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PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY'S TRADE UNION PROGRAM

PLP which considers the little red book of Mao Tse Tung's sententious slogans to be the apogee of Marxist-Leninist wisdom, has been compared to the ultra-left Stalinist parties of the "third period" because of its earlier adventurism, its lack of a perspective for political struggle, and its tendency toward crude economic determinism, e.g., students to the factories.

An examination of PLP's trade union program (PL, August 1969) and practice, makes clear the inadequacy of the "third Period" tag, that analogies can only be correct within limits, and that PLP is also the product of the "Democratic Front", however much it might presently fulminate against Georgi Dimitrov and the reformist policies of the Communist Party from the mid-'30's on.

The Fatal Flaw

PLP's fatal flaw is its inability to examine its past theories and practices in depth, and at any point that may discredit Stalin or Mao. For this reason, it cannot acknowledge Stalin as the real author of the class collaborationist "People's Front".

In addition, PLP suffers from political schizophrenia. It identifies, on the one hand, with the Maoist variety of "socialism in one country". Mao's world outlook, as enunciated by his heir apparent, Lin Piao, conceives of the destruction of American capitalism, not through the struggle of American workers, who, with the

exception of Black and other oppressed minorities, are seen as conservatized and incapable of revolutionary action, but rather through the encirclement of industrially advanced countries (the "cities") by the underdeveloped "third world" (the "country"). On the other hand, PLP desires to lead a working class revolution, and must, therefore, look to the radicalization of the class, must, perforce, include the white workers in its perspectives.

It is constantly torn between the two conceptions, "correcting" itself, first in one direction, then in the other.

PLP's vacillations between revolutionary and opportunist positions result in a conglomerate mixture, out of which rearrangements are sought. It is periodically forced to assess its policy failures, to correct its "mistakes", without acknowledging the root sources. Its recent mea culpa over its "mistake" in believing in "revolutionary nationalism" ignores the role of Mao's "thought" in support of "third world" ideology, which until the roll-back of the "colonial revolution" by imperialism, even inclu-

ded "princes and potentates", e.g., Indonesia's Sukarno, in its fond embrace.

Despite its rhetoric about "Marxism-Leninism" as a science, it is unable to utilize Marxism as a guide to action, because of its need to exclude fundamental lessons from the arsenal of Marxism which cannot be reconciled with its hagiography of Mao and Stalin. PLP ignores the materialist dialectic for the hunt for suitable quotations to justify whatever policy seems appropriate at the moment.

"Left-Center" Coalition

At the core of PLP's trade union program is the conception of the "Left-Center" coalition. PLP looks back on the '30's with extreme ambivalence. The reformist policies of adaptation to Roosevelt and the New Deal, the conversion of the ultra-left CP into the left wing of the Democratic Party, would also seem to have produced large organizational gains, through a coalition of the CP with labor bureaucrats. Control of thirteen large national unions! A periphery of millions in assorted organizations! A large base among intellectuals! PLP would like to acquire the largest, without the reformism, and hopes to change the nature of things by investing old names with new meaning.

PLP begins by defining the "mass of workers" as the "Center", with a leadership in its own image, and itself as the "Left" The united front is also uniquely defined by it, as between the "mass of workers...and communists".

The united front tactic was designed by Lenin and Trotsky to overcome the split in the working class of a country, by forcing the leaders of the Social-Democracy to agree to a joint struggle with the communist-led workers for transitional demands, enabling the workers to develop confidence in and move toward the communists. This Marxist term was perverted into an equivalent for the "Popular Front"

in the '30's.

The scientific language of Marxism is always "adjusted" by opportunists of all vintages. PLP reared in the school of Stalin-Mao operates in the same fashion.

Having provided sufficient ideological camouflage, PLP identifies the real elements it intends to do practical business with, the labor bureaucrats of moderate hue, "militant, class oriented, but non-communist".

Theory of Stages

Along with and inseparable from the "Left-Center" coalition concept, PLP's "intermediate strategy toward ultimate revolution", it projects a theory of stages. PLP members are to function in unions in accordance with a theory of "levels of struggle", with "minimum demands" for each level, while "attempting to move the fight to the next highest level". PLP will attempt to "unify all those involved in the struggle at every level". In case some of its members may not have gotten the point, PLP emphasizes the "task of the Left [PLP] to maintain and advance the Center forces."

Clearly then, PLP's basic approach is to go no further and no faster than its "Center allies are willing to go. It is the bureaucrat who will determine the "level of struggle", not changes in the objective situation as refracted in the consciousness of the workers. The nomenclature which identifies the mass of essentially uncommitted, still passive workers as the "Center" is not only foreign to Marxism, but is obviously a bit of sleight of hand to justify its present support for centrist leaderships, e.g., Morgenstern and Mage in SSEU, Davis in Local 1199.

PLP's "new" "Left-Center" coalition would seem to be basically identical with the old "Left-Center" coalition of the '30's, in which the CP entered into caucuses with the Thomas-Addes forces of the

United Auto Workers, with Curran of the National Maritime Union, Quill of the Transport Workers Union, etc.

"Economism"

The cosy relationship which PLP hopes to achieve with "Center" bureaucrats, also explains why its members have vehemently opposed placing political questions on union agendas, why it insists on exclusively "bread and butter" issues, in the fashion of the "economism" which it stridently condemns..The "struggle...for immediate gains", even when "sharpened" by PLP is quite acceptable to the "Center" bureaucrats in circumstances where their memberships are feeling their strength and demanding, not only the maintenance of living standards, against inflationary erosion, but real advances in wages and working conditions. What is entirely unacceptable to the bureaucrats are political questions which challenge their ongoing support for liberal Democrats and Republicans such as NYC's Mayor Lindsay, which pose the question of an independent political organization of the working class, of a labor party based on the unions.

PLP will, of course, state its opposition to the two capitalist parties, but only in a general propagandist fashion. It will even pose the question of independent political action, but on a local level, because it does not create difficulties with the bureaucrats. Its willingness to have a "boycott of the bosses" candidates" has the same rationale.

By achieving a "well-defined communist leadership", not within "rank and file" caucuses, but rather caucuses with the centrist bureaucrats, PLP expects, over several years, to win a large base in the unions. It hopes to convince the "Center" bureaucrats of the usefulness of its services, in the hope that it will not be dumped out of the unions by its coalition part-

ners in the event of "ruling class red-baiting attacks", as was the CP in the late '40's, during the "cold war" period.

PLP found it necessary to caution against "sectarianism", i.e., "a revolutionary strategy that dismisses immediate demands is not revolutionary at all", because evidently forces exist within it which oppose opportunistic accommodations to the "Center" bureaucracy, who wish to pose political demands unacceptable to the "Center", and which would, therefore, disrupt the hoped-for coalition.

The Negro Question

PLP has finally stumbled onto an understanding which we arrived at years earlier, and which is embodied in the Memorandum on the Negro Struggle, and in other parts of the pamphlet, Spartacist League Split, that:

- bi-racial caucuses must be built in the trade unions which will unite black and white workers in a struggle against the special oppression of the black workers, in the context of a struggle for the interests of all workers.
- special oppression of the Black people manifests itself in the work-place as super-exploitation.
- black workers represent the most militant sector of the class.
- Black nationalist ideology, which plays into the hands of the ruling class by dividing the workers, must be fought together with white chauvinism.
- the work-place, the "point of production", provides the road into the ghetto for a black working class leadership.

PLP has concluded, as have we, that all-black caucuses are inevitable where bi-racial caucuses do not exist, and that the bi-racial caucuses which do develop should attempt to achieve a unity with the black caucuses in struggle. However, in its usual fashion, PLP adulterates even these positive

raise this demand

insights by its one-sided mechanical approaches.

Its call for "preferential" hiring of black workers can only be understood as supporting the hiring of black workers instead of white, or the firing of white and replacement by black workers. Evidently PLP demands that workers exhibit the selflessness of ascetics. Posed in this manner PLP plays directly into the hands of the bosses, and damages the struggle to unite black and white workers. In addition, the ending of the economic upsurge, will throw large numbers of white as well as black workers into the ranks of the unemployed. The bosses will, no doubt avail themselves of PLP's demand, to pit black against white and white against black, to attack the unions, break strikes, beat back the Black struggle, and, when necessary, mobilize a fascist striking force to place black and white workers and revolutionists into concentration camps for extermination.

The fight against discrimination in hiring, past and present, which even liberals support, must be coupled with the transitional demand for a sliding scale of wages and hours, a shorter work-week without loss of pay, to end unemployment, a demand which is, therefore, an objective condemnation of capitalism's inability to provide workers with work.

PLP which has included points from Trotsky's transitional program in its programmatic summary, like a pack-rat which collects everything that glistens, is far from understanding their quality as transitional demands. In PLP's hands, they are transformed from quality back into quantity, despite the flippant remark of the Spartacist League, that PLP'ers are now "Trotskyists with a pre-frontal lobotomy".

Irreconcilable Contradictions

We believe PLP to be unstable as

it is now constituted, that its contradictions are fundamental and irreconcilable, that sections of it will sooner or later be brought to the realization that PLP cannot function as a revolutionary Marxist organization without having been cleansed from its accumulated mis-education acquired in the Augean stables of Stalinism and Maoism, and that this is denied it.

We believe that, to the extent PLP utilizes its correct insights on the Negro question (the spoonful of honey in the barrel-full of tar) to win black and white workers and students to its banners, it becomes capable of disorienting the workers and derailing a working class revolution, its subjective desires to the contrary notwithstanding. PLP's worship of Maoism, continually poses the possibility of its sacrifice of the proletarian revolution here, in the interests of the Chinese variety of "socialism in one country", as Stalinists have so often done, by a strategy and tactics which are in fundamental opposition to the inner-dynamics of the American revolution, of, in other words, becoming objectively counter-revolutionary.

We intend to cooperate with PLP, in helping it resolve itself into its component parts. In our activities in the unions, we will counterpose PLP's trade union line with our own.

- to PLP's "Left-Center" coalition with labor bureaucrats, the caucus of the rank and file.
- to PLP's schematic theory of stages based on the readiness of centrist bureaucrats to go to the "next higher stage", and "minimum demands" for each stage, a transitional program and organization, linking rank and file caucuses regionally and nationally.
- to PLP's economism, working class politics--a labor party based on the unions.

Our series, "Nationalism and Internationalism" will be continued in our October issue.