

Tokyo-San Francisco
13 August 1971

Workers' Action
Sydney

Dear Comrades,

We are travelling at the moment in a Boeing 747, a sort of super-mobile picture theatre (Playboy of the Western World is on right now) with a dozen lavatories.

This letter is to thank all the members of Workers' Action for their comradeship during my six months in Australia. I enjoyed this time very much indeed, on the whole. And, as perhaps I was bound to, coming from a provincial backwater, I learnt a great deal. Particularly I have to thank WA for giving me a much better appreciation of the role of social democracy in the working class. Although my position may still be slightly different from that of many comrades in Workers' Action it has sufficiently changed to put me in the minority on this question in the NZSL. You will no doubt receive some time a copy of a short account of my views prepared for the NZSL.

I am still benefitting from my Australian stay, as a result of contemplation and reading. But while I am benefitting from the realization of the validity of some of your views, I am equally benefitting from the realization of some of the errors you have made, or which I fear you may make. It is these areas of disagreement, or potential disagreement, that I want to touch on in this letter.

In some respects (clandestinity, workerism/super-proletarianism, etc.) WA is reminiscent of the Ellens faction, a semi-syndicalist group which was involved in an internal dispute in the Spartacist League of the US in 1968, eventually dropping out of the SL, and, evidently, out of politics. I have just re-read the documents of this dispute--after more than a year--and now see how important it was, even though it left the SL crippled numerically and organizationally in its main centre. This dispute refined the SL's store of theoretical equipment. Numbers and organization are important--but only when applied to a correct programme derived from local conditions understood in the light of a correct analysis of world social forces. Politics comes first. Numbers and organization must follow. The Spartacist League is developing the politics.

There is one particularly healthy and unfortunately rare strength to WA: its clear and unqualified acceptance of the fact that the proletariat is the force of the world socialist revolution. This is true. But repeated affirmation of this single truth must not be allowed to substitute for marxist theory. There are some circumstances in which intermediate class forces come into play (sometimes in some sort of combination with the working class). Such organizations as the Ellens group, Voix Ouvriere (whom the Ellens group was trying to emulate), and the International Committee, although they generally saw the importance of proletarianism, saw little else. They thus became disoriented in areas such as the analysis of Eastern Europe, Cuba, China (perhaps the Cultural Revolution), petty-bourgeois guerrilla groups and the like. It is to be hoped that as Wor-

kers Action develops theory in such areas it will not allow its healthy proletarianism to become such a disorienting "super-proletarianism".

I am afraid that I never put the Spartacist position on the Chinese, Cuban and Yugoslav revolutions with sufficient skill while I was in Australia. This position entails recognition of the fact that in certain extreme circumstances (often involving an international war) the petty-bourgeoisie may lead a revolution, which will not be a socialist revolution, but which will install the dictatorship of a Bonapartist bureaucratic clique or caste which may be forced to introduce social property in the means of production. Such was the result (though not the course) of events in the Soviet Union, and such a state was designated a "deformed workers' state" (hereafter dws) by Trotsky.

The SLL has accused the Spartacist League of denying the prime role of the working class in the socialist revolution. This is, of course, rot. The SL, understanding the theory of permanent revolution, sees socialist revolution as a world phenomenon, and the establishment of deformed workers' states in some under-developed countries as a relatively minor aspect of this revolution (which is not to say that it is not essential to have a proper understanding of them). Socialism will be brought about by workers in the developed capitalist countries and the dwses.

If the SLL thinks that only the working class can establish a deformed workers state (and Slaughter's 1966 Newsletter articles on Spartacist are certainly incompetent if this is not their position) then they must argue with Trotsky, who explains quite clearly (eg "The USSR in War", In Defense of Marxism, particularly see pages 18 and 19) how a petty-bourgeois bureaucratic caste can establish a dws with no more than the passive consent of the working class. It is true, of course, that Trotsky was referring to cases such as those he foresaw in Eastern Europe where the dwses were established by the USSR's bureaucratic caste, and it may be that some will try to distinguish such cases from those in which the regime is established by forces within the new dws (though, perhaps necessarily, with the support of an existing dws). However, even if such a distinction were allowed (and I do not see how it can be) it can only be used to prove that, say, Cuba, is not a dws if an extremely mechanistic approach is adopted:--Because in Russia and Eastern Europe (the latter presumably benefiting vicariously from the experience of the former) the bureaucratic clique emerged from the degeneration of a proletarian revolution, such a clique emerging from a petty-bourgeois revolution and administering the same kind of state and the same kind of economy may not be conceptualized in the sacred theory of the "deformed workers' state"--even if, taking the broad historical view rather than looking at the act of revolution in isolation, it is the result of the same class forces. This is surely tripe.

The Revolution Betrayed applied the theory of dwses to its only contemporary example, and it happens that this example developed as a result of petty-bourgeois pressure on a precarious proletarian revolution and a subsequent counter-revolution. But an intelligent

reading of the book (and particularly of chapters 3 and 5) can elicit the applicability of the theory to situations such as China, Yugoslavia and Cuba. In reading the book it must be remembered, of course, that one substantial force not material in the Soviet Union's degeneration, but important in later dwses' evolutions, was the very existence of an established dws to give protection and assistance to the new bureaucratic clique, its state and its economy.

I am relatively confident that you will eventually come to understand this theory of dwses. The question is, will you ever come to see the importance of the question for an international party? Or will you find the glamour of tough proletarian rhetoric and the involvement of a big and active multi-national bureaucracy more important than this tool of scientific analysis necessary for the understanding of international social forces and the leading of the world proletarian revolution?

Later on today (we're crossing the International Date Line so in a way it'll be tomorrow) we will arrive in New York. I am a trifle sick so want to be done with travelling and will not first visit California as we had previously planned. We will write our impressions of politics there in due course. You can send mail to us--and I hope you will write, if not as a group, perhaps individually--at the SL's New York address.

For the World Party of Proletarian Revolution,

Bill

cc: SLUS
NZSL