

# Toward a Critique of the General Line of the CPUSA

by Ralph Beitel and Bruce Occeña

## Political Significance of the Question

A central theoretical task facing U.S. Marxist-Leninists is concretizing and deepening the critique of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA).

Clearly there can be no serious talk of building a revolutionary vanguard party in the absence of such an ongoing critique. At present, the general state of the theoretical work in this area can be characterized as relatively shallow and inconsistent. This article is an initial attempt to rekindle a movement of criticism around the program and practice of this revisionist party.

What is the special significance of the CPUSA? It is not primarily the fact that the CPUSA presents itself as the Marxist-Leninist vanguard of the U.S. working class. As far as that claim is concerned, the party already has at least half a dozen rivals.

## *The Role of the CPUSA*

However, the CPUSA is particularly important. First of all, it is historically the most significant party on the U.S. left. It enjoys the formal organizational continuity of 60 years of participation in the political life of the U.S. It was the designated member party of the Third International and as a result, for better or worse, was the principal

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organizational expression of Marxism-Leninism in the U.S. from the time of its founding until the late 1950s, when it began to lose its ideological hegemony over the U.S. communist movement.

In addition, the CPUSA remains—because of its size, history, influence and international ties—the organization most widely recognized by the masses, the media, and the bourgeoisie to be the principal communist organization in the U.S. As such, it serves as a point of definition on the left and still attracts many spontaneously radicalized forces among the masses. In this connection, we must note that the CPUSA probably has more influence in certain sectors of the trade union movement and among the Black masses than any other organized communist force—although the extent of that influence is a mere shadow of what it once was. (The tendency within the anti-revisionist movement to view recognition of the CPUSA's influence as a negative concession to revisionism is an indication of our recent legacy of infantile leftism.)

But most important, the special significance of the CPUSA is that it is the concrete expression of modern revisionism within the U.S. Revisionism is a profound material force within the international communist movement. The starting point for Marxist-Leninists in the U.S. for the demarcation with revisionism should be the concrete analysis of how this opportunist line actually obscures the tasks of the U.S. revolution. In fact, the demarcation with modern revisionism will not be thoroughly grounded if it remains solely in the realm of a generalized polemic with Soviet revisionism, while ignoring a rigorous and sustained critique of the CPUSA.

These reasons alone are sufficient to indicate the importance of making a careful evaluation of the line and role of the CPUSA in the political life of the U.S. today. But the question has further significance for the developing anti-revisionist, anti-“left” opportunist trend. This trend's immediate antecedents are in the broader anti-revisionist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the leading forces of which have since consolidated an all-sided “left” opportunist line whose principal manifestation is a class collaborationist stance that has become even more naked than that of the CPUSA.

As a result of this legacy, our trend will remain saddled with the “left” opportunist summations and critiques of the CPUSA until we develop our own. As mentioned above, these critiques have been relatively shallow and inconsistent. They also reflect a whole system of infantile leftist politics which today characterizes the “left” opportunist trend.

Among “left” opportunists, criticism of the CPUSA has come to be viewed as little more than an obligatory task preceding the formation of another “new” party. All too often the political line of the CPUSA is oversimplified to the point of caricature. Gross distortions and sometimes sheer invention is utilized in order to buttress sectarian self-congratulation. Such an approach has nothing in common with the

methodology of Marxism-Leninism, which insists upon criticizing a line in its strongest expression and not in its weakest form or via parody.

For example, a typical “Maoist” analysis of the CPUSA by the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) portrays it as a party which plays “a role similar to Hitler's ‘fifth column’ fascist parties” in order “to build support for the aggression and war schemes of their social-imperialist masters” (E. Klehr, *Class Struggle*, Spring, 1978). Apparently it is useless to remind the CP(ML) that this is precisely the view of the CPUSA that has been advanced by the chief representatives of the political police in this country from the days of the notorious Palmer raids to the even more notorious era of J. Edgar Hoover. They are clearly so determined to build their anti-Soviet united front with U.S. imperialism that nothing, it seems, can dissuade them from such reckless anti-communist propaganda.

Perhaps the most serious shortcoming of the prevailing “left” opportunist critiques of the CPUSA is the tendency to reinforce revisionism by conceding to it the struggles for reform, defense of democracy and peace. This simplistic approach obscures the fact that the CPUSA's opportunism is concentrated in its strategic line on peaceful transition to socialism and the illusions this line spreads within the working class. The CPUSA's strategy and program is essentially reformist, not revolutionary. But to equate revisionism with the struggle for concrete reforms, as the infantile leftist and neo-anarchist critique of the CPUSA has done, is the height of irresponsibility. The CPUSA easily emerges from this confusion appearing “realistic,” “level-headed,” and “responsible”—and the influence of revisionism becomes all the more insidious.

Consequently, a Marxist-Leninist critique of the program and practice of the CPUSA is an indispensable element in settling accounts not only with the revisionist trend, but with the “left” opportunist trend as well. It is also critical in combatting the residue of anarchist, Trotskyist and social democratic tendencies which continue to manifest themselves within the emerging Marxist-Leninist trend.

Finally, this critique is a key element in the rectification of the general line of the U.S. communist movement, the essential precondition to the re-establishment of a genuine Marxist-Leninist party which can take up the critical tasks facing communists and the working class in the U.S.

#### *The Question of State Power*

*“The American Communist Party is one of those few communist parties in the world upon which history has laid tasks of a decisive character from the point of view of the world revolutionary movement... When a revolutionary crisis develops in America, that will be the beginning of the end of world capitalism as a whole. It is essential that the American Communist Party should be capable of meeting that*

*historical moment fully prepared and of assuming the leadership of the impending class struggle in America.” (Speech by J. V. Stalin delivered in the American Commission of the Comintern, May 6, 1929)*

These words of Joseph Stalin, spoken over 50 years ago, help to capture the breadth of historical vision required in determining the tasks before the U.S. communists and working class, and they set the criteria for judging the program and practice of the communist party. In order to be “fully prepared” to usher in the “beginning of the end” of the battle against capitalism, the Marxist-Leninist vanguard in the U.S. will need clarity of direction, firmness in principle, flexibility in tactics, and steadfast determination of an exemplary nature within the international communist movement.

The impact of revisionism has qualitatively obliterated this vision, reducing the CPUSA to a mere parody of a proletarian vanguard, especially in light of the herculean task assigned to it by history. This political and ideological degeneration is ultimately caused by the distortion of the line concerning the central question of power. By obscuring the task of leading the working class in the forcible seizure of the state, revisionism has sapped the revolutionary essence from the CPUSA’s program, leaving only disconnected and empty phrases about “revolution” and “socialism”. The strategic political visions of the party have been lowered to something short of revolution. Consequently, the Marxist-Leninist fiber of the party has steadily deteriorated in all areas of its immediate political work, in its internal organizational life, and in the ideological calibre of its membership. It has become, at best, a party of reform. Therefore, a proper starting point for a more all-sided critique of the program and practice of the CPUSA is with the central question of the seizure of political power and how it is mishandled. This is what we propose to focus on in this article.

Any meaningful critique of the CPUSA must be based on a careful reconstruction of its general line. This is easier said than done, and a number of noteworthy difficulties are encountered in the process.

The CPUSA is carrying out its assigned tasks in an international strategy. Therefore, the program of the CPUSA cannot be fully explained without reference to the general line of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which serves as the thinly-disguised foundation of the CPUSA’s line. In addition, the CPUSA’s maximum program collapses almost completely into its minimum program of immediate political demands. This is not surprising considering the fact that the centerpiece of its strategic vision (the anti-monopoly coalition) obscures the question of political power and distorts the Marxist theory of the state to the point that the distinction between maximum and minimum program becomes almost meaningless.

These difficulties make the reconstruction of the CPUSA’s general

line a fairly painstaking task. In attempting to do so we have drawn from diverse sources—articles and documents of the CPSU, the CPUSA’s theoretical and party congress documents, and articles from the party newspaper *The Daily World*. The party’s mass line invariably drops out the subtle and sophisticated theoretical qualifications which are included in its theoretical documents in order to attempt some consistency with Marxism-Leninism. Therefore an examination of the CPUSA’s mass organs provides us with the party’s *operative* line, the one under which the bulk of the cadres and those on the party’s periphery—as well as those influenced by the party in the mass movements—are actually trained.

### The Essential Character of Modern Revisionism

Criticisms of the CPUSA tend to give one-sided stress to either its flunkeyism toward the CPSU or to its reformist character. The challenge actually is to grasp the synthesis of both these negative influences which characterize not only the CPUSA, but modern revisionism in general.

The world outlook of the CPSU and those parties under its ideological influence to varying degrees (including the relatively independent Eurocommunist parties) is what we designate as modern revisionism. The word “modern” here is important because, while borrowing liberally from its ideological predecessors, modern revisionism is a distinctive trend in the world communist movement in its own right. It is, in fact, the most influential trend in the world communist movement today, the dominant ideological influence in the majority of significant parties.

This opportunist trend is characterized by two ideological deviations: a nationalist deviation centered in the general line of the CPSU and a reformist deviation centered in the principal parties not holding state power. It is the intersection between these two deviations that gives modern revisionism its distinctive character.

The characteristic feature of the nationalist deviation in the CPSU is the steadfast view that all questions before the international communist movement must be subordinated to the interests of the USSR’s economic progress and military security. Inexorably flowing from this assumption is the view that whatever the Central Committee of the CPSU determines is in the best interests of the USSR, likewise determines the general line of the international communist movement.

The general line which the CPSU now advances before the communist movement—and which is embraced by the CPUSA—is referred to in Soviet party literature as the “world revolutionary process.” According to the CPSU, the “world revolutionary process” has three main components: “existing socialism” (the socialist countries headed by the USSR), the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries, and the national liberation movements in the colonial and semi-colonial world.

Of these, "existing socialism" is the most important, "the mainstream of the world revolutionary process" or "the decisive factor of world history" (Boris N. Ponomarev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, *Marxism-Leninism: A Flourishing Science*, 1979).

The ideologists of the CPUSA are less sophisticated in their presentation of the line, attributing virtually every revolutionary advance in the world, from Vietnam to Zimbabwe, as being due *in the first place* to the living presence of the USSR.

The principal proposition of the CPSU's general line is that peaceful coexistence between the imperialist camp and the socialist camp is the basic strategy of the "world revolutionary process." For if the USSR can be politically protected from a nuclear attack by the declining imperialist system, the influence and material resources of the Soviet Union will guarantee a relatively peaceful transition to socialism.

Flowing from this proposition, the key political task for revolutionary forces at the present juncture is the struggle for détente, a struggle which is aimed at isolating the "irrational" sector of monopoly capital and reinforcing the "rational" sector. This struggle must involve the masses in their millions who can make détente "irreversible," thus preventing nuclear war and guaranteeing the security and gradual expansion of "existing socialism."

The characteristic feature of the reformist deviation is the view that accumulation of economic and political reforms won by the working class and the masses will gradually be transformed into a sweeping socialist reorganization of society. Central to this view is a qualitative modification of the Marxist theory of the state in which the state is seen as a relatively neutral institution which happens to be under the domination of the bourgeoisie at the present time.

Flowing from this orientation, the CPUSA's general line for the seizure of state power is a two-stage revolutionary process. In the first stage, the struggle for democracy is won by the masses who manage to break monopoly capital's hold over the state apparatus. The most likely path to this goal is an electoral one, made possible by the fact that forces opposed to monopoly capital constitute an overwhelming majority of the population. Upon taking state power in this fashion, this democratic majority—led by the working class—will be able to guide the next stage of the revolutionary process towards socialism. This advance will be from a position of strength since the "popular" forces will have removed monopoly capital from the helm of the state.

The principal proposition of the CPUSA's general line is that a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism is an increasingly realistic possibility in this period, especially given the growing strength of the USSR. Flowing from this proposition, the key political task for revolutionary forces is forging an anti-monopoly coalition capable of embracing the widest strata of the population. The political program of

this coalition will be massive economic reform highlighted by the goal of full employment, broadening of democracy (including the elimination of racism), and détente.

These two deviations must be grasped in both their distinctiveness and their interpenetration with each other. In short, the nationalist deviation envisions a "world revolutionary process" with the USSR at its center. Its theoretical cornerstone is "peaceful coexistence," and its program is détente. The indigenous reformist deviation envisions a gradualist seizure of political power by the proletariat. Its theoretical cornerstone is "peaceful transition," and its program is the anti-monopoly coalition.

In the pages that follow, we will attempt to draw out and deepen the content of these two intersecting lines as the basis for subjecting them to a rigorous critique.

#### *Nationalist Deviation*

In its most sophisticated form, the nationalist deviation is manifest in a subtle but critical theoretical nuance. Starting with the correct proposition that the *fundamental* contradiction of the present historical epoch is between socialism and capitalism, the CPSU concludes therefore that the *principal* contradiction in the world at the present time is between the "imperialist camp" (headed by the U.S.) and the "socialist camp" (headed by the USSR).

This is a distortion on two counts.

First of all, it is a theoretical sleight of hand that obscures the distinction between fundamental and principal contradiction. "Fundamental" applies to the entire epoch. In this sense, the contradiction between socialism and capitalism—between two modes of production, between two social systems—has characterized this historical epoch ever since scientific socialism became a material force in the world. In fact, this was the case even before socialism itself actually appeared as a consolidated social system through the Bolshevik Revolution. The fundamental clash between the forces of capital and the forces of the international proletariat expresses itself in different forms. The "cutting edge" or most concentrated expression of this fundamental clash takes different forms at different junctures of world history. This "cutting edge" is the principal, as distinguished from the fundamental, contradiction. While it is quite possible that the cutting edge of the international class struggle can be the clash between imperialism and the USSR and its allies, this is by no means true by definition. And to imply so is intentional theoretical obscurantism on the part of modern revisionists.

Secondly, on more empirical grounds, it is not true that the contention between the U.S. and the USSR is the most intense expression of the proletarian assault on imperialism. This is so despite the increasing importance of this contradiction, especially with U.S. saber rattling towards the USSR in recent years. Ironically, it is the overall correct

Soviet policy of maintaining relative military parity with U.S. imperialism which is the main deterrent checking the U.S.-USSR contention from developing into the principal contradiction. Obviously it would be irresponsible for the communist movement not to take into account at all times the state interests of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries—individually and collectively.

The subjective views of the communist movement do not define the principal contradiction in the world. That contradiction exists independently of the opinions of the communists or anyone else and can only be revealed by a careful study of world events, most particularly the principal manifestations of class struggle in any period.

Such a study readily reveals, we believe, that the principal contradiction operative in the period since World War II has been between imperialism headed by U.S. imperialism and the peoples and nations oppressed by the imperialist system. The concrete property and investment options of international capital are shrinking at the hands of revolutionary national liberation struggles. From Vietnam to Nicaragua to Zimbabwe, the trend is crystal clear. Far from faltering, the pace of the class struggle in this arena has greatly intensified in recent years, sharpening the secondary contradictions—i.e., U.S.-USSR contention, class struggle in imperialist countries and inter-imperialist competition. But the center of gravity of this all-sided crisis of imperialism still resides in the battlefields of Asia, Africa and Latin America—and not around the SALT-2 negotiating tables as the revisionists would have us believe.

#### *Some Historical Roots of Nationalism*

The precise tracing of the historical emergence and consolidation of the nationalist deviation within the CPSU is beyond the scope of the present article and is the topic of future study. However, in broad outline, these are some of the main features which help account for the phenomenon.

In the period from 1917 through the Second World War, the defense of the USSR was in fact the principal task facing the international communist movement; as such, it was recognized that the class struggle in particular countries might have to be subordinated to it. By the early 1920s it had already become clear that the Bolshevik Revolution would not spark socialist revolution in the major European countries. The attention of international capital became concentrated on suffocating and destroying Soviet power. Even during the late 1930s when inter-imperialist rivalry began threatening a new world war, the bourgeoisie's underlying class unity was expressed in the understanding that Hitler should throw the might of his fascist armies first and foremost against the USSR.

The internationalist task facing the Soviet proletariat was to hold and consolidate power at all costs, against incredible odds, until the further

maturation of world revolution. Other detachments of the world proletariat viewed the defense of the USSR as a defense of their own strategic class interests, as a defense of socialism. We stress this point because it is not sufficiently appreciated by the communist movement today. An understanding of its significance underscores the irresponsibility of Trotskyism which was prepared to risk losing the international proletariat's first beachhead against imperialism through an adventurist policy that would undoubtedly have provoked an armed attack on the USSR by *all* the imperialist powers. It would have been a grave setback to the world proletariat if the USSR had been lost. If imperialism had been successful in defeating Soviet power before socialism spread elsewhere, the task of opening a new beachhead would have been a hundred times more difficult. The imperialists would have been much more prepared to deal quickly and forcefully with the next outburst of revolution if the USSR had been vanquished. By the same token, the survival of the USSR meant the survival of a permanent rear base area for the revolutionary movements, first in those countries contiguous to the USSR and, in time, in more distant regions.

But the world altered significantly after the defeat of Hitler. Eastern Europe, thanks to the power of the Red Army, set out on the socialist path. The triumph of the Chinese revolution under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) liberated a quarter of the earth's population. Communist-led forces in Korea gained political and military hegemony and were prevented from liberating the entire country only by the massive intervention of U.S. troops. Vietnam was the principal harbinger of the shape of things to come. In that country, communist-led forces, after playing a decisive role in the struggle against Japanese occupation, transformed the anti-fascist struggle into a war for national liberation from French imperialism. The Vietnamese inflicted a decisive military defeat on France and began to tie the U.S. imperialists into a protracted war which came to symbolize the defense of the world capitalist system.

Meanwhile, the revolutionary stirrings in the colonial and semi-colonial world had become unmistakable. Asia, strongly influenced by the success of the Chinese revolution, had become the new front line of the world revolution. The whole African continent was dramatically transformed within a decade. Movements for independence grew up everywhere. In some places, communist forces emerged to lead. In others, bourgeois nationalists became the leading forces. But wherever the imperialist powers refused to negotiate independence, a revolutionary firestorm broke out. The success of the Cuban revolution jolted Latin America, where its effects are being felt to this day.

Ironically, this development was exactly what the Soviet proletariat had awaited so many years—the maturation of the world revolution! After decades of imperialist encirclement of the USSR, stalemate, and a

relatively defensive position, the international proletarian movement had once again moved onto the offensive and had begun to seize more and more territory out of the realm of the imperialist system. However, the Soviet leadership failed to grasp the full significance of this development. Perhaps scarred by the memories of the bitter hardships of encirclement and the vast wartime destruction of their land and people, they had begun to lose confidence in the revolutionary capacities of other peoples.

From a nationalist point of view, the Soviet leadership had been left in a lurch and paid dearly on a number of occasions while waiting for the international proletariat to come through for them. The emergence of the real danger of nuclear attack was the last straw in helping to consolidate this nationalist deviation. The Soviet leadership saw their own country in imminent peril and were not about to entrust their strategic safety *principally* to the revolutionary capacities of the international proletariat. They became especially concerned at being drawn into a confrontation with U.S. imperialism which was not of their own making—whether as a result of some “rash” move by a communist party in Western Europe or through some “local” and “overly zealous” national liberation struggle developing into a major conflagration.

In abandoning the class standpoint of the international proletariat, the CPSU has lost its bearings and perspective on the world revolution. In the first and last analysis, the national interest of the USSR becomes central to every question. This nationalist deviation also has another side which expresses itself in the flunkeyism of the revisionist parties that are oriented toward the CPSU. Flunkeyism in this sense represents the active conciliation of the Soviet nationalist deviation, so that these parties are also prepared to place the national interest of the USSR above the interest of the whole international proletariat. In short, the general line of modern revisionism can only be grasped as a relatively sophisticated theoretical rationalization of this nationalist standpoint.

#### *Reformist Illusions*

The other major feature of modern revisionism is the indigenous impulse toward reformist illusions, especially within the imperialist countries. The material advantage in overall standards of living accruing from imperialism, which in turn serves to cultivate strong traditions of national chauvinism, has long been recognized as a corrupting influence upon the consciousness of the working class in these countries.

Lenin made note of the problems stemming from such conditions when he wrote:

*“It is far more difficult to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct, open, really mass and really revolutionary struggle do not yet exist, to be able to champion the interests of the revolution...in a non-revolutionary situation, among the masses who are incapable of*

*immediately appreciating the need for revolutionary methods of action. To be able to seek, find and correctly determine the specific path or the particular turn of events that will lead the masses to the real, decisive, and final revolutionary struggle....”* (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 31, p 97).

Granted, the task of communists to consciously divert the working class from its spontaneous reformist path of resistance is far easier said than done. However, even the awareness of this historic task is sorely lacking among communists in imperialist countries. This negative phenomenon is in large part due to the fact that as communists successfully struggled to gain a substantial mass base among the proletariat in a number of countries, they began to lose their ideological bearings. In organizing and leading the working class in its immediate practical struggles, at its present state of consciousness, the communist detachment all too often absorbs the nationalist prejudices and bourgeois illusions of the class, rather than diverting it to truly revolutionary consciousness. This is a high price to pay for influence among the workers, and it has remained a central political and ideological problem facing the revolution in imperialist countries since the late 1800s.

In the U.S. this problem has been particularly aggravated by a long tradition of pragmatism and the deviation of “American exceptionalism” with its glorification of bourgeois democracy, suggesting that the course of U.S. capitalism would be qualitatively different than in other countries. The relatively weak foundations of U.S. communism, theoretically and ideologically, have left the revolutionary movement ill-equipped to grapple with the strength and sophistication of the bourgeois state apparatus. Consequently, the CPUSA has always been marked by a strong impulse to stand in awe at the prospects of the revolutionary seizure of power. Conspicuous tendencies toward reformist illusions have been a persistent problem.

It is the intersection and synthesis of the nationalist and reformist deviations which provide the modern revisionist trend with its distinct character. Much of the impulse toward reformism was held in check during the period when the CPSU held a revolutionary line. However, when this line degenerated into opportunism, the indigenous reformism in many communist parties blossomed quickly, especially in the imperialist countries as witnessed in the recent development of Eurocommunism. This particular form of revisionism stems principally from the strong reformist tradition within the communist movements of Western Europe. It is reinforced by illusions of mass parties which are able to play a key role in the politics of their respective countries. Eurocommunists are prepared to go much further in their revisionist formulations than the Soviet leadership. The CPUSA for its part, however, stays safely within the bounds proscribed by the CPSU.

Modern revisionism has proven to be a stubborn trend pervading the

international communist movement. Much of this can be attributed to the fact that the nationalist deviation at the center of this trend is enshrined in the powerful state power of the USSR. In addition, the reformist deviation has extremely deep roots in the very character of imperialist countries and the traditions of their communist movements. Marxist-Leninists should take sober account of this fact and proceed accordingly. The Marxist-Leninist critique of modern revisionism must be unfolded in a thoroughgoing, determined manner. Unfortunately, the anti-revisionist movement has been marked by a negative legacy of relatively simplistic and inconsistent efforts in this area.

### Modern Revisionism's "World Revolutionary Process"

As indicated above, the historical conditions which emerged at the end of World War II provided the material basis for the consolidation of a nationalist deviation in the CPSU. However, the Soviet leadership is not naive. The nationalist outlook dominating the CPSU intersects with the realities confronting the socialist system since the leadership recognizes that the USSR will not be secure nor able to freely grow and prosper so long as imperialism exists. What then is the long-term strategy of the CPSU?

Henry Kissinger once remarked that "the problem of our age is how to manage the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower," noting ruefully that the U.S. is "doomed to coexistence."

It is a reasonable inference from an examination of Soviet policy and theoretical production that the Political Bureau of the CPSU would put the question this way: "The problem of our age is how to manage the elimination of imperialism from the stage of history without provoking it into an act of world suicide. More particularly, how can U.S. imperialism, armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons and ever-hostile to the Soviet Union and the socialist camp, be prevented from launching a desperate war of annihilation against the USSR?"

From this orientation the view developed was that if only war between the U.S. and the USSR could be averted, then the internal contradictions of the imperialist system would ultimately bring it all down. In short, as the CPSU sees it, "The central issue of contemporary world affairs is the issue of war and peace" (B. Ponomarev, *Political Affairs*, March 1979).

This is the nub of the problem. In the long run the Soviet Union and other socialist countries will only be secure with the elimination of imperialism. But revolutionary struggles against imperialism—communist-led national liberation struggles and working class struggles in the capitalist countries—may provoke the imperialists into a suicidal frenzy. The fact that there are nuclear weapons in the hands of the imperialists, therefore, has created the necessity for orchestrating the demise of imperialism through a very gradual process of atrophy in which the system will in effect be suffocated by its own internal contradictions.

Thus, the prevention of thermonuclear war must be the foremost consideration—"the central issue"—for world revolutionary forces.

From this entire set of assumptions flows the CPSU's key proposition that peaceful coexistence—or, in its present formulation, "the struggle for détente"—is the central political question before the world revolutionary movement. This proposition in turn gives rise to several corollaries. National liberation struggles can be encouraged, but with the qualification that they not create undue risks of bringing about a wider war. In areas of obvious major strategic interest to the U.S.—Western Europe, Latin America, and, of course, in the U.S. itself—where prospects for revolutionary successes appear dim in any event, a pledge for a "peaceful, parliamentary path" to socialism can be advanced. This objectively amounts to a "peace offering" to imperialism in return for détente.

In the economic realm, through "peaceful competition," the superiority of the socialist system can be demonstrated to the workers of the capitalist countries, thereby releasing their potential for a gradual and peaceful transition to socialism.

In order to develop our critique of this scenario, it is necessary first to locate these propositions in the context of the CPSU's general line. This line, advanced as a theory of the "world revolutionary process," has been elaborately developed as a theoretical concept (V.V. Zagladin, *The World Communist Movement: Outline of Strategy and Tactics*, 1973), and appears frequently in the propaganda literature of both the CPSU and the CPUSA (e.g., Ponomarev, previous citations; *Program of the CPUSA*, 1979). This theory provides criteria for determining the strategy and tactics of the international communist movement, takes up the question of class forces in the world and in particular countries, defines the main enemy, and establishes the direction of the main blow.

Beginning with the correct view that our epoch is characterized by the transition from capitalism to socialism on a world scale, the CPSU advances the erroneous thesis that the principal contradiction in the world is between the imperialist camp headed by U.S. imperialism and the socialist camp headed by the USSR. On the basis of this thesis, peaceful coexistence becomes the *strategic* line of the international communist movement, with the objectives of preventing a thermonuclear attack on the USSR and gradually isolating the imperialists. Within this theoretical framework, the issues of violent revolution in advanced capitalist countries and national liberation struggles become *tactical* questions which must be subordinated to the overall strategy of peaceful coexistence. Therefore, failure to subordinate such tactical questions to the strategy of the "world revolutionary process" is logically deemed opportunist since it places the interests of a part over the interests of the whole (i.e. the safety of the USSR and the socialist camp).

*The International Division of Labor*

The implementation of this strategy falls to the three main components which comprise the world revolutionary forces: the world socialist system, the working class and anti-monopoly movements of the capitalist countries, and the national liberation and revolutionary democratic movements in the oppressed countries. Although the three components have tasks in common, for example the struggle for peace, détente and disarmament, each is also characterized by specific tasks. As a result, the disposition of forces in the "world revolutionary process" is essentially an international political division of labor with respect to the epoch, i.e., with respect to the transition from capitalism to socialism on a world scale. (There is nothing inherently incorrect with an international political division of labor. In fact this is the basis for proletarian internationalism. The problem is the revisionist line which guides this particular international division of labor.)

Not surprisingly, the world socialist system is portrayed as the main force and the base of support for the other two components. "Existing socialism," according to the CPSU, "is the principal force in the struggle against the danger of war. For that reason anything that is detrimental to its positions, consolidation and growth objectively increases the threat of war" (Ponomarev, *Political Affairs*, March, 1979). The combined economic and military strength of the socialist system strictly curtails the options open to imperialism, and in this respect it is able to challenge and check "the aggressive policies and actions of imperialism in general, but especially of U.S. imperialism" (*Main Political Resolution*, CPUSA, 1979). According to Gus Hall, the role of the Soviet Union means that "the imperialist forces can never again play their old game of gun-boat diplomacy," and as a result "world wars and wars of aggression are not now inevitable" (Gus Hall, General Secretary of the CPUSA, *Political Affairs*, November 1977). Furthermore, the Soviet Union, the most advanced example of a socialist country, has the task of serving as a model in the economic competition with the advanced capitalist countries. This is a key factor in the new epoch, but not the sole determining one (Gus Hall, *Imperialism Today*, 1972). In general, according to this theory, without the leadership and support provided by the USSR and the other socialist countries, no "world revolutionary process" would be possible.

The remaining components are seen as the main reserves of the "world revolutionary process." As one component, the working class and the anti-monopoly movements of the capitalist countries have the task of struggling for democracy and the peaceful transition to socialism. But most important, these struggles must be linked to the key strategic task of the "world revolutionary process" as a whole: the struggle for peaceful coexistence, and more particularly the struggle for détente. In this respect, the communist parties in the capitalist countries have a special

responsibility to promote forms of struggle that will not push the imperialists over the brink. This is not, as a leading ideologist of the CPSU has stated, "to belittle the importance of the working class movement, of its activity in the capitalist world." But the strength and significance of the struggle in the capitalist countries "exists only in connection with the existence and role of the world socialist system" (Zagladin, *Socialism: Theory and Practice*, February 1979). In fact according to Gus Hall, the struggle for détente "is the centerpiece in the struggle against world imperialism...that declares to imperialism: 'You are not now the dominating force. The world is not going to accept your dictates. We are insisting on new rules for the game...that take into account the change in the balance of world forces'" (Gus Hall, *Crisis of Capitalism and No Fightback*, 1975). Détente, then, "is a special form of class struggle" (*Main Political Resolution*, CPUSA, 1975). It facilitates the development of the most favorable conditions for the peaceful transition to socialism, because it facilitates the growing strength of the "world revolutionary process." This in turn assures that imperialism will eventually be weakened to the point where such a transition is possible. In the words of the CPUSA's recent program, "the struggle for peace objectively contributes to making easier the transition from capitalism to socialism while preventing the catastrophic devastation of nuclear war" (*Program of the CPUSA*, 1979).

In short, under the banner of "realism", the revisionists have removed the question of the seizure of power from the immediate agenda of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries and have replaced it with the more "responsible" and "practical" task of struggling for peace and détente.

The other main reserve in the "world revolutionary process" is the national liberation and democratic movements in the oppressed countries. This component, the revisionists admit, provides the arena of sharpest contention between the two systems. The capitalist countries continue to exploit the human and material resources of the oppressed countries, while the peoples of these countries step up their revolutionary democratic and socialist struggles against exploitation and oppression. Thus the progressive forces in the oppressed countries are a major threat to the superprofits and the sources of raw materials required by the imperialist system.

The modern revisionist world view recognizes that the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have the basis to extricate themselves (in varying degrees) from the stranglehold of imperialism. This may or may not require armed struggle. According to the CPSU, however, one thing is certain: the peoples of the oppressed countries cannot consolidate their gains without the support of the USSR and the socialist camp in general. Consequently, the whole strategy becomes self-defeating if any particular national liberation struggle unduly threatens the security of the USSR.



Finally, according to this theory the main enemy is imperialism and especially U.S. imperialism. But within this framework the main blow must be aimed at the "irrational" sector of monopoly capital and its allies. These are the forces scheming to reverse the détente process, the forces who refuse to accept a peaceful surrender negotiated in such a way that it is made as painless (for the capitalists) as possible.

#### *The Revolution Postponed*

From this brief description of the main features of the "world revolutionary process," it can be readily grasped that it serves a rather complex general line. However, at the most decisive level, this theory is a failure. Its assertion that peaceful coexistence and the derivative thesis of peaceful transition to socialism are the central tasks in the struggle against imperialism actually serves to prolong the life of the very system which threatens socialism and the international working class movement. As we have said before, peaceful coexistence is an acceptable tactic for the international revolutionary movement. But when the revisionist line elevates this tactic to the level of a strategy, it subordinates the class struggle and proletarian internationalism to the level of mere tactics. This results in the indefinite postponement of the question of the seizure of state power by the proletariat and its allies, particularly in the advanced capitalist countries.

What this means concretely is the following: within the advanced capitalist countries class struggle becomes primarily restricted to the economic realm, with the "revolutionary" forces committed to achieving their goals through the constitutional process. In terms of the bourgeois state, these "communists" address it chiefly from the point of view of defusing its war-making potential and supporting the "rational" sector of the ruling class.

Within the oppressed countries it means that every effort must be made to either prevent or localize the outbreak of war. In this sense, limited concessions which can be wrested from the imperialists gradually and peacefully are preferable to an all-sided revolutionary program which could lead to a large scale military commitment by imperialism and possibly provoke a confrontation between the U.S. and the USSR.

It is this "moderating" influence of Soviet revisionism which has resulted in the theoretical obscurantism concerning the crucial distinction between proletarian and "progressive" national-bourgeois regimes—the much touted "non-capitalist path of development" which is obviously the course "preferred" to revolutionary armed struggle.

Furthermore, the punch line of the whole strategy is this: as the most advanced expression of "existing socialism," the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU must necessarily formulate the general line and theory for the world revolutionary forces. From this standpoint the CPSU's line will undoubtedly be the correct line for the movement in

virtually all cases. But even where it may not be, open opposition to the line weakens the solidarity of the world revolutionary forces and objectively aids imperialism.

The strategy of peaceful coexistence, as noted above, has led to the novel thesis of directing the main blow at the "irrational" sector of the bourgeoisie, whose isolation increases directly with the growth of that sector of monopoly capital made "rational" by the developing influence of the "world revolutionary process." Here we find a particular political formation, within the bourgeoisie, which is projected as the "real" enemy. The shifting divisions within the bourgeoisie, which are of crucial tactical importance to the proletariat, are invested with an unfounded "fundamental" significance.

However, the leaders of the CPSU are far from fools, and it is unlikely that they have tied the longterm security of the USSR to some "rational" sector of monopoly capital which will see the folly of nuclear war. For one thing, it is a somewhat dubious proposition that such a "rational" sector would maintain its enlightened stance as the crisis of imperialism intensified. For another, it is even more dubious that this "rational" sector would be able to maintain political hegemony over the monopoly capitalist class as a whole when the objective developments of the class struggle make their position in the world increasingly desperate. Therefore, it seems much more likely that the leadership of the CPSU sees the inevitable demise of imperialism in relation to the gradual ripening of its internal contradictions.

#### *The Role of Communists*

The fundamental flaw of this revisionist general line is its *mechanical materialist world outlook*. It rests on the erroneous assumption that because the internal contradictions of imperialism arise spontaneously out of the very workings of the system—that is, the class struggle is not an invention of the conscious forces—then the system will ultimately be brought down by the ripening of those contradictions *without* the leading role of a vanguard revolutionary force.

Of course, the revisionists will heatedly deny this assertion since they take great pains to stress the fact that communist parties have an important, even decisive role to play in their version of the "world revolutionary process." But, lip service aside, the role assigned to the various communist parties consists, in general, of holding the revolutionary process in check, slowing it down and channeling the revolutionary potential of the masses into non-provocative political outlets. In practice, this means that the class struggle is always fought out on the battleground designated by the bourgeoisie, thus "bowing to the spontaneity" of the class struggle. The revolutionary forces are not permitted to go over to the offensive until they have already won an overwhelming majority of the masses over to their side.

This gradualist approach distorts the actual historical dialectic in which the working class is won to revolution. The decisive element in transforming the consciousness of the great mass of workers is precisely the capability of the communist detachment to intervene in the spontaneous struggle, thereby defining the terrain of the class struggle by injecting truly revolutionary content and demands into it. It is through the polarization of the class struggle that millions of workers are won to the party and to communism. The economist nonsense peddled by the revisionists flies in the face of historical experience.

The hallmark of revisionism has generally been to envision the triumph of socialism without the difficulties and hardships of revolutionary class struggle. The CPSU attempts to avoid this problem simply by arguing that "détente is a *particular* form of class struggle in the present era." To hold such a position logically, they must posit an economic determinist view of history which, in the final analysis, sees the triumph of socialism as an inevitability requiring not the forcible overthrow and destruction of the old ruling class but rather an extended process of shoves, nudges and bribes whereby the bourgeoisie can be made to see not only the futility of holding out but the desirability of making an accommodation with the forces of the future.

The qualification inserted into this fantastic view by modern revisionism is that if the capitalists prove recalcitrant, the military and economic strength of the USSR will be the guarantor of last resort for every people's revolutionary aspirations. In fact, argues the CPSU, no revolution can succeed without such a guarantee. Thus the national security of the USSR, the growth of its economic and military strength, and the gradual expansion of "existing socialism" are the decisive tasks of the epoch. It is this proposition, closely linked to the thesis on the centrality of the struggle for peace, which justifies in seemingly "objective" terms the nationalist deviation inherent in the world outlook of the CPSU's leadership.

To us the conclusion is inescapable. While the general line of the CPSU is careful to encompass innumerable references to socialism—even to the dictatorship of the proletariat—its concept of providing imperialism with a painless exit from the stage of history can never become anything but a plan for the accommodation of the working class to capitalism. Its gradual, step-by-step vision of the revolutionary transformation of society will inevitably require the glorification of reformism, reducing the role of the communists to occupying the forefront of the reform struggle. This line of the CPSU totally liquidates the role of the party as a vanguard force which raises the revolutionary consciousness of the working class and instead builds into the party the most retrograde features of earlier forms of revisionism—economism, trade unionism and the worship of the spontaneous movement. In the case of

certain parties in Western Europe who have carried the line of the CPSU out to its logical conclusion, it already gives promise of leading to a tragic reenactment of the class betrayals of the Second International.

### The Struggle for State Power

In opposition to the opportunist strategy of peaceful coexistence which flows from the general line of the CPSU, the Marxist-Leninist view is that to eliminate the danger of world war and nuclear destruction it is necessary to eliminate imperialism. Nothing short of this will do. The implementation of the correct strategy must be based upon the Leninist theory of revolution which advances the world revolutionary movement by "the breaking of the chain of the world imperialist front at its weakest link" (Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism*). This theory upholds proletarian internationalism and the centrality of the revolutionary struggle for state power. Any theory which obscures this point objectively serves the interests of the international bourgeoisie.

Today, the principal contradiction in the world is between imperialism headed by the U.S. and the oppressed peoples and nations of the world. This implies that revolutionary assaults at the weakest link will continue to mature most sharply, as they have for the past three decades, in the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Genuine revolutionary forces must resolutely support the national-democratic and revolutionary struggles in these countries. At the same time it must be reasserted that the decisive assault on the capitalist system worldwide is inseparable from the revolutionary success of the proletariat in the imperialist countries. This detachment of the international proletariat, however, is presently ill prepared to engage the bourgeoisie in revolutionary struggle. Therefore, an important responsibility before genuine Marxist-Leninists in the imperialist countries is the great task of arming the working class ideologically, politically, and organizationally for the final conflict, the revolutionary seizure of state power.

How will the transition from capitalism to socialism be accomplished worldwide? First, let us note that it is precisely because the imperialists are on the defensive and armed with nuclear weapons of mass destruction that the revolutionary role of the proletariat in the imperialist countries must be highlighted and made crystal clear. The only force that can be entrusted with the responsibility to attempt to prevent a nuclear war is the revolutionary proletariat in the imperialist countries which is prepared and determined to seize state power before the advent of war. In order to provide active support to national liberation struggles and to seriously struggle to prevent a frenzied attack on the socialist countries already "lost" to imperialism, it is essential for the proletariat to firmly grasp the role that it must play in the revolutionary struggle to overthrow its own bourgeoisie. Thus, the internationalist tasks and responsibilities confronting the proletariat of the imperialist countries are greater now

than ever before in history.

Modern revisionism, on the other hand, projects a vision of peaceful coexistence and peaceful transition to socialism in which the center of gravity remains with the detachments of the international proletariat which have already gained state power. The class collaborationist nature of this line is partially obscured by "qualifications" and references to the teachings of Marx and Lenin. But modern revisionists, faithful to Bernstein and Kautsky, have charted a course that deprives Marxism of its revolutionary essence. Having lost strategic confidence in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat in the imperialist countries, the modern revisionists advance a line which obscures the struggle for proletarian power and objectively entrusts the task of preventing nuclear war to a highly unstable coalition with the "rational" bourgeoisie.

The opportunism of modern revisionism stands in sharp contrast to the attitude that Marx and Lenin held toward the proletariat. They insisted that the only way to struggle against all the illusions, vacillations, and opportunism that develop within the international working class movement was to continually refocus and underscore the revolutionary tasks placed before the working class by history. Despite numerous setbacks and disappointments, they never called for a lowering of the historic vision and tasks before the revolutionary proletariat.

Unfortunately, these lessons have been "forgotten" by the CPUSA. With the modern revisionist worldview thoroughly internalized, the CPUSA has settled into its "realistic" assignment in the "world revolutionary process."

### The Line of the CPUSA

The strategic task that the CPUSA has set itself to accomplish has been stated concisely by one of its leading ideologists: "With the advent of nuclear weapons and armies of mass destruction, it is necessary to find an approach to socialism which unites the broadest number of people to break the main forms of power of the ruling class before the actual taking of full state power by the working class." (Mike Zagarell, *Political Affairs*, August-September, 1979).

What precisely does this statement mean? By linking the "advent of nuclear weapons" to a new "approach to socialism," the CPUSA has set as its principal task the struggle for détente and a gradualist path to power through the anti-monopoly coalition and its anti-monopoly government. In other words, within the overall "world revolutionary process," the prospects for socialism in the U.S. are considered so dim that the best to be hoped for from the U.S. front in the foreseeable future is the struggle for "peace." Since a "realistic" decision has been made to concede power to the monopoly capitalist class for a considerable time to come, any program which can be misinterpreted as a threat to détente is irresponsible, ultra-"leftist," and adventurist.

An approach well suited to this new situation, then, is an anti-monopoly coalition which in conducting its struggle for détente, can simultaneously struggle for power short of socialism, thus merging the strategic question of power with the tactical question of peaceful coexistence between the U.S. and the USSR. An anti-monopoly government is the strategic goal, a stage where the working class will hold partial state power, i.e., "break the main forms of power of the ruling class." The struggle for socialism recedes into the vague and misty future. Socialism emerges naturally from the anti-monopoly government through which the working class will eventually take "full state power." (Emphasis added.) This view totally obscures the question of how the working class can achieve state power in the U.S. The CPUSA merges the question of power with the question of détente by assigning to the anti-monopoly coalition the twin tasks of struggling for peace and effecting the transition to socialism.

The anti-monopoly struggle represents a distinctive stage in the revolutionary process. The strategic goal of the coalition is to eliminate the political and economic domination of monopoly capital over the economy and the state, through "struggles for democratic and social reforms within the framework of capitalism" (*Main Political Resolution*, CPUSA, 1969). The decisive method of struggle is through the electoral process, since this may lead to a labor-dominated people's anti-monopoly government. The CPUSA notes that the election of this government will sharpen the contradiction between the people and monopoly capitalism and will place on the revolutionary agenda the gradual elimination of capitalism itself. This second stage, however, is merely lip service to revolution and plays no meaningful role in the strategic vision of the revisionist party.

Taken as a whole, the strategy of the anti-monopoly coalition is the centerpiece of the CPUSA's general line. It is a fairly sophisticated line, carefully laced with a number of possible scenarios and qualifications. Consequently, the exposition and logic of the CPUSA's line deserves to be flushed out in more vivid detail.

### *Utopia through the Anti-Monopoly Coalition*

The CPUSA has declared that the basis for its strategy is the spontaneous development of an anti-monopoly consciousness and various forms of struggle against the monopolies and the government. The potential of this spontaneous struggle to become a powerful, organized force can be realized only when it is framed by a very broad anti-monopoly coalition. The role of the CPUSA is to identify issues that will facilitate the unity of this coalition and to help lead in developing organizational forms, demands and slogans that will push forward the work of the coalition. As the anti-monopoly coalition develops, it will struggle through a variety of forms: national and local campaigns on

various issues; economic struggles at the workplace; community struggles; and mass actions in the streets.

Insofar as the forces are concerned, the concept of the anti-monopoly coalition is very broad and includes within it virtually all strata of the population. In general it includes the working class, racially and nationally oppressed peoples, youth, seniors, women, the professional and technical intelligentsia, artists, small business people, farmers, and the non-monopoly capitalists who identify their future with the coalition (Victor Perlo, *The Unstable Economy*, 1974). Thus the coalition is comprised of elements from the working class, the petit bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie. The CPUSA uses the category small business to mean anything "from the corner grocer to firms employing hundreds of workers" (*Program*, CPUSA, 1970), so that it overlaps the category of non-monopolist capitalists. All of these forces are described, generally, as holding anti-monopoly sentiments, but the CPUSA is quick to add that these sentiments are not necessarily anti-imperialist nor usually anti-capitalist. (The fact that anti-big business, pro-imperialist elements tend to fall on the far right of the political spectrum has been conveniently glossed over.)

The leading force in the anti-monopoly coalition is the multi-racial and multi-national working class. The CPUSA's approach to uniting the working class within the anti-monopoly coalition is the left-center alliance, a united front of the communists with militant trade unionists. The struggle against racism is viewed as key, and the strategic alliance of the working class movement and the Black liberation movement, is envisioned as the backbone of the anti-monopoly coalition (*Program*, CPUSA, 1970).

(Thus far, the program would be a reasonable tactical possibility for a Marxist-Leninist party. However, the CPUSA's vision becomes increasingly fantastic.)

As the anti-monopoly coalition develops, it will steadily rally millions of people to its banner—to the point that, eventually, it will represent the majority of the population. The question of working class power will ripen accordingly, and the anti-monopoly coalition will need to find appropriate instruments to exercise that power.

Given the history and traditions of the U.S., a very significant role will probably be played by "an independent, anti-monopoly political party led by labor, committed to a program of radical reforms" (*Program*, CPUSA, 1980). Whether candidates stand for election as members of this party or as Democrats or Republicans is not decisive. What is decisive is that these candidates have an independent political base that is essentially anti-monopoly. The crucial question, then, is how to develop an independent base that includes the majority of the "alienated" electorate which does not presently participate in the electoral process. Some means must be found to draw them into the

arena of electoral politics, thereby opening up the bright prospects of the parliamentary path to power.

In order to achieve the goal of breaking "the stranglehold of the big monopolies on the nation" (Zagarell, *Political Affairs*, August-September 1979), the anti-monopoly coalition should strive to eventually mature into an anti-monopoly government. This momentous event will apparently come about through a combination of election victories of peoples' candidates, supported by other political activities of the left-center trade unions and the mass organizations of the anti-monopoly coalition in general.

Once in office—Oh the wonders this people's government will accomplish as it sets out to implement its program of radical reforms! The anti-monopoly government will "impose drastic curbs on the giant multi-national corporations and banks, including nationalization under democratic control with worker participation, in order to provide for the most urgent needs of the masses." It will "win the struggle against racism and national oppression." It would "drastically slash the bloated military budget and apply the saving to constructive public use, such as providing opportunities for employment and training; guarantying affirmative action with firm quotas and timetables." It would "nationalize the hospital and medical establishment [and] provide free, quality, comprehensive health-care for all." It would "abolish the CIA and the FBI." It would "create artistically the most beautiful cities the world has ever known, cities that would rival and surpass in beauty the cities of the Renaissance . . . adequately planned, with well-designed buildings, with strict measures taken to avoid air and water pollution with plenty of parks and a public education system which encourages young and old alike to develop their artistic talents and their appreciation of the arts." It would "pursue a democratic foreign policy based on détente, respect for other countries and noninterference in [their] affairs." It would eliminate unemployment, end inflation, close tax loop-holes for the rich, abolish all taxes for people with incomes under \$25,000 a year, solve the energy crisis and subsidize small farmers. It would, in short, "win a higher quality of life for all which this beautiful, richly endowed country of ours has the potential for." (All citations directly from the CPUSA, the party press and statements by party leaders.)

Truly a vision of Utopia! Yet the tragedy is that it is being advanced as the program of a communist party. Note that all these radical reforms are projected in a period *prior* to the proletariat taking *firm control* of the state apparatus.

#### *What If the Bourgeoisie Objects?*

However, the CPUSA is cautious enough to admit that the enactment and enforcement of these reforms will involve one of the most intense and fundamental class conflicts in U.S. history. Monopoly capitalist groups

can be expected to bitterly oppose the coalition and these measures at every step. But due to the overwhelming popular support for the coalition, *it is quite possible* that the capitalist class will not resort to unconstitutional and violent means to destroy the anti-monopoly coalition and the people's anti-monopoly government.

Does this mean that the state has played a neutral role allowing the popular forces to develop while holding the ruling class in check? Here we have an example of obscurantism disguised behind an "even-handed" approach. On one hand, Gus Hall admits, "We are in a stage of state monopoly capitalism in which the state takes on a more direct anti-working class role and *less and less that of an impartial mediator*" (Hall, *How to Stop the Monopolies*; emphasis added). Thus, as the anti-monopoly movement develops, the state may well oppose the popular forces through court injunctions, strike breaking, police terror in ghetto neighborhoods, and police-military confrontations with demonstrations. The state, in other words, will be used as a tool by monopoly groups. But the CPUSA is quick to add—this is not the entire story, for the state also has a degree of relative independence and can be influenced by mass pressure and contradictions within the ranks of monopoly capital. The punch line is that the state can be "influenced by mass political trends and is forced at times to act contrary to the interests of some monopoly groups. Thus, in spite of its overall subservient role, it can be influenced, can even be curbed, by mass political struggles" (Hall, *Imperialism Today*). Clearly, the overall message of this scheme is that the vacillation of the ruling class combined with the influence of the mass anti-monopoly struggles provides a very real possibility, almost an assurance, that the anti-monopoly coalition will not be destroyed in its cradle.

How can such a dangerous and illusory politics possibly be given a Marxist-Leninist cover? Not surprisingly, the explanation is rooted in the altered world situation and the new tasks stemming from it. As indicated previously, Gus Hall has argued that the struggle for détente must be "the centerpiece in the struggle against world imperialism." The CPUSA has actually refined this argument so that the struggle for détente is in essence a struggle against the "irrational" sector of monopoly capital that is opposed to détente. According to the CPUSA, for the first time in history, strategic military parity has been reached between the U.S. and the USSR. How to respond to this turning point in history is the basic issue underlying a great division in the U.S. ruling class, a division between its "rational" and "irrational" sectors.

The far reaching implications of this notion of a deep division (to the point of being qualitative) within the U.S. ruling class have been drawn out most clearly by Victor Perlo, the CPUSA's foremost theoretician in the area of political economy. "Historically," Perlo has written, "no obsolete ruling class has gone down to defeat without resorting to

violence and war in order to save itself as long as possible. *But this is no longer open as a rational alternative.*" (How many ruling classes at the moment of their defeat have been "rational"?)

"Hence many capitalists turn to competition in the economic field. Economic cooperation with socialist countries, by offering expanding, stable markets, is one way of striving to do that, and one with increasing possibilities. Thus the more reasonable sections of the capitalist class seek to combine their fundamental competition with socialism, and conflict with their own workers, with peaceful co-existence and economic cooperation with socialist countries."

Perlo then poses the problem: "However, far from all of the most powerful sections of the capitalist class take this reasonable option. History shows more than one example of irrational adventurous resort to war by a doomed ruling class or clique . . . . This poses a new task for Marxist economists, to develop the political economy of militarism and the arms race, of disarmament and the reconversion of industry. This field of economic science involves polemical battle with the ideologists and theoreticians of the military-industrial complex . . . . Marxist economists must prove the harmful effects of militarism and the outside military budgets, the economic advantages of disarmament; they must show how to convert the large reservoirs of scientific-technical know-how and experienced labor force to the really unlimited requirements for improving the quality of life of the entire population, of solving environmental problems, of eliminating poverty and assisting—really assisting—the peoples of impoverished lands." (Perlo, *Political Affairs*, June 1979). The "rational" capitalists can be persuaded, on *economic* grounds, to disarm, so the "irrational" sector won't have the wherewithall to defend itself against the death of the capitalist class!

Thus, Perlo has advanced the curious thesis that a "rational" sector of monopoly capital realizes that it is no longer possible to destroy the world socialist system or to turn back the inevitable tide of the "world revolutionary process." This means, as Perlo has stated elsewhere, that the policy of aggressive wars and even U.S. foreign economic policy, based on the export of capital, can possibly take other forms (Perlo, *Unstable Economy*). The U.S. has been forced by objective circumstances (mainly the growing strength of the USSR) to begin to shift its foreign policy, and "large sections of monopoly capital support the shift because of their own economic interests. Because of this strong support, even though for varying class reasons, the shift in foreign policy can be made *irreversible*." (*Main Political Resolution*, CPUSA, 1975, emphasis added.)

This basic illusion, that U.S. foreign policy can be made "rational," runs like a thread through virtually all major documents produced by the CPUSA. For a foreign policy based upon the "rational" sector of monopoly capital to become irreversible, however, the shift must

become the highest priority of the working class and the anti-monopoly movement. Thus, these forces must utilize this contradiction within the ruling class and direct their struggle at the “irrational” sector of monopoly capital centered in the military-industrial complex and supported by their reactionary political allies—stretching from the AFL-CIO leadership, to certain social democratic and liberal elements in the trade unions and media, to the forces of Zionism, to the “Maoists.” (*Main Political Resolution*, CPUSA, 1975) Apparently, the underlying basis of unity between these diverse “allies” of the “irrational” bourgeoisie is their common anti-Sovietism.

So here we have it. The task of Marxist economists has been modestly reduced to showing how capitalism can be made to work better in a non-imperialist fashion if it abandons war and militarism. Meanwhile, the whole fantastic scheme is tactically predicated on the supposed possibility of forging a united front between the working class and a sector of the capitalist class based on a common commitment to détente and “rational” capitalism. The CPUSA assures us that this “rational” bourgeoisie also has a sincere belief in bourgeois democracy and the spirit and letter of the U.S. Constitution.

Our revisionists have spun for us a fairy tale in which a substantial element of the bourgeoisie is prepared to commit class suicide. What a fortunate development for the U.S. proletariat!

#### *Constitutional Transition to Socialism—Someday*

However, the CPUSA admits that with the ascent to power of a people’s anti-monopoly government, the basic contradiction matures. “The logic of an anti-monopoly government, is to serve as a stepping-stone on the way to the struggle for socialism. The fundamental issue for an anti-monopoly coalition will have to be faced—either destroy monopoly or be destroyed by it.” (Perlo, *Unstable Economy*) As the contradiction between the popular government and the monopoly groups sharpens, “it will become apparent to the majority of the working class and most of its allies that capitalism itself must go” (*Program*, CPUSA, 1980). A protracted period of equilibrium will not be possible, since monopoly groups would then move to reassert their control, probably in a fascist form. Thus the anti-monopoly government must move, while its position is strong, to the socialist stage of the revolution. The “tactical” question that remains is whether this transition to socialism (a transition that will require the full scale nationalization of basic industry, finance, and international trade, etc.) can be accomplished peacefully. From a classic empiricist standpoint, the CPUSA informs us that this burning question “can be answered precisely only in terms of the total situation prevailing at the time of such a transition.” (*Program*, CPUSA, 1980)

However beneath the smokescreen, the CPUSA is prepared to speculate and advance some opinions on this issue—once more il-

lustrating the metaphysical force of “positive thinking.” The party advocates peaceful transition within the U.S. constitutional framework: “We believe this democratic transformation can be affected through the constitutional process [which] contains within its own provisions, especially those for its amendment, the flexibility” that will allow for a peaceful transition to socialism. Naturally, a constitutional amendment abolishing the capitalist form of property would be required, and while this may seem a bit unrealistic, “there is a precedent for it in the constitutional amendment abolishing slave property.” (*Program*, CPUSA, 1966) On the other hand, the party throws in a qualification as a hedge, warning that it would be “naive to think that monopoly capital would be restrained by constitutional scruples from resorting to violence to thwart even the most democratic mandate for a socialist solution. No ruling class has ever relinquished its power passively and voluntarily.” (*Program*, CPUSA, 1980) Therefore, in a slight alteration of an old adage, the U.S. proletariat is being told to “be aware of the worst, but prepare for the best”!

An overwhelming people’s majority is the best guarantee for minimizing monopoly’s capacity to use force. Since the police and the military are the main instruments for violence on behalf of the monopolies, it is especially important to replace “these instruments of repression by democratic structures” before a revolutionary situation matures. “In short, the possibility of averting the monopolists’ counter-revolutionary violence hinges on the degree of success achieved in the present struggles for radical reforms which can weaken or remove monopoly’s grip on political and economic power.” (*Program*, CPUSA, 1980)

After monopoly capitalism’s counterrevolutionary potential has been destroyed by reforms, then what? The CPUSA has stated that to advance to the construction of a socialist society, it is a requirement that “working people take political state power” (*Program*, CPUSA, 1980). However, with nationalization and the introduction of planning, “the role of the state will change” (Hall, *Imperialism Today*). The new government will have the job of “renovation of a bureaucratic state structure” and “the whole machinery of government would have to be completely overhauled” (*Program*, CPUSA, 1970). Thus the CPUSA advocates a particular form of the dictatorship of the proletariat as “the essential condition of socialism” (James West, *Political Affairs*, April 1977) while at the same time maintaining that this dictatorship can peacefully renovate rather than forcibly smash the capitalist state machinery.

What if the anti-monopoly coalition is blocked from maturing into the anti-monopoly government or the anti-monopoly government is prevented from executing the transition to socialism? There is still no need, warns the CPUSA, to lose faith in peaceful coexistence or to resort to

some ultra-“leftist” or adventurist course of action. This is because the U.S. proletariat can rest assured that its powerful anti-monopoly coalition will at least contribute to making détente “irreversible,” thereby advancing the “world revolutionary process.” Even if the question of proletarian power in the U.S. was to be deferred indefinitely, détente would assure the steady growth and strengthening of the socialist camp and the gradual decline of imperialism. In some distant future, the question of revolution would then mature for the U.S. proletariat. The principle of revolution deferred indefinitely — this is the bottom line qualification in the strategy of the CPUSA.

Theoretically, the framework for the CPUSA’s anti-monopoly strategy is based on the general revisionist theory of a two-stage revolution in advanced capitalist countries. Although the CPUSA has referred to the anti-monopoly phase of the revolutionary struggle as preparatory to the conscious anti-capitalist or socialist phase (*Main Political Resolution*, CPUSA, 1979; *Program*, 1966), the party has not explicitly stated that it supports a theory of two-stage revolution. However, there can be little doubt that the party’s leadership holds to such a view since the two-stage theory is “recommended” by the CPSU in the context of the “world revolutionary process” as a whole.

In an important article which first appeared in *Communist*, the theoretical journal of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the author notes that in capitalist society the basic contradiction is between labor and capital, but this contradiction “links and counterposes to each other only the two principal classes of capitalist society.” (Zagladin, *Socialism: Theory and Practice*) However, in modern capitalist society all other strata of society, in addition to the working class, are exploited by monopolies. This gives rise to a closely connected contradiction — between the monopolies and the people, between a part of the bourgeoisie and the nation. What is the correct approach to these contradictions? How is it possible within the framework of bourgeois legality to break with the existing system? The answer must be a two-stage revolution, argues the CPSU.

In stage one, the monopolies versus the people contradiction “is resolved as a result of democratic, anti-monopoly reforms turning over the property of the monopolies to the state.” A power structure must be established in which “one thing is indispensable: keeping monopoly capital away from the helm.” Since this will be a “pre-socialist state, capitalist-type exploitation will continue to a definite, and quite large, extent at state-owned enterprises” as well as privately owned small and medium enterprises where working conditions are especially poor and where the class struggle is likely to intensify. In stage two, “the labor-capital contradiction is resolved in a socialist revolution.”

According to another leading theoretician of the CPSU, the second stage is not on the agenda in the foreseeable future in the U.S. (G.

Shakhnazarov, *The Destiny of the World*, 1979). In Western Europe, on the other hand, “with all due reservations. . . the developed capitalist countries will begin to embark on the road to socialist development at the turn of the century.” In fact, the enlightened bourgeoisie already acknowledge “the inevitable victory of socialism, and only ask for a ‘postponement’ on the plea that the opposition has not yet found a method of avoiding disaster in substituting a new. . . economy for the existing economy.”

This Soviet-revisionist theory of two-stage revolution in the developed capitalist countries, while not advanced explicitly as its theoretical framework by the CPUSA, is in fact completely compatible with the party’s anti-monopoly strategy and merely deepens and clarifies its underlying assumptions and expectations.

In summary, the CPUSA’s general line provides the party’s overall ideological, political and organizational orientation toward the fundamental task of the period: the peaceful, gradual, constitutional seizure of state power in the U.S. From the viewpoint of the revisionists, the present epoch, in which the fundamental contradiction is between socialism and capitalism, is marked by a “world revolutionary process.” The chief guarantor of peace and socialism is the Soviet Union and the world socialist system, whereas the principal enemy is U.S. imperialism. As a component part of the “world revolutionary process,” the U.S. working class and its allies have the key task of making détente an irreversible feature of U.S. foreign policy. This is the focal point in the struggle against U.S. imperialism and at times may take the form of tactical alliances with the more “rational” sector of monopoly capital. To accomplish this task, a broad anti-monopoly coalition is required. In addition to the general task of struggling for peace and détente, this coalition has the particular task of serving as the strategic instrument for the seizure of state power in the U.S. The first stage of the revolutionary process is a struggle to curb the political and economic power of monopoly capital through a program of radical reforms. The second stage is a peaceful and democratic transition to socialism. While a relatively peaceful transition cannot be guaranteed at this time, the inevitable growth of the world revolutionary process and the decline of U.S. imperialism make it an increasingly more likely possibility than ever before.

### Toward a Critique

In developing our critique of this line, let us first note that there can be little doubt that the CPUSA shares the general world view of the CPSU — not simply the positions publicly advanced, but the CPSU’s general line as we have reconstructed it here. This world outlook provides the essential foundation for the party’s reformist vision of class struggle and social transformation. While there obviously exists a very powerful

reformist current which has roots in the party independent of the CPSU, the particular history of this party strongly suggests that the influence of the CPSU is a major source of the revisionist general line of the CPUSA.

Perhaps nothing more clearly demonstrates the confluence of flunkeyism and indigenous reformism in the CPUSA than the party's line on détente. Certainly, we would agree that the struggle for peace and against imperialist military attack upon the world's peoples is a particularly compelling task before the U.S. working class in this period. A revolutionary party in the U.S. must take up the struggle for peace and the prevention of nuclear war as one of its foremost tasks. But to pose détente as the principal task and, on this basis, to lay the ideological foundation for a theory of class peace based on the "rationality" of one sector of monopoly capital is totally defeatist and illusory. The CPUSA's line in essence holds that the U.S. working class and its allies cannot realistically expect to decisively defeat the bourgeoisie, but they might be able to push an ever-larger sector of monopoly capital toward "rationality," thereby "making détente irreversible." In short, the CPUSA's line on the path to revolutionary power is so muddled, confused, and contradictory, that it objectively obscures the issue to the point of abandonment.

For example, how will this remarkable "irreversible détente" be realized? According to the remarks quoted above, Victor Perlo suggests an expansion of capitalist trade with the socialist countries will do it. Thus we have the pleasant view of busy little capitalist beavers competing for the socialist market. But what does this have in common with the fact that the inherent logic of the imperialist system is the never ending striving to expand capital? *Finance capital* whose stock-in-trade is the export of capital is seeking a higher rate of profit than it can find in its domestic market. Can we expect *finance capital* to be satisfied with expanded trade to the socialist countries when the very growth of socialism in the world is steadily shrinking the areas of its investment opportunities? Well, Victor Perlo suggests that Marxist economists attempt to show how capitalism can be made to work without war and militarism. But how is it possible to convince the capitalists to abandon war and militarism, on *economic* grounds, when the *principal* purpose of armaments and militarism is not immediate direct profits, but the overall protection of the territory in which international capital is politically free and unrestricted to penetrate and expand itself at the expense of the proletariat and peoples of the world?

Who can be expected to take such drivel seriously? Certainly not the monopoly capitalists. In a world ripe with revolution they can hardly be expected to cut back on their military arm simply to inject some rationality into their economy. In fact, since World War II brought the Great Depression to an end, the U.S. economy has been heavily

dependent on military spending for its *economic* functioning, military needs aside.

No, Perlo here is advancing the mass line that the CPUSA will put before the workers in the years to come. Détente will not simply diffuse the war danger. It will make capitalism viable. Thus, in 1976, when Gus Hall was the CPUSA's candidate for President of the U.S., his campaign slogan was: "Say 'Yes' to Détente and 5 Million New Jobs."

The *Daily World* spelled out the meaning of it all.

"The wolf is howling at the doors of 10 million jobless workers in the U.S. today. . . . The American people have two weapons that can put the wolf to flight. They are bright and shining weapons with sharp edges. They are waiting for the people to use them. They are as simple as A-B-C.

"One is the six-hour day with eight-hour's pay, which the Communist Party and militant trade unions are demanding. The other is trade with the immense, expanding markets in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries." (*Daily World*, Oct. 23, 1976)

Here is a classical example of a communist party promoting illusions on both the short-term and long-range tasks before the working class. It is typical of the CPUSA that even on the question of peace they cannot go forthrightly before the masses and explain the necessity of preventing imperialist war and aggression. They do not believe that the working class can be won to the struggle for peace unless that question can be tied to the workers' immediate economic interests. Therefore, "détente means jobs."

Can the U.S. working class be forged into a revolutionary force by a party which is afraid to explain the rigors of class struggle, but instead undertakes to make every political demand palatable by sweetening the task with promises of some immediate economic benefits? Thus even on its own terms, as an organizer of the struggle for peace, the CPUSA is a failure, ironically demonstrating the fact that revisionists, in abandoning the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat, actually weaken the reform struggle itself.

In effect, the party's struggle for détente reduces itself to this: the CPUSA propagates, objectively, the nonsense that the principal contradiction in the U.S. is between the "rational" and "irrational" sectors of monopoly capital. There are, of course, shifting and unstable divisions within the bourgeoisie, which the revisionists invest with a qualitative, stable significance. This undoubtedly stems from their own wishful thinking. For détente, by the party's own admission, is dependent upon a "rational" sector of monopoly capital coming to see its virtues. It will be adopted by the representatives of the "rational" sector of *monopoly* capital running the U.S. government. In other words, we are asked to believe that this "rational" sector will adopt a set of policies that will sharply reduce unemployment (capitalism's requisite reserve army of



labor), drastically reduce the rate of exploitation of the working class, preserve peace, disarm, and pursue a non-imperialist foreign policy. Even certain social democrats have shown a little more caution!

### *Distortions of History*

The anti-monopoly strategy, the centerpiece of the CPUSA's general line, is the U.S. version of the general revisionist thesis on the peaceful transition to socialism. There is, of course, nothing inherently revisionist about attempting to forge a broad front against the monopolies. It may or may not be a useful tactical instrument in the class struggle depending on a variety of circumstances. But the key question that must be asked of the revisionists is: What do they expect this anti-monopoly coalition to accomplish in the overall path to revolutionary power? Here is where they surrender Marxism under the banner of "realism."

For the CPUSA, the anti-monopoly concept is analagous to the concept of the popular front which the party claims was the strategic line developed at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935. The anti-monopoly coalition is assigned the strategic task of *achieving state power* and effecting a transition to socialism by peaceful means, in a two-stage process relying principally on electoral politics and the enactment of amendments to the constitution. However, these expectations are flawed on a number of counts.

To begin with, there is a convenient distortion of history. Let us note that the concept of the popular front was developed principally as a *tactical*, multiclass alliance in response to the threat of fascism. The CPUSA has glossed over this in order to justify the fact that it has transformed a tactical alliance with elements of the bourgeoisie into a strategic instrument for the seizure of state power. This is not surprising since a characteristic of revisionism is the tendency to elevate tactics to the level of strategy. Additionally, the CPUSA, bowing to spontaniety, has predicated its whole strategy on the questionable proposition of a mystical reunion of the "alienated" masses with the electoral process. Thirdly, with respect to the peaceful abolition of private property it advances the prospect of passing an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, citing as a precedent the constitutional abolition of slave property. Here the party in an obscene moment of social and historical amnesia manages to forget a few details: the question of slave property was essentially resolved in favor of the industrial bourgeoisie after centuries of struggle by the slaves and by a violent civil war, not by the signing of the 13th and 14th amendments!

The two-stage theory of "revolution" adopted by the CPUSA is modeled on the Russian revolutions of 1917 with one important oversight. Russia was a semi-feudal country. In the Russian revolutions the first stage was bourgeois-democratic; the task was to unite the petit-bourgeoisie and the peasantry under the leadership of the proletariat to

overthrow the tzar and break the hold of the feudal landlords. In the current revisionist theory, since there are no unfinished economic and political tasks of the U.S. bourgeois revolution (i.e., the destruction of the remnants of feudalism), the first stage is viewed as the struggle for "advanced" democracy, that is the beginnings, albeit unstable, of proletarian democracy. This means that within the framework of bourgeois legality the anti-monopoly forces are seen as struggling for and accomplishing a program of pro-working class political and economic reforms which actually seize significant portions of power from the bourgeoisie: nationalization of key industries; abolition of the political police; democratization of the army; elimination of unemployment, etc. Thus in the revisionist theory the first stage of the revolution is an eclectic hodgepodge conferring on the anti-monopoly coalition tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat within the continuing framework of bourgeois legality and state rule.

### *Limits of "Legality"*

What is the significance of these points? Simply put, it would be impossible for the working class and its allies to carry out such a program — even discounting the flights of fancy that appear therein — on the basis of bourgeois legality. The entire legal system is designed to protect bourgeois property. And the ruling class has never relied on the ballot for its power.

If the ideological machinery of the country is still in the hands of capital — as we must assume it will be so long as the government proceeds "legally" — it would undoubtedly be used to reinforce the hold that bourgeois ideology will inevitably still have on the outlook of at least a substantial sector of the masses. Thus, the struggle for a popular consensus will not be nearly as simple a matter as the party projects.

Therefore, no anti-monopoly government could enact this program and still operate within the framework of bourgeois legality. But as soon as it stepped outside of the bourgeois legal framework, monopoly capital would be able to call on the armed might of the state. In other words, if the CPUSA holds to its scenario of not going beyond the legal process to enact its program, that program cannot be realized.

It is readily clear that what the CPUSA has produced is not a strategy for the seizure of power. Its anti-monopoly coalition will strive for power legally and will not step beyond those limitations, not being "adventurist" and relying on *détente* in the long run. But that very legality will prevent it from carrying out its program in a period when the capitalists can be expected to utilize every stratagem at their disposal to block its efforts.

### *The Nature of the State*

The capacity to substitute such a fantastic fairytale for a communist party's guiding line for the seizure of state power in inextricably bound up

with distortions of the Marxist theory of the state.

The capitalist state, in one sense, does have a relative measure of independence in serving the interests of the ruling class. Because contradictions exist within the bourgeoisie, particularly around the question of how to wage the class struggle, the state can be relatively independent from any one sector of the bourgeoisie. Otherwise it would be impossible for the state to moderate the conflict between classes in a manner which perpetuates the rule of the entire bourgeoisie. In other words, the capitalist state must retain the flexibility to grant concessions as well as issue dictates in the great conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, in international struggles, and in resolving contradictions within the ruling class itself. But it does these things in order to serve the strategic interests of the capitalist class as a whole.

Now the CPUSA is careful not to deny that the state is tied to the capitalist class at all levels or that the state is an instrument of the capitalist class. However, the CPUSA has turned the relative independence of the state into a principle. The party has fetishized the moderating role of the state, and in so doing, has adopted a thoroughly superstitious view toward the question of state power. For the CPUSA the state is an essentially neutral entity which can be seized bit by bit and turned gradually to the purpose of a particular class. Thus, the capitalist state is not the material expression of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Rather it is "an impartial mediator" transformed into an instrument of the bourgeoisie, an "accomplice" of imperialism. The CPUSA confuses moderation with reconciliation and suggests that the state's claimed capacity to stand above society as a mediator has been compromised through the willful design of monopoly capital. Therefore, it is not a far jump in the logic to conclude that it can be transformed into a truly democratic instrument which serves the interests of the people.

The CPUSA, then, views the state as an accomplice of imperialism, an instrument of the bourgeoisie, but nevertheless in essence a distinct, separate entity. This orientation toward the nature and role of the state allows the CPUSA to bypass the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the relations of private property. What is substituted is a "revolutionary" democratic stage in which the capitalist state secures the program of the anti-monopoly coalition, thus postponing the dictatorship of the proletariat until the second stage of the "revolution." But actually the question of the seizure of state power by the proletariat is so hopelessly muddled in the process that, objectively, the party has abandoned the Marxist theory of the state, postponing the question of power indefinitely.

A brief review of the Marxist theory of the state can serve to highlight these distortions by the CPUSA. To quote Lenin:

"According to Marx, the state is an organ of class *rule*, an organ for the

*oppression* of one class by another; it is the creation of 'order,' which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between the classes."

"Bourgeois states are most varied in form, but their essence is the same: all these states, whatever their form, in the final analysis are inevitably the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*. The transition from capitalism to communism is certainly bound to yield a tremendous abundance and variety of political forms, but the essence will inevitably be the same: *the dictatorship of the proletariat*." (Lenin, *State and Revolution*, emphasis in the original)

In Marxism the theory of the state and the theory of the dictatorship of the ruling class are identical; there is only one theory. This theory is concerned with the concept of *state power*, the political power of the ruling class. Bourgeois democracy is a particular form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. This dictatorship is not a government or a particular set of political institutions. It is the *political power of a ruling class*, a concept which embraces all of the social relations required by class dictatorship, including the state, forms of property, and relations of exploitation. In practice the political power of the ruling class, the state power, is expressed materially in the form of a state or state machine whose principal aspect is a repressive apparatus, the military, police, courts, prisons. The state is the embodiment of the dictatorship, the instrument through which the ruling class exercises its dictatorship.

In the U.S., the state may display great facility in moderating class conflicts, but it is nevertheless essentially an embodiment of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. It cannot be transformed piecemeal. The proletariat must seize state power, smash the state apparatus, and replace it with a state that is the embodiment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the political power of the proletariat as the ruling class. This is the only way in which the question of state power can be essentially settled by the proletariat.

Whereas Marxism asserts that the state is the embodiment of the dictatorship of the ruling class, the CPUSA adopts the view that the state is a particular constellation of political institutions which can be taken over peacefully and transformed into an instrument of non-capitalist power. Thus the CPUSA has abandoned the kernel of the Marxist theory of the state (i.e., the dictatorship of the ruling class), while retaining the superficial idea that the governmental apparatus is the instrument of the ruling class. Accordingly, the party describes the development of what it calls state monopoly capitalism as a further *intrusion* by monopoly capitalism into state affairs rather than as a particular manifestation of bourgeois state power. This is nothing more than a bourgeois theory of government with a Marxist cover. It leads to the conclusion that these intrusions can somehow be curbed and reversed by the election of a

system of administration that is prepared to fight for a program of radical reforms — “government of the people, by the people, and for the people”! Thus the CPUSA maintains that an anti-monopoly state power is the likely intermediary form in the transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In fact, it sees no other “realistic” means to accomplish the transition to socialism; to even suggest that it might not work out so neatly is considered adventurist and irresponsible.

#### *Ideologically Disarming the Working Class*

The principal political result of this distortion is that the question of state power is obscured to the point that it is not on the agenda of the proletariat in any meaningful sense. The dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism, the transition between capitalism and communism is no longer a possibility within the foreseeable future. The proletariat, bogged down in illusions and deprived of political power, must content itself with the economic struggle and the illusion that a particular set of reforms of the political institutions may quantitatively add up to socialism.

If this revisionist nonsense were destined to become merely an irrelevant illusion held by the leading theorists of the CPUSA, we might well dismiss it lightly. However, such a line can become a material force among the politically advanced sectors of the population and thereby can pose a substantial danger to the proletarian struggle.

There is good reason that Marx and Lenin insisted on the dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary instrument for revolutionary transformation. There is good reason that they insisted on the necessity of “smashing and destroying the ready-made state machinery” of the bourgeoisie. Such steps are indispensable for actually securing revolutionary power. It is the height of betrayal for the CPUSA to advance a program whose content requires proletarian dictatorship, while at the same time advocating the pipe-dream that somehow substantial parts of this program can be realized *before* the power of the bourgeoisie has been smashed.

The danger has already been played out in the history of European social democracy, and in another way, in Chile. The danger is attracting advanced, militant workers in the name of revolution, and then corrupting them ideologically, diverting them to attractive illusions about the nature of bourgeois democracy and the possibility of peaceful transition. The effect is to consolidate the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie — which can take the form of bourgeois democracy, or bourgeois fascism. In the case of the latter development, the price of distorting the Marxist theory of the state is not merely one of theoretical inconsistency. Revisionist illusions can result in needlessly sacrificing the front line fighters of the working class upon the altar of opportunism.

In short, the principal feature of the CPUSA’s revisionism is not, as is frequently asserted, the thesis of peaceful transition from capitalism to

socialism. Rather it consists — as it always has — in the fundamental distortion and ultimately the complete abandonment of the Marxist theory of the state. This point has considerable significance in a scientific critique of modern revisionism since any charlatan can hold up the possible necessity of revolutionary violence and armed struggle *in general* or as an abstract theoretical qualification. So we can find Gus Hall, for instance, declaring: “Any revolutionary working class party that either closes its eyes and says nothing, or even worse, gives the impression that because of the new world balance of forces which enhances the possibility of a peaceful transition, the capitalist class is going to surrender to the inevitable, is dealing in dangerous illusions.” (*Daily World*, March 5, 1977) However such pronouncements are rendered meaningless when a party’s general line, political program and ideological orientation are all based upon cultivating illusions about the nature of the bourgeois state and the laws of antagonistic class struggle. This is precisely the case with the CPUSA. The distortions and abandonment of the Marxist theory of the state has enormous implications for virtually every problem that the party addresses. Consider the following, written in 1976 during the presidential election campaign (*Daily World*, August 12, 1976). “Behind these two immediate issues [unemployment and inflation] there lies an overall problem — what to do about monopoly capitalism’s control of the economy and the government, *that is, to what extent can this control be restricted and eased?*” (Emphasis added) As if to underscore the hopelessly reformist outlook implicit in this view, the author adds the gratuitous note that, “This problem is not even mentioned by Carter” — as opposed to our Communist candidate!

#### *A “Policy” Change*

Three years later, Gus Hall put it this way: “There is only one solution to the problems — a radical break with the monopoly-oriented policies of the past and their replacement with a working class-oriented, people-oriented policy. The military budget has to be slashed. This is now an urgent objective economic necessity. Unless this is done, we cannot even begin to extricate ourselves from the mess.” (*Daily World*, August 23, 1979)

There are several noteworthy points in these commentaries. The most obvious, of course, is the view that monopoly capital’s “control” over the economy and the government is subject to being “restricted and eased” under the conditions of capitalism. The clear implication of this view is not merely the blatant absurdity that under the conditions of monopoly capitalism, the economy can somehow be eased from the grasp of monopoly control; but also the classical revisionist view that the state is a relatively neutral institution which happens to be controlled by monopoly capital at the present time but which can conceivably be freed from

that class control by an anti-monopoly coalition short of the dictatorship of the proletariat. What's needed is a change in "policy," not a change in the class in power.

This is likewise the clear implication in Hall's call for "a radical break" with monopoly-oriented, imperialist-oriented policies and replacing them with a "working-class oriented policy." But there is only one way in which the state can qualitatively adopt a "working-class-oriented policy," and that is by becoming a working class state. According to the CPUSA, however, the *bourgeois* state may actually accomplish this remarkable change in "policy."

Further, the use of the word "policy" is itself strikingly suggestive of Hall's underlying outlook. For in keeping with the CPUSA's view of the struggle between the "rational" and "irrational" sectors of monopoly capital, it is inevitable that its call should be to solve the glaring problems of objective capitalist economic irrationality with a change in "policy" rather than in a change of system.

On this matter of "policy," it's worthwhile recalling Lenin's criticism of Kautsky in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*:

*"The essence of the matter is that Kautsky detaches the politics of imperialism from its economics, speaks of annexations as being a policy 'preferred' by finance capital, and opposes to it another bourgeois policy which, he alleges, is possible on this very same basis of finance capital. It follows, then, that monopolies in the economy are compatible with non-monopolistic, non-violent, non-annexationist methods in politics. It follows, then, that the territorial division of the world, which was completed during this very epoch of finance capital, and which constitutes the basis of the present peculiar forms of rivalry between the biggest capitalist states, is compatible with a non-imperialist policy. The result is a slurring-over and a blunting of the most profound contradictions of the latest stage of capitalism, instead of an exposure of their depth; the result is bourgeois reformism instead of Marxism."*

Finally, the outlook in both Hall's statements is that of the liberal reformer who takes responsibility for trying to deal with the fundamental problems of capitalism from the standpoint of assuming the maintenance of the capitalist system. This is completely different from the standpoint of struggling to wrest concessions of every kind from monopoly capital. The revisionists are fond of using the antics of the infantile leftists to cover their own errors. They ridicule those who shun or downplay the significance of the reform struggle, while they themselves reduce their strategy to a struggle for reforms. Communists, on the other hand, understand that the struggle around immediate demands is a key building-block in the forging of revolutionary class consciousness. This is completely different from *reformism* which attempts to improve

the system of exploitation and oppression or to devise more rational, non-revolutionary solutions to the fundamental problems of capitalism. Reformists promote illusory expectations of what the working class can win short of revolution. Communists recognize that every concession won by the workers is wrenched from the hands of the capitalists; that the harsh lessons of the class struggle for reforms must be utilized to point the working class toward the ultimate revolutionary solution. The task of the communists is to combat political illusions among the working class, and to train and lead the class in the enormously difficult task assigned to it by history of seizing state power and then leading society in its transformation. Nothing short of socialist revolution can accomplish this.

In short, the general line and practice of the CPUSA abandons the historic task of the communist vanguard by fostering all sorts of reformist illusions within the U.S. working class. It does this principally by obscuring the central question of the seizure of state power. It commits the general revisionist error of separating the class struggle from the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat. More particularly, it assigns to the anti-monopoly coalition and its government the tasks which can only be carried out by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels wrote: "Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations," in which "the first step in the revolution by the working class, is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy. The proletariat will use its *political supremacy* to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class..." (emphasis added). It is clear from this passage that the founders of scientific socialism held that in order to carry through "the most radical rupture with traditional property relations," the proletariat must *first* hold state power, expressed as the dictatorship of the proletariat. As we have seen, the CPUSA maintains that this rupture will begin *before* the proletariat seizes state power. This "shade of difference" is at the heart of our claim that the CPUSA has abandoned revolution and is at best a party of reform.

### All-Sided Degeneration of the CPUSA

Opportunism on the central question of the proletariat's path to political power opens the way for the all-sided degeneration of the party. Having abandoned the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state, the CPUSA has been obliged to separate the class struggle from the question of political power. The result has been the consolidation of a staggering

economist deviation affecting all areas of the program and practice of the party. Again to quote Gus Hall:

*"At a time when the economic questions and problems faced by the people, and in the first place by the working class, have emerged onto the very center of the stage, we have tended to move away and ignore them, or to deal with economic questions as one of the many we have to deal with. As a party we are not sharply, clearly and consistently focused on the class struggle as the main point of reference. We are not sufficiently involved or concerned with economic problems or economic struggles of workers... The main line of our party must be a fight for the living standards of the workers and the people, to fully support the workers in their strikes for increased wages and improved living standards... We have to keep emphasizing the basic Marxist-Leninist tenets: that in the struggle for human rights under capitalism the main arena of struggle is the class struggle; the main issues of contention are in the economic sphere; the main force in that struggle is the working class. Therefore, for us that is the main point of reference."* (Hall, *Economic Struggles—The Decisive Arena, Political Affairs*, July 1978. Emphasis in the original.)

Compare this with Lenin's approach:

*"We are all agreed that our task is the organization of the proletarian class struggle. But what is class struggle? When the workers of a single factory or a single branch of industry engage in struggle against the employer or employers, is this class struggle? No, this is only a weak embryo of it. The struggle of workers becomes a class struggle only when the foremost representatives of the entire working class of the whole country are conscious of themselves as a single working class and launch a struggle that is directed not against individual employers, but against the entire class of capitalists and the government that supports that class. Only when the individual worker realizes he is a member of the entire working class, only when he recognizes the fact that his petty day to day struggle against the individual employers and individual government officials is a struggle against the entire bourgeoisie and the entire government, does his struggle become a class struggle."* (Lenin, *Our Immediate Task*).

With Lenin's comment as a foil, it becomes apparent that Gus Hall's narrow political vision is more fitting to that of a militant trade unionist and not that of a foremost spokesman for the communists. The fight for the immediate economic interests of the workers, declares Hall, must be nothing less than *"the main line of our party."* His mechanical materialist viewpoint safely locates the class struggle as an expression of the workers' immediate economic struggle rather than an expression of the working class' ultimate struggle for state power. The universal lesson which emerges once again is that the slightest blurring of the central

question of seizure of state power inevitably tends to separate the class struggle from the question of political power, resulting in a proliferation of reformist and economist nonsense attempting to pass itself off as revolutionary Marxism. The CPUSA's flunkeyism and subservience to the revisionist line of the CPSU serves only to aggravate and reinforce this problem ten-fold.

Hall's comments here are indicative of the reformism which has come to pervade every aspect of the CPUSA's program and practice, a detailed critique of which is beyond the scope of this article.

What this helps demonstrate is that the CPUSA today is in the grip of a reformist current so deep and so pervasive that it is extremely doubtful that a rectification of the party's general line could be effected internally, other than in the most formal and superficial sense. For the years of toadying and the legacy of economism and reformism which, while a current throughout the party's history, became especially unchecked in the period after 1957 with the formal adoption of the party's revisionist general line, has produced a profound ideological degeneration within the party ranks. This party has completely lost its class stand and is incapable of effectively representing the longterm interests of the U.S. working class. It has qualitatively abandoned the methodology of Marxism-Leninism, pragmatically dredging up a quotation here or a "principle" there in order to justify a current political position, but totally divorced from the use of Marxism-Leninism as an analytical science of revolution. In short, this party has become so corrupt ideologically that it has lost its vision of the future, as well as its determination and stamina to lead the U.S. proletariat through all the difficult twists and turns till victory.

Even, for the sake of argument, if the CPUSA formally adopted a revolutionary line sometime in the future, it would still have to be restructured from top to bottom and its cadre would have to be completely retrained as Marxist-Leninists. This is an important point. Therefore, although we call upon our trend to take the CPUSA far more seriously than the "new communist movement" of the 1970s had been prone to do, it is equally clear that the basis no longer exists to seriously consider attempting to rectify the general line of the U.S. communist movement from within the organizational framework of the CPUSA. The U.S. Marxist-Leninist party must be re-established upon new foundations.

While the opportunist general line of the CPUSA has served to deepen and consolidate the party's ideological corruption, the line itself has roots in profound ideological weaknesses that historically are not the sole possession of the CPUSA but have plagued the overall working class movement in the U.S.

*Mechanical Materialism*

The philosophical underpinning of the CPUSA's flawed world outlook is mechanical materialism. This view might well be described as "pure" or "literal" materialism. It tends to see as "real" only that which is tangible and immediate. It understands that, in the final analysis, the organization of society to carry out production is the materialist basis of consciousness. But mechanical materialism does not at all attempt to grasp the active dynamic (dialectic) that prevails between matter and consciousness, economics and politics, base and superstructure, practice and theory, or the objective and subjective factors in history. In its crudest expression—economic determinism—mechanical materialism holds that all human behavior can be accounted for and is motivated by only immediate economic self interest. This is the point of view that the CPUSA holds in common with the bourgeoisie. It explains why the CPUSA feels compelled to translate the struggle for peace into the struggle for jobs, or why Gus Hall can reduce the essence of the class struggle to the struggle for defense of the workers' living standards.

Just as the mechanical materialist tends to hold the view that if you can't see it or touch it yourself, it may not be real, so too the economism of the CPUSA believes that the workers can't see beyond the reality of their jobs or their pay checks or their immediate conditions of life, and that they cannot be trained to envision themselves *as a class which is capable of taking over and running society*. From this it is not a far step to the revisionist viewpoint that socialism must be gained gradually, piece by piece, each gain made possible by the fact that the next immediate step is visible and therefore real. For the mechanical materialist there is no dialectical *leap* from quantity to quality nor the understanding that a revolutionary *idea* may become a material force when it is taken up by the masses, even before it is concretely realized in life. (In fact, the essential feature of the revolutionary seizure of power must first become a material force in the minds and activities of the advanced sector of the proletariat *before* it can ever be accomplished!)

Failure to firmly grasp the dialectics of materialism is what accounts for the fact that among the CPUSA's membership and supporters the very notion of the party's "maximum program" is practically unknown. The CPUSA is the sum total of the demands of its "minimum program." The essential historic task of the communists to conduct independent ideological and political work among the working class to encourage it to see beyond the immediate struggles has been completely surrendered by the CPUSA. The future has been subordinated to the present, strategy subordinated to tactics, revolution to reformism.

The most prevalent expression of mechanical materialism in the CPUSA—indeed, in the U.S. communist movement in general—is pragmatism. This outlook is most virulently expressed in the general

contempt for theory which pervades U.S. life, ranging from crude anti-intellectualism of mainstream bourgeois philosophy to the clamor for "palpable results" which continues to be the fetish of large sectors of the communist movement and is certainly characteristic of the CPUSA. Pragmatism in the U.S. is rooted in the philosophical worship of "know-how," made possible by the relatively unencumbered development of capitalism in a country without a feudal legacy. Reformism disguised as Marxism is a clear political expression of pragmatism since it exalts the achievement of immediate and practical goals over the much more difficult to realize long-range goals of the working class. Likewise, it exalts the tangible qualities of practice over the "abstract" nature of theory.

This negative phenomenon is not, of course, new nor exclusive to the communist movement in the U.S. Marx and Engels had occasion to criticize such views which were current in the European movement in their own time. With mocking sarcasm they ridiculed the pragmatists of their day:

*"Instead of laying stress on far reaching aims which frighten away the bourgeoisie and after all are not attainable in our generation, it (the party) should rather devote its whole strength and energy to those petty bourgeois patchwork reforms which, by providing the old order of society with new props, may perhaps transform the ultimate catastrophe into a gradual, piecemeal and as far as possible peaceful process of dissolution."* (Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*)

Some day, those words will be inscribed by the re-established Marxist-Leninist party as the fitting epitaph for the revisionist CPUSA.

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