

TO : NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND ORGANIZERS)

To the CC

Attached are some rough notes I drew up this morning. They represent-- in no particular order of importance--some of the key considerations in changing my position on Cuba and the other workers states.

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Why Cuba is a workers state

1. Above all, the state capitalist analysis could not prove that Cuba conforms to the most essential definition of capitalism--"production for the sake of increasing money". Is it really possible to say that the Cuban leadership is a capitalist class that ruthlessly subordinates all else to capital accumulation and profit-making? Obviously not.

This is not a transitory phenomenon but a stable regime lasting for twenty years. Does the general law of capital accumulation apply?

"the system of wage labor is a system of slavery, and indeed a slavery which becomes more severe in proportion as the social productive forces of labor develop, whether the worker receives better or worse payment"

Again, to look at Cuba honestly precludes drawing this conclusion. The social productive forces are developing--but the working class is not being driven down, but rather is advancing.

The economics of the state capitalist view abstracts--and thereby fetishizes--general aspects of capitalist production: that it rests on wage labor; that wage labor is alienated labor, divorced from any control over production. As a result the presence or absence of workers control is elevated into the sole criteria for determining the mode of production. But the forest is missed for the trees. These forms of production are necessary because the central drive of capitalism--accumulation for the sake of profit--necessitates them. To simply point out that wage labor and lack of workers democracy exist in workers states does not thereby prove that capitalist laws are dominant. The workers states are transitional societies: capitalist laws will not be abolished overnight. But in Cuba et al these laws are curbed by planning--the law of value operates but does not rule supreme (otherwise social gains would have been cut back long ago in a state struggling for its very survival).

By abstracting the most general features of capitalist production--the labor/capital relationship--and belittling the significance of its concrete manifestations, we have been unable to explain the concretes of the state capitalist economy. Why doesn't the USSR export capital? Why no unemployment in Cuba? Why no capitalist crisis? The theory provides no answers--and without answers we cannot explain the real dynamics of these states.

2. The only counter-explanation for the measures of the Castro government is constant mass pressure by the working class. But our whole case has rested on the absence of any independent organization by the class--its manipulation and mobilization by the Castro team. So where's all this pressure--enough to last

twenty years--coming from? A state that carried out such measures--especially without full workers democracy--must have a direct relationship to the working class.

3. What has been our definition of a workers state based on our analysis of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution? It has not been that a workers state = full workers democracy, soviets, etc. The USSR lacked the forms early (by war communism) and the content by the late 20s. Rather--to explain dating the counter-revolution at 1939-40--we defined a workers state as:

"A state is a machine for the suppression of one class by another. Such a state can assume many different forms. It can be more or less efficient, a more or less 'deformed' machine for the suppression of one class by another. (RMP 12)

More recently Scott rephrased it well in his contribution on Indochina:

"The real question is who wields state power and for what purposes. In the interest of which class is the state regime functioning? Does it serve in some sense as an instrument for the working class, even if it suffers, perhaps, from severe bureaucratic deformations?"

Can anyone deny that the Cuban state "serves in some sense as an instrument for the working class"? I tried and failed. Whatever our differences with the Cuban leadership, the tremendous advances for the Cuban people; the progressive aspects of Cuban foreign policy; the aid and support Cuba has given to underdeveloped countries--all this must reflect the proletarian basis of the state or we fall into the trap of attributing a progressive character to the state capitalist ruling class.

(An aside: By striving to identify with and support the Cuban gains we stretched the state capitalist analysis to the danger point. We would say to ourselves--well, of course capitalism can theoretically accomodate all of this. But concretely-politically, how do you explain a capitalist class in an underdeveloped country, with scarce resources, defending such gains? We believe the class struggle is polarizing internationally; world capitalism is in crisis. Are the state capitalist classes immune? Is this a more viable system?)

4. The state capitalist theory failed the most decisive test of Marxism in Cuba--the ability to explain and predict events. As the discussion proceeded we had to screen out the facts to keep the theory intact--the prisoner release, the dialogue, the loosening up of cultural restrictions, aid to Africa and Nicaragua, etc. Instead we narrowly focused in on the worst aspects--absence of workers democracy, labor cards, anti-loafing laws, etc.

The problems here are two-fold: 1) all this and much worse existed in the USSR when we believed it was a workers state. 2) we underestimated--and discounted in a sectarian way--the real economic problems and pressures Cuba faces. This academic stance of demanding perfection in Cuba is in contradiction to what we have learned politically over the years: the need to identify with and advance progressive struggles, movements, revolutions; to intervene and not abstain in a sectarian way. The theory reflects our political past not our present.

5. We got hung up on the similarities between Cuba and other state capitalist regimes in Africa (previous regimes in Egypt, Burma). These similarities are real; the gains made express the Bonapartist nature of these regimes. Petty-bourgeois governments vacillating between imperialism and the masses. There's a similar dynamic in the workers states. But there are decisive--qualitative--differences between Cuba and Mozambique, Angola et al.

There is the extent of the gains and progress made. Yes, Cuba began as a more developed country. But why use the resources to press so far? Why the stability of the gains? Doesn't this express: (a) a different relationship to the working class (b) a qualitative break with imperialism and its dictates?

Moreover, the gains being made in Africa under petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships are much more concessions to mass pressure; this explains their unstable and incomplete character. Either the ruling stratum will consolidate as a propertied capitalist class and use its power to rescind these measures (or drastically gut and curtail them) or they will complete the transition to a workers state. So far not one of these state capitalist regimes has lasted long--the evolution of Egypt and Burma is instructive. The African states--born out of national liberation struggles, in which the state was smashed and the bourgeoisie largely expropriated--have carried out more extensive state capitalist measures. They do not prove the durability of state capitalism (most are a few years old at most) but rather may improve the prospects for the rise of workers and farmers governments.

6. We missed the boat on the workers and farmers government theory. We were stuck on formalities--where are the actual workers parties in the government? As opposed to looking for the working class base of the government and judging its changing class character by its actions. We've always known that Stalinist and social democratic parties are working class in composition--but petty bourgeois in leadership. In the underdeveloped world, the Stalinist parties are rarely even working class in composition. But by formal criteria, we could have accepted governments they lead as workers and farmers governments while denying that label to the Cuban government in 1960--which had far more support in the working class, carried out popular measures, etc.

7. We underestimated the level of working class participation in the Cuban revolution and the social overturns. I counterposed the actions of the rebel army--in the nationalizations, land reform, etc.--to "independent working class" action. But who was the rebel army--workers, peasants, and youth! This was not the army of a capitalist state--ranked, disciplined, and forced to defend capitalist interests against the working class. Nor were the mass organizations established by the government--for women, youth, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, the militia--simply bureaucratic shells, as I often asserted. Comrades have offered strong proof that workers did take initiatives and did respond enthusiastically to the government's call to action usually through these organizations, INRA, and the militia.

8. In Nicaragua--a living, breathing revolution--we have a chance to see what we missed in Cuba. The composition and social role of the Sandinista forces parallels the July 26 movement. There is virtual dual power developing between the Sandinistas and their bourgeois coalition partners. The Sandinistas must lean on and organize the masses--who are already pressing their demands. Is it hard to see how a workers and farmers government could form (by a split in the junta government) which would lead the masses in establishing a workers state--without a second insurrection? Yet this is not a classical proletarian party

leading "independently organized" masses. A workers state that came to power this way might well have serious deformations--but to deny that it represented a tremendous advance for the world socialist revolution would be disastrous.

9. The state capitalist analysis cannot explain the role of the USSR in subsidizing Cuba. This is clearly not an imperialist relationship.

10. Comrades who analyzed the Cuban revolution from a state capitalist point of view should stop back and look again. Having discarded the theoretical framework I began with--and have fought for at all levels of the party for a year or more--I am not prepared to make a snap political judgement on the character of the Cuban leadership. That question must be confronted anew--from within a workers state framework.