

VANGUARD NEWSLETTER

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PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY'S TRADE UNION PROGRAM

PLP which considers the little red book of Mao Tse Tung's sententious slogans to be the apogee of Marxist-Leninist wisdom, has been compared to the ultra-left Stalinist parties of the "third period" because of its earlier adventurism, its lack of a perspective for political struggle, and its tendency toward crude economic determinism, e.g., students to the factories.

An examination of PLP's trade union program (PL, August 1969) and practice, makes clear the inadequacy of the "third Period" tag, that analogies can only be correct within limits, and that PLP is also the product of the "Democratic Front", however much it might presently fulminate against Georgi Dimitrov and the reformist policies of the Communist Party from the mid-'30's on.

The Fatal Flaw

PLP's fatal flaw is its inability to examine its past theories and practices in depth, and at any point that may discredit Stalin or Mao. For this reason, it cannot acknowledge Stalin as the real author of the class collaborationist "People's Front".

In addition, PLP suffers from political schizophrenia. It identifies, on the one hand, with the Maoist variety of "socialism in one country". Mao's world outlook, as enunciated by his heir apparent, Lin Piao, conceives of the destruction of American capitalism, not through the struggle of American workers, who, with the

exception of Black and other oppressed minorities, are seen as conservatized and incapable of revolutionary action, but rather through the encirclement of industrially advanced countries (the "cities") by the underdeveloped "third world" (the "country"). On the other hand, PLP desires to lead a working class revolution, and must, therefore, look to the radicalization of the class, must, perforce, include the white workers in its perspectives.

It is constantly torn between the two conceptions, "correcting" itself, first in one direction, then in the other.

PLP's vacillations between revolutionary and opportunist positions result in a conglomerate mixture, out of which rearrangements are sought. It is periodically forced to assess its policy failures, to correct its "mistakes", without acknowledging the root sources. Its recent mea culpa over its "mistake" in believing in "revolutionary nationalism" ignores the role of Mao's "thought" in support of "third world" ideology, which until the roll-back of the "colonial revolution" by imperialism, even inclu-

ded "princes and potentates", e.g., Indonesia's Sukarno, in its fond embrace.

Despite its rhetoric about "Marxism-Leninism" as a science, it is unable to utilize Marxism as a guide to action, because of its need to exclude fundamental lessons from the arsenal of Marxism which cannot be reconciled with its hagiography of Mao and Stalin. PLP ignores the materialist dialectic for the hunt for suitable quotations to justify whatever policy seems appropriate at the moment.

"Left-Center" Coalition

At the core of PLP's trade union program is the conception of the "Left-Center" coalition. PLP looks back on the '30's with extreme ambivalence. The reformist policies of adaptation to Roosevelt and the New Deal, the conversion of the ultra-left CP into the left wing of the Democratic Party, would also seem to have produced large organizational gains, through a coalition of the CP with labor bureaucrats. Control of thirteen large national unions! A periphery of millions in assorted organizations! A large base among intellectuals! PLP would like to acquire the largest, without the reformism, and hopes to change the nature of things by investing old names with new meaning.

PLP begins by defining the "mass of workers" as the "Center", with a leadership in its own image, and itself as the "Left" The united front is also uniquely defined by it, as between the "mass of workers...and communists".

The united front tactic was designed by Lenin and Trotsky to overcome the split in the working class of a country, by forcing the leaders of the Social-Democracy to agree to a joint struggle with the communist-led workers for transitional demands, enabling the workers to develop confidence in and move toward the communists. This Marxist term was perverted into an equivalent for the "Popular Front"

in the '30's.

The scientific language of Marxism is always "adjusted" by opportunists of all vintages. PLP reared in the school of Stalin-Mao operates in the same fashion.

Having provided sufficient ideological camouflage, PLP identifies the real elements it intends to do practical business with, the labor bureaucrats of moderate hue, "militant, class oriented, but non-communist".

Theory of Stages

Along with and inseparable from the "Left-Center" coalition concept, PLP's "intermediate strategy toward ultimate revolution", it projects a theory of stages. PLP members are to function in unions in accordance with a theory of "levels of struggle", with "minimum demands" for each level, while "attempting to move the fight to the next highest level". PLP will attempt to "unify all those involved in the struggle at every level". In case some of its members may not have gotten the point, PLP emphasizes the "task of the Left [PLP] to maintain and advance the Center forces."

Clearly then, PLP's basic approach is to go no further and no faster than its "Center allies are willing to go. It is the bureaucrat who will determine the "level of struggle", not changes in the objective situation as refracted in the consciousness of the workers. The nomenclature which identifies the mass of essentially uncommitted, still passive workers as the "Center" is not only foreign to Marxism, but is obviously a bit of sleight of hand to justify its present support for centrist leaderships, e.g., Morgenstern and Mage in SSEU, Davis in Local 1199.

PLP's "new" "Left-Center" coalition would seem to be basically identical with the old "Left-Center" coalition of the '30's, in which the CP entered into caucuses with the Thomas-Addes forces of the

United Auto Workers, with Curran of the National Maritime Union, Quill of the Transport Workers Union, etc.

"Economism"

The cosy relationship which PLP hopes to achieve with "Center" bureaucrats, also explains why its members have vehemently opposed placing political questions on union agendas, why it insists on exclusively "bread and butter" issues, in the fashion of the "economism" which it stridently condemns..The "struggle...for immediate gains", even when "sharpened" by PLP is quite acceptable to the "Center" bureaucrats in circumstances where their memberships are feeling their strength and demanding, not only the maintenance of living standards, against inflationary erosion, but real advances in wages and working conditions. What is entirely unacceptable to the bureaucrats are political questions which challenge their ongoing support for liberal Democrats and Republicans such as NYC's Mayor Lindsay, which pose the question of an independent political organization of the working class, of a labor party based on the unions.

PLP will, of course, state its opposition to the two capitalist parties, but only in a general propagandist fashion. It will even pose the question of independent political action, but on a local level, because it does not create difficulties with the bureaucrats. Its willingness to have a "boycott of the bosses" candidates" has the same rationale.

By achieving a "well-defined communist leadership", not within "rank and file" caucuses, but rather caucuses with the centrist bureaucrats, PLP expects, over several years, to win a large base in the unions. It hopes to convince the "Center" bureaucrats of the usefulness of its services, in the hope that it will not be dumped out of the unions by its coalition part-

ners in the event of "ruling class red-baiting attacks", as was the CP in the late '40's, during the "cold war" period.

PLP found it necessary to caution against "sectarianism", i.e., "a revolutionary strategy that dismisses immediate demands is not revolutionary at all", because evidently forces exist within it which oppose opportunistic accommodations to the "Center" bureaucracy, who wish to pose political demands unacceptable to the "Center", and which would, therefore, disrupt the hoped-for coalition.

The Negro Question

PLP has finally stumbled onto an understanding which we arrived at years earlier, and which is embodied in the Memorandum on the Negro Struggle, and in other parts of the pamphlet, Spartacist League Split, that:

- bi-racial caucuses must be built in the trade unions which will unite black and white workers in a struggle against the special oppression of the black workers, in the context of a struggle for the interests of all workers.
- special oppression of the Black people manifests itself in the work-place as super-exploitation.
- black workers represent the most militant sector of the class.
- Black nationalist ideology, which plays into the hands of the ruling class by dividing the workers, must be fought together with white chauvinism.
- the work-place, the "point of production", provides the road into the ghetto for a black working class leadership.

PLP has concluded, as have we, that all-black caucuses are inevitable where bi-racial caucuses do not exist, and that the bi-racial caucuses which do develop should attempt to achieve a unity with the black caucuses in struggle. However, in its usual fashion, PLP adulterates even these positive

raise this demand

insights by its one-sided mechanical approaches.

Its call for "preferential" hiring of black workers can only be understood as supporting the hiring of black workers instead of white, or the firing of white and replacement by black workers. Evidently PLP demands that workers exhibit the selflessness of ascetics. Posed in this manner PLP plays directly into the hands of the bosses, and damages the struggle to unite black and white workers. In addition, the ending of the economic upsurge, will throw large numbers of white as well as black workers into the ranks of the unemployed. The bosses will, no doubt avail themselves of PLP's demand, to pit black against white and white against black, to attack the unions, break strikes, beat back the Black struggle, and, when necessary, mobilize a fascist striking force to place black and white workers and revolutionists into concentration camps for extermination.

The fight against discrimination in hiring, past and present, which even liberals support, must be coupled with the transitional demand for a sliding scale of wages and hours, a shorter work-week without loss of pay, to end unemployment, a demand which is, therefore, an objective condemnation of capitalism's inability to provide workers with work.

PLP which has included points from Trotsky's transitional program in its programmatic summary, like a pack-rat which collects everything that glistens, is far from understanding their quality as transitional demands. In PLP's hands, they are transformed from quality back into quantity, despite the flippant remark of the Spartacist League, that PLP'ers are now "Trotskyists with a pre-frontal lobotomy".

Irreconcilable Contradictions

We believe PLP to be unstable as

it is now constituted, that its contradictions are fundamental and irreconcilable, that sections of it will sooner or later be brought to the realization that PLP cannot function as a revolutionary Marxist organization without having been cleansed from its accumulated mis-education acquired in the Augean stables of Stalinism and Maoism, and that this is denied it.

We believe that, to the extent PLP utilizes its correct insights on the Negro question (the spoonful of honey in the barrel-full of tar) to win black and white workers and students to its banners, it becomes capable of disorienting the workers and derailing a working class revolution, its subjective desires to the contrary notwithstanding. PLP's worship of Maoism, continually poses the possibility of its sacrifice of the proletarian revolution here, in the interests of the Chinese variety of "socialism in one country", as Stalinists have so often done, by a strategy and tactics which are in fundamental opposition to the inner-dynamics of the American revolution, of, in other words, becoming objectively counter-revolutionary.

We intend to cooperate with PLP, in helping it resolve itself into its component parts. In our activities in the unions, we will counterpose PLP's trade union line with our own.

- to PLP's "Left-Center" coalition with labor bureaucrats, the caucus of the rank and file.
- to PLP's schematic theory of stages based on the readiness of centrist bureaucrats to go to the "next higher stage", and "minimum demands" for each stage, a transitional program and organization, linking rank and file caucuses regionally and nationally.
- to PLP's economism, working class politics--a labor party based on the unions.

Our series, "Nationalism and Internationalism" will be continued in our October issue.

A NEW VANGUARD NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

We publish below the statement of resignation by two ex-members of the Canadian Workers League, in which they make clear the political basis for this act, and for their identification with VANGUARD NEWSLETTER.

Bob and Jaime Sherwood entered active political life as members of the Spartacist League. As Trotskyists, they demanded that theory be implemented by practice, that the SL's political line on the working class, on the Black struggle, and on the need for a vanguard party, be carried into practical activities, that the national leadership function in a systematic manner, that a central organ be regularly published. They left the SL when they became finally convinced that they were dealing with a form of left centrism, with dilettantes, often able to reach academically correct political conclusions, but incapable of giving them practical implementation.

Threatened with reprisal for political activity in the shape of the draft call-up of Bob Sherwood on the manufactured grounds of delinquency, the Sherwoods entered Canada where they became members of the Canadian Workers League. P.M.P!

The WL's "Bulletin" published several of Bob's articles, using his middle name, Hartley, as a nom de plume. When the Canadian government, evidently instigated by the US, instituted legal proceedings against Bob, the formation of a broad defense committee prevented his deportation to the US. It should be noted in this connection that an article in the March-April 1968 "Spartacist", and an often-circulated SL leaflet entitled "What is the Workers League?", attacked Bob Sherwood by name for a Canadian "cop-out", even identifying him as Robert Hartley Sherwood!

In the WL, the Sherwoods had hoped to find, at last, a serious Trotskyist organization, endeavoring to sink roots in the working class, and concerned to politically expose and defeat the revisionists of Trotskyism and all other varieties

of opportunism in the process of establishing itself as the vanguard party of the class. They subordinated their differences on the Negro question, among others, in joining it, in the hope that a process of internal discussion combined with experience in struggle would alter the WL position on this question, key to the successful construction of the Leninist party in the stronghold of world capitalism.

Having found their expectations of meaningful discussion within the WL over continuing political and organizational differences to be illusory, and having reached basic political agreement with VANGUARD NEWSLETTER, they resigned from the WL to establish the Toronto VANGUARD NEWSLETTER Committee.

We heartily welcome the new VN committee, with the confidence that it will succeed in winning a significant base of support among Canadian revolutionists and workers. We look forward to the establishment of similar committees in other parts of the US and Canada.

Although, as we have stated repeatedly, our goal is a party of the Bolshevik type, a democratic-centralist organization, we proceed toward it by initially organizing in discussion groups, involving those who consider themselves to be, or wish to consider the ideas of, revolutionary socialists, of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, in the context of the concrete conditions in which the class struggle manifests itself today.

We begin as an informal association of committees. Through a process of struggle--"discussion, debate, and unity in action"--we hope that a hard core of revolutionists having essential programmatic agreement can be assembled. At that time, we intend to hold a founding convention and constitute ourselves

as a democratic-centralist organization.

We have stated that the shattering of the world Trotskyist movement is, in the final analysis, a reflection of the negative objective circumstances of the past quarter of a century. We believe that the maturing world crisis of capitalism to which the crisis of Stalinism is inextricably linked, and which is now being expressed in the unbalancing of economic,

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August 18, 1969

Political Committee
Workers League
New York, New York

For some time we have held a number of political positions differing from the Workers League majority; the prime difference being over the "Negro question", on which the Workers League holds an abstentionist line, refusing to see in the present unrest the radicalization of the Black masses which Trotsky foresaw.

The maintenance of capitalism in the United States is achieved through the continuance of the capitalist two party system, and the maintenance of racism as an effective tool through which to divide the working class on the basis of color. Instead of waging a special struggle against the super-exploitation of the Black masses, through which the class as a whole could be united on an anti-white chauvinist and anti-black nationalist basis, the Workers League chooses to ignore the fight of Black people wherever it transcends reformist bounds and meets head on with white chauvinism. The excuse the Workers League puts forth is that in most instances this leadership is black nationalist, and therefore cannot be allowed to taint their self-styled "vanguard party". The Workers League through the pages of the "Bulletin" boasts that it has always and consistently never been involved with

social and political equilibria, is producing the new, favorable objective circumstances, in which a reconstruction of the international Trotskyist movement can and must take place, if the crisis of leadership which has become "the crisis of mankind" is to be resolved. We believe that the process we have outlined will produce the clarity and principled agreement which is indispensable for that reconstruction.

* * * * *

the Black Panthers, or other such black organizations, evidently content to leave the plight of the Negro worker, the most exploited section of the working class, to some distant socialist solution. We say flatly that this is a major concession to white chauvinism, and a concession which will prevent the WL from winning any number of black workers, revolutionary white workers, or students (the vast majority of which, even through the reactionary black nationalist leadership, sees some sense in a special struggle against the oppression of Blacks). We say, the only way a Leninist party can be built in the United States is through a consistent struggle against white chauvinism, and its counterpart, black nationalism. Concretely, going a bit into the past (and a past which the Workers League makes little reference to) in the case of the aborted Trade Unionist for a Labor Party, the Workers League actually went so far as to specifically oppose any sort of anti-racist demand in that group's charter, saying that the one and central task at hand was the building of a labor party, choosing to ignore the fact that the major impediment to working class political consciousness, was the use of capitalist created racial antagonisms to place the white worker in an advantaged position to more effectively exploit the class as a whole. This occurred at a time when the ruling class had a campaign

afoot in New York City and elsewhere, to divide the working class on racial lines, through support to "community control". During this turmoil the TULP, under Workers League leadership refused to put that organization on record favoring an anti-racist campaign, or for that matter, against racism at all! The Workers League, through the pages of the "Bulletin", in a moment of chest thumping conducted a "Smash Wallace" campaign. This so-called anti-racist campaign ended with the election, as the real political point of a labor party was made clear by that time, leaving the matter of racism to the future. Such is the anti-racism of the Workers League.

In our two years as members of the Workers League, we have seen that organization fall from a genuine desire to struggle for dialectical materialism, to the depths of subjectivity. Unable to see the central importance of the Negro question, the Workers League has become increasingly isolated from the most militant sections of the working class. This is in a period when practically every group is growing by leaps and bounds, except the moribund. To meet the fact that in the past two years the Workers League has failed to grow, and much less attract people who were capable of being more than a toady to the leadership, a campaign against "subjectivity" was launched. The assumption was that since the line of the Workers League was so superior, and so well worked out, that the only thing holding the Workers League from "striking it rich" was the membership itself. Of course, during this period, the Workers League remained much as it was in the past, unable to achieve the necessary increase in membership that was projected over a year ago as necessary for the weekly "Bulletin". Thus the membership, not the defective method of the leadership, was held accountable for the failing. This is an ideal-

ist method to the core, as this approach views "subjectivity" divorced from material reality. This is the beginning of the end for the Workers League, as the leadership, unable to lead a successful intervention in the working class, turns on its membership in a subjective attack, in the name of combating "subjectivity". When we recently raised, in a more forceful manner, some of our political differences, we were informed that these political differences were a rationalization for our subjectivity, not a product of a real divergence from the majority of the Workers League. Tim Wohlforth was insistent on this point, notwithstanding the fact that we have held some of these differences from the very day that we joined the Workers League, over two years ago! The leadership of the Workers League uses, not the method of Marxists, but the reactionary babble of mind readers and mystics.

The Workers League, along with the rest of the International Committee has made a political move toward a re-unification with a section of Pabloism. This was probably done to boost the falling fortunes of the Workers League in the United States and Canada, in what amounted to a cynical "get rich scheme". The line amounted to this: With the impending break-up of the Pabloite international, many conflicts would break out between open liquidationists, and those who were more firmly rooted in Trotskyism, and who opposed such a liquidation. We were told to distribute the relevant literature in the Pabloite ranks, pushing not a line of confrontation, but patiently explaining and educating these people to the sins of liquidation. Out of this process we were told to expect from the ranks of the SWP and LSA, the "old Trotskyists" such as Dobbs and Dowson to be favorably inclined in our direction, perhaps increasing the membership of the Workers League by the hundreds. But hundreds of what? The falling out in the ranks

of the Pabloite international is not a struggle of revolutionaries against revisionism, but a fight between the hard and soft wing of Pabloism. This projected coming together shows how close the political method of the Workers League is to Pabloism.

During the past couple of months we have maintained fraternal contact with the comrades of the VANGUARD NEWSLETTER. This was a unity based on a common agreement on our political tasks and perspectives, not a unity designed as a wrecking operation on the Workers League. Our intent was to fight, through political argumentation, to win the majority of the Workers League to a correct understanding of the Negro question, and away from its idealism, and the scientific method of empiricism, trial and error. We did not at any time plan to stab the WL in the back, etc., etc. We NEVER contacted the Spartacist League, James Robertson, or any of its members. This is a lie, which was repeated to us in Toronto by a member of the WL Political Committee. This is a deliberate attempt to discredit us without engaging in a political discussion. At this time, a political discussion would be most unsettling to the Workers League leadership, and they know it. This is why it enlisted the aid of a political double agent to obtain the necessary information to move against us organizationally, to avoid a political confrontation. From what information we received over the phone, there is also reason to think that our personal files were broken into to obtain some further information. This resembles not the actions of conscious people, Marxists, but rather that of a frightened isolated sect, resting on a network of toadys and moral prostitutes.

As our ties with the VANGUARD NEWSLETTER have become common knowledge, it would be impossible for us to remain members of the Workers League, and defend ourselves honestly against any organizational

charges which might be brought against us. We defend ourselves politically and continue to do so. This is why we refused to attend a special meeting with the remaining member of the WL in Toronto. Such a meeting would only have provided a basis for the WL to move against us on a subjective basis immediately. As our membership in the VANGUARD NEWSLETTER group is based on political agreement, it would be wrong to renounce our ties, in order to maintain membership in the Workers League, with which we politically disagree. Therefore, we are resigning from the Workers League.

There needs to be a struggle in the Workers League against its erroneous method, and its complete inability to understand the importance of the present unrest among the Black masses. It is through this struggle, and the complete transformation of the Workers League that we hope to find ourselves in a common Leninist party, which maintains the continuity of Trotskyism, through carrying out Trotsky's fight on the Negro question, and Trotsky's fight for dialectical materialism. To say anything else would be to say that our differences were not of substance.

Bob Sherwood
Jaime Sherwood

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