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Notes on the Cuban Discussion Within the Revolutionary
Tendency (Summary of remarks made in oral discussion)

by James Robertson, 30 April 1963

Cuba and the Deformed Workers States
(Preliminary discussion draft)

by Tim Wohlforth, 20 July 1961

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NOTES ON THE CUBAN DISCUSSION WITHIN THE
REVOLUTIONARY TENDENCY

(Summary of remarks made in oral discussion)

(1) The spawning since 1943 of a whole series of anti-capitalist states in various of the more backward portions of the world has impaled the world Trotskyist movement on assorted dilemma horns. The theoretical impasse and political crisis for the movement arises through the apparent absence of either proletarian base or Bolshevik leadership to the revolutionary civil wars waged in Yugoslavia, China, Indo-China, or Cuba. An additional consideration involves the Cuban revolution whose victorious leadership was not Stalinist in its origins.

Trotskyists have reacted in four kinds of ways in measuring this twenty-year development and in assigning plus and minus signs from the standpoint of the road to socialism: (1) Some, currently Swabek over China, come to convince themselves that the revolutions in question are clearly proletarian and with a Marxist-Leninist leadership to match. This position continually eliminates itself by the defection from the Trotskyist movement of its supporters and indeed is nothing but an overt writing off of authentic revolutionary working class struggle of which Trotskyism is nothing other than the consistent program in historic depth; (2) The SWP Majority and the European Pabloites have come, by and large and with certain formal pretense to the contrary notwithstanding, to view the revolutions as basically sound, but with any flaws present to be located in the leaderships which are insufficient, unconscious or absent. (Once holders of this view find the leaderships to have become generally sufficient, conscious and present, centrism becomes galloping revisionism rapidly leaving the arena of alleged Trotskyism.) (3) Those who hold the views expressed in these notes look upon the revolutions as fundamentally defective, limited, and moreover with leaderships to match; (4) Finally those who share the stand of the SLL as expressed in 'Trotskyism Betrayed' generate an approach that in large measure either denies that social revolution, solid or defective, has taken place at all and correspondingly that the leaderships are capitalist-bonapartist; or else as over China leave inexplicable the admitted fundamental transformation.

Several observations about this spread in approach are evident. (a) The symmetry between our and Swabek's positions flows from our both seeing the revolutions and their leaderships as in consonance with one another. (b) The basis for a common stand between ourselves and those such as the SLL exists at this juncture because the same programmatic points flow from each approach. (c) The position of the French IC group is one of straddling the last two basic viewpoints--thus the amorphousness of 'phantom-like capitalist' or of 'transitional' states.

(2) More specifically, the position of the French IC'ists suffers from the central weakness that it views the Cuban

revolution as analogous to the Spanish experience of the 1930's in which the Stalinist forces propped up the 'Loyalist Government'--an insubstantial capitalist regime--in the face of a raging proletarian revolution and by repression and terror smashed that revolution. The analogy is not merely defective--it emphasizes exactly what is not in common between Spain and Cuba--a bona-fide workers' revolution!

Moreover the French comrades make sweeping denials of the significance or applicability of all elements in the Cuban situation which might be deemed to have led to a fundamental and decisive break from internal and world capitalism. But the depth and extent of the denials are too great. The Chinese revolution, a true analogue to the Cuban, falls under this ban as well. Thus the interpretation 'proves' too much; that is, it does not accurately reflect the true structure of reality.

The phrase 'structural assimilation' and the nebulous but 'magical' qualities attributed to it by some Trotskyists are irrelevant to the Cuban discussion. The phrase was a way for the Trotskyist movement to convince itself that, following the victory of the Soviet Army in Eastern Europe, in certain cases the Kremlin was actually sufficiently unconciliatory to capitalism as to consolidate economic and state power in the wake of military conquest. What is presently under discussion is the creation of those states which came into existence essentially independent of any immediate or direct role of the Soviet Union.

(3) The entire structure of the French IC theoretical viewpoint flows from the initial premise which is treated as axiomatic that any kind of workers state must originate in a workers revolution.

Hence (a) the class nature of the state issuing out of the Cuban revolution is not determined by indigenous events--likewise for China, Yugoslavia, Indo-China--since manifestly the working class was not essentially involved in the domestic revolutionary processes.

And (b) 'structural assimilation' is the way in which these states have had transmitted to them the workers state quality of the only workers revolution still extant, the Russian October of forty-five years ago.

And (c) the proof of 'structural assimilation' as the decisive link in the change in the class character of these new regimes is that they have become in every way in essence identical with the Soviet Union, hence must have been 'structurally assimilated.'

As an aside (d) it is suggested that there are capitalist states (Burma, Egypt, etc.) which have pretty much the same formal economic structure as the emergent anti-capitalist regimes, but which lack the vital sharing in the Russian 'original good' and so cannot transcend state-capitalism.

Sad to say, this example of pure scholasticism is the central core of such a theoretical insight. A critical way of putting its substance is to suggest that in this view 'the class character of a state is determined by its foreign policy'!

(4) In the present discussion it has been proposed that we base our position upon our 'Draft Resolution on the Cuban Revolution,' a three page YSA document printed in Young Socialist Forum No. 15, December 1961. The most serious criticism of this document arises out of its very excellence at many points. As presented, the resolution only makes sense in the context of its viewing Cuba as a deformed workers state; but none-the-less, the characterization is withheld. With the passage of another year and a half, it is high time to grant it! For example, all of the shortcomings and weaknesses of the Cuban revolution as cited in the resolution and all of the measures and demands proposed to combat them are consistent only with the view of Cuba as a variety of deformed workers state. No suggestion is offered at any point in the draft resolution that capitalism still needed to be eliminated in Cuba! (Except that basic consideration common to the entire Soviet bloc that a bureaucratic ruling stratum is itself a reflection of the dominance of capitalist imperialism in the world.)

(5) There is no need among partisans of the deformed workers state interpretation to be excessively modest in upholding the position. There is sometimes encountered a feeling that this view is perhaps the best around--but the best of a bad lot. Essentially this deprecation arises from the circumstance that the theory explains events deeply repugnant to genuine Trotskyists--non-proletarian leaderships and bases in mass struggles--and some of the feeling rubs off. But the dissatisfaction and the ambiguities are lodged in the realities of the interval since the Second World War, not in a now adequate theoretical interpretation and guide to action. The theory has the necessary values of a simplicity to the extent reality will allow, predictability (thus in knowing how the movement should intervene in colonial situations so as to break up the peasant-based military formations by a polarization process through working class activity and in direct opposition to, e.g., section 13. of the SWP Majority's 'For the Early Reunification of the Fourth International'), and as a sharp tool for historical analysis, e.g., as in recognizing the decisive points in the chronology of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, i.e., focusing on the pivot point at the end of the year 1923 over who ruled, for what aims, and by what method.

(6) The fullest and best available document analyzing the Cuban revolution as having led to a deformed workers state is Wohlforth's draft of July 1961, 'Cuba and the Deformed Workers States.'

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1. Their Method and Ours
2. The Evolution of Cuba
3. Workers States and Deformed Workers States
4. The State in Transition
5. The Role of the Working Class
6. The Political Revolution

Of the material covered in these sections, there are two points about which some reservations should be made. Section 4, the State in Transition, has throughout a rather superficial quality. At one point Wohlforth was reduced to taking refuge in some dubious 'dialectics' to slide over difficulties in his explanations. These difficulties arose out of not paying sufficient attention to the prior history and nature of the newly victorious states which had won in geographically separated dual power situations, i.e., civil wars.

In Section 6, the Political Revolution in Cuba, the call is made 'for us to advocate a political revolution in Cuba.' Yet it is asserted to be one which could be consummated without organizing 'an armed insurrection;' thus hope is seen for the possibility of a 'non-violent political revolution.' Particularly for Cuba this tactical outlook gets matters twisted. The reasons for this approach seem to be taken in large measure from dubious formal definitions contrasting Cuba with pre-1933 Soviet Union.

These criticism should not be allowed to obscure the general correctness and clarity of the document in systematically presenting the deformed workers state interpretation of contemporary Cuba.

(7) Both the delineation of a more considered approach to the political revolution in Cuba and a useful summary for these notes as a whole is found in the letter of 24 February 1963 from J. Robertson to B. Martin, which formally proposed opening a Tendency-wide Cuban discussion in preparation for the party convention:

"As you probably know, I hold that Cuba is a 'deformed workers state,' more precisely expressed by me as a 'workers state of the second kind,' or to put it empirically, as a 'state resulting from the same kind of revolutionary process as won in Yugoslavia and China.' Further, I think that the program of political revolution for Cuba ought to be given a transitional formulation (e.g., 'Make the Government Ministers Responsible to and Removable by Workers' and Peasants' Democratic Organizations'). Not only has the Cuban regime issued out of a revolution like China and Yugoslavia (and unlike Stalin's Russia which was created in a political counter-revolution), but in addition in Cuba the lack of a prior formed bureaucratic party and system of rule, i.e., full-blown Stalinist practice, left an initial 'openness' to the undeniable rule from above. While

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CUBA AND THE DEFORMED WORKERS STATES

Their Method and Ours:

Ever since the beginning of the discussion of Cuba in the Party, the majority has sought to stampede us into coming to an immediate position on the nature of the Cuban state. For the party majority there was little difficulty in arriving at a position. Their method was that of impressionistic empiricism. They simply described what Cuba appeared to be at the moment and called this description--a theory!

We properly rejected this whole method. We said that Marxists must do more than describe what appears at the moment. It is our task to view political and social developments in process, in motion. We must study them as they evolve and put this evolution within the framework of the whole world situation and of our whole theoretical outlook. Thus we stated that it is impossible to understand what is at the moment unless we understand what had been and what will be.

We urge those who reproach us for 'not seeing the new reality quickly enough' to study the history of our world movement and to see what happened to others who earlier grasped the 'new reality' so quickly, embraced bureaucratic regimes so lovingly. These comrades embraced the new bureaucratic regimes in the hopes that these alien forces, rather than us, would carry through the socialist revolution. We will not be stampeded into junking Marxist method. We will take the time necessary to study the evolution of Cuba and to define the nature of the state on the basis of an understanding of this evolutionary process.

The Evolution of Cuba:

Most of us are quite familiar with the evolution of Cuba. Let me just sketch briefly those highlights of this evolution that are relevant to an understanding of the nature of the Cuban state. The Cuban Revolution was carried through by a radical petty-bourgeois nationalist group whose primary social base was a petty-bourgeois class--the peasantry. (In passing it is important to note that Che Guevara has specifically repudiated the Hansen-Sweezy thesis that the 26th of July Movement based itself on the rural proletariat in its earlier stages. He noted that in the mountains no such proletariat existed and that the organization based itself on the local peasantry.) Organizing itself in military fashion and utilizing the techniques of rural guerrillas, Castro was able to give cohesiveness to this otherwise unorganized peasant force and with this social grouping to topple a decaying capitalist regime.

Upon coming to power, Castro almost immediately destroyed the old Batista state apparatus and the army upon which it rested. He created a new administrative apparatus composed of the radical petty-bourgeois elements and based on the Rebel Army. From the

very beginning, the relations of this new bonapartist state to capitalist property were quite contradictory. While this new state apparatus based itself for at least a year and a half on these capitalist property relations, the force of the revolution and the opposition of imperialism to the democratic demands of the revolution forced the government to move against capitalist property relations--though in a sporadic, empirical way. However, the ability of the government to so act was at least in part attributable to the fact that the new government had broken up the old state apparatus and was therefore able to act in a bonapartist fashion partly independent of the capitalist class in Cuba.

This process, spurred on primarily by the hostility of U.S. capitalism, reached its culmination in the nationalizations of September, October 1960 which brought at least 80% of industry, all significant industry, and the entire banking system, under direct government ownership. The agrarian reform, carried out in the previous spring, was not socialist but it was far more extensive than that in the USSR or Eastern Europe. This series of expropriations clearly wiped out of Cuba the national bourgeoisie. Further, the government established a complete monopoly of foreign trade and began a rudimentary form of economic planning.

The September-October nationalizations raised the question of whether the bonapartist governmental apparatus, continuing to be free of control by the working masses, would firmly base itself on the new property forms in Cuba or whether it would seek to return Cuba to essential capitalist relations. We can say that while the sweeping nationalizations of the September-October period laid the basis for Cuba becoming a deformed workers state, it was not automatically determined that the petty-bourgeois state apparatus would defend and develop these property forms. It was therefore incorrect, in my opinion, to characterize Cuba at that time a deformed workers state.

It was the invasion of April 17th which clearly showed that the Castro regime, for all its weaknesses, was definitely committed to the defense of the new property forms. This was shown first of all in the defense of the revolution which Castro carried through so well. More important, the invasion made it perfectly clear that imperialism was not interested in an accommodation with Castro. The imperialists were seeking first of all to overthrow the regime if at all possible. Should this not be possible, as I am sure they now realize, the imperialists wish to force Castro precisely into the arms of the USSR--into becoming a Stalinist country. For this way the imperialists are able to limit the appeal of Castro and contain the revolution. The policy of the U.S. State Department only makes sense if interpreted in this way (and believe it or not, there is a bit of method in their madness!)

Regardless of how we interpret the meaning of the invasion, it was immediately clear that Castro interpreted it as meaning

that he must definitively base himself on the new property forms and on his relations with the Soviet Bloc if his regime was to survive at all. This is the real meaning of his declaration that Cuba is a 'socialist' country. That Castro meant business and that this was no mere passing reference was soon made absolutely clear. A heavy drive towards the Stalinization of the country has been in full force since this declaration. In this respect it is important to note: (a) the Cuban press is now almost exclusively devoted to praise of the Stalinist countries and puts forward an essentially Stalinist political line; (b) economic relations have been stepped up with the deformed workers states; (c) the wide-scale net of arrests during the invasion revealed a highly developed secret police set-up which portends to be dangerous in the future because it is not under the control of the working class; (d) the drive for 'a single party of the revolution' which in the context of these other developments appears to be the setting up of the traditional Stalinist one-party rule, has been underway at fever pitch; (e) the moves against the Trotskyists are the final sign of the deformed nature of the regime.

Workers States and Deformed Workers States:

Our insistence from the very beginning of the discussion on the recognition of the qualitative difference between workers states and deformed workers states was perhaps the most important contribution we made in the whole discussion. Over the past fifteen years an unbelievable amount of theoretical confusion has been generated in all sections of our world movement because of lack of clarification on this central point.

Workers* and deformed workers states have two essentially different and mutually contradictory political systems even though they both rest on a foundation of nationalized property --of working class property forms. The deformed workers state is characterized by the rule of an uncontrolled petty-bourgeois bureaucracy which suppresses the working class and which has a counter-revolutionary outlook. This social stratum finds itself at all times to be in contradiction to the very property forms upon which it must base its rule. The real development of these forms requires the total destruction of this parasitic formation and the creation of a whole new state structure based on the direct rule of the working class. Therefore it takes a political revolution to transform a deformed workers state into a workers state.

* There has been a certain tendency to refer to workers states per se as 'healthy workers states.' This is because the term 'workers state' has been so freely applied to both workers states and deformed workers states. However, I feel this is an unhappy choice of terms, for many workers states are not too healthy but still are not deformed workers states. Therefore, I prefer to continue to use 'workers states' to refer to what Lenin called 'the soviet or commune type of state' and to never use this term also to refer to deformed workers states.

Conversely, in a workers state the working class rules directly through its own representative organs and its own party. The political regime is on consonance with the property forms upon which it is based and therefore the possibility of the advance of society as a whole to communism is opened up. The transformation of a workers state into a deformed (or more precisely degenerated) workers state is a political process so profound that a thermidorean political counter-revolution, what Trotsky called 'a preventative civil war,' which literally removes the working class bodily from all ruling positions and turns power over to a counter-revolutionary petty-bourgeois bureaucracy, is necessary to complete the transformation.

Not all workers states are uniformly healthy nor are all deformed workers states uniformly sick. Within the general framework of each different type of formation there are varying degrees of sickness and health. Thus, the USSR contained within it serious sicknesses or deformations almost from the beginning but it was not a deformed workers state until it had gone through a profound thermidorian counter-revolution which ultimately literally annihilated the former working class leaders. And it is possible also to have a deformed workers state where a clearly defined bureaucratic privileged caste does not as yet exist.

While recognizing these variations we must not fall into the trap of refusing to recognize the qualitative difference between these two forms of political rule. One of the most marked characteristics of the confusionist thinking of the liberal is a tendency to break down qualitative differences and turn everything into what Marx used to call a 'mish-mash.' Thus, since there are some workers who are quite poor and others who are relatively well off, and there are some capitalists that barely make a go of it with their candy store, etc., and others that are very rich--therefore there are no qualitative differences between workers and capitalists--there are no classes. Likewise the same methodology is applied on occasion in our movement to the theory of the state. (Joe Hansen is an expert on this.) You see there exist many different forms of workers states--degenerated, deformed, peculiar, abnormal, yet even healthy ones--all of which more or less approximate the ideal form of the workers state conceived of by Lenin. Suddenly, the qualitative difference between workers states and deformed workers states dissolves into gradations of quantitative differences. Suddenly all Trotskyist theory is destroyed and Joe Hansen sinks comfortably into that odoriferous ooze in which centrists are so happy.

A complete understanding of the qualitative difference between a workers state and a deformed workers state is precisely the basis of our whole theoretical conception of Cuba and of the other deformed workers states. The rest of the theoretical conceptions in this essay are derivative from this basic starting point. If this past political struggle in the party only accomplished this one thing--if it etched in the minds of our comrades this one concept--then the whole wearying struggle was worth it.

The State in Transition:

I feel we were essentially correct in emphasizing the transitional nature of the new Cuban state apparatus. This particular concept has been under the strongest attack. It is said to be in contradiction with the Marxist conception of the state as at all times the instrument of the ruling class of a particular society. But those who have attacked our concept of the Cuban state have been unable to come up with any substitute for it! Shane properly challenged the majority to define the nature of the Chinese state between 1949 and 1952-53 when the party claimed it to be a deformed workers state. Joe Hansen, in his polemical article, simply side-stepped the question, and not one comrade of the majority has answered it to date.

I will expand on the challenge, and state categorically: all the emerging deformed workers states--Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Cuba--went through transitional periods of more or less extended periods of time during which a Bonapartist state apparatus administering a capitalist economy was transformed into a state apparatus, still Bonapartist, administering a nationalized economy. This is simply the reality, and we must face up to it. The Marshall Plan forced the USSR to wipe out the last vestiges of capitalist property in Eastern Europe, but it did this without changing essentially the state apparatus which had originally administered a capitalist economy in these countries. The Korean War forced China to carry through its final expropriations and to definitely become a deformed workers state, but, once again, the state apparatus did not change from that which had come into power in 1949. In Eastern Europe, in China and in Cuba, a strikingly similar pattern emerges: the old state structure and the army upon which it is based are destroyed (in Eastern Europe by the Soviet Army, in China and Cuba by the culmination of a civil war); a new petty-bourgeois apparatus emerges free from direct entanglements with the old system; finally imperialism forces the new state apparatus to consolidate its rule on the basis of new property forms (the effects of the Cold War on Eastern Europe, the Korean War on China, the economic blockade and the April 17th invasion on Cuba.)

Does a recognition of this reality demand that we revise the essentials of the Marxist theory of the state? I think not. I feel the problem the comrades have in comprehending this process flows from two errors: (a) a formal rather than dialectical approach towards social change, and (b) not fully comprehending the contradictory nature of a deformed workers state.

We should take note of the fact that the development of deformed workers states in the post-war period dramatically confirms the Marxist concept of the state in one important way. In all these countries a new state apparatus emerged to replace the former capitalist state apparatus and which based itself on an essentially new and different army. In Eastern Europe

the governmental apparatus was from the very beginning completely dependent on the Soviet Army and on no other significant social force in these countries.* In China, Yugoslavia, and Cuba, this pattern becomes even more clear. Here the new state apparatus bases itself on an essentially peasant army which comes to power after defeating in battle the old capitalist army. In all these countries the emerging state, from the very beginning, had a base at least in part independent from the old capitalist structure in the country. In none of these countries does the new state emerge without in reality breaking up the old apparatus and the old army upon which it rested.

It is also important to note that the relations of the new state apparatus with the capitalists in the country was always an uneasy, unnatural one. While on the one hand the petty-bourgeois leaderships of these new states sought the cooperation of the capitalists, the capitalists feared and distrusted the new state power--they recognized that it was not wholly theirs--that it could move decisively against the capitalist class as no previous state could. Thus the fleeing of capitalists was a regular part of the revolutionary process in all these countries.

There is, however, something new involved here which does require a minor modification of our approach to the state--a modification which is consistent with the theory as a whole and with our essential dialectical method. The state which was established in these countries had replaced the old capitalist state apparatus, but its real nature only becomes clear after it goes through a process of transformation. The change in the nature of the state under these particular historical circumstances is not a formal categorical event which can be pin-pointed to a particular week, a particular day, a particular second. It was a process of a truly dialectical nature. Dialectics teaches us that in order to get

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 While in this section I mainly emphasize the similarities between all the deformed workers state which were formed after World War II, I would like to take note in passing of the differences in historical origin of the East European regimes (excluding Yugoslavia) and China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Cuba and in large part Yugoslavia. In these former regimes the transformation into deformed workers states was carried out, not on the basis of any indigenous revolutionary process, but was imposed through the Red Army. Thus the character of the governing regime was least important in these countries because the real government was the USSR through the Red Army. The emerging deformed workers states tended (and still tend) to have less of a mass base and to express more profoundly the contradictions inherent in all the deformed workers states. The other deformed workers states emerged from civil wars with a certain mass base. Therefore the nature of the ruling party and state apparatus, as well as the army, are important in understanding the evolution of these countries.

from point a to point b one must at one and the same time be at point a and not at point a; at point b and not at point b, etc. The new states in these countries both are and are not capitalist states; and are and are not workers states. They go through a transition which, because of particular historical circumstances, is more or less drawn out. But, it must be kept in mind at all times that it is only their original break with the old capitalist state apparatus which frees them so that they can undergo this transformation. (That is, that by breaking with the old capitalist state apparatus the new apparatus has already partially left point a --has already partially reached point b.)

We must keep uppermost in our minds at all times the peculiar historical circumstances which have produced these highly contradictory phenomena and the contradictory result of this process--the deformed workers state itself. The essential contradiction which produces the objective conditions which nurture these deformed workers states is the contradiction between the over-ripeness of the conditions for the overthrow of capitalism and the weakness of the revolutionary vanguard. (The over-ripeness of the objective factor and the under-ripeness of the subjective factor.)

The lack of working class leadership forces horrendous distortions on this revolutionary process--distortions which halt the process part way and prevent its spread on a world-wide scale. These distortions primarily take the form of the creation of a bureaucratic state apparatus which stands in contradiction to the property forms upon which it is based and which prevents the working class from assuming its rightful place at the helm of the state. The governmental apparatus which runs the state thus represents a counter-revolutionary force. Thus this state apparatus represents, in the ultimate sense, the influence of the bourgeoisie within the new deformed workers state.

It is therefore understandable that such a state apparatus can undergo the type of transformation described earlier--can administer essentially both a capitalist and a workers state. It is precisely this similarity it has to a capitalist state which necessitates a political revolution to destroy this state apparatus and erect in its place a truly soviet state apparatus. And this is the crux of the whole theoretical problem--it is precisely because a political revolution is essential to change a deformed workers state into a workers state that a political revolution is not essential during this peculiar transitional period, during which a state apparatus administers first a capitalist and than a deformed workers state, characteristic of all deformed workers states. What is essential for this latter process is a social revolution which wipes out capitalist property but which is not completed in precisely the political or governmental sphere and which must therefore be completed at a later date by means of a political revolution.

Thus the state apparatus which can administer both capitalist and workers property forms is a state apparatus which is in contradiction to both--which is by its very nature unstable, temporary, passing.

The Role of the Working Class:

So far we have stressed what Cuba has in common with all other deformed workers states. We can sum up these characteristics as follows: (1) the revolution was led by petty-bourgeois strata who were forced to go beyond capitalist limits; (2) basing itself on the new army, the old army and the old state apparatus are destroyed and replaced with a new state apparatus free, at least in part, from direct capitalist control; (3) after a period of cohabitation with capitalism, under pressure from imperialism and from the masses, all capitalist holdings of any real significance are taken over; (4) the new state apparatus exhibits a determination to defend these new property forms from imperialism but at the same time rules in a Bonapartist fashion free from the control of the masses; (5) the new government tends to base its outlook on a nationalist rather than a proletarian internationalist outlook.

But Cuba is very significantly different from China in many important ways. Through an understanding of these differences we can arrive at different tactics than those we would apply in China today. Furthermore, I feel that it is through an understanding of these differences that we can get a deeper insight precisely into the essential identity of Cuba with the other deformed workers states. Above all we must assess the full meaning of the fact that Cuba is the first deformed workers state to be formed not under a Stalinist leadership, which lacks a fully-developed bureaucratic caste, and which is not geographically contiguous with the USSR or other deformed workers states.

I have noticed a certain tendency among Trotskyists to read into the political developments which led to the formation of deformed workers states a greater role for the working class than it actually played. Let me state my own view absolutely clearly, for on this I feel the events in Cuba have confirmed this outlook. The motive force for the transformation of the Eastern European countries (excluding Yugoslavia) into deformed workers states was the Soviet Army. The working class played essentially a dispersed, passive role in these events. The motive force behind the Chinese Revolution which deposited Mao and Co. in power was primarily the peasantry. In the major events which led to the CP coming to power, the working class played essentially a passive role not having recovered from the defeats of the 1927 period. The transformation of China into a deformed workers state was instituted, not by the working class of China nor primarily because of great pressure from the working class--it was carried through on top on the initiative of the Maoist bureaucracy itself as a defensive act against imperialism.

It is now quite clear that Cuba has followed the model of China quite closely. It was primarily the support of the peasantry which pushed Castro into power. The extensive nationalizations were primarily initiated by the regime itself in response to imperialist provocation and not by the working class which generally tailed these events.

Cuba makes this process all the more clear precisely because of the central unique feature of the Cuban revolution--that the transformation into a deformed workers state occurred under the leadership of a party which was not even ostensibly 'working class,' by a non-Stalinist petty-bourgeois formation.

Thus the Cuban experience not only illustrates the small role the working class plays in these transformations; it also suggests that the so-called 'working class' nature of the Stalinist parties in many of these colonial countries has been given too much emphasis as well. The fact that Castro's 26th of July Movement was able to carry through a social transformation in an almost identical manner as Mao's CCP reflects, in my opinion, the essential identity in nature of the CCP and the M-26. Both parties were essentially petty-bourgeois formations--petty-bourgeois in the class nature of their leadership, their membership, their mass base, and their ideology.

While the ideology of the Stalinists contains certain socialist elements within it and in this respect is different from that of the M-26, it is questionable as to whether these elements essentially changed the nature of the movement. This is especially doubtful when one realizes that the Stalinist perversion of socialist ideology is precisely in the direction of petty-bourgeois nationalism. Thus these parties must be viewed, in my opinion, as essentially the instruments of the petty-bourgeois classes in society--not as even distorted instruments of the working class.

Here we must understand the difference between a working class party--a party with a broad working class base--such as the Labour Party in Britain or the CP in France, both of which have a petty-bourgeois program and leadership, and these Stalinist parties in a country like China which lack precisely this working-class base. The former is a working class party with a petty-bourgeois program while the latter is a radical petty-bourgeois party with perhaps even a touch of a working-class ideology. The same approach should be taken to the so-called social democratic parties in colonial areas. Except for a few cases where there exists a sizable working class upon which this party bases itself, most of the so-called social democrats in these countries are in reality radical petty-bourgeois nationalists (and some are not so radical). Just ponder over the nature of U Nu's party or the Praja Socialist Party of India. As Marxists we must seek to determine what social class a particular party actually represents in a particular country--in so doing we must probe a bit deeper than the surface manifestations of ideology. What self-respecting bourgeoisie nationalist isn't a 'socialist' these days?

To sum up: we must reject as a distortion of reality a view which gives undue weight in the process of forming deformed workers states to the working class or to the 'working class character' of these Stalinist parties in such countries as China, North Korea, and North Vietnam.*

Both the Chinese Revolution and the Cuban Revolution are essentially revolutions led by petty-bourgeois movements whose social base is primarily the peasantry and a section of the middle classes rather than the working class. Because of the extreme crisis of capitalism together with the crisis of leadership of the working class, these essentially intermediate social classes have been able to play an extremely radical role which the Marxist movement earlier had not foreseen--they were able to break with capitalism itself. However, their very radical actions proved the essential weakness of this social strata--while they were able to negatively smash the capitalist system they have been unable to positively substitute their own rule for the rule of the capitalists. Rather they are forced to lay the economic basis for the rule of another class, the working class--a class which they in reality distrust and despise. While on the one hand their very historical weakness as an intermediate social class forces them to create property forms for another class, the crisis of leadership of the working class allows them to consolidate a political rule inimical to the working class. Thus the development of a bureaucratic caste and the necessity of political revolution.

The above is frankly crediting to the petty-bourgeois strata in society far more independence than Marxists had previously felt possible. However, to refuse to so credit them or to pretend that these intermediate classes are somehow 'working class' leads immediately to serious political errors (it logically leads to the Sweezy-Pablo-Swabeck school of

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Of course, once the social transformation is completed these parties become the spokesmen for a new social stratum which rests on working class property forms. Since this social stratum must, in part, defend these property forms and therefore defend, in part, the interests of the working class, it is correct to consider the political arm of this stratum to be within the proletarian camp. This goes both for whatever party Castro is in the process of forming as well as for the CP's. However, the working class character is not so much in the party itself but in the social base it must defend. This is an important political distinction. I have been discussing only the nature of these parties before and during the process of the formation of these deformed workers states, not after they have been formed. In other words, it is not that deformed workers parties transform the property forms but that the property forms transform the petty-bourgeois parties. Whatever Theoretical problems this transformation may raise are simply derivative from those posed by the transformation of the state.

illusions about China). Further it distorts the reality and thus is theoretically untenable. Trotsky said somewhere in his Germany writings that 'All great theoretical questions come home to roost.' One simply cannot get away for long with a sloppy or incorrect theoretical conception, for if its political implications are not dangerous at first--they soon will be. Thus unclarity over China must be cleared up before Cuba makes any sense at all. An understanding of Cuba straightens out in retrospect our theories of all the deformed workers states.

If looked at in its proper perspective these new social processes dramatically confirm the Marxist concept of the petty bourgeoisie. A series of extraordinary circumstances in the postwar period literally thrusts power upon these strata with the capitalist class almost melting away right from under them. Given state power, freed from capitalist domination, not threatened by an active working class, history is saying to these social strata: 'Now is your chance. Seize the opportunities I have provided you and create your own new society.' But the petty bourgeoisie has flunked the ultimate test--it simply could not create new property forms. The forms it created are those of its grave diggers, the working class. Its rule is unstable and transitional. Only terror holds the operation together. The petty bourgeoisie is shown to be definitely an intermediate social class.

It is therefore clear that we must reject any view of these deformed workers states as a general stage in the development of society as a whole. This view was implied in Pablo's 'centries of deformed workers states' theory and this outlook is also implicit in many of the views that have been half-formulated in the general political confusion which reigns in our party. These deformed workers states only occur under very specific circumstances: (a) in economically backward countries with a weak national bourgeoisie and with crass imperialist exploitation; (b) where the working class is relatively backward and small or where it has been crushed and demoralized (it is of extreme importance to note that the development of a deformed workers state required the crushing of the working class in both China and Vietnam); (c) where the petty bourgeoisie has taken the military road of struggle, civil war, and carries this struggle to the point of destroying the old capitalist army and state apparatus; (d) where direct military intervention by imperialism is difficult to carry through successfully. Even if all these conditions exist in a country, it is by no means automatic that the petty-bourgeois force will succeed.

It is therefore possible for deformed workers states to come into existence in more countries. Yes, it is possible--in fact it is quite probable during the interim period before the world working class once again siezes the revolutionary initiative. This is precisely why it is so important for us to understand the Cuban experience.

It is extremely important, however, for our movement to pay special attention to the central contributing factor to these deformed revolutions--the general weakness of the working class. Whenever the working class exists as a conscious organized force, such petty-bourgeois formations simply split wide open if they are unable to crush the working class first. (In this latter respect the Vietnamese experience is of special importance. There the Stalinist-led forces literally exterminated the working class movement in the cities of Vietnam, including our comrades. This was a necessary precondition to the development of a deformed workers state in Vietnam at a later date. This is the significance of the present moves against the POR in Cuba. If a working class vanguard is not crushed, then the intervention of the working class could rip apart the petty-bourgeois movement posing immediately the possibility of proletarian leadership of the struggle--and of the development of a real workers state--one we could truly embrace and be at one with.)

It should therefore be absolutely clear that these deformed revolutions are not wholly ours. This is simply another way of saying that they are not wholly the working class's. These petty-bourgeois strata carry through only the most minimum social transformation consistent with the continued rule of the strata itself. At every point in the transformation process they seek to minimize, to control, the intervention of the working class. They are forced to exterminate the working class vanguard or any potential vanguard; they seek to contain the revolutionary development within the boundaries of their own country; and they produce a society so disfigured by bureaucratic deformations as to be unattractive to the working classes (what attractive pull does East Germany have on the West German workers? Why is the Stalinist party in Japan, which is so close to China, so small?) In fact we must frankly admit, as Trotsky did before us, that these deformed workers states give the working class less freedom to function and develop its own vanguard than do many of the capitalist societies. The reason for this is clear--it is precisely because the bureaucratic caste is less stable and more vulnerable to working class overturn than the capitalist class that it feels a greater necessity to suppress the working class.

There is now a certain tendency among those who call themselves Trotskyists to interpret the Cuban experience to mean that we, too, must go into the mountains and build a movement based on the peasantry. The Pabloites have actually formulated this in their Sixth World Congress documents, even suggesting that their comrades set up schools in guerrilla warfare. We completely reject this whole approach. We can only come to power on the basis of one class--the working class--and no other. The defeats of the working class are our defeats; the victories of the working class are our victories. This is our only identity, our only reason to exist. Were we to build a movement based on these petty-bourgeois strata, we, too, would be transformed into a petty-bourgeois party and the revolution would likewise be deformed from the very

beginning. No--our place is first of all in the cities, in the factories. Then, with the working class, as the most advanced section of it, we will reach out to mobilize the peasantry also--to precisely break up any independent formations of the petty bourgeoisie and to win to our banner the most radical section of the intermediate class.

The Political Revolution in Cuba:

We must recognize that precisely because Cuba developed in its initial period without the direct control of a Stalinist party, the revolutionary regime was far more open to the influence of the working class, and the possibilities of developing a true working class revolutionary party in Cuba were far greater. This is shown graphically in the fact that Cuba is the only emerging deformed workers state which has allowed, until recently, a Trotskyist party to legally exist.

Conversely, we must recognize that the growth of Stalinism in Cuba both as an ideology and as an organized movement, is an expression of the bureaucratization process--of the beginnings of the development of a separate ruling bureaucratic caste in Cuba. Stalinism is still the ideology of bureaucratic rule, and the spread of this system of thought, not only through the PSP, but within the Castro ruling group itself, is simply an ideological expression of the deeper bureaucratization process. The fact that Stalinism is emerging so strongly in Cuba today is the final proof that Cuba is a deformed workers state.

In fact the development of a Stalinist ideology in Cuba today gives us a deeper understanding of what exactly the Stalinist ideology is. It is not simply a matter of the ideology of the USSR and of those CP's directly controlled by the USSR. This is what Swabeck suggests when he claims that for Mao to break with the USSR is the same as for Mao to break with Stalinism. Again elements of this approach can be found in the thinking of most of the majority comrades. Stalinism is the ideology of bureaucratic rule which is based on proletarian property forms--it is this and nothing else. Thus the transformation of Cuba into a deformed workers state forced upon the Castro leading group the necessity to transform its ideology so as to be able to defend these new property forms and to defend its own uncontrolled rule. Castro did not create an ideology from new cloth--he is simply

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 This is not to say that we are predicting that the Russian agents that run the PSP are destined to take over in Cuba. It is possible that the Castro regime can maintain a certain independence from the USSR comparable to Yugoslavia or China. In which case we should not rule out a showdown battle of some depth between the Blas Roca Russian agents and the 'independent Stalinists' around Castro. Should Castro launch such a struggle, that would no more free him from Stalinism than it freed Tito when he took a similar step.

taking over wholesale the already existent ideology of bureaucratic rule--Stalinism.

Cuba's geographical position will help it maintain a certain level of independence from the USSR. In fact it may very well require this to maintain the Cuban economy which needs trade relations with the capitalists much more than the other deformed workers states. However, it is clear that whatever economic relations Cuba works out in the foreseeable future, they will be based on the maintenance of its planned economy and monopoly of foreign trade. Again the weakness of imperialism forces it to deal with these deformed workers states since it is incapable of overthrowing them without releasing social forces which could well overthrow it.

Is it proper to characterize Cuba as a deformed workers state when it does not as yet have a clearly defined bureaucratic caste and if we so label it, is it proper for us to call for a political revolution in Cuba? Yes, I feel it is proper to so characterize Cuba, for Cuba has the essential characteristics of a deformed workers state: (a) a nationalized economy; (b) a ruling stratum which is not under the control of the working class. However, it is highly important to understand that Cuba is a developing revolution and that the bureaucratic caste is in the process of formation right at the present moment. A recognition of this reality allows for the working out of a considerably different strategy and tactics than that which we would apply in a more stable (relatively) deformed workers state such as China. Because of this fluid situation, the intervention of the working class to counteract this bureaucratization process is not only possible but essential. In Cuba the possibility of establishing the direct rule of the working class is far greater than in any other of the deformed workers states, and Trotskyists in Cuba must work energetically towards this end despite the persecutions against them. We must counsel the Cuban Trotskyists to neither write off the Cuban revolution and act as if this bureaucratization process is completed nor to rely upon the bureaucrats themselves to counter it. Only the conscious intervention of the working class into Cuban politics can save the situation. The achievement of this intervention must be the central strategic goal of our movement in Cuba. All tactical questions, such as our attitude towards conflicts between Castro and the PSP, must be judged according to whether or not they further this strategic goal.

Since there is no clearly defined bureaucratic caste in Cuba is it proper for us to advocate a political revolution in Cuba today? My answer to that is also emphatically, yes! The establishment of workers rule in Cuba today would be a profound political change. It would necessitate the creation of a revolutionary Marxist party with a mass base and the formation of representative institutions of the masses. These institutions would have to replace the present administrative apparatus in Cuba, infusing all governmental levels with working class elements. The Marxist party would have to

replace the present petty-bourgeois Castro leadership in Cuba. Such changes can only be described as revolutionary changes in the political structure of the country. That is, that what is involved is more than mere quantitative changes (the amount of working class democracy as the majority likes to put it)--what is essential is a qualitative change in the political structure of the country. It is a matter of replacing the rule of a petty-bourgeois apparatus with the rule of the working class itself. Changes in the economic structure would not be so profound, and that is why we characterize such a change as a political as contrasted to a social revolution.

It is possible that someone may suggest that instead of applying the concept of political revolution to Cuba we should follow Trotsky's approach to the USSR before 1933 and work for political reform. I feel that this would be an incorrect approach and would reflect a lack of understanding of the only real difference between the degenerated workers state in the USSR and the postwar deformed workers states--that is, its unique political evolution.

The USSR was established as the first workers state led by a genuine revolutionary working class party. The evolution of the USSR was the evolution of the decay of this working class party under conditions of isolation, etc. Thus revolutionists must take a different attitude towards the process of decay within a working class party than we would towards a petty bourgeois party which never was a working class party in any real sense. We must never write off too quickly the possibility of reform from within the former and never count on reform from within the latter.

An even clearer understanding of the important theoretical distinction between the process of political revolution and the process of political reform can be gained if we refer to the distinction made earlier between a workers state and a deformed workers state. It is possible to discuss reform, that is, a quantitative change, within a workers state which is seriously sick. In a deformed workers state, no matter how much it may be in flux, only revolution, a qualitative change, can bring about the leap of society to a new form of rule--that of the working class itself. To raise the question of reform in a deformed workers state, even like Cuba, is to break down the qualitative difference between a deformed workers state and a workers state--that is to bring into question the very concept of a deformed workers state. Thus raising the question of reform automatically raises the question of whether or not the society in question is a deformed workers state. But there is one thing that is certain--Cuba is not now nor has it ever been a workers state, sick or not, for the working class has never ruled in Cuba!

While it is possible for comrades to question this approach in general, it is unquestionably correct, in my opinion, once we approach it within the framework of the

concrete reality of Cuba itself. Castro rules with a governmental apparatus alone, while the Stalinists always rule through a disciplined party. Thus what is at issue here is not calling for the reform of a party--but of the governmental apparatus itself. Thus we immediately begin to orient towards this or that section of the governmental apparatus and lose sight of--the working class. Since the governmental apparatus has virtually no working class elements within it, it cannot be reformed from within. Only the independent mobilization of the working class can push forward the revolutionary process in Cuba. We, of course, expect that such independent intervention will swing to the side of the working class a section of those who support Castro including people in the Government. But this is a by-product of the independent struggle, not the central axis of our strategy.

Does this mean that we are stating that we would approach the political revolution in Cuba as we do in other deformed workers states--that is, that we would in effect organize an armed insurrection? Not at all. It is precisely because of the fluid state of things in Cuba today--that the bureaucratization process has not been finalized--that we can hope for the possibility of a non-violent political revolution. (Or more accurately one of limited violence, for it is my conviction that our relations with the Stalinists will be settled one way or the other violently.) Marx held open the possibility of a non-violent revolution in the U.S. because he felt that the bureaucratic apparatus and the standing army were not developed on the scale of the European capitalist countries. Lenin ruled this out on the basis of the later evolution of the U.S. Today, if there is any government which fits Marx's description of one where its overturn could be carried through without an armed insurrection, it is the Castro regime in Cuba.

However, as recent moves against the POR show, time is fast running out in which the political revolution can proceed with little violent disruption. The party majority, of course, is interested in none of this. It has completely deserted the methodology of Marxism in its knowtist urge to wipe Castro's rear. The development of Marxist thought in our movement here rests now with us. We, at least, will give these questions the serious attention they deserve.

Tim Wohlforth
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