward China. I have often stated my disagreement with the Chinese on the question of Stalin vs. Trotsky. But a fundamental and historically documented criticism of the Chinese views on this point can have fruitful educational value only within the framework of such a rational attitude.

Let's examine the other part of Comrade Banda's statement that the Chinese remain tied to the old doctrines, to the sanctified dogmas and the bankrupt fetishes of Stalinism.

To do so, it is necessary to refer to the works of Mao Tse-tung -- the authentic leader of the Chinese revolution.

First however, let me point out that the Chinese cannot at all use the sanctified dogmas and bankrupt fetishes of Stalinism. It would serve no purpose whatever. Nor can we use our formulas about Stalinism to interpret the Chinese revolution. They would explain nothing, but rather lead us astray. This is the fatal mistake made by the SWP leaders. They attempt to squeeze their "interpretation" of the Chinese revolution into the mould of the Stalinist degeneration in the USSR. They seem blissfully unaware that we always interpreted the rise of Stalinism on dialectical materialist grounds, as a parasitic bureaucratic excrescence not endowed with any quality of permanence. Much less can such a monstrosity arise elsewhere under different historical conditions.

Each revolution unfolds according to laws of its own internal development; and it can be interpreted only in terms of an understanding of these laws. What is necessary, above all, is to see China today as it actually is and as it has developed out of its own protracted revolutionary experience.

You will recall that during the events of the 1927 defeated Chinese revolution the main thrust of Trotsky's criticism of Stalin's policy was that it subordinated the CCP to the Kuomintang and the Chinese workers and peasants to the bourgeoisie. Mao's critique of these same events closely paralleled Trotsky's. His main point was the failure to maintain the independence of the CCP and of the armed forces under CCP leadership. But he did not lay the blame for this failure to Stalin. Quite the contrary; he said for this we Chinese must take the responsibility.

Mao broke with Stalin, not in name but in fact, during the struggle for power in 1947-49. At the time Stalin had a pact with Chiang Kai-shek, officially recognizing his regime as the legitimate ruler of China. Stalin advised the CCP to collaborate with Chiang and not engage in a struggle for power. The CCP did the exact opposite.

When assuming state power Mao and his associates maintained their conception that two major stages of development are embodied in the Chinese revolution -- the bourgeois democratic and the socialist. This had no relation whatever to the sanctified dogmas and bankrupt fetishes of Stalinism. It was the theory of permanent revolution to which they had adhered throughout the protracted struggle for state power. Most generally they used the term uninterrupted revolution.

In December 1939 Mao stated this basic conception succinctly. "The democratic revolution is the necessary preparation for the socialist revolution, and the socialist revolution is the inevitable sequel to the democratic revolution..."

A clear understanding of both the differences and the interconnections between the democratic and the socialist revolutions is indispensable for correct leadership in the Chinese revolution." He added the pertinent point that the democratic and socialist revolutions formed "two parts of one organic whole, guided by one and the same communist ideology." (Selected Works, Vol. II, pp. 331, 361)

Correct leadership in this development the Chinese Communist Party attained through its clear understanding of both the differences and the interconnections between the democratic and the socialist revolutions. Affirmed in life was once again the permanent character of the revolution.

Hitherto the Marxist conception of revolution as an uninterrupted process has not been explicitly projected beyond the political and economic sphere into the cultural arena. Nevertheless, this further extension was implicit in its basic premises. Ideological changes to conform to the changed socio-economic structure have always been regarded as imperative, but all too often expected to follow automatically. Only the inflexible determination of the Chinese Communist Party leaders show the earnest effort to really bring it about. Under their guidance the socialist cultural revolution is rolling on with the force of an avalanche. It subjects all persons in authority to criticism by the masses. Many millions, workers, peasants, soldiers, students and intellectuals are stood on their feet to join political debate in the streets, factories, army, communes, schools, everywhere. The people are aroused to criticise and supervise their leaders. This is proletarian democracy in its broadest and most authentic form.

The Communist Party is similarly subjected to critical scrutiny by the masses. This is a most healthy aspect of the great debate. The revolutionary quality of a working class party is not established once and for all; it must be subjected to constant test and verification. If the revolutionary quality is to endure, it will need constant renewal; and only through the practical experience in the class struggle can political and theoretical clarity and firmness with revolutionary dedication be maintained.

The burning question today is, which road to follow: whether forward on the socialist road or backward on the road that reverts to capitalism. This issue is focussed within the party; and it is being fought to a finish with the participation of the masses. In turn, the masses are educating themselves in this great revolutionary movement.

Most assuredly, these examples of how China has developed out of its own revolutionary experiences do not have any resemblance to the sanctified dogmas and bankrupt fetishes of Stalinism.

If I understand Comrade Banda's speech correctly, he seems to think that the Chinese Communist Party is saddled with the theory of socialism in one country; it has "degenerated to a point beyond redemption"; it does not follow a policy of international revolution; "it is an empirical movement without an integrated theoretical conception behind it."

How do these complaints correspond to reality? Surely, both bureaucratic and revisionist tendencies have shown up within the Communist Party. More important, however, is the question: what is being done about it? And on this point, as you comrades do recognize, the Mao Tse-tung leadership is fighting against both tendencies. But this is not all of it. The same leadership has carried on over a period of several years a vigorous, tireless, protracted and stubborn struggle against the revisionism of the Kremlin and the Kremlin oriented Communist Parties. And it has done so pretty much in the same manner and with the same theoretical clarity with which Lenin combatted the revisionism of Kautsky and the Second International. This is what the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute is all about.

If you will recall some of the essential points made by the Chinese in this dispute, you will quickly recognize that these very points are derived from a well founded program and a thoroughly integrated theoretical conception.

The major Peking indictment against the Kremlin revisionism is on its peaceful coexistence with American imperialism. "In the place of international class struggle they advocate international class collaboration," say the Chinese. Next they turn to the Kremlin advocacy of the peaceful road to socialism, which includes the pernicious notion that bourgeois parliaments can be converted "from an organ of bourgeois democracy into a genuine instrument of the people's will." These, say the Chinese, are "precisely the questions that divide Marxists from revisionists."

The practice of peaceful coexistence with imperialism and the advocacy of a peaceful road to socialism we have always recognized as central issues of Kremlin treachery, which were to be combatted. Precisely this is what Mao and his associates have been doing for so long.

Additional explanation of their views is contained in the basic documents published in the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute, from which I will extract a few points to refresh your memory. The Chinese recall that Lenin stressed "the great significance of the unity between the proletariat in the capitalist countries and the oppressed nations for the victory of the proletarian revolution." To carry this idea into reality, the Chinese say, the proletariat and its communist vanguard in the capitalist countries must march in the lead. But they must also support the struggles of the oppressed peoples in colonial and semi-colonial areas in order to establish the common cause against imperialism.

Peaceful coexistence between nations of different social systems, they say further, "cannot be a substitute for the necessary revolutionary struggle...To advance the idea of general disarmament as the fundamental road to world peace, and spread illusions that imperialism will lay down its arms, is deliberately to deceive the proletariat and help the imperialists in their policies of aggression and war."

Mao and his collaborators insist: "There must be a revolutionary party able to link the leadership closely with the broad mass of the people...Proletarian internationalism must be demanded of all parties, large or small...The proletarian party must never base its thinking, policies and actions on the assumption that the capitalists will accept peaceful transition to socialism. It must fully prepare for armed struggle in the revolution...Ideologically and organizationally the party must constantly prepare its own ranks and the masses for revolution and promote revolutionary struggle...In the capitalist countries the party must not fall into legalism and parliamentary cretinism...The proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat are essential for the thorough solution of the contradictions of capitalist society."

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At the Young Socialist conference at Morecambe a delegate, Mark Jenkins, when discussing the question of China, informed the audience: "It is impossible to defeat bureaucracy if you do not understand how it arose and only Trotskyism and the Fourth International are able to explain how it arose in Russia and China and therefore only they can lead a successful struggle against bureaucracy."

Is such boastfulness really warranted? Is this the way to educate the youth? I feel we can afford to be more modest. We have yet to earn our right to leadership of any really effective movement, not to mention a great revolution such as Mao and his collaborators have guided successfully from its initial stage through its continued and uninterrupted development to the present higher social and cultural levels. In its real essence this is more than a socialist cultural revolution; it is simultaneously a political revolution aiming to crush the pronounced bureaucratic and revisionist tendencies that have arisen.

Giving this whole development the serious consideration it deserves, one aspect calls for special attention. I have presented some excerpts from the Chinese position in the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute. That also is more than just a dispute with the Kremlin. It is a conscious effort toward revolutionary reorientation of the world communist movement -- a conscious effort to support the Marxist-Leninist tendencies that may exist within and outside of this movement.

This poses a pertinent question also to the Trotskyist movement -- at least to the section of it which is sufficiently open minded to recognize the Chinese revolution. Trotskyists can have no interests separate and apart from those of the working class. Most certainly, the Chinese effort toward revolutionary reorientation is in the interest of the working class. And just as certainly, it should be up to all revolutionary members and supporters of our movement to work toward a common cause in these efforts. This is the pertinent question that demands an answer.

Hoping that you comrades will give due consideration to the various and important points of this letter, and with best wishes for further progress along the line of the positive steps that you have already taken, I remain

Comradely yours

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