

S P A R T A C I S T L E A G U E

I N T E R N A L D I S C U S S I O N B U L L E T I N

M A R X I S T T H E O R Y A N D D E F O R M E D W O R K E R S S T A T E S

- Letter on the Cuban Question by Bill Logan, SL/ANZ, 21 March 1973; with Cover Letter to Central Committee-SL/US by SL/US N.O., 21 April 1973
- Letter to SL/US N.O. by Frank B., 23 May 1973
- Guerrilla Movements and Deformed Workers States by Joe Vetter, with cover letter, 26 May 1973
- Letter to PB-SL/US by Bill Logan, 1 June 1973
- Motions on the Discussion by PB-SL/US, 10 June 1973
- When Did East Europe, China and Cuba Become Deformed Workers' States? by Joseph Seymour, received 24 June 1973
- Draft Addition to MB#8 Preface adopted by PB-SL/US, 8 July 1973; with Introductory Note by J.R., 26 June 1973
- The Fight in the United Secretariat: Reformist Appetite versus Guerrillaist Centrism [extract], 9 July 1973
- Letter to David S. by Bill Logan, 19 July 1973

New York
21 April 1973

Central Committee,
Spartacist League

Dear Comrades:

Enclosed is a document by comrade Logan of the SL/A-NZ on the Cuban Question. It will be discussed at an enlarged PB meeting projected for the May-June period. Comrades are encouraged to do collateral reading in preparation for that discussion.

Comrade Logan's document takes issue with the 1961 "transitional state" theory of Hage (accepted by Wohlforth for a time and imposed upon the balance of the then SWP minority as "our" position in the June 1961 SWP National Convention discussion period). The unagreed with, but publicly presented, Hage position was an early source of friction within the tendency.

In the SL/US an explicit reckoning with Hage's position came only in the fall of 1964 in the context of a class series in New York (and given again in 1968 in expanded form). Mimeographed outlines and reading lists of the two class series were made at the time and have been used since for internal education.

Other possible topics for the projected PB meeting are:
1. international movement; 2. Workers Vanguard; 3. trade union perspectives; 3. SL organization--N.O., strengthening existing and consolidating new local committees; 4. the Equal Rights Amendment; 5. the RCY; 6. opponent work.

Comradely,
Jim Robertson

LETTER FROM LOGAN ON THE CUBAN QUESTION

Australia
21 March 1973

James Robertson
New York

Dear comrade Jim,

...In brief, I think that Shane Mage did not break fully from bureaucratic collectivism, that this is manifest in his (and Wohlforth's) concept of a transitional state in Cuba (expounded in MB #8), that this concept has affected much of our early writing on Cuba, that it constitutes a flaw in our anti-Pabloism which weakens our propaganda armoury in the struggle for the rebuilding of the Fourth International, and that from the correction to this flaw will flow some slightly unexpected theoretical consequences.

Mage's Bureaucratic Collectivism

We were sent recently a copy of Mage's The Hungarian Revolution (Young Socialist Forum, Berkeley, 1959), written in the left wing of the YSL. You will have noted the bureaucratic collectivist tint which colours the whole of this document and becomes explicit at least twice. On page two and three Mage distinguishes between his position and the SWP's on the nature of the Chinese revolution: "I hold to the 'illusion' that the Chinese revolution represents a progressive historical event...[T]he Socialist Workers Party... agrees with me on the Chinese revolution and further believe that all the Stalinist states are 'degenerate' or 'deformed' proletarian states." On page five he uses the classical state capitalist and bureaucratic collectivist argument against the deformed workers state theory: "...the proletariat, inherently a propertyless class, cannot rule except directly and politically, i.e., through its own class organisations of the 'soviet' type." I presume that one of the reasons for the postponement of the publication of MB #6 (which I believe is to include this material) lies in the necessity of writing an introduction covering these points.

MB #8, Cuba and Marxist Theory

The centrepole of MB #8 is that Cuba went through a phase of being a "transitional state" as an essential part of the process of becoming a deformed workers state. Of this "transitional state" which is so central to our attack on Pabloism I am tempted to ask "Not a Workers and Not a Bourgeois State?" and it seems almost certainly to derive from bureaucratic collectivism. However, peculiarities of MB #8 give the impression that you know the point. I refer particularly to the second and third paragraphs of the preface, and more importantly to number six of your "Notes on the Cuban Discussion..." dated April 1963. Referring to Wohlforth's "Cuba and the Deformed Workers States" you say:

"Section 4, the State in Transition, has throughout a rather superficial quality. At one point Wohlforth was reduced to taking refuge in some dubious 'dialectics'

to slide over difficulties in his explanations. These difficulties arose out of not paying sufficient attention to the prior history and nature of the newly victorious states which had won in geographically separated dual power situations, i.e., civil wars."

You are saying this in a "Summary of remarks made in oral discussion" and it is parenthetically noted at the end that it is an "expurgated version" for use in a public class. I would not be surprised if part of what you expurgated was a more trenchant criticism of Mage-Wohlforth's fundamentally reformist conception of a "transitional state," so it suffices for me to look at two sentences, both from page five of Wohlforth's contribution to MB #8:

- (i.) "Shane properly challenged the majority to define the nature of the Chinese state between 1949 and 1952-53 when the party claimed it to be a deformed workers state."

Wohlforth has conveniently pointed in anticipation to a contradiction between the Spartacist view of the Chinese revolution and the Spartacist view of the Cuban revolution. Whereas the position on China consistent with our view of Cuba in MB #8 would be that China was at this stage some sort of "transitional state," the orthodox Spartacist position is that it was a deformed workers state from 1949 (see "Chinese Menshevism," Spartacist #15-16, p.9):

- (ii.) "I will...state categorically: all the emerging deformed workers states--Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Cuba--went through transitional periods of time during which a Bonapartist state apparatus administering a capitalist economy was transformed into a state apparatus still Bonapartist, administering a nationalized economy."

This flies in the face of the Marxist theory of the state as armed bodies of men protecting a property form, but then, a reading of the SWP's Education for Socialists on Class, Party and State and the Eastern European Revolution shows that Wohlforth shares his problems in this area with the whole of the Fourth International in the 1949-51 period. The "Genesis of Pabloism" (Spartacist #21) comes to account with this section of Trotskyist history without devoting more than parts of two sentences to it. On page seven of Spartacist #21 the nature of Eastern Europe at this time is characterized as "...capitalist economic institutions but the state power held by the occupying army of a degenerated workers state..." And on the following page in a parenthetical remark it is noted that "in the immediate post-war period an examination of native property forms would hardly suffice since the state power in Eastern Europe was a foreign occupying army, the Red Army." (This is quite correct of course, but we should do something fuller some time on this question which is theoretically central to the emergence of Pabloism.)

An extract from my notes on this question (dated 13/2/1972 and scrawled on the back of the relevant Education for Socialists) is pertinent to the Cuba discussion:

"...(2.) The class nature of a state is determined by which property form the dominant bodies of armed men will

stand for. This is not a matter of whether the economy is in fact capitalist or socialist [meaning here, based on nationalised production in the absence of a bourgeoisie], but which will eventually tend to predominate under the power of the state. The programme articulated by the officers of the state, or the social composition of the council of ministers is not decisive as to the class nature of a state.

"(3.) The property forms which the dominant bodies of armed men stood for--and had to stand for whatever their subjective desires--were the forms of a workers' state, right from the time of the soviet occupation... Although the actual change in the predominating property forms took place some time later than the occupation, development in that direction was inevitable as a result of the occupation, and therefore they were dws's from that time.

"(4.) Development in the opposite direction would only have been possible with a change as to which bodies of armed men dominate..."

The Answer

The state is armed force and ancillary institutions--the weapon of a class with which to fight for its property forms, either to gain them or to defend them.

The bourgeois states in Eastern Europe, having been smashed, were replaced immediately, and the replacements proved to be workers states. I hold the same is true of Cuba, China and Yugoslavia, but the logical conclusion with regard to these guerrilla states is that the territories controlled by the guerrilla forces constituted deformed workers states even before their final victory, because the role of these armed bodies of men (forced at least in part by the pressures of world politics) would be to defend workers' property forms.

Confusion of the state with the form of property it will fight for lies at the core of the difficulty over guerrilla revolution. The workers state was not established in Cuba or China (nor even Russia) at the time at which workers' property was introduced, but at that time at which the armed force that will fight for workers' property, having been formed, takes control of territory and inhabitants capable of supporting a form of property relations (i.e., of supporting some form of political economy). (Thus a few rebels hiding in a cave cannot ever constitute a deformed workers state because a cave can never support a form of property or be a state.)

Reformism

Other than the documents in MB #8 our material on Cuba apparently avoids characterising the state as transitional, but the descriptions of the creations of the new deformed workers states is usually based on conceptions which surely derive from the "transitional state" theory. The Revolutionary Tendency's document sub-

mitted to the YSA convention, December 21, 1961 says:

"Taken as a whole, the process going on today in Cuba is that of the formation of a deformed workers state...However, this does not signify that in Cuba today the bureaucratic apparatus is as consolidated or dominant as in the countries of the Soviet Bloc." (Spartacist #2, p. 7)

The point here is that the fragility and unconsolidated nature of the bureaucracy is not relevant to the question of whether the state is bourgeois or proletarian, nor (if it is proletarian) does it make it any the less deformed. Introducing the republication of this document in July-August 1964, Spartacist refers to the "process" of the "formation of a deformed workers state" and says:

"It has been our opinion for more than a year that this process has reached a point of consolidation such that Cuba has become a DEFORMED WORKERS STATE."

It would seem clear that the conception behind this is of deformed workers state developing through a process of reforms, and that this conception is based on the "transitional state" theory.

Of course if reformism can result in a deformed workers state it can also be used to bring an end to the deformations, and there is an unfortunate consistency revealed in the article on Cuba in Spartacist #3. This is written with the view that Cuba is some sort of workers state, and is mostly consistent with a characterisation of it as a deformed workers state, but the whole article is saturated with a programme of removal of the deformations by reforms. The Cuban Posadists, who are quoted uncritically, might possibly have some excuse for peculiar "transitional" formulations of the need for a political revolution, but a propaganda organ in the United States cannot use any excuse for such an approach and for abstention from revolutionary struggle.

A sophisticated-looking refinement of the "transitional state" theory is found in the sections of "Theses on Guerrilla Warfare" (Spartacist #11, 1968) headed "The Cuban Example" and "Consolidation of Power." The phrase "transitional state" is not used but is replaced by a "temporary vacuum in the bourgeois state" which (if a coalition of the guerrilla leaders with parts of the national bourgeoisie is unable to fill it) may suck in the guerrilla leaders as the sole Bonapartist rulers, who may then be forced to make a series of reforms laying the "groundwork for a deformed workers state." After this the new bureaucracy will consolidate its power, thus presumably conferring on the resultant structure the full status of a deformed workers state. This way of formulating the matter solves none of the problems.

Opponent Views--I--Hansen

Joseph Hansen's early articles on Cuba "The Character of the New Cuban Government" of July 1960, and more particularly his attack on our position in "What is the Discussion on Cuba About?" of May 1961 (reprinted by the SWP in the Education for Socialists series,

The Nature of the Cuban Revolution) are most important at a general level as an excuse for ecstatic praise and sycophancy towards Castro, justified by rampant Pabloism, but for our purposes here it is necessary to focus on a narrow concern, the revolutionary process. Hansen sees Cuba as having, after a political revolution, passed through a stage of a "Workers and Farmers Government" in a state which was presumably bourgeois (he specifically says it was not a workers state). This became a workers state as a result of the nationalisation reforms of August-October 1960--a workers state qualified as

"one lacking as yet the forms of democratic proletarian rule,' meaning that while it is not 'deformed' in the sense of having Stalinists in power, the state is not under the democratic control of the workers and peasants (but may develop such forms with relative ease)."

This is a totally reformist model and masks appetites completely foreign to the Mage-Wohlforth thesis. However, although it doesn't use the words "transitional state" it has in fact much of the same content, at least in regard to the period up to the nationalisations of 1960 (characterised by Hansen as "a highly contradictory and highly unstable regime, subject to pressures and impulses that can move it forward or backward"). It is thus unfortunate that Hansen is given the opportunity by our documents to get in a more or less correct attack on the "transitional state" concept. Quoting an article by Mage, Hansen says

"He affirms, 'We have termed the Cuban state neither a capitalist state nor yet a workers state, but call it a transitional state.' (Previously the adjective was 'developing.')

This novel type of state can shift towards either a capitalist state or a workers state without a civil war, the minority comrades inform us. It can become a workers state through institutionalizing workers democracy. On the other hand capitalism can be restored in various ways, Comrade Mage holds...

"...Meanwhile we are faced with the real question: what is the character of the state in Cuba today?"

"'Developing' or 'transitional,' responds Comrade Mage. 'The answer will not be found in Cuba,' the August 17 document emphatically declares. 'It is clearly too early to answer in terms of finished categories, for the nature of the Cuban Revolution itself is not yet decided by history,' the same document continues just as emphatically. Comrade Mage affirms this once more just as emphatically in his April 14-18 article: 'the nature of the Cuban state is not yet determined by history.'"

"With such labels and such arguments the minority leaders evade the problem of characterizing the state in Cuba. The state is quite real and must serve definite class interests, but our minority leave it floating above classes in defiance of everything taught by Marxism."

Hansen's stuff, which doubtless had some affect on members of the SWP, indicates the practical importance of our weakness in this area for propaganda work.

Opponent Views--II--The OCI

A more important document to look at in this regard is the position of what was then the French Section of the International Committee of December 1961. (Their position paper on the Cuban Question was published in the SWP's International Information Bulletin, April 1963, I.) It would be interesting to know whether the OCI stands by their highly interesting "phantom bourgeois state" characterisation, as it had much greater claim to serious attention when it was written than it has now that the phantom has so persistently haunted us for fifteen years, but nevertheless it is certainly worth remembering what they had to say about the Revolutionary Tendency's position:

"The formula of a 'transitional state' defended by the S.W.P. minority has the great advantage of leaving the door open for another definition. It reflects the thoughts of those comrades who correctly think that the situation in Cuba is transitional par excellence. But at the same time it is a refusal to give a definition and thereby leaves the door open for the most dangerous contradictions."

The fact that they have previously seen what is wrong with us on Cuba (a germinal point of our anti-Pabloism) is going to make it difficult for us to show comrades from this milieu the infinitely greater deficiencies of their anti-Pabloism.

These people tried in anticipation to reject my view of Cuba as a deformed workers state from birth. Here is their argument in full:

"The term 'deformed workers' state' was first applied by Trotskyists to the European 'iron curtain' countries. This expression translated the idea of 'structural assimilation' to Russian society under the leadership of the Stalinist bureaucracy, that is to say (regardless of what one might think of the theory of 'structural assimilation') the fact that the state in these countries was, above all, a reflection of the interests of the Russian bureaucracy, an element foreign to the society. It is obviously impossible to put the Cuban state into that family of 'workers' states' born out of the union of a control of the real but limited movement of the masses by the Russian bureaucracy and a bourgeois-type state apparatus reconstructed after the war, especially the army and the police force (e.g. Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc...).

"The term 'deformed workers' state' was also used by the Trotskyists to characterize the Yugoslav and Chinese states, which were born out of the revolutionary action of the masses controlled and limited, however, by a Stalinist and bureaucratic leadership. This quickly led these states to bureaucratize themselves and to manifest common features with the 'degenerated workers' state,'

i.e. the existence of new property relationships, concretized by the nationalization of the means of production, of trade and of transportation and a state apparatus which cannot be called proletarian, because it is absolutely not controlled by the proletariat and reflects the interests of a new bureaucratic caste. As far as we know, and despite the criticism of the Cuban P.O.R., which is a member of the Pabloist I.S., against the absolutism and bureaucracy of the Castro regime, none of the comrades who say Cuba is a 'deformed workers' state' claim to assimilate Cuba to Yugoslavia and China and to denounce in Cuba, as in those two countries, the existence of a real bureaucracy of working class origin." (Pages 3 and 4)

This patently weak argument rests on two major errors: (i.) The first paragraph rests on a restricted and mechanical view of the methods available for "control of the real but limited movement of the masses by the Russian bureaucracy" and a consequent failure to see the substitution of the physical armies the Russians had in Eastern Europe by what might be called a geostrategic presence in Cuba. (ii.) The second paragraph rests on a formalised concept of Stalinist bureaucracy. Stalinism is merely a form of ideology and it would be a half-arsed thing to use the ideology of the ruling group as the defining characteristic of the nature of the state. Rather the reverse is true--if Cuba is a deformed workers state then the ideology justifying its ruling group is Stalinist. And by bureaucracy, for the purposes of a deformed workers state we mean no more than a group who hold power (politically) by balancing between the working class and other class forces. The degree of organisational sophistication, the amount of red tape, the rigidity of the structure, and the class origins, public images and life styles of the incumbent bureaucrats are all irrelevant.

Opponent Views--III--The New Wohlforth

After his break with the Revolutionary Tendency Wohlforth wrote an article ("The Cuban Way--The Pattern for the Future?," SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 24, No. 17) in which he uses the weaknesses of the "transitional state" theory in order to force it into oxymoronic union with the reformist theory of structural assimilation and the Lambert group's misapplied "phantom bourgeois state" characterisation:

"China...is a very particular phenomenon. The revolutionary peasantry, under the leadership of the predominantly petty bourgeois Communist Party, was able to defeat Chiang Kai-Shek and establish a transitional but still essentially capitalist state. Its transformation into a deformed workers state...took place through the same manner as the transformation of Eastern Europe--that is through a process of structural assimilation of a buffer region adjacent to the USSR." (page 7)

"Thus we must characterize this state as a decomposed, partially eroded capitalist state susceptible to the pressure of the working class as well as other social

forces but not under the control directly or indirectly of the working class...By the way of analogy we would say the Cuban state has the same essential class character as the Eastern European states between 1947-49 and the Chinese state between 1949-52." (pages 21-22)

So Wohlforth's new theory, too, boils down to reformism--it is just that the reforms haven't been carried out in Cuba, because "the structural assimilation of Cuba is of no value whatsoever to the Soviet Union." (page 23)

Supporting Argument and Some Implications

My ideas on these subjects were worked out partly in correspondence with Adaire early this year, when she was in Melbourne and I was still in Wellington. Some extracts might help you understand what I'm getting at.

Bill to Adaire, 3rd January 1973:

"The discussions I've been having with Joel on the guerrillaist state and revolution have been quite useful theoretically I think, and Joel has been moving towards my (still very tentative) position, which seems to be a refinement of the SLUS's and inconsistent with most of their formulations...

"The SLUS talks of China and Cuba becoming deformed workers states at some point considerably later than the removal of the bourgeois state. What then are they between the time of the revolution and the time they become deformed workers' states? Spartacist #2 (July-August 1964) says Cuba has been a deformed workers state for more than a year. Castro came to power on the first of January 1959.

"I'm fairly sure that some SLUS formulations have it that these are deformed workers states from birth. Their claim might be that there is a period after the removal of the bourgeois state but before the birth of the deformed workers state in which they are non-states--that is non-states dominated by the Mao and Castro groupings and with armies and other instruments of social rule used, for example, to administer the nationalisation of productive property. This would be rather anomolous. There are only two other possibilities.

"One possibility is that these states were healthy at birth and then degenerated--without the working class ever having had political power, and without any political counter-revolution. This would do violence to our position that the only kind of workers state which can emerge from petty-bourgeois guerrillaism is deformed.

"Alternatively these states existed from the time of the revolution, as deformed workers states. Until discussing

the matter with Joel I had assumed this latter position to be that of the SLUS and it is clearly the best, but it has some slightly peculiar implications resulting from the fact that it slides over the problem of exactly when the revolution occurred. For example, in China we assume that the revolution was in 1949, but despite the fact of Mao controlling quantitatively more land in 1949 and Chiang quantitatively less, both the deformed workers and the bourgeois state are qualitatively the same before and after that date. In a sense dual power took the form of each side of the duality having complete state power over its territory (rather than the two sides contending for power within a single territorial unit). The revolution took place at different times in different parts of China, as the Maoists took control from the bourgeois state.

"There are other questions which follow. How far back is it that the Stalinists come to constitute a deformed workers state? Is any territory controlled by Bolsheviks a healthy workers state? What about 54 Glen Road? I suspect the answers lie in the definition of the state. On the one hand a state is obviously not territorially identical with a nation (e.g., Vietnam, Korea, Germany, etc.). On the other hand it must have at its disposal armed force capable of protection of productive property in the interests of either the working class or the bourgeoisie. (Which class interests it will serve might become apparent only after some time, and will be determined not by the subjective desires of the leaders of the state, but by objective factors: the pressures of imperialism and the pull of the existing deformed workers states.)

"I suspect that to count as a state, the Stalinist force must administer an area containing sufficient material and human resources for the development of some sort of viable political economy capable of continuing to exist for a historical period. I would guess that whereas Yen-an became a deformed workers state as Mao established himself there, on the Long March his forces merely constituted a preliminary dual power."

Bill to Adaire, 17th January 1973:

"[The argument] that China became a deformed workers state on the growth of its ties with Russia is, as you note, unconvincing. It is very close to the structural assimilation argument that we have long ago abandoned in relation to Eastern Europe. But it is an essential part of my argument that the development of a guerrilla deformed workers state arises from the intersection of the domestic class forces of the capitalist state [in which the guerrillas are operating] and the geostrategic forces operating between the existing deformed workers states and imperialism, that is, the international class forces. This is orthodox Spartacism, all I am adding

is that these forces exist right from the beginning of the small rebel guerrilla state, and determine its class character (bourgeois in the case of Algeria, deformed workers in Cuba and China) from that beginning. With sufficient empirical data properly analysed it is probably possible to determine the class character of a guerrilla state right from its earliest days, but in practice this is likely to be difficult until such time as there are considerable property nationalisations [or the smashing or exodus of the bourgeoisie] (or alternatively a period of capitalist growth).

"The case of Eastern Europe is in one way archetypical (with the exception that the new army is not of domestic guerrillas). Note especially the weakness of the domestic bourgeoisies and proletariats, the (absolute) geostrategic dominance of the USSR, the apparent maintenance of bourgeois democracy for a period, and finally the property nationalisations and unambiguous Stalinisation. Eastern Europe had the character of deformed workers states from the time of the occupation of the Soviet Army, which constituted the 'armed bodies of men' who would eventually act against capitalism in the interest of workers property forms (i.e., support nationalisations). Eastern Europe pretended to be bourgeois for a while and had the Fourth International fooled, but proper analysis could have revealed that the states dominated by the Soviet Army would come down on the side of workers property forms.

"The guerrilla deformed workers' states developed on the basis of bureaucratically dominated armies with rural proletarian and petty-bourgeois peasant interests unified around some common demands including expropriation of the landlords and some level of opposition to the major imperialist power. The policies which proved sufficient for the bureaucratic governments to maintain the support of their armies led ultimately to the breakdown of the continued viability of capitalist imperialism in the territories they controlled. Although, as Lenin well knew, land reform is a bourgeois demand, in the imperialist epoch it may well alienate a key section of the weak local bourgeoisie, which is, in these colonial or semi-colonial countries, usually based on land-holdings. (This is in obvious harmony with the theory of Permanent Revolution as applied to situations in which the proletariat is not a contender for power.)

"The guerrilla deformed workers state controlled Cuba for eighteen months, engaging in land reform and operating a capitalist economy though increasingly alienating the Cuban and US bourgeoisies. Then, in an attempt to gain greater independence from the USA in June 1960, Castro imported oil from the USSR, and asked US oil companies to refine it. They refused and the state took over the refineries. The US retaliated by cutting off imports of Cuban sugar, forcing Cuba into the hands of the Soviet Union. Cuba's move was to nationalise further US invest-

ment. By 19 October the US embargoed almost all exports to Cuba, and by 25 October almost all US investment in Cuba was nationalised, and also the biggest Cuban business interests. Cuba was now completely dependent on the Soviet Union.

"We know that the existence of capitalism in the short term is not pertinent to the class nature of the state (the introduction of the NEP did not return Russia to bourgeois rule). We must look at whether in the long term it is in the interests of bourgeois or workers property which a particular state with its armed bodies of men will serve. In the case of Cuba we must conclude that Castro's state with its peasant guerrilla army was from the first caught in the dynamic cross-current of domestic and international class forces which would lead it inevitably (probably even unwillingly) to the side of workers property forms. The guerrilla state thus has the character of a deformed workers state from birth."

It is possibly a good idea to add at this point a note about what I have called the geostrategic forces. (They are not merely objective forces because they are controlled by the wills of the leaders of the great powers.) In the period of atomic weaponry, massive mobile naval power, etc., the states of the great powers extend far beyond their formal territorial boundaries, and it must be remembered that extraterritorial state power ultimately has exactly the same function as intraterritorial state power--the defence of property. The deformations of the existing workers states are such as to normally prevent them from actively seeking to extend the area of workers property forms, but purely defensive reasons relating to global military power relations may on rare and unusual occasions come into play to counteract the deformations--not to the extent of allowing them to encourage proletarian (and therefore inherently anti-bureaucratic) revolutions, but to the extent of helping the formation of new deformed workers states. It would seem necessary that we achieve a better understanding of world power relations, so that we are better able to deal with the phenomenon of guerrilla revolution. I would not be surprised if modern bourgeois academic theorists of international politics were useful to us here.

Adaire to Bill, 16th January 1973

"I have been reading 'The Class Nature of the Soviet State,' Trotsky, 33-34 Writings with your Cuba-China ideas in mind and thought the following might interest you: 'Not only up to the Brest-Litovsk peace but even up to the autumn of 1918, the social content of the revolution was restricted to a petty-bourgeois agrarian overturn and workers' control over production. This means that the revolution in its actions had not yet passed the boundaries of bourgeois society. During the first period, soldiers' soviets ruled side by side with workers soviets and often elbowed them aside. Only toward the autumn of 1918 did the petty-bourgeois soldier-agrarian elemental wave recede a little to its shores,

and the workers went forward with the nationalization of the means of production. Only from this time can one speak of the inception of a real dictatorship of the proletariat. But even here it is necessary to make certain large reservations. During those initial years, the dictatorship was geographically confined to the old Moscow principality and was compelled to wage a three-years' war along all the radii from Moscow to the periphery. This means that up to 1921, precisely up to the NEP, that is, what went on was still the struggle to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat upon the national scale.' (Page 106) If you look at your letter dated 3 January on page 3--'On the other hand it is obviously not necessarily territorially identical with a nation...' this seems to be relevant. Also it has the conception of a transition between the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Bill to Adaire, 10th February 1973

"Your quote from Trotsky on the revolution is extremely important but must be read carefully and in conjunction with The State and Revolution. It means not that there is a gap between the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, but that the dictatorship of the proletariat started to perform its historical function at a later point (i.e., at the property nationalisations) than the revolution."

Objectivism

I rather anticipate the objection to these ideas that they constitute a form of objectivism, but I do not think they do in any sense to which opprobrium attaches. Pabloite objectivism is the viewpoint that the world can be moved decisively towards socialism without the conscious intervention of the working class. It looks to the post-war advances of Stalinism as evidence of this. The anti-revisionist position is based on an understanding of the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism and the dual historical character of its post-war expansion--on the one hand it temporarily kept the anti-capitalist struggle of the international working class from reaching the level of socialist revolution, and on the other hand it created deformed workers states which, while in themselves incapable of moving towards socialism are gains that the working class must defend against international capitalism and in which the revolutionary process releasing the development of socialism will be less fundamental than that necessary in bourgeois states, a political rather than a social revolution. To put this in another way, a healthy workers state is under the control of the class-conscious proletariat. A deformed workers state is a workers state without this conscious element, and it is thus an essential characteristic of a revolution giving birth to a deformed workers state that class consciousness is absent as a decisive factor.

Conclusion

I'm sorry about the long-winded and repetitive way in which I've presented these ideas to you, caused by a mixture of shortage

of time and a desire to be as clear as possible.

It should be clear that I see no immediate programmatic consequences from all this, and believe that while it is absolutely necessary to clarify our views on the matter (as in the long term all theoretical questions will come home to roost) it would be a betrayal of the struggle to rebuild the Fourth International to allow the process of clarification to be used to break the solidarity of the Spartacist Tendency, either internationally or in any of its sections.

And what's to be done? I suggest a new introduction to MB #8.

Warmest comradely greetings,

Bill

copy, file.

LETTER FROM FRANK B.

May 23, 1973

Dear Comrades,

... I read Logan's letter on Cuba, and although I find it interesting, I think it's rather mechanical. The deficiencies he points out in MB 8 are real, but his alternative isn't. The main thrust of my criticism lies in his fetishization of the state: the state, as he points out, depends on "bodies of armed men". This is precisely the crux in a situation like that of Cuba. Although the Cuban revolution from the beginning smashed the state apparatus of Batista's bourgeois state, the question of which property forms the Castroite guerrillas were willing to defend remained moot. Was it at all clear that Castro's guerrillas were from the beginning committed to the defense of "socialist" property forms? I think not. It is precisely the nature of such petty-bourgeois guerrillaism that the intentions of the "bodies of armed men", and more particularly their leadership, remain profoundly divided--if the concept of a "power vacuum" is insufficient, then that of "power flux" is key. The nature of the state power may remain unclear until the state apparatus stabilizes itself, in the course of which it necessarily takes a position on the character of the social forms of production which it will defend. In the course of this stabilization process, the relation of such guerrillaist forces to world imperialism and the deformed workers' states becomes key. I think that in this respect the quotation from Trotsky, cited by Adaire, about the stabilization of the dictatorship in Russia, is extremely interesting (with the qualitative difference that in Russia the revolutionary leadership was a Bolshevik party, whose intentions of establishing the proletarian dictatorship were clear, thus lending the situation much greater stability than in the case of Cuba.) These comments are obviously extremely sketchy, but I hope they will have at least a catalytic function in the discussion.

I would note in defense of my thesis the much-debated comment by Marx about the possibility of a peaceful transition to the D. of P. in England and the U.S. Marx, if I remember correctly, stated that such a transition was conceivable (though not necessarily likely), because of the absence of 1) A large standing army, and 2) A large established bureaucracy in the countries in question. That is, there was a possibility of peaceful transition because the state apparatus was relatively underdeveloped. I think Marx was categorically wrong in his estimation of the U.S. and Britain, even in the mid-nineteenth century, but his methodological approach wasn't. That is, the state is an apparatus ("bodies of armed men"), and especially when that apparatus is smashed or rendered temporarily powerless (Germany in November 1918), the character of the apparatus which will eventually replace it may be unclear for some time. The new, unstable state apparatus needs time to stabilize, and especially where the class character and leadership of the revolutionary movement is contradictory (as it necessarily is in Stalinist and guerrillaist movements), the dialectic of external

and internal factors may either lead to the stabilization of a bourgeois or (deformed) workers' state. As Engels wrote:

The state is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without; just as little is it "the reality of the ethical idea," "the image and reality of reason," as Hegel maintains. Rather it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms and classes with conflicting economic interests might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate, and keep it within the bounds of "order"; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state. (Engels, Origin of the Family, Selected Works, p. 586) (emphasis mine)

One has to be careful, of course, about this quotation, since it deals with the historical development of the state. But I feel that Bill tends to view the state in an ahistorical manner, instead of as a developing apparatus. Trotsky somewhere noted both of the Spanish and German revolutions (1936 and Nov. 1918), that the revolution had actually occurred, but that the bourgeois state was re-established by the reformists--in Spain by the Stalinists, in Germany by the Social Democrats. I would contend that a situation of dual power can exist before and after a revolution, until either the bourgeois or proletarian state has consolidated itself. Otherwise I would be at a loss to explain why China and Cuba consolidated as deformed workers states, while Spain and Germany consolidated as bourgeois states. The question of leadership is not the sole factor, since there were no qualitative differences in the rottenness of the leadership in the instances cited....

Comradely,

Frank

26 May 1973
New Orleans, La.

SL-PB

Dear Comrades:

Enclosed is a document which I have written in response to the Long document. I hope that it will assist the enlarged PB in its consideration of the question at its meeting.

I would strongly urge that besides the usual material on China that comrades read Red Star Over China by Edgar Snow, and The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China by Mark Selden.

C. G.'s

Joe V.

internal for members only

GUERRILLA MOVEMENTS AND DEFORMED WORKERS STATES

by Joe Vetter

The document by Comrade Logan raises some extremely important questions about an apparent spread which has existed in our position on the deformed workers states. In my brief and (I feel) only surface consideration of the question, it seems that Comrade Logan has missed the essential point around which our analysis revolves:

"Two decisive elements have been common to the whole series of upheavals under Stalinist-type leaderships, as in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam: (1) a civil war of the peasant-guerilla variety, which first wrenches the peasant movement from immediate control of imperialism and substitutes a petty-bourgeois leadership; and then, if victorious, seizes the urban centers and on its own momentum smashes capitalist property relations, nationalizing industry under the newly consolidated Bonapartist leadership; (2) the absence of the working class as a contender for social power, in particular, the absence of its revolutionary vanguard; this permits an exceptionally independent role for the petty-bourgeois sections of society...."

--from "Theoretical Clarification" by James Robertson
6 April 1966 as printed in MB #8

While it is true as Comrade Logan states that the smashed bourgeois states in Eastern Europe were immediately replaced by workers states, the petty-bourgeoisie came to power in China, Cuba, etc. After a period of direct threats and overt moves by imperialism (e.g., the Korean War) the petty-bourgeois state power splits and is forced to side with the working class (through its property forms) in order to preserve its gains. The "three anti" and "five anti" campaigns are examples of this splitting in China. At this point the petty-bourgeois state power is broken and those that throw in their lot with the proletarian property forms consolidate a deformed workers state. To go back to the bourgeois state after this transformation would require a real social counterrevolution. A simple reorientation of the former petty-bourgeois leadership would not be enough.

Under pressure from an active working class movement it would have been inevitable that these governments would have played their traditional role and fallen to the bourgeoisie properly. But the lack of the working class in the arena and the pressure of imperialism causes a section of the petty-bourgeois leadership to break away.

The Class Character of the Leadership

It is incorrect to characterize the parties which were forced into forming a deformed workers state as anything but petty-bourgeois prior to their splitting. In speaking of the leadership of the Chinese Red Armies, Trotsky says:

"But after all aren't there Communists at the head of the Chinese Red Armies? Doesn't this alone exclude the possibility of conflicts between the peasant detachments and the workers' "

organizations? No, that does not exclude it. The fact that individual Communists are in the leadership of the present armies does not at all transform the social character of these armies, even if their Communist leaders bear a definite proletarian stamp."

--from "Peasant War in China" 26 September 1932

Unlike the CP's of Russia, East Europe and most of the advanced countries which are deeply rooted in the working class the social composition of the CP's of China, Cuba and the rest strongly reflect their origins as peasant parties. These parties have remained essentially non-proletarian in composition:

"From a low point of only a handful of worker party members at Liberation, the proportion of workers in the Party membership had risen to 6.3 per cent in 1951 and 7.2 per cent in 1952. By 1956, this proportion had increased to 14 per cent of the total Party membership, although the proportion of workers dropped to 13.7 per cent in the following year after the concentration on recruiting intellectuals during 1956."

--from "The Party and the Unions in Communist China"
by Paul Harper, China Quarterly, Jan.-March, 1969

Even in the factories themselves the percentage of workers in the party factory cells never got above 20 per cent as of 1956. An infusion of proletarian elements takes place at the time of the leap to a deformed workers state, but the party still reflects strongly its petty-bourgeois past. This is what assisted in giving these parties strong Stalinist characters.

The character of these parties just serves to emphasize the rotten policy of entry which was pursued by the Pabloists. The need for political revolution and the further splitting should be more obviously necessary than in a party which had the origins of the Russian CP. While forced to defend the property forms and heavily influenced by them, these parties in leaping into the working class movement have only managed to grasp onto its fringes.

Civil War and the Fragility of the Petty Bourgeoisie

Because the control of the country has fallen to the petty bourgeoisie at the time of liberation, an extremely unstable situation exists. Because of the fragility of this situation the civil war takes on a low key character when compared with the Russian Civil War. The main task of smashing the bourgeoisie's state machine took place earlier and the final replacement is decided on by an anemic but very real civil war. The scattered and divided nature of the petty bourgeoisie, the lack of the working class in the arena and the broken bourgeoisie are the roots of the low key nature of the civil war.

Guerilla Base Areas: Deformed Workers States?

While it is true that in China and Cuba, etc. the government of the guerilla regions was quantitatively the same as the government which existed after the seizure of power, it is absolutely

incorrect to characterize them as deformed workers states prior to the "anemic" civil war.

China is an excellent example of this. Prior to the Anti-Japanese United Front, only land revolution was carried through by the Soviet Government of the Yen-an region. Nothing else could have been done in the region because there was no industry beyond extremely small production. The following table indicates the situation for the 321 families of the Third Township:

Class	1/35 (Before Land Revolution)		12/39 (After...)	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Hired laborer	31	9.6	15	4.9
Poor peasant	204	63.7	136	42.6
Middle peasant	50	15.6	123	38.2
Rich peasant	16	4.9	22	7.0
Landlord	12	3.8	0	0
Worker	3	0.9	7	2.0
Small Merchant	1	0.3	7	2.0
Vagrant	4	1.2	3	0.9
Spirit/Medium	0	0	3	0.9
Intellectual	0	0	5	1.5

--from The Yen-an Way in Revolutionary China
by Mark Selden, p. 81

All the region could possibly support was a peasant government as long as it remained isolated from the Chinese working class in the large cities to the south.

The fact that the Anti-Japanese United Front was never more than a shaky treaty between two governments does not in any way reflect on the class character of Yen-an as a workers state. The Kuomintang remained the consistent enemy of the peasant as well as the worker. The desire of the Kuomintang to destroy Yen-an was based on the desires of the Landlord to destroy peasant gains.

The CCP did slow down and eventually did stop the land reform. But this was only in regard to spreading it to additional areas:

"The 'Directive to All Levels of the Communist Party and Soviets on the Execution of the Revised Rich Peasant Policy,' issued jointly by the Central Committee and the Central Soviet Government on April 4, 1936, clarifies the transitional agrarian policy and provides the fullest elaboration of alleged errors in its implementation. The party called for a review of earlier judgements, emphasizing, in particular, greater leniency in the classification of middle and rich peasants, and even went so far as to insist on restitution of property where injustices had occurred. In no case was redistributed land to be reclaimed from its new proprietors by the original owner. But in the event of error, provision was made for due compensation after elaborate review...."

--from The Yen-an Way in Revolutionary China, pp. 97-98

The program which Mao spells out in "On Policy" dated 25 December 1940 concerns the part of the border region where the land

revolution had not occurred and is the program of a peasant regime under Stalinist influence. While the program outlined in "On Policy" was written under a blockade and attack on the region by Chiang Kai-shek, it was only after an attack by the Japanese that the CCP took a harder line toward the landlords -- but still without attacking their property. It was during this period that many of the Maoist organizational conceptions were developed, i.e., "unity-criticism-unity" and the procedure for "Cultural Revolution" types of struggle. (See in part Mao's "Talks at the Yen-an Forum.") During this period to fortify itself the regime introduced a large measure of populist equality conceptions:

"Intense criticism and self-criticism was an extraordinarily effective method for breaking down traditional leadership conceptions, for overcoming differences in values between outside and local, educated and uneducated cadres. In the process of group study and criticism, cadres were educated in and committed to ideological and party norms while leadership dedicated to the party and its principles was identified and encouraged. Leadership which emerged in the course of cheng-feng had demonstrated ability to persuade and motivate peers in intense group sessions where status and face were scorned. To set oneself above the group, to rely on rank or office, implied rejection of the power of the group to evaluate each individual."

--from The Yen-an Way in Revolutionary China, p. 198

Even today there is a quantitative difference between the privileges of the Chinese and the Russian bureaucracies. Not driven together as workers by the social nature of their existence, the party and government base was compressed by the hardship of the region and the attitudes of bourgeois equality existing among the peasants.

The relationships established in Yen-an during this period continued to exist with the landlords until the outbreak of the civil war. The coming of the Korean War finally forced a complete break with the landlords and the Chinese bourgeoisie. It seems clear that no deformed workers state was either assured by the existence of Yen-an, nor did a deformed workers state exist prior to the "three anti" and "five anti" movements of the early fifties.

Conclusions

Even in the stage of "pure" petty-bourgeois leadership, it is the duty of the Bolshevik party to defend these parties against the foreign imperialist as well as against White Army forces in their own country. This conclusion was drawn by the Comintern in a similar (though not identical) situation in Bulgaria in the Spring of 1923. (See the documents in International Communism in the Era of Lenin.)

Second, a difficulty that we have with Maoists seems to derive from our trying to draw simple ironclad parallels between the development of the Chinese and Russian bureaucracies. This seems to be one of the main problems with the 1955 SWP document on China.

The simple inversion of drawing these iron parallels leads right to the Pabloist arguments. Although Moscow exerted a powerful influence on the Chinese, the development of the CCP took place during years of being cut off from direct contact with the Russians.

Third, the Chinese bureaucracy came to rest on top of a deformed workers state as a result of a break with its peasant past whereas the Russian party broke in part with the working class and began to drift right. This is the real meaning behind "deformed" and "degenerate."

To characterize the liberated areas of South Vietnam as deformed workers states in embryo as Comrade Sharpe does in WV #21 does not clarify the situation. It is possible that they are deformed workers states now if the DRV army is the administration of the areas. If not then they are peasant/petty-bourgeois states, i.e., they are just as likely embryonic bourgeois states.

Fourth, if these guerilla base areas represent miniature deformed workers states then the possibility of a real coalition government with bourgeois forces (e.g., in S. Vietnam or in 1945-47 China) is out of the question! If this is possible then it is qualitatively the same thing as saying that it is possible that the recent N. Korean overtures to S. Korea for a coalition government can come about without a counterrevolution in N. Korea. This is obviously just running the film of reformism in reverse. If we accept the thesis of miniature deformed workers states, then the guerilla leadership can only sell out the non-liberated areas. If indeed the Viet-Minh areas constituted such a miniature deformed workers state in 1954, then how did they give back half of Vietnam without a counterrevolution in those areas? The answer can only be that nothing fundamental changed in those areas!

--26 May 1973

LETTER FROM LOGAN TO P.B. SL/US

Melbourne,
Australia

1 June 1973

The Political Bureau
SL/US
New York

Dear comrades,

The series by John Sharpe on Vietnam recently run in Workers Vanguard raises some questions relevant to the matter under discussion in the Central Committee of the SL/US arising out of my letter to Jim Robertson of 21 March 1973. I should comment on two formulations.

(a.) From Part I of the series:

"But the Stalinists moved faster [than the ICL]. At 5 a.m. on 25 August [1945] the Viet Minh carried out a bloodless coup, occupying the city hall and police stations. Behind the backs of the masses, and with the participation of the bourgeois nationalists (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, VNQDD), the Stalinists simply took over the existing state machinery and installed a new bonapartist bourgeois regime."

Was this any more a bourgeois state than Castro's Cuba--presumably it had armed forces distinct from that which it overthrew?

(b.) From Part IV:

"Fundamentally the NLF-controlled areas in the South are deformed workers states in embryo."

Is it their "stateness" or their "deformity" which is in embryo? How is it that an "embryo" can exist outside the womb (i.e., surely, the bourgeois state)? This formulation unfortunately finds a way back to the sense of the "transitional" state.

I notice that despite their inadequacies these formulations are sufficiently algebraic to leave the way open for clarification along the lines of any conclusion reached in your discussions.

Warm fraternal greetings,

Bill

cc: file

MOTIONS FROM ENLARGED PB #6, 9-10 JUNE 1973, ON

THE DISCUSSION OF COMRADE LOGAN'S DOCUMENT

Under agenda point 10., Russian Question, motions adopted:

(1) To continue this theoretical-educational discussion opened by comrade Logan's document, by opening subject for oral and written treatment by the SL and RCY memberships, subject to a reasonable maximum rate of publication limitation averaging 15 pages per month.

(2) To ask comrade Seymour, who rather closely expressed the consensus of opinion at this enlarged PB on most aspects of the question, to contribute to this discussion [in written form], particularly to bring to SL/ANZ comrades the thinking from this first organized oral discussion in the CC-SL/US.

(3) To incorporate the outcome of the present discussion in an extended MB#8 (Cuban Question) and in the eventual MB #6 (East European Revolution).

passed unanimously

WHEN DID EAST EUROPE, CHINA AND CUBA
BECOME DEFORMED WORKERS STATES?

by Joseph Seymour

The central fallacy of comrade Logan's document is the identification of an insurrectionary armed force with a state and, therefore, with a unique, unambiguous and immutable class character. An insurrectionary armed force is not an embryonic state, although, if victorious a state emerges from it. The class character of an insurrectionary armed force is determined by the class character of the political forces which control it. An insurrectionary armed force can (and usually does) have a contradictory class character. The dominant class is then determined through internal, usually bloody, factional struggle within the insurrectionary armed force. It is possible that the existing state apparatus is destroyed and the insurrectionary army achieves military dominance before its class character has been determined through internal struggle. In that case, the class character of the emerging state will be determined by the factional struggle within the inherently unstable regime controlling the victorious insurrectionary army. A state is organized by giving a monopoly of power to personnel unambiguously loyal to the dominant class in society. If an insurrectionary armed force comes to power with divided class loyalties, there is no dominant social class and no state in the classic Marxist sense. Rather the dominant class and state are produced precisely by political struggle between those forces controlling and composing the victorious insurrectionary army.

The logic of comrade Logan's document negates the transformation of the bourgeois democratic into a social revolution--that is, "the permanent revolution" concept. Political and social revolution are seen as immutable categories determined at the very outset of an insurrection. Thus comrade Logan states:

"...these forces exist right from the beginning of the small rebel guerrilla state and determine its class character (bourgeois in the case of Algeria, deformed in Cuba and China) from that beginning. With sufficient empirical data properly analyzed it is probably possible to determine the class character of a guerrilla state right from its earliest days, but in practice this is likely to be difficult until such time as there are considerable property nationalizations (or the smashing or exodus of the bourgeoisie) (or alternatively a period of capitalist growth)."

This is objectivist determinism of a remarkably pure sort. If it were true, there could be no basis for the communist vanguard to intervene in popular insurrections led by Stalinists or petty-bourgeois nationalists (Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam), since the outcome of these revolutions is pre-determined at their inception. In one sense, a social revolution is a political revolution (i.e. the destruction of the existing state apparatus) and its replacement by an armed force committed to changing property relations. Since a communist vanguard rarely leads a revolution from the beginning, the struggle for a

socialist revolution is reduced to the struggle for communist leadership over the insurgent masses against bourgeois nationalists and liberals, petty-bourgeois radicals, reformists, Stalinists and centrists.

East Europe, 1945-48

The Soviet army is not a workers state in itself, but only in relation to Soviet society. In its interventions in bourgeois societies the role of the Soviet armed forces is defined by the class character of the Stalinist bureaucracy (simultaneously bourgeois and proletarian) which controls it. That is why the armed forces of the Soviet state are capable of administering and defending the bourgeois order (e.g. its counter-revolutionary role in the Spanish Civil War) as well as expropriating the bourgeoisie.

In the 1940 polemics on the Russian question, Trotsky categorically states that the military expansion of the Soviet army will not necessarily lead to the overthrow of capitalism. Rather the Soviet armed forces could administer a bourgeois society. Contrasting Soviet policy in the Baltic with that in eastern Poland, Trotsky asserts:

"...Shachtman refers to Lithuania, Esthonia and Latvia where everything has remained as of old. An incredible argument! No one has said that the Soviet bureaucracy always and everywhere either wishes or is able to accomplish the expropriation of the bourgeoisie."

("From a Scratch--to the Danger of Gangrene")

Of course, administration of a bourgeois society by the Soviet army is an unstable situation, which cannot last indefinitely. This instability is caused both by the national question and the reluctance of the bourgeoisie to operate under Soviet occupation resulting in economic chaos.

Soviet policy in East Europe after World War II was determined primarily by the issue of military defence. From the standpoint of the Stalinist bureaucracy, military defence could be secured in one of two ways. One was the creation of a zone of neutral bourgeois states--the "Finlandization" of East Europe. The other was the creation of an expectedly permanent military alliance by placing the domestic Stalinist parties in power **creating states like the USSR**. Between 1945 and 1948, the class character of East Europe was in the process of being determined, primarily through the relation of the Soviet bureaucracy to U.S. imperialism. In one significant case, that of Austria, the path of bourgeois neutralization was chosen. When the Soviet army withdrew from Austria in 1956, it left a clearly bourgeois society which quickly generated a demonstrably bourgeois state. In the rest of East Europe, the Soviet bureaucracy chose the method of Stalinist governments and states modeled on the USSR. The decision was made in 1947-48.

The transformation point was not the actual nationalizations, which were a prolonged process, but the irreversible commitment by the Soviet bureaucracy to expropriate the bourgeoisie. In the case of Czechoslovakia, this decisive commitment is precisely datable with the Prague coup of February 1948. In the rest of East Europe, the point of transformation is less precisely datable, but in each case the Soviet bureaucracy made a definite decision to give the domestic Stalinist parties a monopoly of power and establish satellite states modelled on the USSR. Before the 1947-48 transformations, the East European bourgeois societies did not have their own states. Rather they were administered by the armed forces of the Soviet state, which played the role of a bourgeois state apparatus.

China in 1949 Versus Cuba in 1959

The consensus of the SL/US leadership is that China became a deformed workers' state with the Red Army victory over Chiang in 1949, while Cuba became a deformed workers' state with the nationalization of the domestic bourgeoisie in August-October 1960. This analysis disturbs comrade Logan because it appears to imply two different criteria for the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In reality, we have one criterion. The dictatorship of the proletariat exists when a monopoly of power is in the hands of an armed force which will necessarily expropriate the bourgeoisie and establish a collectivized economy. This condition was met in China in 1949, but not in Cuba in 1959. This difference lay in the different historically evolved relations between the leadership of the victorious insurrectionary armies and the bourgeoisie.

The Chinese Communist Party in 1949 was led by the cadre of a once revolutionary workers party, it had organized peasant land seizures and uprisings and was generally loyal to the foreign policy of the Soviet bureaucracy. For those reasons, the basic policy of all sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers toward the CCP-PLA was one of physical annihilation. Consequently, there were no purely bourgeois elements within the CCP and its army. During the 1946-Civil War all sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie gave military support to Chiang against the PLA. For that reason, the Civil War destroyed the Chinese bourgeoisie as a politically organized class, reducing them to atomized property owners. Despite "the bloc of four classes" rhetoric, the early Maoist regime did not share power with any section of the Chinese bourgeoisie. And there were no elements within that regime fundamentally committed to the bourgeois order. Thus, in a fairly faction-ridden party, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie met with virtually no internal resistance. Given the complete powerlessness of the Chinese bourgeoisie, the absence of the working class as an independent force, the predisposition of the CCP cadre for a state modelled on Stalin's Russia and objective pressure toward centralized economic planning, the collectivization of the economy was inevitable with the PLA victory in 1949. This inevitability was not inherent in the class character of the pre-1949 PLA, but arose from the specific, and not pre-determined, relations between the CCP, the Chinese proletariat and the domestic and imperialist bourgeoisie. Had a proletarian uprising broken out in 1949, which chal-

lenged the hegemony of the PLA, a wing of the CCP would probably have sought a reconciliation with the Koumintang, thus reversing the results of the Civil War. In that case, the "bloc of four classes" would have been transformed from a fiction into the program of real counter-revolutionary class collaboration.

In contrast to the CCP, the 26th of July Movement originated as the militant, adventurist wing of the party of the Cuban liberal bourgeoisie (the Othodoxo Party). Castro himself had been elected to parliament as an Othodoxo politician and would have served had it not been for Batista coup of 1952. The program of the 26th of July Movement was the restoration of the Cuban Constitution of 1940. For these reasons, the anti-Batista insurrection was supported by significant sections of the Cuban bourgeoisie and tolerated by U.S. imperialism. Politically, the leading cadre of the Rebel Army ranged from Roman Catholic liberals (Hubert Matos) to utopian Stalinists (Che Guevara). The regime which took power in January 1959 could not have nationalized property because the bourgeois forces within it (including the Rebel Army) were too strong. Had Castro announced an intention to expropriate the bourgeoisie and bring Cuba into the Soviet bloc in early 1959 (of course, he opposed such policies at that time), his armed forces would have abandoned him and he would have been overthrown by forces including the bulk of the 26th of July Movement. It is known that Guevara hid his real political positions during 1959 and only revealed them gradually as the regime's supporters were prepared to accept them. In order to establish a deformed workers state, the right-wing of the 26th of July Movement and its allies had to be politically and physically destroyed. By late 1960, the main leaders of the 26th of July Movement right-wing (Hubert Matos, David Salvador, Manuel Ray) were either in prison or in exile. In turn, the place of the ousted right-wingers in the regime (including the army command) was filled by the cadre of the Cuban Stalinist party.

Theoretical Implications

A radical petty-bourgeois party is based on a utopian, internally contradictory program which cannot be realized no matter how favorable objective circumstances. For that reason, when faced with the task of wielding state power, petty-bourgeois parties split into irreconcilably hostile factions each proclaiming loyalty to part of the original program (e.g. the Russian Social Revolutionaries in 1917 or the Left SRs in 1918). This is precisely what happened to the 26 of July Movement during 59 when it split into bourgeois liberals on the road to reaction and incipient Stalinists. From January 1959 until November 1960, the personnel leading and composing the Cuban armed forces supported programs associated with the rule of different classes. This is a highly unstable, transitory situation to which the classic Marxist concept of the state, which refers to a historically viable institution, does not apply. What does a Marxist do when a new, unanticipated situation arises which does not fit into our historically developed categories? There are two alternatives. One is to analyze the situation as best one can, while noting that certain Marxist categories cannot be applied to episodic, historically non-viable situations.

that often occur in revolutions. The other alternative is to extend the established category to the new situation while noting the exceptional and qualified use of Marxist terminology. If one were to extend the Marxist concept of state to the Cuban situation from January 1959 through November 1960, it could be termed a "petty-bourgeois state"--that is, the state of a class incapable of rule and therefore an internally contradictory state.

The core of comrade Logan's analysis of the Cuban revolution is the following:

"In the case of Cuba we must conclude that Castro's state with its peasant guerrilla army was from the first caught in the dynamic cross-current of domestic and international class forces which would lead it inevitably (probably even unwillingly) to the side of workers property forms."

In the absence of a concrete analysis of alternative possibilities, comrade Logan's use of the term "inevitably" is objectivist--it asserts that whatever happened had to happen.

As previously noted, in order to establish a deformed workers state the Castro leadership had to wage a successful struggle against the pro-bourgeois element within its regime and movement. This struggle could have gone the other way. In December 1959, Hubert Matos, one of the four leading commanders in the anti-Batista insurrection and then military commander of Camaguey province, organized a counter-revolutionary conspiracy against Castro. Castro suppressed the conspiracy and imprisoned Matos, but this was hardly inevitable. Had the anti-Castro right unified behind him, Matos' coup, with its base in the Rebel Army, might well have succeeded. And was it inevitable that international class forces pushed the Castro regime toward a break with capitalism? There were conciliationist elements within the American ruling class. The chairman of the board of Freeport Sulphur, which owned a major nickel processing plant in Cuba, constantly advocated conciliating the Castro regime and criticized the hardliners in the Eisenhower administration. There were also conciliationist elements within the Eisenhower administration, for example, the ambassador to Cuba, Bonsal. Given the state of American politics it was unlikely, but not impossible, that the forces in favor of conciliating Castro might have won out. Concretely, conciliation would have meant subsidizing the expropriation of American owned sugar refineries, plantations and utilities. Faced with a similar situation in Algeria (and having learned from the Cuban experience), the Gaullist regime did subsidize the expropriation of the colons, thereby strengthening the pro-bourgeois, pro-French wing of the FLN. I have indicated two real possibilities whereby the Cuban revolution would have been arrested short of a deformed workers state. There are others. If in 1959-60 the Soviet bureaucracy was on a hard rapprochement drive with U.S. imperialism (as it is at present), the Eisenhower administration might have been able to bargain for a Soviet "hands off Cuba" policy. In that case, the pro-Soviet elements in the Castro regime would have been discredited and the regime probably would have come to terms with U.S. imperialism. During 1958,

Castro might well have liquidated the insurrection in return for Batista's ouster, general political amnesty and reestablishment of parliamentary democracy. This was the policy of the Cuban liberal bourgeoisie and U.S. State Department. If there was ever a revolution whose actual outcome was less inevitable from its inception, it was Cuba in 1957-60.

The dating of the Cuban deformed workers state with the expropriations completed by November 1960 is not because nationalization is a self-sufficient, absolute criterion for the establishment of a workers state. Rather these particular nationalizations signified the decisive commitment by the leadership of the Cuban armed force to expropriate the bourgeoisie as a class and create a state modelled on the USSR. The failure to nationalize at an earlier date primarily reflected the continued resistance within the Castro regime to breaking with capitalism. Thus, two months after the nationalizations, the government officially declared Cuba "socialist" and Castro made his famous "I Am a Marxist-Leninist" speech.

Conclusions

It is necessary for a proletarian vanguard in a backward nation to understand how petty-bourgeois led guerrilla forces will act in different circumstances--what they are capable and incapable of doing. By equating an insurrectionary army with a state, comrade Logan's document appears to assert that when Stalinists and certain types of radical nationalists take up the gun they are incapable of liquidation, betrayal and counter-revolutionary class collaboration; rather that they must fight their way to a collectivist economy if they are not militarily defeated. Thus, guerrilla forces of the Maoist-Fidelista type are seen as unequivocally anti-capitalist, at least on the national plane. This conception would have been disastrous for a communist vanguard in Vietnam in 1946 when the Stalinists suppressed a workers' uprising in order to liquidate peaceably in the face of the returning French army; or again in 1954 when the Stalinists liquidated their insurrectionary bases in the South in the face of a murderous puppet regime (which was moving from old French to new American masters). In the face of an urban, working-class uprising, petty-bourgeois led guerrilla forces will split with elements forming a counter-revolutionary alliance with sections of the bourgeoisie. For a communist vanguard not to realize that proletarian revolution tends to drive Stalinists and petty-bourgeois nationalists into the camp of reaction could be suicidal.

Afterward

The purpose of this document is to deal with the main substantive questions raised in comrade Logan's document. It is not meant to be a comprehensive, critical survey of our literature (public and internal) on the Cuban question. That is why there is no mention of Cuba and Marxist Theory, Theses on Guerrilla Warfare, as well as the Joe Vetter and Frank B. documents. In particular, comrade Logan might object that there is no discussion of the "transitional state" concept. However, the "transitional state" concept is not the central theoretical axis of Cuba and Marxist Theory. It

belongs only to the episodic Wohlforth contribution reprinted in MB #8, as he zig-zagged through an approximation of our "deformed workers state" position on his way from Mage's earlier full-blown "transitional state" interpretation to Healy's insistence that Cuba remains a capitalist state.

What is not as clear in MB #8 and what comrade Logan has sought to clarify is indeed the theoretical issue before us in this discussion. All participants agree on the political conclusions of the Spartacist tendency regarding the outcome of the Cuban Revolution. But the specific character of the class struggle and of the state power of the prior period--both as a test of Marxist theory and of the "Russian Question" (East Europe, China) in the post-World War II period--can well use additional, explicit written delineation.

Comrades wanting to familiarize themselves with the political history of Cuba in 1959-60 and particularly the factional struggles within the Castro regime are referred to J. P. Morray's The Second Revolution in Cuba. Morray is a pro-Soviet Stalinist whose thesis is that Castro's leftward course was forced upon him by conservative resistance to his program both without and within the regime.

received 24 June 1973

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The following addition to the preface of Marxist Bulletin #8, "Cuba and Marxist Theory," is proposed as an interim clarification introduced in the light of the concern expressed by Comrade Logan in his document of 21 March 1973. Comrade Logan's contribution has opened a discussion within our international tendency of a theoretical character on aspects of the processes which have led to the creation of a number of deformed workers states since the second World War.

Since this discussion is still in progress, strenuous effort has been made in the addition to the MB #8 preface to avoid anticipating the outcome of the discussion. Instead, the supplemental remarks are intended centrally to clear up any misunderstanding or ambiguity as regards the Spartacist tendency's sharing, or having ever shared, in the "transitional state" theory held by Mage and Wohlforth in the 1961 period. Therefore even those related theoretical and political views held generally by our movement (and which are the basis for that section of the remarks of our delegation at the London 1966 IC Conference reprinted in MB #8) have only been touched on in a limited and general way.

--J.R., 26 June 1973

With the passage of time, a slow drift in the appreciation of old events occurs in the Marxist movement, leading at certain points to sharp departures from what had been previously taken for granted. Sometimes what is in essence a higher and more comprehensive synthesis is arrived at with only incidental loss of particular detail known in an earlier period; and sometimes an essential grasp of reality is dissipated. Which predominates depends on considerations larger than and sometimes remote from the event under consideration.

Haston/Vern Thesis

Certainly the massive enthusing over Fidel Castro by those with pretensions to revolutionary Marxism has been today largely dispelled, or more generally, displaced. But the explanations, rationalizations and substitutes of all the centrist, revisionist and reformist currents have been no improvement. For example, miscellaneous leftist elements presently or recently in the Socialist Workers Party have lately rediscovered in old SWP bulletins the writings on Eastern Europe from the early 1950's of the Vern-Ryan tendency, a faction in Los Angeles long since dissolved into Max Shachtman's Independent Socialist League (itself long since dissolved into the Socialist Party/Social-Democratic Federation). Dennis Vern had in turn borrowed the core of his outlook from the British Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party's majority faction led by Jock Haston, until the Hastonites liquidated essentially into right-wing Labourism. What is not necessarily appreciated today is that the Haston/Vern thesis--that wherever the Red Army arrived at the end of World War II, by that fact that piece of land was a deformed workers state--was a felt liquidation of Trotskyism, not as logic would indicate to the Stalinists, weak in Britain and the U.S., but ultimately into the reformist reflections of one's own bourgeois order.

But Haston and Vern did see one aspect of the social transformation in Eastern Europe which was largely lost on the perplexed Trotskyist theoreticians of the time, such as Hansen and Germain-Mandel--namely that account must be taken of the existent armed force as an elementary consideration in seeking to understand what process is going on. But Haston and Vern stopped at only the beginning of wisdom. And they skewed that piece of wisdom besides. The given class character of the state until or unless overthrown certainly determines the direction of social development within the society which that state protects. However, in Eastern Europe the core of the state was a Russian army, agent of the Russian Stalinist degenerated workers state.

In the short run the Russian Stalinist leadership could and did exercise choice (choice not freely arrived at) as to the social outcome--hence the elementary error in the Haston/Vern syllogism "class character of the state equals domination of that class in the society" when the state (army) is Russian and the society is, for example, Austrian or Hungarian. The Russians evacuated the areas they controlled in Austria and Iran but directed the transformation of the bulk of Eastern Europe into social and political counterparts of the Soviet Union--i.e., consolidation in the wake of Russian conquest.

An exception was the particular but at the time not obviously noted case of Yugoslavia, whose social transformation was essentially internally arrived at. Despite the Tito-Stalin split the significance of Yugoslavia only became fully clear in the light of the Chinese and also the Cuban revolutions.

Wohlforth

The Yugoslav, Chinese and Cuban revolutions can in no way be explained in terms of a direct imposition of Russian rule--by anybody to the left of the John Birch Society, that is, with the exception of Tim Wohlforth of the Workers League/"International (Healyite) Committee." And even Wohlforth's tortured dogmas--that trivial parody of Marxism entitled "The Theory of Structural Assimilation" (a Bulletin publication of 1964)--manifestly collapsed with the author's inability to incorporate Cuba in his schema. As Wohlforth noted in his preface:

"In the summer of 1961 I wrote a preliminary draft document on the nature of the Cuban state and the theoretical implications flowing therefrom ["Cuba and Marxist Theory" (reprinted in Marxist Bulletin #8)--SL note]. The first discussions of this document immediately convinced me that I was utterly and totally on the wrong track. Like the SWP leadership itself, I was simply throwing together scraps of theory to 'explain' an impression of reality in Cuba and to justify a political conclusion--one of course far more critical of the Cuban leadership than that of the SWP majority. If I was to get to first base in understanding Cuba it became clear that I had to fit Cuba into a general theoretical understanding of postwar developments as a whole. Thus first I had to wrestle with the theoretical problems raised by East Europe, Yugoslavia and China before I could expect to get anywhere on more current developments. Ironically, the more I reached an understanding of these events the less I found them related to Cuba. So a document, which started out as an analysis of Cuba, does not even deal directly with that question. We are issuing an analysis of Cuba separately."

Wohlforth's "theory" boils down to the following: first, absorption of adjacent states into the Russian degenerated workers state; second, social transformation of the newly acquired region; third and finally, its release as a separate deformed workers state--all because of a "defensive expansionist" drive by the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy in response to the urgent threat from capitalist imperialism. Wohlforth even explained North Vietnam's becoming a deformed workers state by his own version of the "domino theory": first China was absorbed by Russia and regurgitated, then North Vietnam likewise by China.

But looking at his map Wohlforth noticed that Cuba is rather distant from Russia and an island to boot! Thus was Wohlforth left holding the position which the Workers League still, more or less shamefacedly, advances today--that the Cuban state led by Fidel Castro is capitalist. And this is presumably why the so prolific Wohlforth has left us still waiting in 1973 for the promised "separate

analysis of Cuba." (Come to think of it we haven't noticed any recent reprinting of "The Theory of Structural Assimilation" either.)

* * *

In opposing the SWP Majority's revisionism, our original tendency came into existence and fought for three main programmatic points in orienting to the Cuban revolution and its defense: insistence on the Permanent Revolution, i.e. the view that no essential task of the revolution could be achieved short of the victory and consolidation of a workers state; and, correspondingly, insistence on the struggle for hegemony of the working class in the revolution; together with the necessity for a conscious Trotskyist party as the proletarian vanguard to lead that struggle.

"Transitional State"?

As noted in our earlier preface, in 1961 Shane Mage--with the agreement of Wohlforth and with the disciplined support of others in our then common tendency--had advanced a politically principled but theoretically yet vague and indefensible position: that the Cuban state had no yet defined class character, that it was a "transitional state." This viewpoint, together with the way it was imposed upon the tendency, was one of the early frictions in what finally resulted a year and a half later in the split of Wohlforth from what became the Spartacist tendency. Mage's 1961 resolution on the Cuban question was brought, previously entirely uncirculated among the tendency, into one New York tendency meeting with the statement by Wohlforth that in any case it had to be submitted to the SWP internal bulletin the following morning. Since a possible majority of the tendency in New York and nationally considered that Cuba had already become a deformed workers state, many of us went along only out of a strong sense of tendency discipline demanded by the programmatic struggle in the SWP.

For the next immediate period the disputed question of what was presently the class character of the Cuban state--Mage's "transitional state," the bulk of the tendency's "deformed workers state," or (after leaving Mage's position and a brief fling with the tendency majority's view) Wohlforth's "capitalist state"--tended to leave certain theoretical aspects in the shadows, in particular a precise analysis, chronologically specific, of the earlier periods of the Cuban revolution. These differing interpretations, while all conjuncturally consistent with our common programmatic basis, were nonetheless a source of tension within the tendency.

Then in November 1962 Wohlforth, abetted by A. Phillips and Gerry Healy, split from the tendency essentially over whether to seek a bloc with the SWP Majority to head off its threatened unification with the European Pabloists--a policy which Wohlforth/Healy sought to foist on the tendency in the guise of a debate on the nature of the SWP (see Marxist Bulletin #2). Our political struggle around the issues raised for the SWP's 1963 Convention and our unsuccessful fight against expulsion from the SWP (precipitated by Wohlforth's fabricated "revelations" about us to the Majority) preoccupied our tendency for a year.

In 1964 extensive oral discussion in the New York section of the tendency led to Mage's pretty much vacating his position and to an arrival by consensus at the following central proposition: Cuba became a deformed workers state with the pervasive nationalizations in the summer and fall of 1960, which liquidated the bourgeoisie as a class.

Since most of our argumentation was directed against the SWP majority, which saw Cuba as evolved from "a workers and peasants government" into a "healthy" workers state "though not yet possessing the forms of workers democracy" and led by "the unconscious Marxist, Fidel Castro" (the Joseph Hansen position), most of our verification centered upon the qualitatively deformed, i.e. Stalinist, character of the Cuban worker's state: the compulsion for Castro to discover and declare that he was a "Marxist-Leninist" and for the Fidelistas to fuse with the pre-existing Cuban Stalinist party while purging it of its loyalty to the Russian bureaucracy; the existence of a powerful state apparatus of repression, and separate from the masses, as revealed in the massive (and quite justified) incarceration of suspect sections of Cuban society during the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion; the self-admitted bonapartist role of Fidel Castro personally in arriving at the crucial decisions in the missile crisis, a life or death matter for the whole Cuban people.

A Petty-Bourgeois Government

We took it as incontestable that the Cuban armed rebels who had originally come ashore from the Granma were in every way a petty-bourgeois formation. Their militarily marginal struggle was the last straw for the Batista regime, which was hated by the masses, increasingly isolated from the upper layers of Cuban society and finally abandoned by Yankee imperialism. The rebel army which occupied Havana on 1 January 1959 continued as a politically heterogeneous petty-bourgeois formation possessing massive popular support.

It's initial coalition government with authentic liberal-bourgeois politicians took place in the context of a shattered old bourgeois state apparatus. In the course of the earlier guerilla struggle--a species of civil war--the commanders of that rebel army had had their previous direct connections with oppositional bourgeois-liberal elements broken and had become episodically autonomous from their class (and in many cases biological) fathers, the Cuban bourgeoisie. After taking power, they were confronted by U.S. imperialism's clumsy and mounting attempts to bring them to heel through brute economic pressure upon Cuba without corresponding attempts by the contemptuous Eisenhower administration to create the conditions and connections to reknit the new rulers to the old social fabric in order to facilitate accomodation to the brutal demands of the imperialists.

No less crucial than the estrangement created by the civil war conditions between the petty-bourgeois guerilla fighters and the bourgeois order was the absence of a class-conscious combative proletariat which would invariably have polarized these petty-bourgeois militants, drawing some to the workers' side and repelling others back into the arms of the bourgeois order. Hence the exceptional

latitude available to this petty-bourgeois government in the face of the escalating tit-for-tat economic struggle with the American government in that period and under the enormous popular, patriotic upsurge of the undifferentiated Cuban masses.

Deformed Workers State

But when the end was reached with the economic liquidation of the Cuban bourgeoisie (far more systematic and complete than the Chinese Maoists have instituted to this day--even including nationalizing the street ice cream vendors), this petty-bourgeois government even under these most favorable conditions was unable to find a third way between labor and capital to characteristically organize a society, and by virtue of its newly acquired social position--holding a political monopoly at the head of a nationalized economy--was compelled to embrace that ersatz Marxism which is the necessary ideological reflection of a Stalinist bureaucracy, however newly fledged.

To be sure, the existence of the Russian degenerated workers state presented the encouragement of a model and, more important, the material support which made the outcome a practicality. But in no way did the Russians or their domestic enthusiasts directly create the actual process within Cuba itself. The alliance with the Russians was an outcome of, not the precondition to, the formation of a deformed workers state in Cuba.

At no point was there a classless "transitional state" in Cuba. To repeat, in the intervening period between the shattering of the old capitalist Batista state, the compradors of American imperialism, and the consolidation of a deformed workers state, there was a petty-bourgeois government--not a class-neutral one--with the core of its power being the petty-bourgeois Rebel Army. This regime had temporarily become autonomous from the bourgeois order through the violent polarization of the guerilla struggle, moving through a period of great popular (not specifically proletarian) mass upsurge, but as yet not locked upon a nationalized economy. Moreover its existence episodically apart from the fundamental social classes--the bourgeoisie and the proletariat--was made possible by the failure of the working class to itself pose a challenge to capitalist rule.

Hence this regime possessed the indeterminacy in outcome and tension of either the potential to regenerate and consolidate a capitalist state or for a section of that regime to lock on to the form of nationalized property and thus verify through a living process the validity of the earlier Trotskyist characterization that, viewed from a most general standpoint, the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy is in one of its central contradictory aspects--i.e. the transmission belt for the pressure of the world bourgeois order on a workers state--a petty-bourgeois formation. The decisive section of the Castroites could make the transition to the leadership of a deformed workers state because in the absence of the egalitarianism and proletarian democracy of a state directly won by the working people, they never had to transcend or fundamentally alter their own radical petty-bourgeois social appetites, but only to transform and redirect them. And parenthetically, in this is both the decisive signi-

ficance and the necessity of the political revolution, approached from the Cuban experience, i.e., from a different aspect than that of the long, losing rearguard action that Trotsky fought in Russia in the 1920's.

* * *

from Political Bureau Minutes No.7, 8 July 1973:

"Motion: To adopt the political thrust of the addition to the preface to Marxist Bulletin #8. Passed"

Extensions and corrections made, 8 August 1973.

THE FIGHT IN THE UNITED SECRETARIAT:
REFORMIST APPETITE VERSUS GUERRILLAIST CENTRISM

[The following material extracted from an article in a recent SWP Discussion Bulletin (Vol. 31, No. 28, July 1973) has a bearing on the discussion within the Spartacist tendency.]

...

Not "Armed Struggle," But Proletarian Revolution

The central revision of revolutionary Marxism by the international majority is the separation of the class organization of an insurrection from the society emerging from it. A revolutionary workers state, in which the working class democratically governs on the basis of collectivized property, can only be established if the armed forces of the labor movement itself play the dominant role in overthrowing the capitalist state. The insurgent peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie are necessary allies of the proletariat in socialist revolutions in backward countries. However, as Trotsky insisted again and again in his fight against Stalinism, the decisive question is whether the proletariat leads the petty bourgeoisie or vice versa. The leadership of the proletariat in a social revolution does not have a general or nebulous political or ideological form. Any bourgeois nationalist, petty-bourgeois radical or Stalinist can and often does claim to be fighting for workers power. "Proletarian leadership" is meaningless rhetoric unless extended to military dominance during an insurrection. The leading role of the proletariat in a social revolution also means the military dominance of proletarian armed forces (workers militias and proletarian sections of the old armed forces) during the insurrection. This is a fundamental principle of revolutionary Marxism. Whoever denies it is not a Trotskyist!

Where capitalism has been overthrown primarily by petty-bourgeois armed forces (Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Cuba), what has emerged are deformed workers states--bureaucratic ruling castes based on collectivized (i.e., working-class) property forms. That the guerrilla road to power necessarily leads to a Stalinist regime is shown by the Cuban revolution, where the insurrectionary leadership did not begin as conscious Stalinists. Rather, the 26th of July Movement was a heterogeneous radical nationalist group originating out of the militant adventurist wing of the party of the Cuban liberal bourgeoisie (the Ortodoxo Party). However, in order to overthrow capitalism and maintain bonapartist rule of the consolidating bureaucratic caste over the Cuban working class, Castro's movement had to become a Stalinist party, merging with the wretched Cuban CP.

In a generally politically correct document, Comrade Gerald Clark states, "By incorrectly generalizing the unusual experiences of the Cuban revolution and applying them on a continental scale in Latin America, the majority has revealed its petty-bourgeois adaptation to non-revolutionary currents in the workers movement." (Gerald Clark, "The Only Road to Revolution is Through the Proletariat," SWP Discussion Bulletin, Volume 31, Number 1, April 1973, page 8.)

This statement indicates that Comrade Clark has not yet entirely

transcended the theoretical framework of Pabloism. Revolutionary Marxists oppose the abandonment of "the Leninist norm of proletarian revolutions" in favor of "the Cuban road to power" not because "the Cuban road" is unlikely to succeed elsewhere--indeed, the Bolshevik revolution has not yet been repeated elsewhere--but because it necessarily produces a nationalist, anti-working-class regime. Soviet Russia in 1917-24 and Cuba (or China or Russia today) are two different types of societal organizations separated by a political revolution. Between Trotskyism on the one hand and Castro, Mao, Ho Chi Minh and their ilk on the other is a line of blood! They know this and so should we.

The Consistency of the Argentine PRT

The debate has centered around the politics and activities of the international majority-supported group in Argentina, the PRT (Combatiente). The international majority has simultaneously defended the PRT against minority accusations of adventurism and criticized it for Guevarist deviations.

Even when Comrade Germain seeks to demonstrate the PRT's close ties to the working class, he demonstrates just the opposite--a thoroughgoing petty-bourgeois elitism: "The ERP detachments penetrated into some 30 factories where special conditions of repression existed and where armed factory guards of the bosses and the army terrorized the workers. They disarmed the guards, convened all the workers into general assemblies and held long discussions with them on the present stage of the class struggle in Argentina." ("In Defense of Leninism...", page 17.)

We might remind Comrade Germain that in 1949 Mao's Red Army, on a much broader scale, disarmed the repressive bourgeois army and convened (that is, ordered) the workers to assemble to hold "long discussions" with them. Revolutionary Marxists seek to replace the repressive bourgeois state apparatus with armed forces controlled by the workers movement. By contrast, the PRT seeks to replace the bourgeois state apparatus with armed petty-bourgeois bands which are not controlled by the organized working class.

The PRT's support of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and its belief in the revolutionary character of the Cuban, North Korean and Vietnamese Stalinist parties is not "inconsistency" or "theoretical eclecticism" as Comrade Germain contends. The PRT is a consistent insurrectionary Stalinist organization. It is opposed to workers democracy in the state which it is seeking to establish and it is pursuing insurrectionary methods designed to ensure military control over the working class should it come to power. It is the PRT's uneasy apologists of the international majority who are inconsistent. The international majority claims to believe that a workers state should be governed through soviet democracy, but advocates insurrectionary methods which deprive the working class of decisive military power. The kindest thing one can say of the international majority position is that it is utopian. Just as pre-Marxist socialism looked to the enlightened members of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie to liberate the working class, so the international majority believes that enlightened and heroic petty-bourgeois

guerrilla fighters will overthrow the capitalist state and magnanimously grant the working class soviet power.

The PRT seems to be rapidly moving away from the United Secretariat. This is easily understandable. Not only does it flow inevitably from the actual urban guerrilla struggle the PRT undertakes, but, as Comrade Germain has himself noted, the initiating PRT cadres who had been more "Trotskyist" have been largely exterminated. (This is the usual fate of terrorists practicing terrorism and is a sufficient comment on the international majority's approach to the difficult and lengthy task of building leadership.) Comrade Germain cannot justly disown those who engage in the "strategy" he defends when they go on to embrace the corresponding left-Stalinist ideology. Because they are fundamentally nationalist, regimes which come to power via the guerrilla road repudiate the perspective of socialist revolutions in other nations when these are an obstacle to making diplomatic deals with bourgeois states. Appropriately, Fidel Castro has evolved in a manner parallel to his onetime publicist, Comrade Hansen. Castro too once advocated guerrilla war, but now finds it "ultraleft." The Havana regime has repudiated guerrilla war in order to form an alliance with Latin American bourgeois nationalism (the Peruvian junta, the Chilean popular front, Peronism). In a like manner, Mao has endorsed capitalist counterrevolutionary terrorism in Bangladesh and Ceylon. Some Maoist-Fidelistas are repelled by the present policies of the Havana and Peking regimes. These dissident left Stalinists can only be won to Trotskyism by proving to them that the counterrevolutionary foreign policy of Havana and Peking is the organic and necessary result of the manner in which these regimes came to power: without the dominant role in the revolution being played by the working class under Trotskyist leadership. But all wings of the United Secretariat have adapted to left Maoism-Guevarism by presenting Trotskyism as a form of insurrectionary left Stalinism. This is the crime of the centrist international majority in its policies toward Argentina.

Terrorists, Guerrillas and Stalinist Bureaucrats

Much confusion exists in our movement about what Stalinism is. It is far more than an ideology, a particular political-organizational tradition, and certainly not simply a phase in the history of the USSR. Stalinism is a social phenomenon--bureaucratic rule on the basis of working-class property forms. In addition to being a reformist working-class current, Stalinism has organic roots in the urban petty bourgeoisie of the backward countries. Petty-bourgeois radical nationalists identify with and take as models the Maoists, Viet Cong and Fidelistas as people like themselves who have made good. In one of its aspects, Stalinism is a form of petty-bourgeois radical nationalism--the politics of aspiring bureaucrats.

No one should be taken in by the international majority's attempt to make a fundamental distinction between classical terrorism and contemporary guerrillaism of the ERP-Tupamaros type. Both represent the same basic political class content: the attempt by a section of the petty bourgeoisie to overthrow the bourgeoisie and succeed it as the dominant stratum in society. Guerrillaism is nothing more than the current characteristic method of struggle by

petty-bourgeois radical nationalists who in particular circumstances smoothly transform themselves into Stalinist bureaucrats.

Decades before the emergence of "Marxist-Leninist guerrillas," Trotsky pointed out the organic connection between left-wing terrorism and Stalinist bureaucratism:

"Individual terrorism is in its very essence bureaucratism turned inside out. For Marxists this law was not discovered yesterday. Bureaucratism has no confidence in the masses and endeavors to substitute itself for the masses. Terrorism works in the same manner; it seeks to make the masses happy without asking their participation. The Stalinist bureaucracy has created a vile leader-cult, attributing to leaders divine qualities. 'Hero' worship is also the religion of terrorism, only with a minus sign. The Nikolaevs imagine that all that is necessary is to remove a few leaders by means of a revolver in order for history to take another course. Communist terrorists, as an ideological grouping, are of the same flesh and blood as the Stalinist bureaucracy." (Leon Trotsky, The Stalinist Bureaucracy and the Kirov Assassination, Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35, Pathfinder Press, page 124.)

The SWP Leadership: For and Against
the Guerrilla Road to Power

For many years, the SWP leadership was not only an ardent advocate of guerrilla war, but engaged in idiotic enthusiasm over the Castro regime and Fidelista movement. The SWP's self-styled orthodox turn against guerrillaism is part of its rightward motion in adopting a reformist program acceptable to sections of the liberal bourgeoisie. The present arguments over which tendency has a distorted interpretation of the Ninth World Congress decisions are quite beside the point.

For the major document which in 1963 laid the basis for the SWP's unification with the European Pabloists to form the United Secretariat stated: "(13) Along the road of a revolution beginning with simple democratic demands and ending in the rupture of capitalist property relations, guerrilla warfare conducted by landless peasants and semi-proletarian forces, under a leadership that becomes committed to carrying the revolution through to a conclusion, can play a decisive role in undermining and precipitating the downfall of a colonial and semi-colonial power. This is one of the main lessons to be drawn from experience since the second world war. It must be consciously incorporated into the strategy of building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries." ("For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement," Statement of the Political Committee of the SWP, SWP Discussion Bulletin, Volume 24, Number 29, April 1963, page 39. Also quoted in "On the Disputed Questions in the Fourth International: A Brief Summary," by C. Howard (IMG), SWP Internal Information Bulletin, Number 3 in 1973, June 1973, page 25.)

Interestingly, at that same time the oppositional tendency which later became the Spartacist League produced the following explicit

counterposition on guerrilla war: "(15) Experience since the Second World War has demonstrated that peasant-based guerrilla warfare under petit-bourgeois leadership can in itself lead to nothing more than an anti-working-class bureaucratic regime. The creation of such regimes has come about under the conditions of decayed imperialism, the demoralization and disorientation caused by Stalinist betrayals, and the absence of revolutionary Marxist leadership of the working class. Colonial revolution can have an unequivocally progressive revolutionary significance only under such leadership of the revolutionary proletariat. For Trotskyists to incorporate into their strategy revisionism on the proletarian leadership in the revolution is a profound negation of Marxism-Leninism no matter what pious wish may be concurrently expressed for 'building revolutionary Marxist parties in the colonial countries.' Marxists must resolutely oppose any adventurist acceptance of the peasant-guerrilla road to socialism--historically akin to the Social Revolutionary program on tactics that Lenin fought. This alternative would be a suicidal course for the socialist goals of the movement, and perhaps physically for the adventurers." ("Towards Rebirth of the Fourth International--Draft Resolution on the World Movement," submitted for the Minority by Shane Mage, James Robertson and Geoffrey White, SWP Discussion Bulletin, Volume 24, Number 26, June 1963, page 16.)

It might now appear that the SWP majority has capitulated to Spartacism on the guerrilla war question! Such a view however would be inverted. The SWP leadership's present opposition to guerrillaism flows directly from its reformist appetites, not simply from opposition to a tactically adventurist policy. The Spartacist tendency, while condemning tactical adventurism, opposed guerrilla war primarily because of its class content and the type of regime which emerges from it if successful....

9 July 1973

LETTER FROM BILL LOGAN

Melbourne,
Australia

19 July 1973

David S.
USA

Dear Dave,

...Your notes on the discussions on the Russian question are not really adequate for me to reach any conclusion on, though it seems quite clear that we will come to a far better position than the existing one. We feel isolated from the discussion here, so please try to give us some more idea of what's going on.

While I would not pretend to be satisfied with my March letter to Jim, no better explanation has yet been given to me. The alternatives, apparently, all have implications which are bad, with the exception of the "embryo" characterization of the guerrilla states, which is unclear to me (though apparently less dangerous than the existing characterization). So I continue to argue the position of my March letter.

Reliance in the discussion on analogies, such as embryo, seems to me undesirable. Analogies are, by definition, not identities, and are thus useful in propaganda only AFTER it is clear as to exactly what they mean, that is, after proper analysis avoiding such devices. When we've done the theoretical work and know exactly what we want to explain we can look for an analogy. (Have you thought of the possibility of a Joey--kangaroo in its mother's pouch--deformed workers state?)

The most sophisticated danger comes from Frank B.'s misuse of Marx's view of the exceptional possibility of peaceful transition. I side with Lenin: "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is violence against the bourgeoisie; and the necessity of such violence is particularly created, as Marx and Engels have repeatedly explained in detail (especially in The Civil War in France and the preface to it), by the existence of a military clique and a bureaucracy." (Lenin's italics, from his discussion of the passages to which Frank B. refers, in The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, Collected Works, Volume 28, p. 238). A military clique and a bureaucracy--that is a good description of the political agency unifying and organizing Mao's petty-bourgeois forces. That which must be absent for a peaceful transition is not only present, but most highly developed in the guerrilla state!

I noted in the March letter that the question of permanent revolution is closely related to the question of guerrilla deformed workers states. However, in the classical formulations the permanent revolution is seen as led by the class conscious proletariat, under the leadership of the Leninist party. It is useful to look at the present discussion as being about the permanent revolution in situations of the relative passivity of the proletariat and the inability of the conscious revolutionary factor to intervene. The theory of permanent revolution is validated in the difficulties these

countries had in maintaining capitalism after the introduction of bourgeois-democratic reforms. These difficulties may, for all I know, in certain circumstances lead back to feudalism (Columbia). Equally they may lead to the establishment of proletarian property relations--even in the absence of a proletariat (Albania). The question is to look at the forces operating on any specific guerrilla formation to discover which form of property it will, in the long run, be forced to defend. Often the crucial force is the threat or reality of the exercise of the state power of some foreign workers (or alternatively bourgeois) state.

Calling a view "rigid" or "mechanical" does not necessarily make it so. Suffice to say that I make a start to come to terms with some of the diversity of things which determine the eventual outcome of the processes set in motion by guerrilla warfare. It is the job of Marxists to find a way of analysing a developing situation to discover its likely outcome. I assert that in this area such analysis is possible, though I don't pretend to be able to do it in every case. It appears from your notes that some comrades are moved by a sheer lack of confidence in the potential of our scientific tools. However, even those comrades who are worried that it may be completely unclear as to whether a particular guerrilla state is ultimately for workers or bourgeois property forms must see that the clarity or otherwise of the situation to us does not in this case determine what is. I agree with Liz's reported remark that confusion should be avoided between the time at which a formation becomes a deformed workers state and the subsidiary question of the time at which we are ready to say so.

The real issue is whether there is in fact--for example in 1947 Maoist China, 1959 Cuba, or 1973 NLF/South Vietnam--the possibility that the state would continue in future years to protect bourgeois property. I would say that the answer is clearly "No." I would also add that most of Cambodia is now a deformed workers state, the leadership of Prince Sihanouk notwithstanding.

To draw from someone else's armoury, there seems to me to be a suggestion that some of the comrades display a fetishisation of the word "state," seen in their reluctance to confer the sacred title on a ragged guerrilla band (at least without giving the title some diminutive or disparaging qualifier). After all, states are supposed to be solid, respectable institutions with ponderous procedures of government.

This all has a bit the quality of tilting at windmills, because I still know virtually nothing of how the discussion in the US is going. However, in case it is a subject of discussion at the summer camp it seemed best to let you know my reaction to that information on the discussion which I have received. After all I'm going to be bound by the results of the discussion process. I presume there will be no early decision....

Warm comradely greetings,

Bill

cc: SL/US, file