

# INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION BULLETIN

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Draft Postscript to Marxist Bulletin #8 Preface Addition

[Analytical refinement in the light of summer camp, plenum and informal subsequent discussions: distinctions between "transitional state," petty-bourgeois state, petty-bourgeois government.]

A state rests upon and struggles to defend a characteristic property form on behalf of the (thereby indicated) dominant class. In Cuba from January 1959 until fall 1961, the political-military power did not fit such settled, stable organization. There was a predominant armed force in that period, the rebel army; it was petty-bourgeois. Hence the class-neutral phrase "transitional state" is not only inapplicable but suggestive of fundamental revisionism on the class nature of the state. A "petty-bourgeois state" in the Cuba of the 20th century world is a misnomer and a contradiction in terms. And the contradiction was in Cuba real and concrete. The armed force in question wavered and shifted on the social direction in which to point its guns. This petty-bourgeois force, faced with the only two practical and conceivable modes of societal organization--capitalist ownership and accumulation or nationalized and collective property--had to choose. And until that choice had been definitively resolved, the fundamentally contradictory government did not and could not function as a stable power. The ambivalence characteristic of the Cuban rebel army had already been resolved in the cases of the Yugoslav partisans and of the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army prior to their ascension to power throughout their respective countries. The Joe Hansen/Livio Maitain/others belief that this was the essential configuration in a "cold," "from above" development in Guinea or Algeria or Egypt or Burma or Syria, etc., etc. is simply empirically false and more or less willfully confuses the process of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie as a class with the massive shifts in the ethnic or other locus of the continuation of bourgeois domestic rule within the framework of the imperialist world order.

--J.R., 27 August 1973

(A contribution to the written discussion on the Russian Question)

by D. Kalinin

In recent oral discussions on the Russian Question, the following formula was suggested: the deformed (and degenerated) workers states are "workers states with petty-bourgeois governments." This formulation has the advantage of identifying the bureaucratic caste in the Soviet Union, which came to power on the basis of political counter-revolution, with the ruling castes of the deformed workers states, which came to power on the basis of military conquest. The term "petty-bourgeois" serves to equalize these ruling groups which, in spite of their different origins and original bases of support, are essentially identical in their social role and ideology. The governments of Russia, China, Cuba, Yugoslavia, North Vietnam, etc. are cases of convergent evolution: their similar political functions dictated the evolutionary convergence of their structures and methods of rule. The clearest case, and the mathematical proof, of this theory is Castro's Cuba, where a petty-bourgeois band of guerrillas developed rapidly into a bureaucracy with all the essential (but not all the secondary) features of the Stalin bureaucracy in the USSR. The term "petty-bourgeois government" also has the advantage of indicating the bonapartist nature of these castes, their role as arbiter between classes on a national and world scale, and the unity of their proletarian and bourgeois functions.

However, I believe that the term "petty-bourgeois government" implies a revision of Marxism. The reasons for this assertion become more clear if we examine briefly our use of the slogan for the workers government. Marxists have traditionally used the term "workers government" to cover everything from a Labour Party government in Britain to the governing apparatus of a healthy workers state. In this view, a workers government is a government of workers parties, not in coalition with the bourgeoisie, regardless of the class nature of the state. This traditional usage has the advantage of stressing the independence of the workers parties in taking power, in opposition to pop frontism, whereas the "petty-bourgeois government" formulation could not allow us to distinguish between a Labor Party government, a Farmer-Labor Party government, or a Peasant Party government (e.g., Stambuliski's government in Bulgaria).

Spartacist usage has tended to narrow the term "workers government" to mean only a government administering the dictatorship of the proletariat. This revision is entirely correct. However, the Soviet Union (and China, etc.) is also a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat, although badly deformed (since there can be no "dictatorship of the bureaucracy")--thus, the government of the Soviet Union is a workers government, and not a petty-bourgeois government.

For the sake of purity, we could narrow our definition even further, granting the honorable title of "workers government" only to healthy workers states. But this would be mere moralizing, and

not Marxist method. We are not ashamed to call on reformists to take power--"for a workers government!" When we apply this slogan we do not mean the CP-SP should administer the capitalist state, nor do we mean they should create a deformed workers state (when this is a concrete possibility, as in Vietnam, we use a different formulation--All Indochina Must Go Communist!), what we mean is these parties must be exposed and overthrown so that the Fourth International can step in and guide the workers to power.

Applying the Marxist definition of the state we must regard as "workers governments" the governments administering the workers states, healthy or deformed. From this flows also our definition of workers parties--parties based on workers organs (e.g. Labor Party based on the trade unions), or the ruling parties of the workers states (the CPs).

The government derives its class character from the state it serves. A petty-bourgeois government is impossible because there can be no petty-bourgeois state. Moreover, this term merely states the obvious: a state is in any case, by its very nature, at least half bourgeois. The Bolshevik state, in its most healthy period of existence, was more than half tsarist. Of all its organs only the party and the Cheka were free of bourgeois-tsarist influences. In time these organs too degenerated and took on a bourgeois character. The Stalinist state apparatus is bourgeois from top to bottom--but there is no bourgeoisie. It would be more reasonable to characterize the deformed workers states as "workers states with bourgeois state apparatuses" except that this term is also meaningless, as it also accurately describes the Bolshevik state under Lenin.

It is scholastic and pluralist to divide the state into different components without seeing the essential unity of all its organs. The different categories of the state power derive their essential class character from the class nature of the state as a whole. Castro's victorious guerrilla army (which also functioned temporarily as the governmental power) lacked a class character, precisely because there existed for a whole period, no state from which these organs could derive a class identity. Similarly, a workers militia, or a soviet, although typical organs of a healthy workers state, acquire their full proletarian character only at the time they begin to administer a proletarian dictatorship. Thus, Lenin was at one time prepared to abandon the soviets, if they proved unable to overthrow the bourgeoisie, relying only on the party as the vehicle of proletarian power. The class character of any organ of power is determined not by the class origins of its leaders, or even of its class base of support, but by the class character of the state it serves, or is determined to bring into being. (This is why we say a reformist workers party is half bourgeois and half proletarian). Thus, in Germany, 1918, although the Social-Democrats, a genuine workers party, were in power, in no sense did they administer a workers government. Their parliamentary power cannot be seen separate from their informal alliance with the military-police forces of the old order.

History has proved that the state is not an eternal and stable

entity, as the reformists believed. We saw, in Cuba, that a military-government power can exist, even for an extended period, in the absence of a state. When the state power is consolidated, based on one of the two possible modes of property relations, this state subordinates to itself all the organs of state power in the society, modifying their structures in accordance with the needs of the state and its rulers; and these organs derive their class character from the state they serve. Thus, a party solidly proletarian in composition can administer a capitalist government, while a grouping based on declassed or petty-bourgeois elements can administer a workers state. Only workerists could see this as a paradox. The correct leadership of the proletariat is a question of conscious program, and not of class origins and composition. The bureaucratic castes which dominate all the workers states are negatively characterized, not by their petty-bourgeois or bourgeois origins, nor even by the bourgeois features of the states they administer, but by their role as the direct political lieutenants of the bourgeoisie internationally, by their counter-revolutionary actions, their betrayals and their nationalism.

received 28 August 1973

LETTER FROM LOGAN

6.

Melbourne.  
2 September, 1973.

James Robertson,  
New York.

Dear Jim,

Ken's letter of 21 August, containing summaries of the discussion on the Russian question at the summer camp, has led me to tentatively vacate my position.

Until this letter, which arrived last night, we had received by way of response to my 21 March letter only a few cryptic comments from David and the mimeoed documents of Joe V. and Frank B. I hope we can be excused for having fooled ourselves that the arguments against mine were pretty weak.

It seems to the CC of the SLANZ to have been an inefficient way to carry on the political struggle for you to have let the discussion go on right to the point of decision--a decision effectively binding on us--without any attempt to apprise us of the arguments or even to change my views. This is an important criticism of your functioning in this respect and we hope that the experience will prepare us for the international political struggle of the future in which the rebuilding of the Fourth International will require a rigorous and speedy exchange of frank, fraternal views before the hardening of position of any national section occurs. (You will have noted that in my initial letter I stressed that the SLANZ had not taken a position on the matter, which seems the responsible thing where possible until there has been real international discussion. Thus, on 19 July I said in a letter to David that "I presume there will be no early decision" on the matter.)

The useful point reportedly made against me was that my document was objectivist. But the objectivism of which I am guilty was not that of ignoring the role of the scientific consciousness of the working class under the leadership of the Leninist Party. Indeed my rather incredible mistake was in thinking that this was the only kind of consciousness which could possibly be significant. I was talking about situations in which there was no Leninist Party nor any real chance of us building one. So, for me, there was no significant conscious factor at all. I entirely ignored that different outcomes could be produced by different forms of false consciousness or bourgeois consciousness. This fact undermines my argument because consciousness is incapable of being accurately forecast (though sometimes some pretty good guesses can be made).

I would now argue that the consciousness of the guerrilla leaders is usually pretty stable: they are bound to a programme on which they have built their support. Castro, for example, wanted to build what we might call a petty-bourgeois state--and proved its impossibility. Of course in trying to do what he wanted to do he so damaged the bourgeois order that he incurred the wrath of the bourgeoisie and was driven into acceptance of proletarian property forms.

So the consciousness in question is not so much that of the guerrillas as that of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Whilst the consciousness of the proletariat could probably be decisive only as a result of a political revolution smashing the power of the Castro grouping, I'm inclined to think that the consciousness of the bourgeoisie could actually have had a decisive effect in Cuba. The outcome might well have differed had a greater section of the bourgeoisie decided to give more support to Castro. By refusing to let Castro annoy them too much the bourgeoisie could have saved Cuba for themselves. This completely buggers up my argument.

I have been forced to the view--tentatively--that after the smashing of the bourgeois state it may in certain circumstances be replaced by a new state capable of some brief period of class independence and temporarily able to rest uneasily on the petty-bourgeoisie and balance between proletarian and bourgeois property forms, but which must soon establish links with one or the other.

This is certainly not a petty-bourgeois state: it is incapable of establishing and defending a social system based on a petty-bourgeois property form (whatever that might be), and it does not have to be smashed for the building of a workers state.

It would seem strange to say that in this period there was no state--although such a situation is conceivable for very short periods of time. Castro's forces during this time, however, protected the property interests of sometimes the peasants, sometimes the bourgeoisie, and sometimes the workers. If you were a large landowner who resisted the land reform you would find out very concretely that there was a state. A little later, if you were a capitalist resisting the nationalisations you would find out there was a state. So, rather than saying there is no state it would seem more accurate to say that the state had not yet become enmeshed as the organ of a particular class and its property form (though it was certainly a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms). I think that when Lenin is explaining how the bourgeois state is in fact forced to defend bourgeois property interests he talks of a "thousand threads" binding together the state apparatus and the class, i.e., thousands of people in positions of authority in the state apparatus personally bound to the ruling class and its form of property. Well, when a state apparatus is built independently of either of the two historic classes--as in Cuba--then it has got to establish such ties to one or other class. This will take time.

I am in fact writing this letter now despite the tentativeness of my views (necessary tentativeness deriving from the inaccessibility of all the arguments to me) because it seems important to, as quickly as possible, make it clear that I have changed my mind and also that I stand against the "petty-bourgeois state" and "no state" positions (and also the abstentionist position which leaves things at the obvious, that Castro's was a petty-bourgeois government and that's all that matters).

It will be clear that I now see that as a complete explanation

for the development of these guerrilla states my old argument was wrong. It does, however, contain within it a thrust which is useful still, partly because the objective factors remain extremely important in a situation in which the class conscious proletariat is unable to intervene, and partly because in some cases a guerrilla state may be tied to proletarian property before its final victory. The question can only be decided on the data in each instance. (It is therefore worth questioning two of the arguments against my old document: My old position would NOT prevent work in the army nor deny that in a revolutionary situation the mass army contains also the core of the new state (though only insofar as the army rebels). And to say that my old position would have implied critical support for Castro in 1958 is as wrong as saying that the deformed workers state theory implies critical support for Brezhnev and Mao.)

I would prefer it if this letter were restricted as much as possible to leading cadres until I have seen, thought about, and responded to the internal bulletin on the Russian question which I believe has been produced, and which I presume is on the way here.

Warm comradely greetings,

Bill.

cc: file.



NOTE ON THE RUSSIAN QUESTION DISCUSSION

by Bill Logan

I have now read IDB number 21, but, although it dispels the misapprehension that a premature decision had been reached, I have little to add to my letter to Jim Robertson of 2 September. I agree with comrade Seymour's contribution on the whole, and find the draft addition to the Preface of MB #8 a useful interim clarification.

While comrade Seymour is guilty of a certain over-kill in respect to my earlier document (misunderstanding my peculiar form of objectivism), and while I would disagree with his postulation of a petty-bourgeois state, I am now able (as my previous letter makes clear) to agree with him that the petty-bourgeois guerrilla army in Cuba at first supported programmes associated with the rule of different classes, that this is a "highly unstable, transitory situation", and that this situation did in fact allow the possibility of alternative outcomes. Having read his document since my last letter, I am now further convinced that the developing class character of the regime was determined via internal factional struggle.

Accepting the general line of comrade Seymour on the development of the Cuban revolution, it seems still to be useful to characterise the Cuban state in the period between the destruction of the Batista regime and the clear consolidation of the deformed workers state. Both the "petty-bourgeois state" characterisation and the "no state" characterisation would seem a trifle absurd; I prefer the underlined characterisation of my 2 September letter.

The seeds of destruction for my false position were actually sown in my original document (21 March--see IDB #21 page 11) where I note parenthetically that what I called the "geostrategic forces" (which I saw, and still see, as important) "are not merely objective forces because they are controlled by the wills of the leaders of the great powers." It was inconsistent to say that the precise direction of such forces was entirely predictable. Of course the same argument applies to the domestic class forces--these are always exercised according to the wills of the members of the different classes (which may or may not be organised in political parties with varying degrees of consciousness). They are therefore never wholly predictable.

Some Plekhanov (Fundamental Problems of Marxism) and Gramsci (The Modern Prince) read between the writing of my first letter in March and my last probably cleared the ground for my change of mind, though I had previously known (at some level anyway) that to pretend the independence of the objective from the subjective is to deny the nature of social reality.

25 September, 1973.

cc: file

Sept. 10, 1973

Dear Comrade [Milin],

This letter is intended as an answer to your polemical article, "The Fight in the United Secretariat: Reformist Appetite versus Guerrillaist Centrism", which in my opinion contains a very serious theoretical flaw. It was because of this flaw, and other secondary considerations, that I refused to support the document when it was first brought to my attention. I would like to take the time now to explain why.

The theoretical flaw can be stated syllogistically: The United Secretariat is centrist. It defends "insurrectionary nationalist Stalinism of the left Maoist-Guevarist variety". The proof of this is their support of the PRT. "The PRT is a consistent (!) insurrectionary Stalinist organization." Stalinism is reformist. Therefore, centrism equals "left" Stalinism which equals reformism!

To begin with Stalinism cannot be centrist and reformist at the same time. While it is not theoretically excluded that some Stalinist organizations may become centrist, it has been the position of Trotskyism for some time now that Stalinism represents a reformist, counterrevolutionary tendency in the workers movement. How can the PRT be both centrist and Stalinist at the same time? Or do you believe the PRT is Stalinist and reformist? If so, how is it possible that a Stalinist organization can be "consistently insurrectionary"? I've heard of revolutionary organizations being consistently insurrectionary (certain anarchist groups, the Blanquists, etc.), but not Stalinist organizations. Even the VCP cannot claim to be a "consistent insurrectionary Stalinist organization".

Furthermore, you state that "the guerrilla road to power necessarily leads to a Stalinist regime". (emphasis in original) Is that so? Is that what occurred in Algeria? Is it possible for bourgeois nationalist guerrilla organizations (Fatah, the Peronists, etc.) to establish a Stalinist regime? Wouldn't it be more correct to say that at best, the guerrilla road to power can only lead to the creation of a deformed workers state which, if not already under the leadership of Stalinists, will inevitably lead to the establishment of a Stalinist regime? If not, you could wind up with the formula: bourgeois nationalism based on guerrillaist methods of struggle equals Stalinism which equals PRT which equals United Secretariat which equals centrism!

In fairness to you, I should point out that you do not make a direct equation between the PRT and the United Secretariat. But you do say both organizations defend insurrectionary nationalist Stalinism. In fact you go one step further and state: "But all wings of the United Secretariat have adapted to left Maoism-Guevarism by presenting Trotskyism as a form of insurrectionary left Stalinism." (my emphasis) If the United Secretariat makes no distinction between Trotskyism and insurrectionary left Stalinism and defends the PRT which is Stalinist, any distinction between centrism and Stalinism becomes completely obscure. If the United Secretariat

"advocates", "defends", and "adapts" to left Stalinism, how is it qualitatively different from the PRT which you say is Stalinist?

The guerrilla road to power may or may not lead to a deformed workers state; may or may not lead to a Stalinist regime. The guerrilla road to power may as well lead to a bourgeois regime, which is neither Stalinist nor workers state. What we can say with certainty, and you say it in your document, is that the guerrilla road to power "necessarily produces a nationalist, anti-working class regime". The example of Cuba shows how a non-proletarian armed force once in power must turn either toward the proletariat or the bourgeoisie. The Castroists turned empirically toward the proletariat but only to create a deformed workers state, which was all they were capable of creating. This fact, the fact that a deformed workers state was established in Cuba under the leadership of a non-proletarian force, guaranteed the inevitable political transformation of this force into conscious Stalinists.

But what could you possibly mean by characterizing the PRT as a "consistent insurrectionary Stalinist organization"? Does it mean that some form of Stalinism is centrist, that is, consistently struggling for revolution but without a correct program and strategy? Or does it mean that the PRT is Stalinist, i.e., reformist, but struggles against the bourgeoisie using guerrillaist methods, which are insurrectionary by definition? It is not clear to me. If one were looking for a consistent Stalinist organization in Argentina, which may or may not resort to insurrectionary methods of struggle, wouldn't one have to conclude that the best example of that is the Argentine CP and not the PRT?

In concluding this part of the letter, let me point out what needs to be corrected in your thesis:

1. You have to define what you mean by "insurrectionary Stalinism". Not all guerrilla movements are Stalinist. And not all guerrilla roads to power lead to the creation of Stalinist regimes or workers states. If Stalinism is reformist, how can it be consistently insurrectionary?
2. How can the United Secretariat be centrist and at the same time present Trotskyism as left Stalinism? Centrism means that a revolutionary party is opportunist in practice; it vacillates between Marxism and reformism. If U.Sec presents Trotskyism to the masses as left Stalinism, where is the vacillation?
3. You say the PRT is Stalinist and consistently insurrectionary. Isn't that a contradiction? If the PRT is Stalinist as you say, isn't it also reformist? But how can a reformist organization be "consistently insurrectionary"? Wouldn't it be more correct to say the PRT is centrist and has adapted completely to guerrillaist methods. And on the theoretical plane, reflects contradictory ideologies, taking some ideas from Trotskyism and some from Stalinism? Is it any worse than say PL was when it was waving the Red Book and singing praise to chairman Mao?

As for my statement on Cuba, the quote you use doesn't justify your criticism whatsoever. In the first place such a quote cannot be a basis for attacking my methodology as Pabloist or semi-Pabloist. Methodology is not something one develops overnight or even in one document. And it must be shown that one's "errors" have a consistent pattern to them in order to point out weaknesses in methodology. Otherwise what you are talking about is lack of theoretical clarity or superficial analyses, or some other form of polemical and technical weakness.

Secondly, neither the substance of the quote nor the words that follow the quote can justify your counterposing "the Leninist norm of proletarian revolution" to "the Cuban road to power" because you say I implied that "the Cuban road is unlikely to succeed elsewhere". Yes, I oppose the Cuban road to power because it is "unlikely to succeed elsewhere"! For the reasons given in my document! Allow me to quote from my document starting with the passage you cite and see if you were wrong in juxtaposing Lenin to Castro in my case:

"By incorrectly generalizing the unusual experiences of the Cuban Revolution and applying them on a continentwide scale in Latin America, the majority has revealed its petty-bourgeois adaptation to nonrevolutionary currents in the workers movement. Its method and approach not only throws out the window the Transitional Program, which it has little use for anyway, but adopts a totally un-Marxist position on how revolutions are made. On this score the SWP is absolutely correct. The idea that a small and determined group of dedicated revolutionary warriors, armed to the teeth with everything except the Marxist method, can lead the masses in revolution by going underground and setting an example for them to follow, is not only anti-Marxist, it is suicidal! It's not that the workers are afraid to lay their life on the line; they have done that much too often in the cause of revolution. Not at all. It's just that Marxism teaches the workers to make the revolution themselves, to put trust in only their own class organizations, to be one with the masses which only they are capable of leading to socialism. Revolution requires more than just a few heroic fighters. It requires powerful, mass working-class organizations with courageous revolutionary leaders at their head. The strategy proposed by the U.Sec. majority can only lead to defeat and demoralization. It must be rejected!" ("The Only Road...", pages 8-9, emphasis added)

You can see from reading the entire quote that my intention was to counterpose "the Leninist norm of proletarian revolution" to "the Cuban road to power" not only because it is "unlikely to succeed elsewhere", but because "Marxism teaches the workers to make the revolution themselves, to put trust in only their own class organizations, to be one with the masses which only they are capable of leading to socialism". And because revolution "requires powerful, mass working-class organizations with courageous revolutionary leaders at their head". That's what was intended and that's what the document said.

The Cuban Revolution was indeed unusual; it was different from every other revolution made by non-proletarian forces. The difference was of course the fact that it was not led by Stalinists. It was this difference--this "unusual" difference in relation to all others--which led the United Secretariat into the trap of adopting the Cuban model as its own. Certainly if it were really seeking any non-proletarian guerrilla road to power it didn't have to wait for the Cuban Revolution to occur. The examples of Yugoslavia, Algeria, China, and Vietnam, were readily available.

I have other differences on popular frontism which I will go into in a separate paper. I hope this clarifies my position on your document to some extent. Further elaboration will of course be necessary....

Comradely yours,

Gerry Clark

25 September 1973

Dear Comrade Clark,

... At one level, your criticisms can be answered fairly easily and, in fact, you do so yourself. The document does not derive the centrist character of the USec Majority from the centrist or reformist character of the PRT. (In fact, the document doesn't characterize the PRT as centrist or reformist.) Rather the document asserts that the centrism of the USec Majority (for which there is ample evidence quite independently of its activities in Argentina) is demonstrated by its adaptation to the PRT in allowing a manifestly Stalinist organization, with numerous formal programmatic elements counter-posed to Trotskyism, to join an ostensibly Trotskyist international. Now the term "adaptation" (or capitulation) implies not political identity, but a particular kind of relationship. To say that Pablo adapted to Stalinism in 1953 is not to say that the Pabloite tendency became Stalinist, just as to speak of the SWP's capitulation to bourgeois liberalism or feminism does not mean the SWP is a liberal or a feminist organization. A central characteristic of centrist groups is tailing forces to the right of them by deliberately camouflaging their own formal program.

However, the more substantive points that you raise concern the nature of Stalinism. Your absolute equation of Stalinism with reformism is formalistic because it abstracts from the social bases of Stalinist organizations as they evolved over time and space. Recall that Trotsky considered Stalin's Comintern during 1928-34 as bureaucratic centrist. He regarded the "Third Period" policies as an ultra-left zag by a centrist tendency. It is true that after 1934 until his death, Trotsky considered the Comintern a reformist organization. However, that designation becomes sterile unless one understands the social basis of that reformism and that organization.

The core social base of the Comintern's reformism was the privileged Soviet bureaucracy which sought to trade class peace within the capitalist states for apparent diplomatic-military concessions. The reformist policies coming from the Soviet bureaucracy fed into (and sometimes conflicted with) the indigenous reformism of the CPs in the capitalist countries--a reformism arising from the CPs generating a parliamentary-trade union bureaucracy in the manner of social democracy. Those Stalinist parties which had achieved a significant working-class base, particularly in bourgeois democratic countries, evinced an organic tendency to revert to traditional social democracy breaking their ties to the Soviet bureaucracy.

However, the Chinese CP was composed of declassed urban petty-bourgeois elements organized as an armed force and seeking a mass base among the peasantry. From the standpoint of social composition and orientation, the Chinese Stalinist party (and those Asian Stalinist organizations centrally involved in peasant-guerrilla war) were not working-class tendencies at all. Such organizations naturally showed an organic tendency toward petty-bourgeois radical nationalism.

The material resources and authority of the Soviet bureaucracy

enabled it to hold together a unified world movement through the late 1950's. However, since the Sino-Soviet split the world Stalinist movement has clearly fragmented and it is no longer possible to refer to a unique Stalinist tendency at all. Under these conditions, what is the basis for adjudging an organization, Stalinist?

I would posit two criteria. One is that the organization see itself in continuity with Stalin's Comintern and justify its practice by referring to Comintern examples. However, since the world Stalinist movement pursued radically different policies over time and space, groups embracing the Stalinist tradition can have fundamentally different politics. Left Stalinist groups usually justify their policies in terms of "Third Period" practice or the Chinese and Vietnamese civil wars. The second criterion for a Stalinist organization is programmatic advocacy of bureaucratic rule on the basis of collectivized property (although, of course, this is not how the Stalinists put it).

On the basis of the above analysis, a group can certainly be Stalinist and centrist. That is, it can contain subjective revolutionary impulses deformed by bourgeois ideology reflecting the pressure of non-proletarian class forces and interests. In this country, PL before its break with Mao, the Communist League and Venceremos can be characterized as Stalinist, centrist organizations. From what I know of the Argentine PRT, the same designation would apply. It was apparently committed to the violent overthrow of the capitalist state and the establishment of working class property forms under a bureaucratic, nationalist government.

I do not understand the analysis underlying your terminological criticisms. It is empirically indisputable that there exist throughout the world organizations (like the PRT) committed to the insurrectionary overthrow of the capitalist state and its replacement by a state modeled on present-day China or Cuba. If you object in principle to terming such organizations "insurrectionary Stalinist," what do you propose instead?

In discussing the concept of "consistent insurrectionary Stalinist organizations," you, at one point, counterpose Stalinism to anarchism. One of the major themes in the document is that a certain tendency within contemporary Stalinism and anarchism share a common social base in the appetites of the urban petty bourgeoisie. Anarchism (including terrorism) was the characteristic nineteenth century expression of rootless, petty-bourgeois youth seeking to place themselves at the head of society. Insurrectionary Stalinism is the contemporary political expression for the same social phenomenon. The Chinese and Cuban revolutions quite conform to the Bakuninist vision.

The close relationship between anarchistic, petty-bourgeois radicalism and Stalinist bureaucratism was far less evident in Trotsky's lifetime than it is today. However, Trotsky was not unaware of that relationship. This is indicated by the passage on "communist terrorism" quoted in the document. The following quote poses the same issue in a more general way:

"This is the political snobbery, common to pacifist-democratic, libertarian, anarcho-syndicalist and, generally, ultra-left circles of petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. There are others who say that since the state has emerged from the proletarian revolution, therefore every criticism of it is sacrilege and counter-revolution. That is the voice of hypocrisy behind which lurks most often the immediate material interests of certain groups among this very same petty-bourgeois intelligentsia or among the workers' bureaucracy. These two types--the political snob and the political hypocrite--are readily interchangeable, depending on personal circumstances." (The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism--emphasis added)

One of the criticisms raised in your letter may well be valid. It is possible that the document gives the impression that all regimes coming to power through guerrilla war will become Stalinist (i.e., will establish deformed workers states). If the document does appear to assert that, it is because of poor formulation. That is certainly not our position.

The passage in your document (in its entirety) that we criticized fails to relate opposition to the Castroite-USec Majority revolutionary strategy to the question of Stalinism in power. To begin with, the terms "workers" and "masses" are used virtually interchangeably. However, one of the central points at issue is precisely the leadership of the labor movement over the insurgent petty-bourgeois masses (both urban and peasant). The passage poses the issue too much in the SWP manner of small group adventurism versus mass struggle, rather than focusing on proletarian leadership over the petty bourgeoisie.

Essentially the passage criticizes the Castroite-USec Majority advocacy of exemplary insurrectionary violence as a form of infantile adventurism. However, the concept of exemplary insurrectionary violence, particularly coming from conscious Stalinists, is an ideological reflection of a partly conscious desire to maintain a monopoly of armed force throughout the insurrection so as to insure military dominance over the masses should that insurrection succeed. An organization which advocates the insurrectionary leadership of workers' militias tied to the mass labor movement is also asserting its intention to lead the working class politically and not dominate it militarily. The issue of workers militias is, therefore, far more than a revolutionary-military strategy. It is central to the political rule of the proletariat.

Communist greetings,

[Michael Milin]



Nov. 8, 1973

Dear Comrade

... 1. You were quite correct in pointing out that the substantive point of disagreement between us was the question of the nature of Stalinism. This is not a new thorn in the side of the Trotskyist movement; we have been feuding over it ever since Trotsky developed his concept of Thermidor with regard to Stalinism and the degenerated Soviet state. What is Stalinism? What really happened in post-war Eastern Europe? What are the differences between Chinese Stalinism and Soviet Stalinism? Is Stalinism counterrevolutionary through and through or is it capable of leading revolutions? Is it capable of becoming centrist or even revolutionary? If so, what is the relationship between Stalinism and Trotskyism? These questions and more are still being debated in the revolutionary movement for obvious reasons: they have yet to be settled. The Trotskyist movement has yet to solve the crisis of leadership of the proletariat. (To dramatize--if you can call it that--what I mean, take the following news brief printed in the October issue of Teamster magazine: "The 1973 Eugene V. Debs award will be presented this month to U.S. Rep. Michael Harrington of Massachusetts, noted for his fight against poverty in the United States and the author of several books." To steal a famous quote from the 1968 Czech. uprising, "Debs, wake up! They've all gone mad!")

The above anecdote underlines I believe the importance of reaching an understanding of what Stalinism is. I would certainly have to agree with you that Stalinism has undergone some changes over the past 35 years, that is, since Trotsky first characterized it as counterrevolutionary in character. One could say that this definition has been confirmed over and over again but that would be looking at it one-sidedly. The Stalinist movement has also gone through a major split causing some Stalinists to call others "social fascists". There have also been a number of revolutions since Trotsky's death which were--like it or not--led by Stalinists. These events have forced the Trotskyist movement to take another look at the phenomenon of Stalinism. The first big split in the Trotskyist movement (Pabloism) can be traced to the disorientation created by the post-war stability of Stalinism, contrary to all our predictions.

The question of centrism and what it means is also related to an understanding of Stalinism (although we recognize that the concept was developed by the communists as early as the founding of the Third International if not earlier). Marxists must be able to distinguish between reformists and centrists, and centrists and revolutionaries, otherwise we could degenerate ourselves and not recognize it. Therefore having an understanding of the nature of Stalinism is of prime importance for the revolutionary Trotskyist movement.

Concretely, then, I'm still puzzled by your use of the concept "consistent insurrectionary Stalinist organization". What do you mean by "consistent insurrectionary Stalinist"? If you recall, I asked you this same question in my last letter. Your only answer was "what do you propose instead?" I do not propose anything new. I merely criticize what I think is wrong with your terminology.

Even if I admit the possibility of a Stalinist organization being centrist too, how can such an organization be considered "consistently insurrectionary" and "committed to the insurrectionary overthrow of the capitalist state and its replacement by a state modeled on present-day China or Cuba"? I don't refute their desire to model their state on present-day China or Cuba. What I do refute is their commitment to the insurrectionary overthrow of the capitalist state on a consistent basis. To define an organization as being consistently committed to the overthrow of the capitalist state by insurrectionary means is to define a revolutionary organization!

I used the example of the anarchists against the Stalinists not to prove the anarchists were superior in their methods to that of the Stalinists; you are quite right, they are both bureaucratic in their methods. Spain proved that. I used the example of the anarchists to show that if you wanted to use the concept of "consistently insurrectionary", it would more likely apply to them rather than the Stalinists. But I disagree that the Chinese and Cuban revolutions quite conform to the Bakuninist vision. Those revolutions were made not because of the success of the tactic of utilizing small bands of men and women, committed to socialism, making incursions upon the state through the use of insurrectionary methods. They involved masses of people, many of which were armed and determined to change the society under which they suffered. The anarchists were against in principle any kind of powerful state apparatus; this can not be said of the leaders of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions. The latter advocated the creation of a democratic state!

Armed insurrectionary conflict with the bourgeois state or bourgeois armies cannot by itself be a basis for characterizing an organization as revolutionary or reformist or centrist. As you know all types of class organizations--bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, and working class--have at one time or another practiced armed struggle. The real question for us is what program do these organizations struggle for and what are their class composition. Armed struggle is necessary but subordinate to the political program.

Programmatically, then, a Stalinist organization expresses a reformist, non-revolutionary ideology for the working class. Either "left" or "right", Stalinism represents a qualitative break with revolutionary Marxism, i.e., non-revolutionary in words and deeds! Therefore, a Stalinist organization which is centrist should, consequently, be capable of becoming a revolutionary organization! And why not? Since centrism implies, to use Trotsky's own words, "a shift between two poles, Marxism and reformism", a centrist tendency is capable of making a leap from reformism to revolutionary Marxism. Do you believe, as do the Pabloists, that Stalinist organizations are capable of making this leap? If so, you should have no principled difference with the Pabloist conception of entryism sui generis, since this conception was based on the theory of the reformability of the Stalinist parties, e.g., that they were capable of becoming revolutionary under mass pressure.

My understanding of Stalinism may be too formalistic, but yours gives it an undeserved fresh quality, analogous to pumping new blood

into old veins. It is true of course that Stalinism--both left and right--is not dead, and still plays at times a dynamic role in world politics. But even in Vietnam, where it is playing the most dynamic role, Stalinism is incapable of making the leap beyond reformism, i.e., popular frontism. Its belief in the two-stage theory of revolution leads to the subordination of the proletarian revolution to the democratic revolution and determines its nationalist character.

Your definition of centrism as groups which "contain subjective revolutionary impulses deformed by bourgeois ideology reflecting the pressure of non-proletarian class forces and interests" doesn't satisfy me at all. As Trotsky pointed out on numerous occasions, the Comintern after 1935 contained many "subjectively revolutionary" workers which the Fourth could not disregard. Would you deny that such elements still exist in the French CP? The same could be said of such organizations as the YSA and YWLL. A subjective desire for revolution can not be a basis for determining whether an organization is objectively revolutionary. While so-called left Stalinists may scream loudly on occasion for "proletarian revolution", their program denies the central role of the proletariat in revolution and can only act as a brake on the revolutionary process. Centrists, on the other hand, have the rudiments of a revolutionary program but lack a resolute leadership and a clear vision of the road ahead. Their theoretical formulations are always hazy and irresolute. When the time calls for swiftness, they move hesitatingly. They give lip-service to internationalism, etc.

To call a Stalinist organization centrist one must show that that organization is either moving away from revolutionary Marxism or towards it. In the case of the Stalinists, they have already moved away from revolutionary Marxism. Therefore, one must show that they are moving back towards revolutionary Marxism, right? O.K., name me the Stalinist organizations which are moving towards revolutionary Marxism? As far as PL is concerned, what guaranteed its degeneration into the reformist swamp it is today was precisely its inability to break with Stalin's theory of revolution in stages as manifested in Mao's theory of the bloc of four classes. This very same reformist theory is now being applied quite openly in PL's trade union work.

As for your criteria for defining Stalinism, I would have to conclude from this that the United Secretariat is indeed Stalinist (likewise the SWP) because it advocates bureaucratic rule on the basis of collectivized property using as its model the Cuban state! This is not to say that your criteria are wrong. Not at all. But your criteria are only the beginning of knowledge.

If you recall, the concept of centrism was used primarily by the early Communist International to describe those social democratic elements who were breaking away from the Second International towards the Third. Many of these elements had already physically broken with the Second but were hesitant about joining the Third International. After the demise of the Comintern and the call was made for the creation of the Fourth International, Trotsky characterized as centrist, in a similar fashion, those elements who had or were beginning to break away from the Comintern towards the FI.

As you know, the FI was not able to win over very many: most either returned to the Stalinist fold or went over to the social democrats and bourgeoisie. But these groups were characterized by the FI as centrist because they were beginning to break politically with Stalinism; to reject the theory of socialism in one country; to reject bureaucratic rule; to reject the Stalinist position on fascism; to see the need for a democratic International body; etc. None of the Stalinist groups you mentioned in the U.S.--least of all PL--can claim to have rejected any of the positions I outlined above. Quite the contrary: their programs are based on such positions! Their absolute hostility to Trotskyism, i.e., revolutionary Marxism, attests to that. Consequently, centrism means--if it has any meaning at all--the breaking away from Stalinism in the direction of Trotskyism. (And here I mean not simply making "left" criticisms, but making fundamental changes.)

2. As to our difference over guerrilla warfare, I read [the] "Theses On Guerrilla Warfare", published in Spartacist, num. 11, March-April 1968, and think [it is] quite correct in [its] analysis. In fact, it corresponds very closely with my own position. For example, the "Theses" state on page 8, paragraph 3: "If initially a guerrilla movement, led inevitably by the petty-bourgeoisie, partially destroys the imperialist grip on its country, the succeeding political convulsions at best (emphasis in original) may force the new government to consolidate a bureaucratically deformed workers state like Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, politically and economically related to the USSR; the more likely outcome (my emphasis) is that the country will remain under imperialist control (as happened in Algeria with regard to French imperialism)."

I think if you read my document again, the letter I sent you and the RIT Declaration of Tendency, you will see that these positions correspond quite closely to the above quotation.

And then following the above-quoted paragraph you find these words: "The example of the Cuban Revolution, a revolution which resulted in the unique development of a deformed workers state in Latin America, shows that victorious guerrilla movements can do no more than hasten the creation of a temporary vacuum in the bourgeois state...." (my emphasis) A "unique" development the "Theses" state! Compare this statement with my own which you criticized: "By incorrectly generalizing the unusual experiences of the Cuban Revolution and applying them on a continentwide scale in Latin America,..." (emphasis added). "Unique" or "unusual", the point is that both documents emphasized the need for proletarian revolution and proletarian leadership. The Cuban Revolution had neither.

3....

4. The last thing I want to discuss is your characterization of NPAC as a popular front. Let me say in the beginning that I agree with you that it was class collaborationist, that is, carrying out a policy which was reformist and consequently subordinate to the interests of the bourgeoisie. This is the fundamental question. But there are hundreds of such organizations in this country today which

do not qualify as popular fronts. (viz. the unions, COPE, Peace and Freedom, NOW, the hundreds of peace committees, religious organizations, NAACP, NSA, CORE, etc.) That is, they are for all the classes working together rather than struggling against one another.

But when a working class party and a bourgeois party are involved, you have the basis for a popular front, provided the working class party subordinates its program to that of the bourgeoisie's. According to the pamphlet written by James Burnham in 1937, a popular front is "the broad union of these various social classes [workers, peasants, and bourgeoisie] and groups on the basis of a common program for the defense of bourgeois democracy against fascism." The avowed aim of such "Peoples' Fronts" is "to accept governmental power". Burnham goes on to explain that "The People's Front is merely a re-wording of the theories and practices of class collaboration and coalition government, as these have been advocated by reformists since the beginning of the modern labor movement. Class collaboration is what the Peoples' Front specifically proposes: the union of organizations and parties representing various classes and sections of classes on the basis of a common program to defend bourgeois democracy." (p.11, my emphasis) The Peoples' Front "first and foremost involves the acceptance by all members of the Peoples' Front of a common program." (emphasis in original)

Burnham, as if directly speaking to our question, comments on the application of the Peoples' Front policy to "anti-war" work. He writes: "Through a multitude of pacifist organizations, and especially through the directly controlled American League Against War and Fascism, [the forerunners of PCPJ and NPAC one presumes] the Stalinists aim at the creation of a 'broad, classless, Peoples' Front of all those opposed to war'". (my emphasis) I underline "aim" because on page 53, Burnham makes the point that "In the formal sense, there is not yet in the United States an established 'Peoples' Front'". Yet the Stalinists were active in a "dozen fields" including the unions with the "aim" of establishing a Peoples' Front! In other words, they hadn't succeeded.

The same can be said of NPAC and PCPJ. The aims of the SWP and the CP were to establish a "Peoples' Front". In order to do it, it was necessary to broaden the front into an organization based on a common program, not just on the Vietnam War issue, but on many other issues. If you recall, that is what the CP tried to do but failed. But the "peoples' front" policy of the SWP and CP failed for another reason. Burnham commented on that too. He said: "In the formal sense, there is not yet in the United States an established 'Peoples' Front'. The United States is not faced with a developing revolutionary crisis, as is France, nor is it in the midst of a Civil War, as is Spain." (my emphasis) The point is clear: a Peoples' Front was not established in the United States during the war in Vietnam because the bourgeoisie was not faced with a revolutionary crisis; it did not view NPAC or PCPJ as a threat to its rule. If it had, it would have sent in more than a Vance Hartke to accomplish its goal of subordinating it. The bourgeoisie will enter into a coalition with a working class party on the basis of a common program, i.e., bourgeois program, when the relationship of class forces

is such that it feels its rule may be threatened by the power of the workers. In just about every situation where Popular Fronts were formed, it was accompanied by a deep-going social crisis (Russia, France, Spain, Chile, Vietnam, Ceylon, etc.).

Trotsky refers to such "anti-war" organizations set up by the Stalinists as "petty-bourgeois" or "pacifist" organizations. The Stalinists held many Anti-war Congresses during the late 1930's to try and unite all classes for "peace". Trotsky never referred to these Congresses as Popular Fronts. Your insistence on calling NPAC a Popular Front adds little to your correct analysis of the SWP's anti-war work as reformist and class collaborationist. You give the SWP--a tiny group with no working class base to speak of--too much credit. The way Nixon brought NPAC's activities to an end was indicative of how the bourgeoisie viewed it. The same holds true for WONAAC. The bourgeoisie wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole.

Comradely,

Gerry

19 December 1973

Dear comrade Clark,

This letter will concentrate on the questions of "centrist" and "consistently insurrectionary" Stalinism. As admitted in my letter of 25 September, the formulation about victorious guerrilla wars necessarily leading to deformed workers states is misleading and does not reflect a position that we have ever held.

You ask, what precisely is "consistently insurrectionary Stalinism." In the 25 September letter I gave two criteria for judging an organization Stalinist: "that the organization see itself in continuity with Stalin's Comintern and justify its practice by referring to Comintern examples" and "advocacy of bureaucratic rule on the basis of collectivist property." You find these criteria inadequate on the grounds that they could apply to the Pabloites. I contest that. The first criterion clearly doesn't apply and, despite impressions, neither does the second. The Pabloites have always maintained a formal position in favor of soviet democracy in the Stalinist ruled states. Even in the heyday of its Fidelismo, the SWP characterized Cuba as "a healthy workers state, lacking the forms of proletarian democracy." No genuine Stalinist could have made such a statement. As noted in my previous letter, Pabloism is an adaptation to, but not a form of, Stalinism. Thus, I believe the criteria used to identify Stalinism [are] adequate to contemporary reality.

The term "consistently insurrectionary" means that an organization will abandon its insurrectionary activities only through a major internal struggle (probably involving a split). The important thing to realize about the Latin American Guevarists and similar tendencies elsewhere is that they originated in splits from other Stalinist organizations precisely over the issue of immediate insurrectionary activity. In many cases, these splits occurred when the Havana and Peking regimes opposed insurrectionary adventures, thus forcing the armed struggle faction to consider itself more Castroite than Castro or more Maoist than Mao. In the USEC faction fight document, we conjectured that the reason the Argentine PRT was prepared to associate with an ostensibly Trotskyist international was in reaction to the current Havana policy of seeking diplomatic alliances with Latin American bonapartist nationalism. Likewise, the Nixon-Mao detente led to the "armed struggle" Venceremos split from the RU.

Thus the Latin American Guevarists and similar tendencies elsewhere (e.g. Ceylonese JVP) are different from the Chinese and Vietnamese CP's, for whom peasant-guerrilla war was a tactical episode within a strategy of allying with the national bourgeoisie. The Chinese and Vietnamese CP's liquidated their insurrectionary activities at the behest of Moscow (sometimes suicidally). In contrast, groups like the Argentine PRT broke with Havana or Peking in order to engage in insurrectionary activity. Significantly, in Vietnam, Stalin-Ho's right turns produced splits leading to groups prepared to collaborate with the Trotskyists (e.g. the Nguyen van Tao group which broke from the Stalinists in 1939, worked with the Trotskyists

and re-joined the Viet Minh after the war.) Such Vietnamese groups are somewhat analagous to the Latin American Guevarists under conditions of a monolithic world Stalinist movement and a strong domestic Trotskyist pole. The term "consistently insurrectionary" was used to denote the political basis on which groups, like the Argentine PRT, broke with the Havana and Peking regimes and were willing to collaborate with ostensible Trotskyists.

In the early 1960's, when we considered ourselves in political solidarity with Healy's IC, one of our outstanding differences was over Cuba. The IC insisted that Cuba was state capitalist on the grounds that our position that it was a deformed workers state necessarily led to Pabloism--denied the need for a revolutionary party in overthrowing capitalism. We countered that this analysis accepted the Pabloite framework of regarding the establishment of deformed workers states as an ambiguous step toward socialism. We asserted that nationalist, bureaucratic rule on the basis of collectivist property was an obstacle to socialism--that the Cuban state and the political forces which created it were simultaneously progressive and reactionary.

Your position is somewhat similar to the old IC position, only focusing on the party rather than the state level. You assert that to contend that there are tendencies genuinely committed to using insurrectionary means to overthrow the capitalist state and replace it with one modeled on China or Cuba would contend that Stalinism can be "revolutionary." We assert that such groups exist and they are not revolutionary in the Leninist sense, since their program--nationalist policy and bureaucratic rule on the basis of collectivist property--is not revolutionary, but is an obstacle to achieving socialism, is both progressive and reactionary.

The terms reformist, centrist and revolutionary are not applicable to all non-bourgeois political tendencies. They define a historically evolved categorical spectrum in the post-1917 workers movement. These categories do not apply to petty bourgeois radical tendencies, usually adhering to a utopian, national populist program, regardless of commitment to insurrectionary methods. Were the Russian Left Social Revolutionaries reformist, centrist or revolutionary? ... was Castro's 26th of July Movement, the Ceylonese JVP or the Weathermen?

In my 25 September letter, I wrote: "From the standpoint of social composition and orientation, the Chinese Stalinist party (and those Asian Stalinist organizations centrally involved in peasant-guerrilla war) were not working class tendencies at all. Such organizations naturally showed an organic tendency toward petty bourgeois radical nationalism." Despite their ties to the Soviet bureaucracy and formal ideology, the Chinese and Vietnamese CP's were essentially petty bourgeois radical nationalist formations, for which [the] terms reformist, centrist and revolutionary do not apply.

Where the concept of centrist Stalinism is relevant is in reference to those Maoist tendencies within the workers movement. Perhaps a concrete discussion of Progressive Labor will clarify our



differences. During the late '60's, we considered PL a left-centrist organization. You contend PL is reformist on the grounds that it has yet "to reject the theory of socialism in one country; to reject bureaucratic rule; to reject the Stalinist position on fascism; to see the need for a democratic International body...." This enumeration is misleading and one-sided.

For example, PL supported the Cultural Revolution believing, like many other Maoist groups, that it was an attack on bureaucratic rule in favor of workers democracy. (Recall the initial formal program of the Cultural Revolution was a government modeled on the Paris Commune.) More importantly, when the Cultural Revolution was liquidated in 1968, PL denounced this and published approvingly a document by a dissident Red Guard group criticizing the Mao regime and calling for genuine democratization. PL does not have the Trotskyist conception of workers democracy (i.e. a multi-party soviet system). However, what they perceived as opposition to bureaucratic rule was important in their break with Peking.

Your enumeration omits PL's history of opposition to class collaboration. The Rosen tendency was formed primarily over opposition to the CP's strategic alliance with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. In 1969 (Road to Revolution III), PL generalized its opposition to class-collaboration into rejection of the "two-stage revolution", "bloc-of-four classes" strategy, albeit with an ultra-left position on the peasant question ("peasants are workers"). During the late '60's, PL waged a crude, but genuine, attack on the most important manifestations of reformism within the left--alliance with the liberals over war and black nationalism. It was for these reasons that we considered PL left-centrist, well to the left of the SWP and had a particular orientation toward it. PL's marked right turn in 1971-72 does not negate the above analysis.

You say "centrism means... breaking away from Stalinism in the direction of Trotskyism." This is true in an objective programmatic sense, but not necessarily in a subjective or organizational sense. Like PL, many Maoist groups split from pro-Soviet organizations in opposition to domestic class collaboration. On this decisive question, they had broken with reformism and become centrist. Whether they perceived this as breaking from Stalinism in the direction of Trotskyism depended on their conceptions of Stalinism and Trotskyism.

Khrushchevite revisionism is historical nonsense, yet many Maoists believe that Stalin's Comintern was a genuinely proletarian, revolutionary organization. As noted in my previous letter, many left Stalinist groups model themselves on Third Period practices (e.g. the Communist League and MLOUSA).

As important as illusions about Stalinism are misconceptions about Trotskyism. The "Trotskyism" that American and European Maoists reject is, in good part, the "Trotskyism" of Pabloite revisionism. Significantly, the SL has recruited very heavily from the Maoists (including two formal fusions), while the much larger

SWP recruits few Maoist cadre. This is important evidence that American Maoism is, in general, to the left of the SWP and entire Maoist tendencies, not merely individuals, can be won to Trotskyism.

Observe that Maoism is relatively much stronger in West Germany and Italy than in France or Britain, where large, ostensible Trotskyist organizations can recruit Maoists and would-be Maoists. Had the Fourth International survived as a unified, revolutionary organization, Maoism in the advanced capitalist countries would be qualitatively weaker, perhaps insignificant. Maoism in the workers movement is, in general, an impulse against Stalinist reformism under historic conditions where the revolutionary (Trotskyist) vanguard is too weak or too politically degenerate to win over the resulting left-reformist or centrist currents.

Comradely,

[Michael Milin]

POSTSCRIPT TO CLARK

6 January 1974

Dear comrade Clark,

After writing my last letter to you, I read Trotsky's "Peasant War in China and the Proletariat" reprinted in the Pathfinder Writings (1932). I call this article to your attention because it is very germane to the subject of our correspondence, particularly the capacity of Stalinist organizations in backward countries to change their class character. Of course, the article suffers from the expected flaw that it predicts a victory of the Red Army over the Kuomintang would, in the absence of working class revolutionary activity (which Trotsky considered a possibility), lead to a bourgeois regime, not fundamentally different from the Kuomintang.

Comradely,

[Michael Milin]

1963 Memorandum to the SWP Political  
Committee on the "Progressive Labor" Group

by Lynne Harper, Albert Nelson, James Robertson

I. SOME INFORMATION AND OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PROGRESSIVE LABOR:

(a) The Progressive Labor grouping originated a year ago as a left split from the CP. After the first issue of their monthly appeared in January 1962, comrade Dobbs wrote a report in The Militant of Feb. 12, 1962. The conclusion of this report was that "the editors of Progressive Labor are searching for class-struggle answers to the crisis of American labor."

(b) PL'ers claim 400 members total including about 30-40 youth in NYC. Since PL generally seems to exaggerate numbers by a factor of 2 or 3, the appropriate reduction of claims should be made. While PL is obviously working hard to extend itself nationally (e.g., into the South, and through campus contacts across the country), it is still largely an NYC-based group. It seems to consist in New York of a leadership core and a surrounding layer who are in the 30-45 age group and who have considerable background in the Communist Party. In addition there is in NYC a more youthful contingent of perhaps a dozen energetic, dedicated student and former student youth in the 20 to 30 age range; some of these youth were CP youth leaders and cadre, others not.

Outside NYC there is a PL group in Buffalo and another in the San Francisco Bay Area; there are also PL forces in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. All these out-of-New York groups are apparently of older comrades with a Trade Union background. In the South, PL has made a breakthrough on one (white) campus, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where part of a circle of radical students have been won over and have formed a PL student club.

(c) PL's role in the Cuban crisis has shown, more than any other single thing, the serious revolutionary potential within that group. PL worked at maximum pitch during the crisis, holding a series of street meetings attacking the U.S. role and mobilizing for mass protest demonstrations. They also passed out 20,000 of their own and Fair Play leaflets. PL remained in favor of maximum militancy when all other groups except the SWP caved in after Khrushchev gave in to the imperialists. PL sought to bring about a march to Times Square by demonstrators from the FPCC picket line of 2000 near the United Nations.

(d) Following the Cuban crisis activity PL called the only NYC-held 45th anniversary celebration of the Russian Revolution. The meeting was attended by about 100 people. It began with the singing of the (American) national anthem, while the main speech, by PL leader Milton Rosen, was on the need for a Leninist vanguard party of the workers as counterposed to "peaceful coexistence" and against working in the Democratic party. PL seemed unaware of the contradiction between the anthem and the speech!

(e) The Progressive Labor people in New York have shown a willingness to work with Trotskyists which taken together with their break

to the left from Stalinism is unusual in the extreme. Hitherto groups breaking from the CP to the left have typically been themselves fiercely anti-Trotskyist, seeking vainly to avoid receiving the label of "Trotskyite" from the Stalinists. This has not been the reaction of PL. For example they sought to get 116 University Place to hold a party for their Student Cuba Travel Committee; on campus their people have shown a comradely attitude, as did PL as a whole during the actions around the Cuban crisis. PL has solicited the attendance of Trotskyists at meetings and socials. The repeated offers by PL in their press inviting contributions on topics seems clearly to include Trotskyists.

(f) Summary of current known projects and perspectives:

i) TU work. In the Sept. and Oct. '62 issues of Progressive Labor is printed the PL Trade Union Program to which considerable importance is attached by them and while is currently under discussion in PL. It appears that PL is currently seeking to develop an anti-Dubinsky grouping in the ILGWU, based upon the union's Negro and Puerto Rican members.

ii) Student. PL is seeking to build an organization of student chapters. In NYC they have circulated thousands of copies of a large printed leaflet calling for a student organization and setting forth its proposed aims. The leaflet is signed by a student executive committee of the main PL youth activists on New York campuses and includes the names of Wendy Nakashima, Levi Laub, Steve Martinot, and Anatole Schlosser. Fred Jerome, another of their youth leaders, is not a student. PL has already set up a club at Columbia University. The PL youth are running the "Ad Hoc Student Committee for Travel to Cuba" and exploiting it heavily to extend PL contact into American campuses.

iii) South. PL is actively trying to build a southern base. One of their youth leaders, Jake Rosen, attended the recent SNCC conference and is reportedly working out of Atlanta now. PL has evidently been working to use its Chapel Hill group as a springboard as well. Most recently PL youth are organizing a relief action to aid the striking coal miners of Hazard, Ky.

iv) New Magazine. PL is planning to publish a new magazine, Marxist-Leninist Quarterly. The prospectus which announces the magazine contains the highest expression of political consciousness that the PL forces have so far set down in writing: the subtitle of the magazine is the quotation from Lenin, "Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." The declared aim of the magazine is to facilitate "the prior formation of a Leninist vanguard party of uncompromising revolutionary socialists" to unite "a mass movement capable of challenging the capitalist class for power."

## II. AN EVALUATION AND SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT PROGRESSIVE LABOR:

(a) As the foregoing observations suggest, PL is an aggressive, empirical, inexperienced, serious grouping aiming at present to build a Leninist combat party on the basis of an overly primitive and ex-

cessively organizational approach. Its actions and declarations make it appear that the members of PL have moved further from Stalinism than is actually the case. Even in the best of the PL people many habits, practices, and thoughts of Stalinist origin are still to be found, and on the fringes of PL are people who just barely have chosen PL over the Communist Party. The reason for the discrepancy is that PL is moving to the left and emphasizes the class struggle positions it has achieved, not the static "average" of the contradictory views in the heads of the PL leaders and members.

(b) Thus PL is a heterogeneous, leftward moving formation of a broadly centrist character, having broken with Stalinism on a sound basis of working class struggle and having passed a serious test of loyalty to elementary principle over the Cuban crisis. But PL is quite without, indeed seems to deny the need for, a historical, theoretical or concretely internationalist outlook. Without both recognizing the need for and achieving a Trotskyist clarity about the nature of the SU and of Stalinism, no formation (above all one formed as a breakaway from Stalinism) can acquire an authentic and durable revolutionary quality.

(c) PL as it has developed offers a rare and valuable opportunity for the SWP to win over, not a few contacts or peripheral members from PL, but the bulk of the central core of the grouping, if the proper approach is taken patiently over a period of time. Here is a chance to add to the Trotskyist cadre in this country. Two elements are involved in undertaking a potentially successful approach: most fundamental is the bringing about of a political confrontation between PL forces and the Trotskyist program, because in order for forces in PL to transcend their centrism they must be won to that program. Secondly, to facilitate this outcome it will be necessary to seek and find points at which contact with PL and common work with them is feasible.

(d) It is essential in carrying out a serious approach to PL to avoid falling off either into mere flattery and "togetherness" for its own sake, or to make a routine opponents-work approach of trying to win a few of the PL peripheral elements thus estranging the far more important and radical active core. If an approach to PL is undertaken by the SWP and over a period of time begins to show success, it will certainly be through the classic pattern of an internal differentiation within PL. Toward such a process the party will require a steady hand in acting as a proper catalyst: that is, neither substituting itself for intra-PL polarizations, nor retarding or opposing this necessary process. Finally, as a cautionary note, the manner and tone of carrying out our line toward PL is important; i.e., we should avoid a patronizing approach. The PL'ers naturally think they are as good as (or better than) we are. It would be throwing up an unnecessary obstacle to our work to contemptuously step on their self-esteem.

### III. SOME TACTICAL EXAMPLES OF OUR APPROACH:

(a) In the recent past: i) During the Cuban crisis, given the very similar response of PL to that of the party, a considerable amount

of agitation and publicity work could have been jointly conducted, not only to the benefit of the tasks at hand, but also throwing a number of party members into close contact with PL members and sympathizers. ii) PL could have been approached for endorsement or aid in the SWP election campaign, thus posing in a most natural and powerful way the questions of the Socialist Workers Party and of PL's opposition to the capitalist-imperialist party candidates.

(b) There are the usual things that can routinely be done in connection with a friendly orientation toward a group: e.g., letting it be known that the physical facilities of the SWP and YSA are available at reasonable prices to PL; inviting PL to send speakers on occasion as well as inviting its members to attend appropriate functions; encouraging SWP and YSA comrades to support (but not swamp) PL activities.

(c) When PL or their youth project some special committee or action it may not always be possible or desirable for us to participate, but the general rule should be to approach PL actions with a sympathetic, not a hostile, reflex. On campuses where both the PL youth and the YSA have forces we should seek common actions or joint discussion clubs as circumstances permit.

(d) A most acceptable and defensible way to initiate direct pressure upon PL toward winning their most serious section to Trotskyism is through the use of the press, both SWP and PL, for example, responding to the open offer of PL to publish in their press critical evaluations of their Trade Union program. In addition, when and if the projected Marxist-Leninist Quarterly appears, it should be given serious, friendly, critical attention in the party press.

January 6, 1963

Appendix

The PL Memo was originally submitted to the party National Secretary under the following covering letter of January 9, 1963:

"The enclosed memorandum on the "Progressive Labor" group is for consideration and action by the Political Committee.

"Should you or the committee desire amplification on the information, views or proposals in the memo, we would meet with you at any convenient time. We would appreciate hearing from you what action the committee takes on the memorandum.

"Since much in the memo is not of such nature as to require prior action by an SWP national body and since the bulk of Progressive Labor falls within the province of either the New York party branch executive committee or of the YSA National Executive Committee, we are sending copies of the enclosed document to these two committees."

The Memo was then referred by the National Office to the New York branch executive committee for consideration. In the light of mounting interest in Progressive Labor, the memorandum is now being introduced on the initiative of its authors into the annual branch conference for the information of the branch membership.

In the two months since drafting the document several additional points about PL and its activities have developed:

(1) PL has become deeply involved in support to the Hazard, Kentucky coal strike. PL initiated the "N.Y. Trade Union Solidarity Committee" which held an NYC mass meeting of over 700 people in late January. The party is giving support to this committee.

(2) Other activities: a) PL youth continue the "Student Travel to Cuba" group in which the YSA is now also involved. The perspective currently is to seek to get a group of students into Cuba during the Summer. b) PL has begun to get its finger into the Monroe, North Carolina situation. The able Monroe youth leader, Richard Crowder, is currently in New York speaking under PL auspices.

(3) The latest Science & Society has an honest, serious article on "Trotsky's Political Writings". (This is unprecedented for this magazine which has been until recently entirely within the Stalinist orbit.) The Trotsky article appears through the action of one of S&S's editorial board members, Eugene Genovese. We hear that he is now the editor of PL's Marxist-Leninist Quarterly, the first issue of which is already on the press. This development promises to greatly facilitate a responsive confrontation of PL forces with Trotskyism.

(4) In general with regard to PL, it is important to keep in mind that, as it stands, PL is a highly transient formation which will not permanently be open to our intervention.

2-27-63