

Part Three

Cliff Slaughter: A Political Biography (1928–1963)

David North
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This political biography of Cliff Slaughter covers the period between 1928 and 1963. A second section of the biography, from 1963 through his death, will be published later in the year.

The Class Struggle, Marxist Theory, and the New Left

The same issue of *Labour Review*, which appeared only a few months after the “Whitsuntide Conference,” also carried a lengthy theoretical essay by Slaughter. Titled “The ‘New Left’ and the Working Class,” this article is of exceptional importance. It elaborated the philosophical conceptions underlying the Socialist Labour League’s insistence on interventions in the daily struggles of the working class.

For Slaughter, the central characteristic of the ideologists and theoreticians of the emerging and increasingly popular “New Left” was their effort to direct Marxism away from its concentration on the class struggle as the driving force of history.

Slaughter noted that *Labour Review* and the *Newsletter* were criticized for upholding an outmoded dogmatic form of Marxism, advocating a “mindless militancy” derived “from an over-simplified model of capitalist society divided into employers and workers, in which the struggle of the latter against the former must be intensified above all, ‘mindless’ of all else.” He called attention to the “interesting remark” by Ralph (Rafael) Samuel—a former member of the Communist Party, friend of E.P. Thompson, and a leading representative of the emerging New Left in Britain—“reminding Gerry Healy that ‘industrial struggle is not the decisive thing—what is decisive is the fight for political power.’” Slaughter continued:

We shall certainly return to the importance of the struggle for power; meanwhile let us dwell on the interrelation of the industrial and political sides of the class struggle. This is a theoretical question, a historical question, and one on which intellectuals should be consistently working in order to arm the working class. ... Take away industrial struggle and what “political” activity are you left with? Parliament? We look across the channel to France and shudder.

It is just a little difficult to see what remains of the “Marxism” which some in *Universities and Left Review* and *New Reasoner* circles avow. Do they regard any of the theoretical discoveries or conclusions of Marx as still valid? If so, which

ones? Or do they claim that only Marx’s method (dialectics) remains valid and that the social reality of today demands completely new discoveries, using that method. One suspects that in fact the dialectic would be rather haughtily sniffed at by most of these critics as a hang-over from Hegel which old Marx could not quite shake off. Just what remains, then?

For our part we will “discredit” ourselves still further by saying that Marx’s dialectical method exposed the basic antagonism of capitalist society, the struggle of the workers against the employers and their State, reflecting the contradiction between social production and private appropriation. Stating this is, of course, no substitute for detailed and intensive research on the changes within capitalism. But these are changes within capitalism, and if they are not studied with that fact always in mind—that the changes have taken place within the constant framework of the power of Capital over Labour—then such study will be useless. By useless we mean not only “practically” useless for the working class, but also scientifically worthless. ...

From the specific historical character of capitalist development flows the modern class struggle. Yes, there is a growth of differentiation within the working class; yes, there is a growth of new “middle classes”; yes, capitalist ownership is distributed in more complex ways. But if these developments are viewed as things in themselves it will take their investigators much longer to appreciate their real historical significance, which is their significance for the class struggle, than if they recognized from the start the essence of Marx’s method and the central discovery he made about class society. [53]

Slaughter proceeded to identify a critical point of division between the New Left and Marxism:

It is around the concept of class that the drift from Marxism is concentrated, despite the lip-service paid to Marxism. *There is not a scrap of Marxism in any approach to class which does not have class conflict at its core.* The working class is defined basically, not in terms of status, income or any formal social characteristics, but in terms of its necessary antagonism to the capitalist class, deriving from and constantly developed by the proletariat’s special position in capitalist production. You can define the working class by any number of formal characteristics; *it defines itself historically by the development of its organization and struggle against the bourgeoisie.* Marxists in the social sciences

bear the task of helping the working class to a clearer consciousness of its position and the actions necessitated by that position. *At its highest point, this means playing a part in the greatest task of this historical period: the establishment of the political independence of the working class.* Such is the important function of theory, and of the political and organizational instruments based on theory; it must be the test of all theoretical contributions from Left intellectuals [emphasis added]. [54]

It is evident from this passage that Slaughter had made a careful study of the early writings of Marx and Engels, in which they developed the materialist conception of history in opposition to the petty-bourgeois “Critical Critics.” Of particular importance to Slaughter was a passage in *The Holy Family*, written by Marx in 1844:

It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organization of bourgeois society today [emphasis in the original]. [55]

Proceeding from the theoretical divisions to their expression in program and practice, Slaughter attacked the small-minded reformism that the New Left intellectuals tried to palm off as a reasonable alternative to a genuinely revolutionary practice based on the class struggle. “The desire to find something concrete, established within present-day society as a solid foundation-stone for future advance is fundamentally a petty-bourgeois standpoint,” Slaughter wrote, “a refusal to face up to the need for a radical rupture with the world of private property, a confinement to the horizons of what [American sociologist Norman] Birnbaum calls the ‘administrative technologist’ who lives by manipulating things-as-they-are and who approximates in his social life to the bourgeoisie rather than to the proletariat. The busy concern in *Universities and Left Review* with ‘socialism in the here and now’ is the worst manifestation of these ideas.” [56]

The Pabloite response to the founding of the Socialist Labour League

The decision to found the Socialist Labour League was, predictably, denounced by the Pabloites. In an “Open Letter to the Organizations of the International Committee,” the Pabloite International Secretariat asserted:

By inordinate attacks against the leaders of the L[abour] P[arty] and the trade unions, and by its “third period” activity at the rank-and-file level, disregarding the most elementary discipline necessary toward the party in which supposedly the essential work was to be done, [the Socialist Labour League] is now destroying all the positions won inside the L[abour] P[arty] and the trade unions, in a struggle—ill-chosen both in terms of the correlation of forces and in terms of timing—with the reformist bureaucracy. [57]

Underlying this attack were three fundamental principles of Pabloism: 1) that the Fourth International can exist only as a pressure group on the existing organizations controlled by the Stalinists, Social Democrats, and “left” bourgeois parties; 2) that it is simply impossible for an independent revolutionary party, based on a Marxist program, to win the leadership of the working class; and 3) that no attempt should be made to build such a party.

The International Secretariat, justifying its opportunist prostration, declared that “no alternative leadership will be built up essentially through leading militant strike actions on the economic front.” [58] It added, for good measure, that “no *mass* revolutionary party will be built mainly by *individual recruitment* (i.e., winning over, through propaganda or the example of militant actions, individual members of the mass party, or groups of 4, 5, 10, 12 members at a time).” [59]

The International Secretariat chastised the SLL from having banished itself from the Social Democracy:

The way the SLL was launched rendered its existence within the Labour Party practically impossible, for anybody who has no illusions about the nature of the right-wing bureaucracy. But let us admit that the naïve founders of the SLL were taken by surprise by the Transport House [LP headquarters] ban. This ban is, however, a fact. Now if the SLL had wanted to stay inside the Labour Party, it would, after this ban, have had to disband under protest. Nothing of the sort happened. It decided *openly to defy the bureaucracy*. Under the present circumstances, such a defiance inevitably leads to expulsion [emphasis in the original]. [60]

For the Pabloites, “to defy the bureaucracy” was the greatest of all political follies. The only conclusion that could be drawn from their argument was that Trotsky’s call for the founding of the Fourth International—defying the most powerful bureaucracy in world history—was a catastrophic political mistake. Thus, all the efforts of the Pabloite International were directed toward rectifying that mistake by reducing the Trotskyist movement to nothing more than a pressure group on the existing organizations of the dominant bureaucracies.

In an editorial statement written by Slaughter, titled “In Defence of Trotskyism,” *Labour Review* upheld the revolutionary perspective upon which the SLL was based:

The Socialist Labour League has not come into being by accident, but out of the struggles of the past year, which showed that such an organisation was needed by the British working class. It has come into being to intervene in the experience of the working class, to organise, educate and prepare the vanguard which is drawing fundamental lessons from the employers’ offensive, from rank-and-file resistance and from Right-wing betrayals. It has come into being at a time when the growing militancy in industry is not yet being carried into the Labour Party. It has come into being to fight for class struggle policies inside the Labour Party and trade unions, so continuing and carrying forward in present-day conditions the best traditions of Trotskyist work within the mass organisations of the working class.

Pablo and his band of international secretaries have made not the slightest attempt to analyse or assess the present situation in Britain, the objective class relations, the industrial struggle, the political struggle, the problems and tasks of Marxists that flow therefrom. This is not their method. For one thing, such an analysis and assessment could be fruitful only if it drew on the experience

of practical activity by the Marxist movement in Britain. But the international secretaries do not need to draw on anyone's living experience. They have their ready-made scheme. And that means subordinating one's own intervention in the class struggle until mass pressure forces the bureaucracy or sections of it into the leadership of a revolution.

The anti-Marxist idea that "mass pressure" could change the essential nature of the bureaucracy; the anti-Marxist idea that "mass pressure" could force the bureaucracy to go along with the world revolution; the assumption that—again under "mass pressure"—the communist parties could lead the working class to the conquest of power: it was against these Pabloite theories (which are indeed the "crude revision of the Marxist conception of the bureaucracy" which *Labour Review* branded them almost two years ago) that Marxists defending the principles of the Fourth International gave battle. There could be no compromise, for what was at stake was the International itself as a revolutionary force. For while Pablo and his supporters might repeat, side by side with their revisionist ideas, formal phrases about the necessity for the Fourth International, their revisionist ideas in practice steadily undermined its very foundations. Formal adherence to the International while destroying its content, its programme: that sums up Pabloism. Those who put forward Pabloite ideas in the proud name of the Fourth International are impostors.

Trotskyists in various countries who opposed this revision of Marxism therefore set up an International Committee to defend the programme and principles of the Fourth International against these people who posture as Marxists.

The supreme task for Marxists today, as the International Committee sees it, is to establish the political independence of the working class through the construction of powerful revolutionary parties in every country, parties which will provide the solid foundations for the Fourth International. If this task is to be achieved there can be no compromise with Pablo's theories. Between Pabloism and the Marxist ideas which guide the practical activity of the Socialist Labour League there lies an unbridgeable gulf. The Marxist *cadre* of the future cannot emerge without a consistent struggle against Pabloism. [61]

Divisions within the International Committee

The founding of the Socialist Labour League intensified the conflict not only with the trade union and Labour Party bureaucracy in Britain. It brought into the open the political divisions on fundamental issues of program, perspective and class orientation within the International Committee of the Fourth International. Indeed, it is not possible to fully understand and appreciate the work of the British Trotskyists apart from the decisive influence of the lessons they had drawn from the 1953 split and its aftermath upon their appraisal of the world situation and its implications for the work of the International Committee. This influence, as we have explained, had found powerful expression in the response of The Club to Khrushchev's Secret Speech, the Hungarian Revolution, and the crisis in the British Communist Party. Healy recognized that the events of 1956 did not merely present the Trotskyist movement in Britain with the opportunity to recruit disaffected elements who were leaving the Communist Party. Far more important for the formulation of political strategy was the historic vindication of Trotsky's opposition to the program of "socialism in one country," his analysis of the origins of Stalinism and the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union, the

counterrevolutionary character of the Soviet bureaucracy and its affiliated political parties, and, therefore, of the decision to found the Fourth International.

In the final analysis, the essential significance of the 1956 crisis was that it heralded a profound change in the world relation of forces between the Fourth International and the degenerate Stalinist bureaucracy. However great the political obstacles and practical difficulties confronting the still small forces of the Fourth International—and they were surely very great—the crisis of Stalinism signified the weakening of the grip of the old bureaucracies upon the working class. As *Labour Review* had declared in January 1957, the "Great Ice Age" had come to an end. Objective conditions that favored the resolution of the historic crisis of leadership of the working class were now emerging. The challenge before the Trotskyists, within Britain and internationally, was to respond, in both their theoretical work and practical activity, to the demands posed by the new situation.

Within this historical and political context, the struggle against Pabloism acquired renewed urgency. In the aftermath of 1956, the efforts of the Pabloites were directed, to use a military analogy, toward reinforcing the beleaguered forces of the weakened bureaucracies against the danger of an offensive by the revitalized forces of Trotskyism. The Pabloites responded to the crisis of 1956 by seeking, under the guise of reunification (i.e., ending the split of 1953), to split the International Committee. The prospects for achieving this goal—the "reunification" of the Fourth International on the basis of subordination to the Stalinist and Social Democratic bureaucracies, adaptation to a multitude of bourgeois-nationalist and petty-bourgeois radical forces, abandonment of the fight for the political independence of the working class, and the repudiation of the theory of permanent revolution—were bolstered by the rightward drift of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the United States in the aftermath of the 1953 split.

The response of the SWP to Khrushchev's Secret Speech and the Hungarian Revolution was far different from that of The Club. While Cannon delivered one excellent speech and Murry Weiss, another leading member, wrote a well-crafted essay on the subject of Stalinism, nothing remotely comparable to the sustained political and theoretical work of The Club was undertaken in the United States. Despite the fact that the factional conflict and organizational disintegration of the American Communist Party was far more severe than what occurred in Britain, the SWP recruited virtually no one from the Stalinist movement. This was not simply the result of insufficient organizational initiative. Rather, the SWP responded to the events of 1956 not by developing the offensive against Stalinism, but by promoting a "regroupment" of "left" tendencies in the United States that deliberately evaded any clarification of the historical issues that underlay the struggle waged by the Trotskyist movement against Stalinism.

The SWP's regroupment initiative, announced in December 1956, was itself a manifestation of the party's drift in the aftermath of the split away from its traditional "proletarian orientation" and toward adaptation to the protest politics of the American middle class. The repressive anti-Communist political climate, abetted by the reactionary AFL-CIO bureaucracy and the sharp decline in rank-and-file militancy, certainly contributed to a mood of discouragement and resignation within the aging SWP leadership. Cannon, preoccupied with the idea that the SWP was becoming a "sect" without prospects, became susceptible to a change in political orientation, away from the working class and toward the petty bourgeoisie.

The break from a "sectarian" existence meant, in practice, the repudiation of the proletarian orientation and Trotskyist program.

In March 1957 Cannon wrote, without consulting the British Trotskyists in advance, a letter to Leslie Goonewardene, among the most opportunist of the leaders of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in Ceylon (later renamed

Sri Lanka). He signaled support for the opening of discussions with the International Secretariat, with the intention of achieving the reunification of the two factions.

This letter marked the beginning of a protracted internal struggle within the International Committee. The British Trotskyists rejected the SWP's claim that a rapprochement with the Pabloites was justified because the differences that had led to a split in 1953 had been largely over questions of organization, that the political issues had been somehow resolved through the passage of time, and that there was no need to dwell on 1953.

While the British insistence on the clarification of the differences underlying the 1953 split complicated the SWP's maneuvering, the victory of Fidel Castro in Cuba in January 1959 was seized upon by the American organization to drive the reunification process forward. The claim was made that support for the Cuban Revolution—which, the SWP asserted, along with the Pabloites, had created a new workers' state—provided the basis for carrying out reunification.

The Socialist Labour League's historic defense of the Fourth International (1961–1963)

On January 2, 1961, the National Committee of the Socialist Labour League addressed a letter to the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party. It expressed concern that the Socialist Workers Party, in its efforts to reunify the Fourth International, was retreating from the fundamental principles of the Fourth International that had been stated concisely in the Open Letter of 1953. Moreover, the claim that the differences that had led to the 1953 split had been superseded by agreement on more recent events was based on an incorrect appraisal of the nature and evolution of Pabloite revisionism. Far from drawing closer since 1953, the chasm between Pabloism and Trotskyism had not only grown wider; it was, theoretically and politically, unbridgeable. The SLL National Committee stated:

The greatest danger confronting the revolutionary movement is liquidationism, flowing from a capitulation either to the strength of imperialism or of the bureaucratic apparatuses in the Labour movement, or both. Pabloism represents, even more clearly now than in 1953, this liquidationist tendency in the international Marxist movement. In Pabloism the advanced working class is no longer the vanguard of history, the centre of all Marxist theory and strategy in the epoch of imperialism, but the plaything of "world historical factors", surveyed and assessed in abstract fashion. [62]

Pabloism's revisions of the essential conceptions of Trotskyism, and of Marxism itself, had to be decisively rejected. The SLL warned:

Any retreat from the strategy of political independence of the working class and the construction of revolutionary parties will take on the significance of a world-historical blunder on the part of the Trotskyist movement. [63]

The SLL did not accept the premise that reversing the split of 1953 would signify a reunification of Trotskyists. This was, it insisted, a dangerous misconception:

It is because of the magnitude of the opportunities opening up before Trotskyism, and therefore the necessity for political and theoretical clarity, that we urgently require a drawing of the lines against revisionism in all its forms. *It is time to draw to a close the period in which Pabloite revisionism was regarded as a trend within Trotskyism.* Unless this is done we cannot prepare for the revolutionary struggles now beginning. We want the SWP to go forward with us in this spirit [emphasis in the original]. [64]

The letter marked the beginning of a political struggle upon which hinged, as in 1953 and, later, between 1982 and 1986, the survival of the Trotskyist movement. In this intense struggle, which spanned two years, from 1961 to 1963, Cliff Slaughter played a critical role, as the author of the most important statements and reports produced by the SLL. However, it must be stressed that Slaughter's contribution, however substantial, was not an achievement carried out in isolation. It in no way detracts from the high estimation of Slaughter's work to note, as a historical fact, that his contributions were made in the closest collaboration with other outstanding members of the SLL, which included Mike Banda, Tom Kemp, Cyril Smith, Jack Gale, and the still very young Geoff Pilling. Healy provided decisive and incisive leadership. He brought to bear in the struggle against the SWP a powerful intellect, vast political experience, and an unrelenting determination to win the advanced workers to Trotskyism and prepare them for leadership in the coming socialist revolution. What particularly characterized the theoretical work conducted by the Socialist Labour League, under Healy's direction, was its direct connection to the development of revolutionary strategy and the mobilization of the working class. This essential orientation to the working class as a revolutionary force imparted to the ICFI documents of 1961 their political precision and fighting spirit.

Cannon understood that the SLL's letter of January 2 was the equivalent of a shot across the SWP's bow. He wrote on May 12, 1961, to Farrell Dobbs, his successor as SWP national secretary: "The breach between us and Gerry is obviously widening." [65] But though he claimed that "the SLL is off on an Oehlerite [i.e., sectarian] binge," [66] the real problem was that the SWP was overdosing on opportunism. In its 1961 "Resolution on the World Situation," the SWP resorted to pessimistic and self-defeating sophistry to justify its adaptation to petty-bourgeois radical movements, such as that led by Castro. There was simply not enough time, it claimed, to build a revolutionary party. Therefore, Castro must be accepted as an acceptable substitute:

The masses, particularly in the colonial area, feel the desperateness of their situation in the keenest way. *They are completely unable to wait until a revolutionary-socialist party is constructed before they move into action.* Since such parties do not exist, except as small nuclei, the masses, following a well-known law of politics, push into power whatever leadership of national scope happens to stand to the left of the ruling party. In default of socialist leadership—a default due to the decades of betrayal by the Social Democratic and Communist Parties—nationalistic bourgeois and petty-bourgeois formations of all hues occupy left positions and are much stronger than they would be if they were flanked by revolutionary-minded proletarian parties. ...

Cuba has demonstrated what a fatal error it would be to cross off in advance a revolutionary-minded petty-bourgeois formation simply because it begins with a petty-bourgeois outlook [67] [emphasis added].

This passage exemplified the fatuous declamations that characterized SWP documents. Particularly noteworthy here is the way the development of the revolutionary party and “the masses” are treated as unrelated processes. The masses, it is claimed, “are completely unable to wait” for the construction of the revolutionary party. But why is this impatience not expressed in the actual growth of the revolutionary party? The impatience of the “masses” must indicate the existence of objective conditions that make possible the building of a Marxist party. The real problem was not the “impatience” of the “masses,” but the impatience of the Pabloite organizations, which bypassed the problem of fighting for leadership among the masses by adapting opportunistically to non-proletarian political forces.

Cliff Slaughter replied at length to the SWP’s resolution in the political report that he gave at a meeting of the International Committee, held on July 28–29, 1961. Drawing out the implications of the SWP’s revisionism, the report is a concise presentation of the essential elements, both political and methodological, of the critique developed by Slaughter of the positions of the SWP:

The fundamental weakness of the SWP resolution is its substitution of “objectivism”, i.e., a false objectivity, for the Marxist method. This approach leads to similar conclusions to those of the Pabloites. From his analysis of imperialism as the final stage of capitalism, Lenin concluded that the conscious revolutionary role of the working class and its party was all-important. The protagonists of “objectivism” conclude, however, that the strength of “objective factors” is so great that, *regardless* of the attainment of Marxist leadership of the proletariat in its struggle, the working-class revolution will be achieved, the power of capitalism overthrown. It is difficult to attach any other meaning than this to the SWP resolution’s formulations about the “impatience” of the masses who cannot delay the revolution until the construction of a Marxist leadership. ... If the petty-bourgeois leadership in Cuba has been forced by the objective logic of events to lead the proletariat to power (the SWP says Cuba is a “workers’ state”, which can only mean the dictatorship of the proletariat) then we must demand an analysis of the present world situation which shows how this type of event has become possible, so that the Leninist theory of the relation between class, party and power, must be discarded.

Similarly with the formulation in the SWP resolution about the construction of the revolutionary party *in the course of the revolution itself*. Again, the implications of the formula must be thought through to the end. For us, such formulae only have meaning under the aspect of the general historical perspective of class relations. The SWP must show in what way “objective factors” in the world situation make it *unnecessary* in some cases to prepare and construct a revolutionary leadership. The construction of such parties through periods of the blackest reaction, as well as in preparatory and pre-revolutionary periods, is the great historical work of Lenin and his followers....

Once the basic Marxist theory of leadership and consciousness is revised in this way, the door is open to a completely wrong method of evaluating the non-Marxist political tendencies. Leaders are described according to some general scale of “progressive” or “leftward-moving” (under the pressure of irreversible and mighty “objective” forces, of course) instead of in their specific class role between imperialism and the world proletarian revolution. ...

The SLL National Committee regards this tendency towards objectivism as particularly dangerous at this time. ... The role of the bourgeois nationalists, the Stalinist bureaucracy, the Social-

Democracy in the old European powers, and the new bureaucracy centered on the UN, have enabled the imperialist economic machine to keep going despite the necessity for large political concessions. It is a basic necessity for all Marxists to have a clear class opposition to all these forces for the stabilization of imperialism, and to the reflection of these forces in the opportunists of the Labour and national-liberation movements. Capitulations to opportunism at this phase of imperialist development are the main danger to the revolutionary party. Only a consistent struggle against the opportunists, and against all those who fail to draw the political conclusions from their reactionary class role, can preserve the revolutionary party from degeneration. Failure to develop theoretically, and to understand the contribution of all these trends to the needs of imperialism, can be the beginning of precisely such concessions and such dangers. The opinion of the SLL National Committee is that the SWP is in danger of following such a course. ...

There are serious political consequences of these theoretical differences. If the “new reality” of the SWP resolution includes the recognition of petit-bourgeois leaderships as *revolutionary* in the fight of the proletariat against imperialism, then recognize the practical conclusions for Marxist revolutionaries. It is surely implied that the petit-bourgeoisie is a viable class with a great historical destiny, and that the role of the conscious proletarian vanguard at this stage is quite different from what we had thought. Once again we say, the revisions must be thought through to the end, just as Trotsky demanded of those who rushed to characterize the Soviet bureaucracy *a class*, a *necessary* historical organ in the development of society, rather than as an “accidental” excrescence on the process of world revolution, that they elaborate their programme for that unique epoch of history. [68]

In 1962, as the conflict within the International Committee entered its second year, the SLL took the discussion to a new level by subjecting the theoretical methodology of Pabloism and the Socialist Workers Party to a critical—perhaps “devastating” would be a more appropriate word—analysis. In an editorial in *Labour Review* written by Slaughter and Banda, titled “A Caricature of Marxism,” the letters of Pablo to Castro and Ben Bella (the leader of the bourgeois nationalist FLN in Algeria), expose the revisionist theoretician’s crass impressionism and abandonment of the most basic elements of historical materialist analysis:

Pablo’s letters to Castro and the FLN fall into the category of *sacrifice* of the revolutionary party, of revolutionary theory, and thereby of the political independence of the working class, to the petty bourgeois leaderships of the national movement. These letters are at best appeals to Castro and the FLN leaders to “make a choice” between socialism and falling back into the grip of imperialism. Historical materialism has been forgotten; no trace is here of the need for definite *classes* to forge their own political theory and organization. A change of mind by those in power can change the course of history. [69]

Slaughter and Banda called attention to a passage in which Pablo claimed that the future of not only Algeria but also all the newly independent states of Africa depended upon “the use to which these politically limited élites will put the state power.” [70] Thus, the hope is raised that Ben Bella and others will follow the advice of the great Pablo and bestow socialism as a gift to the masses, without independent

revolutionary struggle and the creation of organs of working-class power. Further examples were given of Pablo's groveling before Castro:

For an analysis of the needs of the working class to win power itself under the leadership of a Marxist Party, Pablo substitutes adulation of Castro, to whom he writes: "I am convinced we are in the presence of a revolutionary socialist leadership of a high intellectual and practical quality ... you belong in fact to the line of great revolutionaries who have known how to discover, assimilate, interpret and develop Marxism in a creative and profoundly revolutionary manner, such as Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and in certain fields, the revolutionary Yugoslavs and Chinese." All sense of proportion, let alone Marxist analysis, is thrown aside. ...

We cannot dwell on the comic passages in Pablo's letter. Some of them are almost unbelievable. For example, he predicts great social reforms, including "improving even the quality of the human material by an intelligent eugenics more and more voluntarily accepted". (And before the voluntary type?! [71])

The editorial concluded with a damning indictment of Pablo's bankrupt methodology:

Instead of concrete analysis, abstract comparison. Instead of strategy, crass optimism ("The achievements so far of the Cuban Revolution, the quality and critical spirit of its leadership permit a more than reasonable optimism on the plane of the struggle against bureaucracy and bureaucratization.") Instead of a perspective of work by revolutionaries among the working class, the abdication of responsibility to those leaders who receive the spontaneous support of the masses at the first stage of the national revolt, e.g., to Castro: "It is in this also that your supreme responsibility lies before history." "Upon the leadership of this revolution rests the immense historical task of making the wisest use of these opportunities, for the benefit of the Cuban and the world masses."

For all the talk about struggle against bureaucracy, we have the bureaucratic mentality par excellence. Instead of the day-to-day struggle of the working class to build its own leadership, enabling the masses to determine consciously the course of history, we have calls on Castro and others to "make the wisest use" of opportunities "for the benefit" of the masses.

Pablo's letters are not the letters of a Trotskyist as we understand it *in any sense*. They are nothing but a comically unsuccessful attempt to cover up a theoretical and practical capitulation to the existing leadership of the national movements. This surrender has its counterpart in the Pabloites' attitude to the Social Democratic and Stalinist bureaucrats in the other parts of the world. [72]

Reviewing these passages almost 60 years after they were written, and with the benefit of knowing what lay in the future, it might strike the contemporary reader as nothing less than astonishing that Pablo's gibberish could have been defended by the SWP as a valid Trotskyist analysis, or that the SWP could have insisted that the political differences that led to the split in 1953 had been resolved. But the SWP's turn to Pabloism was determined not by the quality of the revisionist leaders' arguments, but by the objective pressures exerted upon the SWP by American imperialism and its adaptation to the political orientation of the

radical middle class.

Notes:

[53] "'New Left' and Working Class", *Labour Review*, July-August 1959, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 50.

[54] Ibid.

[55] *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), Volume 4, p. 37.

[56] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[57] Cited from the *International Bulletin of the International Secretariat*, April 1959, in *Labour Review*, July-August 1959, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 33.

[58] Document available here.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] *Labour Review*, July-August 1959, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 38.

[62] *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism: A Documentary History*, Volume Three (London: New Park Publications, 1974), p. 48

[63] Ibid., p. 49.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., p. 71.

[66] Ibid., 73.

[67] Ibid., pp. 97-98

[68] Ibid., pp. 161-69.

[69] *Labour Review*, Volume 7, Number 1, Spring 1962, p. 5.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[72] Ibid.



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