

## Rise and Decline of Maoism in Canada

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Several small Canadian groups are now vying for the nod of Chairman Mao Tsetung. Each claims to be the Canadian expression of the thoughts of Mao. And all seek a bureaucratic franchise from the Chinese workers' state.

A look at the recent decline of the Vancouver-based 'Progressive Workers Movement' [PWM] reveals some important lessons for today's radicalizing left in Canada. The history of the PWM also gives us a glimpse of how other, more recent Maoist groups can expect to fare.

In October, 1964, the PWM proclaimed: ". . . We will be heard—and will not retreat . . . We are here to fan the flames of discontent, and disdain to dissimulate or hide our intentions from any man—friend or foe." The PWM, in the same issue of its paper *Progressive Worker*, issued a statement of principles. It called for a "national confer-

ence in the near future for the purpose of organizing a Marxist-Leninist-Workers Party in Canada."

Nearly five years have elapsed since that bold statement . . . five years of revolutionary upsurge throughout the world. After a brief interlude of rapid growth, mostly through regroupment of older left-wing elements from the decaying B.C. [British Columbia] Communist party and from the CCF-NDP [Cooperative Commonwealth Federation-New Democratic party], the Progressive Workers Movement entered a period of attrition and decline that continues to this day.

The failure of the PWM is rooted in the neo-Stalinist heritage of its founders. The formative stages of the PWM program took place under the guidance of Jack Scott, the chairman of the group. He was expelled along with others from the Communist party in 1964 for dissenting pro-Peking "factional activity." He founded the PWM shortly after.

The PWM attacked the Communist party leadership for its liberal-reformist politics and its crass Canadian nation-

alist line. PWM attacked the CP record of supporting the wartime "no strike pledge" and its call for a "Liberal-labor coalition" in support of Mackenzie King in 1944. They blamed these class-collaborationist politics on the American Communist party leader of that period, Earl Browder.

Jack Scott charged that CPers now in the trade unions are mainly interested in getting elected to responsible positions and "are proud when they are good administrators." Many of these criticisms are valid — as far as they go.

However, the PWM attack on the Communist party stayed rigidly within the ambit of Peking's polemics with Moscow. It never broke with the Stalinist ideology and tactics inherited from the CP. PW's first public meeting in December, 1964, prominently displayed Stalin's portrait. Soviet revisionism, according to the PWM, started with Khrushchev.

The PWM failed to come to terms even with the postwar split in the Canadian Communist party led by Fergus McKean. That split produced the historic critique of the Communist parties, *Communism versus Opportunism*. In his book, McKean—once the top leader of the B. C. CP—recorded the policy of class collaboration and betrayals conducted by the Canadian and American CPs during the prewar and wartime period.

The PWM began its political activity with the albatross of Stalin and Stalinist policies around its neck. Ever since, it has displayed—through five years of remarkable opportunist and sectarian twists—a thoroughly ultraleftist stance on the major political issues of the day.

PW dismissed the New Democratic party as a capitalist party. Blinded by Stalin's theory of "social fascism" which equated the German Social Democrats and Nazis as political "twins," the PWM classified the NDP as a reactionary party. PWM withdrew its members from the NDP. It called upon all "genuine" socialists to leave the NDP and join PW. A few did, but they soon dropped away.

The central focus of working-class politics in Canada has become the NDP. Through it, organized labor broke with capitalist "Liberal-labor" politics and launched a labor party. The revolutionary-socialist tactic of supporting such developments and working within them has been defended many times over by Marxists. Lenin had occasion to analyze and defend this approach in his polemic against ultra-leftism entitled *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*.

Seemingly ignorant of this analysis, as of Marxism in general, PWM directed most of its fire at the Trotskyists of the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière, attempting to "expose" the LSA/LSO's support of the NDP with the ready-made arsenal of epithets and charges provided by Stalin's school of falsification.

With this antilabor party policy, the PWM condemned itself to speedy isolation from the real world of working-class politics.

PWM's main political "capital" was the red banner of Mao's thought—the franchise to speak for Mao which they claimed to hold in Canada. The widespread interest in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, in the tremendous progress of the Chinese workers' state, and in the Chinese criticisms of the Soviet policies has been most pronounced among the youth and on the campuses. Despite this fertile interest in China and Maoism, the PWM failed utterly to win over significant youth forces.

This failure cannot alone be explained by its adulation of Stalin. The PWM failed to understand the importance of the youth radicalization and the strategic role open to the campus youth under neocapitalism. In fact, the PWM initially pulled its few youth off the campuses and sent them into the factories—to fight for Canadian unions!

PWM floated a youth group, the Youth Against War and Fascism. This group, also confined to Vancouver, didn't survive long, and was quietly buried. It left behind no program for youth—only a few memories of isolated demonstrations and militant displays of revolutionary fervor on workers' picket lines.

The Youth Against War and Fascism's birthmark was the PWM's chronic habit of combining a "minimum program" with ultraleft action.

This separation of minimum and maximum programs—a sectarian error soundly condemned by all great Marxists—most notably Luxemburg and Lenin, not to speak of Marx and Engels—dominated the PWM's one lapse into electoral activity.

Having denounced the New Democratic party as a capitalist party, the PWM decided to enter a candidate against the NDP in the 1965 federal election. It chose to run in Vancouver East, a traditional working-class stronghold. Jerry Le Bourdais, a prominent Vancouver unionist (then president of the Oil Workers union and a member of the Vancouver Labor Council executive) was put forward as PWM's candidate. PWM advanced its own program—a "minimum" program, no further to the left than that of the NDP. Some aspects of its "minimum" program were weaker than the NDP's—on social welfare issues, for example, where the PWM mustered enough fervor to call for "adequate medical, dental and hospital care coverage!"

The PWM "minimum" program echoed the NDP's program of reforms—with the addition of a strident Canadian nationalism. They called for the nationalization of American-owned monopolies—but carefully avoided aiming the same demand against Canadian-owned monopolies which, presumably, did not thwart Canadian independence.

The PWM showed in its 1965 electoral program its complete ignorance of the transitional program—a program which advances a series of class-struggle demands which can mobilize workers in struggle and advance their consciousness towards anticapitalist and socialist views. They zigzagged between their minimum reform demands on the one hand, and their exhortations to revolution on the other.

Their minimum program netted them some 300 votes, contrasted to many thousands for the NDP.

The common observation that ultraleftism and opportunism are but two sides of the same coin is borne out by PWM's record in the trade unions.

Just as they dismissed the NDP as a "capitalist" party, the PWM rejected the organized trade-union movement. Since this meant rejecting the international unions, which PWM labels "American," the main struggle before Canadian workers, according to PWM, was therefore for pure, all-Canadian trade unions. PWM tried to bypass the Canadian Labor Congress and the B. C. Federation of Labor with a series of trade-union adventures that virtually destroyed its original roots in the unions themselves.

The first escapade—in 1965—was the so-called General

Council of Workers. Just as the PWM would substitute for the NDP, this labor body would challenge the CLC. Needless to report, this Maoist front was short-lived.

After this disaster, the PWM poured even more steam into the campaign to "liberate" Canadian workers from the internationals. They allied themselves with any and all elements in the unions which sought Canadian unions at any cost. Any—or no—program would do. This brought them into collaboration with anti-NDP, pro-Liberal elements in the unions and led to the eventual formation of the Committee for Canadian Unions.

Thus, after attacking the CP for its crass nationalism, the PWM came full cycle back to the same position.

The program for Canadian unionism is a catchall which diverts rank-and-file struggles away from the key problems in the unions, such as bureaucracy and leadership careerism, and state intervention into union affairs. Bureaucracy in the unions is a social, not national feature. It is endemic to the workers' movement in all the advanced capitalist countries. In the fight against bureaucracy and for rank-and-file control, trusteeships and attacks by the brass may necessitate split situations. But PWM's policy made splitting with the internationals an obligatory principle and strategy without concern for what impact this would have on labor's overall strength against international capital.

PWM failed to understand that rank-and-file democracy and militant unionism depend upon raising *class* consciousness in the unions. Cultivated nationalist illusions and all-Canadian unions are no guarantee of rank-and-file democracy. Moreover, Canadian unionists should understand that the Canadian state—and the provincial governments—are just as viciously antilabor as the American and cannot be relied upon for assistance against "American domination."

The opportunism of PWM's Canadian unionism stance complemented its staggering infantilism in local union situations. Ultraleftism led to the isolation of some of its best trade unionists, most notably Jerry Le Bourdais. During his term as an executive member of the Vancouver Labor Council, Le Bourdais and the PWM had a caucus of almost a dozen VLC delegates. By following the PWM forays into the union movement, Le Bourdais was led into easy victimization and a defenseless situation in his own union, the Oil Workers local in Vancouver. His militant record was no substitute for a policy of winning the rank-and-file to a viable program of struggle.

When Le Bourdais was fired in 1966, he was rendered defenseless, thanks to the record of PWM's sectarian capers. PW substituted the issue of Maoism in place of the necessary and elementary defense of a trade unionist victimized by the boss.

Nothing now remains of the PWM presence in the unions, on the local level or at the VLC—not even the echo of their revolutionary rhetoric. PW has paid the price of substituting itself and its nationalist schema in place of a carefully worked out transitional program in the trade unions, a concerted struggle against the parasitic bureaucracy, and support of independent labor political action.

The most wretched aspect of PWM's neo-Stalinist outlook was its rabid sectarian attacks on other left-wing organizations. The operating principle of the PWM in other organizations and the unions was expose Trotskyists first

and CPers second. Once free reign could be secured for the PWM, action could proceed.

This strategy was most pronounced in the Canada-China Friendship Association. From its original function, that of promoting "better understanding between the people of Canada and China" and combating the capitalist press distortions about China, the association was converted by the Maoists into a propagandistic mouthpiece for the thought of Mao Tsetung. One had no business in the CCFA unless the thought of Mao was foremost in his mind and he supported the cultural revolution.

Similarly, the PWM pulled out of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and launched a factional tirade against the FPCC. They red-baited it as "Trotskyist." The countercommittee they formed folded shortly after it announced itself—coinciding with PWM's "discovery" that Cuba was a "bourgeois" state!

The February 1968 issue of *Progressive Worker*, PWM's journal, offered its readers a "systematic presentation of the PWM's position" on Cuba. Cuba, it said, is "essentially a bourgeois-democratic revolution masquerading as socialism," led by "petty-bourgeois leaders." According to this "systematic presentation," Castro "aims at no more than a patching of the capitalist system."

Castro's failing, of course, was that he did not prostrate the Cuban revolution and its revolutionary internationalism to the opportunism of Peking's foreign policy.

PWM failed the acid test—the defense of the Vietnamese revolution. Its record of capricious activity in "solidarity" with Vietnam substitutes for mass actions and support for the antiwar movement in North America. PWM characterized the actions of bringing thousands of Canadians into the streets to demand the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam, an end to Canada's complicity, and self-determination for Vietnam, as "petty-bourgeois." The September 1967 issue of *PW* charged that the leadership of the antiwar movement was dominated by "counterrevolutionaries." Since then, PWM has not participated in building antiwar actions.

PWM's political method is at least consistent. The NDP is a capitalist party! International unions are CIA fronts! Cuba is a capitalist state! The antiwar movement is petty-bourgeois! Not a trace of class analysis goes into this confused and incorrect assessment; what does go into it is the preconceived, bureaucratic outlook of international Maoism. Worse, the method is crassly idealist; the class character of a state or a political party is determined here by the ideas of its leaders, not by its class foundations, roots, origins and developments it is undergoing.

These sectarian positions coupled with ultraleft confrontations on the picket line and a reformist policy in their election campaign spelled an early end to the PWM as a political force even in the Vancouver area.

Today, after a series of splits, expulsions, and resignations by disillusioned members, the PWM is a handful of sectarians outside the mainstream of political life.

The once-monthly magazine *Progressive Worker* has been supplanted by a mimeographed bulletin and a promised quarterly magazine. Their forums which once attracted many young radicals have been discontinued. Their policy of regroupment is academic. What have they left to regroup?