

## Suggestions for Our Discussion Group (by CFB)

In my view, the job of this "discussion group" is to take a hard look at the theory, line and practice we have held/engaged in from the 60's to the 90's. For those of us who base ourselves on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, we must not shy away from identifying and exploring theoretical and political errors in this great body of thought and social practice in order to develop it to a higher level and apply it to current conditions. Judging from the experience of the last decade or more, the ability of the RCP to undertake this task has been extremely uneven and limited. So we have some work to do.

(a) I suggest several additions to the issues listed in DC's letter:

### **(1) The prospects for revolution, and the road to proletarian revolution, in the U.S.**

This has a host of major sub-questions, many of which are noted in DC's letter. These include: The strengths and weaknesses of U.S. imperialism, the Black national question, the role of revolutionary movements in Latin America, the nature of the oppression of women, and a scientific analysis of sexuality. (On the last question, my view is that the RCP has a heterosexist line; it treats homosexuality as an ideology, lumping it together with nationalism and religion, instead of a form of sexuality that in most cases is not chosen and is not inherently in contradiction with communist ideology.)

### **(2) Questions about How the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was carried out by Mao Tse-tung and his allies in the CCP.** (To be clear, I am not questioning the need for, the overall political line, and the basic goals of the GPCR.)

The fact that there was relatively little resistance to the revisionist coup and to the arrest of the Four in 1976 was not adequately explained at the time, or since. Even taking into account the ability of the Chinese CP to institute and maintain a nationwide fascist clampdown on revolutionary forces since 1976, it is troubling that, in the 21 years since the coup, there have not been more significant contacts (that I am aware of) between supporters of Mao and the Four and Maoists around the world. When revolutionaries suffer a major defeat and face severe repression, they often regroup in other countries. A case in point is the Iranian communists after the triumph of reactionary Islamic forces in 1981-82.

This situation also raises questions about how deep were the social and ideological transformations of the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976. Where were the greatest advances made? What areas of society and the country were most resistant to revolutionary transformation? How did the international situation, particularly the growing contention between the U.S. and Soviet led imperialist blocs, affect the course of the GPCR? At various times, how strong were the pro-Soviet, pro-Western and revolutionary sections of the Chinese CP?

Analysis of the balance of forces over this period of time, both in China and internationally, must include examination of how Mao and his allies dealt with this situation. To what extent did mistakes by Mao, and by the Four and other revolutionaries in the CCP, play a role in the outcome?

In all of this, we seek a deeper understanding of the freedom and necessity faced by a socialist country in a world of hostile states, as well as that faced by the revolutionaries in the leading Party. These are not academic questions. A correct summation will help clear the confusion and cynicism that afflicts many and holds them back from full participation in revolutionary political work. The next wave of socialist revolutions, including in China, requires this summation in order to scale greater heights theoretically and practically.

### **(3) Stalin and Socialism in the Soviet Union, and the Cuban Revolution**

Closely related to this closer examination of the experience of socialism in China, are two other important questions:

(1) The role of Stalin and the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. Mao defended Stalin against Khrushchev & Co., making a 70% positive/30% negative estimate of Stalin's leadership of the USSR. However, this does not settle the question for us.

It is especially important to examine the effect of the United Front Against Fascism line on the CPSU and Soviet society from 1935 on; and the relationship between Stalin's denial of the continuing existence of the bourgeoisie in socialist society and the large-scale purges and executions of the 1930s. What effect did all of this have on the revolutionary sections of the proletariat and their political representatives in the CPSU? To what extent had the proletariat in the USSR already lost political power between 1935 and Stalin's death in 1953?

More generally, is the restoration of capitalism solely a question of the overthrow of a (mainly) proletarian political line in the leading communist party by a bourgeois line? What if most of the society is no longer implementing a proletarian line, and the revolutionary forces have been suppressed or immobilized? Finally, what does it mean for a country to be on the "socialist road"?

(2) With the reversal in China and the more recent collapse of the Soviet Union, many revolutionary-minded people have been drawn to Cuba as a model of socialism and resistance to Yankee domination. There should be no question that it is our duty to oppose U.S. attacks on Cuba, including the embargo and support for right-wing terrorists operating both in and outside Cuba.

Still, there are important outstanding questions about the effect of the close relationship between the leaders of the Soviet Union and Cuba over nearly three decades in many spheres of society, including the political line and practice of the Cuban CP; whether a strategic alliance with the USSR was the only way the Cuban revolution could avoid being crushed by the U.S.; Cuba's approach to agrarian revolution and the dominant role of sugar cultivation; the nature of social relations in Cuba today; and the extent to which Cuba is supporting revolutionary struggles around the world.

The response of the Cuban government to the disintegration of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s must also be examined closely. This includes recent attempts to develop local industry, sustainable agriculture, and transportation and power resources that do not require imported oil. At the same time, Cuba is encouraging foreign direct capital investment in tourism and other sectors, and the growth of small businesses throughout Cuba. What "road" is Cuba on today? How can a socialist society survive and advance on an island less than 100 miles from the United States?

#### **(4) Voluntarism/Idealism in the RCP**

Though this issue may be included in DC's mention of the "quality of the vanguard and its work," I want to put on the agenda the question of a correct understanding of the relationship between subjective and objective factors, and how leaps in our political influence can take place through revolutionary practice.

At least in the late 1970s and through the 1980's, the RCP had a bad case of what I would call voluntarism. We were constantly exhorted to take enormous leaps in our work with little analysis of the concrete conditions in which we were

working and how we could build from there. These leaps were "necessary" because of the imminent approach of WW 3, and they were "possible" because of the presence of millions of advanced "masses" whom we were "lagging behind."

Yes, there are large numbers of advanced people in the U.S. today. This was also true in 1980. But what was the material basis for increasing the weekly circulation of the Revolutionary Worker from less than 10,000 to 100,000 during the course of the May Day 1980 campaign? Huge amounts of energy were poured into realizing an unrealizable goal, with the result that many of the actual advances that could have been made were not realized.

Instead many Party members and supporters burned out, got sick, became disillusioned, and left the Party. (Of course, some left for other reasons, especially once it became clear that the revolutionary upsurge of the 1970s had ebbed.) If the RCP has ever done any self-criticism on this campaign I am not aware of it. At the time, unqualified support for this campaign was the litmus test for your revolutionary standing.

Another example: What was the material basis for the longstanding slogan, "Revolution in the 80s, Go For It!" Or for the stock ending of hundreds of articles in the RW that a chance to make revolution was not far off?

On the one hand, the RCP's analysis of the objective situation demonstrated serious shortcomings and a major error (its inevitable WW 3 scenario). On the other, the Party's analysis of the overall subjective factors for revolution in the 80s was never very specific, and for good reason. The solution of the Party leadership was to greatly overestimate what a relatively small number of Party cadre could accomplish through stepped up activity and a "deeper grasp of the [current] correct political line."

There is irony in this situation. A party can become so fixated on the danger of "throwing away the opportunity to make revolution in the U.S." that it is not able to do the revolutionary political work, and develop the mass base, that will put it in a position to lead an assault on the system when a revolutionary situation finally does ripen.

While I was in the RCP, this voluntarist/idealist view that we could do nearly anything if we just worked hard enough was treated as the received truth. It created a host of difficulties for individual cadre--including health problems and blaming yourself if you couldn't keep up with the pace--for their families, and for the Party as a whole.

(b) It is difficult to suggest how to proceed with our discussions without knowing more about who is involved, what their political experiences have been, and where they're at politically. It might be useful if we all know how many of the participants consider themselves to be Maoists, anarchists, revolutionaries, etc.; how many are veterans of the 60's, 70s, 80s or 90s; and whether we all agree on the necessity for the armed overthrow of U.S. imperialism. (At some point, we must discuss what our political basis of unity should be.)

I don't feel the need to know who the participants are. However, we might open things up somewhat if some of us expressed a desire to do joint work on a major issue for the group. Once we have a better idea where this "discussion group" is going, we will be able to determine how it should be structured and what the appropriate level of security should be. For now, I suggest that we do not use e-mail or faxes, since they are easier to intercept.

I am most interested in pursuing five questions: The WW3/AID analysis; the prospects for revolution, and the road to proletarian revolution, in the U.S.; the road to revolution in the countries oppressed by imperialism; summing up the Cultural Revolution and the loss in China; and inner-Party issues such as how democratic centralism should operate. If all participants indicate their primary areas of interest, I suggest that we leave it to DC to propose an appropriate sequence and time frame for our discussions.

At this point, taking up one major issue at a time makes sense. In order to make the discussions as focused and productive as possible, it would be helpful for participants to prepare "papers" (such as A. Montano's letter) and recommend some readings (MLM, RCP materials, important books or articles in an area, etc.) We also have to think about how to divide up the work on some of the mega-issues, like an analysis of the contradictions of imperialism in the 80's and 90's, or summing up the Cultural Revolution.

I suggest that we each volunteer to research and prepare materials on one or more of the key discussion topics we have agreed upon. This will give all of us ongoing work to do as part of a common, long overdue project.