

MEMORANDUM ON THE WORLD MOVEMENT

Submitted to the National Committee by Tim Wohlforth

It is extremely important that, after several years in which there has been almost no organized discussion among orthodox Trotskyists throughout the world, an important political and organizational discussion has begun. It already seems as if the discussion will be a thorough one and a frank one -- the only kind of discussion which is going to get us any closer to a solution of the extremely difficult problems our world movement faces.

The Trotskyist movement has been passing through a period of the most deep-going political and organizational crisis over the past ten years, and although we can now begin to see our way a bit better, we are not yet completely out of it. It is highly important to understand the objective causes of this process which has so racked and destroyed our precious small forces.

We are paying the price for the failure of the workers' revolution in Europe in the immediate postwar period. Following this first severe crisis, the capitalists, with the essential aid of the Stalinists and Social Democrats, have been able to stabilize their rule in the leading metropolitan countries and guarantee for a while a prosperity which has had such a deleterious effect on the class struggle in the metropolitan countries. The relative docility of the working classes in these countries has tended to strengthen the hold of the traditional reformist and Stalinist parties over the working class and has had an extremely harmful effect on the vanguard. Thus, the relative isolation of the Trotskyist parties in the major countries throughout the world and the inability of these parties to seriously intervene in the class struggle and to grow.

If this were not bad enough, a series of world events has occurred which has caused severe ideological dislocations for our movement. The absence of any significant intervention into world politics by the advanced working class has been combined with a quite opposite development which has produced some very contradictory results. The colonial revolution has pushed forward at such a rate that in China, North Korea, Vietnam and partially in Cuba it has broken outside capitalist bounds. However, this breakthrough has taken place not under our leadership nor in alliance with the advanced workers in other countries. Of course, the long-range effects of these developments is to seriously weaken world capitalism and to bring its day of doom that much closer. However, for us a not unimportant by-product of these developments is that they encourage an ideological tendency to slight the role of the conscious vanguard in history and to rely on a sort of unconscious objective revolutionary process.

The world Trotskyist movement, to the extent that it has not retreated from reality through sectarianism (and this has taken a heavy toll), has been plagued with another and by no means less dangerous disease -- Pabloism. By Pabloism I mean a tendency to underplay the importance of the vanguard to historical processes substituting for the vanguard the unrolling, panoramic objective wave of leaderless revolution. The theory works something like this: The objective conditions of the collapse of capitalism and the

growth of the workers states propel the masses into action. These masses then force the reformists, the bureaucrats, the Stalinists, the centrists (in fact anybody but ourselves) further and further along the path of revolution. The role of the Trotskyist vanguard is relegated to that of a pressure group (the British call it a "ginger group") to exert pressure on the existing leaderships of the workers' organizations.

This necessitates organizationally a "deep entry" of the revolutionary forces into the mass organizations and once inside these organizations the minimization of their independent role. The Trotskyist is not inside the alien party (it begins to look less and less "alien" to him) to build the vanguard party but rather to pressure the leadership or the centrists who in turn pressure the leadership. Floating in the stratosphere far above the pressure groups in the existing mass parties is the INTERNATIONAL CENTER which produces magazines in several languages which more or less brilliantly speculate on the constantly advancing world revolution and develop pretty theoretical constructions to explain these developments.

It is not at all surprising that Pabloism, as expressed by Pablo himself, combines with the above approach a high handed cavalier attitude towards the historically-formed cadres of Trotskyism. The size of these forces are relatively unimportant to him as he looks elsewhere than to the revolutionary vanguard for the real motive force of history. Thus to split and destroy cadres is no organizational idiosyncrasy of Pablo's but rather the logical outcome of a theoretical approach which places little value in the subjective factor in the revolutionary process.

An Initiative Gained and Lost

The Open Letter of the SWP and the world-wide split that it precipitated was an extremely necessary step not only to counter the organizational methods of Pablo but to reaffirm the fundamentals of Trotskyism in the face of the political revisionism of Pablo which lay behind the organizational methods. (Jim Cannon formulated the relationship between the political and organizational differences between the IC and I.S. quite well in his letter of January 26, 1954 to Goonewardene: "The first concern of Trotskyists always has been, and should be now, the defense of our doctrine. That is the first principle. The second principle, giving life to the first, is the protection of the historically-created cadres against any attempt to disrupt or disperse them.") This step decisively gave the world initiative to the IC and orthodox Trotskyism and augered well for the reorganization and growth of the world movement on sound political grounds.

However, this initiative slipped through our hands as the IC failed to really function as an alternative center to Pablo while Pablo continued to keep an active world center going (though not much else). This was perhaps unavoidable because of severe financial and personnel limitations but it was still bad. Without a dynamic center of orthodox Trotskyism and a continuing political struggle against revisionism it was inevitable that we would be

able neither to make any real inroads into Pablo's ranks or prevent a further decomposition of our own forces internationally.

Despite all this the past seven years has provided decisive vindication for orthodox Trotskyism. It has only been the groups supporting the IC or in ideological solidarity with it (as is the case of the SWP) that have significantly grown in this period. Most impressive has been the growth of the British group to a point where it now includes in membership more Trotskyists than all the supporters of Pablo in the world combined with the possible exception of the dissolute LSSP. The development of Trotskyism in Japan has been just as impressive if not more so. The modest growth and vitality of the SWP and of the Canadians likewise points up the same thing.

While we lost a certain initiative in the world movement from 1954 to 1957, we completely disoriented and confused the world movement with our unity proposals to the Pabloites in the period from 1957. The first letter to Goonewardene (March 12, 1957) notes that "the two sides appeared to come closer together than was the case in the period prior to the formal split." It further states: "A consistent approach of both sides toward common positions on the political questions of the day would justify a deliberate and serious attempt at reunification. . . ." The current letter of the PC majority to the SLL (January 31, 1961) acts as if what was tentatively stated in 1957 is now a proven fact. "We have noted nothing since the question was last discussed with you," the document reads, "that would indicate we should revise the view that the political differences on some key questions have diminished to the point where unification is possible and justifiable. . . ."

Once noting a certain coming together of formal views, at least on the Russian question (but hadn't Pablo already pulled back on this question quite a bit before the split), all emphasis was then put on the organizational solution to the split. Therefore in the intervening three years little or nothing has been done to seriously explore whether or not there is a political basis for unity. The confusion over the organizational proposals and counter-proposals simply played into Pablo's hands as it once again gave him in effect a certificate from us that he was a Trotskyist and that his political line was essentially correct. Under such conditions it is not surprising that there has been little resistance to his ideas inside the I.S. organizations.

Has Pabloism Really Changed?

Has Pabloism (I refer here not simply to Pablo personally but to that body of thought and approach towards building the party originally associated with him and still adhered to by the leading circles of the I.S. and its supporters internationally) really changed that much over the years? If one looked at Pabloism in 1953 as essentially a pro-Stalinist tendency then certainly a case can be made for this proposition. There is no doubt that on the Hungarian events the Pabloites took a strong anti-Stalinist position. But is this really Pabloism? Did not the real pro-Stalinists (like Clark, Mestre, Lawrence) break with Pablo?

If one looks at Pabloism as a centrist tendency which theoretically minimizes the role of the vanguard and in practice destroys the vanguard then Pabloism has not changed -- rather its nature has become far clearer over the past seven years. (It is interesting that a rereading of the document "Against Pabloite Revisionism" passed at the 25th Anniversary Plenum shows that this document is for the most part still applicable to Pabloism today for it, even then, saw Pabloism as far more than simply a pro-Stalinist deviation.) If this latter approach is correct then the failure of the SWP to really convince our co-thinkers in the IC to actively work for unity with the Pabloites and conversely the refusal of the Pabloites on their part to really work for unity with the IC is not simply a matter of uncontrolled factionalism -- it is rather an expression of the real political gulf that exists between Trotskyism and centrism.

Let us first look at the theoretical approach of the Pabloites today. Here I feel the SLL has done a pretty good job in pinning down the evasive formulations of the Pabloites both in their letter to our NC and in their International Perspectives Resolution. I have not seen the resolutions of the recently concluded Pabloite Congress and I will have to withhold my comments on these documents until a later date. However, a perusal of their latest magazine (Fall, 1960, Fourth International) is enough to give one some inkling of their approach. I will run through some of the material quickly:

1. The lead editorial, "The Situation on the Eve of the Sixth World Congress," This editorial presents the Pabloite view of the ever expanding wave of revolution which has reached the point, they feel, where the chances of imperialism establishing national capitalist states in Africa "seem to be small, not to say non-existent" as "in the majority of cases the necessary social and political premises are lacking." Thus they feel that Africa also will be swept clear of capitalism even though the working class is extremely small and our forces virtually non-existent. Further, the counter-revolutionary influence of Stalinism in the colonial revolution is minimized: "The union between workers' states and the colonial revolution constantly becomes closer, in spite of the bureaucracy and its peaceful coexistence." At no time this editorial, which is supposed to relate the world situation to the Sixth World Congress, is the state of the Trotskyist forces discussed in relation to this wave of revolution (even in the negative). In fact, with small terminological changes, it could appear as an editorial in the Monthly Review.

2. The editorial, "Decisive Hours of the British Labor Movement." Here, as the SLL has commented, the Pabloites see "the central task of British revolutionary Marxists" not building of the revolutionary vanguard itself, but rather "regrouping, inside the Labour Party, all these scattered forces of the labor left." In other words, rather than build the vanguard, the Pabloites propose to utilize the vanguard as a pressure group to form a broad centrist wing of the Labor Party.

3. The Documents section includes a short article "on Ceylon." It is, in reality, a kid-gloves treatment of the criminal act against the working class perpetrated by the LSSP's support of a capitalist government. Nowhere is this traitorous policy clearly attacked as a popular front one.

4. "An Open Letter to the Leadership and Members of the Chinese Communist Party." This document, which is addressed to the leaders as well as members of this Stalinist party, starts "comrades." The letter is written from the political outlook of 1928 whereby not only the Chinese Stalinists but all Stalinist parties are simply a part of the "communist movement" which includes the Pabloites. Again we have cropping up this Deutscherite concept from the 1953 period: "The successes of the Chinese Revolution liquidate the subjective bases of Stalinism in your own rank and file as they earlier liquidated the objective ones." The document ends with a call, not for the building of a Trotskyist party in China, but rather "for the revolutionary-Marxist renovation of the communist movement."

And this is only one issue of the FI! Comrades, don't you think that perhaps we should at least explore the level of political agreement before we plunge into all sorts of organizational proposals?

But if one still has doubts about the reflection in theory of the revisionist approach of the Pabloites, one only has to look at the level of the concrete tasks of building the revolutionary party and there is no room left for doubt! After seven long years of his own organization, what has Pablo to show for his efforts? Has he built one single party in one single country which has shown any vitality, any ability to grow, any real roots in the working class? The answer is clearly no. But the record is more damaging than that -- Pablo has effectively dulled the revolutionary independence of his own forces and done his best to destroy those vital Trotskyist forces (e.g., England and Japan) that have shown their ability to grow. A political tendency which attempts to destroy the revolutionary vanguard is our mortal enemy no matter how much this tendency vows loyalty to Trotskyism! Just as Lenin had to struggle against every centrist tendency which attempted to dull the revolutionary consciousness, to throttle the independence of the party in order to build the party that led a successful revolution, so must we today follow in his footsteps.

The experience of the SLL is familiar to all our comrades. The British comrades have given us a model of how to build the vanguard under conditions which necessitate entry into the BLP and to do so without compromising in the slightest to the BLP leadership or to the centrists within the BLP. The role of the Pabloites in Britain, both in their opposition to the formation of the SLL (what is clearer than their support of Cadogan?), and in their failure to build a movement on their basis is also familiar to the comrades. The experience of Belgium may not be so well known. Here one of the key leaders of the Pabloite organization has been personally in charge of the Trotskyist forces in the country. Please read

the attached article from the Newsletter on the role of La Gauche in the recent Belgium General Strike. Then ask yourself -- can such people build the revolutionary party? Is it only a small "tactical" difference that separates us from them? Can we unite under the same umbrella the builders and the destroyers of the revolutionary party?

What Is To Be Done?

If unity is out of the question right now then what should we do? The first thing that is necessary is for the orthodox Trotskyists throughout the world to work out their common ideas as clearly as possible. One of the difficulties over the past period has been that the relative inactivity of the IC has contributed to the political problems within the IC itself. Until the IC can clarify its views it will not be in much shape to worry about its tactical approach to the I.S.

The SLL International Perspectives Resolution is an excellent step in this direction. It clearly states once again the fundamentals of Trotskyism and applies these fundamentals intelligently to the world of today. Its essential approach is to reiterate once again the central and determining role of the advanced metropolitan countries in the world revolutionary process and to put us once again back into that process. It clearly states that the Trotskyist vanguard party is essential for the success of the revolution in every country of the world: in China and Yugoslavia as well as in Russia; in Ghana, Guinea and Cuba as well as in India; and of course in the advanced capitalist countries.

We are all, of course, in agreement with this general political approach which we originally formulated in 1953 as against Pablo. In fact Jim Cannon's letter to the PC of June 17, 1960, clearly enunciated this point. He stated:

"These two developments in France and Germany (De Gaulle coming to power and the retreat of the SPD from a socialist program -- TW), which have their general reflection throughout western Europe, have weighed heavily against the unthinking impression of steady and consistent advance of the international revolution by way of the colonial and semicolonial upsurge. The Chinese Revolution, and its reverberations throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America, are mighty factors upsetting the stability of world imperialism. So also, in their own way, have been the struggle and pressure for workers' democracy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. But all these tremendous developments taken together could not be properly considered as a substitute for the proletarian revolution in the industrially advanced countries which are the center of imperialist power.

"Up to now we have not sufficiently criticized and stigmatized the fuzzy thinking which has optimistically pictured the world as steadily advancing toward socialism by way of industrial progress in the Soviet Union and China and in the colonial revolts. In my opinion, this is nothing but an expanded version of the original theory of Socialism in One Country."

What makes the reaffirmation of this basic approach so important is -- to put it frankly -- that there has emerged a certain tendency in our own ranks to adopt certain Pabloite approaches to some questions. I do not know of any other way to characterize the trend of Swabeck and Liang's thinking on the Chinese question which has reached the point of adopting the posture of being the loyal left wing of Mao. The party leadership quite correctly spotted this trend far before I did and countered it.

However the recent theories of Hansen on the Cuba question are of a similar order but this time the party leadership, rather than condemning these Pabloite theories, has embraced them. I am referring here, not to the question of the nature of the state particularly, but rather to the giving up of a perspective for an independent Trotskyist party in Cuba. The comrades rely instead on "convincing" Castro and transforming the petty-bourgeois Castro movement into a Trotskyist party. Joe's conception of the reformability of the Cuban CP through mass pressure is of the same stripe.

In addition to holding a political discussion within the IC we should encourage the reactivation of a world center for orthodox Trotskyism (even though our organization is barred by law from participating in such a world body). We should not allow the present split with Pablo to excuse our own lack of international initiative. This does not mean we have to go "whole hog" with a formal congress, etc. But the essence of international organization and functioning must be preserved.

Finally we must launch a propaganda offensive against the Pabloite theoretical concepts and Pabloite deep-entry policy of destroying the independence of the vanguard. This must of course be done in an intelligent manner so as to try to reach those internationally who either do not understand the international split and therefore have abstained from organizational involvement with either the IC or I.S. and those who may support Pablo out of fetishism about the International rather than political agreement (a strong factor in Latin America). The question here is not how we present our ideas -- but that we present them!

In order to facilitate the reaching of the ranks of those sections affiliated with the Pabloite international an approach along the lines of that spelled out in the SLL International Perspectives Resolution seems sensible. That is, we should approach the I.S., not with a proposal to set up a parity commission to organize an immediate World Congress on the assumption that political agreement exists; rather, we should approach Pablo with a proposal to set up such a parity committee simply to regulate a joint discussion in the ranks of the I.S. and IC affiliates to see to what extent there is political agreement. (It goes without saying that if there is political agreement we will put forward the excellent organizational proposals for reorganizing the International that we have already worked out.) Should the I.S. accept such a proposal then this will facilitate our reaching their ranks with our ideas. Should it turn it down, as it probably would, this would raise questions in the minds of many of the I.S. supporters as to why the I.S. fears a real political discussion of political issues.

In any event we should organize a discussion within the IC ranks and this necessitates our supporting the SLL proposal (see January 2 letter) for setting up an international discussion bulletin. This modest step can help quite a bit in spurring on the political process necessary to the rebuilding of the world Trotskyist movement.

It is only along this path that we will be able to build strong national sections of our movement as well as a strong international organization. We must give these international questions the most careful consideration for we will not be able to build a healthy party in this country without the fullest ideological participation in the international movement in the traditions of the Trotskyist movement and the early CI.

March 8, 1961.

Tom Kemp

was sent to Belgium by
The Newsletter, this is
the third of his reports.

CLASS STRUGGLE IN BELGIUM

Left Failed to Seize Opportunities

APART from the Communist Party, whose policy stood well within the bounds accepted by the official leadership, the only alternative line was offered in the special strike editions of the left-wing weekly, 'La Gauche'. This paper has been published for four years as a kind of equivalent to the 'Tribune' in Britain. Some reports have spoken of it (as well as of Renard) as 'Bevanite' -- it may be truer of the paper than of the trade union leader, at any rate if we judge by what we find in its pages.

Given a situation such as that in Belgium there should have been considerable opportunities for the building of a strong left wing in the party and the trade unions. It was not enough, however, to build a left wing of opinion, which is mainly what 'La Gauche' has done; it was also necessary to build, at any rate in embryo, a leadership which could come forward and function as an alternative to the official figures when they proved their impotence. For that it was necessary to have roots in the organised labour movement and to establish an accepted position of authority amongst workers; outside the youth movement nothing has been done in this direction.

It is true, however, that 'La Gauche' does have some standing among a certain number of militant workers and is recognized as the voice of the left wing in the Socialist party. During the strike it was self-consciously putting forward slogans and a programme for the movement, not that it wished to establish a claim to be an alternative leadership, but primarily because it thought that it could help to create a current from below which would induce the leaders already in position to take them over as their own. Therefore, the slogans, and especially the programme, did not go outside what these very leaders in public statements and conference resolutions had committed themselves to accepting but did not explicitly link up with the strike against the 'Single Law'.

Two Calls

The policy put forward by 'La Gauche' consisted of a call for a march on Brussels. This was the main slogan raised at meetings and demonstrations. It was said that if such a march were to take place (as a kind of cross between Aldermaston and a hunger march) it would require the setting up of an organization along the route and in the capital itself. It would also focus the energies of the strikers on a precise object and prevent them being aimlessly dissipated. These arguments contain some sound sense. If such a march had been organized it could have changed the climate in the capital and strengthened the hand of strikers in the north. What was to happen in Brussels was left vague and since the slogan was not accompanied by any other positive calls to action by the strikers (other than the setting up of committees -- for what?) it was inadequate and did not provide strikers with the issue for which many of them were looking.

The other main call was for 'structural reforms' of a social and economic kind notably: a free national health service; nationalization of power

industries; full employment and economic planning; control of the trusts; tighten up on tax evasion; halve the military budget; a Public Investment Board.

Pressure Politics

This programme, in line with the policy of the Belgian Socialist Party, was hoped by some of its advocates to mean a mortal blow to Belgian capitalism, at least in the conditions brought about by the strike. But they were none too clear about this. Thus Ernest Mandel wrote in 'La Gauche' of December 24:

'It is not necessary to participate in the government to get satisfaction on the essential points. Under the pressure of the strike, Parliament can be led to refuse the 'Single Law' and to take other laws into consideration....

'It is sufficient if the Social Christian M Ps listen to the voice of their own electors, that they take up position under the pressure of the strike on their own mandates, for a new parliamentary majority to emerge at least on these two questions: withdrawal of the 'Single Law', vote of an outline law on tax reform and structural reforms.'

This was presumably what was meant by 'Strike to a finish', another slogan of 'La Gauche'. It is true that some other statements in this journal seemed of a more militant character. In articles in the issues of January 1 and January 8 Jacques Yerna stated that while being profoundly attached to social and political democracy they (i.e., the team around 'La Gauche') did not believe in it as it functioned in Belgium' and that it could not be substituted for the direct action of the masses. In fact he opted for the trade union leaders (Renard?) who preferred 'direct action' to the Socialist Party leaders who acted within the framework of a Parliament 'dominated by a few powerful financial concerns who falsify its work'.

What a reader groping towards some way of escape from the Belgian crisis would get from 'La Gauche' would be a few slogans and a confused prospect ranging from putting pressure on Social Christian M Ps to 'direct action' by trade union leaders.

The reporter of 'L'Express', a French weekly closely identified with the views of ex-Premier Mendes-France, who went to 'La Gauche' for his information about economic and political conditions in Belgium, put his finger on an important point. In the issue of December 29 he wrote of the 'structural reforms':

'This economic programme, remarkably moderate for a Frenchman or even an Italian, but which in Belgium passes for revolutionary, gives a first impression of the outdatedness of the apparatus and methods of Belgian capitalism.'

Only Confusion

Let the same journalist continue, as he did the following week (L'Express, January 4):

'Rarely has a general strike, insurrectional by its tone and its sharpness, been undertaken for such reasonably moderate demands. The weekly, "La Gauche", organ of the Belgian "Bevanites", speaks of "assuring by the general strike the supremacy of Labour over Capital once and for all"; and "La Wallonie", the daily of Andre Renard (who is for Belgian Socialism what Bevan was to the British) speaks of "making the regime bend in time to avert the worst, if not on the other

side of the grave". However, this shock language, recalling the revolutionary syndicalism of fifty years ago is here in the service of a programme which France realised fifteen years ago and which M. Baumgartner (Minister of Finance and former boss of the Bank of France) could himself agree with: planning, full employment, control of the trusts, nationalization of the coal mines, gas and electricity (nothing more). [my emphasis -- T.K.]

From this it is clear that the 'structural reforms', derived as they were from the minimum programme of Social democracy, are perfectly compatible with the maintenance of Belgium capitalism and could be accepted by its more enlightened supporters under favorable circumstances. At the same time to adopt such a programme is, for the left, to become its prisoner -- and this is what 'La Gauche' seems to have done, so that it wins sympathetic references in newspapers of the left bourgeoisie, but does not make much headway amongst the working class. After all, the present leaders have declared, in effect, that they are for the implementation of such a programme in good time -- i.e., when they have a parliamentary majority, or join a coalition. Insofar, then, as the working class supports its present leaders, and whatever their misgivings about their role in the strike, the programme of 'La Gauche' seems gratuitous and its activity that, not of an alternative leadership, but of a pressure group.

Unfulfilled Task

In the meantime, unfortunately, the direction of the energies of an important section of left moving workers, of Marxist socialists and, especially, of the socialist youth into this channel has left the major task unfulfilled -- that is of building the basis of a new movement and leadership. Consequently the left wing has been unable to move effectively. While it can claim to have clean hands that is partly because it has not got down to real business; in fact it shares responsibility for the serious difficulties which the Belgian movement is likely to face in the future. It may gain support from those who break away from the old-line leaders. But its leaders and militants, supporters of 'La Gauche' and 'Jeune Garde', need to make full and frank assessment of the line taken in the strike which, if persisted in, will leave the movement a prey to misleaders and adventurers.

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