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The Ideological Struggle in the American Left

An editorial article reprinted from
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TO THE READER

BECAUSE OF the wide interest in the continuing debate between the Soviet Union and China on issues and principles involving the peace and welfare, indeed, the future of mankind, and because of the repercussions of this debate among left and progressive forces in American political life, we are reprinting the complete text of *The Ideological Struggle in the American Left*, which appeared originally in the August, 1963 issue of *Political Affairs*. This article presents a basic analysis of the current resurgence of petty-bourgeois radicalism in the U.S.A., which often presents itself under the banner of Marxism and even in defense of Marxism, but which, masking itself behind leftist slogans and demands, actually weakens, confuses, and disrupts the struggle for peace, national liberation, economic security and socialism.

To meet the widening demand for this editorial article, it has been published as a public service in popular pamphlet form.

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The Ideological Struggle in the American Left

At the very heart of scientific socialism lies the Marxian doctrine of the class struggle. Under capitalism, wrote Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*: "Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—bourgeoisie and proletariat."

From this flows the fundamental thesis which runs like a red thread through all of Marxist theory, and which the *Communist Manifesto* expresses in these words: "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product." Indeed, other elements of capitalist society—the various sections of the middle strata—look not to the future but to the past, except insofar as they ally themselves with the working class and identify themselves with its outlook.

In the form of the working class, capitalism produces its own gravediggers. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. The victory of socialism is the victory of the working class. In these and similar words, this fundamental thesis repeatedly appears in Marx's writings. And from this it follows in turn that the essential instrument of the fight for socialism is the Marxist-Leninist working-class political party, based firmly on the concept of the working class as the bearer of the future. This is the very ABC of Marxism—of scientific socialism.

PETTY-BOURGEOIS SOCIALISM

Throughout its existence, the Marxist movement has had to contend with the intrusion of bourgeois ideology into its ranks in the form of Right opportunism and revisionism which seek, among other things, to emasculate the Marxist theory of the class struggle. But it has also had to contend with another ideological

current, appearing both within and outside of its ranks, a current which Marx originally termed "petty-bourgeois socialism."

Its chief characteristics are the following. First, it negates the leading role of the working class and bases itself rather on the peasantry, small business, middle-class professional and intellectual elements, and similar groups. Second, it is marked by ultra-Leftism, revolutionary phrasemongering, romanticism and a penchant for the violent and the melodramatic. And third, it is highly vacillating and unstable, displaying sharp ideological swings with the ebb and flow of the class struggle.

In the course of the past century and a half, this trend, with its utopian, romanticized approach to socialism, has manifested itself repeatedly in a great variety of forms. Marx himself waged an unceasing battle from the very outset against the petty-bourgeois socialism of Sismondi, and later, in the days of the First International, against a related trend—the anarchism of Bakunin. Lenin's first great struggle in the forging of the Bolshevik Party was directed against the Russian Narodniks, who considered the peasants as the revolutionary class and ridiculed the idea that in industrially backward Russia the proletariat could lead the battle for socialism.

In later years, after the October Revolution, Lenin was forced, in his

pamphlet "*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (International Publishers, New York, 1940), to do battle with what he described as "petty-bourgeois revolutionariness, which smacks of, or borrows something from, anarchism, and which in all essentials falls short of the conditions and requirements of a sustained proletarian class struggle." (p. 17.) He goes on to describe it more fully in these words (pp. 17-18):

For Marxists it is well established theoretically—and the experience of all European revolutions and revolutionary movements has fully confirmed it—that the small proprietor, the small master, who under capitalism suffers constant oppression and, very often, an incredibly acute and rapid deterioration in his conditions of life, ending in ruin, easily goes to revolutionary extremes, but is incapable of perseverance, organization, discipline and steadfastness. The petty bourgeois, "driven to frenzy" by the horrors of capitalism, is a social phenomenon which, like anarchism, is characteristic of all capitalist countries. The instability of such revolutionariness, its barrenness, its liability to become swiftly transformed into submission, apathy, fantasy, and even a "frenzied" infatuation with one or another bourgeois "fad"—all this is a matter of common knowledge. But a theoretical, abstract recognition of these truths does not at all free revolutionary parties from old mistakes, which always crop up at unexpected moments, in a somewhat new form, in hitherto unknown vestments or surroundings,

in peculiar—more or less peculiar—circumstances.

A NEW UPSURGE

Today a new resurgence of petty-bourgeois radicalism is taking place in the United States, expressed by a number of groups and individuals who in this instance generally present themselves under the banner of Marxism. This modern manifestation has, to be sure, certain features peculiar to itself, but its essential aspects are those characteristic of the phenomena in general.

In typical fashion, it rejects the leading role of the working class in the fight for socialism in the United States (or even in all advanced capitalist countries). The grounds offered for this contention vary, but the principal argument is that the working class has become corrupted and bourgeoisified in its thinking by the relative affluence provided from the spoils of imperialist exploitation. Hence, the argument goes, this class as a whole is politically backward and is dominated by a labor leadership which is not only backward but downright reactionary in its political outlook. And hence, it is concluded, it is primarily the radical middle-class and intellectual elements that must be relied upon to bear the brunt of the struggle and eventually to bring the "backward" workers up to their level.

This has given rise in recent years

to such developments as the movement, centered in New York, to establish a new political party running candidates on a socialist platform, without the participation of labor—in fact, breaking with the "backward" masses of workers who insisted on looking toward the Democratic Party and its candidates in the elections. The movement proved to be rather short-lived.

The most explicit and theoretically developed exposition of this view, carrying it to its extreme, is that presented by Paul M. Sweezy and Paul A. Baran in two essays on Marxism appearing in the *Monthly Review* of October, 1958. In "Marxism: A Talk to Students," Sweezy writes:

But what are the chances of a change to a more rational society, a more civilized society, a society of genuine human solidarity? Marxism holds that it can never be the result of mere ideas or ideals. It must be the result of human agency, and this means that it can only be brought about by the class or classes under capitalism who bear the full brunt of the irrationality and cruelty of the system. Marx himself thought that this meant the workers in the most advanced capitalist countries.

Alas, he was wrong. The advanced countries managed to harness their productivity to give the workers a tolerable even if degraded life, and they increasingly imposed the heaviest burdens on the peoples of the colonies and the raw-materials-producing back-

ward countries. It was, indeed, at least partly out of the surpluses squeezed from these hapless victims of capitalist imperialism that the workers of the metropoli were provided with the living standards which kept them from recognizing and revolting against the inhuman standards of capitalist civilization.

And so we come to the great paradox of the modern world: capitalism has so poisoned its immediate victims as to paralyze them, and at the same time it has awakened and set into motion the vast masses of the backward countries who now are the ones to bear openly and undisguisedly the burdens of the irrationalities of capitalism—irrationalities which must be counted in terms of world wars, depressions, fascism. (Emphasis added.)

This is echoed by Baran ("Crisis of Marxism?"), who says:

While it was thought earlier that people would be incensed by injustice, inequality, and exploitation but would be prevented temporarily from rising against them by fear of divine or civil opprobrium and punishment, under monopoly capitalism they actually do not understand and feel injustice, inequality, and exploitation *as such*, and do not *want* to struggle against them but treat them as aspects of the natural order of things. . . . (Emphasis in original.)

The conclusion which Baran draws from this is particularly noteworthy. The prospects of socialism in the advanced capitalist countries, he asserts, are poor indeed. But he adds:

It would be parochial and myopic, however, to judge the prospects of socialism in the world solely on the basis of the conditions prevailing in the countries of monopoly capitalism. It was Lenin's genius to have recognized that in the age of monopoly capitalism and imperialism this function of leadership would be taken over by the nations inhabiting the colonial, dependent and underdeveloped countries. Bearing the brunt of the irrationality of the capitalist system, not having been exposed to the same extent as the advanced capitalist countries to the debilitating and demoralizing impact of capitalist "culture" and bourgeois ideology, some of these nations have already revolted and others are revolting against the irrationality of the capitalist order and now march at the head of history's forward movement. Within an historically short time it will be in these countries that the tone of the world's further development will be set, while the countries of monopoly capital will first lag behind and then eventually be swayed by the force of example and by the slow but irresistible process of osmosis.

We shall not attempt at this point to deal fully with the validity of this estimate of the working class in the countries of monopoly capitalism. One may ask in passing, however, how does it square with the strength of the Communist Parties in countries like France and Italy, and with the fact that the great bulk of their workers follow the lead of these parties and not that of the Guy Mollets and the Giuseppe Saragats?

As for the United States, suffice it here to point out that what Sweezy and Baran have done is to take certain temporary features arising from the special conditions created by World War II and transform them into eternal verities. These special conditions, which once gave birth in the minds of the monopolists to dreams of an "American Century," have now come to an end. Increasingly, the economy is beset by stagnation and unemployment. Increasingly, the world position of American capitalism is deteriorating. And with these developments, the "hopelessness" of the American working class is coming to an end. Indications of this are already growing. The momentous struggle of the Negro people for full equality, motivated in large measure by the critical level of joblessness, are a harbinger of things to come. So, too, are the sharpening economic struggles of the working class.

Furthermore, the position expressed by Baran distorts Lenin's views. What Lenin held, in opposition to the theoreticians of the Second International, was that under the conditions of imperialism it is *not necessarily* the most developed capitalist countries which first come to socialism. Rather, according to the Leninist theory, it is those countries which constitute the weakest links in the world chain of imperialisms. These may *or may not* be the less developed countries. It is enough

to recall that a socialist revolution took place in Germany in 1918 and that it was put down only by being drowned in blood with the aid of the Social Democrats. Or that at the close of World War II the initial course of political development in France and Italy did not differ greatly from that in the Eastern European countries, but that the aid of U.S. imperialism was sufficient to enable the ruling class to turn the tide in the former, whereas in the latter the preponderant influence was that of the Soviet Union.

What Baran has done is to pervert Lenin's well-founded thesis into the erroneous one that it is *necessarily* the colonial and dependent countries which assume leadership in the world struggle for socialism—that is, precisely those countries in which the proletariat is comparatively small and the peasantry and other petty-bourgeois elements predominate. Moreover, it should be noted that the revolt of these countries, world-shaking as it is, has as its aim not socialism but national liberation, and for virtually all of them socialism is still a matter of the future.

AN IDEOLOGY OF CAPITULATION

Like its predecessors the present trend is, as we shall see, also marked by super-Leftism and by the reckless hurling about of charges of revisionism and betrayal of the fight for so-

cialism. But what is most important to note at this point is that such theories lead inevitably to a policy of inactivity, of hopelessness, of capitulation. For if the working class is hopelessly paralyzed, and if the efforts to build movements based on middle-class radicals yield minuscule results, what is there to be done but to sit it out and wait for developments elsewhere?

Thus, this ideology ends by playing into the hands of the ruling class, which itself strives to maintain its rule by ceaselessly arguing the uselessness of resistance. The refrain runs: "Maybe things are not as good as they should be, but there is really nothing you can do about it. We are strong, you are weak. Give up. You are wasting your time. Your fellow man will not support you or even appreciate your efforts. The workers are all corrupt and not worth it. The people will not fight." And so on.

To varying degrees, this ideological DDT seeps into the fiber of the people. Some of those poisoned by it quietly give up the struggle and withdraw. Others openly proclaim their surrender and spin theories to justify it. Still others cloak it by mouthing "revolutionary" phrases—phrases which have no relationship to the realities of the actual struggle, which lead no one, and which serve only to spread feelings of pessimism and capitulation in the working-class movement. Their dogmatic

slogans are not intended to lead people in struggle, but are designed rather for the self-satisfaction of a sect which has withdrawn into a shell and is critical of everyone but itself, attributing its difficulties not to its own dogmatism and sectarianism but to the "backwardness" of the masses who do not respond to their abstract slogans. For these are people who have lost contact with the objective reality of the present, who are incapable of assessing the forces involved in the current struggles, and hence have lost confidence in their ability to influence or change the situation.

This defeatism leads in the direction of Trotskyism, which carries to its extreme the cloaking of capitulation and even support of reaction in "revolutionary" phrases. Trotsky was himself a classic example of this outlook. After the people of Russia had won state power in the Great October Revolution and had set out to establish a socialist society, he declared that "to the proletariat, Soviet power is too heavy a burden . . . we have come too early . . . the European proletariat is more ripe for socialism than we are." It was impossible, he maintained, to build socialism in the Soviet Union alone; it would have to wait until the socialist revolution could be won on a world scale. But the basic defeatism he covered up with grandiose, radical-sounding theories of "permanent revolution." And today, alleged-

ly in the name of fighting for socialism, Trotskyism advances the "theory" that in the Soviet Union socialism has suffered a "bureaucratic distortion," and calls on the Soviet people to correct this by nothing less than a revolt against its government. Here, truly, is "revolutionary" phrasemongering in the service of imperialist reaction

ULTRA-LEFTISM TODAY: THE "MONTHLY REVIEW"

In recent months the ultra-Leftist elements have become increasingly vocal, basing themselves more and more frankly on the ideological position of the Communist Party of China, which lends support and encouragement to their own line. In particular, the editors of the *Monthly Review*, Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy, have come forward as open spokesmen for the Chinese position, to which, in their "Review of the Month" in the May, 1963 issue, they give virtually unqualified support. In doing so, they give expression to their own ideological views, which they here carry to their logical conclusion. And, as we shall see, they expose all the more clearly the capitulation which they really espouse in the guise of "defending Leninism."

The editorial abounds in sweeping statements offered without substantiation, of which the following is a particularly glaring example:

Now along come the Chinese with

their overwhelming proof that Khrushchev's ideas and the political line he bases on them are not Leninist at all.... If Khrushchev and his associates could answer the Chinese and make out a plausible case that they and not the Chinese are the true interpreters of Lenin, that would be one thing. . . . But this would obviously be a hopeless undertaking. . . . The result is a good deal of misrepresentation and distortion of the Chinese position.

In short, the Chinese position is incontrovertible. The proof? The editors say so. Hence the opposition can do no better than to engage in "misrepresentation and distortion." But for this no documentation whatever is presented; in fact, nowhere in the editorial is the position of the Soviet or other Communist Parties ever quoted.

Other examples could be cited. Obviously, such unsubstantiated slanders offer no basis for serious debate. Nevertheless, the editors present their position clearly enough on a number of key issues, certain of which we propose to deal with here.

ON PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE AND DISARMAMENT

The Chinese, say Huberman and Sweezy, unquestionably stand for peaceful coexistence. A socialist country, the argument runs, has no need of war. But imperialism breeds war, and the imperialists are therefore against peaceful coexistence. In

proof, they cite the two world wars and the succession of local wars as acts of aggression since World War II. They conclude, with the Chinese, that only after imperialism has been overthrown, and oppression and exploitation abolished, "will it be possible to eliminate all wars and to reach 'a world without war.'" And they add: "To believe otherwise is not Leninism but bourgeois pacifism." Only if imperialism were to change would this conclusion no longer hold. And imperialism is not changing.

On such grounds, they dismiss the fight for disarmament as something unattainable and relegate it to the status of a "propaganda weapon." They add that "the Chinese evidently believe that to rely on disarmament as a means of promoting or insuring peace makes no sense. The threat of war comes not from armaments as such but from imperialism and can be countered only by fighting imperialism. Hence where the Soviet Union's political line centers on the struggle for peace and disarmament, that of the Chinese centers on the struggle against imperialism."

Further on they place as "the main issue in the controversy—whether the struggle for peace or the struggle against imperialism should take priority..." And they state: "Real peace will never be achieved, much less guaranteed, as long as imperialism exists."

All this may sound very "Leninist." But it evades the central point at issue, on which the real difference between ourselves and the editors rests, namely, the profound change that has taken place in the relationship of world forces. On this change, itself the consequence of the momentous victories won in the struggle against imperialism, they say nothing.

We say, however, that the balance has now tipped against the forces of imperialism, that imperialism no longer possesses the power that it had in years past. It is this, and not a belief that the leopard has changed his spots, that underlies our conclusions as to what is possible in this historical epoch.

The change is demonstrated especially by the fact that imperialism is no longer able to contain the national liberation movement of the colonial and dependent countries, that in its aggressive acts the tide has turned increasingly against it, and that a large and growing number of these countries have been able to win their independence in a relatively peaceful manner in recent years. This has been possible because the struggles of the colonial and dependent nations have been taking place within the framework of the emergence of a socialist sector of the world powerful enough to rebuff imperialism.

No serious-minded person anywhere can now doubt that the vic-

tory of the Cuban people was made possible precisely by this new relationship of forces. On this point, Fidel Castro himself states in his Moscow speech of May 23, 1963 ("Soviet-Cuban Solidarity," *Political Affairs*, July, 1963):

How could our revolution, geographically so far away from the socialist camp, withstand and survive under the very nose of the most powerful imperialist country?

The heroism of our people, its exceptional patriotic spirit, its readiness to pay any price for the defense of the revolution, would be insufficient if, at the moment of the Cuban revolution, there were no new objective conditions in Latin America favoring the struggle of the peoples for their liberation.

The Cuban revolution has once again proved incontrovertibly that the balance of forces is no longer in favor of the imperialist camp.

And further:

The might of the socialist camp stays the hand of the lovers of military gambles, guarantees peace and creates the most favorable conditions for the people's struggle against colonial and imperialist oppression. The stronger the unity of the Communist movement the more powerful will this movement be.

To oppose the fight for peace to that against imperialism, as Huberman and Sweezy do, is to create a false division. This may be the main issue for them, but it is clearly not the main issue for the world Marxist

movement. On the contrary, for the latter the two struggles are inter-related—parts of a single whole. On the one hand, the nations now achieving independence and those who have lately won their fight against imperialism are also one of the strongest components of the camp of world peace. On the other hand, the editors' position is nonsense in the face of the Soviet Union's record of anti-imperialist struggle over nearly half a century. There is no greater anti-imperialist force on earth, and there is not a single victory against imperialism that has not had the assistance of the Soviet Union throughout this period.

The alleged conflict exists only in the minds of the editors; indeed, they do not—nor can they—adduce one case in which the fight for peace has in any way been an obstacle to or watered down the giving of maximum support and aid, including missiles, to the forces directly engaged in the anti-imperialist struggle. Rather, all experience shows that the forces which are the main pillars of the fight for world peace are at the same time the strongest props of the fight against imperialism. Nor does the recent experience of the Cuban people, as we shall shortly see, offer any exception to this.

When Huberman and Sweezy assert that "real peace" is impossible while imperialism exists, one may in the context of the rest of the editorial discount the word "real."

What they are actually expressing is their conviction that genuine peaceful coexistence is unattainable, that the struggle for world peace as a realizable goal is useless—that it is mere “bourgeois pacifism.” Hence the fight for disarmament is dismissed as being equally pointless. In fact, both “peaceful coexistence” and “disarmament” are reduced to propaganda slogans, designed only to expose the evils of imperialism.

They arrive at such conclusions, in our opinion, because they deal with these questions in terms of dogmatic repetition of abstract generalities, and as if nothing had changed significantly since Lenin’s day. We insist, however, that it is necessary to base oneself on analysis of the actual world picture of today and the application of Leninist principles to this concrete reality.

It is because such analysis leads us to evaluate so highly the strength of the socialist world, of the national liberation movement, and of the working people of the developed capitalist countries, including the American people here in the citadel of world imperialism, that we reach quite different conclusions. It is this which causes us to assert that it is now possible for the first time—with struggle and sacrifice, to be sure—to defeat the imperialists and their war plans, and in the process to end colonialism and continue the onward march of world socialism.

We say it is possible to stay the hand of imperialism from plunging the world into nuclear war, and further that it can be compelled to hold down its use of the weapons of war to a minimum. More, we believe that as this process develops and as the scales continue to tip against imperialism, there will come a time when, even with capitalism still existing in part of the world, the overwhelming strength of the socialist world will make it possible to eliminate war altogether.

Huberman and Sweezy, however, evidently do not share this confidence in the strength of the forces aligned against imperialism and war, but continue to see imperialism as it was years ago—the unchallengeable ruler of the world. The inevitable practical consequence of such an overestimation of the power of imperialism is to downgrade the struggles for peace and disarmament, to withdraw from them as having unrealistic aims, and to counsel a policy of inaction with regard to these growing mass movements.

We, on the other hand, see these as struggles through which the people will throw their weight against imperialism and war, and in the course of which they will learn the facts of life regarding imperialism, regarding capitalism and socialism. They will be able to learn these facts because we Marxists who believe in these movements will be there, in the thick of the battles,

to indicate these basic lessons.

THE CUBAN CRISIS

The editors' defense of the Chinese attitude in the Cuban crisis of last October is an especially striking example of indulgence in irresponsible Leftist romanticism. They state:

. . . In the first place, they (the Chinese) were strongly opposed to the introduction of missiles into Cuba; in their view, it was an adventurist act which simply played into the hands of the United States imperialists. The real deterrents to a U.S. attack on Cuba must be the will of the Cuban people to fight to the death, the condemnation of world opinion, the wrath of Latin America; and with respect to these deterrents the missiles could not but do more harm than good. In the second place, the Chinese were definitely not opposed to removing the missiles. What they *were* against was removing the missiles without consulting the Cubans, and agreeing to unilateral inspection by the UN—in short, they were against making a deal with imperialism at the expense of another nation's sovereignty . . . it is clear that if Mao had been in Khrushchev's place there would have been no missile crisis to begin with, and the Cuban crisis, if it had occurred, would have taken a quite different form.

Here the Soviet Union is charged with an adventurist action which provoked the crisis. Such a charge can be made at all only if one rejects, as Huberman and Sweezy apparently do, the now accepted fact that U.S. imperialism was preparing

to invade Cuba, and that the Cuban government, aware of this, had asked for and received the aid in question from the Soviet Union. The cause of the crisis, therefore, was the threat of imperialist aggression, not Soviet provocation. To assert otherwise in the face of these facts is sheer slander.

As to why the missiles were placed, here is the Soviet explanation as presented in the recent open letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (*New York Times*, July 16, 1963):

Curses and warnings—even if they are called "serious warnings" and are repeated two and a half hundred times over—have no effect on the imperialists.

Proceeding from the need for defending the Cuban Revolution, the Soviet Government and the Government of Cuba reached agreement on the delivery of missiles to Cuba, because this was the only effective way of preventing aggression on the part of American imperialism.

The delivery of the missiles to Cuba signified that an attack on her would meet resolute rebuff, with the employment of rocket weapons against the organizers of the aggression. Such a resolute step on the part of the Soviet Union and Cuba was a shock to the American imperialists, who felt for the first time in their history that in case they undertook an armed invasion on Cuba, a shattering retaliatory blow would be dealt on their own territory.

Far from engaging in adventurism and capitulation to imperialism,

therefore, the Soviet Union and Cuba took courageous action—the only kind of action which imperialism understands. And far from “making a deal with imperialism at the expense of another nation’s sovereignty,” the Soviet Union came to the aid of the Cuban people at great risk to itself. This is acknowledged by Castro in the Moscow speech cited above in these words:

All honor to a country which, to defend a small country many thousands of miles away put on the scales of thermonuclear war the well-being it achieved in 45 years of creative labor and at the cost of tremendous sacrifices! The Soviet country, which in the course of the Great Patriotic War against fascism lost more lives defending its right to exist than there are people in Cuba, did not hesitate to take the risk of involving itself in a difficult war to defend our small country. History has never known such solidarity. This is true internationalism! This is communism!

In the face of all this, to infer that the Soviet action was provocative is simply to twist the facts. Furthermore, to assert that “if Mao had been in Khrushchev’s place there would have been no missile crisis to begin with” is to infer that Mao would not have come to the aid of Cuba, and thus to slander the Chinese as well as the Soviet and Cuban leaders. In this connection, it is false to assert that the Chinese were strongly opposed to the placing

of missiles in Cuba. They never made such a claim. What they *did* say was merely that they were not asked and therefore did not suggest putting them there.

The fact is that the Soviet action did save Cuba from imminent invasion and has left the Cuban people free to continue building socialism, at least for the present. Apparently Huberman and Sweezy would have preferred to leave the Cuban people “to fight to the death,” which may have its romantic aspects but is hardly a way to preserve Cuban socialism. Rather, is not *this* capitulation to imperialism? And do not the editors belie their loudly proclaimed anti-imperialism when they blatantly point an accusing finger at the socialist forces and overlook the real culprit—U.S. imperialism?

ON REVISIONISM

Having embarked on their crusade to save Marxism-Leninism from the revisionists, Huberman and Sweezy then proceed to discard Lenin’s theory of revisionism and to substitute one of their own making—one which better fits their own preconceived notions on the working class.

The source of revisionism is not, as Lenin maintained, an aristocracy of labor created by bribing part of the working class in the imperialist countries with the spoils of imperialist exploitation; rather, it is the *entire* working class that is thus

bribed and corrupted. Hence the policies of the Communist parties in these countries never worked, because "the Social Democrats and not the Communists expressed what the workers themselves felt to be their real interests." The editors continue:

The workers, in other words, were not revolutionaries at heart, and no amount of exhortation by the Communists could turn them into revolutionaries. Gradually, the Communist parties, though continuing to use revolutionary phraseology, adjusted themselves to this fact, becoming in fact reformist parties much like the Social Democrats. What is happening now, with Togliatti and the Italian CP in the lead, is simply that the Communist parties of the advanced capitalist countries are taking the last step along this road by openly embracing a reformist ideology.

With this, the ideas originally expounded by Sweezy and Baran are extended to their ultimate limit: the Communist parties of the advanced capitalist countries can attract the workers only by becoming reformist. But for this fatalistic theory of imperialist omnipotence no proof is offered. There is no serious analysis of actual working-class struggles, of their relationship to the fight for socialism, or of the role of the Communist parties in them. There is simply the bald assertion, presumably on the grounds that the workers do not take to the streets to shout

"revolution." Nor do the editors trouble to explain the bitter hostility of Social Democracy everywhere to the Communist parties as well as to the Soviet Union.

But they go further. In their eyes, the CPSU is the most revisionist of all. "After all," they write, "the fountainhead of 'modern revisionism' is not Togliatti, nor is it Tito, even if the Chinese often accord the latter pride of place; it is Khrushchev and his fellow-leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." But here, they argue, Lenin's theory of the intrusion of bourgeois ideology among the workers through a labor aristocracy becomes irrelevant.

And so they concoct their own explanation: "The most plausible answer seems to be that the Soviet people are no more revolutionary than the workers of the advanced capitalist countries, though for different reasons. It is not that they have shared as junior partners in the exploitation of a dependent empire, but rather that they have already made their revolution.... Marxism-Leninism is in its essence, as the Chinese insist, a revolutionary doctrine addressed to the oppressed and exploited of the world. How can it be expected to appeal to people who are not oppressed or exploited and who have no need of a revolution?"

With this, they reach the very height of absurdity: revisionism is caused by the successful building of

socialism, and people who have achieved this are incapable of being Marxist-Leninists! In pronouncing this arrogant judgment from the comfort of their editorial offices, they not only ignore the enormous sacrifices already made by the Soviet people and their readiness to sacrifice further to preserve their gains, but more important still, they ignore the fact that the Soviet Union is now embarked on the most revolutionary transformation of society of all time—the transition to communism. And this, if you please, through the application of the very Marxism-Leninism they are supposed to have abandoned.

But having written off with one sweep of the typewriter, both the working class of the advanced capitalist countries and the Soviet people, and having revised Marx and Lenin to make the peoples of the less developed countries the only real revolutionary force, our theoreticians find themselves faced with a Hobson's choice. The Communist parties in the advanced capitalist countries "either have to adopt policies which are acceptable to their own workers or else go into the political wilderness, perhaps for a long time. It can be argued, and we think correctly, that it is better to take the latter course, to begin now to prepare for the day when imperialism in decline once again creates the conditions for vigorous revolutionary movements in even the richest

capitalist countries."

If the Communist parties in question reject this ultimatum, the sentence is prepared. They are condemned as "revisionists and reformists."

Once again, the ideology of capitulation is brought to its logical conclusion. Withdraw from the struggle. Run for the wilderness. Stay away from the workers lest you be contaminated. Forget these "junior partners of exploitation." Forget their struggles, their strikes, their organizing drives. Forget the five million of them who are unemployed and their growing displacement by automation. Retire and wait for the day "when imperialism is in decline once again." Such is their defeatist advice.

But imperialism already is in decline and has been declining for some time. The rise of the socialist world and the newly independent countries takes place precisely because imperialism is being pushed out of the picture. This is the kernel of any political assessment of this period.

The idea that a working-class party can go to the "wilderness" and wait for the opportune moment betrays a lack of Marxian understanding of the processes of the class struggle and of how the working class moves from the struggle for reforms toward the socialist solution of its problems. Workers do not arrive at socialist convictions through abstract

arguments about the virtues of socialism, no matter how brilliant. On the contrary, such arguments make sense only when they are engaged in the struggle for reforms. This struggle also provides another indispensable prerequisite of a successful socialist revolution, namely confidence in organization—in their ability to organize and lead in struggle not only the working class but the people as a whole.

The essential medium for the development of such confidence is the working-class Marxist-Leninist political party. But Huberman and Sweezy have argued for years that there is no need of such a party. They have even attempted to twist the recent history of Cuba to downgrade the role of the working class and to sustain this thesis. The concept of the Marxist-Leninist party is the very essence of Leninism, however, and its negation is the very essence of revisionism.

These editors are not an active part of any organized movement or struggle. They confine themselves to writing, lecturing and publishing. They do not know the American working class, and apparently feel little responsibility toward it, for their magazine deals only infrequently with it and its struggles. They could well profit from some contamination by it.

Their isolation from active struggle and the working class has brought them to a position, if pur-

sued, that leads in the direction of open anti-Sovietism and which, regardless of their intent, can only give comfort to the forces of reaction in our country who seek the destruction of both the Soviet Union and the American Communist Party.

THE ULTRA-LEFTISM OF GENOVESE

We wish to touch also on one other recent Leftist attack, contained in a review of Herbert Aptheker's book, *American Foreign Policy and the Cold War*, by Eugene D. Genovese ("Dr. Herbert Aptheker's Retreat from Marxism," *Science and Society*, Spring, 1963). Like the editors of the *Monthly Review*, Genovese also expresses a pessimism and negativism cloaked in Leftist language.

Consider, for example, his approach to the peace movement:

... one wonders how Aptheker sees a successful peace movement emerging without a sound critical estimate of the nature of imperialism. Only a well-developed socialist party could provide such an estimate and offer the necessary ideological guidance to a broad anti-war movement. If Aptheker thinks that a successful peace movement can be built without an understanding of the nature of imperialism and the sources of the war danger or if he believes that it can acquire that understanding spontaneously, he ought to say so and ought to explain how this view is compatible with the Leninism he professes.

But this is standing the question on its head. Genovese places "a sound critical estimate of the nature of imperialism" as the condition for building the peace movement, whereas in actuality the relationship is the reverse. How can a movement against imperialism itself be brought into existence without first building movements against those particular evils of imperialism—wars, exploitation, enslavement of nations—which people already recognize? To move people against imperialism means in the first place to move them against its concrete manifestations. It is only when they are thus in motion that it becomes possible effectively to point out to them the source of these manifestations.

Nowhere have people moved into struggle under the abstract slogan of anti-imperialism. The peace movement will learn about the source of the war danger, first, because the process of struggle will bring them closer to the root cause, and second, because we Marxists will be in these struggles with them and in a position to point out the lessons of their experiences.

How does Genovese propose to accomplish the task? By rejecting the peace movement as it exists because it does not have on its banners the slogan of anti-imperialism? By trying to set up a sectarian peace organization which does accept such a slogan and excludes the broad forces who are for peace but do not

yet fully understand the source of the war danger? Or by armchair discussions of the backwardness of existing peace organizations? Clearly, such an approach leads nowhere except to removing oneself from the fight for peace.

Equally revealing are Genovese's remarks on the effects of nuclear war:

Does Aptheker mean that if several hundred million people were to be killed, one of the two social systems would not emerge victorious? If so, he is talking nonsense, for even the destruction of the United States, the Soviet Union, Western Europe, and much of China would not preclude the victory of the socialist forces across Latin America, Southern Asia, and Africa. In Aptheker's terms of several hundred million deaths even the victory of the United States or the Soviet Union would not be impossible: the condition of either country in the event of the devastation of half its population, industry, and territory cannot be predicted with certainty. If Aptheker does not mean that several hundred million deaths would preclude the survival of one or the other social system, there is nothing left of his position.

Such is the outlook on which, apparently, he wants the working class and the Marxist movement to base their struggles. The mere contemplation of the frightful horrors he mentions should drive any sane person to do everything humanly possible to prevent their occurrence.

But Genovese evidently does not look at it in that way, and considers it more important to argue the building of socialism by straggling remnants of humanity crawling out of a nuclear inferno. We do not accept such a defeatist and deathlike outlook. Rather, we insist on working to build a movement for peace based on an outlook of victory and life—the kind of peace movement which Genovese rejects.

Genovese completely misinterprets the policy of peaceful coexistence. He writes: "Aptheker seems to assume that 'sober circles' within the bourgeoisie can be prevailed upon to be rational, to recognize what war would mean, and to choose another way." This is a gross distortion both of what Aptheker says and of our position generally.* For what we Marxists really rely on is the growing strength of the movements of the people, which Genovese seems incapable of seeing.

This is glaringly evident in his treatment of the Cuban crisis. He states: "During the October 1962 crisis over the Cuban missile bases, President Kennedy left no doubt that he would gravely escalate the crisis if he did not get his way." (Our emphasis.) Yet, writing seven months after the event, he does not even stop to ponder the simple, obvious questions this statement poses. *Did Kennedy have his way? Was*

Cuba destroyed or invaded? Did U.S. imperialism succeed in its aims? Obviously it did not. Equally obviously, the next question for any serious student of history is: *why not?*

The reasons for this setback of U.S. imperialism we have already indicated above. They include a balance of world forces unfavorable to it, the role of the Soviet Union (which Genovese so easily concedes to total destruction in a nuclear war), the heroism of the people and the government of Cuba, and the support of the other peoples of Latin America. And they include the role of that same peace movement in this country that Genovese decries because it does not carry "Down With Imperialism" on its banners, but whose actions were more telling against imperialism than all the verbiage of Leftist phrasemongers.

There is still another reason. Yes, some circles in the Kennedy Administration *were* sober enough to recognize the realities of the situation, and so were persuaded to yield to the pressures and to make concessions.

Genovese also asserts: "When Kennedy took the path of direct confrontation over Cuba, he removed all doubt of the general direction of his policy, although the specific features, which could be of decisive importance for the fate of mankind, are still not clear." May we ask

* See Aptheker's own reply: "Fanaticism and Peace," *Political Affairs*, July, 1963.

what these "specific features" are? And may we suggest that if he were to discuss them he would find himself dealing with the real questions at issue—with classes and class relations as they actually are today rather than with highflown abstractions?

In relation to Cuba, he further states: "If nuclear threats are made—as they now have been and surely will be again—and if they produce retreats by the other side, what then are the prospects and the content of coexistence?" But this is again a distortion of the truth. There have been no retreats by the forces of socialism which would warrant such a question. To put the withdrawal of missiles from Cuba into this category is to make a defeat out of what was actually a victory—a victory for the policy of peaceful coexistence.

To be sure, in the course of the struggle there will be concessions and adjustments on both sides. But it is only world imperialism that has been retreating and will be compelled to retreat further and further until it is finally driven from the world scene. And we envision the ultimate occurrence of this *without* the destruction of whole nations and societies in a nuclear holocaust.

Genovese's position, like that of Huberman and Sweezy, leads only

to the "wilderness"—to sectarian isolation from the crucial battles of today which are shaping the future. And no amount of invective or "revolutionary" posturing can alter or conceal this.

A WORD OF CONCLUSION

At this point we return to the warning by Lenin, quoted above, that "a theoretical, abstract recognition of these truths (concerning petty-bourgeois revolutionariness and "Left"-sectarianism) does not at all free revolutionary parties from old mistakes, which always crop up at unexpected moments, in a somewhat new form, in hitherto unknown vestments or surroundings, in peculiar—more or less peculiar—circumstances."

We need to be clear on the precise character of this ideological trend, not only in general, but as it occurs today. We need to be alert to confusion on these questions in our own ranks, and to the dampening of initiative and enthusiasm which it engenders. We need to combat tendencies to yield to the pressures of Leftist attacks. And we must strive, while profiting from the experiences of the working class in other countries, always to gear our policies and tactics to the American scene, to the character and level of the struggle as it develops here.

