

Price 5p. (for the WF  
monthly Fund)

WORKERS' FIGHT

INTERNAL BULLETIN.

Special Supplement -  
notes from the Oxford 'Work in Progress' school  
December 1973.

First instalment:

THE RCP AND BRITISH TROTSKYISM AFTER THE WAR

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THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

Bas Hardy.

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## THE RCP AND BRITISH TROTSKYISM AFTER THE WAR.

Cynthia Baldry.

Key dates: During the 1920s (particularly in 1925 and 1929) there were protests in the CP against the anti-Trotskyist campaign. In 1932 the Balham group was expelled from the CP and formed the first independent Trotskyist organisation. In 1938 various small groups fused to form the RSL, the WIL remaining separate. In 1944 the RSL and the WIL fused to form the RCP with about 500 members. In 1947 there was a new split and Healy's group entered the Labour Party. In 1949 the remnant of the RCP left outside the LP simply collapsed.

The Trotskyist movement has had a difficult situation - it has been only an 'ideological' current - particularly in Britain because of weakness of revolutionary tradition and anti-theoretical and chauvinist tendencies. British Trotskyism has lacked cadres and consequently relied more on the international movement.

In the '30s the Trotskyist movement was very tiny. Nearly all the recruits were from the CP and in London. The division between the various Trotskyist groups was on entry tactics - into the ILP or into the LP, etc. The international movement favoured entry in the ILP. But none of the groups built a base round their entry work, and in the mid-/late-'30s Trotskyism stagnated.

1938: fusion into the RSL prompted by a visit by J P Cannon. The WIL said that the fusion was not based on any analysis of past differences, and stayed outside the fusion even though condemned as a 'national deviation' by the FI. The RSL was certainly not more than 100 members - the WIL only a dozen or so.

The RSL had a totally quietist approach to entry work in the LP and to the question of the war. It declined into a number of fragments. Meanwhile the WIL recruited on the basis of its clear line in support of strikes during the war. In 1944 several Trotskyists were imprisoned on grounds of involvement with an apprentices' strike in Barrow against conscription into the mines. Massive support from the Labour Movement freed the Trotskyists.

The RCP majority (ex-WIL, as was, however, Healy) had a consistent position before and after the war on entry - i.e. against it. On the question of perspectives they had varying views. During the war they expected a revolutionary upheaval at the end of it - and projected a direct, automatic relation between economic crisis, decline of reformism, and growth of the WIL. But at the end of the war reformism showed itself still strong. By 1946 the RCP majority (unlike the FI majority) saw forthcoming boom and recovery. They were still, however, opposed to entry in the LP.

At the 1946 FI International Conference, the majority, anticipating no economic recovery, projected demands for the LP to push the struggle forward to dual power forms and looked to a split in the LP. The RCP minority faction led by Healy backed the FI line and had the perspective of joining the LP because there would be not enough time to build an independent party.\* There was a sharp faction fight - the SWP backed Healy, Morrow supported the majority.

The FI resolved the faction fight in a bureaucratic manner by allowing Healy to enter the LP and giving him an official franchise. Especially after the 1947 'left turn' of the CP, the RCP majority found itself 'out in the cold'. By 1949 the RCP was so demoralised that one-third joined Healy in the LP and two-thirds including such former leading figures as Haston and Harber just dropped out.

Cliff claims that the reason for this 1949 collapse of the RCP was that it did not accept the state-capitalist theory. The RCP leadership, he says, accepted his ideas in 1947 and then suddenly rejected them in March 1948 when they (unlike the FI majority) hailed the Prague coup as bringing in a deformed workers state in Czechoslovakia. He also claims the subsequent 1950 split in the Trotskyist group inside the LP was based on the issue of state capitalism. None of this is true. The debate on the class nature of the USSR took place only within a small leading group of the RCP - the majority of the rank and file were primarily interested in the immediate domestic class struggle and most affected by the RCP's relation to that.

The RCP majority was generally more accurate than the FI on economic perspectives, and also in the late '40s on the class nature of Eastern Europe.

RCP/2.

The RCP took the "deformed workers state" position in 1948/ 49 (by the FI not until 1951). Thus it was less prone to opportunist tailing of Tito at the time of the Tito-Stalin break.

Discussion.

BR - Both tendencies in the RCP saw a very close mechanistic connection between entry tactics and economic perspectives. Why was there this error in method ?

AH - Their approach seems to have been similar to the SLL today. The SLL says both "Labour will betray" and "Labour can't betray" - contradiction resolved in a scenario of a split between those who betray and join the Tories and those who don't and join the SLL.

CB - With Healy's position, some of his motives may have been purely factional - to be different from the majority.

AH - What is the importance of the "South African connection" ? (Both Haston and Grant - prominent majority leaders - were from South Africa). Is it true that the Healy tendency represented the primitive 'native' section of British Trotskyism ?

CB - Didn't know.

MT - The Haston/Grant tendency was part of an international current (cf. Craipeau/Demaziere in French section, Morrow in SWP). The whole FI tended to crude and mechanistic methodology (loss of culture and cadres). With cold hindsight it is easy to say that the H/G tendency was superior to the FI majority on stabilisation and the deformed workers' states.

But in fact the H/G tendency in calmly predicting stabilisation was predicting defeat in advance. As we can see from their later record (1949 collapse of RCP, today's RSL, complete political abdication and disappearance of Craipeau tendency after 1947 split in French section) this current was politically fatalist and theoretically mechanistic. The majority was not at all correct, but it is fundamentally justified historically as against the H/G tendency.

Key issues for further study - political characterisation of H/G tendency; RCP's approach to the LP and particularly to Bevanism (which was the model of a 'left centrist current' for the 'deep entry' perspective in 1952).

AH - What was the war policy of the RCP ? Did it have nationalistic tinges ?

CB - Very likely it did. The June 1941 WIL programme of demands on the LP was: arming of workers; election of officers; training of workers as officers; expropriation of major industries; freedom for India and the colonies; workers control of production; a socialist appeal to the workers of Germany.

AH - Was the RSL, even though the FI section, opposed to the FI position ?

MT - Yes, but it's unlikely that they saw themselves as such.

AH - What criteria were used by Grant to determine his position on E. Europe ?

CB - The RCP majority estimated the strength of the bureaucracy more highly than did the FI.

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(\* I doubt that this account is correct. At least, the June 1946 resolution of the IEC advocating entry ('Quatrieme Internationale' Aug/Sep 1946) doesn't argue that way. Its line of argument is simply this: "In contrast with the process of radicalisation on the Continent, which has been expressed essentially in a big growth in the influence and power of the stalinist parties, this process in England has taken the form of an overwhelming mass turn towards the Labour Party, based on the trade unions.... This should entail, consequently, an orientation by the English Trotskyists towards the Labour Party as the principal field of political work, in order to influence the process now underway..."  
MT).

## THE CUBAN REVOLUTION & REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY IN LATIN AMERICA.

Bas Hardy.

An important factor influencing the Cuban revolution was the wars of liberation against Spain. Cuba, being geographically separate from the rest of Latin America, began its liberation wars 50 years after liberation was completed on the mainland.

Because of the lateness of this liberation, the lack of external support, and the added economic and psychological dependence of Spain on the colony, it meant that the liberation wars were longer and more violent than elsewhere. After the three years of fighting in the second liberation war a tenth of the population were dead.

The Rebel Army in both wars (1868-78 and 1895-98) began in Oriente. This was an area of small farmers, in which slavery was almost totally absent. Although the Rebels had support in the towns, these were often also the centres of the reactionaries.

Cuba's economic importance began to decline with the abolition of slavery. After several economic crises, Cuba's major industry, sugar, was dominated by US capital, since only large concentrations of capital were able to hold out in times of hardship.

By 1958 total US investment in Cuba was estimated at \$1200 million. This represented roughly half of total US investment in Latin America. Cuba, unlike elsewhere in Latin America, did not have a situation where rich businessmen made themselves into landowners. The trend was rather for landowners to become rich businessmen. This was done in association with US capital and any native bourgeoisie to speak of became swallowed up by the US concerns. Cuba, by 1958, became an appendage of Florida in much the same way as Puerto Rico is today. The people were Cubans, whereas more and more the rich became synonymous with the Yanqui.

The tradition of the national struggle is also connected with a hostility towards the US which increased over time and was first articulated by Marti.

After three years of savage warfare against Spain in 1895-98, resulting in a downturn in the potential of the Rebel Army, the US intervened and governed directly for a number of years. The 1902 constitution has added to it the Platt amendment which virtually gives the US the right to intervene in the affairs of the country any time it wishes.

Because of the lack of a powerful native ruling class, the fortunes of Cubans were made through the administration. Out of Cuba's eight presidents not one was honest. They acquired immense fortunes, mainly through the public works department. Corruption went from top downwards to the lowest officials. Unlike mainland Latin America, political parties were not based on two factions of the oligarchy (cf. the traditional Latin American split between Liberals based on city merchants and industrialists and Conservatives based on landowners) - because the oligarchy in that sense was non-existent. Elections merely decided which bunch of crooks were able to loot the treasury.

The rule of Machado in the late '20s brought an end to the Liberal and Conservative parties. In response to the growing militancy of the working class and the anti-US position of the students, Machado first put off elections and then entrenched himself as dictator. He took over all parties in Cuba together with their HQs and machinery. Machado's rule saw the revival of mass violence together with the increased use of terrorism on the part of those members of the middle class who wanted the US to annex Cuba outright and end the Mafia-style government and social instability. Machado had to face the ABC - an upper middle class organisation deriving its membership from the Havana Yacht Club and committed to a policy of forcing the US to intervene by use of a terror campaign against the government; the students, who followed a policy of anti-imperialism, basing themselves on Marti, and regarding the older generation as having sold out the struggle for the benefit of becoming 'politicos'; and the working class. The growth of trade unions in the '20s combined with economic difficulties led to increasing confrontations with the government. Though the CP grew in this period, it was still based around immigrant workers and some students. It had no influence outside the towns on strikes such as those of the sugar workers. It was also discredited by its moves to accommodation with Machado out of fear of US annexation.

## Cuba/2.

Machado's power base was the army and also his own terrorist organisation (similar to the Tonton Macoute in Haiti). Nevertheless, there was sympathy within the officer corps for the ABC, and that led Machado on some occasions to appeal over their heads to the sergeants.

Eventually, with a massive strike wave throughout the island combined with the terrorism, the US thought it advisable for Machado to resign. In his place they installed Cespedes, who formed what amounted to a provisional government.

But with strikes, demands for vengeance against Machado's terror squads, and hostility to the Platt amendment, the government was powerless. It rested on absolutely nothing.

Only two institutions in the country had survived Machado - the students and the army. The students, who acted as a kind of Constituent Assembly, brought professor Grau San Martin to the Presidency on a programme of opposition to the Platt amendment. (1933). Within the army a revolt of sergeants had occurred. The old officers were booted out, the sergeants became officers, and made Batista their commander-in-chief. The breaking of the old officer corps led to a strengthening of Batista's position vis-a-vis Grau. He had earned the support of the Americans, denied to Grau, by his ability to end the nationwide strikes and the fact that Batista controlled a national institution which could act in an administrative capacity rather than relying solely on Grau's purged but totally ineffective administration.

Batista scotched the revolution, but given the absence of any effective force or programme other than his, another outcome could not have been likely. In his early days Batista, like Peron, allowed his social base to be expanded by permitting the legal growth of trade unionism, although, unlike Peron, he never lost his following in the Army, having once broken the old officer corps.

In 1940, true to promises, Batista held the first honest elections in Cuban history since 1905. In 1944 he stood down and Grau returned. His own party, the Autenticos, was composed at the top of aging students and professors from the time of 1933. Although it stood for "Cuba for the Cubans" and against Batista's mild corruption (he had embezzled only \$20 million, a modest sum), Grau's rule was less nationalistic and CP activity in the unions was challenged by the government (cold war). Grau was charged with misappropriating \$174 mil.

A split occurred in the Autenticos under the leadership of Chibas on the question of corruption. Its major following was in the youth and women's section, and the split was biggest in Oriente. The Orthodoxos was like the 26th July Movement a one-man organisation. Its leader confined himself to denunciatory speeches on radio exposing corruption and also duelling with the corrupt ministers concerned. On his death Chibas had effectively discredited those political institutions which remained. His death also marked the decline and split-up of the Ortodoxos.

The Ortodoxos considered themselves the true heirs of Marti. They opposed the CP because it had accommodated itself too often in the past with the US. Chibas said he opposed US economic imperialism and the political imperialism of Moscow, Rome, and Washington.

A group coming out of the Ortodoxos was to become the 26th July Movement. Castro had at first planned to use constitutional means to remove Batista, in an attempt to provide a premise for justifying a forcible removal. A major demand was a return to the 1940 constitution.

With the obvious failure of constitutional action, Castro embarked on the attack on the Moncada barracks (1953). The aim was to take the barracks, situated in Oriente, and then declare a general rising. The failure of the attack and the savagery of the repression elevated Castro to national prominence. He was the only credible figure opposed to Batista, the only figure whose past record would not be held against him because he didn't have one.

Castro pursued a different tactic in 1956 with the landing in the Sierra Maestra. The exercise was based on the example of Gomez and Marti and justified in their terms. The idea was to create a base in Oriente from which to spread the liberation war.

In Oriente the sugar estates were larger than elsewhere, and the US presence heavily felt. The province was the last to fall with the expansion of the sugar industry. The situation was of a state of war existing in the region

between the precaristas, or squatters, and the sugar companies. The army, when drafted into the war against Castro, was employed with cash inducements to wage war on the precaristas instead. Castro's army of course became an ally with and later recruited from this stratum.

The programme of the 26th July Movement was "bourgeois democratic", concerning itself in the main with land and constitutional liberties. It also had vague ideas about coexistence between Capital and Labour. In its major aspects it differed little from the CP's programme, or perhaps it was a bit more radical. The major difference in those days concerned the attitude to armed struggle. The CP rejected this outright, counterposing to it elections, strikes, popular demonstrations, etc.

The July 26th was not the only oppositional grouping. Also important was the *Directionario Revolucionaria*, a tendency based on the university. This was composed of Catholics, and its main aim was to unite opposition to Batista. It led an abortive attack on the Palace in 1957. Also in the towns was the Civic Resistance movement. This acted as a front for July 26th by raising money, and also carrying out military activities. The role of the Civic Resistance in tying troops to the city was of great importance to the Rebel Army.

As with Machado, Batista's power now relied solely on the army, inside Cuba. But the process of disintegration present at the time of Machado was brought to its final point under Batista. At least two abortive attempts at a coup had been made independent of July 26 both organisationally and politically.

The lack of a base in society with the exception of the army meant that the army, identified as synonymous with the regime, was loathed by the entire population. Together with military defeat from a small band of guerrillas, as well as frictions between sectors of the army, this meant that by the end of 1958 the army couldn't care what happened to the regime. Bribes rather than fighting could ensure the journey of the Rebel Army to Havana.

Unlike 1933, the army as the sole native institution capable of maintaining the existing property relations was destroyed. The only significant organised political grouping was the CP. Past worries had been about whether Castro would go the same way as other fighters turned "politicos". The development of political theory by those closely associated with the Cuban revolution tried to reconcile this with past experiences.

Castro honestly admitted later that his ideas were "petty bourgeois" before the seizure of power. Debray mystifies this, saying that even at the time of Moncada the movement was "the party in embryo". While we are not dealing with the details of the transformation of Castro's political outlook, it is obvious that the objects of the 26 July were very hazily defined, and none of the members had anything but an intuitive understanding of the eventual outcome.

It was not the case that the guerrillas deliberately put out a bourgeois democratic programme to fool the middle class into supporting them. Revolutionaries should have had a different attitude to that of the CP (condemnation of the July 26 as adventurists). They should have seen the 26 July as a petty bourgeois organisation likely to split once governmental power had been seized and the course of the Revolution had to be defined.

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The technicalities of the foco theory are: (1) the phase of the establishment of the foco. This concerns itself with the survival of the guerrilla group, establishing contact with the peasantry, and securing an adequate supply system. (2) the building of a liberated zone in which a land reform is carried out, and a Rebel administration and a radio set up. This can produce other focos subordinate to the mother foco before the next stage; (3) war of movement - this is the stage in which the Rebel army takes on the government in set-piece battles, advances from the countryside to the town, etc.

The prerequisite for the success in the countryside is a guerrilla front organisation in the towns, whose major role is one of fund raising. Debray does not advise it to take on the forces of repression.

The foco is set up by workers and students. The journey to the hills is supposed to "proletarianise" all concerned. The town "corrupts" the revolutionary since it forces him to compromise with capitalism...!

## Cuba/4.

Critique of the foco theory. (1) Guerrilla warfare can take place only in a dictatorship situation. In non-dictatorship situations, or even situations of semi-dictatorship, the foquista theories do not say what should be done. In practice (including Debray's own practice) this tends to be support for Popular Fronts.

(2) The town organisation has relied since the Cuban revolution on the CP, which, while in the early '60s they supported the guerrillas, left them in the lurch later on. In the majority of cases, this meant that the guerrillas lacked a national political organisation.

(3) Although Debray attacks the traditional policies of the CPs there is no analysis of why they ruled out armed activity and why they betrayed the guerrillas, etc.

(4) Debray admitted early on that focos would be subordinate in the revolution in Argentina and Bolivia. But he puts forward no programme for the working class. Those urban guerrillas operating focos in the towns console themselves with doing things for the workers.

(5) Debray also has a periphery to centre approach. You start in the least political areas and work inwards. But in many cases the political programme of land reform doesn't apply because (a) the government has carried out a land distribution in what it considers to be potentially dangerous areas; (b) US aid has bought off the peasantry; (c) in many cases the most politically backward peasants are also supporters of the regime, e.g. Bolivia.

(6) Political preparation comes after the guerrilla group is in the area. An attempt is made to graft peasant discontent onto the foco's operations.

(7) Although the US awareness of the dangers it encounters in Latin America are taken into account and the necessity of attempting to create "3 or 4 Vietnams" is seen as an answer, the application of the formula is not related to the concrete conditions applying in the three or four countries concerned, but applied mechanically. Its implementation follows a military-strategic conception, e.g. the best place for the continental foco is in Bolivia, because this occupies a central position in the continent.

(8) Also the US presence in a direct sense has not applied. The US has 'Vietnamised' the Latin American armies. They have given the military an ideological cohesion, placed them in a privileged financial position, etc.

(9) There has also been an attempt to widen the social support of the ruling circles through cooperation of US and national capitals.

## Discussion.

JC - What did Debray say about urban guerrilla warfare ?

BH - He ruled it out.

CW - How does Debray relate e.g. Cuba to e.g. China ?

BH - Debray regards Mao's move to the countryside as correct.

MT - What is BH's opinion on the debate among Trotskyists on guerrilla warfare ?

BH - Blanco's position as set out in 'Land Or Death' seems to be correct. Blanco organised peasant unions in Cuzco, Peru, and then organised guerrillas to defend the peasants against the army. Blanco's main self-criticism after the experience is on lack of coherent national political organising.

MT - The SWP criticises the USFI majority on two fundamental grounds. (1) The USFI majority says that guerrilla warfare is a continental strategy; the SWP says that it is a tactic for specific use in specific circumstances; (2) the SWP alleges that the USFI therefore falls into adventurist military action; in reality armed action should grow organically out of the rise of mass mobilisations.

On (1), it is clearly quite correct that guerrilla warfare is a tactic and not a strategy. We can see in Argentina that the PRT (former USFI section) fell into thinking that to lay down arms at all was to be a reformist. Thus the fiasco when they claimed to be fighting a revolutionary war while renouncing armed actions against the government !.. and their isolation and large-scale martyrdom. However, the SWP's claimed approach of examining the concrete

Cuba/5.

conditions in each country is largely a sham. The "concrete examination" by Camejo reduces to a simple tautology: in some countries there is severe repression, so guerrilla warfare would be suicide; in other countries there is not severe repression, so legal work should take priority.... under all circumstances, no guerrilla warfare ! The "continental" overview does have some validity; national boundaries in Latin America are partially artificial; there is a certain homogeneity of political development (after all, Bolivar had a continental strategy !); the SWP does not answer adequately the USFI's argument that a steady build-up of normal mass mobilisation without overflow to armed struggle over a period of years is not on because of the trigger-happiness of the army and the explosiveness of the situation. By chopping up the world and considering each country separately, the SWP end up not with a "concrete analysis" but with a very similar set of tactical routines for every country in the world.

On (2): if the USFI argument about any mass mobilisation leading very directly into armed struggle is correct at all, then certainly it is utterly tailist for Marxists to leave military preparations until the very moment that mass mobilisations are abutting onto armed combat; and it is utterly tailist to reject armed actions by small groups, perhaps organised by political parties on the model of the druzhinniki organised by the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks in 1905 - as the SWP seems to reject such actions. All this does not however make actions such as those of the PRT less politically misguided and tragic - they seem to be classical terrorism, and very little to do with guerrilla warfare at all.

AH - What was the role of the working class in the Cuban revolution ? And to what extent is there workers' democracy in Cuba ?

BH - Active, positive participation by the working class in the revolution did not take place until after the conquest of power. On the extent of democracy, there is little detailed information. There is a SWP pamphlet on "Cuba and Problems of Workers' Democracy" that gives some information.