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# ROADBLOCK TO REVOLUTION



## A RADICAL CRITIQUE OF THE PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

by Edward Greer and Charles Lengram

MLF Leaders Must Be Criticized

Why Che Had to Fail  
No & Co. Haggie Over Details,  
Concede Imperialist Presence  
ON 'SUPER-REVOLUTIONARIES'

Nationalist Demands  
Won't Beat Racism

Rulers Coopt Nationalist Demands

BLACK & BROWN  
STUDENTS USED

The Black working people are engaging in sharp class struggle against U.S. imperialism. They led the armed rebellions. Their on-the-job militancy gives leadership to the whole working class in fighting the enemy. This has had a big

The most important question facing the Black Liberation Movement is who--what class--will give leadership to the movement. Everyone and all

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ROADBLOCK TO REVOLUTION  
A Radical Critique of the Progressive Labor Party.  
by Edward Greer and Charles Lengram  
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The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that the Progressive Labor Party is not a part of the American revolutionary movement.

Our movement is young, both in the average age of its members, and in the extent of its experiences; it suffers from a forced discontinuity with our radical heritage as a result of the McCarthy period. Moreover, our movement is comparatively isolated from both the black liberation movement and the working class. This makes it particularly vulnerable to liberal ideology; especially when that ideology is cloaked in radical, or even revolutionary, rhetoric. Only by constant critical theory and practice can our movement overcome these natural problems and contribute to the development of a revolutionary working class movement.

We believe that it is necessary to put forth a radical critique of the Progressive Labor Party (PL) because they are attempting to assume ideological and organizational leadership in the movement. PL's attraction for many in the movement is a consequence of its class character; therefore it is necessary to explain in detail why their politics is incorrect and harmful.

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## THEORY

Any serious discussion of revolutionary politics must begin with the historic purpose of a socialist revolution: the replacement of the capitalist class as the rulers and organizers of society by the working class which will govern and lead the state, the process of production, and all social institutions.

This approach concentrates on the autonomous elevation of the working class through its activities until it can govern society more humanely, efficiently, and democratically than its present leaders. It must learn to do this both on a general level in control of the state and other major institutions, and directly at the point of production through workers' control. A socialist revolution, far more profound than changing the personnel at the top of the society, is a cultural mission which entails reordering and liberating all of the social relationships which together constitute society.

The revolutionary process develops the experiences and autonomy of the working class to prepare it to successfully carry out this historic mission. This process can only occur in the course of the class struggle which ultimately rests upon an economic conflict between the working class and the capitalist class.

But the revolutionary process is and must be far more than that, if the masses of the working people are to come to hold an alternative view of the world from the kind now dominant under capitalism -- an alternative for whose realization they will risk their lives. It is also an historical process in which a group of people, sharing a common relation to the means of production, share a common fate in the course of which they come to hold a common consciousness. Thus the class struggle is more than economic; it includes as well the sum of accumulated moral, ideological, religious, organizational, aesthetic, and national consciousness.

The task of Marxist revolutionary theory is to articulate the political strategy which will enable the working class to overthrow capitalism by helping to make self-conscious the overall import of the multiplicity of forms of the class struggle and to coordinate them so that their power is cumulative. In this endeavor, it simultaneously criticizes all the institutions, ideologies, and social relations of the existing society and presents, through practical activities, a comprehensive alternative way of life and means to its realization.

PL does no such thing; instead they are guilty of what Mao Tse-tung has characterized as "formula Marxism:" the debasement and deformation of a living revolutionary theory into a set of arid and timeless formulas. In so doing, they bring into their theory and practice an entire panoply of liberal deviations from Marxism.

Marxists have always pointed out that capitalist society is based on contradictions within itself, and that the development of these contradictions constitutes the historical process. The class struggle is thus viewed as the summation and interaction of these



contradictions, all of which affect one another.

But PL only really sees the primary contradiction, the economic conflict between the working class and the capitalist class. They reduce and collapse all other contradictions to this primary one; asserting that all other contradictions (such as those within classes, between ethnic and religious groups, between men and women) are really only aspects of the main contradiction and explicable in terms of it. This narrow reductionist view eliminates the relatively autonomous quality of these other contradictions which affect the class struggle as deeply as economic conflicts do. Thus PL cannot deal with the reality of American society.

Marxism recognizes that in some ultimate and abstract sense other contradictions are derivable "in the last instance" from the primary contradiction between workers and capitalists. Nevertheless, this is a totally inadequate basis from which to develop a working class revolutionary theory. Rather than reduce the complex overdetermined nature of the class struggle to a set of static and useless formulas, Marxism attempts to develop a coherent approach which acknowledges for practical purposes the relatively autonomous and vital impact of all these other contradictions.

The theoretical elimination of the richness of contradiction in PL's theory inevitably leads them to two practices which epitomize bourgeois social science: positivism and ahistoricism.

PL's theory is positivist because they mechanically apply the concepts of natural science to the analysis of social reality. Positivism holds that society, like the natural world, is governed by immutable scientific laws, and that its future is therefore predictable. This was the main approach of a major group of nineteenth century liberal theorists (e.g., Comte, Mill), and it was harshly criticized by Marx who considered it his main enemy in political theory.

A typical example of how positivism is used today is the fashion in which bourgeois economists confuse industrialization with capitalism; thus claiming to be able to discover economic "laws" of development which apply to all societies. Similarly, PL talks about "inevitable laws of capitalist development," and the "general principles of People's War," binding from Mozambique to Bolivia. Unfortunately for those who like formulas to explain events, societies of people do not behave like chemical solutions.

PL's theory is ahistorical because they attempt to explain every historical event and social formation with the same group of timeless categories. Much like the liberal theorists, whose approach they are emulating, PL cannot see beyond the limits of capitalist society. They therefore explain everything with categories appropriate to their contradictionless view of contemporary capitalism (e.g., "the masses," "exploitation," "the capitalists,"); even if the phenomenon under discussion, such as racism or the oppression of women, is rooted in pre-capitalist eras.



These nonsensical practices are totally contrary to Marxism which takes the unique specificity of historical events as its starting point. Marxism understands that history is the dynamic interaction of real people with institutions of their own making; and that it is not reducible to any set of formulas or laws of social development. On the contrary, the conditions governing social life are themselves historical products -- and as such change over time into new ones. History is therefore unique and not predictable precisely because although at any given time the conditions under which people make history are given; nevertheless it is people who make history.

Because of PL's disregard for historical specificity, they cannot develop a meaningful critique of contemporary American capitalism as opposed to a general critique of an abstract system. Such a critique of American capitalism requires a comprehensive understanding of the entire range of problems which affect the quality of life in our country today, and rests on a deep and detailed study of the unique characteristics of the development of the American class struggle, of racism, and of all the forms of alienation which characterize our society.

Furthermore, since PL's theoretical approach prevents them from achieving a concrete critique of the character and effects of American capitalism, they cannot advance a meaningful alternative vision of what life under socialism could be like. A party with no real vision of the kind of society it wants to build -- of what the practice of socialist social relationships would be like -- cannot ever move the mass of working people to risk their lives for socialism.

All of these practices in sum constitute the reduction of Marxism to a liberal world-view. As a result, on the subject of consciousness PL falls into a traditional pair of deviations from Marxism -- economism and voluntarism -- which prevent them from developing a revolutionary strategy or program.

Since there is a great deal of confusion as to what these two terms mean, and how it happens that two seeming opposites come together in the same political tendency, we shall attempt to explain them in some detail (and then illustrate their effect on PL's trade union program).

The clearest way to define these terms is to look at how PL's theory deals with individual human beings and the process by which their consciousness is formed. Their initial tendency is to set up a rigid mechanical model: man's consciousness is determined directly by his material situation. As the rate of exploitation is increased, so too the working class will become more militant and radicalized. But as Lenin pointed out in criticizing this notion, it leads to the historically false belief that the workers will spontaneously arrive at socialist consciousness as the result of the objective workings of the capitalist system.

Such a view treats people as unthinking automatons who respond in a set mechanical way to given stimuli. It amounts to a ruling class prejudice if one believes that workers are only capable of achieving revolutionary consciousness on the basis of hunger in their



bellies -- as though workers, unlike everyone else, cannot be moved by ideals and a vision of justice.

This economist tendency is behind PL's tortuous attempts to prove that the absolute standard of living of the American working class has a secular (as opposed to merely temporary and cyclical) tendency to decline. They seem to have learned their Marx from bourgeois economists instead of from reading his work: in Capital he explicitly states that the real standard of living will rise over time; only relative income falls.

It would clearly be untenable in practice for PL to adhere to this extreme position on the development of revolutionary consciousness. The mechanical model is patently inadequate as an explanation of the actual consciousness of the American working class. And so PL veers to the other extreme, known philosophically as voluntarism.

Voluntarism views history as explicable in terms of the will of the main historical actors. Consciousness is seen in a purely abstract sense, unrelated to the actual environment or to historical experience. Thus the outcome of a revolution depends solely on whether the leaders are "correct" or "incorrect" socialists. Under this theory, workers' consciousness is totally unrelated to objective material conditions; it depends entirely on how it is formed by the leadership.

PL thus adds pure consciousness to its view of man the way one screws a light bulb into a socket -- an automaton plus "consciousness" equals a worker. They wind up with a world-view appropriate to the social engineers of the ruling class, but hardly suitable for revolutionaries.

The voluntarist outlook tends to explain events (especially complicated ones) in terms of conspiracies. Everyone has noted how prone PL is to such explanations. For instance, they explain Soviet politics as a plot by certain Kremlin elements and their CIA friends to restore capitalism -- as though the path of the first socialist revolution could suddenly be deflected by a few bureaucrats, and as though Soviet policy has no deeper roots in the past. Or consider their equally preposterous stance that a few bourgeois elements in Hanoi, on the verge of duping the Vietnamese masses into giving up People's War, to prepare for this swindle have launched the biggest offensive of the war to "fool" everyone.

Marxism, of course, has a somewhat different approach to the problem of human consciousness. Marx drew from two philosophical traditions. From the materialists he took the idea that the concrete material environment sets the basic "given conditions" of human consciousness. From the German idealists, such as Hegel, he developed the idea of man's freedom to impose his own imprint, creativity, and meanings on his environment by the fashion in which he chooses to organize the given material framework. Thus Marx united a materialist analysis with a concept of human freedom into



a unified, dialectical theory of consciousness in which there is a continual interaction between the objective preconditions and man's subjective attempt to creatively respond to them.

To illustrate how the uneasy coexistence of the twin errors of economism and voluntarism operates in PL, we will examine in some detail their trade union program -- a key component to any program which asserts that it is revolutionary.

After stripping away the rhetoric PL's scenario amounts to the following: (1) the objective lot of the workers will progressively deteriorate as a consequence of the need of capitalism to increase the rate of exploitation and of the unwillingness of reformist trade union officials to lead the workers in protecting their standard of living; (2) as a result, there arise spontaneous and militant rank-and-file activities by the workers to fight back not only against their individual employers, but generally against the capitalist state (i.e., police, court injunctions, etc.); (3) as revolutionary cadre with "correct politics" actively participate in these struggles and provide them with dedicated leadership, they can come to achieve leadership in the unions (i.e., the "left-center coalition"). Then when a general crisis of the system occurs, they will lead the organized battalions of workers in their unions into a final assault upon and seizure of state power by the vanguard party. This program, then, amounts to PL's basic strategy for making a revolution.

The belief in factors (1) and (2) is pure economism, and completely false. We cannot afford to wait around until the hypothetical future time at which the workers' standard of living declines. Moreover, although workers are now militant in the face of their exploitation, oftentimes they respond with apathy -- as nonunion shops and previous periods of working class quiescence indicate. The reaction to oppression can be retreat as well as rebellion; which it is depends on a whole series of very complex variables which can never be assumed, but must be carefully studied to be understood.

The belief in factor (3) is pure voluntarism, and is largely false. Not only, as we shall see in a moment, are the unions not a force for revolution; but the idea that the revolutionary movement is recruiting battalions for an assault on the state is an absurd concept of a revolutionary strategy. The Strategy section of this pamphlet is devoted to an analysis of this error.

What PL's concept seems to be is that exposure to revolutionary leadership leads workers to revolutionary consciousness. No matter how this notion is modified it remains voluntarist and false. In its pure form, the idea that if workers are told about socialism they will become socialists, is understood by everyone to be absurd. If it were that simple, the revolution would have occurred decades ago.

Nor can the problem be overcome by saying that the workers will actually see the revolutionaries in action as the most dedicated



trade union militants. This is still an approach which sees the workers as passively learning from an elite with correct ideas.

The crux of the matter is that the mass of workers must themselves personally and collectively undergo experiences which enable them to understand the necessity for socialism. No struggle by itself, no matter how militant, or how radical its leadership, suffices to make masses of workers into revolutionaries.

What is necessary for this transformation are experiences of a special type under special circumstances -- and specifying them is the hard task of revolutionary theory, not capable of being summed up in a phrase. We undertake to outline what these circumstances are throughout the rest of this essay, especially as we criticize the strategy and program which PL alleges to be on "the road to revolution."

That PL primarily relies on the trade unions, spontaneous organs of workers self-defense, as the key mass force for socialism is sufficient to reveal that PL is not worthy of being taken seriously as a revolutionary organization.

All socialist theory since Lenin takes as its point of departure the insurmountable limitations of trade union activity in capitalist society. The trade union, after all, is an institution which is entirely within the terrain of bourgeois society. Its function is to arrange "better terms for the sale of labor power." (Lenin) As Antonio Gramsci, a founder of the Italian Communist Party, pointed out, the unions are:

in a certain sense an integral part of capitalist society, and have a function which is inherent in the regime of private property ... The union cannot be an instrument for the radical renovation of society ... It offers no possibility of fostering the individual abilities of proletarians which make them capable and worthy of running society; it cannot produce the leadership which will embody the vital forces and rhythm of the progress of Communist society. The proletarian dictatorship can only be embodied in a type of organization that is specific to the activity of producers, not wage-earners, the slaves of capital.

Moreover, unions are limited to the terrain of bourgeois society because they inherently accept the division of society into classes -- they represent only the working class, and only in its defense of its corporate interests. But Lenin pointed out:

Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected ... The consciousness of the working masses cannot



be genuine class consciousness unless the workers learn ... to observe every other social class in all the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical, and political life.

In short, a working class movement primarily oriented on the basis of trade union struggles (no matter how insurgent, mass or militant) cannot advance beyond economism.

It will be ever more necessary for revolutionaries, as our movement sinks deeper roots among the workers, to attempt to move workers' struggles off the terrain of capitalist society. As Lenin and Gramsci indicated, this concretely implies the struggle for workers' control at the point of production. And it entails new forms of workers' organization appropriate to a movement that proposes to reorganize the productive process antagonistically to the logic of capitalism, and according to socialist (i.e., human) values. Because the struggle for workers control is the rejection and transcendence of everything capitalism implies for social relations between people, we believe it to be the most concrete and meaningful example of what we mean by the "cultural revolution" throughout the essay.



## STRATEGY

Without a revolutionary theory, a revolutionary practice is not possible. PL's theoretical inadequacies lead them directly to an unsatisfactory grasp of the strategic problems of socialism in the United States.

Because PL cannot understand the nature of power in American capitalist society they are unable clearly to specify the conditions under which the seizure of state power would be practical.

Marxists understand that the control which the capitalists maintain over society amounts to a class dictatorship. They also understand that the state is not the only, or even the primary form of the class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. PL, on the other hand, actually seems to believe that the capitalists remain in power merely because they have control of the state and police apparatus; supplemented perhaps by the workers having been duped by misleaders into not fighting it out with the army.

Such an inaccurate view blinds one to the varieties of capitalist power besides that of sheer force, and thus prevents serious struggle. The hegemony of the capitalist class, exercised primarily by its proprietorship of the political culture, is total. It is manifested by the ways in which bourgeois ideas, values, and even the bourgeois concept of reality pervade every institution and every area of social and political life. This ability to fragment and circumscribe opposition forces before they are able to develop a comprehensive alternative concept of social reality, remains a great reservoir of their power.

Reducing the reality of capitalist hegemony to the mere control of state power is the origin of PL's erroneous notion of what a revolution is, and what the tasks of the revolutionary movement are. This preoccupation with state power leads PL to equate the revolution with seizing and smashing the bourgeois state and replacing it with a dictatorial apparatus of the working class. This view reduces the revolution to a military operation, and the vanguard party to a general staff.

PL does not seem to understand Marx's and Lenin's insistence that the revolutionary crisis must be one of hegemony, and not simply economic or military. It must entail both the inability of the capitalist class to be able to manage the society as a whole; and the political development of the working class to the stage at which the workers are capable of assuming the responsibility of running all sectors of the society.

PL's view leads to an atrophied vision of socialism. Contrary to their economism, the spur to a revolution is not exclusively material deprivation, but the developed conviction among the working class that the quality of life in all its facets is debased and empty, and that it could be made more human under socialism.



Since they take quantitative deprivation, rather than the quality of life as the basic motive for socialism -- as if the Vietnamese were struggling merely for more rice -- a revolution made according to PL's plan might not lead to a qualitative change in the workers' lives. What might occur is that in the course of a severe crisis, a coup d'etat by a bureaucratic party could occur, leading to the most narrow form of state socialism.

In PL's entire range of writings and speeches, the only concept of socialism to appear is the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is necessary to assert that for the United States today, such a concept is a policeman's view of socialism. In no sense does it convey what we want to do for our country, or what is possible for America.

If PL thinks that they can get the workers to take the total risk that accompanies a revolutionary commitment in order to institute a new form of bureaucratic servitude (albeit a more advanced one), then they are guilty of a cynical and contemptuous view of the working class. By contrast, a revolutionary approach to American society identifies not one, but several interconnected historic tasks which constitute the framework of a socialist strategy. (In this article we allude to them only briefly and by way of contrast with PL; each of us is currently preparing further essays on this question).

The primary task of American revolutionaries is to promote a "permanent cultural revolution." By cultural revolution we mean the reordering, redefining, and liberation of all social and institutional relationships in the society. We are not referring to culture in the restricted sense of literature and music, and we are certainly not talking about new styles of dress and drugs. It includes, but is by no means limited to, black liberation struggles against racism, women's liberation struggles, and whatever intellectual, artistic, and ideological battles support and sustain these struggles.

The purpose of this cultural revolution is to enable the working class to smash the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the political culture -- to break the chains of consciousness binding the workers to the bourgeoisie. For workers to accomplish this they must overcome through struggle and real experiences the truncated, distorted, and fragmentary view of the world imposed upon them by oppressive capitalist social relations.

A real cultural revolution must entail not only the elaboration and articulation of a comprehensive vision of a better society, free from alienation and servitude. It must also entail a firm belief by working people that they can actually create that new civilization. Such a commitment, involving a persuasion of the whole human being, cannot be instilled merely by education. Rather, education must take place through practice in order for a real conviction to exist.

Such practice is twofold. First of all, **workers must begin to**



create a network of autonomous working class institutions both in the workplace and in the community. Through their experiences in running them, the workers will learn that they are capable of guiding society more adequately and justly than the capitalists.

Second of all, there must be created a vanguard socialist political organization. It must take exemplary action where appropriate and coordinate (but definitely not direct or control from above) such autonomous developments as we have just described. This coordination must occur on a national scale, bringing together disparate institutions and struggles, so as to prefigure the potentiality of workers control of the state.

The nature of this vanguard political organization of the revolutionary working class movement is not fully clear at this time. It seems increasingly evident, however, that a party following the Bolshevik model is inappropriate to American conditions. It will be one task of our generation to work out the specific form of this new type of vanguard organization.

Only after the cultural revolution is well under way, together with the institutional and political developments which support it, will it be the time systematically to prepare for the final task of the American revolution: the seizure of state power.

When a party is prepared to contest for state power it withdraws from society to achieve this objective. As in the Third World, this may take the form of actual physical withdrawal into the jungle or sierra. Or, as in semi-capitalist Russia, it may take the form of a tightly-knit clandestine cadre party. But such a withdrawal is inappropriate to our society now; and moreover it is impossible to effect.

Socialist consciousness among the workers does not arise spontaneously, but must be developed through struggles; it is therefore essential that revolutionaries work within every sector of capitalist society. Socialists must organize their political practice around participation in struggles which aim at making changes within the system -- struggles which are therefore not in themselves revolutionary (or even initially socialist) in character.

The common objection that such struggles are "cooptable" is spurious. Short of the revolution itself, all reforms and activities are by definition "cooptable" since the capitalist class continues to rule. The objection holds with equal force to all struggles.

An American socialist perspective calls for an intermediary strategy of participation in struggles for reform.

This daily participation within capitalism represents the most difficult test of a revolutionary. The goal of such participation is to utilize the revolutionary potential of these concrete struggles to convince large numbers of people of the necessity of socialism.



Reformist struggles can lead to the development of socialist consciousness. However, they can do this only if they represent a living critique of the values and relationships which constitute bourgeois society -- that is, if they can be moved off the terrain of capitalist society and come to exemplify a set of values and total vision antagonistic to capitalism.

Of course there are dangers in this approach. One must be careful in one's work to define continually a larger socialist vision and thus organically to link practice with theory. The failure to do this naturally leads to pure reformism. (This is essentially what led to the downfall of the pre-World War I German Social Democratic Party).

At the opposite extreme from reformism is the danger of "maximalism." The maximalist argues that it is not possible for workers to make any real gains under capitalism, that workers cannot advance until the seizure of state power; meanwhile the revolutionary cadres are to prepare for this eventuality by recruiting additional members, and attempting to gain control of the trade unions. Not only is this a false analysis -- as workers plainly can and have improved the conditions of their existence ever since the earliest stages of capitalism; but it is one denounced repeatedly by Marx and Lenin. (As well it is a view which led in the pre-fascist period to the destruction of the Italian PSI and the German CP).

Both reformist and maximalist deviations have appeared simultaneously in the same groups. And this is understandable because they arise from the same root: a failure to relate dialectically to capitalist society; a failure to challenge bourgeois hegemony in one's daily struggles.

While in its theory PL wavers between the errors of economism and voluntarism, in its practice it wavers between those of reformism and maximalism. Because PL conceives of revolution essentially as a police action, it is totally unable to develop the revolutionary potential of reformist struggles.

In practice they fight either for minor quantitative demands such as lower rents, or, in the name of militancy they insist upon advocating physical battles with the police authorities. What PL never seems quite able to do is develop and lead struggles that put in question the real values of capitalist society -- that pose in a practical way either the question of power, or the question of working class autonomy and integrity.

PL also has a destructive notion of the role of the socialist cadre in mass struggles. Their view is that the cadre must direct and manipulate these struggles so as to insure the dominance of "correct political content." In such a belief, however, they forget that revolutionaries work within reformist movements precisely to win people to socialism. The transition to socialism on a mass scale can happen only if people arrive at their socialist convictions as the natural conclusion of their own experiences in the struggle. Such struggle must be self-determined, collective, and democratic in the



political decision-making which guides it.

If implemented, PL's concept of the cadre's function would actively prevent people from having just those kinds of experiences which they need to undergo in order to forge socialist consciousness.

#### PROGRAM

We are going to examine four major areas of PL's program as well as the question of their style of work in this part of our analysis. We believe, that in addition to their trade union program which has already been discussed, these are the most significant parts of their policy: the national question (white racism and black liberation), women's liberation, the student movement, and Vietnam. But since they all reveal the same general tendencies, we could have chosen almost any aspect of their program to illustrate our critique.

#### The National Question: White Racism and Black Liberation

PL's program on the national question considers both how to overcome white racism, and how black people should proceed to achieve liberation. On the problem of white racism, PL begins by asserting that it is the duty of revolutionary cadre to constantly educate the workers to renounce it. But the idea that racism is a problem of bad attitudes held by the lower classes and that it is therefore to be extirpated by moral exhortation is essentially the voluntarist concept of the elite liberal ideologists of the corporate bourgeoisie.

More significantly, PL asserts that the capitalists have conspired to use racism to split the unity of the working class, increase the general rate of exploitation, and thus depress the wages of white as well as black workers. Therefore they contend that it will be possible to convince workers to renounce racist practices in the course of trade union struggles by demonstrating that it is in their material self-interest to do so.

This is an economist view insofar as it assumes that racism, as one aspect of workers' consciousness, can be spontaneously eliminated in the course of economic struggles -- despite a century of trade union experience in America to the contrary. At the same time, it is voluntarist insofar as it assumes that workers have been passively stupid in allowing wily capitalists and bad trade union leaders to dupe them into ignoring their material interests; and that furthermore when PL cadre with "correct politics" point it out to workers in their struggles they will suddenly change their attitudes.



PL's view of racism amounts to a combination of the liberal notion that it is a problem of moral attitudes with the totally ahistorical and erroneous proposition that racism is a gimmick created by industrial capitalists and foisted on the workers by a conspiracy. Marxists, however, note that racism has a material basis in the working class because of relative and short-run privileges available to white workers by participating in it. Furthermore, Marxists realize that an understanding of racism must take into account its roots as an ideological justification for chattel slavery, a mode of production which preceded industrial capitalism.

PL totally fails to understand that American racism combines a continuous ideological current with a contemporary material basis. Thus, the revolutionary approach understands that racism is not solely a matter of attitudes or conspiracies, but that it is a structural problem of American capitalism -- perpetuated by an entire web of racist institutions -- and that the main way to struggle against racism is to destroy these institutions.

The same theoretical deficiencies prevent PL from understanding the material and historical basis of an autonomous black liberation movement. By collapsing the richness of historical contradictions into a series of formulas, PL has grave difficulties in paying full weight to the unique experience of black people in America: that black people came from African and not European cultures; that black people were brought here forcibly to live not under capitalism, but in the nightmare of chattel slavery; that for over three hundred years black people of all classes have suffered cultural and physical oppression so extreme that it may reasonably be termed "genocide;" and that despite all this, black Americans have been sustained by a rich and unique culture. One has only to look at the special repression now being visited upon the Black Panthers to realize that black America is treated more like a colony than a part of the nation.

Neither does PL understand the applicability of the Marxist distinction between exploitation and oppression in regard to black Americans. Marx very clearly distinguished in his writings between "exploitation," a technical term he used to mean the appropriation of surplus-value from the labor of the worker, and "oppression," by which he meant all the other forms of coercion, control, irrationality, and destruction imposed by the capitalist class on the entire society in order to maintain the capitalist system.

For PL, the main form of the special oppression of black Americans is what they refer to as "superexploitation," by which they mean that black workers are more exploited economically (to the amount arbitrarily and simplistically calculated by them to be about \$22 billion a year). They never seriously acknowledge that all black people regardless of class have been continuously oppressed as black people -- as an oppressed nation. It is of course reasonable and proper to argue that the special oppression of black



Americans is an integral part of our capitalist civilization; and that a socialist revolution is necessary for the national liberation of black people. But to do what PL in effect does, to deny that black people suffer a special oppression as blacks, other than as workers -- is to accept the most racist notion of all in our society: namely, that black workers are not singled out for special oppression by the system!

Not to attack this racist myth within the working class movement; not to fight by whatever means necessary against the special national oppression of black workers and all black people is to engage in vulgar opportunism in regard to the most reactionary elements within the working class. Whatever its rationale or rhetoric, such a position amounts to an abject surrender to racism.

PL's position of antagonism to black nationalism and culture represents a total betrayal of the Marxist tradition. As Lenin forcefully expressed it:

An abstract presentation of the question of nationalism is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation ... That is why ... the fundamental interest of proletarian solidarity, and consequently of the proletarian class struggle, requires that we never adopt a formal attitude to the national question, but always take into account the specific attitude of the proletarian of the oppressed (or small) nation towards the oppressor (or great) nation. The Question of Nationalities, Dec. 31, 1922.

Marxists then, have always understood that a given nationalist movement can simultaneously contain both revolutionary and non-revolutionary components, and, unlike PL, are never content with abstract denunciations of its reactionary potential.

In America today, it seems to us inescapable that there is a major revolutionary component to black culture and nationalism. Black culture has for centuries sustained and ennobled the resistance of black people to their oppression; and today groups such as the Black Panthers and SNCC draw upon and develop this tradition; (unfortunately some groups talk about culture but suppress its revolutionary component).

Moreover, a serious analysis of the institutional role of racism in American society indicates that the national struggle of black Americans for their liberation cannot be accomplished until capitalism is dismantled. Therefore, not only in subjective cultural terms, but also on an objective material class basis the black liberation struggle is anticapitalist in character -- a major and leading component of the socialist revolution in America.

To fear then, as PL does, that bourgeois or reactionary influences are most likely (or even inevitably) to predominate in



the black nationalist movement betrays prejudices which have nothing in common with a revolutionary perspective. Black workers are perfectly able to guard themselves against any sellout; they certainly have the determination to carry forward their struggle to a successful conclusion.

Revolutionaries are obliged to resolutely struggle against the vulgar racist notion that black workers are malleable or wavering elements. Those who buttress such prejudices within our movement, whatever their intention, actually reinforce racism.

We believe that it is necessary to go beyond merely defending the legitimacy of the black nationalist movement. We assert that its revolutionary component is the vanguard force for socialism in America.

Revolutionary black nationalism is the highest expression of the historical mission of socialism -- the reappropriation by man of everything that is denied by capitalism -- his history, his culture, his humanity, his work. The revolutionary component of the black nationalist movement is developing a revolutionary culture that will be central to the counterhegemonic struggles of the movement.

By defining a universal human vision in the course of advancing its struggle, this emerging revolutionary black culture becomes exemplary for the entire working class. Black liberation embodies the aspirations of all workers for emancipation. Experiencing the moral and political leadership of the black workers in the workplace and in the community has the potential of making the masses of white workers ashamed of their racism. Shame (rather than guilt) is a revolutionary emotion, because it represents a genuine spur to political activity. This shame will arise not through propaganda, but in the course of the actual experiences of the white workers.

It is only then that the real unity of the working class can emerge. Unity on this basis would mean overcoming the key barrier which has kept the working class from realization of its historic mission. Thus the black liberation struggle is the leading force for the awakening of revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary unity among the American working class.

### Women's Liberation

In the position of radicals on the issue of women's liberation lies a key test of their seriousness as socialists. The present mass character of the black liberation struggle requires all political groups to orient themselves in relation to it. However, the women's liberation movement is still small, and because of this some groups try to ignore or downplay its importance.

We believe that the struggle for women's liberation is in a unique way central to the movement. There are two reasons for this. First of all, it deeply affects the lives of each one of us; there is



no one, man or woman, who has not experienced or practiced the injustices of women's oppression. Because of this the struggle for women's liberation is based at once upon a common and universal situation, and as such can provide the cultural revolution with one of its major impulses.

Second, the situation of women is one of the defining ones of the character of social life under capitalism -- their oppression as women indicates that capitalism is incapable of creating decent and humane conditions of social existence for people. The struggle for a cultural revolution in this area offers a superb opportunity to begin to prefigure and explore the nature of socialist human relations.

Every socialist and serious national liberation movement has in its course transformed the nature both of family and property relations. In our revolution it is essential that we attain a much more profound redefinition of the nature of the family and male-female relations if we are really to create a better civilization.

This is because the struggle for the emancipation of women is an integral and absolutely essential part of the socialist revolution as a whole.

PL is notorious for its inadequate treatment of the problem; somehow it does not seem central to their political concerns. Their relegation of the issue to a purely agitational topic is epitomized by their programmatic approach. They seriously question the right and propriety for women to group together autonomously to explore, to define, and to struggle for what they think is best in fighting their common oppression.

PL's theory in regard to the women's question is essentially the same as its theory about the race question. First, they attempt to reduce the question of female oppression exclusively to a question of class. This is as if to say that all women regardless of class, did not suffer common oppression in America (e.g., treatment as sex objects, no matter how high up a woman gets occupationally she is still discriminated against, burdens of childrearing, etc.). PL argues that the plight of women can be understood solely in terms of their more severe economic exploitation.

Consequently, they suggest the same solution to the women's issue as they do to the race one, a solution which is eminently liberal. First, they morally exhort men to "give up" their male chauvinism, as if men are not in the short run beneficiaries of the oppression of women (e.g., menial work performed by them); as if, in short, they can be convinced by arguments to alter their behavior. Second, the assertion is made that because the nature of women's oppression is economic, overcoming it is simply a matter of engaging in militant trade union activities and the like. The first notion is voluntarism; the second is economism.

Nowhere in PL's position on women's liberation can one find the slightest understanding that the oppression of women rests on structural relations in society which include economic relations but are by no means limited to them.



The nature of the family is a major example; its structure determines the way that the socialization of children occurs; it determines as well, the role of women in reproduction of the species. In the same manner, PL shows no understanding of the relatively autonomous role of ideology; this includes the notions of masculine and feminine identity, values regarding sexuality, etc. All of these are integral to capitalist civilization and its institutions; though many of these have antecedents reaching back to the beginning of class society.

To not accept that women suffer any special oppression beyond that as workers amounts to a total surrender to the male supremacism of our civilization. And antagonism to the development of an autonomous women's movement betrays the deepest bourgeois prejudices about women: that they are incapable of understanding and organizing to fight their oppression, that they will necessarily be coopted or misled by bad leaders.

We believe that because of the special oppression of women under capitalist society, their struggle against that oppression brings them into an objectively anticapitalist struggle. We also believe that in the course of their struggles against their oppression, women (much as black people) will contribute to creating new and higher socialist concepts of personal relations; and new institutions and culture for all Americans.

We further believe that in order for the socialist movement to become strong enough to replace capitalist civilization, the immense repressed social energies of women must be tapped by their autonomous liberation movement. Thus the women's liberation movement is a vanguard part of the socialist revolution; a vanguard part of the cultural revolution which preceeds and makes it possible.

PL, with its formula Marxist view of the revolution as simply the seizure of state power, is incapable of understanding the central role of the women's question to the workers movement.

### The Student Movement

PL asserts that the "student-worker alliance" is the basis of its strategy for the student movement. This assertion is both false and a fraud.

It is false because they do not mean it; and it is a fraud because what they do mean, if carried out, would amount to the defusing and destruction of the revolutionary component of the student movement, which would be a major setback for the working class movement. PL's strategy is particularly pernicious given the healthy theoretical and practical developments among those parts of the student movement which can be grouped under the heading of "the revolutionary youth movement."

The student-worker alliance strategy is a fraud because PL does not believe that a revolution in America will occur on the basis of a political alliance between workers as a class and students as a class who unite around a common program. The policy of an alliance between



two classes to make a revolution was successfully employed in Russia by Lenin as the basis of his strategy.

But the alliance between workers and peasants in Russia was critically different from PL's version of a student-worker alliance in this country in that: (a) the peasants had their own revolutionary party, the Social-Revolutionaries with whom the Bolsheviks could make a real alliance; (b) the peasants were the vast majority of the population; (c) the peasants were a class, a social group with a particular relation to the means of production; and (d) the main task of the Russian revolution was the destruction of the Czarist state power, not the carrying out of a cultural revolution -- which Lenin understood and stated could only come after the seizure of power in a semi-developed nation.

None of these conditions, or their equivalents, hold for our country. First, students are not a class; they are a stratum defined by age and relation to the educational apparatus. They come from, and will be a part of, every class which exists in America. Second, students do not have their own mass autonomous political organization (and PL opposes its development), with whom the working class through its revolutionary vanguard party could form an alliance if they thought it advisable. Third, students are not the main group, either by size or strategic location, which any serious revolutionary working class movement would give priority to allying with: black and brown national liberation groups, women, or even rural groups would be more useful. Fourth, since the main intermediary task of our revolution is not the seizure of state power, but rather the cultural revolution, alliances -- which can have only very limited purposes (such as an armed assault on the state) -- are not really relevant anyhow; what is needed is the flowering of a series of loosely coordinated, but essentially autonomous, popular struggles.

PL understands very well that an alliance between two classes is not the issue. They just use an attractive phrase to ensnare the naive. Formerly, liberal guilt was used to get students to help black people (in what was really a very elitist and paternalistic way). Now that the movement is beginning to believe that the working class is the historic agency of socialism, PL attempts to utilize similar feelings to entice students into helping with their working class projects -- none of which, as we have already seen, can be characterized as revolutionary.

PL really means three things by the "student-worker alliance." First, in the short run, students are to supply the bodies for PL's narrow working class activities so as to entrench themselves in positions of leadership among militant workers' struggles. Second, in the long run (when PL absurdly hopes that its overall strategy will produce a revolution), students are to serve as additional bodies, as auxiliary troops, when they lead the trade unionized portion of the working class in an assault on the state. And third, ancillary to this fate which they have marked out for students, all autonomous student political activities are to be destroyed; both because they are a diversion from PL's plan for the students, and also because PL believes that they are inherently bad.



PL assumes that students are a privileged group who have no valid concerns of their own and should therefore be moved by moral exhortation, which plays on guilt, to devote themselves exclusively to support activities related to workers' struggles. Students in PL's view are incapable of carrying on anticapitalist activities based on their oppression as students.

Revolutionaries, at least as far back as Lenin (who was dealing with a comparatively more privileged group of students than those in America), have accepted the idea that student demands could be potentially revolutionary. When PL says that student power demands can be reactionary, that is true -- but so can the demands of workers, or any other oppressed group whose consciousness is shaped by capitalist social relations.

It is clear to us that the activities of the student movement which deal with their particular forms of oppression can potentially lead to the development of revolutionary consciousness. For instance, the demand that education be for the development of the individual as a social being instead of as a trained piece of production machinery is an attack on the very basis of the capitalist property system. The demand for open admissions to the university for working class and minority youth, an effort to destroy a vital part of the system of class privilege, is also anticapitalist.

Moreover, we should all have learned by now that imperialism is vitally dependent on the American university to provide it with the technicians, the information, and the hardware it needs to maintain its empire. The structure and function of the American university allows it to be a service center for U.S. imperialism. Therefore, struggles that question and attempt to alter the function of the university in society can potentially move the mass base of students onto the terrain of revolutionary consciousness.

PL does not understand, in its demagogic attack on the cooptability of student power, that there is an objective class basis for the international phenomenon of a revolutionary student movement. The revolutionary component of the student movement demands:

the suppression of class barriers and elitist culture, and the onset of a universal (revolutionary) culture.... If, as the student movement demands, higher education should be open to all, then those who take it must renounce the capitalist criteria of efficiency and profit-earning capacity, the social division of labor, and all kinds of hierarchy. They must want culture for itself, independent of its utility. But at the same time they must desire a new kind of culture, a new type of society, a new scale of values. Andre Gorz, "The Way Forward," New Left Review #52, p. 63.



PL certainly cannot elaborate a socialist program for students in their particular role as the possessors of intellectual, aesthetic, and ideological tools denied by capitalism to the mass of workers. The Marxist tradition has always held that there must be a dialectical relationship between revolutionary intellectuals and the working class; that intellectuals can play a vital role in clarifying and elucidating the historical situation of the working class. PL's anti-intellectualism prevents them from understanding how students can contribute to the cultural revolution -- a lesson they might have learned had they really studied the Chinese cultural revolution.

Of course the student movement like any other can fail; particularly if it sets itself the impossible tasks of either making the revolution itself ("youth as a class") or of being its vanguard ("youth culture is the revolution"). PL insists on misrepresenting everyone else's position as a variant of these.

But in reality, among radical students some very creative thought and action along quite sensible pro-working class lines is going on; activity which denies PL's crude notion that students can best help the working class by manning its picket lines (though we believe that such activities are often useful supplements to a real program).

That the student movement is not likely to be coopted is shown by its very healthy efforts to transform itself into a "revolutionary youth movement." Properly understood, this approach does not imply giving up on organizing students autonomously around their own interests (especially where this organization has an anticapitalist character); but supplementing it by trying to develop organic links to the working class, swelling the ranks of the movement with working class people.

This is really the rather modest proposition that student organizers can reach certain very limited portions of the American working class in a natural and real fashion. This portion is basically composed of working class students, workers in the army, and younger workers on the job and in their community setting. Basically, movement activists can relate to this stratum of the working class around certain common forms of oppression both are experiencing (e.g., the draft, oppressive high school conditions, police repression, etc.) using common cultural themes as the means (e.g., around what is vaguely referred to as "youth culture.").

This approach, which complements outside of the university the anticapitalist demands of the student movement within it, asserts only that the movement as now constituted can bring revolutionary consciousness and activities to certain limited parts of the working class right now; and that it should do this. It implies some concrete priorities about organizing work (such as taking teaching jobs in working class over elite schools, etc.), and some directions for developing a radical culture.



PL cannot understand a revolutionary approach to the student movement any more than to any other group. Calling in an arrogant and artificial manner for students to go to the working class to learn from them, instead of becoming better revolutionaries where they are and bringing to the workers whatever knowledge, abilities, and politics they have gleaned in life through real organic, rather than artificial, stilted ways -- PL aims to defuse the revolutionary student movement, to separate it from its mass base among the students, and its source of cadre among them. Like all bureaucratic nonrevolutionary parties, PL is frightened by the existence of a genuinely revolutionary American student movement, one which it cannot control and which goes far beyond the kinds of limited struggles which they have set for themselves to increase the size of their organization.

### Vietnam

The heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism, along with the black liberation movement, has been the inspiration to the awakening of socialist consciousness in our generation. A group's stance toward this struggle is a crucial index of its politics.

Since the time of Lenin, socialists have understood that the continued sway of capitalism in the advanced industrial countries has been crucially dependent upon the maintenance and exploitation of imperialist empires. Since the ability of the capitalist class to rule depends on their control of the empire (a fact which our movement has come to understand in all its institutional depth), struggles which aim at dismantling imperialism strike at the heart of capitalism.

Such nationalist struggles are anticapitalist even if they are not led by avowed socialists. This is not to say that all movements seriously oppose imperialism. Since the imperial powers have learned that sophisticated forms of penetration (i.e., neocolonialism) are a more advantageous form of imperialism than outright political control, it has been possible for many nationalist movements to coexist with a capitalist world.

But when a nationalist movement consciously takes on the task of confronting and defeating imperialism, it exacerbates grave contradictions in the capitalist world and is therefore a step on the road to revolution. As Mao Tse-tung said in speaking of national liberation movements in the current situation of world capitalism:

No matter what classes, parties, or individuals in the oppressed nations join the revolution.... so long as they oppose imperialism, their revolution becomes part of the proletarian-socialist world revolution and they themselves become its allies. On New Democracy.

On the other hand PL asserts that: "the choice is either nation-



alism (capitalism) or socialism (the dictatorship of the proletariat)." (PL Magazine, May 1969, p. 11) Because of PL's formula Marxism, they cannot understand that in the imperialist era, national liberation movements have a critical anticapitalist character. This is particularly true of the Vietnamese revolution which is consciously socialist and which is now the vanguard struggle against imperialism in the entire world.

Nor can PL understand the strategy of "an alliance of broad national union" (NLF) during the phase of People's War in which it is necessary to defeat the imperialist aggressor. In the past year PL has decided to oppose this strategy -- even though all great revolutionaries, (and especially Mao Tse-tung; cf. On New Democracy), have always stressed that in the underdeveloped world it may be necessary to precede the struggle for socialism with a broader democratic struggle to create the conditions for socialist revolution.

Finally, PL's position on the negotiations is deliberately malicious. PL cadre assert that they can see nothing to negotiate about between socialists and imperialists; therefore the DRV and the NLF leadership must be collaborating with, or capitulating to, the bourgeoisie. In taking this position they have failed to perform the elementary duty of a group which claims to be a part of the world revolutionary movement -- namely, to examine the reasons the NLF has put forth in its official communiques for why it is negotiating, and the way they see negotiations in relation to the military struggle.

A variety of tactical ends can be achieved by negotiating. Mao Tse-tung suggests the following as valid ones: to show U.S. imperialism in its true colors, to help unite and educate the masses of people, to expose the real intentions of the enemy, to win the sympathy of world public opinion and the middle-of-the-roaders, and so on. ("On Peace Negotiations With the Kuomintang," Selected Works IV, pp. 47f.)

Every serious observer of Vietnamese politics knows the critical importance of negotiations as a tactic to undermine the remnants of the Saigon regime's urban base. As for the military situation, PL has failed to develop any serious analysis of developments, with the exception of the suggestion in the May, 1969, issue of PL Magazine that major offensives are the way that the NLF fools the people to cover up their suppression of People's War in collusion with the Washington-Moscow axis.

This brings us to the point of having to say that beyond a certain stage it is impossible, and indeed demeaning, to take PL's position on Vietnam seriously. We do not believe that any position held on a political issue by itself puts its holders outside the revolutionary camp. On the contrary, complete freedom to question and re-examine even the most cherished tenets of the movement should prevail. However, the way PL has conducted itself in this matter is impermissible. They have systematically misrepresented the NLF's political program. They have been willing to believe, and utilize, every quotation from Harriman, Lodge, Drew Pearson, and the bourgeois press which slanders the NLF, but



they have failed to reproduce the NLF's own statements, which are not generally made available by the media to workers and movement people. Instead of presenting a case, they have resorted to innuendo, logic so patently fallacious that it amounts to distortion, and false analogies (e.g., the constant comparisons with Algeria -- which was not, after all, a communist revolution). They have given credit to the big lie put forth by the American government: that the Vietnamese people are being manipulated and duped by a clique of North Vietnamese leaders who in turn are serving as Kremlin agents.

Over a million Vietnamese have died so far in a struggle which has kept alive the aspirations of all mankind for freedom. We will look back on this period in shame and disgrace that people who were considered to be part of our movement behaved as PL does with regard to our comrades in the NLF.

It is our conviction that in the present circumstances anyone who criticizes the NLF in the fashion in which PL does is serving the interests of the capitalist class in its effort to destroy the Vietnamese revolution and cannot be considered a part of the world revolutionary movement.

### Style of Work

Intimately related to the approach which PL takes towards its political program is its style of work. We have left this criticism for last, (although it is the most common intuitive cause of hostility towards PL within the movement), because we do not believe that the basis of a critique of PL is that they are hard to get along with or even that much of their practice in particular instances is harmful.

On the contrary, we believe that the only principled basis for attacking PL is to demonstrate that their theory is, at its very core, a liberal deviation from Marxism -- and that therefore they are opportunists who are incapable of contributing to the revolution, whatever their subjective intentions.

But we also think it is worthwhile, especially in view of the fact that their style of work is often emulated within the movement, to explain why PL's method of politics prevents the development of socialist consciousness. Some movement activists have a quiet admiration for PL's efficiency, singlemindedness, and ardor; and they find themselves, almost inadvertently, copying their inflated rhetoric, their personal attacks on political opponents, and manipulation of meetings.

It is absolutely crucial to the future of our movement that we definitively purge ourselves of any ambiguity whatsoever on the question of manipulation and democratic behavior. The American socialist revolution, and the historical process which prepares for it, must be the working class's self-liberation and self-definition as a class which can rule society in the interests of all mankind.



Any manipulative, conspiratorial or undemocratic act -- such as vilifying opponents, violating democratically arrived at decisions when they seem inappropriate -- is a corruption of the workers' movement and an insinuation into it of bourgeois values.

The preparation of the working class for socialism necessarily entails, and indeed can be measured by the extent to which it gives up those practices which are considered sharp and clever by capitalists. PL is particularly harmful to our movement because, rather than embodying a higher morality, it reinforces the norms of bourgeois manipulation (i.e., the treating of people as objects) whose hegemony in society we must break down to make socialism a real alternative.

PL claims to be a vanguard party, but it makes no effort to work out a socialist style of political practice. Instead they behave in the fashion of a conspiratorial group whose plan is an ultimate coup d'etat. Their relationship to their would-be constituency is an unalleviated stream of manipulation, arrogance, and paternalism.

They treat the masses with contempt, as passive objects, rather than encouraging active participation. They think that only they have the truth and are unwilling to listen to, and learn from, others. They bully people rather than appealing to their reason. They exhibit a complete disregard for the norms of comradely behavior, and the norms of democratic participation in mass organizations. They dogmatically adhere to a political line, rather than developing with others a general theory and practice. They explain all events which they disapprove of in terms of conspiracies, sellouts, and agent provocateurs, without any real proof, spreading debilitating suspicions throughout the movement. They resort to rhetoric instead of argument, and attack all independent intellectual work. They resort to dishonesty, slander, and innuendo to gain a political advantage. In short, they fail totally to behave as revolutionaries, bringing disrepute and shame to us all.

## CONCLUSION

Socialist history is full of examples of nonrevolutionary groups which have disguised themselves in revolutionary rhetoric to cover up their true politics. These tendencies, bringing liberal ideology and practice into the heart of the developing revolutionary working class movement, debase Marxism and are totally opportunistic. They leap back and forth in the most unprincipled and unpredictable manner on every question: moving from the most adventurist to the most reformist and back again; and oftentimes including including both tendencies within the same organizations, programs, and even speeches.



PL then, is nothing new under the sun of the workers' movement. They are merely the contemporary American embodiment of an old problem. Fundamentally, their opportunism stems from a failure of faith in the working class -- an inability to truly believe, and live according to the belief, that the working class can perform its historic mission of ending forever all forms of exploitation of man by man, all forms of oppression; and create in its place a truly humane and free civilization.

Whenever one looks closely at PL, their contempt for and fear of the working class and other oppressed groups is evident -- from their notion that the workers are "duped" by bosses and misleaders, to their conviction that black people will be "coopted" by the capitalists, to their assertion that the NLF is preparing to "sell out" the Vietnamese people, to their habit of falsifying evidence to win their arguments.

The objective basis for this phenomenon, as we suggested in our introduction, lies in the class character of our movement. It is thus a natural tendency against which we must consciously and systematically struggle. It is no accident that PL is strongest among the elite educational institutions, (e.g., Harvard, Yale) even as the movement as a whole is extending itself ever more deeply into working class strata.

The problem of students coming into the movement on the basis of intellectual perceptions, rather than real experiences of oppression (e.g., oppressive work situation, experiences with racism, family persecution during the McCarthy period, punishment under the draft laws) is a general one. But those who are familiar with the movement are struck by the more acute fashion in which this problem is manifested by PL. With uncanny regularity it is those who were formerly on the extreme periphery of radical politics whom PL transforms in mere weeks into the most vociferous instant Marxists -- ready with the most extreme rhetoric for every problem; ready to cast aside as worthless suggestions put forth by movement people with years of experience.

Even if PL did not exist, the problem which they represent would, even if less acutely. If the debasement of revolutionary Marxism, which PL represents, were limited to those in the movement who saw themselves as part of or close to PL, we would not have taken the time to polemicize against them. But unfortunately this is not the case; and many within the movement who consider themselves fervent opponents of PL have unconsciously accepted much of their political terrain, logic, strategy, rhetoric, and style of work. Therefore all criticisms of PL should be viewed as only one aspect of our more serious task -- bringing maturity and coherence to the real revolutionary forces.

PL has filled the void left by the absence of a well-stated new left revolutionary theory for America. It is our collective responsibility to fully articulate this theory, the program which flows from it, and begin to make the revolutionary organizational forms which can implement it.

