

BRUCE H.

SPARTACIST LEAGUE

INTERNAL DISCUSSION BULLETIN

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TRADE UNION MERGERS

While revolutionaries have always favored trade-union unity, we favor such unity in order to further the class struggle. When it is premised upon joint trade-union actions to strike the boss or to organize the unorganized, we heartily welcome such unity. When, however, a trade-union merger accomplishes the smashing of a militant opposition or sells out a particular section of workers--like the SSEU-AFSCME merger--then we oppose it.

I would contend that the mergers in the post-World War II period have been of a reactionary character, in no way different from the generally reactionary policies pursued by the trade-union leadership. The realignments effected by union mergers were simply one aspect of the jurisdictional conflicts fomented by the labor bureaucracy (at the expense of the union rank and file and the unorganized workers). These mergers, which brought a temporary end to jurisdictional battles, are no more supportable than is an imperialist "peace" that follows an imperialist war (as in Vietnam). Indeed, the mergers simply recorded a changed relationship of forces within the labor bureaucracy rather than serving as a weapon to fight the capitalists. Perhaps the best example of this process is provided by the changing relations between the AFL and CIO themselves.

THE AFL AND CIO

The CIO leadership from its inception was a section of the ~~AFL~~ bureaucracy--Lewis, Hillman, and Dubinsky all represented AFL unions organized on an industrial basis. The political policies of the CIO leadership were not qualitatively different from those of the AFL; even the issue of industrial unionism soon ceased to distinguish the CIO from the AFL, as the AFL leaders demonstrated a willingness to embrace industrial unionism, at least in some sectors, in order to meet the competition from the CIO. Nonetheless, the CIO was based upon a more dynamic section of the proletariat and achieved concrete relative gains for its membership, in terms of racial integration and union democracy. Preservation of these gains, as well as their extension to unorganized workers, required an approach to the AFL. Otherwise the bourgeoisie and its state would be able to play off one union federation against the other. This in fact was to be the future course of events.

The SWP correctly called for the building of a national left wing in both the AFL and the CIO on a programmatic basis, while on the whole maintaining a tactical orientation to the CIO. Part of the SWP program for the unions included the following point: "A rank and file referendum for the unification of the entire trade union movement on the basis of the preservation and extension of the industrial form of organization" (Farrell Dobbs, Trade Union Problems, 1940).

While this provided a basic condition for unity, in itself it was not sufficient to guard against a government-sponsored unity effort based on wage controls and a no-strike pledge. Unity conditions that protected against such an eventuality, as well as the sacrifice of economic benefits or rights of political expression by a section of workers, should also have been included in the criteria for merger. While these conditions were not explicitly stated, it is to the credit of the SWP that at this time it opposed Roosevelt's schemes to unify the AFL and CIO, designed as measures to provide for a uniformly disciplined labor force in WW II.

The essentially conservative CIO leadership, of course, never counterposed a political alternative to the business unionism of the AFL. After WW II, the AFL--with its hard-line pro-Cold War leadership--remained the favorite of the government. The CIO bureaucracy, desiring to prove its reliability to the bourgeoisie, eliminated Communist opposition from key leadership positions in the late '40's, expelling those unions it could not separate from Stalinist control. Rather than increasing the leverage of the CIO, however, these purges weakened the CIO vis-a-vis the AFL and the unorganized workers. These actions increased the appeal of the AFL bureaucrats, who red-baited the CIO as a commie-infested labor federation. As Art Preis describes it in Labor's Giant Step, the red purges were followed by an intensive raiding of the CIO by AFL unions (particularly the IBEW, the Teamsters, and the Carpenters). The result was that, while at the time Dobbs wrote in 1940 the memberships of the AFL and CIO were approximately equal, in 1955 at the time of merger the AFL had 10 million members to only 5 million for the CIO (and this was hardly due to an aggressive AFL orientation to the unorganized).

Faced with widespread loss of membership, the CIO leaders had two alternatives: 1) to counterpose a class-struggle policy to the jurisdictional squabbling of the AFL and seek unity on that basis, or 2) to capitulate to AFL officials. Of course, they chose the latter. Despite the rhetoric of the bureaucrats, the AFL-CIO merger had nothing to do with strengthening the position of labor. In fact, it came at the time of a pronounced retreat by the labor movement--the passage of Taft-Hartley and other anti-labor legislation, a falling off of organizing the unorganized, the McCarthy witchhunt of militants and communists, etc. And of course, the labor leadership itself was becoming increasingly reactionary. At the CIO Convention directly preceding merger, almost all resolutions of a progressive character, such as calling for a labor party, were overwhelmingly squashed.

The SWP incorrectly gave critical support to the AFL-CIO merger. On February 21, 1955 the Militant wrote: "We have every reason to welcome the unity of organized labor in the

firm belief above all, that 15 million organized workers united in one great union, will not willingly accept forever submission to the capitalist political machines [i.e., will build a labor party instead]." And in Labor's Giant Step, Preis said: "Whatever the aims and motives of the leaders, the very existence of a single labor organization of the monumental size of the merged AFL-CIO represented a tremendous historic achievement of the American working class." Rather than being a "tremendous historic achievement," however, the AFL-CIO merger represented the organizational conclusion to the jurisdictional raidings and explicit anti-communism of the labor bureaucracies. In fact, the 1955 merger was preceded by two no-raiding pacts between the AFL and CIO, beginning in late 1953, which were meant as first steps toward unification. This was clearly the fundamental concern. And reflecting the actual relationship of forces, the CIO bureaucrats came out second best in this peace treaty. Meany grabbed the Presidency of the AFL-CIO, with CIO President Reuther relegated to a position as head of the "Industrial Union Department." In addition, the CIO made a concession to the AFL on racial policies--by accepting the principle of Jim Crow unions over the protests of A. Philip Randolph and others. This alone should have been enough to forfeit the support of genuine militants for this merger.

The AFL-CIO merger provides a model for many of the mergers in the post-war era that reflect the surrender of the relative gains realized during the organization of the CIO. The failure of the leaderships of the old CIO unions to put forward a class-struggle policy of labor unity has allowed the companies and government to play off their AFL or independent counterparts against them. The weakened position of these unions, in turn, drives them to seek "merger at any price," in order to retain even secondary bureaucratic positions. For instance, when the once-Stalinist-controlled Fur and Leather Workers union merged with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters (AFL) in 1955, the unity conditions specified that no members of the CP could be officers of the union. Other outstanding examples are the ILWU and the NMU.

THE ILWU AND THE NMU

The ILWU (then part of the ILA) was organized at the beginning of the upsurge for industrial unionism in 1934 and achieved significant gains, like the union hiring hall. Although driven out of the CIO in the late '40's, the Bridges leadership remained intact. To this day ILWU members retain a relatively high degree of union democracy, frequent conventions and elections and a hiring hall for their warehouse section. However, the unwillingness of the ILWU to spearhead a united labor offensive against the effects of containerization and automation has led to a drastic loss in membership as well as an increase in jurisdictional conflicts with . . .

inland Teamster-organized warehouses. When Bridges recently put out merger feelers to the much larger Teamsters, the ILWU ranks reacted instinctively to this imminent betrayal of their interests.

Similarly, the organization of the NMU in 1937 left only a shell of the old SIU on the East Coast and Gulf--mainly racists and anti-Communists. The NMU leaders regarded the SIU with great disdain in those days. However, the conservative policies of the NMU leadership, its failure to take the lead in organizing foreign seamen, have driven it into a cutthroat struggle with the SIU for the dwindling number of jobs on American flag ships. The advantages and prestige which the NMU once enjoyed have disappeared: like the SIU, the NMU scabs on other strikers, offers to cut back on manning scales, packs its union with shoreside workers, witch-hunts reds, etc. Gone also is the 20-year no-age pension. It is not Paul Hall and the SIU but the NMU bureaucrats who, having lost contracts to the SIU, now scream loudest for "unity" and "one unlicensed seamen's union."

It is, in general, difficult to evaluate all of the proposed mergers, for the simple reason that negotiations are conducted behind closed doors by the bureaucrats, and the terms are not made available. Nevertheless, it seems clear that these mergers are a substitute for united labor action against the bosses, attempts to bolster sagging memberships without organizing the unorganized, "solutions" to jurisdictional raiding by giving up the relative gains of one section of the class, rather than extending them to other workers, etc. This is true of proposed mergers like CWA-Postal Workers or AFT-NEA, as well as the above-cited mergers between the CIO unions and their AFL counterparts.

POSTAL WORKER-CWA

A recently-proposed merger involved the 450,000-member CWA, the 280,000-member American Postal Workers Union (APWU) and the 200,000-member National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC). APWU and NALC (both AFL-CIO) are the two most important of four unions that represent postal workers (the others being Laborers International (AFL-CIO) and the National Rural Letter Carriers Association). Recent conventions of APWU, NALC and CWA approved the setting up of 5-man merger committees in each union to draft a constitution for the proposed new union. In the spring of 1973, however, the NALC leadership announced that for its part, anyway, merger plans were off. The stated reasons given were that the proposed set up would too sharply increase the per capita dues of NALC members, would underrepresent NALC membership at union conventions and would eliminate the referendum election of national officers (instituted at the last NALC convention over the opposition of the current leadership!).

While it is difficult to analyze all the factors involved, the essential dynamics seem to be the relationships among the postal unions, with the Beirne bureaucracy eager to gain the benefits of playing off the squabbling postal unions. The rumored CWA-APWU merger would, in effect, be a substitute for one union for all postal workers. (The relations between the postal unions are demonstrated by the very division between NALC and APWU. The APWU itself, founded in 1971, was a merger of 4 postal unions but could never come to terms with NALC. The CWA serves as a screen behind which the NALC and APWU bureaucrats continue their sniping at each other, at the expense of postal workers).

Further, it is clear that a CWA-APWU merger, on the terms the bureaucrats envision, would in no way be a preparation for a real struggle against the bosses, for the union shop and the right to strike. Present laws outlaw the union shop for postal workers; and it appears that postal union bureaucrats are willing to settle for the agency shop. This is convenient for Beirne, who could safely continue his open ("agency") shop operations in a merged union. And, as President Filbey of APWU put it in the July journal of the APWU: "The power to strike would give us that weight. But it is increasingly obvious that Congress is not yet in a mood to provide us with that kind of right. Merger with the CWA may provide one shortcut..."; that is, a substitute for fighting for the right to strike.

AFT-NEA

Another rumored merger involves the 385,000-member AFT and the 1.4 million-member NEA. (While it is incorrect at this point to consider the NEA a "company union," NEA locals have only recently begun to employ the strike as a weapon and the union's tradition of "professionalism" correlates with a real backwardness in union consciousness among much of the membership). Without going into much detail here, it is important to note the history of jurisdictional raids, strike-breaking, etc. between these two unions, which continue to this day despite rumors of merger disseminated by the bureaucratic tops.

Two of the "conditions" for merger presented by the NEA are 1) nonaffiliation with the AFL-CIO and 2) racial quotas for the union executive board. Of the reactionary character of the first demand, little need be said; of the second, this is not only tokenism but a measure of the hypocrisy of the NEA leaders. Since the AFT represents urban areas, with relatively large numbers of black teachers, while the NEA is more heavily drawn from the suburbs, this means in effect quotas for the AFT leadership. The SWP gives support to the NEA over the AFT, in view of the former's ostensibly more progressive policies for Vietnam and racial issues. While it

is true that the heavily Shanker-influenced AFT bureaucracy takes a number of socially conservative positions, it should be noted that the NEA's "social responsibility" includes "support for the community"--that is, strikebreaking, as it has often advocated in AFT urban strikes (as in the last Philadelphia teachers' strike).

FOR TRADE-UNION UNITY

The precondition for the AFL-CIO merger was the deterioration of the CIO unions and expulsion of militants and communists from their ranks. This made merger acceptable to the AFL labor fakers. It should not be construed from this fact, however, that socialists oppose organic unity within the labor movement. On the contrary, we must fight for such unity on a class-struggle basis. The T-1 group we support calls for the following minimum conditions to be met in constructing "one militant...union," (embracing T-1, T-2 and other related sections of the industry).

- a) Democratic unionism--full discussion of all issues, including merger proposals; right to express opposition viewpoints
- b) Parity--no sacrifice of benefits of any section of workers
- c) Commitment to international organizing
- d) No government intervention in unions and labor movement.

--submitted by Jay Brule,
3 November 1973

UNION MERGERS IN THIS PERIOD

by Joseph Seymour

Our position on union mergers derives from our position in favor of industrial unionism, which, in turn, derives from our position in favor of trade unionism--i.e., the inclusive organization of workers in units maximizing their economic leverage. Stronger industrial unions produced through mergers do not, in themselves, guarantee a higher level of class struggle, any more than any kind of organizational structure can. This depends decisively on the union leadership and consciousness of the ranks. However, more inclusive industrial unions provide the objective organizational basis for a higher level of class struggle. Therefore, we have a predisposition in favor of mergers.

There are three reasons for opposing mergers. One is where the merger is not along industrial union lines, but rather produces an inherently fragmented structure more easily subject to bureaucratic control. Two is if the terms of the merger mean a significant deterioration in democratic rights or economic advantages for the members of one or both unions. And three is where the primary purpose of the merger is to allow an unpopular incumbent facing a rank-and-file revolt to escape into a stronger bureaucratic machine. The underlying principle is that mergers along industrial union lines should be supported, except where they lead directly to a lower level of class struggle.

Differences with Comrade Brule

It is clear that comrade Brule does not accept the above principles. Rather he would support mergers only on the basis of a positive program representing a higher level of class struggle than that pursued by the two unions prior to the merger. In other words, comrade Brule would support mergers only in the context of general leftward motion, probably involving a rank-and-file revolt against the incumbents. Comrade Brule's position means not supporting most mergers in this period and amounts to an unjustifiable bias in favor of the organizational status quo, which is, itself, simply a temporary result of past splits and mergers.

A central part of comrade Brule's argument is that mergers in this period are irrelevant; that they do not result in working class unity even in the most elementary trade union sense:

"I would contend that the mergers in the post-World War II period have been of a reactionary character, in no way different from the generally reactionary policies pursued by the trade-union leadership. The realignments effected by union mergers were simply one aspect of the jurisdictional conflicts fomented by the labor bureaucracy. . . . These mergers, which brought a temporary end to jurisdictional battles, are no more supportable than is an imperialist 'peace' that follows an imperialist war (as in Vietnam)."

The logic of comrade Brule's position is not to oppose, but to abstain on most union mergers. The only basis for opposing a merger is that the existing situation is more beneficial to the workers

than the post-merger situation would be.

In contrast to comrade Brule, I contend the steps toward an industrial union structure are progressive, even in this period. Not least important, such a structure determines the objective organizational strength which a successful communist opposition will inherit. Most unions mergers will be beneficial or harmful to the interests of the class, although often in long term effect.

It is certainly true that workers often have an exaggerated notion of the benefits of a merger. Such illusions are part of the general illusions about trade unionism. That workers have illusions about the benefits of mergers is no more reason for opposing them than that unorganized workers have inflated expectations about the benefits of unionization is a reason for opposing unionization. Rather if a merger is objectively beneficial, we should support it while pointing out propagandistically that the potentially greater strength of the post-merger union will not be used by the reactionary, incumbent bureaucracy; it will only be used by a militant leadership committed to the class struggle.

The AFL-CIO Merger Reconsidered

The criteria for supporting the merger of two business union federations is different than that for supporting the merger of two unions along industrial lines. However, an analysis of the AFL-CIO merger is both historically and methodologically significant.

Comrade Brule is absolutely correct in noting that a precondition for the merger was the rightward degeneration of the CIO. However, it by no means follows from this fact that the merger, as such, should be opposed--a confusion of cause and effect. The only reason the Trotskyists condoned the existence of two competing business union federations in the 1930-40's was that, given the circumstances, a merger could only mean a marked rightward shift in the CIO and, therefore, in the general political climate. By 1954 this was no longer true and there was no programmatic justification for the independent existence of the CIO. The merger was desirable both because it resulted in a certain organizational unity for the class and helped destroy the illusion that the CIO of 1954 was fundamentally to the left of the AFL.

The only reason for opposing the merger might be the CIO's capitulation to the racist practice of the building trades. However, this was acceptance of the status quo, not an actual worsening of the conditions of blacks within the labor movement. Had the merger resulted in the initiation and spread of racist practices throughout the labor movement, it clearly would have been necessary for communists to oppose it. As it was, the CIO committed an ideological betrayal which its rightward degeneration had stripped of practical effort. A better formal position on the black question was not a supportable basis for the continued independent existence of the 1954 CIO.

Concrete Cases

I have greater agreement with comrade Brule over some of the concrete cases he deals with. The CWA-postal worker merger should be opposed on straight industrial union grounds. Given the fundamentally different legal situation of federal government employees, a union of the phone company workers with a fraction of the postal workers could only be an artificial, jerry-built structure, lacking organic cohesion. Moreover, comrade Brule is undoubtedly correct in seeing the proposed merger as a substitute for a merger of the two major postal unions, which should be our goal at that level.

A merger of the National Education Association with the AFT is clearly desirable in principle. However, comrade Brule is correct in asserting that a minimum condition for our support is that the resulting union be affiliated with the AFL-CIO. This is particularly important in a petty bourgeois union heavily subject to scabbing. From our standpoint, the most important value of teacher unionism is welding the petty bourgeoisie to the industrial working class.

However, comrade Brule's examples are one-sided. They deal neither with past mergers, which are unobjectionable, or with situations where mergers should take place, but the bureaucracy is opposed. Two of the most important mergers in the past decade were that of the Mine, Mill and Smelter (MMS) with the Steelworkers and that of the Packinghouse Workers with the Amalgamated Butcher Workmen (ABW). In neither case can the merger be condemned as generally regressive. The MMS-Steelworkers merger directly laid the basis for the long copper strike in the late 1960's, which would have been beyond the financial capacity of the old MMS. The post-merger ABW is a relatively militant and politically liberal union; it was the only national union to organize a work stoppage against Nixon's wage control.

The decades-long conflict between the UE and the IUE has been disastrous for electrical product workers, making General Electric an unusually anti-labor company. A merger of the UE and IUE is clearly warranted. The Machinist-UAW conflict in aircraft has likewise been disastrous, for example, leading to UAW plants being open when Machinist plants were on strike in the fall 1971. Either the aircraft components of the UAW and Machinists should be merged into a separate industrial union, or the UAW and Machinists should merge as a step toward creating a general metalworkers union similar to the German I G Metall.

Minimum Conditions

The minimum conditions for supporting a merger should be negative; that the merger does not cause a lowering of the class struggle for the unions involved. Of course, we use the merger prospect and negotiations to agitate for key elements of our full program; we do not agitate for a merger on the basis of minimum conditions. However, our agitational demands are not our minimum conditions.

Comrade Brule proposes the following minimum conditions as a norm for supporting mergers:

"The T-1 group we support calls for the following minimum conditions to be met in constructing 'one militant . . . union,' (embracing T-1, T-2 and other sections of the industry).

- a) Democratic unionism--full discussion of all issues, including merger proposals; the right to express opposition viewpoints
- b) Parity--no sacrifice of benefits of any section of workers
- c) Commitment to international organizing
- d) No government intervention in unions and labor movement."

Conditions a and b conform to the principles developed in this document. However, conditions c and d are advanced class struggle demands, presently supported only by reds, indeed only by the SL. Comrade Brule's minimum conditions are tantamount to communist leadership of the unions before the merger. Comrade Brule's document is at variance with the traditional and, I believe, correct Trotskyist position of supporting steps toward an industrial union structure, even under bureaucratic leadership.

3 January 1974

by K. Douglas (Detroit)

There has been a sporadic discussion of workers control and related questions in the SL for some time. From the Chicago TU conference in Dec. 1972, to the Nov. 1973 Midwest Regional Conference, that discussion centered on various aspects of the auto program. Simultaneously, comrades have had an opportunity to see similar points worked out by trade union caucuses we support, particularly in the work of the active Militant Action Caucus of the CWA. In various letters, programs, and publications a wide range of formulations and conceptions have appeared. Many of these are vague, misplaced, and wrong.

This document does not purport to rewrite in detail these various programs. By its critique, it aims at conceptual clarification, and the prompting of further discussion, which should result in much needed revisions.

The following questions should be examined:

- 1) management prerogatives: what is their relation to workers control?
- 2) shop committees: when and how do we motivate their existence and their tasks?
- 3) "Management off the shop floor:" is this a necessary or sufficient condition for workers control? is the election of workers to organize the shops' jobs synonymous with workers' control?
- 4) "Nationalization under workers control:" does this "short-hand" term adequately and correctly express our program?

Semantics, Revisionism, and History

The term "workers control" is sufficiently broad to have encompassed a wide range of meanings. It has been grasped by revisionists who cling to Marxist terminology while broadening concepts to fit reformist politics. This tendency has been facilitated by language itself. In French, German, and Italian for instance the word "control" generally means "to check or to verify" (as in open the books), while in English control has a more forceful connotation of actual power to make decisions and to regulate.

The vagueness of the word "control" has allowed virtually the entire left--not to mention elements of the trade union bureaucracy, and, on occasion, even bourgeois parties--to claim workers control as their own. But the Bolshevik conception and use of the slogan is a far cry from Leonard Woodcock's admiration of the SPD's co-determination, the semi-syndicalism of Andre Gorz, the Pabloites adoration and popularization of Lip, Mandel's "anti-capitalist structural reforms," or the Britons' Coates and Topham's "industrial democracy."

While the main points at issue in the SL fall to the left of the positions mentioned above, maximum possible precision on our part is needed to distinguish our goals and methods from theirs. Further, we must be able to capitalize on the more generalized sentiment for workers control that may be generated by our opponents, as the Bolsheviks did, in order to cut the ground from beneath them and lead that sentiment towards the capture of state power.

There is of course a certain tension involved in abstracting a demand like workers control from other transitional demands to which it is linked (i.e. expropriation, workers government) without creating a static, isolated conception which transforms workers control into a reformist end in and of itself. This latter is the classic revisionist ploy. It is precisely what PL has done to "30 for 40."

This problem is even more acute with workers control. The demand "workers control" characterizes a fluid and volatile period of dual power which cannot be reduced to 1 or 2 formulae. Indeed, historical experience suggests that revolutionary reality unfolds in a manner infinitely more varied and rich than we can reasonably foresee in detail. Our goal then is not to create slogans that predict every step of the masses, but ones which are sufficiently broad to encompass the probable developments and sufficiently precise to lead in the direction we desire.

Trotsky's most succinct statements on workers control are found in the Germany writings, where he describes the character of workers control:

Workers control through factory councils is conceivable only on the basis of sharp class struggle, not collaboration. But this really means dual power in the enterprises, in the trusts, in all branches of industry, in the whole economy. (Struggle Against Fascism in Germany, p. 78)

The contradictions, irreconcilable in their essence, of the regime of workers control will inevitably be sharpened to the degree that its sphere and its tasks are extended, and soon will become intolerable. A way out of these contradictions can be found either in the capture of power by the proletariat (Russia) or in the fascist counterrevolution, which establishes the naked dictatorship of capital (Italy). (Ibid., p. 82)

Trotsky's essential points can be reduced to the following:

- ① workers control and dual power can occur only as the product of a vast proletarian offensive, a shattering of traditional employer-employee relations, and "the convulsing of the bourgeois state."
- ② While the creation of factory committees may not run exactly parallel with the creation of soviets, and while "ownership and right of disposition remain in the hands of capitalists," the process of control over credits, raw materials, markets, etc. will press inevitably towards the seizure of the means of production and state power.
- ③ Such an unstable situation cannot be

indefinite. Either the workers will seize power or be thrown back by an enraged bourgeoisie.

Trotsky's position is based on the experience of the factory committees that swept Europe and Russia during and after WWI. While factory committees emerged in a number of countries, the experiences of Germany, Italy, and Russia provide adequate illustration of the interrelated character of factory committees, workers control, the party's role and the seizure of state power. It is precisely these connections that must be clear in our propaganda. The fundamental lesson is that the forms of dual power guarantee nothing: the steeled discipline of a revolutionary party with the correct slogans and policy was necessary to transform acute revolutionary crisis, complete with workers councils encompassing the proletarian masses, into the seizure of power.

In Germany, the inability of the Spartacusbund/KPD to overcome the semi-syndicalism of the revolutionary shop stewards (who had built a network of rank and file committees centered in the Berlin metal industries in opposition to the war since 1914 and had led many strikes over economic issues), the centrism of the USPD, and the still enormous political weight of the SPD sealed the fate of the revolutionary crisis of 1918-19. The general strike, which toppled the government, forced the abdication of the Kaiser and which spread workers councils all over Germany in a week's time, was settled on "peaceful" economic terms. The KPD's plan for a government based on these committees was dashed on the rocks of the First Congress of Councils which handed all power to the Evert-Scheidemann-Noske dominated Council of People's Commissaries, pending the convocation of a National Assembly. (For the KPD's plan, see Helmut Gruber's International Communism in the Era of Lenin, p. 104.) Again, in the revolutionary crisis of 1923, and the turmoil of the early thirties, the re-vitalization of the factory councils was not matched by the ability of the KPD to lead the workers to power. Fascism's iron heel was the result.

Similarly in Italy, the inability of the Ordine Nuovo group of Antonio Gramsci to lead the factory committee movement (initiated largely by them) to the seizure of power can be laid to their failure to defeat the centrist Serrati and reformist Turati wings of the PSI. Indeed, prior to the April 1920 General Strike in Turin in defense of the factory councils, Gramsci believed that the councils themselves could counter-balance and renew the PSI by their inclusion of the revolutionary masses, without the need of a split in the party. (See John Cammet's Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism, pp. 77-88, for Gramsci's developing view of the party-council relationship.) The crushing defeat of that strike, isolated and unaided by the PSI leaders who prattled about factory councils and workers control in principle while watching both being smashed in Turin, convinced him otherwise. But the great September upsurge, in which factory committees ran occupied factories all over Italy, came while Gramsci's influence was still largely restricted to Turin and was again betrayed by the PSI leadership. The PSI was offered leadership of the movement by the General Confederation of Labor, declined it, and the CGL settled for economic gains that were wiped out within

a year. The capitalists, fearful that the government which had temporized during the crisis could no longer protect their interests, turned to Mussolini.

The other side of the workers control movement developed in Russia. The Bolsheviks' skillful intersection of that movement warrants more attention.

After the February revolution, workers committees mushroomed in factories all over Russia. The absence of recognized, pre-existing, well organized trade unions gave them a dynamic role of importance. The Provisional Government was forced to recognize them for bargaining in a decree of April 22, 1917. While many of the committees originally launched struggles around wages, the 8 hour day and working conditions, their scope soon broadened. In confirmation of Trotsky's theory of the Permanent Revolution, workers in a situation of extreme capitalist crisis saw no particular reason to accept negative replies to their demands. Management intransigence was met by every conceivable aspect of open intervention by the workers in the management of affairs, opening of the accounts, and outright seizure of the plants in the face of lockouts or closures. (See Maurine Brinton's The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, p. 2 for an example of the extensive guidelines established by the Factory Committees of the Petrograd War Industries.)

As today, all left parties paid at least lip service to the concept of the control of production. The anarchists and syndicalists saw in their fairly substantial base in the factory committees the essence of revolutionary organization of production minus the state. The Mensheviks and SRs, busily seeking to shore up the Provisional Government, spoke of the necessity of "control" administered by the state, wrapped in Marxist orthodoxy.

The Bolsheviks initially did not have a clear position on workers control as such. It had not been part of the Party Program prior to February and was not mentioned in a party document till May. The April Theses spoke in points 7 and 8 of "control by the Soviets of Workers Deputies" over banks, production and distribution (CW, v. 24, pp. 23-24), but did not address itself to workers control by the factory committees.

But the actual course of events forced the rapid development of the Bolshevik conception. Minorities in both the growing trade unions and the Soviets, the Bolsheviks looked increasingly to the popular and more audacious factory committees. Lenin, with increasing clarity, focused the task of the party with respect to the committees as undercutting their anarcho-syndicalism by embracing their assaults on private property and pointing out that only "All Power to the Soviets" could assure and develop workers control (CW, v. 26, p. 105). In the context of widespread capitalist sabotage, Lenin stressed the inspection of all books as the "very key to all control" (CW, v. 25, p. 338) but also spoke in more and more detail of the necessity of including workers in the directing organs of the companies, banks and commercial enterprises (CW, v. 24, p. 426).

The party's success was registered not only by its strength in the factory committees' stronghold, the Petrograd metal workers, but also by the overwhelming passage of the Bolshevik resolution to the first Full Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees, doubly significant because it was the first large representative body to yield a sizeable Bolshevik majority. (E.H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, v. 2, pp. 66-67) Bolshevik influence was such that prior to gaining majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets, Lenin considered utilizing the factory committees as the organizational base of the insurrection.

The factory committees did not retain most of their functions after the seizure of power; the transition from dual power to the proletarian state absorbed most of their functions into the trade unions and the Supreme Council of National Economy (Vesenkha) and its regional and local committees. But the invaluable lesson for us is that the party had been able to maximize its influence and undercut its opponents by its advocacy of factory committees, workers control and Soviet power. Conversely, in Germany and Italy where revolutionary parties of sufficient strength to resolve dual power in favor of the proletariat were lacking, the workers were smashed. All three cases demonstrate Trotsky's point: factory committees and workers control cannot exist indefinitely--they serve either as a transition to state power or to capitalist reaction. The crucial difference is determined by the policies, program, and strength of the vanguard party.

why didn't they?

Recognition of the crucial role of the party and the necessity of its skillful wielding of the correct, precise slogans should underline the examination of SL, and SL-supported, formulations. The growth of our influence in the working class movement gives urgency to the clarification of our views. Theoretical sloppiness will bear its fruit in the future.

Management Prerogatives

The unclear relationship of management prerogatives to workers control in the first draft auto program (contained in Auto Pre-Caucus Newsletter, 11/24/72) was raised by Comrade Nelson at the Chicago TU conference. This same confused relationship has been present in other SL supported TU material.

The "End Management Prerogatives--For Workers Control of Industry" point of the draft auto program made a number of valid criticisms of the collective bargaining tradition engineered by Reuther: swapping wage gains for productivity increases and letting management exercise virtually unfettered dominance over shop floor conditions. The '73 negotiations furthered this tendency: locals were ordered to stay on the job or go back to work prior to resolving local agreements. A portent of things to come was given by GM's demand (later withdrawn) to eliminate the local right to strike over production standards.

While these are valid and necessary points to make concerning the nature of Big 3-UAW bargaining, they present a rather narrow motivation for workers control. They seem to make the case for workers control stem largely from "better working conditions" or

"anti-harrassment" sentiment. While we need to highlight and oppose the most obnoxious manifestations of private ownership and bourgeois rule in each industry in its particularity, it should be clear that these are a point of departure and not the sum toto of our motivation for workers control. (Recall that the council movement in Germany rose in opposition to the war, in Italy against inflation, wage cuts and lockouts, and in Russia for the 8 hour day and against economic collapse.) We must combine a focus on shop floor related issues with the more general understanding that the proletariat's desire to maintain its livelihood compels its active intervention into the affairs of capitalist management.

If the second paragraph of this section in the first draft auto program is an attempt at a broader focus, it is nevertheless a complete mishmash. Its central failing is the apparent equation of expropriation with workers control. Are they the same thing? What is the relationship between them? One cannot tell. The paragraph is basically a motivation for social ownership over private property.

We challenge the idea that we must passively submit to a life of wage slavery--we believe that the productive power of our collective work should be harnessed to serve us and society as a whole, rather than our labor power being harnessed to increase the private property of a few capitalist exploiters. We must fight to wrest control of industry from these tyrants--we call for their expropriation with no compensation. This demand has nothing to do with phony nationalization schemes which simply seek to have the workers pay the capitalists' debts with their taxes. (Auto Newsletter, p. 14, emphasis mine)

Then there follows a list of demands:

A steward for Every Foreman, Workers Control over Line Speed and Working Conditions, Strikes against Layoffs and Speedup, End Probation, For a Union Hiring Hall, Workers Control of Hiring and Firing, Expropriate Industry under Workers Control.

The combination of demands concerning union representation, working conditions, layoffs, speedup, hiring and probation all under the rubric of "Ending Management Prerogatives--for Workers Control," (without any explication of their connection) seems designed to leave militants puzzled. It fails to make clear either what management prerogatives are and how we aim to negate them, or what workers control is.

The same jumbling of demands can be seen in the material of the Militant Action Caucus. Though its most recent material is not singular in its history in this regard, Militant Action, nos. 10 and 11 illustrate the point. Under "Decent Working Conditions" goes the kitchen sink: union control of the shop floor, no management on the shop floor, high pay, full cost of living, no monitoring, no speedup, no forced overtime, end all management privileges in the contracts, no forced transfers, full medical and dental coverage, ad infinitum.

In a more refined fashion Comrade Knox's letter to Douglas of Oct. 28, '73 pursues the same confusion by combination. On pages 4 and 5 under paragraphs detailing workers control we find: no discrimination or preferential treatment, line speed and job description fixed by contract, local right to strike, one steward for every foreman, no dropping of grievances without the workers' consent, etc.

In the first draft auto program, the MAC material, and Knox' letter there are many supportable demands. Some relate to shop floor conditions, some to ending management prerogatives and some to workers control. Most in a rather broad sense are connected to each other in some way. But with no explanation of these connections, the "pile it all in one point and call it workers control" approach both obscures the essential character of the diverse demands and calls things "workers control" that are not.

Management prerogatives are generally thought of in the American labor movement as all those rights and powers of managerial sovereignty which flow from the private ownership of property and over which collective bargaining does not obtain. These areas are normally designated in the contract: i.e., the "management rights" section of the Chrysler contract or the "company responsibility" section of the Ford contract.

Related to this are certain contractual guarantees of exceptional management rights under special conditions as in "overtime to make up for acts of God" in auto, or the "needs of service" clause which is frequently invoked to abrogate contract protection in the CWA.

"Ending management prerogatives," also, has a fairly commonly accepted meaning: bringing in to the field of collective bargaining as negotiable issues those items the union wishes to bargain on, and eliminating "special rights" under "extraordinary circumstances."

We of course cannot be indifferent to these limitations on the scope of bargaining. We must struggle for the broadest expansion of the negotiable issues: no issue should simply be the "prerogative of management." For instance, of critical importance in auto is the demand that "line speed be in the contract," particularly at a time of increasing speedup in the industry.

What should be made clear is that these demands are different than the call for workers control: "Line speed in the contract" is not the same as "workers control of line speed." While the former aims at bringing a particular issue into collective bargaining, workers control breaches the normal boundaries of collective bargaining and essentially must be imposed on management. To speak of workers control ending management prerogatives is to stretch the commonly held meaning of the latter out of any recognizable shape and to confuse our demands for workers control with demands for expanded bargaining scope.

The difference between making line speed a negotiable issue and telling management what the speed shall be (or vetoing its decisions), or between a union hiring hall and telling management how many more workers shall be hired are real differences. But by no means do they contradict each other, any more than workers control conflicts with expropriation. Nor do demands which address specific shop floor issues (better conditions) or union representation (a steward for every foreman) conflict with the ending of management prerogatives. But they are not synonymous and do represent a different weight in the scale of our program. I would suggest that the clarity of the MAC program, for instance, would be served by a progression from working conditions to management prerogatives to workers control, with the appropriate demands connected to each point, rather than throwing them all in together.

Clarity is desirable, not simply as a method of science, but to distinguish us from our opponents who mix together supportable reform demands, "good things for the workers" platitudes, and label it all workers control in reformist fashion. For example, a local offices election leaflet (undated) of the IS supported Voice of the Chrysler Workers at Dodge Main listed under "Workers Control of Conditions in the Plant" (later these same demands appeared in a leaflet listed under "Representation!"): demands for the enforcement of existing contract protection, local leaders must "arouse and give leadership to the entire union, reestablishment of the line steward system to 'start forcing the company to end their harassment'" and the establishment of a Stewards Council to coordinate the work of the Chief Stewards. With some allowance, all supportable demands--but not workers control!

The conceptual distinction between management prerogatives, other kinds of shop demands and workers control does not imply a rigid compartmentalization in the course of the class struggle. History has repeatedly demonstrated that skirmishes over limited issues can spill over into fundamental confrontations between capital and labor, posing the questions: Who shall run these factories? Who shall rule? Crucial to this is the presence of aggressive revolutionary leadership.

Particularly in America, given the conservative attitudes and traditions of the central bourgeoisie and the incredible timidity of a brittle and ossified labor bureaucracy, major class battles could be precipitated by conflict over relatively minor issues. Recent strikes, for instance, have revealed a depth of bitterness and a fighting fervor out of proportion to the strikers' stated goals. The "flexibility" of the European bourgeoisie and union leaders, conditioned by a more politically conscious proletariat and the threat of revolution at various points, as illustrated in the inclusion of trade unionists in leading corporate bodies in German co-determination, is quite removed from the predisposition of their American counterparts. An escalation from a struggle over some management abuse into a more fundamental conflict is quite likely. We must, however, be able to not only determine one level of class struggle from another, but also to distinguish the demands that may start a fight from those that emerge from it. Our desire to push from "linespeed in the contract" to "workers control of production"

must be ever present--but it does not transform the character of the demands into identical interchangeable ones.

This recognition should be incorporated in the presentation of our programs. Demands around various shop conditions or benefits, for ending management prerogatives, and for workers control should be sufficiently distinguished to make clear their essential meaning. If this is done, linking them together in the totality of our program, establishing the "flow" of our demands, will pose no difficulties.

Shop Committees and Workers Control

In sharp response to an article in WV #29 proposing shop committees to replace the existing cumbersome grievance procedure in auto, and in extension, to begin exercising control over other areas, Comrade M. Frazier wrote a letter to the CO (Oct. 18, 1973) arguing that the formulations used could have a "syndicalist or dual unionist interpretation." Comrade Frazier argued that not only would the shop floor committee deprive the union of its legitimate responsibilities, but also that "the building and extending of the shop floor committees can be interpreted as denying the necessity of the union caucus in struggle for the leadership in the unions and by extension, the role of the party in struggling for the leadership of the class."

Some of Comrade Knox' formulations were probably a bit ill considered. Establishing committees with the right to take action over grievances would not itself constitute "control of the shop floor;" that would depend on what the committees did with their power. The only hint of anything resembling syndicalism was Knox' projection of reliance on the power to strike as the sole means of "~~deciding the outcome~~" of the struggle. Comrade Frazier, however, did not criticize this. The weakness of Comrade Knox' formulations notwithstanding, Comrade Frazier's notions warrant a refutation that places shop committees in context, as a bridge from shop floor beefs to workers control.

Comrade Frazier's charge that the building of shop floor committees denies the necessity of organized political leadership, of the caucus or the party, reveals a fundamental confusion of great organizational and political importance. With Comrade Frazier's analysis, the same conflict would be said to exist between the party and the trade unions, soviets or any other "united front" type formations. Indeed, there were Bolsheviks in 1905 who saw the rise of the Soviets as a threat to the political role of the party. But the party's struggle for the leadership of the class does not usually involve counterposing itself to broader united front organizations, but rather struggling for its program and leadership within them. There are of course exceptions: after the July days, when Bolsheviks were disarmed, arrested, the party banned, its newspaper closed, etc., Lenin withdrew the slogan of All Power to the Soviets on the grounds that the treachery of the present Soviets could be remedied by the erection in a new revolution of new Soviets (CW, v. 25, p. 189). The slogan was, of course, later resurrected.

Normally, however, the struggle for power in organizations of the class involves deepening and extending the leading role of our cadre and program such that these organizations serve the pursuit of the class struggle. Shop committees in and of themselves are of course not revolutionary: they become so only to the extent that the vanguard party, or a caucus in a union, poses revolutionary tasks to them and leads the workers on that path. The IS' advocacy of shop committees--which not so long ago they saw as the main tasks of revolutionaries in the union--irrespective of the question of political leadership, more appropriately warrants Comrade Frazier's fire.

By maintaining that in a non-revolutionary period, shop committees can only have a dual unionist/syndicalist thrust, Comrade Frazier not only glosses over the difference between propaganda, agitation and calls to action (we certainly do not propose that our friends in the unions go forth and build shop committees tomorrow), but also artificially and statically separates a prerevolutionary situation from our work now. How is the "qualitative leap in the consciousness of the working class" going to come about? Are we to have no role in that process? Do we wait for it to exist before we propose revolutionary tasks and organization? Comrade Frazier ignores that our slogans, policies and program will play a crucial role in stimulating and leading the workers to revolutionary class consciousness.

Advocacy of shop committees is an illustration of the essential method of the Transitional Program; leading the workers from their immediate needs to the realization that they must exercise control, expropriate industry and build their own government. Key to this development is the policy of the vanguard.

There are today, right now, immediately felt grievances within the ranks of the autoworkers which are tied up, frustrated and lost in the existing grievance procedure. In place of that procedure, we advocate not a new bureaucratic structure, but the creation of bodies that involve the workers at the lowest level in the settling of their own disputes and in the formulation of policy and action against the company. The vanguard must continually seek to broaden the ~~scope and function of these committees~~, urging them to intervene ever more in ~~management's decisions~~, checking their actions, vetoing them and ~~enforcing workers' proposals~~. Comrade Knox pointed to this extension of their role in the disputed WV article. (The second draft auto program did not draw the explicit link between the shop committees and ~~various tasks posed in the workers control section~~; it should have. The program of the MAC warrants criticism in this respect; it is forthcoming.)

Comrade Frazier's fear that these functions take away from powers of the union betrays an identification of the "union" with the hierarchy, the officials, a conception common both to many workers and bureaucrats, but one which we must combat. Workers control must involve not only the inspection of accounts in the corporate offices but the conscious activity of the workers in the factories.

It is of course true that every aspect of control cannot be carried out by committees on the shop floor. At some point either

the union structure must serve to generalize and direct the intervention into management affairs at higher levels, or it will need to be bypassed through the creation of factory councils. This will depend on the course of the class struggle: the degree to which the influence of revolutionaries is reflected in their holding of the union offices, or the degree to which the bureaucracy continues to hold its positions but is impotent and isolated.

While historical experience suggests that the moribund apparatus will in most cases be outstripped, codifying such predictions in our programs would seem ill advised at this time (though I welcome comrades with a flair for delicate formulations to offer suggestions). Not only would it seem a bit "crystal-ballish" but it would almost certainly expose us to the charges of dual unionism, or, at best, of seeking to split the union.

Trotsky stated in the Transitional Program:

Where the closed shop has already been instituted in "peaceful" times, the committee will formally coincide with the usual organ of the trade union, but will renew its personnel and widen its functions. The prime significance of the committee, however, lies in the fact that it becomes the militant staff for such working class layers as the trade union is usually incapable of moving to action.

What is necessary at this time is to propose bodies, at least ostensibly within the union structure (shop committees) that can both form the basis for a counterposition of workers institutions to capitalist management and be challenged with tasks consistent with that goal.

"Management Off the Shop Floor" and
"Union Control of the Shop Floor"

"Management off the shop floor" has been a demand of the MAC for some time, was raised in WV in connection with workers control in auto, and, has been discussed as generally useful in most industries: "I think the no foremen in the union together with lead workmen replacing foremen on the shop floor is appropriate in most industries." (letter from Knox to Bob E., 17 Jan. 1974)

I would hold that: 1) there is misplaced emphasis on this demand, 2) that many comrades have come to see, or to use formulations which imply, that this is "necessary and sufficient" for workers control, and, 3) that "management off the shop floor" is neither a necessary condition for workers control nor is it sufficient to assure it.

In most industries, it is the case that no foremen should be allowed in the union (though areas like public employment--where many titles, often as many as a third of the jobs, are nominally "management" titles--will present some prickly problems). Yet, eliminating them from the shop floor is not necessary for workers control. While in the course of sitdown strikes or factory seizures, one most likely will run all management out, there are

other situations of intense class conflict where this might well not be the case. Both in Italy during the September 1920 factory seizures and in Russia from February to October, the workers often sought to keep engineering and technical personnel--who often carried out supervisory functions--at their posts. Lenin advocated as part of workers control that all the "owners who have not withdrawn from their business and the engineering staffs should be enlisted without fail." (CW, v. 24, pp. 513-14)

The existence of rapidly developing and powerful shop/factory committees might well check or eliminate the disciplinary functions of foremen and transform their role essentially into that of leadmen. The more obnoxious and brutal ones may well receive duty chipping out smoldering ingot molds or some more displeasurable fate at the hands of a Workers Tribunal. But, it is not our intention to create a caste of a few hundred thousands of "untouchables": former foremen! If the workers organs of dual power are sufficiently strong to force management off the shop floor, they will, in most cases, be strong enough to subordinate foremen to their will. The point is that the situation may well differ from factory to factory in the give and take of intense class struggle. Why should we make a programmatic projection that may not take place or even be necessary? The real emphasis will and should be on the organizational strength and direction of the workers' own organizations --what to do with the foremen is an extremely subsidiary question.

What is more disturbing than just the use of the demand, however, is that the emphasis on it has led to an apparent tendency to see "management off the shop floor" and its replacement with lead workers or ~~elected union workers as sufficient for or synonymous with workers control.~~

Whether it is consciously conceived so or not, this implication comes through most strongly in the material of the CWA's Militant Action Caucus. While the MAC's history has seen a wide number of different formulations and programmatic statements loosely related to workers control, they seem to be firmed up around the following points:

- 1) SA's should be in the union and under its control (by "control" what is apparently meant is the elimination of management functions from the job and expulsion from the union for "finking" etc.);
- 2) all management should be kept off the floor, including no monitoring;
- 3) "Union control of the shop floor" to insure decent working conditions: this demand, depending on which leaflet or issue of Militant Action one examines, has a wide range of points: demands relating to shop floor conditions and benefits; ending of management prerogatives; union control should be implemented by the election of workers to "organize the work, make assignments and train new people: (MA #10, p. 2) (the problems engendered by the jumbling together of these diverse demands has been discussed previously);

- 4) the Phone Co. and all industry should be expropriated under workers control (as in the first draft auto program, the motivation for this demand never distinguishes between workers control and expropriation).

An understanding of the MAC's position on these related issues involves a certain amount of conjecture, which is hardly a strong point for any program. If SL comrades are forced to guess what certain slogans mean, one wonders what presumably less conscious workers are thinking or drawing from the program. The conjecture revolves around "Decent Working Conditions--For union control of the shop floor" which is the corollary demand to "Management off the shop floor." Is this meant to be the application of workers control to the particular industry, with "expropriation of phone and all industries under workers control" the more general slogan? Some leading comrades, including at least one intimately familiar with the industry, have expressed the interpretation that this is not meant to be workers control but simply a proposal for strengthening the union on the shop floor. If this is the case, there are at least two major problems.

First there is no clear link between this proposal and the later demand for workers control. This lack of connection is doubly troublesome in light of the fact that workers control is not explained, its tasks not even alluded to, in the section on "expropriation. . ."

Second, MAC is then left in the position of apparently advocating a post-management-off-the-shop-floor but pre-workers-control "interim" period. Such a "stage" could only be characterized by the union taking over and carrying out for the company its former responsibilities and tasks: training, organizing of the work, etc. This is a proposal for union administration of certain lower level management tasks--without the power to exercise influence or control over the decisions that shape these tasks. With the same total amount of work, the same number of workers, the union assumes responsibility for the operation of production, or in the case of phone, the supplying of the service. Such a proposal smacks unmistakably of a union-management division of labor and cooperation in the provision of service.

This problem is not eliminated if we assume the MAC does mean workers control by "union control of the shop floor." Their formulations are vastly insufficient in connoting what is absolutely the essential core of workers control: the intervention at all levels into management's powers and decision making by the organization of workers bodies counterposed to management, i.e. dual power.

The thrust of MAC's motivation is against the more obnoxious and overt forms of management abuse, in usually a negative fashion: no harassment, no monitoring, no speedup, etc. This is to be solved, insuring decent working conditions, by replacing management overseers with SA's controlled by the union and elected workers to carry out certain functions that management used to do: assigning and organizing the work, etc. As in the case of auto (with respect to the grievance procedure), we must approach our audience with a

sensitivity to the particularity of their problems. But the narrowness of MAC's motivation and the absence of any terms or formulations that suggest that the fight for workers control would be characterized by the surging forward of a workers offensive and intense class battles implies that once the union, or union "controlled" workers, carries out the functions that management used to, harassment ends, the problems are solved . . . and you have workers control.

There is no suggestion in the MAC's "union control" point that those decisions--in most cases the truly decisive ones concerning volume of work, number of workers available, company finances, etc.--that are made off or above the shop floor level will be touched or interfered with, or that union control of the shop floor will negate these higher level decisions. While it may not be necessary or possible to spell out exactly how these inroads will be made, it is necessary to maintain that intervention into and control over these decisions is crucial to the whole conception of workers control.

The implication that the workers taking over certain management functions is in and of itself workers control is not restricted to the areas cited above. A particularly egregious example is the list of demands submitted by the MAC in this year's bargaining. One of the long list of demands was one that the current security guards ^{Not} be replaced by union guards on the company's buildings! _{See} Another way of putting this would have been to simply organize the current guards into the CWA!

Further indirect indication of the MAC's tendency to see replacing management personnel with union personnel as workers control is revealed in their misplaced emphasis on "management off the shop floor." As was pointed out earlier, the crucial question is not whether management is still around but the strength of the workers committees: who is giving the orders. But while management off the shop floor has appeared in most of MAC's material, the building of shop floor committees was raised in MA #10, but was not mentioned at all in MA #11, #9, or in "Vote Militant Action Caucus," the main programmatic document on which the MAC's convention delegate candidate ran. All of these found room to call for management off the shop floor. It is precisely the construction of workers committees, however it is phrased and however their relationship to the union is explained, and their direction towards ever more audacious encroachments on management's power, that deserves the MAC's programmatic attention.

Further, one wonders why the traditional slogan of "workers control" is preserved in the general point on expropriation but is replaced by "union control" when speaking of the shop floor. It may be that the MAC is seeking to make their program more accessible to backward workers by reference to a known and understood institution, the union. I would submit, however, that "workers control" more aptly explains what we mean and is in fact more intelligible, since it implies an involvement of the ranks and not just a bureaucratic replacement of existing structures with new bureaucratic ones. which is how I suspect most phone workers think of the "union."

While having a broader implication than "union control," the slogan of workers control also leaves advantageously open ended the question of the administration of that control with respect to the relationship of the union to shop committees, etc.

If Comrade Frazier feared that shop committees would tend to undercut the union, it seems that the MAC errs in a similar but slightly different fashion: emphasizing the role of the union as the mechanism of control in an overly rigid way. The role of workers committees is likely to be even more important in the phone industry where, unlike in auto, there is no closed shop, where many areas are not even organized by the union and where there is more than one union. The current positions of MAC do not represent a deviation from a more clear history on the question of workers control. In many respects, its current positions are an attempt to make more concrete and whole conceptions that have been misused, or not used at all, in the past. But the attempt at concreteness and relevance to the industry has led to its opposite: imprecision, misemphasis and ineffectual formulations.

"Nationalization/Expropriation Under Workers Control"

The slogan of "nationalization" or "expropriation" "under workers control" has been used standardly by the SL and by trade union caucuses we support. Its adequacy and precision was first questioned at the Mid-West Regional Conference.

It is noteworthy that neither Lenin, nor Trotsky ever used the term. While both certainly advocated its constituent elements--workers control and the expropriation of industry--they saw them as different but related tasks. Workers control was conceived of as preparatory to the nationalization of industry by a revolutionary workers government. Nationalization would mark the transition from control to direct workers management through the mechanism of the new state apparatus.

What state regime corresponds to workers control of production? it is obvious that the power is not yet in the hands of the proletariat, otherwise we would have not workers control of production but the control of production by the workers state as an introduction to a regime of state production on the foundations of nationalization. (Trotsky, Struggle Against Fascism, p. 78; my emphasis, KD)

On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for the direct management of nationalized industry when the hour for that eventuality strikes. (Transitional Program, p. 23, 1970 S.L.L. edition)

We passed from workers control to the creation of a Supreme Council of National Economy. . . . (Lenin, cited in Carr, v. 2, p. 80)

The "telescoping" involved in calling for expropriation under workers control both confuses the distinction between the two (as has been the case with nearly all SL supported caucus material,

which motivate expropriation under workers control without explaining what workers control is) and carries a flawed political implication. For if workers control implies that the bourgeoisie still retains formal ownership then "nationalization under workers control" appears to be a call for nationalization by the bourgeois state. The slogan has a logic and meaning that exists independent of how one might explain it in private discussion. If the workers are exercising "control" then somebody else, be it a private owner or the bourgeois state, is exercising ultimate administration and management.

This is manifestly not what we mean to propose. We advocate workers control now to meet the needs of the workers and to prepare them for the management of industry, but we insist that only the expropriation of industry and the running of it in the interests of the toilers can truly insure their gains. This task, of course, cannot be carried out by the bourgeois state. Only a Workers Government, the dictatorship of the proletariat, can meet this need.

This is the whole logic of the Transitional Program, where Trotsky deliberately separates the call for factory committees and workers control from the call for expropriation of industry and the banks, and always insists on linking the latter task to the seizure of state power.

In discussing the necessity for agitation focusing on specific groups of capitalists, Trotsky says: "we link up the question of expropriation with that of seizure of power by the workers and farmers." (Transitional Program, p. 24)

Further, in discussing the expropriation of the banks, Trotsky states: "However, the state-ization of the banks will produce these favorable results only if state power itself passes completely from the hands of the exploiters into the hands of the toilers." (Ibid, p. 25)

Lenin's use of the slogan of "nationalization" had the same thrust. From April to October, Lenin hammered away at the measures necessary to avert famine, economic collapse, continued war, etc., not to beseech Kerensky to implement them (Comrade Benjamin notwithstanding) but to rally the workers and peasants behind these proposals, break them from their Menshevik-SR leaders, and demonstrate that these tasks could only be carried out by the transfer of all power to the Soviets.

The epitomal work of that period, the "Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It" has precisely this character. Lenin outlines the basic measures that were absolutely necessary, and points out that they would be simple to institute, were it not for the "socialist" fakers' clinging to the bourgeois state. In an article significantly entitled "One of the Fundamental Lessons of the Revolution" written within one day after he completed the "Impending Catastrophe," Lenin stated:

It is the greatest delusion, the greatest self-deception and a deception of the people, to attempt, by means of this state

apparatus, to carry out such reforms as the abolition of the landed estates without compensation, or the grain monopoly, etc. This apparatus can serve a republican bourgeoisie . . . but it is absolutely incapable of carrying out reforms which would even seriously curtail or limit the rights of capital, the rights of "sacred private property," much less abolish those rights. (CW, v. 25, p. 369)

To say that our program of expropriation of industry is aimed not at convincing the bourgeoisie but the proletarian masses is not to say that we have no response if and when the bourgeoisie does choose to take over a company or whole sections of industry.

Where military industry is "nationalized," as in France, the slogan of workers control preserves its full strength. The proletariat has as little confidence in the government of the bourgeoisie as in any individual capitalist. (Transitional Program, p. 34)

Not only would we continue to advocate workers control, to continue to build and counterpose proletarian institutions in the factories, mines, etc. but the class character of the state would be pushed to the fore. We would say to the workers: "the government nationalizes this industry only to save the capitalists from unprofitable investments, to make the workers pay for the capitalists' bankruptcies. Only a workers government can run these industries in our interests!"

While the "muddle headed reformist slogan of nationalization" almost automatically conjures up notions of the existing state taking over industry a la Britain, the inapplicability of the disputed slogan is perhaps better illustrated by using the kind of phrase that has more frequently occurred in the caucus material we support: "expropriation of all major industry and banks under workers control." If the situation is still "under workers control," who is to do the expropriation of this vast segment of private property? Do we expect the expropriators to expropriate themselves?

Trotsky answers our question:

He who believes that the bourgeoisie is capable of expropriating itself is perhaps an excellent poet. But, for my part, I would not entrust him with the funds of the smallest trade union, because he is living in a dream world while we want to remain in the real world.

It must be said in no uncertain terms: only a revolutionary government of the workers and peasants, prepared for implacable struggle against all the exploiters, can apply the plan, complete it, develop it and go beyond it along the Socialist road. For the proletariat this means to conquer power. (Trotsky, 34-35 Writings, p. 229)

In place of "nationalization" or "expropriation under workers control," I would suggest that the SL utilize Trotsky's method in

the Transitional Program: advancing as separate, but inextricably linked, points workers control, expropriation of industry without compensation, a workers government. Behind this difference in organizational form lies an important political clarification.

This critical review of various slogans revolving around the question of workers control was certainly not aimed at, and is not, an exhaustive treatment of the topic. There is much in the huge volume of literature on the question, in the historical experience of the workers movement in different countries, and in criticisms of the almost universally bankrupt notions of our opponents, that has been left unsaid. But our increased industrial involvement, the growing readership of Workers Vanguard, the increasing working class public for the views of the SL and of militants we support, has compelled me to focus my attention on questions immediately involved in the day to day propagation of our views. This, I believe, is a necessary beginning.

8 August 1974

Letter to Robertson and Seymour

22 March 1974

Dear [comrades]:

I am trying to digest and assess the discussions we have had on the u.f. over the last couple of weeks. If I understand the arguments correctly, particularly as you two have advanced them, they seem to make sense. However, I am unsure that my assessment is correct and would like you to confirm it. Are you maintaining:

The question of the organizational character of class struggle formations is a function of the configuration of forces in the particular historical place and period and the nature of the existing organizations of the class.

The need to have an organizational component (exclusion of capitalist parties, etc.) to the u.f. of the working class is determined by the degree to which organizational unity across class lines is an obstacle to building an independent working-class political movement, party and government.

Other tactical considerations, e.g., the need to establish contact with the working class, supercede the need to draw the class line organizationally in this period.

Or are you arguing that the organizational character of u.f. is simply the consequence of its programmatic basis? Which is, of course, much different.

Realizing that this may not be your central, all-consuming concern at this point, I would be content to receive some brief response to these questions--like "yes" or "no" even.

Comradely,

Henry L. [New York City]

by Joseph Seymour

As a result of polemical simplification, particularly in combatting the SWP, many comrades have adopted the definition of a "popular front" as a "united front with the bourgeoisie." That concept first led to serious internal controversy over the San Francisco City College (SFCC) RCY Defense Campaign. As a result of that controversy a notion permeated our ranks that while a united front with bourgeois forces was permissible to defend democratic rights, it was impermissible over issues central to the class struggle (e.g. opposition to an imperialist war). This concept led to much confusion and controversy over the NYC local's solicitation of Paul O'Dwyer's endorsement of our British miners' solidarity demonstration.

United Fronts and Blocs

A part of the confusion over the united front question results from terminological simplification. A united front does not refer to any and every kind of cooperation with other political organizations. A united front is essentially a common action characteristically around concrete, usually negative, demands on bourgeois authority. The characteristic organizational form of the united front is a technical coordinating committee. This does not mean that a united front need be limited to a single event. It is possible to have a united front campaign, for example, a legal defense case. However, if a united front campaign acquires significant political importance, it has an immanent tendency to develop into a higher form of collaboration---a bloc.

In contrast to a united front, a bloc is an open-ended agreement to collaborate for broadly defined aims usually involving common propaganda, tactics, etc. Characteristically a bloc is a unified opposition to the incumbent leadership of a workers organization. The classic bloc was the Zimmerwald Movement during World War I--the oppositional formation of all anti-war socialists to the social chauvinist leadership of the Second International. For Lenin's faction, the Zimmerwald Movement was viewed as the embryo of a new international. During the early 1930's, the French Trotskyists engaged in an important bloc with left syndicalists in the form of an oppositional caucus, the Unitary Opposition, in the Stalinist-led union federation, the CGT-U. A bloc is inherently in unstable equilibrium, either leading toward regroupment/fusion or breaking apart.

It is common for a bloc to take the form of a nominally independent membership organization (e.g. a trade union caucus). The actual bloc character of such an organization is evident if its activists are primarily loyal to different party organizations; the bloc partners thus constituting the basic factions within the organization. If the bloc breaks up, the dominant partner often retains the original bloc organization as a transitional instrument, usually run along front group lines. The initiation and participation in a bloc, including that embodied in a nominally independent organization, is a legitimate Leninist tactic. Depending on concrete circumstances, its purpose is either an entry/raid, common work leading to regroupment/fusion or an attempt to establish a transitional organization of the vanguard party.

What Was NPAC?

NPAC was a bloc (not a united front) between the SWP and certain bourgeois politicians on a program and tactics congruent with bourgeois liberalism in the 1969-71 period. Thus NPAC was a non-electoral "popular front" quite parallel to those set up by the Stalinists "against war, fascism," etc. in the 1930's. In terms of actual organizational power, NPAC was an SWP front group, that is, the activists and apparatus were effectively controlled by the SWP/YSA so that other political forces, including the liberal bourgeoisie, operated at the sufferance of the SWP.

Our call for "Bourgeoisie Out of the Anti-War Movement" was not meant as a self-sufficient programmatic statement. Rather it was a central agitational slogan as part of a series of inter related demands constituting a revolutionary defeatist and class struggle policy toward the Vietnam War. In no sense was the demand, "Bourgeoisie Out of NPAC" meant to be, "NPAC Without the Bourgeoisie." We gave agitational emphasis, at the time, to kicking out the liberal politicians because their presence represented the most obvious, gross and unpopular manifestation of the SWP's liberal social-chauvinism on the war question.

The Spartacist tendency had broken with the SWP's "independent" anti-war organizations in 1965 when, after a big fight, the primal ancestor of NPAC, the National Coordinating Committee, was formed on the basis of the single slogan, "End the War Now." We asserted such an organization was a deliberately conceived obstacle to a defeatist and class-struggle centered anti-war campaign. We further pointed out, at the time, that the logic and purpose of the SWP's line would lead to a common organization with bourgeois political forces (then represented by pacifists and liberal academics) should opposition to the war develop within the ruling class. The organizational entrance of prominent Democratic politicians around 1969 represented the full realization of and not a change in the nature of the SWP's anti-war organizations. Of course, the actual presence of Hartke et al. was a powerful verification of our line on the SWP and anti-war movement in general, which is why we gave it so much agitational emphasis.

Between 1965 and the entry of prominent bourgeois politicians into anti-war organizations around 1969, the SL employed a number of main agitational slogans in its anti-war activities, notably "Victory for the Vietnamese Revolution" and "For Labor Strikes Against the War." These slogans (like that of "Bourgeoisie Out of the Anti-War Movement") were not presented as self-sufficient programmatic statements. Rather such slogans were attempts to encapsulate, under differing conditions of intervention, a revolutionary, internationalist and proletarian policy toward the Vietnam War.

Given the front group nature of NPAC, an expulsion of the bourgeois politicians could only have come about through a major left split in the SWP which destroyed the latter's organizational control of NPAC. Had such a development occurred in 1969-71, we would have had two tactical choices to be decided by concrete circumstances. One was opposition to any "independent" anti-war organization in favor of a series of united fronts centered on working class tendencies.

The other tactic would have been a bloc of working class tendencies in the form of a defeatist and class struggle oriented, nominally independent, anti-war organization. The purposes of such a bloc are outlined in the first section.

Democratic Versus Class Demands

Partly as a result of the argumentation over the SFCC defense campaign and partly as a result of views put forward in the past by comrades Charlie B. and Henry L., there developed within our party the notion of two fundamentally different types of united fronts. One is a united front to defend democratic rights in which bourgeois elements are permitted; the other is around class demands in which only workers organizations can participate. Under present conditions, the former could be exemplified by a campaign to get a dismissed leftist college teacher reinstated and the latter by a strike support committee.

A rigid dichotomy between democratic and class demands is invalid. Clearly the right of a member of a workers party to teach in a public school is in the interest of the workers movement. On the other hand, even purely wage struggles have a democratic component. In numerous, important situations any difference between support for the democratic right to strike and support to an actual strike simply collapses. At the limit, one should recall that the Bolshevik Revolution was partly motivated by the need to defend the democratic institutions of the working masses from imminent Czarist reaction. Rather than two kinds of united fronts, there is a continuum of social struggles ranging from localized civil liberties cases to the seizure of state power by a workers militia, in which the united front is an applicable tactic.

While the notion of a dichotomy between democratic and class issues has been associated with a leftist position in debates on the SL's united front activities, the concept contains the seed of a serious rightist deviation, particularly if applied to backward countries. The idea of struggles around democratic demands normally involving alliances with the bourgeoisie as distinct from the struggle for workers power contain key elements of a two-stage revolution, if extended beyond episodic situations. Applied literally it would prevent a communist vanguard from seeking to transform a mass upsurge initially centered on a united front struggle for democratic rights into a class-based socialist revolution.

Just as a continuum exists in the democratic/class struggle programmatic character of a united front, so a continuum exists in the degree of bourgeois participation. It is an elementary proposition of Marxism that struggles which are objectively against the interests of the bourgeoisie will be opposed by the organizations of the bourgeoisie. The more directly and significantly the demands of a united front go against bourgeois interest, the less likely bourgeois participation. Thus, while there may be substantial bourgeois support for the right of an academic Marxist to hold a professorship, there would not have been any bourgeois support for a committee to transform the recent San Francisco city workers strike into a general strike. Thus, the bourgeoisie is self-excluded from a given united front by its program and context.

"The United Front of the Workers"

Comrades who have distinguished between democratic and class united fronts have related this to the Comintern's concept of "the united front of the workers." The concept of "the united front of the workers" was the application of the united front tactic to a particular historically conditioned political class alignment, then exemplified by Germany. This political alignment included a mass reformist workers party and consequently the general recognition by the workers of the need for an independent class political expression. Secondly, the communist vanguard had sufficient organizational weight to materially effect the outcome of a concrete struggle and was therefore viewed as a desirable ally by workers loyal to the reformist party. A propaganda group of a few hundred could not apply the united front tactic to a many-millioned reformist party.

"The united front of the workers" was not a type of united front to be distinguished from other types of united front; it was essentially a slogan (see 18 December 1921 ECCI Directive on the United Front, Sec.7) to agitate for a series of united fronts between the communist vanguard and reformist parties. As an agitational slogan it had two virtues. It pointed to the contradiction between the reformist party's claim to represent class interests and its collaboration with the bourgeoisie often against the communists. Secondly, it asserted that unity in struggle between the reformist party and communist vanguard would, in reality (and not merely in exemplary fashion), bring the full power of the organized working class into play.

The concept of "the united front of the workers" did not involve the mechanical exclusion of bourgeois elements. Rather in Western Europe in the 1920's, bourgeois support for workers' struggles would necessarily be marginal. Where bourgeois support for mass struggles (including strikes) would not be marginal--namely, in the colonial countries--the slogan of "the united front of the workers" was not considered applicable. Even in Western Europe, united fronts with bourgeois elements was not ruled out in principle. When the French army occupied the Ruhr in 1923, the KPD formed a united front with right-wing nationalists! While Radek's tactics were criticized as being overly embrasive (the Schlägeter line), no one considered a united front with such forces as wrong in itself. When Trotsky called for a united workers front against fascism, he certainly did not mean that if a contingent from the Catholic Center Party (which had a certain working-class constituency) showed up to defend a union meeting against Nazi goons, they should be told to go home. Quite the contrary! The primary, often dominant, purpose of "the united front of the workers" is to win over the base of the reformist party. However, a secondary purpose is to win petty bourgeois and those particularly backward workers still tied to bourgeois parties. Such political elements must be permitted to participate in a united front under their own organizational banners, not merely as atomized individuals.

The American Question

The "united front of the workers" presupposes both the existence of a mass reformist party and of a communist vanguard strong enough

to materially effect the outcome of labor conflicts. Neither of these conditions are met in the U.S. today. The political class alignment in the U.S. resembles that of Western Europe before the emergence of mass workers parties. The closest parallel is late nineteenth century Britain where a strong union movement supported the Liberal Party, while the would-be revolutionary socialists existed as propaganda groups. The "united front of the workers" is a demand that the mass reformist organizations break with class collaboration and struggle for the workers interests in alliance with the communist vanguard. A literal transposition of the "united front of the workers" to the U.S. would be a demand that the AFL-CIO break with the Democratic Party and form a series of fighting alliances with the Spartacist League. Once the question is posed that way, the inapplicability of the tactic is obvious.

This does not mean that the underlying conception behind the "united front of the workers"---the counter-position to class collaboration of unity in struggle with the communists---is inapplicable in the U.S. Rather the principal tactical form of that counter-position cannot be the united front. The American equivalent of the tactic known as the "united front of the workers" is the labor party movement---a party formed through the trade unions breaking from the bourgeois parties and open to the program and cadre of the communist vanguard.

In sharpening our line against Wohlforth, we have asserted that a labor party (of any sort) is only a historical possibility and not a necessary stage in constructing a mass revolutionary party. In other words we do not preclude, at this time, the linear development of the SL into the mass party of the American workers through direct conflict with the Democratic Party. A fixation with the united front or its proper American analogue, the labor party, tends toward a two-stage theory of party building since embodied in these concepts is a mass workers party not led by communists.

There is a notion put forth, for example, by Harry Turner of what might be termed the "exemplary united front of the workers"---a united front of ostensibly revolutionary propaganda groups symbolically representing proletarian unity. Such a formation is based on a series of programmatic demands (usually culled from the Transitional Program) which exclude not only bourgeois elements, but the trade unions as well. As a concept, the united front for propaganda elevates the united front above the party as a kind of higher political organization. In practice, it often is a device whereby a small propaganda group seeks to overcome its numerical inferiority by dissolving larger organizations into a common public face. Needless to say, we do not rule out united fronts for propaganda when they are in our interests. However, we do not present united fronts for propaganda as an expression of class unity in struggle, as an "exemplary united front of the workers."

While it is possible to exclude bourgeois elements from united fronts that we organize, it is impossible for us to exclude them from the major struggles of the American workers. In practice, our comrades have recognized that organizations involving bourgeois support for labor struggles are not "popular fronts," which we refuse on

principle to enter. Thus, we played an active role in the Farm-worker support committees despite the prominent presence of Ted Kennedy, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, etc. To apply ~~one tactic and one tactic only~~ in dealing with bourgeois presence in labor struggles--demanding their immediate and unconditional exclusion--would be stupid ultimatism, would be an obstacle to our struggle for leadership over the class. Our party must know how to use the united front tactic to expose and discredit friend-of-labor politicians. The definitive expulsion of the bourgeoisie from the workers movement will be the result of a lengthy and complex struggle in which united fronts with bourgeois politicians and groups are a necessary part.

Some comrades have recognized the need to participate in united fronts with bourgeois elements, but have opposed inviting such elements into united fronts that we initiate--a posture which one comrade aptly termed "coquettishness." Such a policy has no tactical merit. It means engaging in alliances with bourgeois politicians on terms set by our enemies, the union bureaucracy, but refusing such alliances on the best possible terms, the ones that we ourselves establish.

Our Changing Tasks

To the extent that the disapproval of the O'Dwyer endorsement did not reflect leftist formalism, it was strongly influenced by the belief that the incident would blur the sharp line between ourselves and the SWP. The "old" line--"a popular front is a united front with the bourgeoisie"--was simple enough to be understood by a retarded YSAer after a minute of discussion. In contrast, the "new" line seems complex and subtle, requires a careful analysis of the concrete situation.

There is a certain similarity (not a parallelism, since we have not changed our line) between the reaction within our ranks to the O'Dwyer incident and resistance within the SWP when Trotsky came out for a change in the labor party policy in 1938. Throughout most of the 1930's the Trotskyists denounced the Lovestonites' agitation for a labor party as opportunist. Thus, despite the changed political circumstances and fundamentally different content that Trotsky gave to the labor party demand, losing face before the Lovestoneites was a definite factor for many SWPers in deciding on the question. In addressing this problem, Trotsky asserted that the party's program was governed by the objective requirements of the socialist revolution and not by contingent polemical relations with a particular opponent.

The above remarks are not meant to downgrade the importance of direct political struggle against the SWP. Until we overtake and displace the SWP as the generally recognized Trotskyist organization in this country, we will not be able to play a major role in American politics. However, precisely because of our greater presence in the labor movement, there will be many important situations where our fractions directly confront and even compete with friend-of-labor Democratic politicians. Unless we know how to use the united

front tactic to expose and discredit bourgeois politicians we cannot transform ourselves from a propaganda group into a workers party.

[undated, author claims it was probably written about mid-April 1974]

[As part of his reply to Henry L., Seymour requests that the following uncorrected transcript be printed in the Bulletin.]

ON THE LABOR PARTY QUESTION

by James Robertson

Note: This is a transcript from a tape, edited only to make coherent sentences. For internal discussion purposes only!

This report is intended to be a presentation of a series of interlocked home-truths and a comment on the search for deviations. of which in a hardened way we seem to have discovered only two. Its origins are the West Coast Labor Day Pre-Conference Discussion, where the issue of the Labor Party thoroughly dominated the discussion. A great deal of uncertainty, confusion and a very considerable spread of opinion on the Labor Party question presented itself there and we had to thrash it out. At this point the slogan which I have been defending and want to defend here is the slogan "Dump the Bureaucrats! For a Workers Party based on the trade unions." Another slogan which was debated, and which presents an aspect of rank and file-ism, of syndicalism, is the slogan, "For a labor party without bureaucrats." That slogan lacks the contradictory tension of a struggle and suggests simply rank and file-ism and possibly, by implication, the development of an organized, mass workers party counterposed to the trade unions: perhaps the equivalent of the red unions of the CP's third period. I gather that on the coast there is a comrade who objects to the first part of the slogan, "Dump the bureaucrats," and just wants to have a slogan "For a Labor Party based on the trade unions." In New York, there is a comrade who just wants to have the slogan "Dump the Bureaucrats. For a Communist Party." There is a great deal of confusion. The confusion centers on two separate axes, and that's why it's a great deal of confusion, or rather complicated confusion. In the last debate in New York, I spent all my time in the decisions of the Third and Fourth Congresses. I'm going to evade that this time and simply point out that the Labor Party slogan is the current American version of the issue of the united front. In the absence of a massive political expression of reformism or Stalinism in the United States, but rather with the organization of industrial unions with a deeply committed pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracy, the issue of proletarian unity and the process of a communist triumph in struggle is centered on the Labor Party question.

There are two axes of confusion over the Labor Party. One is the importance of realizing that this is a propagandistic demand for us today, which has no relationship to what will happen in the future. That is, today the workers (the cadre notwithstanding) who think that Meany because he does not like Negroes, homosexuals or abortion laws, is therefore building a Labor Party in order to carry out these anti-capitalist demands, are idiots. There has to be a sense of proportion, which the CP originally lost in 1924. In the first place, the Labor Party is not the real issue for propaganda. The Workers Government is. We stumbled into this. If you read the early issues of Workers' Action, you will find out that the final, triumphant, ultimate statement of position in the Workers' Action program was for

a Labor Party. We are for a Workers Government, in the unions, in the plants and in our general education and approaching students with the conception of proletarian power. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a formulation which suffers certain problems. A popular understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat is that the workers are going to be put into concentration camps, you know, like in Russia. If you talk of some kind of socialism, you get an image of happy Sweden maintaining its high alcoholism and suicide rates through victoriously staying out of two world wars. But what should be clear in every way, through every kind of issue, is that the working people need their own government. But--how do you get a government? That implies a political party of the working people--a class party. The workers party is a subordinate element of the achievement of a workers government, which is an algebraic expression, as the saying goes, for the concrete realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which requires a workers or a labor party. In its concrete expression, this is a revolutionary labor party: a Bolshevik party. That's a propaganda presentation.

*explain
more terms
the algebraic
expression*

Now what's really going to happen in this country? Who knows?... Only Lyn Marcus. I'll give you some variants. One is, we have an unpolitical, extremely combative working class, with a bureaucracy that at present and without the aid of a thousand YSAers, is incapable at any serious level of struggle of controlling this class. Part of the residue of the enormous class struggles in Europe is the presence of an extremely sophisticated, able political bureaucracy in depth. Can you imagine the capacity of a George Meany to cope with an American general strike the way that the CP did in France in '68? It's impossible. Which is where Jack Barnes and his gang think they've got their opening. As indicated in the fundamental premises of the transformation memo, now that American hegemony has been lost, reducing the United States to a very effective, most powerful of the capitalist/imperialists and with the fundamental preconditions for severe social crisis in the plant, it's entirely possible that the American working class may be impelled into massive political actions without a revolutionary party, without any party at all, and overwhelm the bureaucracy. In the best case that will be a fruitful catastrophe, rather akin to the Paris Commune and the 1905 Revolution. It is not something, therefore, that we work for. But as a smaller propagandistic group we'll do our job. If we are unable to have the capacity as revolutionists to place ourselves at the head of insurgent masses, we will fight anyway, even if we have to go through an experience as the Spartakusbund did in 1918, 1919. The next time around, it will be different. That's a possibility if the motion in the base accelerates. It is possible to cope with the other extreme--an orderly, stretched-out intensification of social crisis, the capacity of the growing communist movement to keep ahead of developments. The possibility that the communist party could simply grow in linear fashion began to suggest itself classically in 1934 in this country when three erstwhile communist organizations led three city-wide general strikes in Toledo, San Francisco and in Minneapolis. The other possibility would be the realization of a labor party either of a revolutionary or of a reformist character. Under the accumulated mounting pressures of social struggle, the bureaucracy may begin to be torn asunder from the pressure from below, from developing class antagonisms, and it becomes stretched. With a successful communist

agitation at the same time the Labor Party could be formed in what will be a very convulsive act. What is behind so much of the conceptual garbage that the Workers' League puts out, is that the Labor Party is an easy thing. There's a book by Henry Pelling, The History of the Labor Party in Britain, which is useful for guidelines. If you study the history of the achievement of political class consciousness by any proletariat, you'll see that it is a convulsive, historically monumental act--sometimes compressed, sometimes stretched out--but always enormous in character, even if the outcome after the dust begins to settle is the restabilization of a pro-capitalist bureaucracy. The impact of ripping the mass of the working people away from capitalism so that the assertion is we need in society in which the working people govern, the productive property is nationalized, is enormous, and on top of this is laid the reformist and Stalinist labor skates. That will be a convulsive period in American history, substantially larger than that of the sit-down period from '35-'37. But what will happen has no particular relationship to our present advocacy, which is a way to pose the question of working people becoming the government and to develop the political instrument to achieve this, to link up that objective, fundamental need with the present consciousness of the bulk of trade union conscious American workers. The attempts to telescope the two as if there were a particular relationship, a linear connection, between what we say today and what will happen in mass motion, is the source of a great deal of confusion and error.

I left open the question of the outcome of the character of the Labor Party in the third case. In the Bay Area somebody said, "Ah, but how can there be a revolutionary Labor Party? Obviously by definition it's reformist." And immediately there came to mind the transformations of the Italian and French mass Socialist Parties into Communist Parties. More engagingly, because of the similarity in name and origins, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (majority) is commonly taken to be a revolutionary Labor Party. But that depends on the relationship of forces between the revolutionists and the reformists who associate themselves with such an insurgent move on the political plane--approximately the same way that John L. Lewis and a section of the AFL bureaucracy did in 1935 with the CIO industrial organization. So that's one kind of confusion.

The other axis of confusion is over "Why advocate a Labor Party?" and what is the relationship between the advocacy of a Labor Party and its political character? Will it represent the general historic interests of the proletariat, i.e. be a revolutionary Labor Party or will it represent special, narrow, aristocratic, chauvinistic and nationalist appetites within the proletariat, i.e. a reformist Labor Party. And therefore why advocate a Labor Party at all since it seems to have a kaleidoscopic character?

There is, of course, a perfectly good circumstance in which the present propagandistic and limited advocacy of a Labor Party would be abandoned. And that is, if we being to see that a Communist Party began to be recognized by advanced sections of the proletariat, not even very large ones but significant layers, and had the capacity to struggle in a linear way, by boot strap operation, to become the authentic and literal vanguard of the class. At that point we would

probably see a section of the bureaucracy form a Labor Party very fast in an attempt to head this off. The progressive wing of the bureaucracy would counterpose the development of a Labor Party. From its birth its essential purpose would be that of an anti-communist Labor Party. We would fight such a thing in every way. We would try to united front it to death, we would denounce it to death, we would raid it to death, we would do everything we could to smash it in the egg. But that is a far cry from the present situation. It is literally not possible by qualitative orders of magnitude--not just one, but qualitative orders of magnitude--to advance at this juncture the Spartacist League as the answer to the felt mass problems of the proletariat. But those mass problems aren't felt to exist. What does exist in a mass way is the trade union movement. Therefore one can point out that the trade union movement, the economic organization of a section of the working class, has the responsibility to offer the political as well as the economic answers to the plight of the working people. And so it is an address to the one institution that exists in the United States--the organized labor movement.

Now I've got a couple of other points to make in this connection. To go back to the workers' government slogan, which is the purpose of the Labor Party agitation, we should be clear what is meant by a workers' government. It is nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat. There have appeared some speculations or projections either in a hypothetical way or at one point as an ephemeral possibility in history. A workers' government is not simply a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Interestingly enough, in the formulations of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, where there was a vagueness and an abstraction about the projection of the conditions under which a workers' government would be achieved, both Hal Draper and Joe Hansen zeroed in on that material as they did on a phrase in the Transitional Program in order to prove that the British Labor Party of 1945 and Fidel Castro's Cuban government were workers' governments.

The concrete possibilities that Trotsky posed in the Transitional Program were roughly of the following formulation: it is conceivable that under mass revolutionary pressure reformist elements might go much further in the direction of a workers' government than they conceived they would at the outset. That was a "what--if" question; a generalization on the following condition that took place in the Russian Revolution between February and October. The slogan of the Bolsheviks addressed to the Provisional Government, which was a coalition government of Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, the miniscule Trudoviks of Kerensky and the Cadet Party, that is, the constitutional democrats, the effective liberal bourgeois party, was the slogan "Down with the ten capitalist ministers, form a government purely of the workers' parties," coupled of course with the social and political and economic demands that the Bolsheviks were raising. Posed in a "what-if?" way, the question is, what is the Cadets had been thrown out of the government? You would have a murky period at that point, something not very stable, in the context of what is already inherently a historical episode of a dual power situation between a bourgeois government and the existence of organized nation-wide soviets. What that would represent is not a workers' government

separate and apart from the dictatorship of the proletariat, but an episode immediately on the way. But of course the centrists make a lot out of non-viable episodes possible in the histories of revolutions, only to try to construct a sort of third camp between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the administration of a bourgeois state by the reformists.

Now another question has arisen just lately; a useful question has been posed by Comrade Seymour's article on the labor party I think, because it's not a clear-cut case and it shows some problems in actual application. That's the experience of the Communist Party in 1923-24 with the Farmer-Labor Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and the general issue of the possibility of a bloc between the communists and, as Cannon put it, the progressive section of the labor movement. You know, apparently it is never too late to learn something, because after 25 years, while reading Seymour's piece, it suddenly occurred to me, Farmer Labor Party--wait a minute, that's a two class party, we're opposed to a two class party, what the hell are we doing in a two class party situation? "One step forward..." Furthermore, the thing has got to be reformist: just think! what kind of interests of both workers and farmers could be contained within a common program. The farmers produce their commodities, they sell them themselves, they're interested in high prices, squeezing out the middlemen, getting to the export market directly, all this kind of stuff is the economic program of the farmers. Sometimes of course farmers can be pretty restless and make a lot of trouble. But those interests of the workers that you could possibly put together could only be extremely narrow, the circumscribed interests of the American working class, even if you just sat down and said, "Let's cook up a Farmer Labor Party." Necessarily, it would have to be episodic and limited in a reformist way because there are a lot of antagonisms between petty- and sometimes not so petty-bourgeois producers, which is what farmers are, and the proletariat. And that's the key to what was wrong in 1924 with the Communist bloc with the Chicago Federation of Labor. From the outset it was preordained that the struggle was going to be for a reformist Labor Party, i.e. throwing in the farmers to boot. It was on that basis that a bloc was constructed then: the Communists agreed to simulate a reformist party hoping for a maneuver on the inside, courtesy of Brother Pepper. It's on that basis and probably from that experience that Shachtman wrote his article in 1935. Who needs a second class, fake, reformist, hidden Communist Party? Now we, for our part, should have no reason to be opposed to a bloc with a section of the labor movement, including the labor officialdom, providing that bloc goes in the direction we want it to go. But looking back to 1923, on what basis is this Chicago Federation of Labor going to give us what we want? Only on the basis of an agreement to struggle for a Labor Party together in the first place, to struggle with each other over the character of its program and its cadres in the second place. On that basis we'll make a bloc with people. If Meany says, "I'm for a Labor Party--you guys are for a Labor Party," fine; we'll all go and organize for a Labor Party and we'll fight like hell to determine its program. Yeah, we'd accept such a bloc, and we'd fight--we'd seek such a bloc. But it is not in the interests of our bloc partners to have such a bloc. The problem with a bloc is the nice old phrase of Bismarck that every alliance consists of two components--the horse and the rider. So that

I do not know how we would realize the bloc because I'm afraid that our projected horse would bolt. And the Communist Party clearly was doing the donkey work--or proposing--simulating doing the donkey work for the trade union officialdom except that they also wanted organizational control by the Communists plus a reformist program. This does not help anything, and that's the basic reason why they got such a mess out of it.

So that in reviewing the historical experience--we aren't ever for a Farmer Labor Party--we oppose it. A Farmer Labor Party is not going to happen in America. James Burnham made an interesting point in 1938. He said, "Comrades, the Transitional Program says that we should be for a workers' and farmers' government in the United States." But he observed already then, I believe, that there were more dentists than farmers in the United States, and therefore why not a workers' and dentists' government. Comrade Gordon waxes irate with me because I find the formula of a workers' and "x" government very useful while on national tour. You know, there's a workers' and students' government if you're speaking on campus--you go out to the military base, it's a workers' and soldiers' government, you know, and you gradually move through all sections of the population. I suppose in Berkeley a few years ago it would have been a workers' and women's government. The final achievement is one that boggled my own mind. The Argentine Pabloists came out a few years ago with a Workers' and People's government. Well, we're for a workers' and "x" government, all right, the problem with motley America is that "x" stands for a wide variety. But behind that is a truism: the dictatorship of the proletariat will be centrally, but not simply or purely, proletarian. There is a wide layer of oppressed sections in American society--racially, ethnically, socially oppressed, ranging from old people to latins, blacks, students, soldiers. This is quite real, it's quite true, although a workers' and people's government is not exactly the formulation that one wants. But it senses something that's particularly important--if one says a labor movement or a Labor Party right now--there is very good reason to see it right now in the most encrusted, aristocratic, racist, chauvinist George Meany-like fashion. It's extremely important, and one of the reasons for the formulation "Dump the bureaucrats! For a Workers' Party." There's no difference in conception between a Workers' Party based on the trade unions and a Labor Party based on the trade unions, except that the terminology projects a somewhat different conception.

5 November 1972

March 30, 1974
Oakland, California

Dear Comrade [Milin],

I'm sorry for the long delay in answering your last letter (dated Dec. 19, 1973) but I've been studying and discussing with the SL locally many of the questions raised in your letters and have only recently found time to write you. In addition to all that I was in the process of changing jobs which absorbed a lot of my time.

I found the Trotsky article on "Peasant War in China and the Proletariat" and the PL "Memorandum" quite helpful. I also realized how unprepared I was to discuss PL since in the SWP such discussions were rarely held, and I never really read the PL press. After having read most of your material on PL and some of PL's material, I have come to the conclusion that I was wrong about certain aspects of that organization's development. For example, I did not realize it had broken theoretically with the two-stage theory of revolution. Although one can see that such a "break" has had little effect on PL's political program domestically, it is still significant in the sense it forced PL to break its ties with Maoism. But let's begin this discussion of PL with your first statement in 1963 in the "Memorandum."

In the "Memo" you state on page three that "...PL is a heterogeneous, leftward moving formation of a broadly centrist character, having broken with Stalinism on a sound basis of working class struggle and having passed a serious test of loyalty to elementary principle over the Cuban crisis... Without both recognizing the need for and achieving a Trotskyist clarity about the nature of the SU and of Stalinism, no formation (above all one formed as a breakaway from Stalinism) can acquire an authentic and durable revolutionary quality." (my emphasis) You make two essential--and if I may add, in one case, prophetic--points in this statement: (1) that PL was centrist and had "broken with Stalinism on a sound basis"; and (2) that PL could not "acquire an authentic and durable revolutionary quality" without adopting Trotskyist politics. At this early stage in PL's development you were probably correct in your characterizations. At the same time, it corresponds to my position that a Stalinist organization must break with Stalinism in order to become centrist; and that if it is to become revolutionary, it must adopt Trotskyist politics. You admit this is correct "in an objective programmatic sense, but not necessarily in a subjective or organizational sense." (Letter of Dec. 19, emphasis in original) In the same letter you stated that "On this decisive question [class collaboration], they [PL] had broken with reformism and become centrist..." I'll get back to this point later.

I've looked over back issues of Spartacist and I was unable to find any information concerning your position on PL during the middle 1960's (1964-69). I would like to know what you thought about PL in this period. Have you always considered it centrist? When did it become Stalinist again?, etc. Your article in the Nov.-Dec. 1966 (No. 8) issue of Spartacist, "Maoism Run Amok," says nothing about PL. If I've missed something please inform me as soon as possible.

The first article on PL appears in the Aug.-Sept., 1969 (No.13), issue of Spartacist. In this article you characterize PL as "Trotskyism with a pre-frontal lobotomy" (!), as "unconscious bad paraphrase(rs) of Trotskyist analysis." But in the same breath, you charged that PL has "accepted, if unevenly and incompletely, the counter-revolutionary dead-end of Stalinism," and "PL belongs to a tradition of degenerate Bolshevism-Stalinism and Maoism." These statements confuse me. First, if PL "broke with Stalinism" in 1963, when did it re-adopt the "counter-revolutionary dead-end of Stalinism"? Second, how can such an organization--"of degenerate Bolshevism"--be considered "Trotskyist," with or without a brain operation?

In another issue of Spartacist (No. 19, Nov.-Dec., 1970, "PL At A Dead-End"), you wrote: "PL recoils from the results of its 'left-center coalition' opportunism and, recently, from its trivial, moralistic CWSA orientation in SDS. But its reaction can be no more than than to run blindly from opportunism. PL is at a dead end in its interpretation of communism; its subjectively revolutionary impulse is at odds with its own history as a left variant of Stalinist-Maoist revisionism. PL has been shoved off its Stalinist base." But two months before that, in the Sept. 1970 issue of the RMC Newsletter (No. 4), you wrote that PL was still Stalinist (see article "Stalinism in Boston")!

A great deal of energy was spent by your organization denouncing the CWSA--the main front organization of PL at the time--as "apolitical," "conservative," and "at odds with Leninism." Are we to believe that this very same organization which was responsible for creating the CWSA was also simultaneously espousing "unconscious Trotskyism"? By utilizing such loose characterizations a working-class organization can shift and slide from holding counter-revolutionary Stalinist positions to become "left-centrist" and "unconscious Trotskyists" (with head scars to be sure) without any fundamental break in programmatic thrust. The main criterion then becomes the subjective wishes of this or that organization.

The same thing can be said about drawing any analogy between Trotsky's characterization of pre-1935 Stalinism as "bureaucratic centrism" and the "centrist-like" zig-zags of PL today. When Trotsky made that statement he was allowing for the possibility that the Comintern could still become the vanguard party of the proletariat. After 35 additional years of betrayal, this prospect--of Stalinism becoming transformed into the vanguard--is for all practical purposes ruled out. History has taught us that Trotsky was essentially right on this score. Any return to the formula, "Stalinism and bureaucratic centrism" can only further confuse our understanding of this contradictory phenomenon.

Later, in a series of articles in Workers Vanguard in 1973, you stated that PL started out as a left-Stalinist movement which went through a prolonged Maoist phase, and then broke empirically to the left on the national question and the theory of stages. But, in its attempt at theoretical justification, PL elaborated its break from Maoist into a full-scale flight from Leninism, toward syndicalism and sterile ultra-leftism. (WV, Feb. 1973). Then following that article another one appeared in the April 1973 issue of WV wherein

you stated that "The transformation of Progressive Labor from an aggressive left-centrist grouping into reformism is almost (!) complete." In the next issue, May 1973, a third article appeared where we learned that "PL has never taken a hard line against the labor bureaucracy" (emphasis in original), and "has consistently called for a 'center-left' coalition in the trade unions." The last article was written to expose PL's opportunist "turn" toward the labor bureaucrats.

The conclusions drawn in these articles were that PL has degenerated into a reformist organization, and that "in breaking with its own Maoist and Stalinist past, Progressive Labor has proceeded to overthrow Marxism." These statements raise many questions, but the main one is how did PL move from being "aggressively left-centrist" to wanting to "overthrow Marxism" in such a short period of time? What fundamental changes in its program occurred which forced it back toward reformism from whence it came? If the main factor in holding back PL's development toward revolutionary politics was its Maoist and Stalinist past, why, then, at the moment it "breaks" with this past, it proceeds to overthrow Marxism altogether? Something is missing here.

The concept embodied in your initial "Memo" on PL I believe is a correct one. Centrism, to have any meaning at all today, must imply a breaking away from all forms of reformism--either of the Social Democratic, Stalinist-Maoist, or "Trotskyist" schools. Ultra-left zig-zags, rejection of class-collaboration on paper (viz. SWP, PL, etc.), or subjective wishes provide little basis for a sound Marxist appraisal of political categories.

PL's "opposition" to class collaboration "at home" was based, as you say, mainly on its inability to put into effect Mao's theories of a "bloc of four classes" on its own turf. Without a large peasantry and an "oppressed" national bourgeoisie, a bloc of four classes has no meaning whatsoever. PL realized that to call for a coalition with the "number one enemy in the world"--U.S. Imperialism--it would lose any chance of being taken seriously by its friends in the "third world" and of course by the vanguard at home. But this opposition to class-collaboration at home was contradicted by PL's support to it abroad; by its shame-faced apology for the ruinous actions of the Maoist Indonesian CP; and by its anti-working-class positions toward Cuba and the Soviet Union after 1966. The decisive test for any ostensibly revolutionary organization is not just opposition to class-collaboration at home, but opposition to class-collaborationism in principle, anywhere! The true test of the Bolsheviks was their ability to break with Social Democracy at the time of the first world war on this very question, the question of internationalism.

It is of course the position of the Pabloists that Maoism represents a form of centrism. Your position differs by limiting it to working class tendencies, or, as you put it, "to those Maoist tendencies within the workers movement." This is a weak conception because it implies that by simply identifying with Maoism and being "in the workers movement" a group can qualify as being centrist. But this contradicts your own definition of Maoism as a petty-bourgeois tendency expressing essentially the same politics as the Soviets only

with a more "left" face. (You also seem to hold another position of Maoism that it represents "Menshevism under the gun." Are you implying that Maoism in general is a working-class tendency?) Maoism has, it is true, attracted many subjectively revolutionary people in the advanced industrial countries, and the SL was quick to recognize this and orient to it. But Maoism never was able to develop even a "centrist" program for the developed countries. All the western Maoists could do was repeat the words of Mao at the top of their lungs, denounce U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism, and give support to most national liberation struggles. This hardly qualifies as a "left-centrist" program.

The fact that PL broke with Mao to embrace simple reformism is significant in that it shows the relative ease with which Maoists are capable of moving to adopt reformist politics. For the most part the splits that have occurred within Maoist organizations have been over methods of struggle (guerrilla warfare or "mass work") as opposed to political principles. Interestingly enough, PL has experienced almost no internal struggles or splits over principles (with perhaps the exception of the Epton split). Also interesting is the fact that almost everyone who left PL and made a genuine turn toward Trotskyism, was forced to take up all the disputed theoretical questions before he or she was able to adopt a revolutionary program. If this is true, why did you write that PL has a "revolutionary proletarian line" between 1969 and 1971?

As for PL's support for the Cultural Revolution "believing it was an attack on bureaucratic rule," this is probably true. But if PL was unable to determine that bureaucratic rule already existed in the Chinese state under Maoist leadership, how could it possibly know what bureaucratic rule was or that the petty-bourgeois Red Guards could not destroy it? In general, as Lenin and Trotsky pointed out, the students have often been used as a force opposed to bureaucracy, but in the case of China during the Cultural Revolution, the students were also used against the workers--who were genuinely interested and capable of establishing workers democracy!

If PL was really interested in establishing a government modeled on the Paris Commune it would have called for the democratization of the party and state, i.e. political revolution. It would have called for the creation of workers Soviets, new elections, immediate recall, the right of tendency, political rights, etc. You say PL doesn't have a Trotskyist understanding of workers democracy. You are so right! Because that is the only understanding that is revolutionary! While PL was calling for "workers democracy" in China it was beating up communists in this country!

In summary, your position on PL subordinates the question of program to "revolutionary practice." Whereas in the "Memo" you started from an objective appraisal of PL's programmatic break from Stalinism, beginning with 1969, your analysis was based primarily on PL's subjective desires and "revolutionary thrust." While I am willing to accept the fact that PL had made an important break away from Stalinism in the early period, since it adopted a Maoist line in the middle sixties, its healthy centrist thrust became aborted. It then became a left-Stalinist grouping tied to the Maoist bureau-

crazy, reformist in its program and ultraleft in its tactics and strategy. Today, after its break with Mao, PL still represents a Stalinist, reformist grouping but without its ultra-left stance (an ultra-left is an opportunist standing on its head).

2. The second point I'd like to discuss is the question of the nature of the Chinese Communist Party and State. To the question, "Was the CCP a petty-bourgeois party before it took power?", I must answer yes--it was. The article by Trotsky "Peasant War in China..." and the writings of Peng Shu-Tse, in particular his article "Report on the Chinese Situation" (Education for Socialists bulletin, June 1972, reprinted from 1952 by the SWP), have convinced me that the CCP was a petty-bourgeois party between 1928 and 1949. However, I prefer the characterization "petty-bourgeois Stalinist party within the workers movement." This may appear to be a contradiction in terms so let me try to explain what I mean.

Because of the origins of this party as a revolutionary workers party, and because of its political and material ties to the Comintern, the CCP remained within the "socialist" or workers movement even when it became physically separated from the Chinese working class. In composition it was of course a petty-bourgeois peasant party. In ideology it was Stalinist. But Stalinism--while it is to be sure a form of petty-bourgeois radical nationalism--is also "a reformist working-class current...bureaucratic rule on the basis of working-class property forms." This dual aspect of Stalinism cannot be ignored because it is the only way we can explain such phenomena as the "buffer states" and the other deformed workers states. In program the CCP put forth in classic style the Stalinist line on the two-stage theory of revolution for backward countries, and in particular, the Stalinist attitude toward the peasantry.

In short, the Stalinist program called for a bloc with the national bourgeoisie on the basis of a democratic program. But the democratic program for backward countries is an important part of any working-class program. The Transitional Program has the following to say about the democratic program:

"It is impossible merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force for such countries as China or India. This slogan must be indissolubly tied up with the problem of national liberation and agrarian reform. As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic program. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic program, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie. Then, at a certain stage in the mobilization of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise...."

The point I'm making is not that a simple democratic program is sufficient to make a socialist revolution in backward countries (I went through a factional struggle inside the SWP to oppose such a non-revolutionary concept), or that it equals a working-class program, but that it is an important part of a revolutionary program in back-

ward countries. In this sense the program of the CCP was partly working-class, albeit, class-collaborationist.

But this fact alone could not suffice to characterize the CCP as working-class because it chose to orient its forces toward the peasantry and build the party on that basis. As a result, the "socialist" tasks became subordinated to the democratic as the peasantry took on the role as "revolutionary vanguard" of the Chinese Revolution. As Mao incorrectly stated it, "The Chinese Revolution is in fact a peasant revolution....The policy of the New Democracy is in fact the transfer of power to the peasantry...." By substituting the peasantry for the working class in carrying out the democratic and socialist tasks of the revolution, Mao turned his back on the proletariat and in fact carried out an "SR" line with regards to China.

Did this completely deny that there were working-class tendencies inside the CCP? No. As Peng stated in another article on the nature of the CCP, "...because of its historic origin (as a section of the C.I.) because of some working-class traditions remaining from the second revolution and because of its close relations with the international Stalinist party (which as degenerated as it is, still remains a workers' party) and because of its general support of Marxism-Leninism, of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the perspective of Communism, etc., we have to admit that even when it had degenerated into a peasant party there remained a certain inclination in the party towards the workers...." ("Some Supplementary Remarks And Corrections to 'The Report On the Chinese Question'," from same bulletin.)

By characterizing the CCP as "a petty-bourgeois party within the workers movement" I am asserting its differences with other petty-bourgeois parties which have developed over the years based on essentially agrarian programs. For example the party of Stambuilsky in Bulgaria in the early twenties was such a party. This peasant party which was in power from 1919 to 1923 maintained capitalist relations right up until it was overthrown by a right-wing coup. This party, which carried out a few reforms in the interest of the peasants, was unable to go beyond this stage because of its petty-bourgeois program. The CCP, on the other hand, was able to carry out nationalizations and establish a deformed workers state. I say the difference was due to the CCP's ties with the workers movement and its partial working-class program.

You say the reason this petty-bourgeois party was able to establish a deformed workers state in 1949 was because the bourgeoisie was entirely on the side of Chiang's forces. Whereas in Cuba, this was not the case; an internal fight was necessary in order to throw out the bourgeoisie in the first Castro government. But in the case of Bulgaria the bourgeoisie was also entirely on the side of the putschists. After the coup, both the Peasant Union and the Bulgarian CP were crushed. The point is not that the bourgeoisie was strong or weak; (in the case of China, weak; in the case of Bulgaria, strong), but that the contending class forces were very homogeneous in China and Bulgaria! The question then is why wasn't the "peasant government" of Bulgaria able to carry through a social

revolution whereas in China it was? (Another question to think about is what do you consider the first government in China to have been? A peasant government? A workers and peasants government? Or a workers government?) Remember also that it is not even necessary to have the bourgeoisie as a class present in the government to define the state as bourgeois (viz. the Spanish Pop Front)!

As a result of becoming convinced of the class nature of the CCP, as a petty-bourgeois party, I have also come to the conclusion, in order to be consistent, that a workers state was not established in China until after nationalizations. And that what existed in China between 1949 and 1953 was a petty-bourgeois government resting on bourgeois property relations, i.e., a bourgeois regime, without the bourgeoisie! Is that possible? Yes! That's what happened in Spain, Bulgaria, and the "buffer states." In the case of Spain and the buffer states, to complicate things even more, this task was carried out by clearly working-class parties and military forces! History has shown that a bourgeois state can be administered by any class under certain conditions (generally in a highly unstable situation and of short duration, where the proletariat is very weak, etc.). History has also taught us that when both major classes--bourgeoisie and working--are extremely weak, the generally, and historically weak, petty-bourgeois class comes to the forefront and will take over state power and run it in the interest of one of the two major classes.

3. The last point I want to deal with is the question of the PRT-ERP. You stated in your document ("The Fight in the United Secretariat...") that "the PRT is a consistent insurrectionary Stalinist organization. It is opposed to workers democracy in the state which it is seeking to establish and it is pursuing insurrectionary methods designed to ensure military control over the working class should it come to power...." (my emphasis).

On paper, that is not true. In the program of the PRT, "Draft Program of the Revolutionary Workers Party" and the "Program of the Revolutionary Army of the People" both written in 1970, it calls for workers democracy more than once. For example, in the program of the ERP, it states: "(b) To establish a system of Social Democracy, a Revolutionary People's government led by the working class," and "(f) Worker-state administration of all the nationalized companies." In the "Draft Program" of the PRT it states: "(b) Only the leadership and control of the working class, through the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat (or, workers democracy), will assure the permanent character of our revolution, the defeat of the enemy classes, the liquidation of bourgeois interests and pressures, and a consistent advance in building socialism." And: "(c) The revolutionary workers and people's government that we are fighting to achieve will usher in a new stage in the life of the nation, establishing workers democracy, ending imperialist domination, and initiating the struggle that will destroy the capitalist system and lead to the construction of socialism."

"1. The new workers democracy will be based on a system of councils of workers and people's deputies elected by a direct vote and subject to recall at any time. These councils will organize and

direct the economic, social, and political life of the country on the local, provincial, and national levels, as well as controlling foreign relations."

"2. This new workers democracy, that will lead toward the total destruction of the state apparatus, will be based on arming the people, eliminating the standing professional army and police, along with replacing them by workers and popular revolutionary defense militias and, temporarily, by a well-organized people's army for defense against foreign invasion until imperialism is defeated on a world scale."

In addition, the PRT calls for: "2. Restoration of democratic freedoms and individual rights, especially freedom of association, organization, press, and the right to form unions."

"3. Full observance of the right to strike and the repeal of all restrictive regulations."

"4. Setting a minimum sliding scale of wages that guarantees a decent level of existence, with periodic readjustments by the parity commissions, which must be restored and allowed to function."

"5. Ending all types of state interference in the union movement." (International Internal Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 10, No. 5, April 1973, published by the SWP, pp. 29-33).

Of course this program for workers democracy only exists on paper. The PRT can never carry it out so long as it relies upon the petty-bourgeoisie. But that's just the point I'm making with regards to the SWP's position on Cuba. "On paper" the SWP calls for workers democracy in Cuba but it does nothing to bring it about. Likewise, the PRT calls for workers democracy in Argentina "on paper," but it does nothing to bring it about. Anyone can call for workers democracy but if one does not draw the programmatic conclusions from it, it has little meaning. Or to put it another way, to admit there is no workers democracy in Cuba and then do nothing about it amounts to telling the workers to be satisfied with what they've got! This is nothing more than capitulation to Stalinism and acceptance of bureaucratic rule "in one country."

Comradely yours,

Gerry Clark

9 May 1974

Dear comrade Clark,

Our correspondence has gone beyond certain formulations in a document which I drafted to deal with long-held and public positions of the SL (e.g. Progressive Labor, the Chinese Revolution). I believe greater clarity can be gained on these questions through discussions with the comrades in the Bay Area than through continuing this correspondence. I therefore hope to conclude our correspondence with this letter.

Progressive Labor and Centrism

You will find a brief, but attempted definitive, assessment of PL through the late '60's in our 1969 national conference resolution, published in Marxist Bulletin 9-II. In it PL is characterized as left centrist.

Your evaluation of PL as centrist until it embraced Maoism in the middle '60's is based on empirical misinformation. PL supported Maoism from its inception in 1962. The Rosen-Scheer tendency within the CP antedated the open Sino-Soviet split, but considered itself part of the Stalinist tradition as embodied in the Foster (anti-Browder) wing of the party.

I deny that our position on PL "subordinates program to 'revolutionary practice'." By program we mean the totality of positions taken on the major questions of the day and not a formal tradition. Our characterization of PL as left centrist in the 1968-71 period was based on programmatic congruence on two important positions on the American question and one on the international plane. One was PL's rejection of black nationalism and assertion that an end to racial oppression is associated with the victory of the proletariat. An important corollary of this was PL's opposition to dual vanguardism exemplified by its criticizing the Black Panthers from the left, despite the latter's great moral authority. Secondly, PL took a hard line against collaboration with the liberal bourgeoisie over the war question. Thirdly, PL was the only other organization in this country to denounce the Vietnamese NLF's class collaborationist program, again despite the latter's great moral authority. Obviously the above remarks do not represent a blanket endorsement of PL's positions and activities on these questions. However, in that period PL clearly represented a left thrust away from the prevalent Third Worldist petty-bourgeois radicalism exemplified by the ostensibly Trotskyist SWP.

Centrist organizations contain a complete inter-penetration of revolutionary and reformist elements in theory, program and practice in which motion is a decisive factor. In 1932, Trotsky regarded the Brandlerites, who formally based themselves on the first four Congresses of the CI, as to the right of the SAP, which did not adhere to Leninism. Furthermore, centrism implies enormous confusion and contradiction. The real contradictions of PL that you point to does not refute, but rather affirms, our characterization of it as centrist.

A centrist group emerging through a split from a coherent historical tradition (Social Democracy, Stalinism or Trotskyism) generally evinces a contradiction between its formal programmatic tradition and its living program. For leftward moving centrist groups (the SAP, PL in the '60's) the formal programmatic tradition is to the right of their actual program; for rightward centrists (the POUM, the SWP in the early '60's) the reverse is the case. While not all political phenomena are capable of symmetric expression, the concept of symmetry is a useful test of one's analysis. You admit that a group can claim adherence to a revolutionary tradition (i.e. Trotskyism) and yet be centrist, even reformist (the SWP). Yet you deny that a group can claim adherence to a reformist tradition (i.e. Stalinism) and yet be centrist. Why this asymmetry? By asserting that a Stalinist (Maoist) derived organization can only become centrist by formally and systematically breaking with the Stalinist tradition, you deny an important process generating leftward moving centrist groups in this period.

I am hesitant to generalize on the significance of our differences over the nature of centrism. It is possible that your position reflects a residual "family of Trotskyism" attitude prevalent within the United Secretariat. This is the position that any nominally Trotskyist organization is closer to revolutionary politics than any nominally Stalinist one. In contrast, we maintain that the lines between reformism, left and right centrism cut across the formal Trotskyist/Stalinist division. This position is an important part of our political world view directly related to our assessment of the depths of Pabloite revisionism and degeneration and to our call for the re-birth, as distinct from the reconstruction, of the Fourth International.

The Chinese Revolution

You apparently regard your designation of the pre-1949 CCP as a "petty-bourgeois Stalinist party within the workers movement" as important in understanding the outcome of the Chinese Revolution. As far as the CCP's ties to the Comintern are concerned, the Tito split demonstrated what should have been evident from a general understanding of Stalinism--that the unity of the Stalinist International could not survive a multiplicity of nationally based bureaucracies. To argue that the working-class element of the CCP flowed from the proletarian aspects of Stalinist ideology is, I believe, idealistic. The assertion that only the organizational and ideological ties of the CCP to Stalinism can account for its expropriation of the bourgeoisie is clearly disproved by the Cuban revolution. Therein lies the unique significance of Castroism in understanding the expansion of post-war Stalinism through indigenous social revolution as distinct from conquest by the Russian army.

The dictatorship of the proletariat exists when a monopoly of power is in the hands of an armed force which will necessarily expropriate the bourgeoisie and establish a collectivized economy. We hold that this condition was fulfilled with the Red Army victory of Chiang in 1949. To hold that China was a bourgeois state in 1949 is to assert either that the Mao regime/Red Army was capable of indefinitely administering a capitalist economy or that the Mao regime could

be replaced by unambiguously bourgeois forces, perhaps with an internal split--in other words, that the Red Army 1949 victory was an episode in an as-yet-unconcluded revolution, rather than its termination. I contend neither of these developments were historically possible.

Your Bulgarian analogy overlooks the essential difference in state power. Stambulisky came to "power" through an election and appointment by the King! The Stambulisky regime of 1919-23 was based on an unstable bourgeois parliamentary system supplemented by extralegal violence against both the left and right. The Peasant Union Orange Guards partly displaced, but certainly did not overthrow and replace the traditional state apparatus, whose personnel were simply biding their time for a favorable opportunity. Likewise the bourgeois parties were active and real contenders for power. After all, Stambulisky was overthrown by a classic coup centered on the officer corps and long-active rightwing terrorists (IMRO). How could the equivalent of the 1923 Tsankov coup have occurred in China after 1949?

No less important in understanding Stambulisky's policies while in "power" than his relations with the bourgeoisie were his relations with the working class. The Bulgarian working class, led by a mass revolutionary party, was a contender for power. If the Chinese working class in 1945 had been led by a mass, revolutionary (i.e. Trotskyist) party, the outcome of the Third Chinese Revolution would have, to say the least, been different.

Your analogies of East Europe in 1945-48 and Spain in 1936 are no more valid than the Bulgarian one. In 1945, East Europe was administered by the army of a foreign workers state, for which withdrawal was a historic possibility (e.g. Austria in 1956). The role of a bourgeois state being played by workers militias under a reformist leadership (e.g. Germany in 1918, Spain in 1936) can only be an episode during a revolution. Contrary to reformist illusions (e.g. Hilferding's attempt to incorporate soviets into the Weimar Constitution), the bourgeoisie will never permit workers militias to replace or even seriously check the traditional state apparatus--a carefully selected officer corps and police force. From the bourgeois standpoint, there is no guarantee that a workers militia will remain under reformist leadership. Moreover, the function of the bourgeois state is not only to protect the capitalist system from revolution, but to discipline the working class so as to maintain a satisfactory rate of exploitation. If workers militias do not overthrow the capitalist system, they will be self-liquidated by their reformist leaders or suppressed.

To restate the essential point about the Chinese Revolution, if you maintain that China was a bourgeois state from 1949 to '53, you must indicate a possible historical alternative (other than the military intervention of U.S. imperialism) whereby the bourgeoisie would not have been expropriated.

Argentine PRT/ERP

Virtually all Stalinist organizations pay lip service to workers democracy. Stalin himself authored a fine denunciation of the bureaucratic Tito regime in 1949. What distinguishes Trotskyism and Stalin-

ism on this question is the latter's assertion that workers democracy is realized in an existing state (e.g. the USSR, China, Cuba, etc.). The PRT's approbation of the governments of North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba are adequate to identify it as Stalinist. It is true that a Pablo/Deutscherite position on the self-reform of a particular Stalinist regime (and this was what the SWP's line of the early Castro regime amounted to) and a left Maoist/Guevarrist criticism of the bureaucratism of such a regime may appear to be similar. However, the former position recognizes, as the latter does not, that workers democracy means a set of objective governmental institutions and not the relative moral authority or mass support of the regime in power. To repeat, a left Maoist/Guevarrist could not replicate the SWP's characterization of the early Castro regime as "a healthy workers state, though lacking the forms of workers democracy."

Comradely,

[Michael Milin]

ON THE THIRD CHINESE REVOLUTION

by J. Holbrouck (Boston)

Before the Korean war, the class nature of the new Chinese state had not yet been defined by history, as an examination of the early period of the Third Chinese Revolution clearly demonstrates. What is more, the brief descriptions of that period which occur in our literature are often simply factually inaccurate.

Although this question may on the surface seem to be purely historical, it in fact has considerable relevance to our work. We have maintained that Mao made no attempt during the revolution to carry out his utopian program of New Democracy. Thus for example, the article in WV #28 on the Revolution attempts to prove Davidson wrong by showing that there was no stage of the Chinese revolution corresponding to Mao's scheme of New Democracy. This is both wrong and completely beside the point, and the perfect way to lose an argument with a sophisticated Maoist. The CCP did indeed attempt to carry out the program of New Democracy. Indeed it could not have done otherwise, because the People's Liberation Army was recruited on the basis of that program. The "bloc of four classes" broke down because of the Korean war. The Chinese bourgeoisie turned against the bourgeois program of New Democracy, which a section of it had initially gone along with. It thereby compelled the Mao regime to go beyond that program. Our overly-simplistic understanding of the Chinese revolution can obviously serve as a barrier to winning over elements from the Maoist milieu. Also, in the U.Sec. fight, where the Mandelites maintain our position whereas the SWP, as usual, is more "orthodox," our China position can obviously cause problems. Finally, a correct understanding of the Chinese revolution is a precondition for understanding the Indochinese revolution.

The document by Cde. Seymour states "An insurrectionary armed force can (and usually does) have a contradictory class character. The dominant class is then determined through internal, usually bloody factional struggle within the insurrectionary armed force. It is possible that the existing state apparatus is destroyed and the insurrectionary armed force achieves military dominance before its class character has been determined through internal struggle. In that case, the class character of the emerging state will be determined by the factional struggle within the inherently unstable regime controlling the victorious insurrectionary army." (Emphasis in original.) This is a good description of the Cuban events, but applied to China becomes a lifeless artificial schema. Since no major split occurred in the CCP in the '51-'52 period therefore regardless of what may have been going on in China at the time, that could not have been the period in which the class nature of the new Chinese state was decided. This poses a seemingly obvious problem. When was the "internal factional struggle" that did decide the class nature of the PLA? The '35-'59 period was the most prolonged period of relative internal peace in the entire history of the CCP! The 1946-47 definitive break with Chiang "met with virtually no internal resistance," to use Seymour's phrase. The only methodologically consistent position for Seymour would be the old Logan position that the PLA from its inception was proletarian in character, in some mystical Wohlforthian fashion! The essential error here lies in not realizing the different concrete national peculiarities which led fundamentally similar stages of the Cuban and Chinese revolutions to take on somewhat different empirical appearances at the governmental (i.e. cabinet) level.

Cde. Seymour states that "the basic policy of all sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers toward the CCP-PLA was one of physical annihilation." This is not true. In the '46 negotiations, Marshall (the representative of the U.S. imperialists) supported the formation of a Chiang-Mao coalition government. Chiang's American advisers urged him against the advance into Manchuria. And when Truman was reelected, he cut off all US aid to Chiang! The industrial bourgeoisie of Northern China had favored the '46 compromise, and, on March 13, 1946, sent a delegation to KMT headquarters to obtain immediate cessation of hostilities¹. Indeed, after Mao's victory in '49, according to Barnett, "in the period of Communist takeover the majority of China's bourgeoisie attempted to make an adjustment to the new regime."² To understand why this is so, it is necessary to understand the ultra-Bonapartist, totally isolated nature of the Chiang regime.

Bureaucratic Capital

The extreme concentration of power in the hands of the government led to the phenomenon of the submergence of the industrial bourgeoisie by "bureaucratic capital." After the war, all Japanese-owned enterprises were expropriated by the KMT government which ran them for the benefit of the infamous "four families" (Chiang's own, the Soongs, the Kungs, and the Chen brothers), who held most of the key government and party positions, elbowing aside the great majority of the Chinese compradors and even to a certain extent the imperialists. Large amounts of Chinese capital, thereby shunted aside from productive investment, were employed for speculative purposes, aggravating economic chaos.³ For example, according to Barnett,

"The most important industry operating in Tientsin at present is still cotton textile manufacturing; it is almost entirely government-owned . . . many other local industries are owned and managed by the National Resources Commission . . . a top official in the biggest chemical company in Tientsin told me that the government has repeatedly tried to force its way into control of the company--and is still trying to do so. The omnipresence of the Central government in the economy has made things extremely difficult for private enterprise . . ."⁴

The last years of the KMT regime were characterized, as Peng puts it, by "consummate Asiatic despotism, corruption and inefficiency." Inflation accelerated to the point of the collapses of the currency. By the end of 1948, all commerce and industry had come to a halt. The civil war was used as an excuse to squeeze the last drops of blood out of the peasantry by taxes, levys, and conscription into the army. All protest was met by brutal repression. The regime became totally isolated, not only from the people, but even from the bourgeoisie. The KMT disintegrated into factional warfare, and the bourgeois elements outside the KMT gathered around the impotent, petty-bourgeois liberal "Democratic League."⁵ Thus according to Belden,

"Businessmen weighted down by heavy taxes and losing their factories to Chiang's so-called program of nationalizations were becoming so wroth at the national government that they were

actively organizing the shipment of American arms and ammunition to the communists."⁶

The United States had sent Marshall to China, as Peng puts it, to "maneuver(ed) between Chiang and Mao for a temporary compromise in order to gain time to destroy the latter." Unfortunately for U.S. imperialism, Chiang preferred to commit suicide. Not being able to commit troops in China the U.S. was forced to abandon China as a bad bet, and adopt a "wait and see" attitude towards the CCP. The PLA, faced with the impossibility of an alliance with Chiang, was compelled to call for his overthrow, and as WV #28 puts it, "announc(ing) an agrarian reform scheme similar to the "rich-peasant-policy" Mao had followed in 1930, but much more radical than the rent reduction (and Red Army-enforced rent collection) of the period 1942-47." (Actually a milder land reform had already been initiated in May '46). Also there was a purge of landlords and rich peasants from the Party. This lasted only so long as the Chiang offensive was a serious threat. After Chiang had been militarily defeated, and the road was clearly open for complete military victory for the PLA, all land reform was abruptly halted (August, 1948). As "Li Fu-Jen" put it,

"The Stalinists undoubtedly enjoy the support of huge masses of the peasantry. However, they not only do not encourage, but actively discourage the peasants from taking any military initiative. There are no flaming appeals to the peasants to rise against the landlords. Instead, the Stalinists enjoin the peasants to await the arrival of the "Red" army."⁷

The Seizure of Power

There is a myth in our ranks that the SWP was unable to analyze or comprehend the seizure of power by Mao in '49, and denied up to the last minute that it would occur. The February '49 FI article "The Kuomintang Faces Its Doom" by "Li Fu-Jen" accurately predicted the course of events.

"Whether the Stalinists will rule in their own name or form some sort of coalition regime with "anti-Kuomintang" bourgeois elements remains to be seen. Certain it is that on the morrow of military triumph Mao Tes-Tung, like Tito, will be confronted with the need for economic relations with the outside capitalist world. A coalition with the Chinese bourgeoisie, or a section of it, would undoubtedly facilitate contact with the world market. If this variant should develop, Stalin is going to have greater trouble with Mao than he is having with Tito. . .

The American imperialists have already emitted cautious hints that they might be ready to do business with a Stalinist-bourgeois coalition . . . On the other hand, the social forces they have set in motion and the further needs of the yet-uncompleted struggle against the Kuomintang may compel the Chinese Stalinists to go beyond their present program and move against the property of the bourgeoisie. This variant could be stimulated by a hostile U.S. imperialism."⁸

After the seizure of power, the hostility of U.S. imperialism did indeed force the CP to go beyond its program of New Democracy. The new regime initially avoided anti-imperialist economic measures, precisely in order to "facilitate contact with the world market." All such measures taken were in direct response to economic and political measures taken against the People's Republic of China by the imperialists. The completion of the struggle against the KMT, however, did not require anti-capitalist measures, for the simple reason that Mao won with hardly any struggle, with almost every city and army in Bourgeois China either passively surrendering or actively going over to the PLA!

The pattern was set by the famous "Peace of Peking," the most important city of North China, and base for all KMT forces in the North. After a peculiarly pacific 40-day siege, marked by such events as the PLA's public offer to supply Peking with electricity during the siege (which was accepted), the city surrendered peacefully. The eight-point surrender program included the following:

- "2) Chinese individual commercial and industrial property will be protected . . .
- 3) Bureaucratic capital . . . will be taken over by the Liberation Army, although private shares will be respected . . .
- 7) The lives and property of all foreigners will be protected . . ."

Fu Tso-Yi, head of all KMT army forces in all North China, became a member of the National Military Council of the People's Republic of China! Barnett, who was in Peking at the time, comments,

"In human terms, it has been somewhat like a game of musical chairs. The top personnel of key organizations, together with certain titles and names have been reshuffled and changed overnight, but the organizations continue to function much as they did before . . . The first stage of the Communist revolution has been mild and, in a sense, no revolutionary changes have occurred . . ."9

After Mao's army crossed the Yangtze and entered South China, where the great majority of the Chinese population lives, most Chinese cities did not even bother to wait for the arrival of the PLA to surrender. The only city where there was even token resistance was Shanghai, the industrial center of South China. How the CCP handled this problem is interesting.

"With the fall of the city coming ever nearer, many businessmen prepared to flee . . . In order to counter this tendency, reported a Chinese businessman, 'Groups of underground 'United Front Workers' were hurriedly dispatched to contact the panic-stricken would-be refugees' . . . Businessmen were assured of generous treatment, protection of their property, and the opportunity to do business. Copies of Mao's "The Present Situation and Our Tasks" were distributed to publicize the CCP's intended policy towards the 'national bourgeoisie.' Robert Loh observed, 'The pamphlet was remarkably effective. It acted as a tranquilizer on the nervous industrialists and traders. It

allayed their suspicion and fear of the Communists and left them with the feeling, 'Well, nothing could be worse than life under the Nationalists.' Many stayed on."¹⁰

The New Regime

"The Chinese Communists . . . found themselves in the unique position of having already conquered power while the revolution which they headed had not yet been effected over the major part of the national territory."

"The Third Chinese Revolution," Ernest Mandel, Jan-Feb '51 FI

The new regime was a petty-bourgeois regime with a classically petty-bourgeois program. Peng at one point compares it to the regime of the French Jacobins. It was certainly not a petty-bourgeois state, for at no time did it seek to defend petty-bourgeois property relations (i.e. the feudal craft-guild system). Nor was it committed to the defense of bourgeois or proletarian property forms. It was committed to the utopian program of New Democracy--the repetition of the 18th-century bourgeois revolution in France in 20th-century China. In other words it was not a state at all in the Marxist sense. It is true that "there were no fundamentally bourgeois elements within the CCP and its army," but neither were there any fundamentally proletarian elements. There were some elements fundamentally committed to the Russian bureaucracy, (Li Li-San, Kao Kang), but Mao had them purged.

In the cities, only the properties of the "four families" were nationalized. Private shares in "bureaucratic capital"--the property already nationalized by the KMT--were respected. The right to strike was abolished, and compulsory arbitration instituted. The nationalized factories were placed in the hands of control committees composed of representatives of 1) the former owners, 2) supervisory personnel and 3) the workers. Final say went to the director, who was usually the pre-Liberation factory manager.¹¹ In the initial period, the main objective of the regime was to get industry started again, by means of government loans to private capital, wage cuts, layoffs, etc. Several massacres of striking workers occurred (such as the machine gunning of the Sun Sin factory #9 workers in Tientsin, resulting in 300 casualties).

In the South of China, where the majority of the Chinese peasantry lives, the PLA was faced with a problem. The program of New Democracy called for the abolition of feudalism, redistribution of the landlord's lands, and the development of capitalist agriculture. However, the bourgeoisie of South China, with whom they were trying to ally themselves, were indistinguishable from those same landlords! (This had been somewhat less true in the agriculturally backward areas of the old Red Army stomping ground.) The peasants greeted the Red Army as their liberators and attempted to seize the land themselves. This is how the CCP responded:

"National China News Agency Aug. 20, 1949

Everywhere we are making great progress in the work of exterminating bandits in Central China. In Hunan Province during the past year about 38,700 bandits were killed, wounded, captured

alive, or forced to surrender."¹²

In order "to consolidate all strata of the Chinese people" initially only a reduction of land rents and interest payments was carried out, and even that only as a concession to peasant pressure.

The government was formed as a coalition with the Democratic League (DL), the Revolutionary Committee of the KMT (RCKMT), and various other small Chinese parties--although of course real power was in the hands of the peasant army. The DL was the traditional organization of Chinese petty-bourgeois liberalism. The U.S. had hoped that it could be used to liberalize the Chiang regime. Marshall wrote to Truman that "The salvation of the situation, as I see it would be the assumption of leadership by the liberals in the government and in the minor parties, a splendid group of men . . ."¹³

When negotiations for a coalition government fell through, the DL split, with Carsun Chang's "National Socialist Party" joining the Chiang government, and the rest coming out in support of the Red Army.

The RCKMT was an alliance of several of the cliques of the dis-integrating KMT, including many prominent KMT officials and army generals. Its leader was Marshal Li Chi-Sen, the butcher of the Canton Commune, who had held various top governmental posts, and had been Chiang's Chief of Staff in '27.

In themselves, these groupings were not major social forces. But then, neither were the Companys and Azanas in Spain. The Spanish bourgeoisie supported the Spanish fascists with far greater unanimity than the Chinese Bourgeoisie supported Chiang. And at least in Catalonia, the bourgeois state had been destroyed every bit as thoroughly as in China. It was reconstructed by the Stalinists, Anarchists and POUMists. Had they constructed a worker's state instead, Companys would probably have resigned himself to being the Mme. Sun Yat-Sen of proletarian Catalonia. After all, he had already had to swallow the physical extermination of most of the bourgeoisie in Catalonia who had not fled to Franco's camp. Yet nonetheless, he played an important role in the reconstruction of bourgeois rule in Catalonia.

According to WV, "the bulk of the bourgeoisie had fled to Taiwan. With the help of Soviet aid, the Communists set about building up a state sector of industry, while arranging for the continuation of private ownership in some industrial concerns, under state control and supervision." It is simply not true that the bulk of the bourgeoisie had fled to Taiwan. It is true that the abolition of "bureaucratic capital" meant that most heavy industry was in the hands of the PLA. But most Chinese capital was traditionally engaged in light industry, commerce and usury anyway. Egypt and Syria nationalized much more. The real question was in whose interests the nationalized property was being run, which was not at all clear at first. Before the Korean war, no imperialist property had been nationalized. The strongly probusiness policies of the initial period resulted in a sharp business boom that virtually compelled a pro-labor policy shift, if only to maintain the Bonapartist balancing act, but before the war period it was only quantitative in character. Even the

foreign policy of the People's Republic was described by Mao himself as "leaning to one side." And as the CPUSA pointed out in a recent polemic, he who leans to one side can always lean to the other. It was not only Owen Lattimore and the SWP who speculated on the possibility of a U.S.-China alliance.

The phrases in the 1949 Common Program about the state sector having a socialist character and playing the leading role in the economy are in themselves far less meaningful than the slogans "benefit to both public and private industry" and "consider the interests of both labor and capital" to be found in the same program. Carsun Chang, minister of the last Chiang government, says in his book "Third Force In China"

"Though I am neither a believer in Communism nor a fellow traveler of the CCP, I can endorse the policies expressed in Chapters III to VII insofar as the official language is concerned.
 . . . "14

In China, even the KMT was supposedly for something called "state Socialism."

The Korean War

However, the U.S. troops crossing into North Korea simultaneously with a U.S. economic boycott of China, forced the Chinese bourgeoisie and the PLA apart. The Chinese compradors, though not objecting to a little anti-imperialist, pro-Soviet rhetoric, were not about to actually fight their U.S. owners. The land reform in the South now had to be carried out, to crush landlord opposition. Poor peasant committees were formed throughout South China, to crush the landlords by civil war measures. The violent Against Counter-revolutionaries campaign of 1951 was directed at all opponents of the fight against U.S. imperialism. According to Peng, "In this campaign, not only thousands of reactionary landlords and kulaks . . . labor traitors, and Kuomintang bureaucrats and agents have been imprisoned, exiled, and executed, but likewise a great number of 'affiliated' elements and followers of Li Chi-Sun and the 'Democratic League' have suffered the same fate." Finally, the 3- and 5-anti campaigns of winter-spring 1951-'52 completed the process of the consolidation of a Chinese deformed worker's state by breaking the political and social power of the Chinese bourgeoisie. No nationalizations were carried out in these campaigns, carried out under the banner of New Democracy. They were essentially campaigns against corruption. The 3-anti campaign purged government and CCP officials that had accepted bribes, or in other ways had been guilty of "rightist and pro-bourgeois thought." The 5-anti campaign was directed against capitalists who bribed government officials or tried to cheat the government. In other words, the basic purpose of the campaigns was to hermetically seal the government off from the bourgeoisie. The regime mobilized the masses, through the trade unions, to physically seize individual capitalists, compel them to confess their sins, repent, submit to close government supervision and pay large fines. According to Barnett, the campaign "probably eliminated any possibility of significant political influence on its (the bourgeoisie's) part."15

Until the Korean war, there was a very genuine coalition with a sector of the Chinese ruling classes, symbolized by the presence of the liberal lawyers of the DL and the opportunist warlords of the RCKMT in the government. With the outbreak of the civil war, the Chinese compradors could not help but become traitors, because of their social nature. The bourgeoisie was politically destroyed, under the banners of honesty, clean government and patriotism. The DL and RCKMT stayed with the CCP, not so much because they deserted the bourgeoisie, but rather because the bourgeoisie deserted them, just as the Spanish bourgeoisie deserted Azana and Companys for Franco. The Korean war drove an unbridgeable gulf between the Chinese bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois nationalist PLA, thereby rendering inevitable the destruction of the former. Had U.S. imperialism followed a different policy, this would not have occurred, and the Stalinization of China would have meant a split right down the middle in the PLA, and a real civil war. In such a case, the Chinese bourgeoisie might well have resisted Mao as well as the bureaucracy did in the course of the cultural revolution. And besides, Mao would probably have been too busy fighting agents of Soviet social-imperialism to try. Since we are materialists not idealists, we must consider the CCP cadres' "predisposition . . . for a state modeled on Stalin's Russia" to be less important than the 20 years they had spent fighting a peasant war. Had New Democracy come into collision with Stalinism, it is doubtful Stalinism would have won. As it happened, New Democracy came into collision with the Chinese bourgeoisie. The Chinese revolution must be considered parallel to the Cuban in its course. The more rightward character of the Castro movement, which was neither anti-imperialist nor anti-American in character, meant that even in the face of total hostility from the U.S., the creation of a deformed worker's state required a split in the Rebel Army.]?

Theoretical Conclusions

Does this mean that no peasant-guerrilla-type movement is capable of establishing a deformed workers' state except if forced to by imperialist pressure? Not at all. A guerrilla movement with an anti-capitalist program, if successful, would do so. Espartacos 1-3 refer to such movements, exemplified by the Guatemalan MR-13, as "Guevarist," distinguishing them from the usual "Fidelist" kind. However, as the peasantry is not a socialist class, the former almost always soon degenerate into the latter.

In practice, however, this does not seem ever to have happened. In the case of Vietnam, comrades who think that the DRV was already a workers' state in '54 will have to answer Joe V.'s question of how Ho managed to give half of Vietnam back without a counterrevolution. The last sentence of my letter to Y.Sp. #24, which asserted that until '56 a coalition government was entirely possible, was edited out. I think the body of the letter presents a good prima facie case that a coalition government was not impossible.

In the case of Yugoslavia, there were indeed bourgeois ministers in the coalition government until Fall 1945, when they all resigned in protest. As is well known, British imperialism was unremittingly hostile to Tito.

As for Indochina now, the "embryo deformed workers' state" formulation is absurd. But because of the dominant role of the DRV army, in both S. Vietnam and Laos, the situation is actually more analogous to E. Europe than China. In Cambodia, the position that the victory of the Sihanouk/Khmer Rouge forces would create, to use the IT's marvellous phrase, "a feudal, semi-monarchical workers' state resting on capitalist property relations" seems weak to me. It is possible that a workers' state could eventually result, especially if the DRV army takes a hand in things, possibly even including Sihanouk for decorative purposes. This is also possible in Guinea-Bissau, as Y.Sp. mentioned and WV seems to have forgotten. But it is also quite possible for "Mao/Sihanouk" to act as the "U.S.'s last hope," as WV #26 put it.

Received 5 August, 1974

Footnotes

1. Ernest Mandel, The Third Chinese Revolution, pt. 1, Jan-Feb, FI, 1951.
2. A. Doak Barnett, Communist China: The Early Years, p. 153.
3. Mandel, op. cit., pt. 2, May-Jan. FI, 1951.
4. Barnett, China on the Eve of Communist Takeover, pp. 56-57.
5. Peng Shu-Tse, Report on the Chinese Situation, Education for Socialists. Bulletin "The Chinese Revolution," pt. 1, p. 24, SWP.
6. Jack Belden, China Shakes The World, p. 9.
7. "Li Fu-Jen," (see text).
8. Ibid.
9. Barnett, Eve, pp. 344-45.
10. L.P. Van Slyke, Enemies and Friends: The United Front in Chinese Communist History, Stanford University Press, 1967, p. 264.
11. Hsieh Yueh, Mao Tse-Tung's "Revolution", Dec '49 FI.
12. C.L. Liu, China: An Aborted Revolution, Jan.-Feb. '50 FI.
13. Van Slyke, p. 198.
14. Carsun Chang, Third Force In China, Bookman Assoc., 1952, p. 276.
15. Barnett, Early, p. 143.

by Gerry Clark

April 24, 1974
Oakland, Cal.

Spartacist League
Bay Area

Dear comrades,

Before I was expelled from the SWP I wrote two documents for the 1973 National Convention. I began both documents with a statement on the need for a Leninist party and international:

"Any class-conscious worker interested in picking up the revolutionary cudgel for purposes of forging it into a tool for overthrowing the bourgeoisie, must first come to grips with the question of what specific tool is necessary to accomplish the job. Being a worker, and somewhat familiar with tools, he or she will soon discover after doing some preparatory reading of the Marxist manuals, that the only tool capable of taking on such a momentous task is one which is grounded in correct theory and tempered in the class struggle; flexible, but always prepared to move with swiftness and precision; and powerful enough to tackle the problem wherever it crops up. That tool is the Leninist combat party joined together with other parties around the world into the Fourth International--World Party of Socialist Revolution." (The Only Road To Revolution is Through the Proletariat, SWP DB, Vol. 31, No. 1, April 1973, p. 6)

Today, after the Tenth World Congress of the "United" Secretariat of the Fourth International has met, that task is even more urgent! That Congress decided nothing; all it accepted was to deepen the crisis of leadership of the proletariat. All the central political questions were brushed over in favor of "unity"--including the question of democratic centralism! How else can one explain the fact that all organizational questions were adopted unanimously! I presume this included the Appeal issued by Comrade John Ebel of Australia and myself. Yet we have heard no word from the Congress either that it received our Appeal or that it acted upon it. What is a World Congress for if not to resolve such political questions as the expulsion of a tendency?! The "dual power" which exists inside the United Secretariat cannot be passed off as democratic centralism. And backroom deals and bureaucratic maneuvers cannot substitute for a single political line aimed at mobilizing the proletariat for revolution. As a Trotskyist International, the patched-up United Secretariat represents a sorry example for class-conscious workers.

All the more serious is the crisis of the proletarian leadership in this period of rising class struggle. But this phenomenon has both a positive and negative side to it. On the negative side, it leaves the proletariat disarmed in the face of vicious attacks by the bourgeoisie. The case of Chile provides the clearest example of this crisis. Disarmed by the class-collaborationist leadership of the Popular Unity government, the Chilean workers have suffered

a big defeat in their struggle for socialism. The same kind of defeat was experienced in Bolivia, albeit, without a popular front government at the head of the masses. The negative examples are unfortunately too numerous to name.

But on the opposite side, the rise in the class struggle is creating new opportunities for revolutionaries to penetrate the workers movement and gain a foothold. In addition, it is providing verification of the Trotskyist analysis of the nature of our epoch and the absolute necessity of building proletarian parties united in a revolutionary international. It is also revealing the bankruptcy of the Stalinist and reformist leaderships and their rotten class-collaborationist programs. Trotskyism can be strengthened as a result if a correct revolutionary strategy is applied. This is the explanation for the factionalism inside the United Secretariat, which is a positive development. It is therefore essential that Trotskyist parties be built in this period that can take up the banner of socialism and lead the working class to victory. The alternative could be disastrous for the proletariat for years to come.

With this understanding of the present period and the tasks confronting revolutionaries, where does the Spartacist League fit in? In order to answer this question, I must explain what I believe the SL is and where it came from and where it is going.

As a tendency inside the SWP (the Revolutionary Tendency), the future SL crystalized around a political struggle against Pabloism and the SWP's adaptation to Castroism (an "unconscious Trotskyist"). The RT represented what was still healthy inside the SWP as the party began to seriously degenerate after 15 years of isolation from the working class. The ruthless method used to expel this Tendency was indicative of the party's political degeneration. The same ruthlessness was used 10 years later against myself and the R.I.T.!

At the time of the RT's expulsion, the SWP was the Trotskyist movement in the U.S. As a small "sub-propaganda" group, the SL was forced to orient its work toward the SWP in the same way the Left Opposition was forced to orient toward the Comintern after its expulsion (noting the difference in size of both organizations). This policy produced little results and was soon replaced by a policy of "regroupment." This was based on the belief that the SL would eventually become the nucleus of a revolutionary vanguard party and eventually displace the SWP as the main Trotskyist organization in the U.S. The SL believed this because of its understanding of the need for a revolutionary program as the basis of a Bolshevik party. It believed the SWP was in the process of abandoning that program. Was it right?

Yes, it was. The past ten years has confirmed that the fight begun in 1961 was an important step in keeping revolutionary Trotskyism alive in this country. It can be said--and it should be said without equivocation--that if it hadn't been for the SL, its persistence and determination as a revolutionary current, revolutionary Trotskyism would be at a much greater disadvantage, in terms of building a party, than it is today. The SL can also take credit for

helping polarize left wings inside other left organizations--in addition to newly forming left wings inside the SWP, including the R.I.T.--which has contributed to the strengthening of its organization and the weakening of reformist and centrist currents in the workers movement. Today, these correct policies are paying off in terms of growth and political authority.

But not without having paid a heavy price. During most of the SL's existence as an independent organization, it remained isolated from the workers movement and its organizations both nationally and internationally. This isolation took a heavy toll of its original cadre and membership. Of the original RT, perhaps three or four still remain in the SL today. In addition to the loss of membership, the SL unconsciously built an organizational sectarian wall around itself designed to protect its revolutionary principles. Many of its activities during the early years were carried out simply to "make the record."

While there were some exceptions to this policy, such as the work around the Harlem Defense Committee, the SL experienced very little success in its work. The most obvious reflection of this was its failure to publish a regular press. The magnitude of this problem can be understood by the fact that it wasn't until late 1971 that the SL started putting out a regular press! What I believe this failure represented, more than simply a question of funds or other organizational reasons, was a lack of confidence, of political purpose and perspective. Of course this lack of confidence in self, of one's political role, had a legitimate material basis: the SL was small, isolated, and standing outside the main body of Trotskyism, with a weak and untested political leadership. But no matter how valid these reasons were, the SL's lack of confidence in its political role could not but engender a similar reaction in the people around it, including its own members! Add this to the SL's organizational sectarianism and its irregular press and you have the basis for its disappearance as a political force. Today it is admitted by the SL that the 1968 split almost destroyed the organization. But the organization wasn't destroyed. Why?

The answer to that question can be found mainly in its program. The SL had a revolutionary program which kept it alive. It can also be partly explained by its main leader, Jim Robertson, who has struggled tirelessly to build a Bolshevik party in this country for the past 20 years. And also partly by its sectarianism, i.e., its desire to maintain and protect the revolutionary principles embodied in the Transitional Program. This has a contradictory side to it because most sectarian organizations which refuse to take their "sacred" program into the working class out of fear of having it rejected or having it compromised, don't usually have an opportunity to become a mass revolutionary party; they usually wind up in the dustbin of history along with other assorted turncoats and class betrayers.

Why then didn't the sectarianism of the SL lead it into the same dustbin of history? In the first place, that question is still unresolved. The "dustbin" I'm talking about is quite large; there is room for all of us if necessary. The main reason the SL has survived so far, and is growing, in addition to having a revolutionary program,

is because of the change in the objective conditions and the further degeneration of the SWP as the Trotskyist party in this country. The simultaneous rise of the black struggle and the struggle against the war gave the SL an opportunity to "come alive" and put forth its revolutionary line on nationalism and imperialist war. However, this work was carried out, due to force of habit, in a sectarian fashion: leaders and organizations were denounced as usual; communist slogans were advanced everywhere and at all times; lengthy statements were issued on the necessity of class struggle; the red banners were unfurled and the record was made. After all this was done, the SLers disappeared back into their cosy meeting rooms and apartments and planned their next "strategy." No one could say--and let history record it!--that the revolutionary Trotskyists did not speak out against reformism and class collaboration!

Despite this sectarianism, the SL won some recruits (sectarian purity can be attractive to some during certain periods, especially if the other so-called revolutionary organizations are being clearly opportunist). This was a real shot in the arm for the SL: self-confidence began to appear as a real trait in the organization. Soon the SL was not alone in its militant rhetoric: other organizations just as sectarian (the BPP, SDS, PL, etc.) began appearing and raising militant slogans. The sectarianism of these organizations criss-crossed with the SL between 1968 and 1970, in SDS. The same thing occurred in the S.F. strike and at some anti-war meetings. The SL even came out and supported the Panthers when they ran on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket! (PL of course was opposed "in principle" to bourgeois elections.)

The SL received a good education during this period. Unable to out "ultraleft" the PLP, it tailed after it for a while going so far, as if in justification, to characterize it as "unconscious Trotskyism" (remember the SWP did the same thing to justify tailing after Castro). But its work in SDS was fairly successful, winning over some PLers and elements from the "new left." Some of these recruits were very good people and really helped transform the SL into a less sectarian organization. Its press became more frequent and it was able to strengthen its national leadership (both are related). This marked an important change in the development of the SL.

During this period of its involvement in SDS, the SL stood on an orthodox Trotskyist program. On all the major political questions of the day--nationalism, feminism, imperialist war, Maoism, the trade union bureaucracy, bourgeois elections, etc.--the SL advocated a revolutionary communist line. On a few points it went overboard, such as characterizing NPAC as a "popular front," PL as "unconscious Trotskyists," and by supporting the BPP-PFP electoral bloc. But all and all, it was able to maintain a revolutionary line.

My differences with the SL program today consequently do not involve principles, but involve a number of questions which could lead to fundamental differences of a principled nature later on, differences which could lead to factional activity. It is not factional activity per se that I fear but unnecessary factional

activity. That is why I believe it was correct of me to proceed slowly in my political discussions with the SL. It was necessary for me to "discover" the organization and feel it out, and gain confidence in it as a revolutionary tool of the working class. Unfortunately, that confidence has not increased in a linear fashion; it has developed unevenly.

The differences I have involve questions on the Middle East, the nature of Stalinism and centrism, guerrillaism, China, trade union work, and popular frontism. In addition, I do not believe the SL is doing enough to recruit blacks or adequately addressing itself to racism in the working class. With the exception of China and the nature of centrism, most of my positions are written in my two documents. I still hold these positions. As far as China is concerned, I now agree that the CCP was a petty-bourgeois party when it took power in 1949, but I don't believe it established a workers state until after nationalizations, just as in Cuba. As far as the SWP is concerned, I no longer believe it is centrist; it is clearly a reformist party today.

Where I see a possible fundamental difference arising right away is over the trade union question. In principle I agree, and have written in my document to that effect, with the SL's position on trade union work. Strategically, what this means is that revolutionary caucuses have to be built in the unions based on a full transitional program. This position is based on the understanding of the present epoch as one in which capitalism is incapable of solving humanity's problems and must be destroyed before it destroys humanity; and that the crisis of leadership of the proletariat is the central problem facing us which must be overcome in practice through a combined economic and political struggle against reformism and Stalinism. It follows therefore that this struggle must be waged inside the unions as well as outside; that the vanguard party views its central task in the unions as one which requires the building of revolutionary caucuses as alternative leaderships. All this I agree with and have said myself many times before.

Where the difference arises I believe is over how to carry out this line. I don't believe it is necessary to raise your full program on every leaflet. Nor is it necessary to present your full program everytime you speak at a rally or union meeting. A revolutionary program is not a bowl of pabulum to be dished to the workers in spoonfuls that's for certain. The working class will digest a revolutionary program as quickly as it comes to realize its necessity--and not any faster. But on the other hand, if we try to dish it out all at once, in every case, at all times, the working class will spit it out right in our faces! A revolutionary program must be viewed as a living set of demands and goals to be introduced in a realistic way (not the way PL campaigns for 30-for-40 for example). At the same time it is not so "sacred" that the workers cannot understand the need for 30-for-40, labor party, and even a workers government today, without waiting around until that fateful day when all workers are demanding the full transitional program (as the CSL, IS, SWP, etc., would have us believe, which of course is a pipe-dream). The important thing I believe is understanding the necessity to present the full program and, at some point, to begin the construction

of a caucus around that program. That, in my opinion, is what separates a militant reformist from a revolutionary communist. A militant reformist doesn't even believe or see the need to bring a full program into the unions. Quite to the contrary, he believes it would be a mistake. Needless to add, the militant reformist has no need for a Leninist party either, which would be viewed by him as an obstacle to his "revolutionary" work.

On this latter point, a point which I have never forgotten despite what the SL thinks, I have been told by the SL that I cannot carry out a revolutionary line in the unions without first joining the SL. I disagree! As long as I am still outside the SL and consider it a revolutionary organization, with proven ability in creating caucuses in the unions, I will seek your advice and guidance--but I will not halt my work! I, unlike you, see no contradiction in being an active sympathizer of the SL and doing revolutionary work in the unions. If the SL refuses to help me while in the process of trying to recruit me, which I believe is the only way to handle it, it will indicate to me a serious weakness in the SL's approach to recruiting class-conscious workers. (I understand that the SL is busy with other more important trade union work, therefore I'm not suggesting the SL assign cadre to help me. All I'm asking for is advice and guidance from your organization, which is only natural). It will also indicate to me that the SL has not altogether rid itself of its past sectarianism.

The SL today is going through a very positive development in terms of its press, growth in membership and influence, and in its political analyses and program. However, organizationally, it is still very weak and inexperienced. It has far too few public members, resulting in a picture of the SL as a "tiny" organization composed mainly of students. Its contact work in the Bay Area is sloppy and irregular. Its meetings are too long (11 hours on one occasion!). It continues to put out lengthy manifestos, sometimes referred to as leaflets, which are still too rhetorical. Its policy on union security is much too restricted, especially in the present period where red-baiting is less common and accepted by the rank-and-file. The SL needs more public trade unionists!

In terms of internal political debate, I've noticed a real tendency on the part of local leaders to prematurely characterize undeveloped positions as finished products, e.g., as "right-wing," as "new leftites," as "Reutherites," as "Pabloites," etc. This method of principle-mongering is reflective of a sectarian desire to protect the "sacred" program from attack. The critic is usually denounced as a "nit-picker" or told to address himself to principles since those are the things sectarians are so good at defending. This method of political debate is especially wrong when dealing with new recruits or active sympathizers. What is wrong with the Leninist norm of comradely debate, even between opposing tendencies?

The SL has a future only if many of the above shortcomings are corrected; otherwise the SL shall remain a small sectarian propaganda group with a revolutionary program. The dictum of Marx that the task of revolutionaries is not only to interpret the world and history but to change it shall never become a realizable goal for the

SL unless it makes this transformation. I do believe, however, that I would be able to function as a revolutionary inside the SL today; and I do believe that I could contribute to your transformation. I see no other alternative to the SL in this country. On the basis of the above positions, criticisms, and opinions, I request that this letter be accepted as a basis for membership, or, if you feel it is inadequate, for further discussions.

Comradely yours,

Gerald Clark

P.S. I understand that my letters to [Milin] have been published in your internal bulletin. These letters contain my positions on Stalinism, centrism, guerrillaism, the Middle East, and popular frontism, therefore I won't go into them here.

cc: New York

[This letter while still in slightly amorphous draft form became the political property of the organization as a whole as a result of the following circumstances: it was originally a dictation draft; several deletions and additions together with a good many proposed reformulations by both Gordon and Robertson were written into the draft. It was set aside for some weeks unfinished and with possible changes unresolved. Then it was taken to the West Coast to show comrade Clark and photocopies were made there by other comrades. Consequently despite some loss of precision and a little repetitiveness it is now being printed without any new changes, with the retention of the material suggested for deletion and with the inclusion of previously proposed additions; only specific alternative formulations are resolved one way or the other.

---J.R., 10 August 1974]

LETTER TO GERRY CLARK

(semi-corrected dictation draft)

7 May 1974

Gerry Clark
Bay Area

Dear Comrade Clark,

Thank you for the copy of your letter of 24 April. I know that the question of applying for SL membership is taken very seriously by you and that you take this step only after very considerable reflection. Your abrupt expulsion on fictitious grounds by the SWP was surely a bit disorienting in the short run. As your letter makes clear, you have a substantial number of particular differences in policy, interpretation and historical estimations from those hitherto arrived at by the Spartacist League. But one thing is very clear to me: the sharp contradistinction between your own views and the somewhat similar but entirely opportunist, cynical and above all maneuverist views that Gregorich/Passen threw our way in their "unity" discussions with us. Unlike these latter elements, you have shown a demonstrated consistency in the development of your positions as well as a corresponding organizational responsibility and discipline. I.e., whatever our differences, you have shown principled seriousness and determination to act as a revolutionist. It is in the light of this appreciation that I offer the following comments on some of the views and opinions expressed in your letter.

I think you have missed the main drift in the historical evolution of the Spartacist League. You see us as having early locked ourselves behind a defensive sectarian wall and standing now before the possibility of breaking through this barrier of our own making. While it is not easy to discuss concrete examples of what you might mean by sectarian, because trade-union policy aside you do not yourself cite such cases, I think that the course of the SL's experience has actually moved--and especially in the last few years--in a way which you might find to be of increasing sectarianism. (An additional complication not easy to measure even as to direction, much less magnitude, may be the extent to which your understanding of the SL is colored by essentially local impressions.)

If you look at the beginnings of our activity in almost any

field (trade-union, black, antiwar, youth, women, international) I think you will see a combination of a highly empirical, tentative, conciliatory and ahistorical quality, although within the framework of whatever our programmatic development was at the time. It has generally only been through the resulting dialectic of interaction in the milieu with program, and the resulting extension of program, that a more tested, comprehensive and historically founded policy has emerged. Our years-long work, for example, in the SSEU was marked and marred from the outset by an excess of honest unionism, so that in truth in the whole period of the SSEU's existence as an independent union, our few but very active comrades there performed invaluable service, not least by means of the literally hundreds of leaflets our caucus produced for the membership, as trail-blazers in establishing and defending practices of solid union democracy and fighting the union leadership's conciliations of the employer. A very experienced trade unionist later won to the SL from another industry well described the break that he had to make in his own functioning as "not being a trade unionist in the party but a communist in the labor movement." For a period of more than five years our comrades in the SSEU, even though in Spartacist when they went into the union, were, willy-nilly and despite good intentions and serious efforts, never able in practice to break through to communist functioning. We helped build and defend that union; others, notably PL and WL, raked in the recruits.

Our experience in maritime overlapped that in the SSEU and continues on today. In good part as a result of the recognized weakness in SSEU, our work in maritime has been strengthened. Our maritime fraction comrades are known as the communists in their union, good and serious trade-union militants but above all communists. In maritime our fraction has continued to strengthen itself and will not be easily outflanked. This did not happen automatically or easily. Our initiating fraction was involved in a good deal of struggle within the party to go qualitatively beyond militant and radical trade unionism. (You should examine the first half-dozen issues of Workers' Action.) The Leninist approach is the exact opposite of that which we used to get from the Wobblies, who saw the revolutionists at the point of production as everything and the conniving petty-bourgeois party bureaucrats situated in some distant petty-bourgeois city as at best irrelevant, generally disruptive of the class struggle and frequently downright treacherous.

With the qualitative enlargement of our forces a few years ago we not only undertook a qualitative increase in our union implantation but have proceeded in a far more systematic way. Vital to the prosecution of this activity has been our theoretical-historical struggle--notably undertaken by our Trade Union Director--to recapture and critically assimilate the real experience of the CP in the 1920's, particularly the TUEL, and later of the American Trotskyists. You will find the tracks of this struggle spread through the issues of Workers Vanguard.

It is of course always easy to bend the stick too far in the other direction. However one must always distinguish between a principled and an opportunist approach. Within the framework of a principled approach one must seek to be as clear, simple, persuasive

and intelligent as possible. Thus for example in our party press we have had to learn that in the main Midwestern industrial centers, to call for a communist program in the trade unions is downright misleading in conveying the understanding that we intend, as compared to calling for a class-struggle program in the labor movement. Just imagine what "communist" might mean to militant but religious and East European-descended workers! Likewise, barring only overriding security considerations, we certainly encourage caucuses influenced by us to propagate that part of the Trotskyist program, which is found in a full and contemporary expression of the demands set forth in the Transitional Program. But it would be a weakness on our part to give equal emphasis to all of these demands equally at all times. To do this would obliterate the necessary distinction between agitation and propaganda. This consideration however is quite different from for example the CSL's opportunist appetite to hide parts of the Trotskyist program which it formally professes. Moreover we must always be aware that in any case one cannot say everything that communists must say to the rest of the workers from within the framework of the trade unions themselves. Hence our party press must seek to compensate for the partial gag imposed on all of our comrades within the trade unions.

You note, "I have been told by the SL that I cannot carry out a revolutionary line in the unions without first joining the SL. I disagree!" Providing one accepts the necessary intermediate links in a chain of reasoning, which I do, I however agree with the statement; otherwise I wouldn't either. But as far as I can tell, you also do accept those intermediate links. If the SL is uniquely in this country the essential embodiment of revolutionary program, and if one knows this, and if one is not debarred by compelling and principled personal reasons from functioning in the SL, then one would reasonably have to believe that not to be in the SL would be to appear to deny that the building of a Leninist vanguard party is a necessary element in a revolutionary line for the labor movement. I.e., one would have to be some kind of syndicalist or not-very-left centrist.

Further, I believe there is another objection to the possibility of independent militant trade unionism, a barrier which is practical and quantitative rather than conceptual but will become equally decisive in practice and over time. The trade-union movement is not a passive vessel for the infusion of communist ideas. Like any milieu, and perhaps more so than most, the trade-union movement exerts its own deforming influence upon communist consciousness. The pressures toward opportunist reconciliation with reformist business unionism, which finds a powerful bulwark in the materially self-interested bureaucracy, are powerful while at the same time union activists are prey to the narrowness and parochialism which are inherent in any milieu and which must be counterbalanced by the pressure of a vanguard representing, and reflecting in its own experience, the historical experience of other sections of the international working class.

Despite the admitted fragility of our union implantation, we have been made to feel these pressures very concretely in our work. Our tendency in its collectivity has had to struggle continually

against them in the process of developing and concretizing a program for the labor movement. The brief discussion here of our accumulated experience in SSEU and maritime serves to underscore the fact that our unionist comrades--many of them already committed revolutionists at the time of their implantation, and possessing among them a not inconsiderable accumulation of experience in the Marxist movement as well as personal capacity--have required careful party guidance not only in transcending the business unionist framework but in developing the concrete programmatic stands and tactical judgment relevant to their particular industries. For us it has not been only in theory but in fact that, just as the party requires the participation of active union militants, not only in bringing its program to the working people but in developing that program, so our labor activists have required not merely supervision but a process of internal party struggle in carrying forward their work. Likewise the party press must serve not simply as a commentary upon our industrial work, or a means for propagandizing it among other sectors of the working people, but as a parallel driving force and tool of intervention. Separated by choice or by chance from party direction--and as Leninists we are not ashamed to use such a term to describe the influence of the party as a whole on the interventionist work of our comrades in any arena of struggle--an individual union activist, whatever his personal capacity and subjective revolutionary commitment--cannot expect to carry forward a revolutionary work.

You write that "Where the difference arises I believe is over how to carry out this line. I don't believe it is necessary to raise your full program on every leaflet. Nor is it necessary to present your full program everytime you speak at a rally or union meeting...if we try to dish it [the revolutionary program] out all at once, in every case, at all times..." Comrade Clark, if this is the difference you think you have with the SL, we might all agree that you have merely misunderstood our approach through the understandable unfamiliarity of a non-member with our concrete practice. However, a comrade such as yourself with a considerable history in the Marxist movement, who is clearly a careful and sympathetic reader of Workers Vanguard, and who moreover has some familiarity with the work of SL comrades in your local area, should not really put forward such an impression of SL trade-union work. Clearly you are not acquainted, since it was scarcely reflected in our public press, with the concrete daily work of the SSEU fraction--for instance the painstaking and detailed exposes of the real provisions of the proposed SSEU merger plan, in literally dozens of leaflets to the membership. But you are certainly aware of the NMU Militant-Solidarity Committee's campaign for union rights for Group 2's, or the vigorous work of the CWA MAC caucus in fighting for union democracy and the defeat of the red clause (centered on the struggle to form a principled united front of all formations in the union opposed to the red clause, whatever their programmatic differences on other issues). You have seen reprinted in WV perhaps a dozen "single-issue" resolutions of militants in the UAW over such matters as the deportation of Haitian workers, defense of the Farmworkers, strikes against layoffs, etc. In your own local area you should be familiar with the anti-blacklist campaign in longshore and the intervention of the SL itself in picketing Chilean ships. How can you maintain that the SL--

supported trade-union militants raise their "full program on every leaflet" or present it "everytime [they] speak at a rally or union meeting"? Perhaps your formulations are a case of pedagogical overstatement, but perhaps also you are uneasy with the ways and times in which we do raise our full program, or seek to tie together aspects of it, or concretize it with demands such as hot-carguing scab products or union organization across international boundaries. We wonder if you might be uneasy with aspects of our union work but find it difficult to generalize your reservations into a critique, recognizing possibly opportunist implications akin to workerism in any clear counterposed policy.

Turning to the trade-union security question, you assert that our "policy on union security is much too restricted...." noting that the resulting effect is exactly the reverse of what Harry Turner attributes to us. He asserts that our union work is undertaken to impress students. You have observed rightly that our party trade unionists are not available to impress much of anybody in their own localities. Now this is too bad. Other things being roughly equal, we would be very happy to impress contacts or other militants in any field of work or milieu with our active workers from any other arena. But in general the price of using our active trade unionists as public members is too high. By now there are a number of plants which used to have young CP, or IS, or CSL, or WL, or PL, or RU, or OL fractions along with SL fractions. (However, the RSL and even more the Spark group have much more cautious or even 'clandestine' practices than we do.) The tendency in such places after a year or two is for there to be only SL fractions, and those not without incidental loss along the way.

Our prognosis in the next period is for heavy industrial class action. Yet unlike so many tendencies which have gone workerist, we also struggle to extend our student-centered RCY, as a fertile source of recruitment. We continuously seek and test out ways to involve our union supporters in more general political work, not least of all to counteract the effects of absorption in one milieu (and especially one in which they cannot generally present their full political profile for security reasons), but always within the framework that we will not seriously jeopardize our trade-union base. We hope that your undervaluing, in our opinion, of the dangers of trade-union victimization of reds does not flow from an idealization of the union movement, the product of the anti-communist witchhunt, as inordinately democratic or relatively free of the bourgeois ideology which views reds as dangerous alien elements.

I think that if you will look at the development at various times of other of our activities, you will see that we have undergone broadly parallel experiences in most of the fields of our endeavors--i.e. an evolution which you might find to be of increasing rather than decreasing "sectarianism." A brief look at our activities around the periodical Women & Revolution, and at the periodical itself, would be instructive. As you will see from its early issues, W&R when initiated reflected only a partial separation of our supporters from some of the pressures of the feminist-dominated women's liberation movement, especially over organizational aspects such as "consciousness-raising" and the so-called "tactic" of male exclusion-

ism. In a truly dialectical process of interaction between internal party critics of our comrades' intervention with the involved comrades, who themselves felt inadequacies in their work--a process which involved protracted and seriously undertaken, although not factional, intra-party struggle--we developed our program, propaganda and not least of all the organizational aspects of this work. Centrally important in the "rectification" of the W&R was the painstaking historical investigation of the Leninist historical precedents for work around the woman question--which over the question of "an independent women's movement" confirmed our wildest "sectarian" impulses!--which gave us for the first time a solid historical foundation for our previously eclectic undertaking (and which parenthetically unearthed the previously almost entirely unknown organizational aspects of the Communist International's struggle against bourgeois feminism, a precedent which is now the accepted stock-in-trade of every anti-Pabloist individual and grouping).

There are a couple of specific suggestions that you offer which I believe must be flatly contradicted. You state "many of its [SL's] activities during the early years were carried out simply to 'make the record'." What? Where? When? Life is too short and the work too hard for us to willingly waste our time in such a fashion. Of all the things that we did in the early years, the activity for which we received the most criticism as useless and senseless was the production of elements of our documentary history in the form of "Marxist Bulletins." But we knew that this was a vital activity, and so it proved. None of the numerous regroupments which we have experienced took place without the closest scrutiny of this material by those with whom we were fusing; nor would we have it any other way. This "making the record" has been, as we knew it would have to be, a key element in the struggle to maintain and strengthen a politically homogeneous tendency with comrades from the most diverse political backgrounds. It has also proven essential in the development of international collaborators seeking to assimilate critically our history from a vantage point of parallel experience at great distance.

You also state "Today it is admitted by the SL that the 1968 split almost destroyed the organization." I wonder how you acquired this impression. The 1968 split was the foundation of our present strength. Immediately after the split we coined an aphorism: "Ellens said our membership was half social-democratic; Turner said our leadership lacked collectivity. By the time the fight with them was over we had a hardened Bolshevik membership and a fighting collective leadership." That was our "admission" then and now.

The cliquist defections of Cunningham et al. actually did more damage to our self-confidence. And this leads us straight to the question of our spasmodic press over most of the years of our existence. From 1964 through 1968 with the actual forces that we had, and which were willing or able to be situated in a common center, aggravating and miserable though the situation was as I well recollect, the plain truth that we faced in terms of priorities as a still partially amorphous one-mini-section international was that there was no other possibility for our public press. Even though for example if we had been able to space out our Spartacists and copious substan-

tial leaflets we probably produced the equivalent of an 8-page monthly in that period, we canvassed unceasingly for an editor, competent and sealed-off from other responsibilities. We even tried Lyn and Carol Marcus for a couple of issues--Ms. Marcus having been Managing Editor of Wohlforth's Bulletin the year before. In 1968 we snatched at Cunningham, a prolific if ill-disciplined writer and literate political comrade from the environs of the University of Iowa. The personal root of his subsequent deepening disgruntlement lay clearly in his frustrating inability to actually function as Spartacist editor. With the change in the objective situation and the strengthening of the quality, though not yet the quantity, of SL membership, a regular and more frequent periodical came to be recognized as vital and achievable. We seized on Cunningham's friend Benjamin despite his glaring weaknesses and the all-round sense of transience which he generated. And indeed the pounding which production of a monthly gave Benjamin, Cunningham's bitterness in failure and the new ever-heavier rhythm of work in the SL threw them into a deep secret estrangement, the top of the iceberg being their expressed nostalgia for the good old days when not so much happened.

In the spring of 1961 I was on national tour for the YSA and met briefly with Wohlfroth in Chicago. We discussed the prospects for our then-common tendency. We agreed that in any case we didn't want to split without a good hundred supporters. I observed then, and Wohlfroth agreed, that a good part of the reason for the ephemeral character of most little Trotskyist groups newly cohered of young people lay in their false and effectively liquidationist priorities of public face over cadre-building. Over and over they would pour all their energy and money into a few issues of a publication, get no echoes and disperse. I had in mind particularly a 20-year-effort to create a Mexican section. I stated that if we had the forces and finances for only one functionary it had better be a national secretary, not an editor. But we also agreed that with something on the order of 100 comrades coming out of the SWP we would not have to face that hard choice. But 2 1/2 years later the RT was ejected (due in no small measure to the efforts of the Wohlfrothites) with only a nominal 35 or so supporters, and of our three leading comrades both White and Mage were already visibly and by their own admission pretty damaged.

Looking back upon that period of desperate struggle to preserve the existence of the revolutionary Trotskyist tendency, with terribly limited material resources and with barely any cadre and some nominally leading elements visibly demoralized by the devastating effects of successive frame-up and expulsion (first by Healy, then Dobbs) and the resulting disorientation, isolation and organizational weakness such that endemic disgruntlement or panacea mongering was so easy as to be almost automatic for inexperienced or soft individuals. The striking feature in retrospect is our perseverance in the attempt to break out of our limitations; to transcend national isolation first through our orientation toward the IC and then through efforts to enter into discussions with other tendencies; to push the rightist and passive Bay Area organization into some semblance of activity around the campus radicalization and "Free Speech Movement"; to squeeze another year or two out of demoralized leading elements and our few trade-union militants; to struggle in an exemplary

fashion (in our propoganda and through rent-strike work and the Harlem Organizing Committee) to fill the vacuum left by the SWP's capitulation to nationalism in the black movement; to win by regroupment and recruitment some fresh forces.

Our most damaging failure in the early period was in fact our failure to orient speedily and fully towards the thousands of radicalized petty-bourgeois youth in SDS. It was partially owing to this failure that the polarization of SDS and the impulse on the part of many of its radical students to orient toward the working class that Progressive Labor was able to win hegemony over a section of SDS on the basis of a crude and deformed but subjectively sincere attempt to pose a working-class line.

You state that the SL "tailed after" PL and that we characterized it as "unconscious Trotskyism." You go on to draw the parallel, "Remember the SWP did the same thing to justify tailing after Castro." If this were true, Comrade Clark, you and I should form a faction to root out the capitulatory and liquidationist elements sponsoring such a policy! But there was no such policy as you project. The principal characterization that I recollect we made of PL in those periods that it was emphasizing the class struggle was "Trotskyism with a pre-frontal lobotomy." Now the sometime idiot Trotskyism imputed to Milt Rosen was not exactly the same thing as Castro's alleged "unconscious Marxism"!

Your impression, if it is not merely formalism in drawing the supposed parallelism between our policy toward PL and that of the SWP toward Castroism, may result in part from the SWP's leadership's constant insistence on the Stalinism of PL as a way of side-stepping the implications of the fact that PL in those years stood in its main thrust clearly to the left of the SWP; let us not forget the righteous indignation of the NPAC marshalls as they forcibly ousted our comrades along with the PLers, incanting epithets about Stalin and the assassination of Trotsky, in defense of an antiwar policy which, even aside from the organizational exclusion, was archtypically Stalinist: overt class-collaboration with the "progressive" antiwar bourgeoisie. The SWP's facile characterization of groups like PL and the Panthers as simply "ultra-leftist" was a convenient evasion of the responsibility of authentic Trotskyists to expose and combat their concomitant opportunism.

In any case, whatever the roots of your impression, it overlooks the content of our political intervention into SDS. The purpose of the SWP's (Joseph Hansen) characterization of Castro as an "unconscious Marxist" was to justify tailing the Cuban leadership; the purpose of our characterization of PL was to seek to shock their militants into examination of the content of the Trotskyist bugaboo and the implications of their own partial and contradictory class-struggle programmatic positions. The watchword of our intervention, as reflected in a headline in our press, was "SDS: Toward Stalinism or Trotskyism?" The mechanisms of this intervention included the production of the early mimeographed RHC Newsletter (forerunner to the present Young Spartacus as our SDS caucus was the forerunner to the RCY)--a hard political weapon devoted primarily to exposing PL

and its operation in SDS for political rightism and front-groupism as well as for ultra-left excrescences. Looking at your SL/SWP "tailism" analogy and extending it as it should be extended, can you imagine the SWP in its Fair Play for Cuba waging a vigorous campaign for the defense of the persecuted Cuban (Posadasite) Trotskyists? Or introducing resolutions for the concrete implementation of the institutions of workers democracy through soviets? Or in a word fighting for the political revolution in Cuba? Yet a corresponding hard and principled political thrust was consistently the motivation and practice of our SDS intervention which you term "tailism" on the basis of our deliberately highly insulting characterization of PL.

I suppose a good example of how we "tailed" after PL was in 1964 when both we and the Wohlforthites were publicly giving critical support to the SWP's electoral campaign and both orienting to PL. We passed out leaflets directed to the PL members explaining why they should change their abstentionist policy and vote SWP. We caught the Wohlforthites, in particular Fred Mueller of their PC, hanging around a PL local club passing out PL leaflets calling for boycotting the elections. When we confronted Wohlforth on this behavior we were told this was one more evidence of our tactical inflexibility, i.e. our sectarianism. Several years later when PL tried to crash and smash an SMC conference in Boston, we mobilized our more robust members to help repel PL's physical assault (the SWP even had to give public acknowledgment of our aid). You will find a long report on the incident and a scathing denunciation of PL's Stalinist gangsterism within the left movement on the front page of our entrust organ in SDS, the RMC Newsletter (some months later at an SDS national conference held in Chicago, we nominated our comrades for SDS offices as a means of obtaining additional floor time in nominating speeches, presenting as one comrade's credentials his physical defense of workers democracy against this example of PL hooliganism!). At about the same time, the Bulletin, then in its pro-Red Guard phase, defended a PL attack on SWP electioneers in San Francisco, stating that the SWP "counter-revolutionary scabs on the Chinese Revolution" had gotten what they deserved.

Now these are some particulars. Behind them lay our general guideline. We see a fundamental contradiction in those formally Stalinist organizations and tendencies around the world which simultaneously advance a "one-stage" conception of proletarian revolution yet seek to support this position from the standpoint of Stalin, Mao, etc., and we believe that such organizations are prone to a regroupment process of polarization, especially if we can assist in making bare such a decisive contradiction. (Parenthetically, the evolution of the CWC provided retrospective confirmation of this analysis.)

It is genuinely not clear to me what you should do about applying for SL membership. But I think that the decision lies basically with you. You have been a serious comrade of proven responsibility. Your particular views evidently fall within the SL Statement of Principles. Evidently you can accept and carry out in a disciplined fashion the program and present policies and decisions of the SL. We are not some kind of bureaucratic formation which picks and

chooses wantonly or with secret criteria. Nor would we seek to pressure prospective members into forswearing the political views which they are known to hold, which would destroy their credibility should they undertake in the future to defend these positions or estimations within the organization; it goes without saying that you would not undertake such political abasement, which would sterilize your future as an articulate and experienced comrade playing a role in our internal life.

Therefore, if in your own estimation membership would require your going to war with much of the rest of the organization, it would really not be worth it on anybody's part, as you noted. But if you believe that the organization might be modified in ways which you believe beneficial and necessary by essentially incidental struggle, pressure and example rather than by the final conflict, then you should join. In short to give an epigrammatic telescoping: "In our Father's House are many mansions; but remember Zack!"

Comradely,

Jim Robertson (with corrections and additions by Liz Gordon)

cc: file
BASL

16 June 1974

To the Editor:

In WV #43 a correction appeared regarding the formulation of "workers and peasants revolution" used in the previous issue, essentially to the effect that its (formal) logical extension implied the formation of a workers and peasants state, an un-Marxist concept. While the formulations of a workers and peasants state, a peoples state, or a democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants, implying a distinct historical stage in the revolutionary transformation of bourgeois dictatorship to proletarian dictatorship, is in fact anti-Marxist, the formulation of "workers and peasants revolution" need not necessarily be so. Regarding the Spanish situation in 1931, Trotsky wrote:

"To be sure the proletarian revolution is at the same time a peasant revolution; but under contemporary conditions, a peasant revolution without a proletarian revolution is impossible. We can say to the peasant quite correctly that our aim is to create a workers' and peasants' republic just as, after the October Revolution, we called the government of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia a 'workers' and peasants' government.' But we do not counterpose the workers' and peasants' revolution to the proletarian revolution; on the contrary we consider them identical. This is the only correct way of putting the question." (emphasis added), see p. 121, The Spanish Revolution, by Trotsky.

This statement by Trotsky would seem to make the correction in WV #43 unnecessary as revolutionary Marxists should use the terms synonymously.

With Communist Greetings,

Jack Sherman (NYC)

[Since this letter did not find its way into the paper, the author has requested it be printed in the Bulletin.]

by J. Brule

I believe that the formulations in the article "West Europe's Imported Labor" in WV #31 are defective. The idea seems to be that we can protect foreign workers from deportation and super-exploitation while ignoring immigration quotas themselves. This is a purely utopian conception. (It reminds me of the joke about the policeman who must give up his pursuit of the bank robbers at the state line: if the lucky immigrant manages to slip across the border, we protect him--but if not, too bad! It is in fact impossible to defend foreign workers without taking a clear position on immigration quotas. In fact, the conception is logically meaningless. If one could hypothetically "guarantee" the protection of foreign workers, immigration quotas would serve no function for the bourgeoisie anyway. If it has any meaning, it is: "Maybe we should treat the Arabs in Detroit a little better, but we certainly don't want any more of the dirty bastards to enter the country.")

Opposition to immigration quotas, like the right to self-determination, is a negative demand designed to cut through the chauvinism of the oppressor and the nationalism of the oppressed. While migration is not a solution to the problems of oppressed peoples, it is not for the workers movement to permit the chauvinist imperialist state to make these decisions. To argue that opposing immigration quotas is tantamount to "advocating immigration" makes no more sense than asserting that recognizing the right to self-determination is equivalent to supporting bourgeois nationalism and separatist movements.

In practice, immigration quotas are simply instruments of imperialist policy. An obvious example is the closing of borders to Jews after World War II. When the bourgeoisie favors immigration for its own purposes, immigration laws are simply ignored, as with the importation of Mexican paupers (not workers!) to work in the fields of California, Texas, etc. These "laws" did not prevent immigration--they simply assured that the immigrants were illegal--hence, easy pickings for super-exploitation and use as scabs.

To give tacit support to immigration quotas on the grounds that immigration per se may be harmful smacks of objectivism. In fact, if you really wish to discourage immigration, why not support the existing set-up of deportations and discrimination--why not toughen the laws against immigrants! Marxists have long recognized the utopian character of attempts to regulate the export of capital, in the advanced capitalist states. We clearly identify attempts to regulate the size of trusts, or their international scope, as utopian at best or protectionist at worst. The same holds for immigration quotas. The inability of capitalism to solve the national question and the continuing relative impoverishment of the "colonial nations" in the epoch of imperialism provides the material basis for the migration of peoples and nationalities. Short of a socialist revolution in the undeveloped countries, this tendency will continue to assert itself.

The "harmfulness" of immigration depends not on this or that demographic factor but in the last analysis on the character of the

leadership of the proletariat. Even tacit support for immigration quotas undermines the authority of communists. Such support, in the imperialist country, is a left cover for the chauvinist labor bureaucracy. In the U.S., from the time of the founding of the AFL, labor fakers have supported these quotas precisely on the grounds that they prevent the inundation of the native American labor force by "hordes of Mongols," etc. In an oppressed country, like Mexico, these laws are viewed (correctly) as anti-Mexican. If the proletarian vanguard fails to oppose them vigorously, it simply reinforces the position of the nationalists and reformists, who portray the U.S. (worker and capitalist alike) as the enemy. Thus, in fact, the vanguard surrenders its authority to argue with Mexicans against migrating, appearing as chauvinists!

The slogan "full citizen rights for foreign workers" is ambiguous. A better formulation would be "Abolish all laws discriminating against non-citizens." Insofar as the thrust is towards rights the two slogans are the same (the second more consistently democratic, not restricted to "workers"). Nevertheless, we do not advocate German citizenship for Turkish workers in Germany. This would only foster democratic and liberal illusions among Turkish workers, while reinforcing the bourgeois concept of citizenship. As long as there remain laws discriminating against noncitizens, in general we critically support reforms that would enable one to more easily obtain citizenship. But what our slogans should say and what we will support critically are not the same thing. In this instance it is the difference between proletarian internationalism on the one hand and reforming the nation state on the other.

Of course, we distinguish between capitalist and workers states. While we oppose the oppression of Jews and other national minorities by the Soviet bureaucracy and would advocate a more liberal emigration policy, we do not advocate an "open border." This is tantamount to abandoning the defense of the Soviet union.

4 December 1973

by Al Garfield (Buffalo)

4 August 1974

SL Political Bureau

Dear Comrades:

Two weeks ago on Friday, 19 July we had a debate and discussion up here between Charlie and myself over the Irish question. During the course of the discussion which ensued after the debate, Charlie put forward the position that the slogan of the right of self-determination for an independent and democratic Ulster should be eliminated from our program for Ireland. I put forward the conception of an independent and socialist Ulster. One other comrade, Druce, defended keeping the slogan of the right of self-determination for an independent and democratic Ulster.

At the same time as I put forward the position of an independent and socialist Ulster, I also put forward the view that we should eliminate the slogan of a unified democratic and secular Ireland.

At this moment, I would keep the "socialist" part of my slogan but would eliminate the "independent" part.

Let me explain my view, and hopefully, it will be clearer than I think it has been up to now in the minds of other comrades. Fundamentally, I think that the only solution to the Irish question, which is not really an "Irish" question, but is rather an "Ulster" question, is for Trotskyists in Ulster to fight to weld the working class together through struggling for a program of transitional and democratic demands. That is, I think the existence of the specialy oppressed Catholic minority in Ulster mandates a section of our overall program to deal with that oppression, much, in fact, as we have such a section of our program to deal with the oppression of black people in this country. Hence, demands to deal with unequal pay and hiring, possibly union-controlled hiring halls with hiring into different jobs in each industry done on a first-come, first-served basis although within the framework of the maintenance of a non-discriminatory seniority system, might be one (I mention this purely as an algebraic possibility, since I am not aware of the way trade unions are set up in Ireland); a shorter work week at the same pay, which is a transitional demand; a sliding scale of wages and hours, another transitional demand; and general demands, such as equality in hiring and upgrading, equality in promotions, etc., which have, I believe, more of a democratic character to them, would have to be stressed.

In a certain sense, then, I would see our program for Ulster as being analogous to our now-existent position on Cyprus, a position I agree with.

Let me explain why I am opposed to keeping the slogan of a unified and democratic, secular Ireland. First of all, we have two "little" problems in Ulster. One, we have all the basic political prerequisites, up to a point in history, for nationhood there: Ulster has had over a period of time a separate political economy, first and foremost; has had it since the 1607-09 Ulster plantation,

though my sense is that that political economy since then has largely become reincorporated into that of Great Britain's, making any notion of unifying Ulster with Eire a fantasy. Besides, it has had (as opposed to Eire, though not necessarily as opposed to Britain) a majority language and culture, and its own separate territory.

What is added to this picture, however, and considerably complicates it is hinted at above where I mention that Ulster has "a majority language and culture": namely, point number two, interpenetrating peoples. The two major groupings in Ulster are the Catholics and the Protestants. There is roughly a sixty percent Protestant majority and a forty percent Catholic minority. The way in which Britain initially colonized Ulster in 1607-09 had an effect subsequently throughout all of Ulster's history. Namely, it resulted in what Liam de Paor refers to as a patchwork or hodge-podge of "alien and hostile cultures" throughout the area, at some geographical locations interspersed almost as the fingers of clasped hands are interspersed.

These two factors, Ulster's basic prerequisites for staying a separate entity from Eire, and the fact of interpenetrating peoples that exists there and nowhere else in what many people are wrongly fond of designating "Ireland" make any demand for a unified and democratic, secular Ireland incorrect. To raise that slogan does two things: (1) it falsely raises the national question, i.e., posing a unity between Eire and Ulster for which there is no objective basis in Leninist terms (I do not believe that the struggle of the United Irishmen led by Theobald Wolfe Tone at all fits into a legitimate Leninist criterion for determining the basis for nationhood), and (2) it cannot, given the objective basis I've just mentioned, undercut the existing Protestant chauvinism of the majority of the Ulster population. Rather, even with the word "secular" added, that slogan of a unified, democratic and secular Ireland can only wave a red flag (and not the red flag we want to win the workers to) in the face of the bull of Ulster Protestantism.

Some comrades in subsequent informal discussions, have attacked my position as "Luxemburgist." In fact, the very existence of interpenetrating peoples in Ulster makes the slogan of a socialist Ulster the only possible way of dealing with the severe divisions existing within the Ulster proletariat. Not only this, but any notion of imposing a unity between Eire and Ulster for which there is no objective, Leninist basis is itself, far, far more in line with the Luxemburgist view--which constructed a lovely theoretically abstract edifice, namely, "there are no nations, the proletariat is an international class!" which Lenin in absolutely correct terms smashed as utopian and, in fact, having bureaucratist and anti-democratic connotations--than is my own, which recognizes the objectively separate character between Ulster and Eire. Those comrades who insist on squeezing together two political-economic and territorial entities who have no basis in objective terms for unification are themselves guilty of Luxemburgist errors. Their position simultaneously makes it impossible to undercut the violent chauvinism of the Protestant working class by raising the specter--to the Protestants--of unification with another very different nation in which they would be a very small minority, and, at the same time, abstractly

and in pure theoretical (i.e., "pure" in the sense of theory divorced from practice) terms negates the existence of two different nations. (I term Ulster a "nation" here primarily to show it as incorporated, in the sense of its political economy being incorporated, into Britain, and consequently, that it is separate from Eire. I don't now consider it a "nation" separate from Britain, however.)

Initially, I was opposed to deleting the slogan of the right of self-determination for an independent and democratic Ulster from our program, though at that time I had not worked out fully my views on the slogan of a unified, democratic and secular Ireland. The problem with this slogan of the right of self-determination for an independent and democratic Ulster is that in speaking of that right for a democratic Ulster, one is speaking of it for a bourgeois Ulster as much as for a socialist Ulster. That is, the right of self-determination means one and only one thing, namely: the right to political secession, or as I am informed that one comrade put it, "the right to make your own postage stamps." But for the Catholic minority in Ulster, who is interpenetrated with the Protestant majority, this could only mean genocide, within the framework of a bourgeois state that is. Hence, the problem of interpenetrating peoples mandates the only possible solution, which is the struggle for the transitional program in Ulster linked with a program of demands to deal with the special oppression of the Catholic minority. I believe the slogan of a socialist Ulster encapsulates this viewpoint.

I was also, two weeks ago, for the slogan of an "independent socialist Ulster," as I mentioned. However, I had raised that in conjunction with the slogan of a socialist Eire and a Socialist Federation of the British Isles, which last is, I believe, the key slogan for intervention in the Irish-Ulster situation. I had raised the term "independent" in my formulation because I did not then see what I now believe to be true, namely, that Ulster's political economy while fundamentally separate from that of Eire, is still pretty much incorporated into that of Britain (which, I think, is one reason the Protestants do not call for separation from Britain). Hence, the struggles for socialism in Ulster and in Britain closely tie in with each other. Another motivation for raising the "independent" part of my slogan was that I saw "independent socialist Ulster" as still being in some sense an expression of "self-determination for Ulster," and in fact, found myself during the debate up here in a tacit bloc with Bruce in arguing against comrades who saw no basis for the right of self-determination for Ulster. The self-determination I saw was self-determination from the South (Eire), not from Britain (though a consistent argument against the slogan of the right of self-determination which came from comrades opposed to it seemed to be: the Protestants don't want to self-determine from Britain, so why are you even talking about it? This objection completely ignored the fact that what was being spoken of was the right of self-determination from the South, namely Eire, not from Britain). In other words, the way I saw it was as follows: we would say to the Protestant workers, all right, you fear unification with Eire? You may then have your own nation, that is, you may secede if you wish. The problem with this approach is that the right of self-determination for an independent and democratic Ulster was posed by us in conjunction

with the call for a unified, democratic and secular Ireland (namely, unite Eire and Ulster) and, "therefore, neither Orange or Green, but a Workers Republic". The position of a unified, democratic and secular Ireland plus Workers Republic is seen as the way of undercutting the Protestants' fears--especially the term "secular" in our slogan. The whole problem is that more confusion results from both of these, i.e., the right of self-determination for Ulster plus unified, democratic secular Ireland/Workers Republic than is warranted or necessary, and furthermore, the arbitrary squeezing together of two separate areas, Ulster and Eire, is maintained. (With the deletion of right of self-determination for an independent, democratic Ulster but the maintenance of the rest of our current slogans, that "squeezing together" is intensified, and consequently the Luxemburgist character of the formulation is even more sharply emphasized.) With the intensification of that squeezing together, and of, what I believe, are the effects--namely, the impossibility of posing a thoroughgoing solution which cuts through all of the rival chauvinisms in the area--Trotskyists, those who might be in a future section of the International Spartacist Tendency in the area, would be left in a completely politically untenable position where all they would be able to do would be to say, Well, sorry Protestants, your nation may be separate from Eire and indeed, even part of Britain, but that doesn't matter because you've simply got to be part of a bigger nation--that'll of course be secular--because back in the 1790's, Theobald Wolfe Tone's movement somehow talismanically and mystically superseded all preceding and subsequent history by the mere fact of its existing. That, in fact, seems to me to be the methodology in back of some comrades' saying, don't you see, we've got to recognize the historical viability of the unified Catholic-Protestant United Irish movement and the slogan they raised, for a Unified Ireland.

The only problem, by the way, with that way of posing the question is that, were it true that the Wolfe Tone-led movement was in fact a legitimate basis in itself (which I do not believe) for calling for a unified Ireland, then why did all the Protestant support simply dribble away from that movement in 1797? Surely if there had been a more solid basis for unification, then the reactionary Orange movement would not have found it as easy as they did--according to de Paor--to split the Wolfe Tone-led UI. Also, from reading what I did read on the Irish-Ulster question in de Paor--which, unfortunately, was not as much as I would like to have finished reading--my sense was that those Protestants who were members of the Wolfe Tone-led United Irishmen were from different backgrounds and were, consequently, "different" than were those in the Orangemen rank and file. My sense also was that those in the Orangemen rank and file were probably, in terms of their backgrounds, more representative of the majority of Protestants in Ulster than were those Protestants in the United Irishmen. (I here speak in terms of those Orange Protestants as probably being representative of the large number of people who colonized Ulster in the 1600's, whereas it seems to me that de Paor has phrases in his book implying a difference between them and the Protestants in the UI, namely, characterizing the UI Protestants as "dissident" Protestants and so forth. Why were they dissident and what was their background are the two questions which come to my mind.) And this makes even more

significant the fact that the Orange movement was able to split the UI, rather than the UI being able to split the Orangemen. Or rather, that last fact seems to bear out my point more.

Anyway, eliminating the call for a united democratic and secular Ireland/Workers Republic eliminates the problem which really necessitates putting "independent" prior to "socialist Ulster," namely the problem of Protestant chauvinist fears of being "drowned" in a Catholic majority "sea." It is this and my sense that the Ulster economy is incorporated into that of Britain which leads me to eliminate the "independent" portion of my slogan, and simply to pose the solution as, For a Socialist Ulster; for the right of self-determination from Britain of Eire, and a Workers Republic; for a Socialist Federation of the British Isles. Within Ulster, the primary task of revolutionary Trotskyists is to struggle for the construction of a Catholic and Protestant revolutionary socialist vanguard party. I suspect that a primary and absolutely central task that would be part of our work there would be the recruitment of a Trotskyist cadre of Irish Catholic minorityites, since I suspect that the doubly oppressed Catholic minority there will play a leading role in the coming socialist revolution in Ulster and consequently, any Trotskyist party worth its salt must have as a basic task recruitment from among this section of the population.

I apologize for the typing errors and somewhat sloppy way in which I rather hurriedly dashed this out. If possible, would someone there be able to type it over for inclusion in pre-Conference discussion? Also, I have kept one copy for myself and provided one copy to the Buffalo local files. However, since I've referred to Charlie in this letter, perhaps you could xerox up a copy and give it to him since I am currently out of work and don't at this immediate moment have access to a xerox machine which doesn't cost anything. As for my mention of Bruce, he is in the local here and can read the local file copy.

Thanks ahead of time for help in these last matters.

Comradely,
A. Garfield

* * * *

ADDENDUM

1. What about the imperialist partition?

The basis for Ulster's being a separate entity from Eire does not reside in the fact of the partition established by imperialist Britain in the 1920's. To even pose the question this way in arguing against what is really a straw man (It's a straw man because I do not recognize any imperialist partition--though I underline this term "imperialist" because there could arise a hypothetical situation in which a partition would arise in the course of a real and legitimate national uprising or in the course of a socialist revolution that granted the right of secession to various oppressed nations which we would defend), betrays a serious misunderstanding of the national question. The basis for a nation, any nation, is not in the esta

blishment of it as a "nation," that is, as an artificially-constructed entity by various super-powers in the epoch of imperialism. In fact, even in pre-imperialist epochs, Marxists did not recognize any integrity to the fallaciously and artificially-constructed Austro-Hungarian empire, which we sought to see dissolved. No, the basis of a nation is "organic," it resides in the commonality of political economy, territoriality, language and psychological make-up manifesting itself in a common culture. This is the materialist basis for nationhood; those who would argue against my position have a responsibility to revise this criterion for nationhood. I believe, by the way, that seeing the Wolfe Tone-led movement as having "historical viability" which we must defend as a basis for a unified Ireland is a revision of the view which, up to now, we've held on what constitutes the basis for a nation.

2. Some clarification on my view that my slogans are not Luxemburgist:

I believe not only that calling for a unified democratic and secular Ireland is incorrect and betrays an element of Luxemburgism (though this is an even worse kind of Luxemburgism than is embodied in the slogan of a united Workers Republic, because it puts forward unity of two separate entities and leaves the class character of that unity up in the air, at least leaving the possibility that it could be a unity on a bourgeois basis, with the consequent impingement upon the democratic rights of the Protestants of Ulster which a unified, democratic and secular Ireland could pose under these circumstances), but further, that the slogan of a Workers Republic (that is, seen as a Workers Republic made up of Eire and Ulster) does this. It was, after all, Luxemburg who put forward the view that national self-determination was a fraud and in fact, "what's needed is socialism," i.e. for her, that lovely theoretically abstract edifice of "we Marxists never defend national boundaries!" Yes, comrades, it is a lovely edifice--in theory--but the truth is concrete. We have to deal with the historically specific situation of Ireland/Ulster, not something existing in the heaven of our imagination.

4 August 1974

* * * *

ADDENDUM II

5 August 1974

1. The question of whether or not Ulster's economy is fundamentally incorporated into that of Britain's, and therefore whether or not one would call for some slogan implying Ulster's independence from Britain has been brought up to me; since last night the local went through several rounds of discussion on the Middle East, and then again on the Irish-Ulster question. My impulse was initially to say, no, we would not call for such a slogan. But after hearing arguments, especially relating to the Canadian political economy's essential incorporation into the economy of U.S. imperialism, I am now at best unsure.

The basic question in my letter of yesterday, however, remains twofold: (a) whether the Irish-Ulster question can be solved or even

posed short of raising the dictatorship of the proletariat, and by "raising" it I do not mean to say, "raising it as a slogan." Rather, I wish to emphasize that the slogan of a Socialist Ulster is meant to encapsulate the view that the only method for smashing down the chauvinistic barrier between Catholic and Protestant in the North is the struggle for the program of transitional demands linked up with the program of demands to deal with the special oppression of the Catholics; and (b) whether raising unification of Ulster and Eire can do anything but impede the process of welding together the Protestant and Catholic workers in the North by exacerbating the fears of the Protestants and, indirectly, turning them even more ferociously against the Catholics. It does not seem to me that putting "independent" before my current slogan, or not putting it before it would fundamentally alter the primary issues I'm trying to deal with here, and which I think are encapsulated in the Socialist Ulster slogan. Whether or not I would add "independent" again--that is, revert fundamentally back to the view I held two weeks ago--would be contingent upon my being entirely convinced that either Ulster's political economy is not so incorporated into that of Britain's, or, and after last night's local discussions and ensuing informal discussions with comrades this seems to be the view I'm more closely tending towards, that the question of incorporation/non-incorporation of political economies isn't fundamental to whether or not we raise the slogan of independence with socialism here, but rather something else supercedes that (It's that "something else" I am looking for).

2. "Self-determination for Ulster"?

I would still, however, oppose raising the classless slogan of the right of self-determination for Ulster, because, like Cyprus, the problem of interpenetrating peoples in Ulster cannot be solved short of the struggle for the transitional program. Unlike Cyprus, this program must deal with two relatively unequal groups, the Protestants and the oppressed Catholics. Hence, the even greater necessity for a stress upon the programmatic aspects dealing with the special oppression of the Catholics.

The right of self-determination in and of itself for Ulster is a slogan which leaves open the class character of that right. In a context where sixty percent of the population is Protestant and forty percent is Catholic, that means "leaving open" the possibility of a slaughter of the Catholic minority by the Protestant majority.

There is a symmetrical error in this formulation, an error that is symmetrical to the error in the formulation of a unifeid, democratic and secular Ireland (i.e., Eire and Ulster). That symmetrical error resides in this: both positions maintain the existing deep-going and historically-rooted divisions between Catholic and Protestant workers in Ulster. Neither cuts through the fact of interpenetrating peoples, and the chauvinisms rivalling each other in Ulster. While saying "reunify Ulster with Eire" both denies the validity of the proposition that there is or ever was a nation in Ulster and also denies validity to the notion that interpenetration of peoples is even applicable to the Irish-Ulster situation, calling for the right of self-determination for Ulster denies the existence of forty percent of the population of Ulster.

Only the struggle for the transitional program, linked up with struggle for demands dealing with the special oppression of the Catholic national minority in Ulster, can solve the Ulster question.

5 August 1974

* * * *

[Buffalo]

5 August 1974

SL Political Bureau

Dear Comrades,

In my letter of 4 August 1974 to you dealing with the Ireland-Ulster question, and specifically referring to a debate that occurred in the Buffalo local on 19 July 1974, a Friday, I wrote: "One other comrade, Bruce, defended keeping the slogan of the right of self-determination for an independent and democratic Ulster."

I now feel that having included this statement in my 4 August letter was unfair to Bruce, since during discussions in the Buffalo local last night, he indicated that he had changed his previous position. Consequently, to indicate without any correction what his view was on the 19th of July, as I did in my letter, would be to present a half-accurate picture.

Therefore, would you kindly publish this letter as an addition to my 4 August letter, and 4-5 August Addendums, or else make appropriate corrections in my letter.

Oh, also, I had mentioned the position which Charlie had taken in that Debate. I do not currently know if he's got the same position, but again, if he does not, I would ask that this be published in addition to my letter of 4 August or else that appropriate corrections in my 4 August letter be made in order to right any wrong misconceptions my mentioning him might have caused as well.

Thanks ahead of time for help in these matters.

Comradely,

A. Garfield

By Martin Cobet (Cleveland)

[Reuben Samuels]

August 5, 1974

Dear comrade,

I'm writing this letter in anticipation of your visit to Cleveland. As you know, I've found myself in the minority in recent O.C. discussions on the national question. Given your authority on that subject, your trip here should prove to be particularly useful.

Obviously, if you have a sense of my position prior to arriving in Cleveland you'll be better prepared to speak to the points in dispute, and the discussion will be more fruitful. Hence this letter...

Let me begin with some preliminary comments on the Norden motion, passed unanimously as an amendment to a motion by cde. Robertson at the Third Plenum of the Third Central Committee, 16-17 March 1974. It reads:

That the right of self-determination is a general democratic right which applies to all nations, including Hebrew and Arab-speaking peoples in the Near East. However, whether Leninists advocate separation depends on a number of concrete circumstances. The right of self-determination cannot be implemented by suppressing the right of self-determination for another people.

I believe that this motion at least implicitly obscures three important distinctions, i.e.,

- a) the distinction between a bourgeois-democratic right and a programmatic demand,
- b) the distinction between the demand for the right of nations to self-determination and the principle of the equality of nations, and
- c) the distinction between the nation and the (national or multinational) State.

Bourgeois-democratic rights are, by virtue of the historical context of their generation and, virtually by definition, trans-class in character, i.e., equally applicable to both oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited, bourgeoisie and proletariat. There is, however, a distinction between the abstract generality of such bourgeois-democratic rights and the concrete specificity of demands, raised by the proletarian vanguard, calling on one party or another to recognise the legitimacy of the application of such rights in a particular case. The abstract existence of such bourgeois-democratic rights does not, in itself, legitimize (much less render mandatory) demands which speak to those rights. At what point, for example, did Bangla Desh lose the right to self-determination? At what point did the demand for the right of Bangla Desh to self-determination lose its legitimacy?

You see, cde. Norden in the first phrase of the first sentence of his motion intends more than a simple affirmation of the general applicability of bourgeois-democratic rights. He sees in this ample justification for raising the demand for self-determination for the 'Hebrew and Arab-speaking peoples of the Near East'. One could

similarly justify the demands for self-determination for France and universal suffrage in the U.S.

The last sentence of cde. Norden's motion is obviously and curiously incorrect. "The right of self-determination cannot be implemented by suppressing the right of self-determination for another people." In fact, this right has, more often than not, been implemented precisely at the expense of another people, as the establishment of the Israeli State so vividly points out; further examples of the 'unfairness' of the implementation of bourgeois-democratic rights by the bourgeoisie can be found in WV #45 (pg.11, col.1, para.3). It is precisely because of this that we prefer, in general, to posit the 'negative' demand for the right of nations to self-determination--that is, their right to secede--rather than give blanket political support to the positive implementation of that right. Whether or not intended, cde. Norden seems to equate the demand for the right to secede with the principle of the equality of nations.

I believe this to represent a mystification of Clause #9 of the Russian Program. And, in this respect, cde. Norden merely reflects an equally curious formulation in WV #45: "The demand for self-determination of oppressed peoples means that they should have the same national rights already achieved by already established nations, ..." First of all, the counterposition between 'oppressed peoples' and 'already established nations' is itself a strange formulation; the Black population in this country and the pre-revolution Russian Jewry could properly be called 'oppressed peoples', while Poland and the Ukraine were both 'already established nations' while under Russian rule. The counterposition is either meaningless or it's an example of peculiarly non-Marxist terminology, i.e., 'oppressed peoples' meaning nations, and 'already established nations' representing an euphemism for the State.

Secondly, "...if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal definitions, or 'inventing' abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state. Later on we shall see still other reasons why it would be wrong to interpret the right of self-determination as meaning anything but the right to existence as a separate State." (Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination). I want to return to this point, but first there is one more distinction which is, I believe, implicitly obscured by the Norden motion.

The first sentence of the motion does more than affirm the general applicability of bourgeois-democratic rights when he includes the "Hebrew and Arab-speaking peoples of the Near East" in the category of nations. The nation and the national State are not equivalents; the State is not simply the two categories of 'nation' and 'government' added together. We have a different orientation towards bourgeois States, i.e., we demand, thru the vehicle of the transitional program, the revolutionary resolution of the class struggle.

"Under normal circumstances," admits WV #45, "the self-determination of oppressor nations (States) is of course not in question." But what if the bourgeois-democratic rights of the oppressor State is impacted? Though we can beat to death the peculiarity of the Near East situation, we must first recognize the general truth that the political program of every bourgeois war has been, and will be, the unbridled and violent rape of national rights, in the case of nations, and of political sovereignty, in the case of States. In this, the situation in the Near East is but a specific, though vicious, manifestation of the norm.

Where we are dealing with nations and the violation of national right, Marxists have traditionally put forward the demand for the right of nations to self-determination, i.e., the right to secede. Where we are dealing with violations of the political sovereignty of oppressor states of roughly the same socio-economic plane, we have called for revolutionary defeatism; and where we are dealing with imperialist attacks upon the political sovereignty of backward countries (the Sino-Japanese War) or with attempted violations of the political sovereignty of the deformed workers' States, we have demanded revolutionary defensism.

In fact, under 'normal circumstances,' the political sovereignty of various States is constantly being called into question in the epoch of imperialism, from the Monroe Doctrine to the Lebensraum of the Third Reich. The bourgeoisie of every State impacted by imperialist policy has hastily pointed to the threatened violations of its 'national rights.'

To apply the demand for the right of nations to self-determination to the bourgeois State means to fundamentally re-define that demand. It means to call for the right of the State to political sovereignty and, in the context of war, to the right of the proletariat to defend that sovereignty against attack by other bourgeois powers. Implicitly, it is to condone voting war credits for the defense of one's 'own' sovereignty. It means to divest the principle of revolutionary defensism of its class content.

That is why, for example, this demand was not raised by revolutionary Trotskyists in the case of Nazi-occupied France or Czechoslovakia during WW II. In both cases the threat to the 'national rights' of the Czech and French was real and significant. In the former we called for defensism, in the latter for defeatism, but never for the right to self-determination, and not because (as was implied by some cdes. during a recent discussion) the threat to these 'nations' was a little threat while the threat to the 'Hebrew-speaking nation' is a big threat, which is a patently absurd and historically inaccurate criteria for the application of a demand which seeks to codify a bourgeois-democratic right.

No doubt I am being somewhat unfair to cde. Norden; motions rarely have the thought-out character of theses, and this particular motion was obviously put forward to concretize elements of a discussion in which I did not take part and which was certainly more comprehensive than the motion itself. I feel justified in speaking to the motion because, as far as I can determine, it reflects in embryo

errors in the political thrust of the articles in WV Nos. 45 & 47.

So, in summary:

1. the demand for the right of nations to self-determination is the specific demand that an oppressed nation have the right to form an independent national state.
2. the demand is inapplicable to nations which have already achieved statehood.
3. while appropriate in the case of Palestine (self-determination for the Palestinians) it is inappropriate and dangerously misleading when applied to the 'Hebrew and Arab-speaking peoples of the Near East.'
4. that we speak to questions of violation of political sovereignty thru the positions of revolutionary defeatism and revolutionary defensism, these being the fundamental programmatic elements of our position on the 'national question' in regards to the national or multi-national state.
5. that the correct position on the '48 war is one of revolutionary defeatism; that this position is based on a class analysis of that conflict rather than upon new military data indicating that neither side had a significant advantage (we don't suggest revolutionary defeatism to the Israelis because we've determined that the Arabs are incapable of ensuring that defeat)
6. the question of 'self-determination for interpenetrated peoples' is analogous to the Black question and points to the fundamental importance of territoriality as a criteria for a nation and, hence, a justification for the application of the demand for self-determination.

Please forgive the sketchiness of the above outline. In any event I hope it serve as some aid in preparing you for your visit. I sincerely look forward to it.

Comradely,

Martin Cobet