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CONTENTS

Page

AN ANSWER TO THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL SECRETARY , by Bill Massey (Internationalist Tendency), Chicago Branch	3
LATIN AMERICA AND THE MASSEY-SHAFFER-SMITH TENDENCY , by Gordon Fox, Oakland-Berkeley Branch	6
SHOULD WE JUNK HISTORICAL MATERIALISM—OR HOLD FAST TO IT? by George Novack	10
APPENDIX: Letter from Les Evans to Jan Garrett	14

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- Marty Jan 2014

AN ANSWER TO THE NATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONAL SECRETARY

by Bill Massey (Internationalist Tendency),
Chicago Branch

For the benefit of the comrades of the Trotskyist movement we submit the following materials for publication in the SWP Discussion Bulletin:

1. Letter to the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party from Bill Massey, dated January 31, 1973.
2. Letter from the National Organization Secretary to Massey-Shaffer-Smith, dated February 12, 1973.
3. Letter to National Organizational Secretary from Bill Massey, dated March 1, 1973.
4. Letter to Bill Massey from Rich Feigenberg, National Office, dated March 10, 1973.

I include No. 4 in this material since it is the only answer ever received from the national office of the party. We assume that publication of this material will prompt the leadership to fulfill their responsibility in this regard.

Copies of this material are being sent to the United Secretariat and the International Majority Tendency for their information and with the request that it be printed in the International Internal Discussion Bulletins.

May 19, 1973

* * *

January 31, 1973

The Political Committee
Socialist Workers Party
14 Charles Lane
New York, New York 10014

Dear Comrades;

In conjunction with the letter of Tendency which was signed by Comrades Shaffer, Smith and myself, dated January 19th, 1973, I would request that you circulate the letter of Tendency to all Branches of the Socialist Workers Party and have it read at the regular Branch meeting for the information of the members of the Party. We would, of course, appreciate that this be done at the earliest possible date.

Enclosed is a copy of a letter sent to the U. S. F. I. concerning the publication of the letter of Tendency in the International Discussion Bulletin.

Comradely
s/Bill Massey (Oakland-Berkeley)
for John Shaffer (Houston)
& Don Smith (Chicago)

Encl.
Copy to: U. S. F. I.
File

14 Charles Lane
New York, N. Y. 10014
February 12, 1973

Bill Massey - Oakland Berkeley
John Shaffer - Houston
Don Smith - Chicago

Dear Comrades,

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of January 31. Before bringing your letter before the Political Committee, further clarification is needed from you.

1) Your letter of January 19 stated that you have formed a "political tendency within the SWP for the purpose of participation in the discussions preceding and the deliberation of the Tenth World Congress of the Fourth International," and that your January 19 letter cannot present a "full statement" of your views. What resolutions on the international questions in debate in the world movement compose the platform of your tendency?

2) Are you spokespersons for this "political tendency within the SWP"? Are there other members?

3) I notice you sent a copy to an "International Majority Tendency." What is this tendency? How did you become informed of it? Do you have a copy of its platform? To whom did you send this copy?

4) Do you consider yourselves a part of or members of an international tendency or faction in the world movement?

Comradely
(s)/Barry Sheppard
National Organization
Secretary

cc: United Secretariat
N. C. members: Oakland-Berkeley
Chicago
Houston

March 1, 1973

Barry Sheppard
National Organizational Secretary
Socialist Workers Party
14 Charles Lane
New York, N. Y. 10014

Comrade Sheppard:

The following are responses to the four questions asked in your letter of Feb. 12, 1973. I will restate your ques-

tions in order to facilitate comprehension.

1) *Question:* YOUR LETTER OF JAN. 19 STATED THAT YOU HAVE FORMED A "POLITICAL TENDENCY WITHIN THE SWP FOR THE PURPOSE OF PARTICIPATING IN THE DISCUSSIONS PRECEDING AND THE DELIBERATION OF THE TENTH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL," AND THAT YOUR JAN. 19 LETTER CANNOT PRESENT A "FULL STATEMENT" OF YOUR VIEWS. WHAT RESOLUTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS IN DEBATE IN THE WORLD MOVEMENT COMPOSE THE PLATFORM OF YOUR TENDENCY?

Answer: Inasmuch as the International discussion has just commenced, your demand to know specifically the documents that our Tendency supports and opposes, seems to me to be patently premature. Have all the documents been published? In your Feb. 18 report to the Oakland/Berkeley branch you listed a minimum of a half-dozen issues in dispute. Furthermore you emphasized an alleged concern that a full, thorough and comprehensive approach to the International debate transpire, particularly in the European sections. But apparently comrades who are co-thinkers in the United States are expected to take positions on documents that have not even been written.

Our Declaration of Tendency specifically outlined our attitude toward the major controversial issues in the International as they have been demonstrated in practice, through political organs, and in reports such as your own to the Oakland/Berkeley branch and those given at Oberlin and elsewhere. This clearly differentiates our method from that of the present leadership of the Socialist Workers Party. For example, in your report to the Oakland/Berkeley branch you stated the view that our Party will continue to violate any decisions of the United Secretariat which the SWP leadership disagrees with and considers to be "non-Trotskyist." You used the formulation that we would publicly "blast them," to express what the SWP leadership's course of action would be, should a disagreement such as that over the Sallustro affair arise again. When will this conception—which in effect demands a federated as opposed to a democratic-centralist International—be put explicitly into writing rather than arbitrarily carried out.

I will state, however, that the votes of our Tendency would have been cast for the Draft Thesis, "The Building of Revolutionary Parties in Capitalist Europe," and not against it—as were the votes of the present leadership of the North American co-thinkers. That vote of ours would have been based on agreement with the essential thrust of the document, allowing for differences on particular parts and secondary questions—which is the Leninist way of acting in such situations.

Further elaborations of our views will be contributed to the discussion at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner. At present it is our opinion that the Declaration of Tendency stands on its own as an explicit summary of our views.

2) *Question:* ARE YOU THE SPOKESPERSONS FOR THIS "POLITICAL TENDENCY WITHIN THE SWP." ARE THERE OTHER MEMBERS?

Answer: If we three (Massey/Shaffer/Smith) were not the spokespersons of the Tendency, why would our three names appear on the Declaration? Are you suggesting

that perhaps we are the literary agents for some other mysterious spokespersons? What is the purpose of such a question?

The second part is equally perplexing. Our hope is to win as many comrades as possible to our ideas. However, since the SWP leadership is apparently not going to call for a special convention to concentrate on in a thorough fashion the International questions (as is projected in Europe), we will not be allowed to argue our views in the branches of our party until the advent of the pre-convention discussion for our regularly scheduled convention. Furthermore, supporters of our Tendency have not even been permitted to read the Declaration in the branches such as Chicago, San Francisco and Portland; so at present, the overwhelming majority of the Socialist Workers Party does not even know that a Tendency was announced almost two months ago! Perhaps, since you are so concerned with the numerical composition of our Tendency, you could arrange for our Declaration to be read in *all* the branches—as we requested in our letter of Jan. 31. This will enable all comrades in our party to be informed that there exist at least two points of view in the SWP, before the written discussion gets underway.

Furthermore, I conjecture that you have been made aware of the fact that in the Houston branch, in response to the demand of the Organizer, twenty-three comrades stated that they supported the Tendency. At the point when the official vote on documents is held, you will undoubtedly be informed of the full strength of support for the Tendency.

3) *Question:* I NOTICE THAT YOU SENT A COPY TO AN "INTERNATIONAL MAJORITY TENDENCY." WHAT IS THIS TENDENCY? HOW DID YOU BECOME INFORMED OF IT? DO YOU HAVE A COPY OF ITS PLATFORM? TO WHOM DID YOU SEND ITS COPY?

Answer: In your report to the Oakland/Berkeley branch you described and denounced at length an "International Majority Tendency" with much venom. The Majority Tendency to which we sent our copy of the Tendency Declaration is undoubtedly the same one; unless, of course, there exists TWO International Majority Tendencies, which would certainly be a novel situation! Furthermore Comrade Hansen in previous documents has spoken of the need to form a tendency, and at the 1972 Oberlin Conference Comrade Barnes presented a major address (open to SWP and YSA members, as well as contacts), which was an unvarnished attack on the leadership of the United Secretariat. Similar attacks have been perpetrated in branches across the country under the guise of "educational" on the International, in which only one point of view is presented. In San Francisco this reached its zenith (or nadir, depending on one's point of view) in National Committee member Art Sharon's slanderous denunciations of both the leadership of the United Secretariat and various sections. Sharon's protracted polemic against the IMG involved everything short of a Reichian analysis of Comrade Tariq Ali's character armour—it even included gossip about Ken Coates' departure from the British section. In the same educational (or miseducational) series, National Committee member Edwards referred to the present United Secretariat leadership as "Pabloite."

Is it possible that the intent of your question is to deny that Minority and Majority tendencies are extant? Or that

there could be no legitimate means of determining who might be leading them? Perhaps the real purpose of your question was to suggest that the spokespersons of the new Tendency have some private involvement in other sections of the International. Based on the example of the present leadership of the SWP—which has conducted consistent and unilateral and provocative interventions into the affairs of at least the British and Argentine sections—I can understand how easy it might be for you to project. However, your projections are completely without basis in fact.

No, we do not have a copy of the platform of the International Majority. We do have your statement of the three points they are united upon, which you presented to the Oakland/Berkeley branch on Feb. 18. We would appreciate having any other concrete information made available as soon as possible, inasmuch as the remainder of your presentation consisted of highly questionable interpretations of the International Majority's positions, which you based upon such dubious evidence as private conversations and the facial expressions of International leaders.

A copy of our statement was sent to the International Majority Tendency, care of Comrade Germaine. Inasmuch as you in your report to the Oakland/Berkeley branch continuously denounced the "Germaine-Maitan-Frank" leadership, it would appear that this was probably the correct address.

4) *Question:* DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELVES PART OF AN INTERNATIONAL TENDENCY OR FACTION IN THE WORLD MOVEMENT?

Answer: Yes. The SWP considers itself a co-thinker of the United Secretariat, and we have formed a loyal tendency within the SWP. Why would we state our positions on a series of issues under dispute in the International and request participation in the forthcoming World Congress if our political scope was *not* international? However, we are not at this time part of the International Majority Tendency nor of the Minority Tendency associated with the SWP leadership. If we decide to change our status in the future, we will certainly inform you,—and we hope that you will permit the membership of our party to be informed as well! Although democratic centralism restricts political debate on previously decided questions until certain designated times, it should not serve to keep

the membership of the party ignorant of important facts—such as the existence of a political tendency within the party.

Your present practice is in my opinion essentially a continued abuse of Bolshevik norms which was highlighted at the 1971 SWP convention. I am referring to the refusal to give National Committee representation to the Proletarian Orientation Tendency which at that time represented nearly 10% of the SWP. And I am also referring to the massive transfer of approximately 50 comrades into the Oakland/Berkeley branch following that convention, in a blatant violation of the perspective passed at that convention for building up SWP branches in outlying areas. Similar organizational abuses are now being perpetrated in regard to the Houston branch of the party.

I have answered your questions as fully as I can at the present time, although the character of your questions seem to be primarily aimed at provoking or casting suspicion upon the newly formed Tendency, rather than enabling the exchange of information which would lead to political clarity and the united effort to build the International Trotskyist movement.

Comradely,
s/Bill Massey
(for Massey, Shaffer and Smith)

cc: United Secretariat
International Majority Tendency c/o Comrade Germain

14 Charles Lane
New York, N. Y. 10014
March 10, 1973

OAKLAND-BERKELEY
Bill Massey

Dear Comrade Massey,
This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of March 1 to Barry Sheppard.

Comradely
(s)/Rich Feigenberg
SWP National Office

LATIN AMERICA AND THE MASSEY-SHAFFER-SMITH TENDENCY

by Gordon Fox, Oakland-Berkeley Branch

A minority political tendency or faction that seeks to substantially challenge the party's positions on a wide range of things is duty-bound to make clear the nature of its views on the key questions of the world movement. To date, the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency has failed to do more than to say a few relatively vague things in its declaration of tendency. This could ostensibly be due to the fact that preconvention discussion is still in its early stages. Hopefully that is the case and these comrades will behave in a loyal fashion by fully clarifying their views. However, early signs indicate that exactly the opposite will be the case.

The central question in the Fourth International today is that of Latin America. It is impossible to abstain on this question. This is the case because the Latin American question has called into question both our understanding and use of the Transitional Program, and the strategy of building a Leninist combat party. Yet it appears that the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency may well be abstaining on this fundamental question. There are real reasons for this, as will be indicated later. However, it should be stated clearly that a *serious* tendency must offer a *serious* analysis of this question; to do less is to display a lack of seriousness towards both the Latin American question and towards the party.

An initial indication that this tendency does not intend to offer any serious analysis of the Latin American question was the tendency's minority report to the Oakland-Berkeley branch on the Latin American question. As the tendency members selected the reporter, Comrade Ralph Levitt, he presumably represents their thinking on the Latin American question. It is unlikely that this report or another similar document will be submitted for the written preconvention discussion, as it will be seen from the following that this report was of the most unserious variety.

What does the position of the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency consist of? Any comrades who expected to be enlightened by Comrade Levitt's report were sorely disappointed. For Comrade Levitt managed to devote the overwhelming majority of his time to everything under the sun except Latin America. Furthermore, members of this tendency presented contradictory views on the Latin American question in the discussion.

Members of the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency should be clear on one thing: they cannot abstain on this question. They must take one position or another. They should also be clear on what political adherence to the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency means concretely, politically, as they seem to be flirting with this idea. Political adherence to the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency, among other things, would mean: (1) that they support the strategy of guerrilla warfare on a continental scale for a prolonged period as the main strategy for the Latin American Trotskyists, and the concept that technical preparation for that guerrilla warfare is the main task of

the Latin American sections of the Fourth International; (2) that they support the strategy of orienting towards the "new mass vanguard" as the main strategy of the European sections; (3) that they support a positive assessment of entryism *sui generis*; (4) that their leaders ignored for an extended period the political degeneration of the PRT (Combatiente) and have on numerous occasions intervened in a factional manner in other sections of the world movement (i.e., the "Domingo Letter" and the recent intervention in the IMG); (5) that their leaders do not consider the Chinese CP to be Stalinist; (6) that they support the perspectives of the SWP in this country.

It is of course possible that members of this tendency intend to develop a third position in the world movement on the Latin American question. Possible, but not likely. They state that they support neither side. Yet, they have failed to clarify what their position is, and have asserted in the branch discussion on Latin America that their position is already sufficiently clear and that they will not be "bullied" into writing any documents if they do not want to. They have eluded this question with the remarkable and astounding revelation that, after all, Latin America is a secondary question! Apart from the fact that this is itself a rather unique view, that the question that has led to the formation of two international tendencies is "secondary," the questions remain: do you have a position on Latin America? If so, what is it?

Why Is The Minority's Position Unclear?

The lack of clarity on Latin America and, it is predictable, on numerous other questions, flows from the nature of the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency itself. For this tendency is based not on politics but on an unprincipled combination of various political outlooks around opposition to and various gripes and horror stories about the party leadership on a branch and national level. These organizational questions, gripes, and horror stories are put ahead of politics in each and every instance. Thus the minority reporter in the Oakland-Berkeley branch dodges the question of Latin America and devotes his time to horror stories about the party leadership.

The Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency is placed in a real bind on the Latin American question. They cannot agree with the SWP and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency on this or any other question. Heaven forbid! They are forced to disagree with the SWP as the basis of their existence is opposition to the party leadership. Neither can they agree with the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency, as this tendency has expressed its general agreement with the SWP's perspectives for the American revolution. This is not to say that Massey-Shaffer-Smith are in staunch opposition to the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency. On the contrary, they appear to be attempting to ally themselves with the IEC majority in order to gain more allies in their campaign against the SWP leadership. Quite a dilemma! And so Comrade Levitt hems and haws and—

tells horror stories about the party leadership.

Exploding The Myths

It was mentioned above that, in order to dodge the Latin American question, Comrade Levitt as reporter for the minority informed us that this question is in reality a secondary one. He then proceeded to list what, in his opinion, the *real* questions are. According to Comrade Levitt's understanding of the world movement, these real questions—and a few that need to be asked of Comrade Levitt's tendency—are as follows:

Real Question No. 1: Electoralism. According to Comrade Levitt, this is a burning question for the world movement today. The question, he says, is whether to take an electoralist approach as the SWP does toward bourgeois elections, or to take an exemplary Leninist approach, as does the Ligue Communiste. At the outset, it should be noted that Comrade Levitt is the first in the world movement with the startling revelation that electoralism is the burning question and Latin America is not. Additionally, some questions need to be asked of the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency. Is it exemplary Leninism to orient a major election campaign around the issue of "parliamentary cretinism," as did the Ligue in 1969? Was it exemplary Leninism for the Ligue to support the Union of the Left in the recent French elections? How would you draw a balance sheet of the recent Argentine elections in which the PRT (Combatiente) took an attitude of ultra-left sectarian abstention as counterposed to the Workers and Socialist Pole organized by the PST to break the workers from Peronism?

Real Question No. 2: The working class. Comrade Levitt informs us that the real question is whether or not to intervene in the working class. Furthermore, he states that the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency supports intervention in the working class, and that the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency does not. Aside from the fact that the party rejected overwhelmingly at its last convention Comrade Levitt's concepts of abandoning our work in the mass movements to artificially implant ourselves in "key" factories, Comrade Levitt or others in his tendency should clarify for the party whether they consider the "new mass vanguard" of the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency to be the working class, as that is the central theme of the European draft theses on which the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency stands. Should we in this country orient towards this "new mass vanguard"? Further, it should again be pointed out that the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency is in general agreement with the SWP's strategy in the U.S. This "real question" has little reality about it.

Real Question No. 3: A democratic-centralist International. We are informed that the SWP opposes the concept of a democratic-centralist International until and unless it can get its way on all questions, and that it has behaved in a factional manner toward the world movement. Comrade Levitt tells us that anyone can agree with the statements by the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency about democracy in the world movement. Therefore, several questions need to be put to Comrade Levitt. Where do you stand on the questions of democracy in the next world congress? Do you support the stand of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency on allowing the rest of the world movement to read the key documents? Should the PST be represented at the congress? Can a democratic-centralist International

be built at this time?

These are the real questions the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency must answer. Their "real questions" have little to do with reality and are simply a cover-up for the fact that they do not have a unified position on Latin America.

Unfortunately, these dodges are not the only ones utilized by the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency, nor are the charges the only ones raised. There are several other key charges raised by Comrade Levitt. Most important among these is the charge that it is in fact the SWP that is chiefly responsible for guerrillaism in the world movement. This charge is based, among other dubious sources, on the fact that party members currently and in the past express a deep respect for Che Guevara as a revolutionary hero, and that the party's bookstore in Berkeley is named after the ship used by Castro and Guevara. Add to these definitive proofs some selective quotes, and there you have it—the SWP started the whole guerrillaist problem and now it's trying to cover up for its past errors. In reality the charge that the SWP has a guerrillaist past is false through and through.

It is indeed true that the party has displayed deep respect for Che Guevara, and there is a reason for it. It is undeniable that Guevara was a revolutionist who sacrificed his life in order to further the world revolution. However, it does not follow from the fact that we admire and respect Guevara as a revolutionary hero that we do not differentiate ourselves from him. I refer comrades who may be in doubt on this question to both Peter Camejo's "Why Guevara's Guerrilla Strategy Has No Future" (November 1972 *ISR*) and to Joseph Hansen's "Report on the Third World Congress of the Fourth International Since Reunification" (SWP Internal Information Bulletin, June 1969). These two articles deal with both our differences with Guevara and our respect for him.

A point of confusion injected into the discussion both internationally and in the Oakland-Berkeley branch discussion is the usage of the terms "armed struggle" and "guerrilla warfare" as though they were synonymous. We understand that guerrilla warfare is a variant of armed struggle. Further, we have never opposed either armed struggle in the abstract or its guerrilla warfare variety. What we have objected to is the concept of making guerrilla warfare into a strategy for an entire continent for a prolonged period. We furthermore object to the making into a principle of "armed struggle" as though that tactic were a universal virtue. Additionally, we understand that the ultraleft error made by the last world congress has called into question some fundamental aspects of our movement—to be precise, the Transitional Program and the Leninist concept of party building. That is our stand on guerrillaism. That has always been our stand on guerrillaism. Lest any illusions remain on this score, I refer comrades to Joseph Hansen's evaluation of the OLAS Conference in the November-December 1967 *ISR*. It will be remembered that the OLAS Conference took place at the height of guerrillaism among Latin American revolutionary currents. The party did not take a hostile view towards the OLAS Conference, as it represented a significant event in that various revolutionary currents from throughout Latin America came together and rejected the reformism of the Venezuelan CP. And although there was an important guerrillaist trend at the OLAS Conference, we did not by any means give it a blank

check of approval. On the contrary, Comrade Hansen wrote in evaluating the conference, "A problem which some of the delegates were already pondering at OLAS demands the most intensive consideration. This is the problem of the revolutionary struggle in the cities. The key issue is what to do in situations where the masses are not yet prepared to engage in all-out combat but can be mobilized to at least some degree. Is leadership of the workers and the unemployed to be turned over to the right-wing betrayers [the CPs]? Without a battle for the allegiance of the masses? Are there partial struggles which the workers and the unemployed might be prepared to engage in that could prove propitious to the revolutionary cause and which might serve at least to remove the right-wing betrayers from the field as a serious obstacle? . . . The correct countermove [to the CP's efforts to divert the masses to electoralism] would seem to be to step into the arena of the class struggle in the cities and seek to outflank the right-wing CP leaders to the left. The secret of success lies in the development of transitional slogans which in and of themselves are more realistic than the measures advocated by the reformists yet entail a logic that takes the masses along the road of revolution. All this is associated with the question of developing a homogeneous leadership and organizational structure capable of giving correct guidance to the revolutionary struggle in all its aspects. This is what revolutionary Marxists mean when they talk about the necessity of building a party of action." ("The OLAS Conference" by Joseph Hansen, in November-December 1967 *ISR*, Pg. 9.) Thus we did not have a guerrillaist approach even at the height of Latin American guerrillism — much less now.

Splitting the World Movement?

As his ultimate condemnation, Comrade Levitt charges that the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency is trying to split the world movement, since it can't seem to get its own way. After all, he argues, mention of Pabloism has been made, and the last time we mentioned Pabloism we split the world movement. A rather curious conclusion, at best. But there is more. If the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency is Pabloite, Comrade Levitt says, then Healy was right in refusing to participate in the reunification of the International. And in any case, he asks, why has no mention of Pabloism been made in the International since the reunification?

First of all, it should be clear that no one to date has charged the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency with Pabloism. No one, that is, unless one includes several individual members of the Oakland-Berkeley branch, all of whom were in Comrade Levitt's tendency two years ago, and some of whom are in his current tendency. Other than these individual members of Comrade Levitt's "principled" tendency, no one has charged the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency with Pabloism.

Certain points have been raised, however, regarding the intervention of some of these leaders in the internal affairs of the IMG in order to determine the composition of the IMG leadership. It is true that this is not the same thing as bureaucratically overturning a section's elected leadership as Pablo did. However, the intervention in the IMG does sound a rather ominous note, reminiscent of Pablo.

Further, there are certain elements in the politics of Mandel, Maitan, and Frank that are directly descended from their past association with Pablo, such as their attitude towards Stalinism and entryism. But the key point is that it was not the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency that re-injected the issue into the international discussion. Rather, it was the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency itself which presented a document to the world movement which gave a positive assessment of entryism *sui generis*. The comrades of the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency need to answer the question of where they stand on the issues of entryism, of the reunification (which some of their supporters question or oppose), and of the intervention into the internal life of the IMG.

Comrade Levitt Solves The International's Problems

As mentioned above, Comrade Levitt differentiated himself from guerrillism, and stated that he considered that the last world congress made a guerrillaist error. So far, so good. He went on to state, however, that this error was far more healthy than the SWP's supposed electoralist error, and that in reality the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency represents the healthy left wing of the world movement, while the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency represents the right wing. Furthermore, Comrade Levitt stated that the guerrillaist error will be corrected due to the critical-minded nature and proletarian composition of the European sections, while the "electoralist error" of the SWP will not be corrected because we are petty-bourgeois and not critical-minded. Finally, we are informed that the guerrillaist error flows merely from excess revolutionary zeal, and that it is perfectly legitimate to look towards a major breakthrough for the Trotskyist movement somewhere in the world, as this is bound to happen sooner or later.

However, things are not so simple as Comrade Levitt would have them. It is clear that, rather than a simple error that is better than the SWP's "electoralism," the guerrillaist error of the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency represents a grave ultraleft danger. Comrades should refer to Comrade Hansen's *In Defense of the Leninist Strategy of Party Building* to see some of the ramifications of the guerrilla warfare line in the advanced capitalist countries. And since that document was written, this error has resulted in the Ligue Communiste making some grave deviations towards urban guerrilla warfare and/or terrorism. This, along with the vanguardism of the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency, is labelled "healthy" by Comrade Levitt.

The Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency bases itself on the centrality of building a Leninist combat party; the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency does not. The Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency defends the Transitional Program; the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency distorts it. The Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency correctly analyzed the Latin American situation regarding the possibilities for building a party and for the "classical variant" of socialist revolutions; the POR (Gonzales) in following the line of the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency, was organizing rural guerrilla warfare while a prerevolutionary situation was shaping up in Bolivia. Finally, the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency places strategy before tactics, and politics before guns; the Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency does not.

Even if we assume, as Levitt does, that the European sections are more proletarian than the SWP, it does not

follow that this composition will necessarily determine the correctness of the line they advocate. It is furthermore difficult to see how "critical-minded" these proletarian comrades can be if they have extreme difficulty in obtaining the key documents under discussion.

Comrade Levitt is at least partially correct when he states that the guerrillaist error flows from excess revolutionary zeal. Partially, that is, insofar as we are discussing the rank and file, for the leaders of the guerrillaist theory have made clear their unwillingness to rectify their error. But since when is "excess revolutionary zeal" a virtue? Since when does it represent anything more than a symptom of ultraleftism? Again, Comrade Levitt's position works both ways.

Finally, Comrade Levitt states that there is nothing wrong with looking forward to a major breakthrough somewhere, sometime. In this, he echoes Comrade Maitan's "An Insufficient Document" while at the same time differentiating himself from it. It is of course true that there is nothing wrong in making breakthroughs or in hoping for them. However, there is something drastically wrong with making the central strategy of the International for an entire period revolve around making a breakthrough in Bolivia or anywhere else, as Comrade Maitan's document advocated. We do not object to breakthroughs. We do object strenuously to replacing the hard work of building a Leninist party with the panacea of making a breakthrough somewhere. We do object to looking for shortcuts to the seizure of power.

The Nature of The Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency and The Nature of The Massey-Shaffer-Smith Tendency

Comrade Levitt's final damnation of the SWP and of

the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency is the charge that the latter is an unprincipled combination. Here we see a classic example of attempting to make the criminal into the victim and the victim into the criminal. For the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency has made clear, in documented form, its positions and views on all of the key questions in the International. On the other hand, Comrade Levitt has presented the Oakland-Berkeley branch with what is undoubtedly one of the most vague reports in history. If the unlikely occurs and Comrade Levitt submits his views to the party in writing, that document will undoubtedly be similarly vague. The reason for this is simple: Comrade Levitt's tendency has no agreement on the questions involved. In the discussion, we heard differing assessments of guerrilla warfare, Pabloism, the reunification, the nature of Cuba, the Red University, and virtually everything else—all from the members of the same tendency. If that does not represent unprincipled combinationism, the word no longer has any meaning.

The Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency is an unprincipled combination around a vague program. It is predictable that their views will not be satisfactorily clarified for the SWP. Their abstention on the Latin American question up to this point, the unserious nature of their presentation on this question, and the differing positions of their members on a wide range of principled questions, indicates the true nature of the Massey-Shaffer-Smith tendency: an unprincipled combination of sectarians and cliqueists within the Socialist Workers Party. Their outlook must be rejected completely.

May 23, 1973

SHOULD WE JUNK HISTORICAL MATERIALISM — OR HOLD FAST TO IT?

by George Novack

Since the 1840s the revolutionary socialist movement has had to limp along with historical materialism as its theoretical foundation. During this time Marx wrote *Capital*, Engels investigated the origin of the family, private property, and the state, Lenin forged the Bolshevik party, drafted *State and Revolution*, and led the Russian workers to victory in 1917 while Trotsky developed the theory of the permanent revolution and the law of uneven and combined development — all with the aid of its method.

Suddenly, in 1973, Comrade Garrett of the Twin Cities branch announces that, notwithstanding these and other achievements, the theoretical equipment of scientific socialism has up to now been grossly inadequate. He puts forward "a theory of mediation" which, he claims, will overcome the serious structural deficiencies of historical materialism and be a better guide to the solution of philosophical, sociological, and political problems. Creativity of such dimensions does not come along every year or every decade. Such prodigies are rare. But before we cast aside the acquisitions and principles of dialectical materialism, as he urges, we ought to examine what this self-advertised innovation amounts to. Do his notions live up to the pretensions this would-be transcender and superceder of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky makes for them?

Let me first dispose of the aspersion that the thoughts of this "lowly rank-and-filer" were unfairly and arbitrarily excluded even from the book review section of the *ISR*, presumably to maintain my personal monopoly as "quasi-official philosopher of the SWP." On several occasions in recent years Comrade Garrett has sought to introduce his peculiar interpretations of Marxist theory into our press. When he could not manage this directly, he tried to do so indirectly. One subterfuge was to attach them to a book review offered to the *ISR*.

He disregarded the rule that the *International Socialist Review* aims to defend and disseminate the ideas of authentic Marxism, not to provide a forum, in whatever guise, for their disparagement and discard. This matter was definitively settled within the SWP in the dispute with Shachtman and Burnham in 1939-40. We saw no reason for suspending this rule to give space to his smuggling operation. (The correspondence between the *ISR* editor and Garrett explaining the reasons for this decision is appended.)

While he was barred from misusing our public press for the promotion of his individual opinions, he has full right to submit them for consideration by the party in preconvention discussion, as he has done. This is proper procedure in our democratically centralized organization.

All of us can now inspect "the theory of mediation" that he counterposes to historical materialism and judge its worth. The gist of this conception seems to be (he is not a very clear or coherent writer!) that ideas are instrumental in directing human activities and weaving interpersonal relations. This is scarcely a world-shaking discovery about the nature of thought. Ideas obviously mediate between the external world and human aims and activities

and between the members of society; they would hardly be true or useful otherwise. Indeed, John Dewey based his instrumentalist theory of knowledge upon this specific function of ideas.

But there is much more to the nature of ideas than the mediating office they perform in everyday life and in scientific inquiry. First, there is the problem of the origin of ideas. On this point Garrett abandons historical materialism completely. He tells us that Marx "felt that humans produce ideas to solve problems with which they *spontaneously* choose to deal" (my emphasis). This is not what Marx taught. The main practical and theoretical problems humans confronted in the course of their development from the hominid to civilized *homo sapiens* were set for them by their existing conditions of life and labor, the level of their productive powers, and the type of their socio-economic relations. They were not "spontaneously," voluntarily, or arbitrarily chosen.

Historical materialism was the first school to demonstrate that human beings created their conceptions of the world and of themselves in conjunction with their processes of producing the necessities of life and in accord with their productive relations. Fresh ideas emerge with changes in underlying social conditions. This is a basic proposition of the teachings of Marxism on the origins, formation, and evolution of the thought process and its products.

Marx also emphasized that the ideas of people did not pop into their heads without sufficient cause. The content as well as the form of their conceptions were materially determined and historically and socially conditioned. The subjective reflections of reality constituting the knowledge of humanity necessarily flowed from the given objective circumstances of life, labor and culture. The imaginative projects, suggestions or anticipations of the most far-sighted genius could outrun the prevailing state of affairs only to a limited extent.

The major types of thinking about the world — magic, religion, philosophy, and science — did not arise as haphazard, spontaneous or accidental phenomena. These determinate and successive modes of intellectual expression and orientation correspond to different levels of socio-economic development, even though elements of each may coexist in civilized societies.

Comrade Garrett, who aspires to reinvestigate and revamp the philosophic foundations of Marxism in order to relate better to women's liberation, should at least be cognizant that women did not "freely" choose their status or their problems either in preclass or in class society. Their functions in clan life, and later in the various forms of the family after the disintegration of primitive collectivism, were imposed upon them by historically created conditions and social divisions of labor beyond their control. Moreover, tribal life bred very different views about the characteristics and roles of the sexes than states where sexual and class oppression developed.

Garrett's next objection to historical materialism is that ideas cannot be reduced to objects in the external world

of which they are "alleged" to be weak "copies" or reflections. No Marxist was ever so crude as to reduce ideas to physical objects, as, for example, the Epicurean theory of perception did. Materialism long ago went beyond that primitive level. Material entities are one thing; their reflections in the mind have a quite different character.

Nonetheless, the materialist theory of knowledge affirms that, while there is no identity, there is a unity between the two. As Aristotle, Spinoza, and others asserted long before Marx, the essential content of correct ideas is substantially and sufficiently similar to the objects of their reference that these concepts can "mediate" in practice between us and them.

Unless such a correspondence between the external world and our ideas held good, we could not at all get along in daily affairs. If an automobile was hurtling toward Comrade Garrett on a highway, and his perception and conception of its movement did not accurately gauge this reality so that he could react in time, he could be gravely hurt or killed. Term this correlation between the physical object and the concept of it what you will; it exists and constitutes the materialist basis of all knowledge and truth.

Science has the same reflective character. The DNA molecule consists of two strands that form a double helix. DNA existed eons before scientists made this discovery in the 1950s. But this conceptual reflection of the pre-existing molecular structure has revolutionized biochemistry.

Since Garrett does not provide any alternative theory of the relation of ideas to objects, it is difficult to pursue argumentation further with him on this pivotal issue of epistemology. At least it is evident that the line of his incoherent and inconclusive criticisms "reflects" the objections of all sorts of academic opponents of Marxism to its materialist conception of the connection between the objective world and our intellectual capacities and processes.

It is gratuitous of Garrett, by the way, to polemicize against me rather than Lukacs on the question of the theory of reflection. The later Lukacs not only fully embraced the Marxist theory of reflection in regard to our knowledge of the external world but sought to make the artistic reflection of reality the basis of his conception of aesthetics. (See *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, by Georg Lukacs.)

Comrade Garrett's elaboration of "the mediation theory" is a skimpy and banal replica of the approach to society, its institutions, and language more progressively employed by bourgeois thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Like them, he proceeds from the fiction of the isolated individual rather than from the labor collective coming to grips with the natural environment to secure the elementary necessities of life. This lone individual then gets together with the second and a third. Institutions, etc., come about through their voluntary association and arrangements. This sort of unhistorical, non-materialist reasoning belongs to the long-superseded social contract school of sociologizing.

Garrett's definition of the "dialectic of history" as "an outdated institution tends to generate its own enemies" is an unoriginal rephrasing of Hegel. According to Marx, the fundamental dialectic of social-historical development is grounded on the collision between expanding forces of production and the constrictions of outmoded relations of production in a given social formation. Out of this

basic conflict other contradictions of social life are generated. Not a whisper of this materialist dialectic from our wizard.

"The most important corollary of the mediation theory," he says, is his special view of alienation. First comes intellectual alienation, then political alienation which produces economic alienation. This stands the order of development of the manifestations of alienation on its head. The root cause of alienation in class society is economic. Its material source is in the divorce and dispossession of the direct producers from ownership of the means of production and control over its products. (See *The Marxist Theory of Alienation* by Mandel and Novack.)

In discussing the problem of historical determinism Garrett not only discards Marxism but levels a false charge against it. "Historical materialism masquerades, at least initially, as an 'ultimately' one-dimensional determinism," he writes. "It tends to 'reduce' activity at the 'superstructural' level to activity at the 'base,' to flatten out Marxism into economic determinism." How many times have the adversaries—and revisionists—of Marxism repeated this unfounded accusation!

The dialectical determinism proper to Marxism does not deny that the multiform aspects and diverse factors of society act and react upon one another and upon the economic infrastructure. Under certain conditions it is possible for political, military, even individual intervention to be decisively determinative of the course of events. (See my article "From Lenin to Castro: The Role of the Individual in History-Making" in *Understanding History*.) At the same time historical materialism insists that in the complex processes of historical determination, economics, and not politics, religion, philosophy, morality, or military power, is decisive in the last analysis and the long run. This is denied by Althusser and other misinterpreters of Marxist method who contend that there is no such single ultimate determinant in history or social and cultural affairs.

Garrett wants to toss away this cornerstone of historical materialism—and, in his effort to do so, travesties its conception of the reciprocal action and mediation between the economic foundations and superstructural phenomena. In his 1939 polemic against Shachtman, Trotsky wrote: "On the question as to how the economic 'base' determines the political, juridical, philosophical, artistic and so on 'superstructure' there exists a rich Marxist literature. The opinion that economics presumably determines directly and immediately the creativeness of a composer or even the verdict of a judge, represents a hoary caricature of Marxism which the bourgeois professors of all countries have circulated time out of end to mask their intellectual impotence." (*In Defense of Marxism*, pp. 118-19.)

In passing, Garrett, like the antihistorical school of empirical American anthropologists, casts doubt on the existence of successive stages and levels of historical development. This liquidation of the fact and conception of progressive development, an indispensable component of the Marxist interpretation of history and scientific socialism, is light-minded and the logic of it is reactionary.

Throughout Garrett strives to assign priority to the idea over material conditions. Thus he asks, where did the reality of a socialist revolution exist before Marx and Lenin conceived of it? That's not difficult for a ma-

terialist to answer. Before these thinkers explained the necessity of the workers' conquest of power the preconditions for this movement existed in the structure, tendencies, and contradictions of bourgeois society. The same objective historic necessity is lodged in contemporary American society. To be sure, this truth has not yet broken through to the consciousness of the masses (ideas do lag, sometimes agonizingly, behind objective relations!). In the United States today only the revolutionary minority recognizes this trend of events and that is the reason for the existence, program, activity, and aims of the SWP and YSA.

Garrett's ideas, too, have preexisted and have their precedents in the prejudices and errors of the subjectivists, moralizers, and muddleheads who maintain that socialism is not the necessary outcome of socioeconomic development that will be brought to birth by the collective action of the revolutionary working masses but is instead a matter of individual choice, a moral option that may or may not come to pass. It all depends on whether enough well intentioned people will it, they say.

After disqualifying historical materialism, Garrett goes on to slander it. He argues that historical materialism justifies the rape of the environment because it identifies progress with the growth of the technological productive forces. He fails to tell us what the prime determinant of progress is. Marxism maintains that the cause of the pollution and plundering of the environment does not lie in the productive forces as such but in their capitalist ownership and abuse. Transfer these forces into the hands of a workers' regime and their further growth and application can save and restore our earthly habitat.

His claim that Marxism induces "a negative attitude toward sexuality" is based on the false assumption that historical determinism leads inexorably to asceticism and repression of sexuality. It is class society and its institutions that distort sexual impulses and activities. The thoroughgoing reconstruction of human relations that socialism will bring about can enable these needs to be fulfilled and become healthy, unmanipulative, and unalienated.

In the current controversy on philosophic method within the Fourth International that originated with conflicting appraisals of the positions held by Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness*, Garrett aligns himself, with certain unstated reservations, with the younger against the older Lukacs and disagrees with my criticisms. (See *ISR* for July-August 1972.) This is logical since he shares the nonmaterialist trend of thought that marks *History and Class Consciousness*.

Garrett says that his illumination began when he first read *History and Class Consciousness*. This may have come as a revelation to him but the ideas of Lukacs were not unfamiliar to older members of our movement who have some acquaintance with the course of Marxist philosophy in the twentieth century. When I and other radicalizing intellectuals of my generation were first learning Marxism in the early 1930s, we were introduced to the views of Lukacs and Karl Korsch primarily through the writings of Sidney Hook and the Lovestoneite theoreticians around *Modern Monthly*. Evidences of the influence of these European thinkers can be found in Hook's *Toward the Understanding of Karl Marx*, written in 1932 with some assistance from Felix Morrow.

In his introduction to *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, Hook singled out only two contemporary authors to whom he expressed "indebtedness"—Georg Lukacs and Karl Korsch. Like Garrett, he borrowed his view of Marxism from this Hegelianizing side current. "The emphasis upon the role of activity in Marxism," Hook wrote in this introduction, "as contrasted with the mechanical and fatalistic conceptions of the social process which prevail in orthodox [Marxist] circles, lays the author [Hook] open to the charge of smuggling in philosophical idealism. But Marx's *dialectical* materialism has always appeared to be idealistic to those who, having reduced all reality to matter in motion, find themselves incapable of explaining the interaction between things and thought except on the assumption that the mind produces what it acts upon."

Hook's book received a lengthy review in the December 1934 issue of *New Internationalist* under the heading "Marxism: Science or Method?" The reviewer summarized Hook's revisions of Marxism in a list that parallels remarkably the list of "innovations" that Comrade Garrett proposes for the party today:

"Marxism is degraded from the high position of a science to that merely of a method; historical materialism is limited only to class societies [Hook, unlike Garrett today, had not abandoned materialism entirely]; Engels and Lenin are sharply separated from Marx on the theory of knowledge; truth is asserted to have no class basis; and even the labor theory of value, a corner-stone of Marxism, is repudiated."

As we assimilated the classics of Marxism, we thought through and rejected the misinterpretations of Marxist method projected by the early Lukacs and Korsch. Trotsky himself played a part in this process at that juncture. (See his criticisms of Hook in the letter reprinted in *The Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1932*.) Hook was disseminating misconceptions of Marxist theory derived from his Hungarian and German mentors.

This page from our past is presumably unknown to Garrett—and comrades elsewhere. In any case, Garrett is not leading our movement forward but trying to pull it back to a stage of ideological development we have long passed by.

Lest these criticisms directed against a younger comrade appear unduly harsh, it should be known that for ten years I have done my best through occasional private correspondence to restrain Comrade Garrett from flying off on tangents in pursuit of aberrant ideas to which he is prone. I kept urging him to make a more painstaking study of Marxist method. Here, for example, are some excerpts from my letter to Comrade Garrett of January 19, 1971:

"I am somewhat at a loss on what to say about your 'intensive methodological reevaluation.' There is not simply a 'philosophical gap' between us but between you and materialism, you and Marxism, you and the theoretical foundations and traditions of our movement. You are arguing against all that.

"In rejecting what you term 'ontological materialism' (is there any other?), you actually repudiate the materialist position. Materialism, as opposed to idealism or any of its many variants, holds that the external world has its own objective existence apart from mankind. Nature is primary, humanity is secondary in existence and in

evolution, just as matter is primary and mind is secondary in the process of knowledge.

"You slur over this all-important distinction by lumping together subject and object, just as the early Lukacs, Sartre and their like have done. From this false starting point your reasoning cannot help but proceed in a non-materialist direction."

Comrade Garrett vows to depose me as the "quasi-official philosopher of the SWP." However it is plain that I am only a stand-in for much more important figures, ranging from the founders of scientific socialism to the founder of the Fourth International. I belong to that eminent company only as an exponent of the same method and ideas.

I have no objection to him or anyone else joining or replacing me as an educator of our movement in matters of theory. The ambition to excel and surpass one's elders in any field of endeavor is an admirable trait. Progress is impossible without it. We can only welcome and encourage such efforts. For almost a third of a century the learned John G. Wright, Joseph Hansen, and I, among others, have done what we could to uphold and propagate the doctrines of materialist dialectics and ensure the

continuity of Marxist thought and traditions in our ranks.

Although neither Comrade Garrett nor the Healyites think much of our achievements, we have at least, I believe, made it easier for the oncoming generation to carry forward that work. Having prepared to hand over the responsibilities for leadership to younger hands and heads in other areas, we older members make no exception in the literary and theoretical departments of our organization.

However, in order to teach others and promote Marxist theory, it is first necessary to learn the essentials of dialectical materialism from the history of thought and the treasury of our movement. Comrade Garrett lacks that elementary qualification. He nurses the illusion that he is an intellect of great stature before he has absorbed the ABCs of Marxism. Having picked up some odds and ends of faddish ideas from pseudo-Marxists and assorted academics, he has made a patchwork of them and presents that to us as nothing less than "an even more profound methodology of which Marx himself was dimly aware."

This vainglorious ignorance and arrogance makes him eligible for the Professor Eugene Duhring Award for 1973.

May 6, 1973

APPENDIX

LETTER FROM LES EVANS TO JAN GARRETT

December 14, 1972

Jan Garrett
Minneapolis, Minn.

Dear Jan:

Forgive the long delay in replying to your letter to the editor of September 8 which discusses Enzo Paci's book, *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man*. At the Socialist Activists and Educational Conference in August Fred Feldman and I discussed with you our reasons for rejecting your original review of this book, submitted in July. At that time we told you that we considered the review to be a veiled polemic with Lenin and Engels on the questions of the dialectics of nature and the role of the subject in the shaping of material reality. We said that while a difference on this kind of question was not quite the same as a difference on immediate political line, that the *ISR* could not print such articles without comment. I made several suggestions to you at the Socialist Activists and Educational Conference: (1) that in areas where you have major differences with the party's approach on philosophical and anthropological matters that the proper forum for debating these differences would be in the Socialist Workers Party's internal preconvention discussion bulletin and not in the pages of the *ISR*; (2) that you should feel free to submit articles to the *ISR* that are in accord with the general line of its Editorial Board; and (3) that if you wished you could submit for consideration as a letter to the editor a shortened version of your review of the Paci book.

On receiving your letter to the editor I noted that in revising it you introduced a direct polemic with George Novack on the character of Georg Lukacs' *History and*

Class Consciousness. This brought into clearer focus precisely what would be involved in printing such a letter. The Editorial Board has discussed the question and decided that it would not be appropriate to do so. The party's tradition and the tradition of the revolutionary Marxist press on this is quite clear. In questions of art and culture we do not have a hard "line" although we may tend to one or another school or approach. Philosophy and method stand much closer to politics than to art, and while there is room for innovation, fundamental revisions such as you propose should rightly be discussed and decided by the party as a whole and not by a magazine like the *ISR*. Clarity will not be served by backing into such a discussion in an abridged form and under the wrong auspices.

You may object that the *ISR* has already become involved in such a discussion by publishing the exchange between George Novack and Etienne Abrahamovici in its July-August issue. What was at issue there was an international exchange of opinion between Marxist publications and parties. That material was published simultaneously in the theoretical organ of the Fourth International for the information of the world movement. If you wish to participate in the international discussion in the public press you must first persuade the *ISR* Editorial Board and the SWP to adopt your positions and to then offer them for consideration to cothinkers abroad.

You should still feel welcome to contribute to the *ISR* in any of the many areas where I presume we have basic political agreement.

Comradely,
s/Les Evans
Editor