

VANGUARD NEWSLETTER

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US IMPERIALISM BLOCKS PRODUCTIVE FORCES IN LATIN AMERICA AND AT HOME

Split in Ruling Class--Vietnam War Program Versus Capitalist Reforms
by Harold Robins

[The following article is submitted for discussion by a supporter of VANGUARD NEWSLETTER.

[Comrade Robins was a founding member of the Communist League of America (Left Opposition), the organization of Trotskyists formed in 1928 by the expelled members of the Communist Party (CP) and youth, and continued to fight for Trotsky's concepts, for Trotskyism, throughout the intervening forty-odd years.

[Cde. Robins was able to participate in some of the most important discussions held with Trotsky in 1939 and 1940, as a member of his household. As his bodyguard, he was able to seize and disarm his Stalinist assassin.

[He resigned from the Socialist Workers Party when it became clear that it was rapidly degenerating into a centrist organization, and departing from the struggle to build a party of the Bolshevik type, nationally and internationally, that it was making an unprincipled adjustment to the divergent Stalinoid elements emerging after the Khrushchev revelations and the Hungarian revolution.]

[In keeping with our orientation of achieving clarity and programmatic agreement through a process of "discussion, debate and unity in

action", we will continue to present timely discussion articles. We will, of course, normally publish articles with which we have essential agreement. However, signed articles will not necessarily represent our positions in their entirety. In that event, we intend to make clear the areas in which we diverge.

[We consider Cde. Robins' analysis of the Rockefeller report to be valuable and timely. [We are in full accord with his basic conclusions, that a sharp division in the ruling class has taken place over the war in Vietnam, that a crisis for US imperialism now impends in Latin America which threatens US imperialist property and profit in that area, and that the drain of the Vietnam war prevents it from even applying palliatives to dampen its mounting difficulties there.]

[We would differ with a secondary conclusion, that the "liberal" wing is now ready to accept a defeat for American imperialism in Asia.

[Here we must clarify our terminology. What do we mean by "defeat" and "victory"?

[The huge US military machine, after four years of massive intervention, has not been able to subjugate the Vietnamese, and is forced to fight on without even the hope

of a military victory. In that sense, US imperialism has suffered a "defeat".

[However, and as we pointed out in our October issue, the program presented by the National Liberation Front (NLF), the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG) and the government of North Vietnam, represents a political defeat for the Vietnamese revolution.

[We understand the difference between the soft and hard wings of US imperialism to be within the context of the maintenance of capitalist relations in Asia, to be tactical

and not strategic, because this question is not being posed at this time. The hard wing insists on greater guarantees, while the soft wing considers the guarantees already given to be adequate.

[The NLF is now even willing to function as a minority in a coalition government headed by the "moderate" militarist "Big" Minh.

[Although our estimates differ on this question, we are in full agreement with Cde. Robins that the soft, "liberal" wing of US capitalism is as firmly committed to the maintenance of US imperialism as the hard.]

* * * * *

The enormous sums, more than one hundred billion dollars spent by US imperialism thus far, for the Vietnamese war has drained off vast resources which the capitalist class had hoped to use to accelerate capitalist development in Latin America, and to establish "black capitalists" in the US who could serve the ruling class as "Judas goats" to keep the Negro communities in line.

This vast drain, together with military expenditures by the US in Latin America, instead of stabilizing, has served to stir up a widespread anti-US reaction among the Latin American middle and lower classes, analogous to developments among the Blacks in the US. This widespread anti-US imperialist rebelliousness has speeded the rupture of the formerly united ruling class and its political hacks, polarizing it into hawks and doves, with Gov. Rockefeller expressing the conciliatory tendencies of the center.

The rising social rebelliousness has forced the ruling class to reconsider its Vietnamese war policy. An important segment now believes that unless the war and its expenditures are quickly liquidated--together with the capitalist attempt to hold Asia, since Asia will be lost to US capitalism anyway--Latin American holdings will shortly go down the drain in a wave of anti-imperialist nationalizations in the Cuban, or Peruvian and now the Bolivian manner.

Trying to reweld the solidarity

of the various imperialist tendencies, President Nixon sent Rockefeller to Latin America to make a serious analysis of the situation for the American ruling class. His report clearly outlines the problems and dangers starkly facing American imperialism.

The Rockefeller report ignores the eye-wash about the "progressive" role of US capitalism, in developing the productive forces either in Latin America or at home. It deals with the social-political movements which are directed against US imperialism, and concludes that massive economic resources must be "invested" in order to stem the tide of social upheaval and confiscatory threats to US capitalist investments in the Western Hemisphere.

[The report, judging from the few sections made public, tends to write-off some capitalist holdings in the Far East, by recommending a sharp cut-back on resources allocated for holding actions in Vietnam and surrounding countries.]

The US is, evidently, now forced to this unpalatable choice, because

it has been unable to induce other advanced capitalist countries to assume part of the burden of acting as a gendarme for world capitalism.

The split in the capitalist ruling circles has found its counterpart in policy divisions among various working class organizations as well. The leadership of the AFL-CIO continues to adhere to its blatant class collaboration "principles", and adapts to the policies of the dominant section which favors continuation of the Vietnam war as the only way to hold Asia for world capitalism.

A section of the trade union bureaucracy goes along with that section of the ruling class which fears the loss of its Latin American holdings in the manner of either Peron or Nasser, and also calls for "peace in Vietnam".

The Brezhnevist Stalinists find the latter capitalist sector "progressive", while the Socialist Workers Party, having long ago abandoned its former military policy, also takes a class collaboration position against "dividing" the peace forces in the US.

Not to be ignored in this class collaborationist "fight" against imperialism, is Mr. Whitney Young, who heads the conservative Urban League, and other black servitors of the ruling class.

The Rockefeller Report

The report, sections of which were published in the NY Times, Monday, Nov. 10, 1969, asserts that US imperialist policy has,

"...tried to direct the internal affairs of other nations to an unseemly degree, thinking perhaps arrogantly, that it knew what was best for them" (emphasis added)

The report notes that accelerated investments for development had been promised but not delivered, and that:

"The United States has allowed a host of narrow special interests, a series of other foreign policy

priorities [which ones?]...a burgeoning bureaucratic tangle, and well intentioned [sic] but unrealistic rhetoric to submerge this special relationship...[and] assistance and trade policies so critical to the development process...have been distorted to serve a variety of purposes in the United States having nothing to do with the aspirations and interests of its neighbors; in fact these purposes have been in sharp conflict with the goals of development." (emphasis added)

Does present-day American capitalism develop or restrict the productive forces? The Rockefeller report makes the record quite clear that US imperialist policy and methods"...have been in sharp conflict with the goals of development."

"When the devil is sick, the devil a monk would be", goes an old adage. The Rockefeller report slyly tries to disassociate itself from the dirty record, by expressing hypocritical concern for the welfare and development problems of Latin American countries and American Negroes.

American imperialist policy in the field of foreign aid was clearly enough expressed by American capitalism's chosen chief for foreign aid programs, Mr. Paul G. Hoffman, Managing Director of the US Special Fund, who, in testimony before a congressional committee said:

"...whether economic aid should be extended to a given underdeveloped country should be determined solely on the basis of whether such support is in the national interest of the donor country. If it is... the selection of programs or projects to be supported should in turn be determined solely by the contribution the program or projects will make to the development of the recipient country." (From Hearings of the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, Dec. 10 and 11, 1962, Titled Dimensions of Soviet Economic Power, page 2. (emphasis added)

Here in sharp contradistinction to the propaganda carried in the capitalist press about so-called generous aid to backward nations, the Hon. Mr. Hoffman, former chairman of the board of the Studebaker corporation, bluntly and forthrightly delineates government policy in such matters. Investments and "aid" should be determined "solely" in the "national interest of the donor country".

What happens when the "national interest of the donor country" requires that the available resources be used for military intervention in the Vietnamese civil war?

The record tells us in the form of the Rockefeller report that American "aid was used for purposes in sharp conflict with the goals of development." We are not dealing with abstract arguments here, but with the record of policy carried out for the past half-decade.

Sociology and the Report

We are told in the Rockefeller report that,

"All nations of the hemisphere share rising expectations and restlessness among those men and women who do not truly participate in the benefits of the industrial revolution and the standard of living which has come with it.

"We know from our experience in the United States that those who live in deprived circumstances no longer live out of sight and out of mind / the mind of the Rockefellers/. Neither are they resigned...nor should they be resigned--to the fact that their lives are less than they could be." (emphasis added)

Thus we can see that even Rockefeller is aware that American capitalism, judging from its current record, not only restricts the development of the productive forces of many nations--including the US, but, and as he quite correctly

points out, things need not have been this way; that they are only the results of capitalist economic, social and political development, a development which has blocked the chance for a better life for tens of millions of declassed and poorly paid working people. This sort of admission is usually restricted to such reports as Rockefeller's while the lively capitalist press sings us songs of the so-called progressive character of modern day American capitalism with its vast social security and foreign aid programs.

The press, naturally, ignores the secret police services, such as the FBI and CIA, which play a significant role in harassing those who rebel against the brutal abuses of racist government officials and policies. The growing police state function, an expression of the increasingly serious difficulties of the imperialist establishment, must continue to expand in order to hold the disposed in their present position.

The report sums up the trend of capitalist development in the following words:

"...it results in slum growth and a multiplication of the problems [what problems?] of urban life, and it cancels out so much of the economic growth achieved as to make improvement of living standards difficult if not impossible.

"Unemployment is high, especially among the young, ranging as high as 25 to 40% in some countries and as low as 4% in others...

"All of this is heightened by the spirit of nationalism,...in the other American republics, United States management, capital and highly advertised products have played a disproportionately visible role...creating increasing pressures against foreign private investment. The impetus for independence from the United States is leading toward rising pressures for nationalization of US industry, local control, or participation with US firms..." (emphasis added)

Marx, more than 100 years ago, pointed out that in capitalist, i.e., commodity producing society, the relationship between its members finds its dominant expression as a relationship between things exchanged. Hence, social, human values in capitalist society are inexorably subordinated to the level of the exchange of equal values.

The Rockefeller report testifies to the validity of the Marxist proposition that the polarity of great wealth and great poverty and deprivation is an inevitable expression of the capitalist mode of production.

The technologically most advanced country, the US, has excluded and cannot help excluding millions of people from the process of production and exchange.

The right of nations under socialism to their full industrial development leads to the utilization of the labor power of all members of society capable of working, but the bourgeois nationalism of small countries inevitably leads to military police states which operate on a smaller scale than the capitalist-imperialist variety emerging in more advanced countries out of its "free" society.

The question of war and peace in the US can only be finally resolved in behalf of the working people of this country, when they put an end to the system of profit which dominates and corrupts society from top to bottom. The basic question is the course to be taken to enable the productive forces of society to develop, to destroy those obstacles which hinder their full and free development, so that the criterion for the production and circulation of goods will be the material and cultural needs of all people.

While the imperialist "peace-niks" posture as "doves" who favor an end to the military intervention policies in the Vietnam civil war, they are also clearly in favor of every effort to bolster capitalism, in Vietnam, Latin America and elsewhere.

But capitalism means enrichment for the capitalists and degradation and misery for untold millions even under the best historical conditions.

The imperialist "peace-niks" are just as firmly committed to this rotten order of things as are the "hawks". What is required today is the defeat of imperialism everywhere, and the replacement of capitalism by workers' states which will take possession of all large scale properties and industries, and operate them to serve the needs of mankind, instead of the profit of a few.

Only when this property transformation is solidly established and democratically controlled by the workers in industry and on the land, on a regional, national and international scale, will there be an end to wars for profit and exploitation.

Not only the Nixons and Rockefellers, but the imperialist "doves" as well should be recognized by their program--as imperialists.
(to be continued)

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NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

Trotsky on the Negro Question

--The "Black Belt"

Was Trotsky "wrong" in posing the "possibility of the Negro becoming a nation", as Tim Wohlforth avers ("The New Nationalism and the Negro Struggle")? If so, he can only perform a service for Marxism, for Trotskyism, by proving his contention.

It is in fact, the duty of a Marxist to explore errors, point out their roots, indicate why a position, once correct, is so no longer, thereby keeping Marxism vital, in contact with current reality.

Marxism was succinctly defined by Lenin as a "summing up of experience illuminated by a profound philosophical conception of the world, and a rich knowledge of history". As a world outlook concerned with human development, with more transitory phenomena than the exact sciences, Marxism can incorporate errors.

In criticizing strategic and tactical positions assumed by the creative Marxists, however, it is necessary to examine the situation obtaining at that time, if one studies Marxism in order to learn from it, and not with the aim of refuting it.

The intrepid warrior against empiricism, Wohlforth, informs us in what appears to be an historical analysis of the Negro question, but is, in Lenin's polemical phrase, "a mockery of the historically concrete presentation of the question", that, "the further development of the Negro since 1939, rather than confirming his [Trotsky] position, has done quite the opposite".

On this basis, every academic wise-acre can point to similar "errors" of the great Marxists.

Marx and Engels considered the Croats and Czechs to be outposts of Russian despotism in 1848, and opposed their national aspirations. Were they "wrong"?

Trotsky, in his discussion on the trade unions in 1939 stated that, "the over-all curve of capitalist economic development is toward decline". But the curve of capitalism since the second World War has been upward! Wasn't Trotsky "wrong"?

"Any possibility of a Negro nation died", states Wohlforth, "with the destruction of reconstruction, the attrition of the plantation economy, and the migration of the Negro "from the 'Black belt'". However, even had these developments not taken place, it would seem that Wohlforth and the Workers League (WL) would have opposed the right of self-determination for the Black people, contrary to Lenin, but in Lenin's name, because "the American Civil War marked the completion of the American bourgeois democratic revolution". (See our discussion on this question in our August issue)

Wohlforth's facile summary bears little resemblance to a serious analysis of the Negro question. The aspects of the question so lightly touched upon by him cover a century of development. Trotsky more than once emphasized the necessity of knowing, not only the direction, but also the speed of a development at a particular historical juncture.

In this connection, the rate of migration from the "Black belt" in 1939, would seem of particular moment. Wohlforth avoids inquiring into the concrete situation at the time that "a certain Carlos" made the assertion that the tendency to migrate from the "Black belt" could no longer operate, however, because he would, perhaps, have been forced to recognize that the method by which Trotsky arrived at his position on the Negro question is inseparable from that used to formulate the entire Transitional Program.

Throughout his life, Trotsky fought for the method of Marxism as indispensable armament for Marxist revolutionists. He could make immense contributions to Marxism only because of his thorough understand-

ing of the materialist dialectic.

The dialectic does not, of course, ensure against mistakes. In dealing with any many-sided phenomenon, all aspects of which are in motion, constantly acting, reacting, and interacting, internally and externally, errors, both minor and major, on one question or another, in one degree or another, are not only possible, but inevitable. The method of Marxism has demonstrated its validity, however, by providing a scientific understanding of the complex and antagonistic motion of matter, particularly in the social sphere.

The Objective Situation

[In examining the objective situation obtaining, on a world scale and in the US, Trotsky had concluded that the inter and intra-capitalist contradictions had reached a stage which threatened all mankind with catastrophe, with a return to barbarism, unless a new revolutionary leadership was forged; that any possibilities for reformist solutions within the capitalist framework had been exhausted; that the curve of capitalist development presaged further economic stagnation and decline, and that therefore, a revolutionary situation was developing which would result in either the victory of the working class under the leadership of the Fourth International or further decay, fascism and war.

That the Stalinists enabled capitalism to extend its lease on life for another period, does not invalidate the tactics developed in and for the preceding historical period. As capitalism's contradictions intensify, the validity of these tactics is again demonstrated.

The situation of the Negro in the US, and in the "Black belt", specifically, also has to be understood in that historical context.

According to the US Census Bureau statistics, at the turn of the century, 45.9% of Black people still lived in the "Black belt", southern counties where they constituted a

majority. By 1940, a little more than a fifth, 20.5%, still resided there. However, during the forty year interval, the rates of migration had varied markedly depending on changes in the objective situation. Before the "Great Depression" in 1929, the rate was high. After, and until the outbreak of the second World War, it was low.

Whereas the percentage of total Black population remaining in the "Black belt" decreased 5.9% by 1910, 8.9% by 1920, and 8.1% by 1930, it had fallen by only 2.5% between 1930 and 1940. As statistics are only available at ten year intervals, one can only postulate the likelihood that with the onset of the depression in 1929, followed by the "recession" in 1937, migration before 1939 had virtually halted, and that much of the limited migration reported between 1930 and 1940 resulted from the stimulus of war production which began in 1939.

[When Trotsky posed the possibility in 1939, therefore, that the Black people, although not a nation, might develop into one, he took into account the quite material basis for nationhood when then still existed, a common territory, as well as the other objective conditions which promised to further, not migration from, but the stability of the "Black belt". One can see, therefore, the groundlessness of the charge by Lucy St. John that Trotsky was "relying on a totally subjective and psychological analysis... 'their feelings and impulses' rather than on an objective analysis" of the Negro question. (The Negro, Nation and Marxist Theory, "Bulletin", Dec. 16, 1968)

The ignorance shown by relative newcomers to Trotskyism is, perhaps, understandable. The disloyalty of self-styled if not "orthodox" Trotskyists, who were evidently not concerned to evaluate all aspects of their difference with Trotsky before rushing into print to attack him, is another matter.

However, the question is by no means exhausted. While the material

basis for the evolution of a separate Negro nation existed then, could Trotsky have been "wrong" in politically supporting such a possible development? Moreover, could Trotsky have correctly taken a position supporting the right of Black people to nationhood if the "Black belt" had not then existed? And what position should Trotskyists take on this question today, now that the "Black belt" has ceased to exist?

Self-Determination

Trotsky stood on the same ground as Lenin on the right of self-determination. To the extent that the workers of an oppressed nation, or of a national minority which may take the path of nationhood, are convinced that the workers of the oppressor nation are their class brothers, who fight for their rights, including their right to secede, who do not stand with their "own" bourgeoisie in defending the state boundaries of the oppressor nation, to that extent they may decide not to seek separation. The Leninist position has proven to be the only basis on which the working classes of oppressed and oppressor nations can be united, St. John to the contrary notwithstanding. Her assertion that, "In that period [1939] as well as today, it meant dividing the [US] working class", is not only an echo of Luxemburg, but also represents a concession to white chauvinism "in that period", as in this.

Further, Trotsky, viewing the matter from an international perspective, understood that the US, industrially the strongest capitalist country in the world in the epoch of imperialist decay, would play an increasingly counter-revolutionary role in the world. To the extent that the Black people struggled for national freedom against the US, they administered hammer blows to American capitalism and to the world imperialist system.

Today, as in 1939, revolutionary socialists would have nothing in common with those who consider the

state boundaries of the US to be sacrosanct.

[Should the mass of the Black people, the vast majority of which is working class, decide on nationhood, reach the conclusion that they can no longer reside in the same national state with whites, and demand a section of the US for a separate state, we would support their demand, in the spirit of the 1957 Socialist Workers Party convention resolution, "The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality" (See our October issue).]

We would still attempt to convince the black workers that the "best solution of the race question for Negro and white workers alike" was unity in the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. We would hope to convince them by forging this unity in the struggle against the special oppression of the Black people. We would hope to unite black and white workers by educating the white workers to the understanding that the struggle against the special oppression of the Black people is in their immediate and fundamental class interests.

Subjective and Objective

The metaphysicians of the WL might consider that we, like Trotsky, are relying on "totally subjective and psychological analyses". They will merely continue to demonstrate that they have not understood Trotsky, Lenin or Marx, that their method is fundamentally empiricist, even when presented as Marxist "METHOD", that they cannot understand that there are no immutable categories in the real world, that opposites such as objective and subjective are transformed into one another, and that the subjective will of individuals becomes an objective force for revolutionists, to the degree that it takes on a mass character, and to the extent that the revolutionists do not have sufficient roots among these masses to provide them with leadership.

(to be continued)