

VANGUARD newsletter

Published monthly by independent revolutionary socialists
Editors — Harry Turner, Hugh Fredericks, Robert Davis
P. O. Box 67, Peck Slip Station, New York, N. Y. 10038



Vol. 3, No. 8 Price 10¢ (\$1.00 per year) Labor donated September 1971

Contents: The Attica Prison Revolt	p. 107
Trotskyism In Bolivia	110
Dissident De Leonists Expel Left-Wing	115

THE ATTICA PRISON REVOLT

Thirty-seven men were deliberately murdered--9 hostages and 28 prisoners --by the 1,000 State troopers, sheriff's deputies and prison guards unleashed by NY State Commissioner of Correction Russell G. Oswald and Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller at Attica State Prison.

Hundreds more of the 1,200 prisoners were wounded, many critically, while attempting to surrender or while lying on the ground trying to avoid the barrage of fire. The attacking force used shot, which is intended to hit as many targets within range as possible, and even dum dum bullets, outlawed in every civilized country, whose particles explode within the body of the victim and rip into adjacent organs, muscles and tissues.

To prepare the public for the massacre, atrocity tales were concocted, circulated and subsequently exposed as complete falsehoods: that the prisoners had slain two hostages before the assault on Cellblock D, cutting their throats and otherwise mutilating them, and that one hostage had been emasculated and further tortured before being put to death.

It was, in fact, determined that after an initial expression of satisfaction at having turned the tables --prisoners now guarding the guards --in which the hostages were stripped and paraded, the prisoners gave the hostages better food, care and accommodations than they had themselves. It has now been completely established by autopsies verified

by two pathologists that all hostages were slain by guns which the attacking force alone possessed.

It has since been determined that three prisoners had died of multiple stab wounds. All prisons contain their quota of "stool-pigeons", prisoners who, in exchange for favors or through fear, keep the authorities informed about violations of the rules, effected or in preparation. The bitterness and hatred of men pent up in prisons is also expressed in personal feuds. That only three men were killed by the "inmates" in the circumstances testifies to their restraint.

Any prison is a consummate expression of class society, and is predominately filled with those who do violence to the property relations established by the ruling class, with "sociopaths", "enemies of society", with brutalized and degraded men and women, whose real "crime" was to be born poor and of Black and Spanish-speaking parentage. It is for this "crime" that they are condemned to dead-end jobs at starvation wages or to unemployment and the "mercy" of welfare, to rat infested slums, and to be burned alive in fire-traps.

Many a Black and Spanish-speaking

"inmate" rots in prison today because he could not afford the legal talent to defend him against flimsy charges, because of the racism of police, judges, prosecutors, juries, of the whole edifice of "justice", because any poor member of an especially oppressed minority is presumed guilty of any crime charged.

Those who refuse to submit to their "fate", who attempt to acquire some of the "good things in life" by an individualistic "expropriation of the expropriators" are jailed.

What about murders, robberies and rapes committed against working men and women? A great many crimes are, of course, committed against them. It is far easier for the lumpenproletariat, as Marx and Engels termed it, to prey upon the working class, and especially on its most oppressed layers, than on the bourgeoisie, which protects its property and persons with safes and vaults, with police and private guards. But, most of these crimes, and especially those committed against Black and Spanish-speaking workers go "unsolved". It is, in most cases, the crime against an "important" person which prods the police--who are known to be in league with organized crime in the dope, prostitution and numbers rackets--into activity. In this process, many an innocent Black and Puerto Rican worker and working class youth is sent to prison.

While sowing not the slightest illusion in the lumpenproletariat as a revolutionary force, as VANGUARD NEWSLETTER noted in its March 1971 issue, Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto did make the point that:

"that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution..."

It is because the most oppressed minorities are the most radicalized, because its workers have the more advanced consciousness that their oppression has a social basis, because they increasingly recognize that their oppression has a special

quality, has racist roots, that more prisons like Attica will explode in revolt.

The prison authorities today stand in fear of the Black militants who see themselves as political prisoners, as the wronged, and no longer as "wrong-doers". Every prison in the US has its outsized proportion of Black and Spanish-speaking prisoners. In Cellblock D, they constituted 85% of the imprisoned. Not only did these "inmates" raise demands for prison reforms--such as more liberal prison procedures, better food and medical care, more recreation time and improved rehabilitation programs, they also demanded that their humanity be respected. And they went beyond this general proposition to class demands, albeit sometimes in confused form, e.g., the right to form trade unions, a minimum wage, the freedom of "all political prisoners" including Angela Davis and the Soledad Brothers, asylum in a "non-imperialistic" country.

Many a columnist has now had occasion to marvel at the unity, discipline and humanity of the prisoners, at the strength, passion, oratory and intelligence of leaders which a "political radicalism" had brought into being, of the "submergence of racial animosity in class solidarity", as Tom Wicker of the "NY Times" put it.

And indeed, the prisoners' security force was interracial, as was the leadership committee. The term "brother", which Blacks had previously given a racial meaning, was now extended to all the prisoners. "Radical class and political views", which captured the full flavor of capitalist oppression were constantly set forth by prison orators and maintained a revolutionary fervor in the ranks of the prisoners.

It was Trotsky who pointed out in discussions on the Negro question in 1939, that "the privileges, the comforts" which prevent the "higher strata" from becoming revolutionists, do not exist for Black workers, who are capable of the greatest revolutionary "courage and sacrifice".

The Attica revolt, led by men who

had been reclaimed by the revolutionary process, testifies to the understanding of Trotsky that Black workers, and with them the workers from other especially oppressed minorities, represent "a vanguard of the working class".

The bloody massacre of the Attica prisoners has offended the liberals and stirred the depths of the Black and Spanish-speaking ghettos and the radical milieu, but not the broad mass of organized workers. Although the working class is now engaged in ever-sharpening struggles on the economic front, it has yet to be won even for a break with the political parties of the capitalist class. The growing crisis of capitalism presents the revolutionary Marxists with ever greater opportunities to win the American workers to revolutionary politics. As part of this task, the revolutionary Marxists must conduct a struggle in the trade union movement to the end that, as Lenin stated in What Is To Be Done, the workers "respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and no matter what class is affected" from a revolutionary Marxist "point of view and no other". (Lenin's emphasis)

Many of the Attica prisoners, who identified with the Black Panthers, called upon Bobby Seale, national chairman of the Black Panther Party, to be a member of the observers committee which they had demanded be established to negotiate their demands. This committee, ranging from 20 to 30, also numbered civil rights lawyer William M. Kunstler, a representative of the Young Lords, Black Muslims, and also included such "moderates" as Representative Herman Badillo, the NYC Democrat. It was the "moderates" who raised the call for Rockefeller to come to the prison to "reason" with the prisoners.

In a preview of what US capitalism has in store for the working class, Rockefeller answered with guns. The revolt, said Rockefeller afterward, had been brought on by the "highly organized tactics of militants" and by "outside forces".

As world capitalism goes into

decline, as competition for a shrinking world market accelerates, each nation's capitalists must intensify a struggle to tear down the living standards of their working classes in an effort to preserve their rate and mass of profits. The tendency to merge the trade union apparatus with the state, which Trotsky noted in 1940, will be speeded. In the US, the Nixon wage-freeze is to be followed by wage "guide-lines" administered with the aid of the trade union "leaders". As a concomitant, a crack-down on "revolutionary agitators" and "outside forces" is being prepared which will go far beyond the repression of the McCarthyite '50's. If it feels its rule crumbling, the ruling class, as a last resort, will seize upon the weapon of fascism.

As a portent of the future, the ruling class is preparing "maximum security institutions", i.e., concentration camps for Black and white revolutionists.

VANGUARD NEWSLETTER has often pointed out that the Black nationalist outlook is a reaction to the pervasive white chauvinism which the ruling class has historically and assiduously promoted. We have often stated that the struggle for the unity of the working class for the socialist revolution demands a struggle against all forms of special oppression, and therefore, against all manifestations of white chauvinism. In so doing, we also fight against the reactionary utopias of Black nationalism which help divide the Black workers from the white and place them at the service of their petty-bourgeoisie. It is because a revolutionary Marxist working class vanguard party does not yet exist, that many of the demands of Black revolutionists for an end to capitalist and racist oppression are couched in Black nationalist and "third world" phraseology.

The Black Panther program, as VANGUARD NEWSLETTER reiterated in March 1971, is a "confused mixture of Black nationalism, reformism, Maoist rhetoric, 'third world' anti-imperialism, but also a growing anti-capitalist orientation".

George Jackson of the "Soledad Brothers", a Black Panther leader, and an avowed socialist, murdered in San Quentin Prison, was by no means an accidental figure.

According to the Workers League (WL) and the Socialist Labour League (SLL) with which it is in solidarity, the national question is completely reactionary when raised in countries such as the US, Canada and Great Britain which have "completed" their bourgeois democratic revolutions.

The WL is, therefore, compelled to deny that special oppression of the Black and Spanish-speaking people exists. Under the sterile slogan of "fight racism", it has made, as we have said, a "passive adaptation to white chauvinism". In the name of Lenin and Trotsky, it and the SLL, in actuality, adopt the point of view of the dominant nation, and cater to the prejudices of the majority of a population against oppressed minorities.

As VANGUARD NEWSLETTER stated in its series, "Trotsky and the Negro Question", in August 1969, these "Leninists" and "Trotskyists" seem unaware that "bourgeois democracy is, at best, limited and incomplete in every area, including the national". (Original emphasis)

It is because the American Civil War failed, as did the American

Revolution, to "complete" the bourgeois democratic revolution in respect to the liberation of the Negro people, and new forms of special oppression replaced the special oppression of chattel slavery, that the national question is still present in the US today. In respect to the complete solution of bourgeois democratic and national tasks, the concept of the Permanent Revolution is valid for the advanced countries as well. Only a socialist revolution will eliminate the heritage of national and racial oppression and of inequality which exists in every country as a product of its uneven and combined development.

The modern state is a mechanism by which the capitalists are able to continue exploiting and oppressing the working class. Jails, police and armies are all instruments for this purpose.

Having taken state power from the capitalist class in a socialist revolution, the working class will exercise its power to eradicate all forms of oppression.

Victims of capitalist "justice", especially those from the oppressed minorities will be "swept into the movement" and will be able to play a part in the socialist revolution led by the working class and headed by its vanguard party.

TROTSKYISM IN BOLIVIA - J. Rose

∟ We have reprinted the following article from the latest issue of LABOR ACTION, the monthly publication of the Labor Action Committee of Canada, a fraternal organization of VANGUARD NEWSLETTER.

∟ The perspective of the Permanent Revolution which Trotskyists uphold, calls upon the small working class of a backward country to lead the much larger mass of peasantry in a socialist revolution. The Bolshevik Revolution, led by Lenin and Trotsky, demonstrated that only a working class party of the Leninist type, a party of "irreconcilable opposition", in Trotsky's words, which has also thoroughly absorbed the theory and

practice of Marxism can lead the workers and peasants to victory.

∟ As VANGUARD NEWSLETTER stated in May 1971:

"The crisis of world capitalism, which is now manifesting itself with especial sharpness in Latin America presents the revolutionary socialists there with an exceptional opportunity to open the road for the international socialist revolution.

"The neo-Menshevik Stalinists and Social-Democrats, the neo-Narodnik Castroists and Maoists, the neo-Pilsudskyists, all, threaten to disarm the Latin American working class.

The revolutionary socialists will be able to win the leadership of the Latin American masses only by conducting an irreconcilable struggle against these anti-working class reformist and revisionist tendencies."

✓As LABOR ACTION points out, however, while the subjective factor, leadership, can be decisive at a revolutionary moment, it does not automatically guarantee victory. The objective conditions must also be ripe for the taking of power.

✓LABOR ACTION undertakes a sober assessment of the defeat in Bolivia, the success of the right-wing coup by "Kornilov", by Colonel Banzer Suarez, against the Torres regime, and the role of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR), which the International Committee of the Fourth International (IC) had acknowledged as its Bolivian section.

✓An assessment of POR's role in August, must take into account, not only its history, its role in the

1952 revolution, in which Paz Estensorro of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) played the role of Kerensky, but also that of the Trotskyist movement in general, in the post-war period in particular; of the role of the International Secretariat (IS) now realigned with the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and of the IC.

✓The attack on Guillermo Lora and the POR by the Workers League (WL) in solidarity with the Socialist Labour League (SLL) is assessed in this context.

✓VANGUARD NEWSLETTER considers the article by LABOR ACTION to be an important contribution to, not only an understanding of the Bolivian defeat, but also to the process of rearming the revolutionary Marxists in Latin America and other under-developed sectors of the world.

✓Subscription rates to LABOR ACTION are \$1.00 per year for ten issues and should be sent to Labor Action Committee, 330 Sumach St., Apt. 49, Toronto, Ontario.✓

*

*

*

*

*

The fall of the Torres regime in Bolivia to the right-wing militarists, and the circumstances surrounding it should be of particular interest to international Trotskyism.

To start with, information that has come from Bolivia concerning the take-over by the right-wing militarists who were supported by the fascist Falangists and Paz (who in 1952 was the leader of the nationalist MNR government), is scarce. Most of the material is second hand, either through the North American socialist press, or bourgeois papers such as the "New York Times or the Paris daily, "Le Monde".

At this writing, only one first-hand report of the recent policies of the Bolivian Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) led by Guillermo Lora exists to our knowledge in the North American press. That is an interview with Sossa, a leader of the youth of the POR, that appeared in the "Bulletin" of 9 August 1971. The "Bulletin" is the weekly newspaper of the Workers

League, a group that is in political sympathy with the International Committee. The International Committee holds as its members the Socialist Labour League (of Great Britain), as well as other groups in other countries.

In the "Bulletin" of 30 August 1971, there appears, after the events in Bolivia, a very stern denunciation of the POR (apparently based upon information available well before the right-wing take-over) written by the Workers League's leading light, Tim Wohlforth.

Let's see what a leader of the POR has to say about the policies of his party:

"Question: Can you tell us to what extent the decisions of the Popular Assembly have been carried

out?

Sossa: Among the miners, the leaders of the Federation of Miners, under the initiative of our comrade Filemon Escobar, immediately took up a systematic campaign of explanation and mobilization around the Popular Assembly and went in person to different centres and different pits. There local committees were created and held meetings which elected 18 delegates representing the miners to the Popular Assembly. The results of these elections reflected a beginning movement of conscious radicalization of the miners and were quite different from the union elections held a few weeks before. Among the 18 miner delegates, five are members of the POR and several other militants are very close to us...

There is no doubt, however, that the degree of mobilization around the Popular Assembly is still very uneven. The miners are very much ahead of other layers of the proletariat and it is essentially because of their weight that the POR was able to win support in the first phase of the Assembly.

Question: What is your estimation of the initial work of the Assembly and of the present influence of the POR?

Sossa: The situation can be characterized in the following way. On one hand, there are the proposals of the POR, the documents and resolutions prepared by us which formed the heart of the Assembly's work and which were adopted with few changes and usually unanimously.

On the other hand, however, as soon as it came to the election of a leadership of the Assembly the POR proposals came up against a very strong opposition and when the votes were counted, the POR represented only around 20 per cent of the delegates, perhaps a little more...

To get back to the decisions of

the Assembly, the most important was the one to accelerate the organization of armed and trained workers' militias. A beginning in this direction took place in the days preceding the meeting of the Assembly and made it possible, together with the mobilization of the masses to momentarily counter the threat of a military coup.

In the case of a coup the Popular Assembly will call a general strike, will assume the military and political command of the masses. The decision to go over the systematic organization of militias is geared to this perspective and prepares the working class for the inevitable confrontation, the fight to fully install its own government, the workers and peasants government..."

Sossa goes on to say how the Bolivian Communist Party "sticks as close as it can to the line of the POR, and follows the masses in their evolution to the left". He says of the CP, "But its policies are still counterrevolutionary. As soon as it can it will attempt to turn the Assembly into a bourgeois institution."

Clearly, and in the words of a leading member of the party, the POR gave support to the Torres government over the right and urged this policy on the Popular Assembly. The POR pointed to the existence of workers' militias, and quite correctly the independent role they could play; yet in fact the workers' militias were formed for the purpose of preventing a coup against the Bonapartist government of Torres by the right of his own army.

With the existence of the Popular Assembly (apparently a representative workers' political institution independent of the control of the Torres government, and the workers' militia, the forms through which the working class could come to power existed. Yet there were no clear attempts to mobilize the working class independent of the Torres government. The POR said

if the Torres government were to fall the perspective was for the Popular Assembly to rule. But in what way would the working class be armed politically to rule? In what way was the working class to achieve its hegemony. To enforce its political power over the authority of the bourgeois government so that it would become a shell of itself, a thing of the past, ripe to be removed? Little is known of the actual conditions of the right-wing coup, other than apparently the majority of the workers' militia withdrew from the capital, rather than make a fight to the finish against the right-wing coup. We don't know, perhaps this was the wisest thing to do under the circumstances. The Torres government, a government of crisis, a government that sought to balance class relations in the essential interests of the national bourgeoisie, fell like the leaves that hide the branches of a tree. The reason it fell in the manner it did was because it represented the same class interests as the rebels of the right, only in a different, more "popular" way. Although the POR represented a strong party of the working class, it nevertheless, according to Sossa, constituted the minority of the working class. A majority was lacking for the POR to lead the Bolivian workers and peasants to power. This might have been true, but what party but the POR was responsible for the political development of the Bolivian workers and peasants?

The POR in its policies towards the Torres government tended to spread illusions concerning that government to the masses. The POR retarded the political maturity of the masses to the point where there was actually confusion as to the differences between the POR and the Stalinist CP.

Is Tim Wohlforth correct in stating:

"In every country of Latin America it can be said that capitalism rules only because of the paralysis and confusion of those

elements which call themselves Trotskyists."?

Certainly there have been a number of revolutionary upsurges in the semi-colonial countries of Latin America, but to elevate the crisis of revolutionary leadership to the sole factor of why capitalism still exists in Latin America is certainly stretching a point. A correct line taken by the POR during the current crisis in Bolivia would have aided in the political mobilization of the masses, but most certainly not have guaranteed their victory.

When things were going better for the POR the attitude the Workers League took towards the Bolivian Trotskyists was altogether different. In an article by Melody Farrow in the "Bulletin" of 19 July 1971, under the title of "Bolivian Workers Defend Assembly", the POR was referred to as a section of the International Committee (something the Workers League and SLL were somewhat unwilling to do before). The article was altogether uncritical and included such items as:

"According to reports from the 'New York Times' and the Paris daily 'Le Monde', the first resolution of the Assembly was to call for a general strike and to assume 'the political and military leadership of the masses' in case of a coup d'etat."

The article concluded with the following:

"The POR has the greatest opportunity in these conditions to build a revolutionary party and to lead the fight for a workers' government."

Contrast this to a quote from Wohlforth's article, "Bitter Lessons of Defeat", in the 30 August 1971 "Bulletin":

"Lora, in collaboration with the Bolivian Stalinists and with the agreement of the Bolivian and international Pabloites, failed to fight at any point for the

overthrow of the Torres military regime. Thus he, along with the rest of the Popular Assembly, acted as a left cover for Torres while the right wing elements in Torres' own army prepared and finally executed their coup."

Wohlforth makes some very correct points in his criticisms of the POR, yet in what way is he distinguished from the Stalinists and Pabloites on the question of the Torres military regime, except by virtue of hindsight?

More likely, Wohlforth's real objections are that the POR simply "failed". As Wohlforth says:

"It is necessary to make an assessment of how this coup was permitted to take place..." (LA emphasis)

In the "assessment" that follows, Wohlforth charts the course of development of the POR from the early 1950's when it supported the nationalist government of Paz and sought admittance to that government of the workers' organizations, through the split in the Fourth International in which the POR followed Pablo. By 1963, the POR found itself outside of either the United Secretariat of the International Committee. At that time, the POR unified with the Pabloite organization of Moscoso and entered the United Secretariat on what appeared to be common agreement over Cuba and Castro. Later the POR broke with Moscoso over the question of guerilla war, preferring to base themselves in the working class.

Following that break, the POR announced its agreement with the IC's international perspectives and expressed solidarity with the International Committee. The struggle of the POR under the leadership of Lora against the guerilla war orientation of Moscoso and his international allies, Mandel and Maitan, occurred in 1969. The International Committee correctly saw the importance of this struggle and had it given wide publicity. The issues the POR sought to struggle with the Mandel-Frank-Maitan axis on were

in part much the same issues the Socialist Workers Party had raised in its struggle against the European Pabloites. The Socialist Workers Party has become concerned with the guerilla warfare perspective of the majority of the United Secretariat.

The SWP opposition was essentially an opportunist one rather than one which advocated a principled turn to the working class. In fact, the SWP has long ago given up on the working class as the agent of social change, and opposed the guerilla war orientation as part of its middle class reformist turn.

With the rise of the Cuban revolution and the defection of the SWP into the revisionist Pablo camp (a defection that was prepared by many years of slow, political rot) the Trotskyist forces of the International Committee were thrown into confusion. The Socialist Labour League accepted the Pabloite analysis of the implications of the Cuban revolution, while denying, to avoid the liquidationist conclusions, that any anti-capitalist social transformation took place.

It was during this period (the early to mid-60's) that the SLL refused to accept a centrist political characterization of the SWP, insisting on a bloc with the Pabloite centre of the party against the ultra-Pabloite right of Weiss and Swabeck.

Especially in Latin America, where the Cuban question weighed so heavily, the IC, which was represented mainly by the SLL, sowed confusion among militants with the SLL's absurd line on Cuba, and lack of clarity in its struggle with the SWP. Under such conditions, organizations such as the POR could only waver on the fringes of the Pabloite international. The death of Guevara in Bolivia, while at the head of a guerilla band, served to raise the antagonisms in the United Secretariat to the breaking point, leading to open battles and breaks such as that made by the POR.

The International Committee accord-

ing to the Socialist Labour League is the Fourth International, while to the OCI, it represents the force around which the Fourth International is to be rebuilt. If this seems odd, it is because the IC is not structured as a real international, but on the basis of parity between the French and English organizations.

DISSIDENT DE LEONISTS EXPEL LEFT-WING

∕In the late '60s, the radicalization of youth, the heightened militancy of Black and Spanish-speaking people and the sharpening economic struggles of the working class produced a ferment in the seemingly petrified Socialist Labor Party (SLP). Opposition took shape against the SLP's rigid sectarianism, which removed the party from even the slightest involvement in these struggles. The SLP leadership quickly answered this oppositional current with a bureaucratic purge. Scores of members were expelled or driven to the point of resignation.

∕As a result, a number of independent De Leonist groups came into being between 1967 and 1969, among them the Socialist Committee of Correspondence (SCC) in New York. After a lengthy discussion, these groups merged into a national organization called Socialist Reconstruction (SR) at a convention in August 1970.

∕The unification was, however, beset from the start by a deepening political difference between the majority of the organization and the group built around the New York-based SCC. The latter had from its very inception undertaken a serious re-examination of its past theory and practice, which had been inherited from the SLP.

In the process, the SCC comrades rejected categorically the sectarian and abstentionist policies of their former party. They reaffirmed their support for the revolutionary principles and traditions of Daniel De Leon and also incorporated into their outlook many concepts of Lenin and Trotsky.

∕The majority of the dissident De Leonists, however, were not prepared

to undertake such an evaluation. They only wished to discard a small part of the peculiar sectarian ideological baggage which the SLP had accumulated since the death of De Leon. ∕Right-wing elements attempted from the start to drive the SCC comrades out of the unified organization. The first attempts at this purge were unsuccessful, but as the politics of the New York group became more crystallized, the right-wing was finally able to have its way. Charging the SCC comrades with "Trotskyism", a charge they did not deny, the right-wing successfully purged them from SR this past July.

∕Since that time, the group has been known by the name of its publication, SOCIALIST FORUM. It has the support of De Leonist adherents nationally and has attracted new forces to its banner.

∕The following is an excerpt from a letter sent to the national membership of SR by those now in SOCIALIST FORUM in an attempt to rally support against the purge. As the letter indicates, revolutionary socialists have much to gain from an appreciation of the work of the uncompromising revolutionary thinker and fighter, Daniel De Leon. We publish it to demonstrate that in uniting De Leon's contributions to revolutionary Marxism with those of Lenin and Trotsky, SOCIALIST FORUM has developed a program which is close to that of VANGUARD NEWSLETTER on most essential questions.

∕We urge our readers to subscribe to SOCIALIST FORUM, GPO Box 1948, New York, N.Y. 10001. Rates for 6 issues for the US, Mexico and Canada are \$1.50, international, \$2.50. 7

* * * * *

We have never denied that our perspective is heavily influenced by the theoretical contributions and writings of Lenin and Trotsky.

Contrary to the second-hand quote attributed to Lenin and so widely circulated by the SLP, De Leon was not the only one to make important contributions to socialist science since the passing of Marx. This is not to deny De Leon's towering role in the movement per se. Fifty-seven years have elapsed since De Leon's death. To assume that there had been no worthwhile contributions in all that time would only admit to the complete intellectual bankruptcy of the socialist movement. We wholeheartedly reject such a characterization.

To Lenin, we owe the understanding of the role of the revolutionary party. Lenin, rather than attempting to "deceive" the Russian masses saw the party, not as the tool of blind leadership, but as a vehicle by which the consciousness of the masses could be raised to the point where they could become masters of their own destiny. The party, then, is designed to deal with subjective conditions. As such, it has a direct bearing and relevancy to the conditions here in America where, even by long's admission [a leading spokesman for the right-wing], the working class is relatively backward in terms of class consciousness.

Trotsky's contributions lie with his internationalist outlook, his brilliant economic and sociological analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the nature of Stalinism, his theory of "Permanent Revolution", which not only predicted the course of the Soviet revolution in 1917, but also foresaw the [present consequences of] revolutionary upheavals in the third world a full half-century before their actual occurrence, and of course, his "Transitional Program".

Of all the positions raised in SR none has rankled the conservatives more than the methodology embedded in the "Transitional Program"... there has been continuous condemna-

tion of this most fundamental and basic concept of not just "Trotskyism", but of Marxism itself. From Marx's observation in the Manifesto,

"The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of the movement..."...

to the idea's highest expression as found in The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International no concept has proved more basic than that of helping "the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of revolution." ("Transitional Program")...

Far from an "elitist, deceptionist, or manipulatory" program, the theory is firmly based on a recognition that only through their own understanding, their own struggles, and breaking with their own illusions can the masses come to understand the historical imperative of socialist revolution. Contrast this with those who have a pre-packaged program of abstractions for the class, who want to impose their ideas on the proletariat without having it learn for itself, or who have no perspective of winning the masses--who limit themselves to building small propaganda circles divorced from the class and its struggles. Transitionalism breaks with elitism as it is a socialist program for the masses--not propagandist abstractions that at best can recruit small handfuls of intellectuals. We stand with Lenin in understanding the tasks required to win the class:

"As long as the question was...one of winning the vanguard of the proletariat to communism, so long, and to that extent, propa-

ganda was in the forefront...But when it is a question of practical action by the masses, of the disposition...of vast armies, of alignment of all the class forces of the given society for the final and decisive battle, then propaganda habits alone, the mere repetition of the truths of "pure" communism, are of no avail... ("Left-Wing" Communism...)

Are Leninist conceptions fixed in a Russian-like milieu, with large numbers of peasantry and backward industrial conditions? No, they are not. There are, of course, many special circumstances entailed in the Russia of 1917, which Leninism addressed itself to, and consequently has little or no relevancy to us... But at the same time, there are many conditions prevalent in America today that call for the use of tactics employed in the Bolshevik revolution. Unquestionably, we are faced with the same fundamental contradiction between the subjective and objective factors, namely the social imperative of revolution and the political backwardness of the masses. The conceptions of the party and a transitional program are both geared to this basic contradiction. Further, many special problems faced by the Bolsheviks could very well crop up here. Can we say, especially in light of the events of recent years, that nationalism among blacks, Chicanos, or Puerto Ricans can never develop into a substantial social phenomenon? How would our orthodox De Leonists handle this situation? With the mechanistic chauvinism of a Luxemburg or a deep appreciation of the special interests of national minorities understood by the Bolsheviks? We should further remind our comrades that the Bolsheviks, like De Leon, placed particular emphasis on political and economic organization, on relatively peaceful transitions of power...

The contention of special and unique conditions in America is by no means the sole property of epigonal De Leonists. "American exceptionalism" runs very deep throughout the American left. It blinded the

early Social-Democrats to the imperialist nature of American capitalism. The SWP sees the circumstances facing American blacks as unique and calls for the "Afro-Americanization of Marxism". Social conditions in America, like conditions elsewhere, reflect peculiar local circumstances. Of course, we must take these local factors into account. But this in no way means that these are "unique" to the extent where we can afford to ignore the history and experience of the workers' international revolutionary struggle.

De Leonism, unfortunately, lost all theoretical continuity with its founder's death in 1914. Since that time there has been little or nothing in the way of theoretical growth or development in the current. Ironic, isn't it, how our comrades will reject an ideology from thousands of miles away while embracing another decades long past?

How can we explain this attitude? Behind the rejection of many of the ideas branded as "Trotskyist" lies an inability to deal with another fundamental of Marxist ideology--dialectical materialism. Paid lip-service by the orthodox De Leonist, it never receives more than ethereal attention. How can a socialist who claims in abstraction that all phenomena are in constant flux and motion, under continuous transformation through a process of synthesizing regeneration, turn around and contend that an ideology intact from 60 years ago can possibly be applicable today? In only one way, comrades, by denying the dialectic in practice. And in so doing he can only embrace the philosophy of the bourgeoisie--empiricism and pragmatism. Impressionistic acceptance of passing surface phenomena, coupled with pseudo-morality, is substituted for appreciative understanding of the determining, but more obscured, social undercurrent.

...three of the slogans /objected to as Trotskyist/ are nothing more than restatements of the fundamentals of De Leonism, though admittedly

not couched in terminology likely to be approved by Arnold Peterson [the former national secretary of the SLP]. What can you call slogans like "For Workers' Power!", "Planned Production Under Workers Management", or "Build a Revolutionary Labor Movement", other than calls for socialist industrial unionism? To the extent that Trotskyist groups have adopted these slogans, then to that degree they come to accept what we as De Leonists regard as essential.

At least two more of the slogans are nothing more than concrete expressions of policy decisions made by the conference. "Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution"...the call of "No Sell-out to GM!"...In this case we were calling upon the UAW rank-and-file to oppose Woodcock's plans of the time to capitulate on the cost-of-living escalator, wage package, and brutal working conditions in GM plants...

The slogan "For a Socialist Middle East" poses the only viable answer to the crisis presently plaguing that corner of the world. Arab is pitted against Jew at the encouragement of the regimes that use the conflict to solidify their own position in their respective "socialist" societies. Attention is diverted from the real and pressing problems facing Jewish worker and Arab peasant alike. The responsibility then of international revolutionary socialists must be that of building support for a true area-wide socialist republic (societies of workers and peasants), bringing Arab and Jew together in joint struggle against their common enemies--Zionist and Arab Bonapartists. What does Bob Long find wrong with the perspective other than the fact that "it's Trotskyist"? Does Long hold, like the American chauvinist SLP, that the workers and peasants of the Mid-East must patiently wait for the American revolution before they can expect any relief from their plight?

Long contends that our slogans for the April 24th Washington leaflet (entitled "The War and the Labor

Movement") "assume the continuation of a class society." Unless Long has in mind a class society unlike any witnessed by history we can only argue that he fails to understand class society. What class society is going to abandon its war machine and convert it to socially useful production? What class society can do without war? What class society has ever provided real full employment at an adequate standard of living? And what class society has failed to initiate fetters on the right of labor to organize?...These demands, in a concrete way, explain to the workers some of the basic aspects of socialism. They demonstrate the nature of "workers' power" while simultaneously posing the limitations of capitalism. They are then, transitional demands...

Long also uses discussion of a revolutionary program for the family to further demonstrate that we are committed to the "continuation of the state after capitalism is replaced". He does not address himself to the question of the family at all. We never know, from his letter, whether or not he accepts the basic tenets outlined by Engels in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. But aside from this we can only describe his contention as a misrepresentation. We do not call for the continuation of the state, we merely recognize that conditions beyond our control may mandate it. Let us make it clear that the demands referred to are designed to be imposed upon the capitalist state. The revolutionary party would mobilize class support to force the bourgeois state to destroy the nuclear family. Obviously though, such a contradiction would tear capitalism apart. But should the nuclear family remain in existence at the time of the revolution and therefore require the continuation of our program for the family, this policy would be implemented through the workers' authority. But this is not to say that this authority may not take the form of a state. We honestly don't know. If one accepts the stylized notions

of the orthodox De Leonists, and if these could actually be realized in social reality (effective political and economic mobilization of the class, complete capitulation of the bourgeoisie, peaceful transition, etc.) we will admit that a state structure would be superfluous. Whether we will see this program realized remains to be seen...we must be prepared for the possibility that our program may not be implemented in its entirety and the resulting consequences. Under such circumstances substantial opposition to the workers' authority, expressed by alien class forces, would likely remain in existence calling for repressive measures that in turn would require a proletarian state mechanism.

About the only slogan discussed in any detail is that of "A General Strike to End the War". We feel an obligation consequently to answer it in similar depth. Comrade Long correctly notes that, "Traditionally De Leonists have pointed out that general strikes are self-defeating." But to adhere to such a conclusion can only be the result of ignoring history for the sake of dogma. Apparently Comrade Long is unfamiliar with the British General Strike of 1926. That action so thoroughly paralyzed capitalism that the Fabian socialists were taken to the highest councils of the Tory government where the bourgeoisie conceded defeat and offered power to the workers. The Fabians, as Social-Democrats, declined. It was only the theoretical bankruptcy of the Labor Party that prevented a revolution. The general strike in itself delivered sufficient force. This is not to say that we disagree with the traditional De Leonist outlook on this question. But unlike the sectarians we approach the ideology dialectically and rather than resting content with formula, we regularly re-examine their content, Generally speaking, yes, a strike of this scope would be disastrous in a revolutionary crisis. We too would call upon the workers to seize the factories rather than abandon

them. But not every crisis is a revolutionary crisis. Just the fact that it is not of such a dimension does not mean we abandon our responsibility to pose specific programs of action. In limited crises, like the one we are in now, a general strike would prove quite effective in building a sense of solidarity and militancy. The war would be opposed by the class with a class action. Flexing its muscle the class would in a very real way come to understand its strength in unity. We specifically counterposed this action to the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice and their "People's Peace Treaty". This group would have the "people" plead with the bourgeois rulers for a specific withdrawal date. Our alternative was one of a class nature. Instead of appealing to the classless "people" we called upon the working class not to plead but force an end to the war through unified class action.

In planning to raise the general strike demand at the Washington demonstration we did approach the Philadelphia branch of SR and proposed joint work under this slogan, among others. They refused on the ground that a general strike was not "practical" at this time, essentially the same argument raised by Long. Both see their programs determined by the subjective mood of the masses. But precisely because of the "background and attitudes of the American working class" we cannot let our program be determined by their political backwardness if we are to avoid the pitfalls of reformism and are to stay on a revolutionary course. With Trotsky we contend that at all times a revolutionist's program must be molded by the imperatives determined by the objective conditions, not the subjective attitudes of the workers:

"We claim to have Marxism or Scientific Socialism. What does "Scientific Socialism" signify in reality? It signifies that the party which represents this social science departs, as every science,

not from subjective wishes, tendencies, or moods, but from objective relationships. Only by this method can we establish demands adequate to the objective situation and only after this can we adapt these demands and slogans to the given mentality of the masses. But to begin with this mentality as the fundamental fact would signify not a scientific but a conjunctural, demagogic or adventurist policy." (Discussions with Leon Trotsky on the Transitional Program)

De Leon was the first socialist theoretician to clearly recognize the anti-class nature of the labor bureaucracy, that brilliant understanding revealed in his classic Two Pages from Roman History. Consequently, it would not be that inconsistent to see De Leonists trying to bring that perspective home to the workers and specifically to the rank-and-file of the trade unions. We feel that the call for a general strike is a useful demand to that end. We can rest assured that the "labor lieutenants" will oppose such a move with all the resources at their disposal, recognizing as they do its revolutionary potential. In fighting for the demand the rank-and-file would come to a better understanding of the social treachery in their union organizations...

Political positions, to our mind, never serve as the basis for expulsions. As Marxists we do not feel that important questions of theory and ideology can ever be answered by purges. No more than scientists can afford to physically remove what they see as "heretics" from their universities and laboratories can we afford to expel members, who while in a minority today may hold the key to revolutionary victory tomorrow. In the words of Trotsky:

"Away with passive obedience, with mechanical levelling by the authorities, with suppression of personality, with servility and with careerism! A Bolshevik is

not merely a disciplined man: he is a man who in each case and on each question forges a firm opinion of his own and defends it courageously and independently not only against his enemies but inside his own party. Today perhaps he will be in a minority... he will submit... but this does not always signify that he is in the wrong. Perhaps he has seen or understood a new task or the necessity of a turn earlier than others have done. He will persistently raise the question a second, a third, a tenth time, if need be. Thereby he will render his party a service helping it to meet the new task fully armed, or to carry out the necessary turn without organic upheaval and without factional convulsions. (The New Course, 1924)

ON LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

It is the practice of the editors of VANGUARD NEWSLETTER to answer correspondence by a direct and immediate letter, if the pressure of other work permits. We apologize to those of our correspondents to whom a reply has been delayed.

When we feel that our correspondents have raised a political point of interest to our readers, we will excerpt this part of the letter and publish it and our answer. In such cases, we will identify the letters by the initials of their authors. Names will be withheld unless the writers give express permission for their publication, except in the case of a public figure. We will, of course, withhold the name of the latter upon request.

We welcome our readers' questions, criticisms and suggestions. They have helped us to improve our publication and remove ambiguity and lack of clarity from our positions. We hope to further improve its format and increase its size in the near future.