

# DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 9 OF 16

FOLDER 22

OCT FRENCH COMMUNIST  
GROUP

Ron: Some of the enclosed is undoubtedly esoteric, but much of it could be of interest to you.

The O. C. I. is a French group. The SLL is British, and Mandel is of the "official" Fourth International.

[26 1973]

Dear Comrades of the O. C. I.

It is with great interest that I have read your "Balance Sheet Of the Crisis of the Fourth International" and its companion piece, the "Roots and Origins of Pabloism". I take the receipt of these documents as an invitation to participate in an on-going discussion. I welcome the opportunity.

I must, however, make clear the framework within which I see such a discussion. The past decade, roughly speaking, has seen the emergence of mass struggles in the United States, in French Canada, in South America, in France, in Italy, in Spain, in England, in Czechoslovakia, and so on, which have taken place for the most part independent of and in opposition to the official apparatus of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals.

Sadly enough, the forces of the Fourth International (and I use the term in its broadest sense) have not, to date, proved capable anywhere of intermeshing with and leading these struggles - certainly not in a bolshevik manner. And far from growing in a manner even approximately proportionate to the quantitative and qualitative level of these struggles, all forces claiming allegiance to the necessity of building the Fourth International have split again and again, with more splits looming on the horizon. The most immediate result, of course, is a rebirth of the influence of stalinism, and especially social democracy.

We know that at birth The Fourth had no breathing space, marked as it was with the shadow of Hitler, the outbreak of World War II, and the assassination of Trotsky. Let us for the moment, just for the moment, accept two decades of expanding and relatively crisis free capitalism as the objective basis for the stagnation of the Fourth in the years after World War II. (Although, as you correctly point out, if the class struggle is viewed as an international phenomena, there was no quiescence in the "non-capitalist" countries or in the colonial world.)

But in any case, and on any basis, it is no longer possible to escape the conclusion that the failure of the Fourth International to grow commensurate with the circumstances of the last decade is rooted not so much in this or that tactical or even theoretical error, but in certain class characteristics-characteristics of the petty-bourgeoisie-which has never learned how to turn theory into practice, and which must be recognized and ruthlessly rooted out of our movement.

#### A Digression - For the Record

This is not to say that theoretical questions are not important - that theoretical errors in the longer run, at least those of a major character, do not have an affect, but this is not the thrust of these comments. Nevertheless, dear comrades, you have correctly criticized the SLL for its failure to delve into the "roots and origins" of Pabloism. Perhaps you have undertaken this task. But in the documents before me, I see no such indication. You point out, correctly, that while Shactman and the rightists in France developed on the outskirts of the Fourth International, Pabloism developed at its heart, and moreover had its origins in 1946. And while you give a good summary of its manifestations, you nowhere touch on the cause of the "political confusion" which existed in 1946.

For the purposes of this discussion, I would point out that one of the characteristics of the petty-bourgeois socialist intellectual is impatience, impatience and its corollary, impressionism. Ideas, "theories" - the jealously guarded private property of the intellectual - move quickly, an instant is all it takes to cover whole historic periods, but history itself and the masses move ever so slowly. (Of course, it is a truism that when the masses do move, the petty-bourgeois intellectual is invariably caught off guard.)

But Trotsky "promised", did he not, that the end of the war would see the Fourth International "leading millions" and Stalinism would be destroyed. Instead, Stalinism expanded from above into Eastern Europe; instead, there was a revolution in China led by a Stalinist Party which based itself on the peasantry; instead, the attempt by workers in the industrialized countries of Western Europe were defeated because of the continued hegemony of the Social-Democratic and above all the Stalinist Parties.

Obviously, we are dealing with questions of political prognoses, of theory, and not just petty-bourgeois impatience - not just a delayed time table. And we must add, parenthetically to be sure, that the SLL concluded that China was a workers' state without ever having had a discussion on it. Here, Comrades of the OCI, is a clue as to why the SLL has found it



difficult to delve too deeply, too thoroughly, into the "roots and origins" of Pabloism.

This discussion must take place at another time. But I have the obligation to state, summarily, where I stand on some questions. I have not changed my view, held since the latter 30's, that Russia underwent a counter-revolution, and ceased being a workers' state in that period. I have never accepted its designation as a new form of exploitative society, namely bureaucratic collectivist. But I am no longer so certain that the simplistic analysis of Russia as state capitalist is adequate. The closest I have come, to date, to a more satisfactory 'definition' is to an analogy, limited, to be sure, to the absolute monarchies which straddled feudalism and capitalism. Progressive as compared to the manorial economy presided over by feudal lords, these regimes had nevertheless to be overthrown in the classic bourgeois social revolution. However, unlike the Stalinist bureaucracy, the absolute monarchies had a historically progressive function which they played for several centuries while the bourgeois revolution was not yet on the agenda of history-while that of the proletariat has been for some time. And in this sense, the analogy is limited.

In any case, I am stating my position in shorthand, as it were-not to convince, nor to open a discussion, but simply in order to make my position, or lack of one, clear. With this proviso, I am in agreement with the comrades of the OCI on the need to rebuild the Fourth International on the basis of the Transitional Program. But let us now return to the problem at hand.

#### Theory and Practice - The 'Party' and the Class

Our socialist intellectuals have learned very well from Lenin that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice. But he, as Marx before him, had more than that to teach - that without revolutionary practice, there can be no revolutionary theory. Lenin learned about soviets from the workers in 1905, and we shall return to the relationship between Lenin and the workers shortly.

Marx, among other things, learned from the Paris Commune. This relationship, the dialectic interpenetration of theory and practice, was integral to Marx. It relates directly to his concept that up to now philosophers, or theoreticians, if you please, have interpreted the world - and the point is to change it. From this approach flows his comment on the Gotha Program - that one real step of the movement is worth a dozen programs. And if the 'party', as the embodiment of theory, at the same time reflects the separation of theory from practice, from the class, then Marx, for most of his life was opposed to a party. The First International was his attempt to unify theory and practice, to unify the class and the party in one organization. Writing to Bolte in 1871, he said that "The International was founded in order to replace the socialist or semi-socialist sects by a real organization of the working class for struggle...the development of socialist sects and that of the real workers' movement always stand in inverse ratio to each other."

In 1869, in a speech to a delegation of German trade unionists, he spelt out his thought somewhat more explicitly:

"If they wish to accomplish their task, trade unions ought never to be attached to a political association or place themselves under its tutelage; to do so would be to deal themselves a mortal blow. Trade unions are the schools of socialism. It is in trade unions that workers educate themselves and become socialists because under their very eyes and every day the struggle with capital is taking place...they (unions) alone are capable of representing a true working-class party and opposing a bulwark to the power of Capital."

Marx, even in his lifetime, could not sustain this position. Insofar as capitalism and the bourgeoisie demonstrated a greater viability than he had expected, that most fundamental of all of the characteristics of capitalism, the division of labor between theory and practice, between the party and the mass organizations of the class, had to come into being.

Even with this retreat, Marx and Engels spent much of their later years fighting to keep the workers dominant within the Party. Aware of the inherent danger, Marx, for example, wrote to Sorge in 1877 that "A rotten spirit is making itself felt in our



"party in Germany, not so much among the masses as among the leaders... A whole gang of half-mature students and super-wise doctors who want to give socialism a 'higher ideal' orientation... We cannot co-operate with people who say that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves and must first be freed from above by philanthropic bourgeois and petty-bourgeois."

#### And Now Lenin

It is not really so strange that most, if not all of our intellectuals, took most wholeheartedly from Lenin precisely that idea which, borrowed from Kautsky and in direct opposition to Marx, he very shortly and very sharply repudiated - in theory and in practice. We refer of course to his polemic "What Is To Be Done" wherein he quotes Kautsky's conception that the 'vehicles of science were not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intellectual'. "Thus socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without, and not something that arose within it spontaneously." Along with this went his position that party members should be a small, carefully selected cadre of professional revolutionary intellectuals. We are not now concerned with the particular circumstances existing in Russia which led Lenin to such a position. The point is that he found his way back to Marx, and to the building of the Bolshevik Party, in very short order.

During the 1905 revolution Lenin said that "At the 3rd Congress I expressed the wish that in the party committees there should be two intellectuals for every eight workers. (Note how far he has already moved from What Is to Be Done). How obsolete is this wish. Now it would be desirable that in the new party organizations, for every intellectual belonging to the Social-Democracy, there should be a few hundred Social-Democratic workers. The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic."

We must at this point note that the clearest indication of Mandel's lack of confidence in the working class, and his petty-bourgeois intellectual concept of the party, is to be found in his article in the December 1970 issue of the International Socialist Review. Here, while claiming that neocapitalism is making ever greater numbers of scientists, engineers, and intellectuals in general available for recruitment to the revolutionary party, he calls for restricting the number of workers to what he calls cadre, in order--- to help guarantee the party against bureaucratism and degeneration.

#### But How Are Workers Recruited?

Here too we must learn from Lenin. And the first thing we must learn is what drives workers, advanced workers, away from the revolutionary movement even in the most favorable objective circumstances.

From the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, when the Menshevik minority effected a de facto split, right through the 4th or Unity Congress of the RSDLP which took place in 1906, that is, encompassing the 1905 revolution itself, Lenin fought for the reunification of the Party.

Let us make no mistake on this. It was already quite clear to Lenin (if there was ever any doubt) that the differences between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks went far beyond questions of organization. In early 1905 he wrote that :

" The differences in principle between Vperyod (bolsheviks) and new Iskra (mensheviks) are essentially the same as those between the old Iskra and Rabocheye Dyelo (Economists) We consider these differences important, but, given the opportunity to fully defend our views, the views of old Iskra, we would not consider these differences of themselves to be a bar to working together in the same party." (Vol 8, Collected Works, p. 131)

And with the actual outbreak of the 1905 revolution, more immediate differences developed: On the central question of the agrarian program; on the question of boycotting the Duma; on the question of support to the Cadets; on the question of the armed uprising itself.



It is, furthermore, of the utmost importance to note that at the 4th, or Unity Congress, the Bolsheviks were in a minority, and some of them wanted to destroy that Congress and split. Lenin insisted, even then, on the absolute need for unity, so long as the minority was guaranteed the right to work for its point of view, in public organs, as well as within the Party. These rights, incidentally, were worked out by the Bolsheviks at the 3rd Congress, which they controlled, and were actually intended to guarantee these rights to the Mensheviks within a unified Party.

Why was unity, even under the conditions of differences on a revolution taking place at that very time so decisive, so central to the future development of the Bolshevik Party?

It was because the workers demanded unity. The masses have a well developed, and deeply motivated reason for their instinct for unity. To put it most simply, they know very well that if workers are not unified in the shops, if they are fighting amongst themselves, then there is no hope for them. They become nothing but helpless victims of an all powerful employer, with his all powerful state. And if a split must come, then they must either fully and completely understand the reasons for it, or they will turn away. And the fact that Lenin understood so deeply, was that the workers did not understand the reason for a split. And for six more years, confident of his program, confident that events would demonstrate why the differences were important, and who was right, Lenin patiently explained to the workers at each turn of events.

"It is no secret to anyone" Lenin wrote in 1905 (C. W. Vol. 10, p. 32) that the vast majority of Social-Democratic workers are exceedingly dissatisfied with the split in the Party and are demanding unity. It is no secret to anyone that the split has caused a certain cooling-off among Social-Democratic workers (or workers ready to become Social-Democrats) (our emph) towards the Social-Democratic Party. The workers have lost almost all hope that the Party 'chiefs' will unite of themselves. The need for unity was formally recognized both by the 3rd Congress of the RSDLP and by the Menshevik Conference held last May. Six months have passed since then, but the cause of unity has made hardly any progress....."

And then, in classic fashion, Lenin goes on to talk about the relation between intellectuals and workers, between theory and practice.

"The relation between the functions of the intellectuals and of the workers in the Social-Democratic Party can probably be expressed with a fair degree of accuracy, by the following general formula: the intelligentsia is good at solving problems 'in principle', good at drawing up plans, good at reasoning about the need for action - while the workers act, and transform drab theory into living reality.

"And I shall not in the slightest degree slip into demagogy, nor in the least belittle the great role played by consciousness in the working-class movement, nor shall I detract from the tremendous importance of Marxist theory and Marxist principles, If I say now: both at the Congress and at the Conference we created the 'drab theory' of Party unity. Comrade workers, help us to transform this drab theory into living reality!... Join with us in settling this practical question of fusion; let this question be the exception (it is an exception that proves the opposite rule) in which we shall have one-tenth theory and nine-tenths practice. Such a wish is surely legitimate, historically necessary, and psychologically comprehensible. We have 'theorized' for so long (sometimes - why not admit it - ? to no use... that it will really not be amiss if we now 'bend the bow' slightly, a little, just a little, 'the other way' and put practice a little more in the forefront. This would certainly be appropriate in regard to the question of unity, about which, owing to the causes of the split, we have used up such an awful lot of paper... Let us, then, unite also to make this revolution!"

#### Trotsky and the Fourth International

When the Fourth International was founded, Trotsky unfortunately, had no workers to whom he could turn, well aware as he was of the social characteristics of the revolutionary intelligentsia. Writing in the *Neue Zeit*, Vol. XXVIII, No2, in 1910 he described "its overall social characteristics; a spirit of sectarianism, an individualism typical of intellectuals, an ideological fetishism."

On the eve of the founding of the Fourth International, the situation was much worse.

"It would be absurd" Trotsky wrote (Writings, 1935-36 pps 26-27) "to deny the presence of sectarian tendencies in our midst. They have been laid bare by an entire series of discussions and splits. Indeed, how could an element of sectarianism have failed to manifest itself in an ideological movement which stands irreconcilably opposed to all the dominant organizations in the working class, and which is subjected to monstrous, absolutely unprecedented persecution all over the world?"

That time has passed. But the social characteristics are still with us. There is no other way to explain our failure in the last ten years.

All groups which stand for the Fourth International will, with a greater or lesser degree of justification, will call the others sectarian, or opportunist, or centrist, or all adjectives combined.

But how many comrades will today remember that in his letter to Pivert (Writings-1935-36, p. 48) Trotsky wrote that "The Fourth International will not suffer in its ranks from mechanical 'monolithism'. On the contrary, one of its most important tasks is to regenerate on a newer, higher historical plane the 'revolutionary democracy of the proletarian vanguard'. The Bolshevik-Leninists consider themselves as a faction of the International which is being built. They are completely ready to work hand in hand with other truly revolutionary factions."

#### What Must Be Done

Comrades - There is still time to build a real Fourth International -one which will attract and hold many young workers, students, minorities. But that time will not last forever. It has been said that sometimes the revolution needs the whip of the counter-revolution. But the counter - revolution today does not use whips. It destroys; it kills; it enslaves. We cannot afford to wait for it much longer.

And what that means is this: That all Trotskyist groups that stand on the Transitional Program and the necessity to rebuild the Fourth International must take a long, hard, bolshevik look at themselves:

They must ask themselves -are our differences with the other groups more fundamental and far reaching than those between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks in the years up to World War I?

They must ask themselves - Is it possible to function, as Trotsky proposed, as a Bolshevik-leninist group, or as the Bolshevik-Leninist group within an International in which there are other groups with whom we may have a certain range of differences?

They must ask themselves - finally- can we explain the fractures and the splits to an advanced worker becoming interested in socialism so that he will understand and not be repelled?

On the answers to these questions depends the future of the Fourth International, and the victory of socialism.

"Comrade Workers;" Lenin spoke in early 1905, "To achieve this great aim, the victory of socialism, we must unite all class-conscious proletarians in a single Russian Social-Democratic Party.... The right to publish literature is now granted to every qualified Party organization.... Full opportunity has been provided for all Social-Democrats to work in co-operation, to join confidently the ranks of a single party, broad and virile enough, strong and welded enough to cut loose from the old traditions... and to wipe out all traces of past friction and petty conflicts."

February 23, 1973

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