

SOME COMMENTS ON PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUSED MOVEMENT

Submitted by Tim Wohlforth

There is much of value in the Spartacist Draft Theses (I have seen only the rough draft). However, it was the opinion of our Co-ordinating Committee that it could not provide the basis for a proper perspective for the fused movement.

The central reason for this is that this draft neither has a perspective on the development of the class struggle in the United States nor does it clearly pose any strategic orientation around which the fused movement could be built. It rather comments, generally correctly, but in a disconnected fashion, on this or that aspect of our concrete work.

Faced with a document we could not accept the C.C. asked Cde. Marcus to prepare a draft for us in collaboration with Cde. Van Ronk. Admittedly we gave this comrade an extremely short time--less than a week--and were unable to give ourselves any time whatsoever to re-work any draft he presented if it was not acceptable to us. The reason for this time problem was the fact that not even a rough draft of a document was submitted to us by the Spartacist comrades until the very last moment. We held off in producing anything of our own for we felt it wrong for us to assume before seeing their draft that it would not be acceptable to us.

The Marcus draft has within it some extremely important elements of a proper perspective for building a revolutionary movement in the United States. Especially important is its correct assessment of the new turn in the economic situation in the United States and impact this turn has had and will have upon the working class, the Negro people, and the students. It is essential that the fused movement understand this new economic juncture and prepare itself for the openings in the class struggle which lie ahead of us in this country. These aspects of the Marcus draft must be incorporated into the future perspectives document of our movement in the United States.

The major weakness of the Marcus draft, is that it does not pose correctly the central task of the American Trotskyist movement for this new period. This task, as I see it, is to reach the new generation of young workers and to develop them into conscious revolutionaries. This must be the central objective of all our work in this country despite the difficulties we may face in carrying this work out and despite our small size and distance from these young workers at this stage in our development.

If our assessment of the new change in the economic situation has any meaning, if truly a new stage of the class struggle in the United States lies ahead of us and not at a distant far off time, then how can we have any other task than to seek to link up with the young generation of workers?

Once we have understood this basic strategic task then it is proper to fit our other tasks into this framework. I agree fully with Marcus that today we must wage a relentless war against every form of revisionism and seek to achieve the dominant position in the American Socialist movement. We have been conducting this ideological struggle since the origins of our group in August 1964 and Spartacist has also devoted much effort to the same objective. Now is not the time to desert this political task.

The struggle for ideological and organizational hegemony is the necessary preparation for the penetration of the mass movement and the winning over of the young workers and minority youth. But this struggle must be understood in class terms, in Marxist terms. Here we get at another weakness of the Marcus document.

Over and over again Marcus uses non-scientific, non-class terminology. This terminology is not only confusing and imprecise, but as is so often the case, reflects a real disorientation. Marcus treats the socialist movement as something apart from the working class. He calls it 'left', 'radicals', 'radical youth', 'extreme left', etc. This movement is seen as something separate from the working class and as essentially synonymous with the students and intelligensia.

A related terminological problem is the use of the word 'youth', 'radical youth', 'youth vanguard', etc. There is no attempt to see youth as separated by classes and as reacting differently and in fact oppositionally depending on their class position. There is no such thing as a 'youth' question in the abstract. The struggle of generations is no substitute for the struggle of classes. While youth in general have little in common young workers do have particular problems as do students to some extent.

The problem is that Marcus tends to go over into a non-Marxist sociological approach, much as he did last fall in his articles on the S.W.P. Then, rather than dealing with the central political questions before the S.W.P. he subjected the S.W.P. to a sociological clique analysis which would supposedly reveal its future course. So today he poses the question of our orientation in a similar way. It all boils down to how to connect up the 'radicals' (read sociologically petty bourgeois) with the workers. Our movement is seen as part of the 'radical' camp and its task is firstly to achieve hegemony over these 'radicals' and then with the radicals marching under our banner either 'ally' ourselves with the workers or ask the workers to follow us 'radicals' (it is unclear which of these two alternatives he envisions).

This is posing the question completely incorrectly. First of all we must dispense with the classless word 'radical' and replace it with 'socialist movement'. Secondly, the socialist movement must be seen as the conscious expression of the working class, the organization of the class in its most conscious form. This movement may express the consciousness of the proletariat correctly, and it may do so incorrectly. It may be a conscious vanguard ahead of the broad layers of the proletariat or it may be a conscious rearguard seeking to hold back the development of the proletariat. But once the socialist movement is not seen as part of the class, then the very Marxist concept of political parties collapses.

As a study of the 'Eighteenth Brumaire' will show clearly, Marx never analyzed political parties, factions within parties and political leaders in terms of their social origins. Rather he sought to expose the objective class forces these particular political formations and personages represented.

The struggle within the socialist movement against revisionism is thus an ideological form of the class struggle itself. The class must first struggle within its own ranks against alien class views before it can seriously struggle directly against the class enemy. The ability of our movement to reach the

young workers in the United States is essentially a political and theoretical problem--not a sociological one. We must fight non-working class methods of thought and political concepts as well as organizational practices within our own movement as part and parcel of our struggle to reach the young workers.

Comrade Marcus has a tendency to grasp hold of an aspect of reality but lose sight of its interconnectedness with the whole of reality. This leads him to a one-sided conception of achieving ideological hegemony. As we have already noted, he sees the 'radical' movement as sociologically middle class and unrelated to the working class. He then projects for our fused organization a task of seeking dominance first over this middle class movement, and then to approach the working class from the outside. Thus he has a rather rigid two-stage theory of our work. It seems that during stage one little or nothing is to be done outside the middle class milieu known as the 'radical' movement.

I feel that our work must be of a more rounded and complex character than this simplistic outline. We begin by recognising that we are part of the working class movement, of the ideological expression of the interests of the proletariat. We recognise that this socialist movement as a whole is politically sick with the virus of revisionism and that it is our central task to defeat revisionism as a necessary pre-condition to the development of a truly conscious proletariat in the United States. But we do not see this struggle against revisionism as a solely propagandistic one, nor do we see the struggle as confined exclusively to the middle class intelligentsia and students.

We must learn how to combine our political polemic with concrete work in the trade unions, the Negro movement, etc., even with our present small forces. We must recognize that even modest successes in such mass work will deepen our appeal to presently disorientated socialists and in turn gains in theoretical clarity will facilitate our penetration of the mass movement.

It is no accident, in my opinion that the trade union and Negro sections of the Marcus draft are so sterile. It is true that neither group is doing much in these fields. This makes our writing on such matters necessarily abstract. But we are doing some things and the little experience we have gained is not reflected in this document. (It may very well be that the completed Spartacist draft will be better in this respect.) And, more important, the general thrust of the Marcus document leaves very little room for such work.

There are other minor weaknesses in the draft which it is not essential to go over here. However, one does take on a certain importance. That is the section on 'automation'. Here I feel the problem is that Marcus is conducting a polemic with the 'Triple Revolution' people who see automation as wiping out the proletariat and thus orient toward the middle classes. But Marcus forgets that there are others we must address ourselves to--namely the working class and especially its younger sections. To the American workers automation does pose a very direct threat. By this term the workers mean the whole process of labor rationalization, mechanisation and increased productivity per worker, that under conditions of a slowing rate of economic growth does present a very real threat to workers' livelihoods.

If our movement in the United States is to address itself at all to the American workers, it must elaborate more of an analysis on this question than is in the Marcus draft. Again this seems to be a reflection of Marcus's pre-occupation with the intelligentsia.

I want to say something on this question of a 'propaganda group'. I know the Spartacist comrades tend to feel very strongly that this is the proper scientific way to characterise our movement today. But I cannot accept the term. It is one thing to see our task as largely propagandistic and it is another thing to see our organization as a propaganda group.

If the comrades want a good example of a propaganda group they should look at the S.W.P. All it does is propaganda tasks. Our movement must be different from all this. It must seek at every point to develop serious connections with the mass movement. It must fuse propaganda with agitation and guide both by theoretical understanding. We can never be content with a strictly propagandistic existence. We must rather see ourselves as a party in embryo, in birth.

The experience of our small organisation, ACFI, is quite directly related to this problem of perspectives. Our group has devoted itself for some time almost exclusively to political struggle with other tendencies and to our own methodological and theoretical development. I believe this work has been fruitful and has produced some important results.

However, for some months now I have felt that our group could not really progress much further as long as it limited itself to these tasks exclusively. I felt that despite the fact we continued to grow numerically. To me it was an important fact that our numerical growth was not accompanied by a proportionate political growth. Rather the larger we got the more we lost our original cohesiveness.

This failure to develop our own comrades was the result of seeking to develop the Marxist method abstracted from real connection with the class. It was in this sense an expression of the impossibility of building a movement along the lines of the Marcus perspectives. As long as our group maintained an exclusively propaganda existence it would become increasingly unlikely that it would survive stage one in order to get to stage two of Marcus's master plan.

The Spartacist comrades, while insisting on a propagandistic course, have done more to break out of an exclusively propagandistic existence than we have. This is one of the ironies of the situation which underlines the absurdity of the present division between the two groups. It is my strong conviction that the fused group will have the human material to begin to develop a more grounded perspective of work in the United States. This will create a healthier atmosphere within which to develop the movement theoretically and methodologically. But in order to accomplish this the movement will need a clear perspective which 1) recognises the real potential for class struggle in the U.S. in the coming period, and 2) begins now to seriously prepare for and reach out to the young workers.

31.3.66.

(Appended to T. Wohlforth's "Some Comments on Perspectives for the Fused Movement")

Motion of the Co-ordinating Committee - 20.3.66.

1. We are confident unity can and will be brought about on schedule.
2. In the opinion of the Co-ordinating Committee, the Spartacist draft outline is not a basis for a sound fusion.
3. Therefore we will draft an alternative draft to present, as stipulated at the Montreal meeting, in April.
4. We should not interpret this as anything but a natural outgrowth of the Montreal meeting. These possible problems were foreseen in Montreal and provisions were made for them; in the final analysis the unification will be the stronger for proceeding in a principled way.