

by Lucy St. John

Throughout this series on Progressive Labor we have shown the revisionist role played by PL in the working class movement. While spewing forth leftist propaganda, PL in all areas of struggle, the trade unions, student movement, and Negro struggles adapts to the present level of struggle. They are for bread and butter in the unions, student power on the campuses, and community control in the ghettos.

They contain these struggles on their present level limiting them to anti-political forms of action. They cannot relate these struggles because they refuse to fight for an independent political struggle with a working class program. Their revolutionary propaganda becomes opportunism in practice.

We have pointed out that the basis of PL's revisionism is method. PL's method is one of pragmatism, "what works now" and impressionism. PL takes one or a number of visible aspects of this society which they distort and exaggerate so that their whole perspective becomes fantastically unreal. They are unable to see the whole picture because they approach it in a one-sided way. They see what they want to see rather than what is there. PL moves from one distorted view to another.

logic

This kind of sloppy theoretical analysis has a logic of its own. Its failure to grapple seriously and objectively with the roots of revisionism leaves it at a loss to explain events in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Cuba, China. According to PL today the Soviet Union is capitalist, Eastern Europe is fascist, and Cuba while being socialist did not become so under the leadership of Castro--his movement was "bourgeois-democratic". Socialism came to Cuba according to PL "through another struggle". These are very serious statements with enormous implications for the world working class. But PL in all its voluminous literature cannot give an explanation for these developments. Rather it apologizes with the excuse that this matter is beyond "the range of this article."

origins

PL sees the origins of revisionism separated from international political developments. They see the rise of revisionism in the Soviet Union as being a result of Khrushchev. They do not attempt to deal with the growth of revisionism in the Soviet Union in a historical context. They see revisionism in the CPUSA as a result of Browder and his theory of "American Exceptionalism."

In attacking this theory they actually use the theory of "American Exceptionalism" seeing the growth of revisionism in the CP as a specifically American phenomenon. They are unable to relate it to the historical development of the world Communist movement and refuse to see any connection with Stalin. For PL Stalin was a "great revolutionary". They admit he "erred", was not democratic enough, but cannot relate Stalin's errors to the development of revisionism internationally and historically.

Contrary to what PL would like to see the origins go back further than Browder and Khrushchev. A Marxist analysis in contradiction to PL's impressionism searches out objective reality to grasp the whole, the origins, and history. Trotsky in his book, "Revolution Betrayed" analyzed the growth of revisionism in this context, using the method of dialectical materialism.

materialist

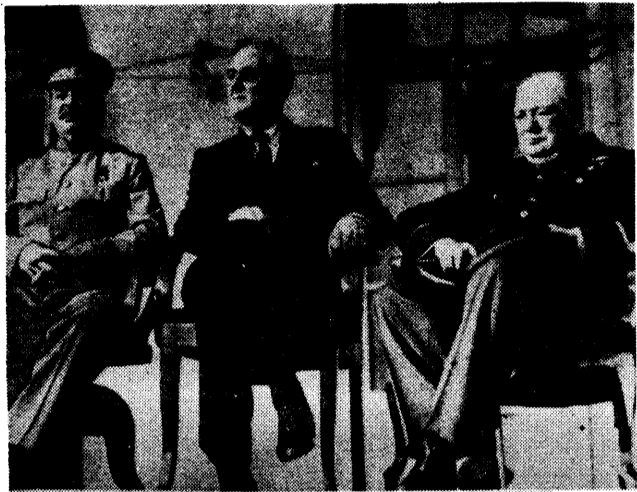
Trotsky sought out the material basis for the growth of revisionism. The material basis for revisionism lay in the objective conditions which the Soviet Union faced following the Russian Revolution, the Soviet economy, the defeat of the European proletariat, the changing composition of the party following the revolution. Stalinism found its base among that section of the party and government which sought to guarantee privileges for themselves through the administration of the economy developing as a result of the socialized property relations.

stalin

It was with this base and within this historical context that Stalin elaborated the theory of socialism in one country. This theory consisted of the justification of the guarantee to the new privileged strata that there would be no upsets, that their privileges would not be sacrificed to the struggle for world revolution. The theory contained the conception that the revolution was completed, that socialism could be built in the Soviet Union regardless of external developments, that peaceful growth could occur as long as there was no intervention.

The theory of socialism in one country required a break with internationalism and workers democracy and a suppression of all those who fought for these

pl and the origins of revisionism



STALIN FOUNTAIN OF REVISIONISM

policies. At the same time the growth of the bureaucracy contained contradictions. It on the one hand usurped the power from the working class in order to guarantee privileges for itself. At the same time its power and privileges were based on the socialized property relations: the social basis for workers rule. While it denied workers rule it was also forced to defend the gains of October, the socialized property forms in order to defend the basis of its power.

collaboration

The direct result internationally of the theory of socialism in one country was a collaborationist policy towards the foreign bourgeoisie with the object of averting intervention under the guise of guaranteeing the construction of socialism in Russia. The task of the parties in the other countries then became to protect the USSR from intervention and not to fight for the conquest of power internationally.

Stalin's line meant that the struggles of the individual CP's became subordinate to the relations between the Soviet bureaucracy and imperialism. The class struggle at home was subordinated to the strategic needs of the Soviet Union. Instead of the class struggle, co-operation with the bourgeoisie. Instead of internationalism, nationalism. This policy is very clearly seen in all countries where there were Stalinist parties.

PL correctly sees that the CPUSA developed an uncritical, non-class attitude to the Roosevelt administration. However what they refuse to admit is that this policy was the policy of the Soviet bureaucracy and the American CP was merely carrying out Stalin's policy of the Popular Front. During the '30's wherever there were Stalinist CPs this policy was carried out. The Stalinist parties all over the world formed sustained political blocs with non-socialist parties, blocs clearly limiting themselves to political goals within the framework of the status quo. The Stalinist parties after 1935 when the Popular Front was announced fought all over the world not for revolution but "democratic unity" and anti-fascist struggle." This policy was far from "American Exceptionalism" as PL would like to have it. The same policy was carried out in France, Spain, Italy, Greece and England and led to the defeats of the working class in these countries.

The origins of "peaceful co-existence" did not in fact come from Khrushchev, but lay in Stalin's policies during the 30s and 40s, conciliation with the imperialists in order to preserve a peaceful situation in the world so as to prevent any trouble for the Soviet bureaucracy. Class collaboration at the expense of the international mobilization of the working class was the position of Stalin and all the Stalinist parties all over the world.

marxist

Progressive Labor is unable to understand revisionism because it cannot approach it in a Marxist way. Instead of approaching the question historically, that is by searching for the origins of revisionism in the development of the Russian Revolution, it sees revisionism in an idealist and subjective way. That is as a set of ideas which a bad guy or guys developed in the Soviet Union. Through what process

these ideas developed is a mystery to PL.

PL is equally unable to understand revisionism in a materialist way. It cannot understand the real social roots of revisionism in the formation of a bureaucratic caste in the Soviet countries. It covers up this inadequacy by slapping unscientific labels on current revisionists which are used as swearwords, as a substitute for serious analysis. Thus the Soviet Union is 'capitalist' and Czechoslovakia 'fascist'. But Marxism is historical materialism--that is it views ideas like revisionism as the product of and serving the social interests of specific social strata and it seeks to understand such strata by studying their contradictory historical evolution.

Unable to understand revisionism through an understanding of its origins and contemporary social roots it of necessity cannot break from revisionism. It shares with the revisionism of the Soviet bureaucracy a common pragmatic method. This method is both the source of its current opportunist politics in the United States and the impediment to its breaking from revisionism through understanding it.

The method of thought of the Soviet bureaucracy is not a unique method exclusive to it because this bureaucracy does not represent some new or independent class force in the world. The Soviet bureaucracy rather represents a degeneration of a worker's revolution--a movement back toward capitalism. It is neither capitalist nor socialist but rather a transitional formation like the trade union bureaucracy--a bourgeois formation which stands on a working class property base. This, like the labor bureaucracy here, it represents bourgeois methods of thought within the working class movement. With such methods it can neither effectively defend the property forms created by the working class nor extend these property forms through revolution elsewhere--which is of course to same thing as the only real defense of the Soviet countries is the extension of the revolution.

The pragmatist cannot understand contradictory phenomena. They can only seek to impose on contradictory reality static formal labels--capitalism, fascism, socialism, etc. So PL wipes out the contradiction between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the workers property forms in the Soviet Union by declaring it to be a capitalist country. Thus we get only one side of reality--the USSR's attempt to hold back revolution and to compromise with the imperialists. Missing is the other side reflected, for instance, in the necessity for the USSR to give real and important material aid to North Vietnam and NLF in their fight against U.S. imperialism--not sufficient aid, and not without strings attached--but aid nonetheless. What capitalist country, we ask, is sending guns and supplies to the Vietnamese?

china

But when it comes to China contradiction is wiped out in the opposite way. The label 'socialist' is placed on China and the contradiction of the Chinese bureaucracy with the workers property forms is wiped out by wiping out the Chinese bureaucracy--not in reality but in the minds of PL members. Thus while PL can understand well enough Mao's mobilization of the Red Guards against Liu it cannot understand how Liu rose so high in the Chinese government to begin with nor can it understand Mao's efforts to leash the unleashed Red Guards, to compromise with center sections of the bureaucracy, and his fear to take any real step towards establishing proletarian democracy in the country--such as recognizing the right of parties who stand on the basis of the workers property form to function, print newspapers and compete politically with the CCP.

While PL can explain Mao's more intransigent stand against the U.S. in Vietnam now, it cannot explain Mao's complicity in the Geneva Accords which allowed imperialism to take over one half of Vietnam and thus lay the basis for the present conflict. The same goes for Mao's support of the Indonesian Communist Party which in turn supported the bourgeois regime of Sukarno leading to its own destruction at the hands of the Indonesian bourgeoisie.

defend

Trotskyists view the world differently. While PL continues to denounce us as 'anti-Soviet' we have no difficulty in defending all the workers states against the imperialists including the USSR and Czechoslovakia. At the same time we fight against the bureaucracies in these countries recognizing them as precisely the social force which undermines the property forms internally and cannot defend the workers states externally.

Here in the United States we start from the class interests of the workers not from particular momentary movements of the class. We fight for a program which can unite the class in action against the capitalist class and through which the workers can go from the defensive to the offensive by fighting politically for a new party of the working class as a whole.