

SWP

discussion bulletin

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DECLARATION ON THE CUBAN CRISIS

(by Robertson, Mage, & Others)

The Cuban Revolution is now at its hour of greatest peril. The result of the round trip of the Soviet missiles has been to make a deal between Khrushchev and Kennedy at the expense of the Cuban people no longer merely a perspective but an immediate threat. U.S. armed aggression in the form of an all-out invasion of Cuba, though still not the optimum variant of U.S. imperialism, is now for the first time guaranteed the tacit support of the Kremlin if a formal "negotiated" settlement restoring U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean cannot be imposed on the Cuban people.

In this situation the duty of the Trotskyists toward the Cuban revolution only begins with demonstrations of sympathy and support for Cuba. The obligation of the Trotskyists, which no other tendency can even claim to fulfill, is to provide a political analysis, a political line upon which the defense of the revolution must be based.

The decisive point in the political line in defense of the Cuban revolution against all its enemies is explicit denunciation of the counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the concrete instance of Cuba. The Cuban revolution cannot be defended by arms under the control of Kremlin bureaucrats whose only interest is to turn the revolution to the service of Russian foreign policy, including selling it out entirely if the price is right. The only defense of the Cuban revolution is the determination of the Cuban people to resist by any and all means, and the conscious solidarity of the international working class against all the enemies of the revolution. The false policy of the Castro leadership, its political bloc with the Stalinists, has gravely undermined this defense.

The International Committee of the Fourth International, in its statement entitled "Defend The Cuban Revolution" published in the November 3rd Newsletter, defined the basic lines of a Trotskyist defense of the Cuban revolution, particularly in its statements: "Installation of Soviet missile bases in Cuba is not for the defense of the Cuban revolution, but part of the diplomatic game of Khrushchev...the setting up of Soviet missile bases as a substitute for international working-class struggle cannot defend the revolution...the counter-revolutionary policy of Stalinism prepares the crushing of the Cuban revolution, not its defense." We ask the

editorial board of the Militant to print this I.C. statement.

We furthermore ask the PC to adopt the political line of the International Committee declaration as the basic line of the party in its defense of the Cuban revolution. This should be the starting point of a campaign for international working-class solidarity with the Cuban revolution based on the establishment of workers' democracy in Cuba and full, open collaboration of the Cuban revolution with the international working-class movement in all phases, military as well as political, of revolutionary defense.

* * * * *

November 30, 1962

Roger Abrams (New York)	Albert Nelson (New York)
Dorothy Bell (Oakland-Berkeley)	Shane Mage (New York)
Emily Cavalli (Oakland-Berkeley)	Charlotte Michaels
Joyce Cowley (San Francisco)	(New York)
Paul Curtis (Oakland-Berkeley)(1)	Roger Plumb (Oakland-Ber-
Maria di Savio (San Francisco)	keley)
Roy Gale(San Fransisco)	Tong Ravich (New York)
Lynn Harper (New York)	Leigh Ray (San Fransisco)
Larry Ireland (New York)	James Robertson (New York)
Rose Jersawitz (Oakland-Berkeley)	Shirley Stoute (New York)
Stanley Larssen (Oakland-Berkeley)	Marion Syrek, Jr. (Oakland
Ed Lee (Oakland-Berkeley)	Berkeley)
	Polly Volker (San Fransisco)
	Jeoffrey White (Oakland-
	Berkeley)
	Jack Wolf (Connecticut)(2)

(1) "I take exception to the last sentence of paragraph three. There may have been no alternative for the Castro leadership. The policy, however, is a false one."

(2) "I favor publication of the I.C. statement on the Cuban crisis. I am in general synpathy with this statement."

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COPY FROM THE NEWSLETTER

November 3, 1962

DEFEND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

Statement by the International Committee of the Fourth International

The US imperialists are bent upon the destruction of the Cuban revolution and have shown that they are even prepared

to risk the danger of world war. The Cuban Revolution, expropriating US capital in Cuba, makes it necessary for US imperialism to take these measures in order that their strangle hold over all Latin America shall not be threatened. Wall Street seized the pretext of Soviet missile bases to bring a showdown.

The working class of the world must act to prevent the Cuban Revolution from being crushed. Such action must be independent of the policies of Khrushchev and the Soviet bureaucracy. Their line of peaceful co-existence designed only to preserve their own privileged rule by diplomatic deals, is opposed to the spread of the Cuban Revolution and to independent workers' action, which are the only guarantees of Cuba's defense. Installation of Soviet missile bases in Cuba is not for the defense of the Cuban Revolution, but part of the diplomatic game of Khrushchev.

A heavy responsibility rests on the shoulders of the official leadership of the Labour movement for their failure to support the Cuban Revolution by fighting the capitalists in their own countries.

The International Committee of the Fourth International calls on all its sections to take their place in all actions for the defence of the Cuban revolution from the US imperialists.

Cuba, as a sovereign state, has the right to accept whatever military aid it decides. But the setting up of Soviet missile bases as a substitute for international working-class struggle cannot defend the revolution. On the contrary, it shows the dangers of the policy of peaceful co-existence in exposing the Cuban Revolution to enormous dangers, providing a pretext for US intervention. In this situation, the counter-revolutionary policy of Stalinism prepares the crushing of the Cuban Revolution -- not its defence.

Any policy of United Nations intervention or of summit agreements over Cuba must be opposed. Such methods will destroy the revolution, which only the international independent class action of the workers can defend.

We stand for the defence of the USSR and of the Cuban Revolution, but such defence means determined opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy and its methods.

In the advanced countries, especially the USA, the working class must organise actions in full support of the workers and peasants of Cuba. End the blockade! End the invasion preparations!

In Latin America, a decisive struggle against US imperialism and its agents, for the extension of the revolution, must be waged to defend Cuba. Without this action, and without defeat of the Stalinist policies of defence of Cuba, the fate of that revolution will repeat the story of Greece, Guatemala and Spain.

We call particularly on the members of the Communist Parties to oppose the policies of their leaders to break from the policy of agreement with the imperialists, to demand independent class action in defence of Cuba.

The sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International must take part in all actions in defence of Cuba, struggling within these movements to build an independent, anti-imperialist movement led by the working class.

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End

THE WHIRLING DERVISH SCHOOL OF POLITICS

by Farrell Dobbs

According to the Wohlforth-Phillips faction the party must undergo a thorough reorientation, and they insist the job must be done "from top to bottom." Toward that end they call for adoption by the convention of a 49-page exercise in political superficialities and factional nonsense entitled, "The Decline of American Imperialism and the Tasks of the SWP," submitted by the so-called "Reorganized Minority." (Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 24, No. 10).

Whatever else you may think about them, you'll have to admit that these seasoned veterans of class warfare are models of restraint when it comes to characterizing their political inferiors. They call the party majority nothing worse than "petty-bourgeois impressionists" and "empiricists" and "centrists." With comparable reserve they simply warn us "how serious the sickness within the party is." You'll also have to admit that they are charitable toward their errant comrades when they write that, "To characterize the SWP majority as a finished centrist tendency is to give up the battle before it has begun."

Comrades marked for reorientation "from top to bottom" may be curious as to what it is and how it works. To find out they need only wade through some 20,000 words of pretentious, repetitious political fiction. Lest any "petty-bourgeois impressionist" get the notion that Wohlforth-Phillips are a bit too wordy, let me be the first to warn against such "empiricist" nonsense. Words are important, and the more the better. Wohlforth made that clear when he dismissed the IC statement on reunification of the world movement as not serious because it took only 8 or 9 pages. After all, who ever heard of saying anything serious in a mere 3,500 words?

Following a brief preamble, Wohlforth-Phillips get down to cases on page 20 of their document concerning the "top to bottom" reorientation. We must "assert trade union work as the main task of the party." Emphatically so because, "Nothing else will come close to equipping our party for the immensity of the task before it." Well, that seems plain enough. Union work must have our main attention and nothing else must get in the way of this task. A bit of confusion arises, however, as Wohlforth-Phillips ramble on. We are directed to "continue our long standing orientation of work in the unions in basic industry." At the same time we must give "a very special priority" to organization drives among depressed strata of workers in spheres like California's Imperial Valley and the New York hospitals, which are not exactly basic industries. Our orientation

must be toward basic industry, but we must give, not only a priority, but a "very special" priority, to other spheres of employment. Comrades may find some difficulty in thus orienting toward one objective while giving priority to another. If this should lead them into errors of one-sidedness in executing the maneuver, they might hope to be forgiven since in either case they would be carrying out the main task of union work.

Would it were so, but the Wohlforth-Phillips school of whirling dervish politics is a bit more complex. While concentrating on union work as their main task, the comrades must also remember that Negro work "should be given primary attention in every branch in this country." Nor can we be content simply to work within existing Negro organizations. "It may also be necessary to go outside of these organizations, working in more temporary formations or even assisting the development of new organizational forms of one sort or other ourselves." Not only that. We must begin "sending qualified comrades into the South on a long term basis." In addition we must reach the Negro masses in the Northern communities and "nothing must be allowed to stand in our way." So that our Negro comrades may concentrate on this work the party is required to "relieve them of all other assignments."

At this point the Wohlforth-Phillips directives stand about as follows: Our main task is union work in which we must orient toward basic industry while giving a very special priority to work outside basic industry. While concentrating on this main task, every branch in the country is to give primary attention to Negro work, moving simultaneously in the North and the South -- on a long term basis -- and allowing nothing to stand in our way. Negro comrades are to stand aside from the main task and devote themselves exclusively to the area of primary attention.

With this brief recapitulation let us now move on to the next set of directives. "Certainly work among the Mexicans must be a central part of the work of the Los Angeles branch at all times," Wohlforth-Phillips assert, "and similarly work among Puerto Ricans must be a central part of the work of the New York branch at all times." An alert is also sounded for Chicago, Philadelphia and Northern New Jersey to take note of the directive to Los Angeles and New York. In this work "the main responsibility must fall on comrades of Latin America extraction." Since they are told to orient toward creation of a special Spanish language branch, it seems likely the Latin American comrades would be directed to forego participation in either the main task or the area of primary attention, so that they could concentrate on the central part of the work in their branches.

Consider what the situation would be for the New York comrades who come in for several specific instructions. Their main task would be to concentrate on union activity among the hospital workers, teachers, garment workers and teamsters, while keeping in mind that, "Young comrades should be actively discouraged from going into fields like variotyping." The New York comrades would be required to devote primary attention to work in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant and other Negro communities and also, as a major party branch, to make comrades available to help colonize the South. A central part of their work would be among Puerto Ricans, at all times. All the branch would need to pass from absolute confusion into utter pandemonium would be to have windy minorityites taking the floor to "motivate" and "clarify" their directives.

The Los Angeles branch would have a comparable situation, give or take a couple of windbags, as would the rest of the party. It can be safely assumed that Wohlforth-Phillips would stand ready, at the drop of a hat, to provide cookbook recipes for each branch, complete with separate directives for the main task, for the area of primary attention, and for the central part of the branch work.

In their 49-page condensed version of the "top to bottom" reorientation, Wohlforth-Phillips devote page after page to directives that would set the party marching in all directions simultaneously -- all directions, save one. Unless my mind wandered at a crucial point, despite my best efforts to absorb all their 20,000 words of wisdom, they take no notice whatever of the 1964 presidential elections. Is the party to be reoriented away from use of the electoral arena in its propaganda activity? Do Wohlforth-Phillips embrace the Cochran thesis on party election campaigns?

During the 1948 presidential campaign Bert Cochran was editing the paper. Until the party called him to order, Cochran squeezed the campaign into a small corner of the paper, asserting that he wasn't going to let us turn the paper into a "house organ." As we entered the 1952 campaign Cochran delivered the following injunction to the party convention: "We cannot just shout promiscuously at the general mass, for that would be like hurling seeds into a storm, hoping that by good fortune a few would find their way into productive soil."

These experiences with Cochran came to mind as I read

Wohlforth-Phillips. They indict the editorial staff for producing "a paper written to be read by petty-bourgeois radicals rather than workers as anyone who has sold the paper to workers knows." They call for greater effort "to have trade union matters covered by the workers in the party who are in the shops rather than written from 116." They direct that: "The party and its press must take a conscious turn towards the main arena of our work, the politically unawakened workers of the mass production industries."

True enough, we should do all we reasonably can to reach workers with the paper, but without aping Wohlforth-Phillips' light-minded disinterest in petty-bourgeois radicals. I think nothing would please the editorial staff more than to receive more material for the paper from comrades in the shops. Still a question remains, what role shall the party and its press play on the electoral arena? Shall we abstain? Or would we be allowed to run a perfunctory campaign, provided it did not cut across the main task, or the area of primary attention, or the central part of our work?

Comrade Phillips is a member of the Detroit branch which is now preparing for petition work this summer to put a party presidential ticket on the Michigan ballot in the 1964 elections. Is he for this effort or against it, does he support the branch in carrying through this big task or does he brush it aside as unimportant? His faction asks the party convention to adopt as its political resolution a document that fails to take notice of the 1964 elections. The Detroit branch and the rest of the party would be left up in the air on electoral policy, and not only on electoral policy.

The Wohlforth-Phillips faction introduces so many misrepresentations and distortions of basic party policy that virtually every page of their document would require extensive rebuttal in order to set the facts straight. Such political shenanigans are not untypical of unprincipled factional combinations, and the party has a right to ask some questions about the Wohlforth-Phillips credentials as candidates for party leadership. What is their "Reorganized Minority?" From what was it "reorganized" and into what has it been "reorganized?" This is the one question the glib minorityites are reluctant to discuss, and a look into their political background will help explain why.

In 1962, after a couple of years of undercover factionalizing behind the back of the party, an organized minority sprung what they smugly expected to be a stunning surprise attack on the party. Their political bombshell, which had the explosive effect of a wet firecracker, was tossed into the plenum of the National Committee in the form of a "Statement of Basic Position." (Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 23, No. 4). The faction, as then constituted, was led by three ex-Shachtmanites -- Comrades Wohlforth, Mage and Robertson -- and a former Johnsonite, Comrade Phillips. Like their teachers, Shachtman and Johnson, they were united on one thing -- opposition to the leadership of the SWP.

They brought considerable baggage with them from their basic education in Shachtmanite circles: Indoctrination in Stalinophobia. Catechismal training in the myth that the SWP is a bureaucratic jungle. And, among other things, the example of revolutionary misleadership set by Shachtman himself. Trotsky knew whereof he spoke when he wrote in 1940 that, "Everybody is aware of the facility with which Shachtman is able to weave various historical episodes around one or another axis." He also called things by their right name when he added that "in the organism of the party comrade Shachtman plays the role of a floating kidney."

These exquisite traits in Shachtman were absorbed by his ex-followers who, from the day they entered our party, set out to reconstruct its theory, program, strategy, tactics and leadership. They got the notion from Shachtman that you can put over anything in politics if you know how to talk fast, long and loud. That's why they jump so nimbly from one position to another, from one unprincipled combination to another, and try to brazen it out by talking all the faster, longer and louder when attention is called to their political gyrations.

Of the foursome leading the original minority combination, Comrade Phillips has some unique political characteristics. He is a disciple of Johnson, who espoused the state capitalist theory within the movement, and he came to the party on that basis. When the Johnson cult pulled out of the SWP in 1950, Comrade Phillips stayed with us, but he clung to his state-capitalist views. In fact he made a firm declaration to that effect during the discussion prior to the 1957 party convention. He said, "We will show that the theory of state capitalism is not a revision of Marxism, as some comrades think, but actually is Marxism today."

In rebuttal of arguments against the state capitalist view, Comrade Phillips declared: "Actually the theory of Trotsky, upon which these arguments are based, which equated nationalized property with proletarian revolutions and with workers states, inconsistent as it is with his other magnificent contributions to the theory and practice of Marxism, represents a deep-going revision of Marxism on four inter-related points which we discuss individually below: 1. The inevitability of state capitalist development, given the lack of intervention of the proletarian revolution. 2. The decisive character of political power in determining the class character of the state. 3. The nature of the bourgeoisie. 4. The character of the basic contradiction in capitalism and the form of its solution under socialism." (Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 18, No. 2.).

Such, briefly stated, is the political background of the quadrumvirate of three ex-Shachtmanites and a former Johnsonite, who set out as a combination to straighten out the line and replace the leadership of the SWP. In their "Statement of Basic Position," cited above, they asserted: "In sum, we believe that the failure of the SWP leadership to apply and develop the theory and method of Marxism has resulted in a dangerous drift from a revolutionary world perspective." To this alleged "drift" they counterposed a call for "political struggle against Pabloism internationally and Pabloite ideas and methodology within our own ranks."

The 1962 plenum was thus confronted with a rather ludicrous situation. It was told that the party must be saved from "Pabloite ideas and methodology," from "the failure of the leadership to apply and develop the theory and method of Marxism," from "a dangerous drift" caused by the leadership default, and -- since Comrade Phillips has never repudiated his 1957 statement -- we must assume the party also needs saving from Trotsky's "deep-going revision of Marxism." By whom shall the party be saved from this political fate worse than death? By a combination of ex-Shachtmanites and former Johnsonites who can agree on only one thing -- the party leadership should be removed and they, or at least the slickest among them, should take the helm. The plenum thought otherwise and it overwhelmingly rejected the minority "Statement of Basic Position."

A few months later the minority split. Neither Wohlforth-Phillips on the one side, nor Robertson-Mage on the

other, have given the party any explanation for this split. It was simply announced in typical double-talk by Wohlforth-Phillips, first to the National Committee last November, and finally to the party in the form of an attachment to their opus, "The Decline of American Imperialism and the Tasks of the SWP." Concerning the split with Robertson-Mage they say only that, "The present tendency shall dissolve and shall re-establish itself on the basis of the preceding points." Robertson-Mage have made no statement about the split in any form, they just continue to factionalize on a business-as-usual basis.

Comrade Kerry has dealt with the minority combinations and their split in his discussion article, "Unprincipled Combinationism -- Past and Present." (Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 24, No. 15). I concur in his general analysis of what he has aptly termed the "Slaughter-Healy-Lambert-Phillips-Wohlforth-Robertson-Mage minority." Leaving aside questions already taken up by Comrade Kerry, I want to get back to the one sentence on the minority split quoted above from "The Decline..." opus.

Here is one of the "preceding points" to which Wohlforth-Phillips make reference in that sentence: "The tendency expresses its general political agreement with the tendency of the International Committee which has agreement around the 1961 International Perspectives Resolution presented by the Socialist Labor League. It must, therefore, begin from the standpoint of its responsibilities towards the political struggles of this tendency in relation to the construction of the revolutionary party in the United States."

This avowal of "responsibilities towards the political struggles" of the Socialist Labor League raises a question. It seems reasonable to expect that the party convention will reaffirm our position in support of early reunification of the world movement. But the Slaughter-Healy leadership of the SLL opposes reunification, and they falsely accuse us of "splitting" the movement because we insist it should be reunited, with their participation if possible, without it if necessary. In this situation what will the Wohlforth-Phillips faction consider their responsibilities? Will they loyally accept the convention decision and support its implementation? Or will the faction play an obstructive role "from the standpoint of its responsibilities towards the political struggles" of Slaughter-Healy?

There isn't much of a hint of responsibility toward the party contained in the closing sentence of the Wohlforth-Phillips opus. "It is the duty of every revolutionist in the party," they assert, "to struggle uncompromisingly for a return of the party to a working class line internationally and an orientation of intervention into the mass movement within this country." That's war talk -- a summons to every "revolutionist" in the party to "struggle uncompromisingly" against the party majority which is branded "petty-bourgeois impressionist" and "empiricist" and "centrist." Maybe that kind of language isn't supposed to mean anything much in the whirling dervish school of politics, but, be that as it may, there's a limit to the nonsense the party will tolerate.

We will soon have a convention at which the issues now in dispute within the party will be firmly decided by majority vote. The present internal discussion will then be terminated, until an official party decision has been made to again open discussion. It will be the duty of every comrade, without exception, to support party-building activities, proceeding on the basis of the convention decisions and on no other basis.

The party will expect the minorityites to conduct themselves in a constructive, responsible, disciplined, loyal manner. How they measure up to these expectations will be determined, not by their double-talk, but by their actual conduct in the daily life and work of the party.

May 1963

End