

Introduction

We are making available an online version of one of the bedrock documents of the International Committee, *Opportunism and Empiricism*. This historical document played a key role in educating a generation of Trotskyists about the difference between revolutionary Marxism and petty-bourgeois opportunism. It first appeared as an internal bulletin during the split between the International Committee and the Socialist Workers Party in 1963. Largely drafted by Cliff Slaughter, it emerged out of the deliberations of the National Committee of the Socialist Labour League, then the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. It was later reprinted in the theoretical journal of the International Committee, *Fourth International*, in the summer of 1965. It was once again reprinted in the anthology, *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, published by New Park Publications in 1974. It has not been reprinted since.

That this long out of print key document from the annals of the International Committee has not been made available for over three decades speaks volumes about the lack of commitment of the present leadership of the International Committee to training the movement in the history and principles of Trotskyism.

As with all important polemics in the history of Marxism, an event of considerable historical significance was the trigger. The period from 1961 to 1963 saw the American Socialist Workers Party making a decisive break from Marxism. With long-time leader James P. Cannon in semi-retirement in California, the reins of the party leadership passed to Joseph Hansen and Farrell Dobbs. Hansen had for a long time represented a right wing tendency within the party leadership. When the opportunity presented itself, facilitated no doubt by the absence of Cannon from the party center, Hansen led the charge away from the principles that had once united the British, French and American sections of the Fourth International in opposition to the liquidationist perspective of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. (In 1953, James Cannon issued an *Open Letter*¹ that repudiated the capitulation to Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism that marked the leadership of Pablo and Mandel within the Fourth International. The birth of the International Committee as a distinct political tendency goes back to this *Open Letter*.)

Led by Hansen, the SWP embarked on a course of reunification of the world movement. The Socialist Labour League, on the other hand, insisted that any possible reunification must be preceded by a thoroughgoing discussion in order to clarify the nature of the differences between the two organizations. The SLL further insisted that any discussion must of necessity include an assessment of the root causes of the split in 1953. Hansen and his counterparts in the International Secretariat opposed the SLL's principled approach and claimed that such a discussion was unnecessary and potentially harmful – that practical events had superseded the dispute and the 1953 split between the two organizations.

¹ Cannon's 'Open Letter' was reprinted in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism: A Documentary History, Volume One*, edited by Cliff Slaughter, (New Park Publications, 1974), p. 298. An online version of this historical document can be found at: <http://www.bolshevik.org/history/pabloism/Trpab-4.htm>

According to Hansen, Pablo and Mandel, the 1953 split was nothing more than a big misunderstanding within the family.

The immediate catalyst for the march toward reunification, the event that, according to Hansen, obliterated the practical differences between the International Secretariat (the name of the Pabloite organization) and the International Committee, was the Cuban Revolution. According to Hansen, the Cuban Revolution showed that the basic elements of a socialist revolution can be achieved with a petty-bourgeois leadership. Furthermore, Castro was lauded as a “natural Marxist”, one whose outlook evolved spontaneously out of the struggle against the Cuban bourgeoisie and U.S. imperialism. The practical import of this was the liquidationist conclusion that it was no longer necessary to build independent revolutionary parties of the working class organized in the Fourth International. Rather, the task for Trotskyists was transformed into cheerleaders for these “natural Marxists” and petty-bourgeois forces that will lead the new wave of revolutionary struggles. This meant in practice that Trotskyists should bury themselves in organizations like Castro’s July 26 movement.

For Hansen and the SWP, reunification with the Pabloite international seemed a natural step because in fact their positions had converged with those advocated a decade earlier by Pablo and Mandel. The Pabloites had concluded in the early 1950’s that the apparent hegemony of the Soviet bloc over a large swath of Europe and China meant that it was no longer possible to build independent revolutionary parties. Rather, they saw Stalinism as playing a progressive role in the postwar world, one whose main features no longer rested on the class struggle internationally, but on a “new reality” whereby the possibility of genuine proletarian revolution led by Marxists was ruled out. Instead, the best that could be hoped for was playing second fiddle to what they saw as the progressive tendencies of Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism. This bankrupt perspective led Pablo and his co-thinkers to support the bourgeois nationalist government of Ben Bella in Algeria and encourage the rightward movement of their affiliate in Sri Lanka. The bourgeois regime in Algeria, after gaining independence from France, turned viciously against the working class. In Sri Lanka, the former Trotskyists of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) actually took the unprecedented step of entering a coalition government with the bourgeoisie.²

Opportunism and Empiricism was written shortly after the SWP had cemented the unprincipled reunification with the Pabloites. The immediate background to this document was another document written by Joseph Hansen, *Cuba – The Acid Test*. In the latter document, Hansen argued that the SLL had become an “ultra-left sectarian” organization that refused to recognize the “facts” of the Cuban Revolution. He maintained that the so-called facts of the Cuban Revolution were something new on the scene of world history, not previously anticipated by Marxist theory – and that therefore a failure to grant Cuba the imprimatur of a workers state, and to recognize the “natural Marxism” of the Castro

² A chronicle of the events in Algeria and Sri Lanka are touched on in *Opportunism and Empiricism*. They are discussed much more extensively in other documents contained in volumes 3 and 4 of the series, *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, published by New Park Publications in 1974.

leadership, proved that the SLL were hopeless dogmatists who closed their eyes to living reality.

The reply to Hansen does not shy away from a discussion on the class nature of the Cuban State and the nature of the Castro leadership. Yet it was this question that Hansen was relying on as his trump card. It is not hard to see why. Hansen appeals to the common sense understanding that was current within the Trotskyist movement as to the definition of a workers' state. Essentially Hansen is saying that because Cuba exhibits many of the features of what has been called a workers' state, therefore it must be a workers' state. And on the level of common sense, Hansen seems to have a good argument. After all, the Castro regime in the early 1960s nationalized practically all the privately-owned property of the capitalists and latifundists. The great majority of the old bourgeoisie had in fact fled into exile to Miami. Furthermore, Castro and the Cuban leadership were talking about socialism and in some cases, notably in the speeches of Che Guevara, even discussed the possibility of "world revolution". Finally, Castro had recently moved against a wing of the old Communist Party and thus appeared as an opponent of bureaucracy and Stalinism. No wonder many in the SWP bought Hansen's characterization of Cuba as not only a workers' state, but unlike the bureaucratically degenerated Soviet Union, a "healthy" workers' state. If Castro was not consciously a Trotskyist, he was at least unconsciously on some level acting like one. Or so it appeared to many within the SWP and the Pabloite International Secretariat.

Yet as important as the assessment of the class nature of Cuba was in these discussions of the early 1960s, *Opportunism and Empiricism* does not begin with that issue. We will return to the question of Cuba shortly, but let us consider for now why it is that *Opportunism and Empiricism*, both in its title and in its focus, concentrates not on Cuba but on the underlying theoretical question of the Marxist method.

It is for this reason that this document has great historical importance. For only here, for the first time since the struggle in the Socialist Workers Party in 1940, did the question of dialectics and Marxist philosophy take center stage. In the 1939-1940 discussion Trotsky personally took the discussion from the differences over the class nature of the Soviet Union to a consideration of Marxist philosophy and its irreconcilable differences with pragmatism. This struggle was documented in the book, *In Defense of Marxism*.³ In *Opportunism and Empiricism* the leadership of the British section of the International Committee made a conscious effort to learn the lessons of *In Defense of Marxism* and for the first time in two decades returned to the fundamental questions of dialectics and the Marxist method. As we demonstrated in our polemic, *Marxism Without its Head or its Heart*, the IC leadership in recent years has in all but name abandoned these lessons, and so it isn't surprising that a crucial document like *Opportunism and Empiricism* has never graced the pages of the World Socialist Web Site.⁴

³ *In Defense of Marxism* is available on line: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/edom/dm/index.htm>. For a recent discussion of the importance of the 1940 struggle inside the Socialist Workers Party, see the document, *Marxism Without its Head or its Heart* – Chapter 4: "The Long Road Back to Pragmatism": http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch04.pdf

⁴ One might add that David North's history of Trotskyism, *The Heritage We Defend* (1988), while it provides a decent enough summary of the political issues at stake in the split of the Socialist Workers Party from the

It is noteworthy that *Opportunism and Empiricism* begins not with a discussion of the differences over Cuba, Algeria or Sri Lanka, or even the basis for the unprincipled reunification of the SWP with the Pabloites, but with a discussion of the role of empiricism and pragmatism in the workers movement. (This is in stark contrast to the approach North takes in the current polemic, where he insists that the discussion begin, not with philosophical issues, but with the “political line.”⁵) For the British comrades, it was crucial in 1963 to highlight the problem that the Socialist Workers Party had failed to address – that its defense of Trotskyist orthodoxy in 1953 against Pablo was not sufficient to prevent it from sliding into the same opportunism a decade later. Rather the SLL correctly focused attention on the theoretical struggle for Marxism as the vital barometer for assessing the health of a movement. The SWP was indicted at the start of this polemic for its abandonment of the struggle for Marxist philosophy:

Trotsky warned the SWP leadership in his last writings that they must encourage a determined struggle on the theoretical front against the ‘American’ philosophy of pragmatism, a more recent development of empiricism; unless this was done, then there would be no real Marxist development in the U.S. Today Hansen and Cannon are ‘confirming’ Trotsky’s warning in a negative fashion.

In *Cuba - the Acid Test* Hansen spelled out his methodological approach quite clearly as one that always begins with what he called ‘facts’. *Opportunism and Empiricism* exposes the practical implications behind this commonsensical approach:

All this argument that ‘the facts’ are the objective reality and that we must ‘start from there’ is a preparation to justify policies of adaptation to non-working-class leaderships.

Empiricism, since it ‘starts with the facts’, can never get beyond them and must accept the world as it is. This *bourgeois* method of thought views the world from the standpoint of ‘the isolated individual in civil society.’

Instead of taking the objective situation as a problem to be solved in the light of the historical experience of the working class, generalised in the theory and practice of Marxism, it must take ‘the facts’ as they come. They are produced by circumstances beyond our control.

Marxism arms the working class vanguard in its fight for the independent action of the Labour movement; empiricism adapts it to the existing set-up, to capitalism and its agencies in the working-class organisations.

International Committee, gives only the most perfunctory treatment of the philosophical differences that played such an important role in the struggle. It is also curious that North’s work does not contain a single reference to *Opportunism and Empiricism*.

⁵ See *Marxism Without its Head or its Heart*, Chapt. 1: http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch01.pdf, pp. 7-10.

When providing a philosophical defense to the SLL's charge that the viewpoint of starting from the 'facts' is that of bourgeois empiricism, Hansen's rebuttal is essentially that there is nothing wrong with empiricism provided it is "consistently carried out". In support of his position, Hansen enlists none other than Hegel, who said,

This doctrine [empiricism] when systematically carried out produces what has been latterly termed Materialism.

However, it is not hard to show that Hegel was talking about the materialism of his day, the mechanical materialism of the French Enlightenment, and not the materialism of Marx. Thus Hansen's defense of what he claims to be "dialectical materialism" is nothing more than a defense of mechanical materialism and in this sense he proved himself to be a systematic empiricist in philosophy and an opportunist in politics.

Thus, the question of the class nature of the Cuban revolution cannot be considered in isolation from a clarification of the philosophical issues. As *Oppportunism and Empiricism* demonstrates, when making an assessment of Cuba, all is not as it appears. Whereas ordinary common sense can serve us well in most day-to-day transactions, it is hardly sufficient when called upon to analyze great historical events and their implications. The essence of Hansen's claim was that Cuba was a workers' state because it satisfied a number of 'criteria' for the definition of a workers' state – criteria that had been applied to a previous discussion on the nature of the Soviet Union. But comparing 'criteria' in this way is to proceed abstractly – i.e. non-dialectically. The retort to the argument from common sense is worth quoting:

Hansen even says we have cut out Trotsky's definition of the USSR 'by declaring it has no relevance to the Cuban discussion'. Is that the same thing as saying that the question of the Cuban state cannot be resolved abstractly by 'criteria' from this earlier discussion? It is always easier to demolish your opponent if you write his case afresh in your own terms. The real point of a historical analysis of the development of our concepts is to establish the way in which they scientifically develop by reflecting the objective world. Just as Trotsky's definitions of the USSR were hammered out on the basis of changing conditions in the USSR and in the world, of struggles against revisionist trends, and of the struggle to build a new International, so the historical threads of the discussion today must be seen as part of the struggle to build a revolutionary International able to lead the working class to power.

The point therefore is to establish scientifically the real relations between classes and not to arbitrarily and ahistorically apply 'criteria'. No matter how tempting (because it provides an easy recourse to a "tried and true" formula), application of 'criteria' in this manner is an obstacle to a scientific cognition of the dynamics of the Cuban state. Rather, it is necessary to investigate the historical formation of the state in its contradictory relations with the world economic system in order to determine its exact nature. Therefore, we move from questions posing 'criteria' such as nationalization, to the question of how and in what capacity did the working class ever exercise power through its own organs and institutions. What made the Soviet Union a workers' state was not that it fulfilled certain abstract criteria for a workers' state, such as the nationalization of industry. As is noted in the

document, other regimes that no one recognized as a workers' state were capable of large-scale nationalization. Rather, it was the originating experience of the proletarian revolution led by the Bolsheviks and the exercise of workers power through its own autonomous instruments of rule, the Soviets, that was the historical content in the characterization of the Soviet Union as workers' state, despite its later bureaucratic deformations. No comparable event ever took place in Cuba. Nor could it, as the Castro leadership, while undoubtedly leaning on the working class for support, was essentially a petty-bourgeois formation based on the peasantry. To this day, no independent organizations of the working class are permitted in Cuba.

If we consider the evolution of Cuba since 1963, there is no question that the International Committee turned out to be far more prescient than Hansen and his associates. Whereas the Castro regime was able to provide the Cuban population with some genuine reforms that improved the lives of millions of people, no one objectively looking at Cuba today can call it a workers' state, let alone a beacon of socialism. Cuba today does not even appear to be a workers' state, as it did to some in the 1960s, during the heroic period of its revolution. Having lost its subsidy from the departed Soviet Union, the Cuban regime has long since made its peace with world capitalism. Although in terms of its foreign policy it remains an annoyance to Washington – not to mention the Cuban exile community – capitalism is now alive and well in Cuba. International capital, primarily European-based companies so far, has been welcomed back to Havana, and that trend will only deepen, whatever changes ensue after Castro's passing away. The dream of socialism in the early years of the revolution has turned out to be empty rhetoric, and in some respects Cuba is returning to what it was in pre-revolutionary days – a beach resort for wealthy Western tourists. (It should be noted that the SWP's political line of uncritical support for Castro involved the abandonment of the Cuban Trotskyist movement and eventually even support for their repression by Castro. See below, p. 28, note 16.)

This old discussion of Cuba has relevance for us when it comes to assessing a topic in today's headlines – the nature of the Chavez regime in Venezuela. For like Castro, Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez has been called a “natural Marxist” by groups claiming to be Trotskyist.⁶ Yet Chavez is a left bourgeois nationalist, whose ‘petrodollar socialism’ is

⁶ The International Marxist Tendency - aka ‘Grantites’, followers of the late Ted Grant - is one group that has particularly distinguished itself with its uncritical lionizing of Chavez. Here is a typical example of their adulatory coverage of Chavez as he greets his supporters,

Each section was greeted in turn by Chavez. Each section responded in turn with cheers. He recounted how he liked to be with workers as when he was younger he too had been a worker before entering the military. Wolf whistles and "knowing" chants also erupted when he revealed that he had received a present from the model Naomi Campbell. Only after much provoking did he reply that it was a watch!

Then the serious message began. He had returned from France the day before to a mass rally of real students. They support the "Yes" vote. The universities will be changed to serve the majority, not the minority. The esqualidos (reactionaries) have stated that they will march on Miraflores, the Presidential palace, but they will not be allowed to.

http://www.marxist.com/venezuela_gen_analysis.htm

nothing more than a dose of welfare-state reformism. The bourgeois state remains intact and capitalism is very much alive and well in Venezuela, with the banking sector achieving record returns under Chavez, despite the political opposition of the middle and upper classes to the Chavez regime.

What the historical examples of both Cuba and contemporary Venezuela demonstrate above all is that there is no national road to socialism. Nor is there any such thing as a “natural Marxist” or a proletarian revolution arising out of a petty-bourgeois movement. An additional issue discussed in *Opportunism and Empiricism* is the implication one draws for the theory of permanent revolution if left nationalist movement such as Castro’s or Ben Bella’s or Chavez’s are seen as capable of solving the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution, let alone the socialist revolution. A cornerstone of the theory of permanent revolution, nicely summarized in the section of the document, ‘Hansen on Permanent Revolution’ states that,

Those countries who arrive at the stage of bourgeois-democratic revolution *late* cannot achieve this revolution under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. The latter, and its spokesmen in the petty-bourgeois parties, are too incapable of an independent development. Their relation to international capital and their fear of the proletariat make their task an impossible one, and they will run to the support of reaction. The proletariat is the only class which can carry through the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. But in the course of its revolutionary actions and the creation of its own organs of struggle, there arise independent class demands. From the first stage of the revolution there is a rapid transition to *workers’ power*. The condition for the maintenance and development of this power and its social base is the international socialist revolution.

If the claims made on behalf of these left petty-bourgeois forces are true – i.e. not only that they are capable of carrying out the democratic revolution, but in the case of Castro, that they have led a revolution that has produced a healthy workers’ state – then the theory of permanent revolution must either be repudiated or seriously reconsidered. And although it took the SWP another two decades to work out the logic of Hansen’s position, by the 1980s under the leadership of Jack Barnes they did indeed formally repudiate Trotskyism and the theory of permanent revolution.

It should be noted that if *Cuba - the Acid Test* demonstrated Hansen’s theoretical backwardness, the letter by James Cannon (appended to this document as it was when *Opportunism and Empiricism* was originally published) showed Cannon’s degeneration as well. A once venerated leader of the Trotskyist movement descends to discussing the Cuban missile crisis in the small change characteristic of the bourgeois punditocracy.

This summary of the arguments in *Opportunism and Empiricism* cannot do justice to the rich insights contained in that document.

We would be remiss in our responsibilities however if we did not point out some of the weak points in this polemic. For one thing, the treatment of pragmatism is superficial.

Pragmatism is literally seen as “the transatlantic younger brother” of empiricism and little more than that. In fact, pragmatism, although certainly sharing much in common with empiricism, has a rich history in its own right. Furthermore, pragmatism has often come into sharp conflict with empiricism in the course of its historical development. That is a subject however that is beyond the scope of this introduction.

Another problem comes up right at the start – the identification of empiricism and pragmatism as forms of subjective idealism. Thus we read,

Empiricism, and its transatlantic younger brother, pragmatism, refuse to admit the possibility of answering the question: ‘What is the nature of the objectively existing external world?’ They thus leave the way open to subjective idealism which explains the world in terms of mind alone.

Such ideas were quite common within the International Committee in this period and in fact reflect what was the prevailing understanding within the Marxist movement for decades. There was an oversimplification of philosophy that tended to view all philosophical sins as being of a variety of “subjective idealism”. (We may recall that when Lukacs published *History and Class Consciousness*, he came under attack by Zinoviev and others for committing the philosophical sin of idealism.) It is high time that the Marxist movement leave this tradition behind. Genuine historical investigation into both empiricism and pragmatism shows that they have a potential for a subjective idealist side as well as a vulgar materialist – positivist side. And it is the latter that has predominated throughout most of the history of the past century, and that was certainly the case with Hansen’s form of crude common-sense empiricism.⁷ Despite this lapse, it is clear that elsewhere in their writings, the Socialist Labour League recognized that the essential quality of Hansen’s method was not subjectivism, but its converse, objectivism. This is clear from another critical document from this period, *Trotskyism Betrayed*, where we can read the following assessment of the method employed by the SWP,

The severity of the SWP document’s conclusion that the SLL is suffering a ‘subjective’ deviation arises from their own departure in the opposite direction, that is, towards pure ‘objectivity’. In fact when the SWP document attacks our stress on revolutionary consciousness, this amounts to an evaluation which helps the enemy. The anti-Marxists attack above all the possibility of the working class achieving political independence; the Leninist party is thus the central target. There must be a conscious construction of this party if the working class is to take power and build Socialism. From the outset, spokesmen of the IC pointed out to the Pabloites that their position on the Soviet bureaucracy and the ‘irreversibility’ of the revolutionary process could only lead to the conclusion that independent revolutionary leadership was unnecessary.⁸

⁷ The dual nature of pragmatism is discussed at some length in *Marxism Without its Head or its Heart – Chapter 4 – The Long Road Back to Pragmatism*,

http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch04.pdf

⁸ *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume Three*, (New Park Publications, 1974) p. 242.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the discussion of whether one “starts from facts” or not has a built-in ambiguity that should have been clarified. Everything hinges on what one means by “facts”. If nothing more is meant than first impressions, then of course everyone starts from “facts” for who can deny that our first impressions are the starting point of our understanding of anything? (Hopefully it is not the end point.) Yet it is on this trivial point that much of Hansen’s argument leans on. But the important philosophical question, buried in Hansen’s formulation, is whether knowledge is or can ever be the product of immediate sense perceptions and our generalizations from those sense perceptions. The entire edifice of empiricism as well as Kantianism rests of the supposed existence of immediate sense data, which are then, depending on what specific theory one is following, either collected into a series of generalizations, or synthesized through the categories of the understanding, resulting in higher scientific concepts.

It was one of Hegel’s great achievements that he punctured this model of knowledge that stands as the foundation of both empiricism and Kantianism. For Hegel demonstrated there is no such thing as the pure immediate intuition divorced from any mediation. Even the simplest, crudest observation of ‘facts’ is already implicitly laden with concepts. It is the failure to understand this dialectical relationship between facts and concepts, and the failure to recognize our contribution as historically situated subjects of a social practice leading to the formation of concepts, that is responsible for falling into the illusions of a false objectivity that is the handiwork of both empiricism and pragmatism.⁹

Thus when *Opportunism and Empiricism* berates Hansen for “starting from facts,” what is meant is a critique of this fundamental dogma of empiricism that Hansen has embraced. It is a philosophical method that demonstrably leads directly to opportunism in practice.

Despite these historically understandable shortcomings, the diagnosis of Hansen and the SWP as being opportunists who have abandoned the basic principles of Trotskyism because they have abandoned the struggle for the dialectic against pragmatism is on the mark. There is still much to learn in this gem from the early years of the International Committee. It provides an insight into the baby that has been thrown out with the bathwater by the most recent turn of the International Committee. We recommend a close and careful study of this masterpiece of Marxist polemics.

We have reprinted the text exactly as it was published in the theoretical journal of the International Committee, *Fourth International*, Volume 2, Number 1, Summer 1965 issue. All footnotes have been added for this edition.

Alex Steiner
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⁹ The difference between Marxism and the false objectivity of positivism is dealt with in *Marxism Without its Head or its Heart – Chapter 3 – Their Science and Ours*, http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch03.pdf

OPPORTUNISM AND EMPIRICISM

'Only by learning to assimilate the results of the development of philosophy during the past two and a half thousand years will it be able to rid itself on the one hand of any isolated natural philosophy standing apart from it, outside and above it, and on the other hand also of its own limited method of thought, which was its inheritance from English empiricism.'

It is clear from this passage that Engels considers empiricism to be a *barrier* to the dialectical conception of the world. Hansen's talk about 'consistent empiricism' is sheer nonsense. The point about empiricism, a reliance on 'the facts as they are perceived', is that it cannot be consistent.

Empiricism, and its transatlantic younger brother, pragmatism, refuse to admit the possibility of answering the question: 'What is the nature of the objectively existing external world?' They thus leave the way open to subjective idealism which explains the world in terms of mind alone. Empiricism, ignoring the history of philosophy, rejects the dialectical theory of knowledge as 'metaphysics'. Only the dialectical materialist view can explain the world, because it includes a materialist explanation of the development of our concepts as well as of the material world which they reflect. Empiricism must be *rejected*, not made 'consistent'. There are many sides to this methodological error of Hansen's.

Trotsky warned the SWP leadership in his last writings that they must encourage a determined struggle on the theoretical front against the 'American' philosophy of pragmatism, a more recent development of empiricism; unless this was done, then there would be no real Marxist development in the U.S. Today Hansen and Cannon are 'confirming' Trotsky's warning in a negative fashion. In the discussion concerning the future of the Fourth International, Hansen leads the tendency which calls for 'unification' with a revisionist tendency on the basis of purely practical political agreement on immediate tasks. From this point of view he rejects an examination of the history of the split and of the differences between the tendencies. This is only part of his substitution of impressionism for scientific analysis (see *Trotskyism Betrayed*¹⁰ and C.S.'s reply to J.H.'s *Report to the Plenum*,¹¹ International Bulletin No. 11). What is the methodological basis of Hansen's approach here? The dominant question for him is always 'what will *work* best?' - asked always from the narrow perspective of immediate political appearances. This is the starting point of pragmatism, the 'American' development of empiricism by Pierce, James and Dewey. It leads Hansen to advocate unity with the Pablo group because that will 'work' better as an attraction for people pushed in a 'leftward' direction, even if the causes of the split are never clarified. Such an approach, as we have explained in earlier documents, destroys the theoretical basis

¹⁰ Reprinted in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume Three*, (New Park Publications, 1974) p. 235.

¹¹ Reprinted in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume Three*, (New Park Publications, 1974) p. 292.

of the movement . The incorrect concepts and methods of our political work can only be overcome through conscious theoretical and practical struggle, not by sweeping them under the carpet.

Pragmatism and the Cuban Crisis

Cannon's letter to Dobbs,¹² summing up the Cuban crisis, could similarly serve as a model of the pragmatist method. After a lifetime of struggle for revolutionary Marxism, particularly against Stalinism, he denies that whole career in two pages with the kind of politics which Hansen's pathetic essay in 'theory' is meant to justify: 'What else could he have done under the given circumstances?' asks Cannon. What were these 'given circumstances'?

'1. The U.S. naval blockade was set for a clash with Soviet ships which would escalate into nuclear war. Kennedy gave clear notice that the U.S. would not stop at the use of the most forceful measures.

'2. The Pentagon was ready to bomb and invade Cuba and crush its revolution. Newspaper accounts report that this was one of the alternative moves considered even for (from?) the start, and it was to be put into effect if Moscow did not yield on the missile bases.'

Cannon replaces class analysis of social forces and political tendencies with pragmatic prescriptions. The so-called 'given circumstances' (equivalent of Hansen's 'the facts') are the *product* of a policy of class collaboration by Khrushchev and the Stalinist bureaucracy in relation to U.S. imperialism. We must evaluate Khrushchev's conduct as *part of the process which produced these circumstances*. Only in that way can Marxists work out their political programme in relation to other class tendencies.

Empiricism versus Revolutionary Politics

Indeed Cannon's letter on Cuba illustrates the *class* role of empiricism and pragmatism, those tendencies in philosophy which accept 'the given fact', etc. Inevitably this acceptance becomes what Trotsky once called a 'worshipping of the accomplished fact'. In effect this means accepting the forms of consciousness proper to those who are adapted to the existing structure, such as the bureaucracy in the USSR and in the labour movement. They develop their ideas as ways of rationalising and justifying their own position between capitalism and the working class. Cannon's justification of Khrushchev, like the recent contributions of Murry Weiss in justification of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and the constant avoidance of the questions of political revolution and construction of revolutionary parties in the workers' states by SWP spokesmen and the Pabloites, are an abandonment of principled revolutionary politics, flowing from the abandonment of dialectical

¹² Published as an appendix to this document and originally appearing in the same issue of *Fourth International*.

materialism in favour of empiricism. Dialectical analysis insists on seeing facts in the context of a whole series of interrelated processes, not as finished, independent entities about which 'practical' decisions have to be made. In the sphere of politics, that means to see each situation in terms of the development of the international class struggle, to evaluate the policies of the various political forces towards this situation in terms of their relation to these class forces and to their whole previous course. This is why it is nonsense to pose the Cuban problem as Cannon poses it-'What else could he have done under the given circumstances?' Taken to its logical conclusion, this type of argument can be used to justify anything. It is not even surprising, once the extent of this theoretical departure from Marxism is grasped, that Cannon utters an absurdity like '... people unaffected by imperialist propaganda have, I believe, breathed relief over the settlement and thanked Khrushchev for his sanity. Bertrand Russell and Nehru expressed themselves along this line.' Who would have thought that at the same time, Nehru was head of a government engaged in armed conflict, with imperialist support, against the Republic of China? In the course of that conflict mass arrests of Indian Communists were carried out. At the same time, Soviet fighter planes were being supplied to the Indian government by Khrushchev. No doubt Nehru praised Khrushchev (as well as Kennedy and Macmillan) for this piece of practical 'wisdom'. Perhaps Cannon will say 'What else could he have done under the given circumstances?' Cannon's method leads to this end not by a trick of logical development, but because the forces for whom he becomes the apologist are tied *in reality* to imperialism and its present needs. Trotskyism is no more an exception to the laws of history than any other phase in the development of Marxism and the labour movement. Once theoretical development stops, then the movement is subject to the dominant ideologies of the time, however gradual and subtle the process of adaptation-and however venerable the 'cadre'.

Hansen's Method

Hansen's document '*Cuba - The Acid Test*'¹³ is therefore an important contribution to the international discussion. It states explicitly the *empiricist* and anti-dialectical basis in *method* for the opportunist tendencies in the SWP's politics as well as for their unprincipled and un-historical approach to the problem of unity and development of the world Trotskyist movement. From the beginning of the discussion, the SLL, described by Hansen as 'the ultra-left sectarians', have insisted that basic differences of method underlay the different political lines and attitudes to organisation. Hansen now confirms this. His insistence on 'the facts', as being the same for empiricism as for Marxism is effectively answered by Lukacs:

¹³ *Cuba - The Acid Test: A reply to the Ultra-left sectarians*, by Joseph Hansen, Nov. 20. 1962, Reprinted in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume Four*, (New Park Publications, 1974) p. 20. This document is also available online at, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/hansen/1962/11/acidtest.htm>

‘These facts are indeed not only involved in constant change, but also they are-precisely in the structure of their objectivity-the products of a historically determined epoch: that of capitalism. Consequently this “science” which recognises as fundamental to their value for science the immediately given form of phenomena, and takes as a correct point of departure for scientific conceptualisation their form of objectivity, this science finds itself planted simply and definitely in the ground of capitalist society, accepting uncritically its essence, its “objective” structure, its laws, as an unalterable foundation of “science”. In order to progress from these “facts” to facts in the real sense of the word, one must penetrate to their historical conditioning as such and abandon the point of view which starts from them as immediately given: they must undergo historical-dialectical analysis ...’
(*History and Class Consciousness*)

In support of his capitulation to empiricism, Hansen quotes the verdict of Hegel.

‘Generally speaking, Empiricism finds the truth in the outward world; and even if it allows a supersensible world, it holds knowledge of that world to be impossible, and would restrict us to the province of sense-perception. This doctrine when systematically carried out produces what has been latterly termed Materialism. Materialism of this stamp looks upon matter, *qua* matter, as the genuine objective world.’ (*The Logic of Hegel*, translated from the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, p. 80).

Hegel’s opposition to empiricism is *correct* in one sense. If ‘empiricism systematically carried out’ led to dialectical materialism, then why would Hegel, the Absolute Idealist, figure so decisively in the development of Marxism? The ‘materialism’ to which empiricism leads, according to Hegel, is of course mechanical materialism, which remains unable to explain the role of consciousness and the material unity of the world, including human action and thought. This ‘defect of all hitherto existing materialism’, as Marx called it, meant that ‘it could *not* be consistently carried out, and it left the door open to dualism and subjective idealism. Hegel overcame the dichotomy of subject and object, introducing a unified conception of a dialectically interconnected whole, by making spirit the content of all reality. Marx had only to ‘stand him on his head’ to arrive at dialectical materialism. This is *in fact* how dialectical materialism developed, through *contradiction*, and not through Hansen’s businesslike logical formula of ‘empiricism systematically carried out’. The relation between empiricism and dialectical materialism has a history, which shows a struggle of dialectical materialism *against* the empiricists and their development in positivism and pragmatism. It is contrary to the method of Marxism to examine empiricism for its ‘strong points’ and its ‘weak points’. As a trend in philosophy it has formed the soundest basis for pseudo-scientific attacks on materialism ever since Marx, and in politics it has always formed the philosophical basis for opportunism.

Hansen avoids this type of discussion by quoting Hegel and then introducing his own paraphrase of Hegel. Hegel said that empiricism systematically carried out

issued in ‘materialism’, by which he naturally meant the materialism of his own day. We must surely appreciate historically what Hegel meant when he said that empiricism ‘systematically carried out’ led to materialism, which ‘looks upon matter, *qua* matter, as the genuine objective world’. The vulgar materialism of that time had a *metaphysical* view of the world, seeing the given facts of experience as fixed, dead, finished products interacting according to mechanical principles, with mind reflecting this reality in a dead, mechanical fashion. Hansen must surely agree that it was *this* kind of materialism which Hegel attacks here. He could hardly have had in his head the theory of *dialectical* materialism as the product of ‘empiricism systematically carried out’. The dialectical materialist method of thought was born only *after* Hegel, through the struggle against Hegel’s dialectical idealism. And yet Hansen, with a very clumsy sleight of hand, uses his quotation from Hegel to identify ‘empiricism systematically carried out’ with dialectical materialism:

‘I would submit that “Lenin and others” did not bring from Hegel his opposition to empiricism on idealistic or religious grounds. On the other hand Marxism does share Hegel’s position that vulgar empiricism is arbitrary, one-sided and undialectical. But ‘empiricism “systematically carried out”’? This is the view that the “genuine objective world”, the material world, takes primacy over thought and that a dialectical relationship exists between them. What is this if not dialectical materialism?’

‘Facts’ are Abstractions

The vital phrase ‘a dialectical relationship exists between them’ (matter and thought) is introduced from the outside by Hansen. It leaps over the whole development to dialectical materialism through the Hegelian school and ‘standing Hegel on his head, or rather, on his feet’! All Hansen’s respect for ‘the facts’ does not seem to have helped him to proceed from the simple ‘fact’ that ideas have a history as part of the social-historical process, and that the vulgar materialism of the bourgeoisie cannot be systematically developed into dialectical materialism by a mere stroke of the pen. It took some years of very hard struggle, of determined theoretical and practical grappling with the objective development of bourgeois society in the first half of the 19th century, to achieve that result.

When we attack empiricism we attack that method of approach which says all statements, to be meaningful, must refer to observable or measurable data in their immediately given form. This method insists that any ‘abstract’ concepts, reflecting the general and historical implications of these ‘facts’, are meaningless. It neglects entirely that our general concepts reflect the laws of development and interconnection of the process which these ‘facts’ help to constitute. Indeed the so-called hard facts of concrete experience are themselves *abstractions* from this process. They are the result of the first approximation of our brains to the essential interrelations, laws of motion, contradictions of the eternally changing and complex world of matter ... of which they form part. Only

higher abstractions, in advanced *theory*, can guide us to the meaning of these facts. What Lenin called ‘the concrete analysis of concrete conditions’ is the opposite of a descent into empiricism. In order to be concrete, the analysis must see the given facts in their historical interconnection and must begin with the discoveries of theory in the study of society, the necessity to make a *class* evaluation of every event, every phenomenon. The empiricist, who pretends to restrict himself to the bedrock of ‘facts’ alone, in fact imposes on the ‘facts’ an unstated series of connections whose foundations are unstated. With Hansen and the Pabloites, their new reality is actually a list of *abstractions* like ‘the colonial revolution’, ‘the process of de-Stalinisation’, ‘irreversible trends’, ‘leftward-moving forces’, ‘mass pressure’, etc. Like all statements about social phenomena, these are meaningless unless they are demonstrated to have specific *class* content, for class struggle and exploitation are the *content* of all social phenomena. This discovery of Marx is the theoretical cornerstone which Hansen has lost, with all his talk about ‘the facts’.

Empiricism: a Bourgeois Method

All this argument that ‘the facts’ are the objective reality and that we must ‘start from there’ is a preparation to justify policies of adaptation to non-working-class leaderships.

Empiricism, since it ‘starts with the facts’, can never get beyond them and must accept the world as it is. This *bourgeois* method of thought views the world from the standpoint of ‘the isolated individual in civil society.’

Instead of taking the objective situation as a problem to be solved in the light of the historical experience of the working class, generalised in the theory and practice of Marxism, it must take ‘the facts’ as they come. They are produced by circumstances beyond our control.

Marxism arms the working class vanguard in its fight for the independent action of the Labour movement; empiricism adapts it to the existing set-up, to capitalism and its agencies in the working-class organisations.

‘In the beginning was the deed,’ quotes Hansen. But for Marxists, action is not blind adaptation to ‘facts’, but theoretically guided work to break the working class from petty-bourgeois leaderships. To ‘join in the action’ led by such trends, merely seeking ‘to help to build a revolutionary-socialist party in the very process of the revolution itself’ is a renunciation of Marxism and an abdication of responsibility in favour of the petty-bourgeoisie.

Hansen says:

‘If we may express the opinion, it is an overstatement to say that anyone finds himself “prostrate before the petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders in Cuba and

Algeria” because he refuses to follow the SLL National Committee in thinking that a Trotskyist can clear himself of any further responsibility by putting the label “betrayed” on everything these leaders do. It is an error of the first order to believe that petty-bourgeois nationalism – petty-bourgeois nationalism, has no internal differentiations or contradictions and cannot possibly be affected by the mass forces that have thrust it forward.’

In the first place, no one has said that there cannot be differentiation within the petty-bourgeois national movement or that they remain unaffected by mass pressure. Who has denied that? What is at stake is the method by which this ‘fact’ is analysed and what consequence it has for the construction of independent revolutionary parties to lead the struggle of the working class. Hansen and the Pabloites, on the other hand, use this ‘fact’ of ‘left’ swings of some petty-bourgeois nationalists to justify capitulation to those forces. Is this point separate from the differences over method and philosophy? Certainly not: Marxist analysis of the whole modern epoch has established that the political leaderships representing non-working-class social strata can go only to a certain point in the struggle against imperialism. The objective limits to their revolution lead them eventually to turn against the working class, with its independent demands which correspond to the international socialist revolution. Only a course of the construction of independent working-class parties aiming at workers’ power, based on the programme of Permanent Revolution, can prevent each national revolution from turning into a new stabilisation for world imperialism. The struggle to create such parties has been shown to involve a necessary fight against opportunists and counter-revolutionary trends within the movement, in particular against Stalinism which subordinates the working class to the nationalists, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois, on the grounds of the theory of ‘two stages’, which conforms best to the Stalinist bureaucracy’s line of an international understanding with imperialism. It is in line with these ‘facts’, facts established through the struggles and theoretical work of Lenin, Trotsky and others, that we evaluate the posturings and the actions of present-day political tendencies, and *not* by regarding the latter as facts ‘in themselves’ or as ‘given circumstances’ à la Hansen and J. P. Cannon.

Class Analysis is Needed

Hansen and the SWP leadership approach the whole international situation in this non-Marxist, empiricist manner. Hansen complains about the SLL ignoring facts, refusing to analyse ‘new reality’, since they don’t seem to fit the prescriptions of Lenin and Trotsky. On the contrary, comrades in the SLL have made a small beginning in analysing the real class basis of the surface ‘facts’ of the present situation. Hansen is satisfied to *list* the ‘mighty forces of the colonial revolution and the interrelated process of de-Stalinisation’. We have published several articles (see *Labour Review* 1961 and 1962, articles by Baker, Kemp, Jeffries, and the resolution ‘World Prospect for Socialism’) beginning a *class* analysis of the relation of these two processes (struggles in the colonial countries and crisis in Stalinism) to the international revolution of the working class against imperialism. We have yet to find any such attempt in the publications of the SWP or the Pabloites. What we do

find is a search for the most positive or progressive trends within the Stalinist and nationalist movements. This means taking *surface* ‘facts’, like the pronouncements of the Chinese or Russian Stalinist leaders, and abscribing to them positive or negative values. Germain¹⁴, for example, arrived at the conclusion that apart from the idea of the revolutionary International, there existed ‘bits’ of the Trotskyist programme in a ‘broken’ way in the various Communist parties of the world, from Yugoslavia with its factory committees, through Italy, Russia and China, to Albania with its insistence on the rights of small parties! No doubt this is a good example of empiricism systematically carried out. It would be interesting to ask minorities within, say, the Albanian Communist Party what the ‘pragmatic’ consequences of this ‘systematic empiricism’ have been for them! (See also the ‘critical support’ for various wings of Stalinism in the IS Resolution on the 22nd Congress.)

Was Evian a Victory?

But to return to Hansen’s reply. It is of the greatest interest that Algeria is almost completely dropped from the argument. This is because the SLL’s accusation about ‘prostration’ before nationalist leaders is best exemplified there.

In earlier documents Hansen made great play of the SLL’s condemnation of the Evian agreement between the Algerian government and French imperialism. We said that this was a ‘sell-out’. Hansen said that here was an ultra-left mistake, showing failure to recognise that at least Evian included national independence and should be welcomed as a victory. We proceeded from an analysis of the class tendency which has asserted itself through the FLN leadership in arriving at a compromise with French imperialism, preventing the Algerian people from going on to win their own revolutionary demands. Those who concentrated on the ‘victory’ and speculated about Ben Bella developing in the direction of Castro only helped Ben Bella to deceive the masses, and turned the energies of Socialists towards alliances with the bourgeoisie rather than the construction of an independent revolutionary party. We characterised this as a well-known form of opportunism, and we say now that by this kind of approach the Pabloites and the SWP are sharing in the preparation of defeats for the working class of Algeria instead of carrying out the responsibilities of revolutionary Marxists in constructing working-class parties. Pablo himself works as a functionary of the Algerian government in some technical capacity. By itself, this fact could mean anything or nothing. The important question is his political line and that of his organisation. There is not the slightest doubt that Pablo’s position in the administration will not be endangered by this political line (which does not at all mean to say that he may not be removed). Hansen’s articles in *The Militant* and the campaign of the Pabloites on ‘aid to the Algerian Revolution’ are confined to an appeal to aid the poverty-stricken victims of the legacy of French imperialism. Instead of a campaign in the labour movement, we have a humanitarian appeal. Pablo and his friends even press for the organisation of volunteer technicians and administrators to go to Algeria, take their place as servants of the Ben Bella

¹⁴ ‘Germain’ was the pen name of Ernest Mandel.

government, and thus counteract the possibly reactionary influence of French and American aid and personnel. In this way the 'objective' conditions will be created for a move to the left rather than to the right on the part of Ben Bella. In the course of all this, the Algerian Communist Party was banned, a new French aid programme was announced, and the direct control of Ben Bella's clique established over the Algerian trade unions. Meanwhile Ben Bella makes great play of tidying up the 'bootblack' racket and takes a 'firm stand' in telling the French to explode their bombs farther South in the Sahara. Are not these 'Trotskyists' conniving at the suppression of any democratic rights for the working class while the nationalist leaders carry out 'left' measures 'on behalf' of the masses? If this is not prostration before the national bourgeoisie, what in the world constitutes such prostration? Hansen claims that 'everybody knows' we need revolutionary parties, the only difference is on how to construct them. But in practice the Pabloites are not for the construction of such parties, they *avoid* the necessity of such construction. If objective developments in the 'new' reality will inevitably push petty-bourgeois nationalists towards revolutionary Marxism, perhaps the role of Trotskyists is only to encourage these background 'objective forces'.

Pierre Frank, prominent leader of the Pablo group, recently visited Algeria and reported his findings in *The Internationalist*, supplement to *Quatrieme Internationale*, No. 17, 13.2.63). There is hardly need to comment on the meaning of the following passages;

'If the government is composed of variegated social and political elements, one must say nevertheless that the central nucleus, the decisive nucleus found at present in the Political Bureau of the FLN (National Liberation Front) is based on the poorest masses of the cities and above all the countryside. This is its main strength. But it cannot automatically head toward extensive nationalization of the economic structure without running the risk of catastrophic consequences. For some years, it will have to permit a development of bourgeois forces, to compromise in certain spheres with foreign capital and to create bastions in the countryside and the towns in order to pass later to the construction of a socialist society. This will not be done without crises or without international and domestic developments that will run counter to this difficult orientation.

'To conclude: Everything is in movement. It is an experiment, a struggle that must be supported throughout the world, but which demands constant determination of bearings so that the development of the various forces operating on the terrain can be gauged. In this way we can contribute to this new revolutionary experience with its altogether specific traits, its difficulties and its potentialities, and help it move toward the socialist outcome.'

At the level of methodology, this illustrates the extreme consequences of a 'contemplative' rather than a 'revolutionary-practical' attitude. To the former, *empiricist* recognition of the 'given circumstances', 'the facts' is a natural starting point (and finishing post). At the political level, it illustrates the capitulation to existing forces, existing forms of consciousness in the political movement,

amounting in the end to support for the servants of imperialism, which flows from the abandonment of the dialectical method.

Who has Corrected Whose Errors?

Hansen says that we are harking back to the original differences of 1953 instead of demonstrating that the Pabloite revisions of that year have resulted in an opportunist course by the Pabloite 'International'. Because Hansen *accepts* the present position of the Pabloites on Algeria does not alter the fact that this course is an opportunist one. In any case, Hansen must still answer our question (See reply of C.S. to Hansen's Report to the Plenum. International Bulletin No. 11) in connection with this matter of 'correcting errors'. He advocates unification on the grounds that the Pabloites have corrected their course of 1953. But the Pabloite Executive Committee insists that unification is possible for the opposite reason-the SWP has overcome its failure at that time to 'understand' the programme of Pablo (Declaration on Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement, June 23/24, 1962).

In the advanced countries too, we have drawn attention to the current policies of the Pabloites. Hansen pretends that our criticisms have amounted only to seizing on isolated statements of Pabloite sections; 'Not even leaflets put out by this group of comrades (the Pablo group) in this or that local situation escape the sleuths. A phrase torn from a leaflet distributed at the Renault plant in Paris in defence of Cuba against U.S. imperialism serves for elevation to front-page attention in *The Newsletter* in London, so hard-pressed are the leaders of the SLL to find evidence of the revisionism of the IS.' (*Cuba The Acid Test*, p. 30).

In the first place, our reply to Hansen's last Plenum report on unification (International Bulletin No. 11) goes through Pabloite material on the main political questions of today, and it is nonsense to say the SLL has made no general criticism. If Hansen wrote '*Cuba – The Acid Test*' before reading this reply, perhaps he will now defend the Pabloites against what we wrote in it. Secondly, what is wrong with examining the leaflets put out by Pabloite sections? It is precisely the way policies work out in the work of sections which illustrates most clearly our differences of method. Surely the section in Paris is a fair example of a Pabloite section-the nerve centre of the Pablo International is there. And is the Renault factory just 'this or that local situation'? It is a vital concentration of French workers. In 1953 was it not a leaflet put out in the Renault factory which came under the scrutiny and attack of the SWP when it made the public break from Pablo? Thirdly, if Hansen claims that the passage criticised by *The Newsletter* was torn from its context, why does he not produce the context and demonstrate our methods of distortion? He cannot do this; the phrase concerned put international working-class solidarity action on the same level as 'aid' given by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Hansen prefers to quote *not a single word either from the leaflet or from The Newsletter's criticism!*

(We omit here a short reference to the Italian section of the IS, as it was based on a faulty translation of an article in their journal.)

Cuba and Spain

The major part of Hansen's attack on the 'ultra-left sectarians' is concerned with the attitude of the SLL towards Cuba. Hansen begins his document by trying to make an amalgam of the SLL and its IC supporters on the one hand, and the Posadas group which recently broke from the IS on the other. Hansen knows these are absolutely separate and distinct tendencies. He makes literally no evaluation whatsoever of their political content or the evolution of their present position. They are both opposed to 'unification', therefore, he implies, they must be responding to the same social forces and must be essentially similar. Here again we have an excellent illustration of the pragmatist method. The objective relations between these tendencies, their history, and their response to the major political problems, are ignored. It is *useful*, it 'works', to identify them with each other as saboteurs of unification-they are 'ultra-left currents'. Hansen reports that the Posadas group includes in its programme the prospect of a nuclear war against capitalism. This is thrown together with the SLL's opposition to characterizing Cuba as a workers' state. Posadas, says Hansen, must agree that Cuba is a workers' state, because it would be 'political death' to think otherwise in Latin America. The differences are thus to be explained geographically. Politically the Posadas group and the SLL are the same - ultra-left sectarians, driven to this by their fear of unification. How is this cussedness to be explained? Hansen is unclear: the heading of the Trotskyist 'mainstream' (the SWP leadership and the Pabloite IS) towards unification comes from the 'mighty forces of the colonial revolution and the interrelated process of de-Stalinisation'.

'The Trotskyist movement has not escaped the general shake-up either. The Chinese victory, de-Stalinization, the Hungarian uprising were reflected in both capitulatory and ultra-left moods as well as strengthening of the main stream of Trotskyism. What we have really been witnessing in our movement is the outcome of a number of tests - how well the various Trotskyist groupings and shadings have responded to the series of revolutionary events culminating in the greatest occurrence in the Western Hemisphere since the American Civil War. The move for unification and the symmetrical resistance to it are no more than logical consequences to be drawn from reading the results, especially those supplied by the acid test of the mighty Cuban action.'

Where is the explanation? Two opposite viewpoints are here 'explained' by the same thing. They were just different 'logical' results of approaching the same events. Could anything illustrate more clearly the barren consequences of refusing to deal with the *history* of the controversies and splits, and to probe to their basis in theory and method? Hansen found it more 'practical' to produce, by sleight of hand, an identification of his opponent, the SLL, with the views of the Posadas group.

The note by the French comrades, appended to this reply, raises similar points about the demagogic results of these methods of controversy. As they point out, their own document on Cuba comes under fire from Hansen but has not been issued to the members of Hansen's party. They also correctly indicate the unprincipled character of the argument which runs: nobody who counts in Latin America agrees with the SLL characterisation of Cuba; therefore it is suspect and shows how stupid and sectarian they are. As the French comrades remark, the 'opinions' of the Soviet and Spanish people were often quoted in a similar way against Trotsky's characterisation of the state and the ruling cliques in both countries. In addition, they take up Hansen's laboured jokes about their reference in an earlier document to a 'phantom' bourgeois state in Cuba. What Hansen must do is *explain* why such a concept is a matter for joking, and in what way he thinks it departs from the *kind* of analysis made by Trotsky of the class forces in Spain in 1936-37. Either Hansen has forgotten, or he chooses not to remind his readers, of the concept advanced by Trotsky at that time of an 'alliance' with the 'shadow of the bourgeoisie'. Perhaps he knows some good jokes about that too.

It would be pointless to take up every step in Hansen's documents in a similar way. His whole method is to argue from incidents and impressions, combined with the vaguest generalisations like 'the might of the colonial revolution' and the 'interrelated process of de-Stalinisation'.

Our Record on Cuba

On the question of Cuba itself, Hansen raises no new arguments in the discussion and no new facts on the regime there. We see no need to reply in detail to Hansen's caricature of the record of *The Newsletter* in defending Cuba before and during the blockade of October-November 1962. Hansen concerns himself entirely with the pages of *The Newsletter*: we take every responsibility for everything written in our journal, but we would also point out that Hansen was in Europe during the crisis. He, and *The Militant* correspondent in London, made not the slightest effort to acquaint themselves with the campaigning activity of the SLL during the crisis. Hansen correctly says that there were many demonstrations against the blockade - and he *contrasts* this with the 'insular' *Newsletter*! This is nothing but a slander. SLL members were right in the forefront of everyone of those demonstrations. They instigated and led a great many of them. The first mass meetings and demonstrations in Britain were led and addressed by our members. No one except the SLL organised a single factory-gate meeting against the blockade. Our comrades also fought tooth and nail to turn the protests especially into the Labour movement and to the factories. They had to fight resolutely against the right wing and the Stalinists in order to do so. They led these demonstrations against imperialism, and in defence of the Cuban Revolution, at the same time educating the workers and students in the role of the Soviet bureaucracy. They explained the causes of Khrushchev's contradictory policies, instead of joining Russell and the pacifists in praising his 'brilliant' diplomacy. In order to do this they had to fight the Stalinists, a fight which won

the support of many Communist Party members for Marxism. That could not have been done without training the SLL in the spirit of revolutionary Communist methods of work and a struggle against revisionism. How well would our comrades have performed had they been armed with the heritage of Pabloism - 'the new situation restricts more and more the capacity of counter-revolutionary measures by the bureaucracy' - or with Cannon's apologia: 'What else could he have done under the given circumstances?'; and calling up of Nehru and Russell, 'unaffected by imperialist propaganda', in his support? We are proud of our record in the Cuban events of last autumn, and we are ashamed of the identification of 'Trotskyism' with the capitulation to the Soviet bureaucracy of Cannon and the Pabloites. Hansen's long list of quotations from *The Newsletter* is really only a mask for that capitulation.

Abstract Norms

Hansen's case is basically the same as Pablo's in 1953. 'Objective' forces pressing towards Socialism make it impossible for the Soviet bureaucracy to betray, and press even petty-bourgeois groupings to adopt a revolutionary path. We have seen above how in Algeria this means calling on Marxists to simply help along the 'objective' forces that will favour a course to the left by Ben Bella and his nationalist government. For all the talk of firmness against imperialism which is supposed to be involved in calling Cuba a 'workers' state', the *actual* 'defence' of the Cuban Revolution by the SWP and the Pabloites was unable to even separate itself from the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy of Khrushchev! *This* is one of the things we mean when we say that Hansen is not analysing Cuba from the point of view of the development of the international class struggle, but by the application of abstract norms to isolated cases.

Hansen approaches the question of definition of the Cuban state by trying to relate it to the history of such discussions in the Trotskyist movement. The analysis of that discussion is certainly a vital part of the Marxist answer to the problems posed by Cuba today, but it will have to be along a different line to that taken by Hansen. He takes the SLL National Committee to task for ridiculing the imposition of abstract norms from Trotsky's definition of the USSR to the economy and political system of Cuba today. He says that we thus 'sever the connection' between the present and the past discussion.

Hansen even says we have cut out Trotsky's definition of the USSR 'by declaring it has no relevance to the Cuban discussion'. Is that the same thing as saying that the question of the Cuban state cannot be resolved abstractly by 'criteria' from this earlier discussion? It is always easier to demolish your opponent if you write his case afresh in your own terms. The real point of a historical analysis of the development of our concepts is to establish the way in which they scientifically develop by reflecting the objective world. Just as Trotsky's definitions of the USSR were hammered out on the basis of changing conditions in the USSR and in the world, of struggles against revisionist trends, and of the struggle to build a

new International, so the historical threads of the discussion today must be seen as part of the struggle to build a revolutionary International able to lead the working class to power. The *whole* political line of the different tendencies in the Trotskyist movement must be the content of an analysis of their discussion on these questions. What looks like ‘historical’ analysis turns out in Hansen’s hands to be the most rigid and unhistorical treatment.

Petty-Bourgeois Leaderships and the Working Class

For example, he criticises *Trotskyism Betrayed* for failing to characterise the Soviet bureaucracy as a *petty-bourgeois* bureaucracy. Hansen’s insistence on this point has a specific purpose: ‘What was new in this situation-and this is the heart of Trotsky’s position on the question - was that a reactionary petty-bourgeois formation of this kind could, after a political counter-revolution, wield power in a workers’ state and even defend the foundations of that state while being primarily concerned about their own special interests.’ It follows therefore that under certain circumstances petty-bourgeois formations will be forced to lead the revolutions of workers and peasants and abolish the capitalist state. Says Hansen: the SLL leaders accepted this for Eastern Europe and China, why not for Cuba? (They should even be more willing, he suggests, since ‘the Cuban leadership is in every respect superior to the Chinese’.) We now see what Hansen means by ‘continuity’ in the discussion. Trotsky saw that a petty-bourgeois bureaucracy could lead and even ‘defend’ a workers’ state. After the Second World War this petty-bourgeois formation could even take the leadership in the extension of the revolution and the establishment of new, ‘deformed workers’ states’. So why should the SLL strain at the notion that petty-bourgeois leadership can lead the establishment of workers’ states in countries like Cuba? There you have the whole of Hansen’s playing with ‘the history of the controversy’. He picks out from the history one aspect, the characterisation as petty-bourgeois of certain social groups. This aspect is selected because it is the one essential to the justification of his present political course. Now it is, of course, absolutely essential that the characterisation ‘petty-bourgeois’ be very precise. This class is continually being differentiated into the main classes of society, bourgeois and proletarian. Its various political representatives reflect this intermediate, dependent and shifting position. They are capable of no independent, consistent political line of action, Only if a petty-bourgeois intellectual *joins* the proletariat, in Marx’s terms, can he achieve that independence and consistency of theory and action. The bureaucracy in the labour movement was often characterised by Lenin and Trotsky as petty-bourgeois in terms of its way of life, its approximation to the standards and acceptance of the ideology of the middle classes, its going over, in the special conditions of rich imperialist countries, to the way of life and social functions of the middle classes. They formed part of the ‘new middle caste’ of society in the imperialist countries, In the USSR the bureaucratic ruling group consisted of the elements listed by Hansen – ‘a reflection of the peasantry, the remnants of the old classes, the elements who switched allegiance from Czar to the new regime - all these and the political-military administrative levels of the new government who, under pressure from the Capitalist West, drifted from the outlook

of revolutionary socialism or came to prominence without ever having understood it'.

The term petty-bourgeois is not at all sufficient to characterise this bureaucracy for the purpose of the present (or any other) discussion. A *decisive* sector of the Soviet bureaucracy was Stalin's faction in control of the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet state. The historical relation between this party, this state, and the Soviet working class gave a specific character to the bureaucracy. It was not at all simply a question of relation between old, middle classes and a new governing elite. The existence of nationalized property relations established by a Soviet revolution, with the Bolshevik Party in power, gave us a historically produced petty-bourgeois stratum at the head of the first workers' state, a group which represented, as Trotsky so painstakingly insisted, not the general laws of development of classes in the transition from capitalism to socialism, but the particular and unique refraction of these laws in the conditions of a backward and isolated workers' state. In extending this 'capacity' of the petty-bourgeois, *as petty-bourgeois*, to defend and even extend workers' states, Hansen and Co. do precisely what Trotsky fought *against* in the discussion. Our French comrades are right to insist that the evaluation of the history of this discussion in the Trotskyist movement is more than a day's work, and the pre-condition of any useful results will have to be a much more serious and scientific handling of Marxist concepts than is displayed by Hansen with his easy identification of a 'petty-bourgeois formation' like the unique bureaucracy of the first workers' state with the petty-bourgeois leadership of the July 26th movement in Cuba.

Hansen on Permanent Revolution

In the coming months the French and British sections of the IC will publish contributions on the history of the discussion of 'workers' states'. Meanwhile we confine ourselves to differences in method to which Hansen draws attention, particularly in relation to Cuba, Nothing that Hansen says in '*Cuba - The Acid Test*' answers the main argument in our section on Cuba in *Trotskyism Betrayed*. But before taking up particular points from Hansen's document it might be useful to state the general position from which we think Marxists must begin. One reason for doing this is that Hansen accuses us of treating Cuba only as an 'exception', and of seeing no continuity between past and present discussions on the character of the state. Castro set out as the leader of a petty-bourgeois nationalist party. His party has led a revolution and been able to hold power in Cuba. How has this been possible? What is its significance?

In the Russian Revolution, the petty-bourgeois (the 'democracy') could not resolutely seize the power on its own account, let alone 'retain' power, because of the strength of the proletariat and its ally the peasantry at that period. Given resolute revolutionary leadership, the working class proved able to overthrow the 'democracy' and achieve power. This power, in the view of Lenin and Trotsky, was an international breakthrough. It was seen essentially, in this backward country, as a

power to be defended ‘until the workers of Western Europe come to our aid’.

In this summary are contained the basic ideas of the ‘permanent revolution’. Those countries who arrive at the stage of bourgeois-democratic revolution *late* cannot achieve this revolution under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. The latter, and its spokesmen in the petty-bourgeois parties, are too incapable of an independent development. Their relation to international capital and their fear of the proletariat make their task an impossible one, and they will run to the support of reaction. The proletariat is the only class which can carry through the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. But in the course of its revolutionary actions and the creation of its own organs of struggle, there arise independent class demands. From the first stage of the revolution there is a rapid transition to *workers’ power*. The condition for the maintenance and development of this power and its social base is the international socialist revolution.

Petty-Bourgeoisie in the Anti-Imperialist Struggle

The nations drawn into the struggle against imperialism now cover the entire world. The class composition of these nations varies enormously. In many of them, there is no industrial proletariat even to compare with the Russian proletariat of 1905, or the Chinese of 1919. In many of them, the development of industry has been forcibly restricted in the special interest of the ruling imperialist powers, so that the population consists almost entirely of a poverty-stricken peasantry. This peasantry is not at all identical with the ‘peasantry’ of Marxist writings in the 19th century. In many cases the majority of cultivators are landless sharecroppers and occasional wage-labourers. The special requirements of extractive and primary processing industries often create a special type of worker-migrant workers, spending half their time employed in mines or on plantations for low wages, the other half unemployed or back in small-scale cash-crop production or subsistence agriculture. The actual relationship of exploitation between international capital, banks, native money-lenders and merchants, landlords, etc., on the one hand, and the direct producers, peasants and workers, on the other, presents new and original forms. These forms are often hideous combinations of the ruthless drive for profit of advanced finance-capital and the backward social relations of feudal sheikhdoms and chiefdoms. At the political level, the peoples of these countries suffer the same deadly combination. All the horrors of modern war are visited upon them, either in direct conflict between the imperialist powers or through the equally effective ‘pacifying’ activities of the United Nations. In each case, we must see a particular combination of the forces and the laws analysed by Trotsky and Lenin in their work on imperialism and the Permanent Revolution.

Cuba is one of those countries where capitalist development has been almost entirely a function of foreign investment and control. The dependence of the economies of Latin American countries upon a single crop or resource (for Cuba, sugar) has often been described. The national bourgeoisie could never be an independent social force in Cuba. It could function only as a political or

commercial executive for U.S. investments. Under these conditions the petty-bourgeois democratic ideologists could not long play their classical role in the bourgeois revolution, that of providing a political leadership tying the workers and peasants first to the bourgeois struggle against absolutism or for independence, and then tying these lower classes to the new regime. In the Russian Revolution the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks attempted to do this. The leadership of the Bolsheviks over a proletariat concentrated in a few advanced centres, particularly Petrograd, in the vanguard of a peasant war, won Soviet power. The alternative would have been a repressive regime founded on the capitulation of the petty-bourgeois parties to the counter-revolution. Even in Germany and Italy, more advanced countries with much larger working classes, the failure of the proletarian revolution was replaced within a short time, not by bourgeois democracy, but by the naked oppression of Fascist regimes. Mankind had entered an epoch where the alternatives were Socialism or Barbarism, in the shape of Fascist reaction.

Capitulation to Soviet Bureaucracy

In the world today, we have a more advanced stage of the same situation. Not only barbarism but complete annihilation presents itself as the alternative to Socialism. This fact on a world scale, together with the preservation of the workers' state under bureaucratic domination in the USSR and the setting up of similar regimes in other backward countries (Eastern Europe and China), have led some 'Marxists' to view the present situation as qualitatively different. The Stalinists have concluded that the threat of war and the power of their own military forces make practicable a strategy of peaceful competition with the leading imperialist powers, and peaceful and Parliamentary roads to Socialism within the individual nations. This is quite clearly not a *theory* but an ideological apology for the actual capitulation of the Soviet bureaucracy, determined above all to preserve its privileges by balancing between the working classes and imperialism. The current Sino-Soviet dispute raises these questions for discussion throughout the Communist Parties. Never was there greater need for theoretical clarity and decisiveness by the Trotskyist movement, for only the scientific development of the theory of Permanent Revolution can provide any answer to the problems raised. In our opinion the revisions of Trotskyism by Pablo, leading to the split in 1953, and now manifested in opportunist policies for the advanced countries, the workers' states, and the colonial countries, were a political capitulation to the forces which stand between the working class and the overthrow of imperialism. The power of the Soviet bureaucracy, and the slowness of the European and U.S. labour movements to resolve the crisis of leadership in the 1930s and 1940s, had an impact on the ideas of Pablo and his group which was not interpreted scientifically, in a class way, but impressionistically. This abandonment of the dialectical method, of the class criterion in the analysis of society and politics, resulted in the conclusion that forces other than the proletariat organised behind revolutionary Marxist parties would lead the next historical stage of struggle against capitalism. We have seen how Hansen explains this for China and Eastern Europe. We remember Pablo's insistence that the Stalinist parties in countries like France could lead

the working class to power. We have seen since then the ‘rehabilitation of the revolutionary peasantry’ by Pablo and the current belief that petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders can lead the establishment and maintenance of workers’ states. In Cuba, even an ‘uncorrupted workers’ regime’ has been established, according to these ‘Marxists’. All this is possible because there is a ‘new reality’; as Hansen says: ‘To this we must add that the world setting today is completely different (?) from what it was in 1936-39. In place of (?) the entrenchment of European fascism, the Soviet Union has consolidated a position as one of the two primary world powers. The Soviet economic structure has been extended deep into Europe. China has become a workers’ state. The colonial revolution has brought hundreds of millions to their feet. De-Stalinisation has altered the capacity of the bureaucracy to impose its will in flagrant fashion as in the thirties ...’

The similarity here to the analysis of the ‘new situation’ presented by the Stalinists is remarkable. They, too, discuss at the level of ‘the strength of the Socialist camp’, ‘the colonial revolution’, ‘the defeat of fascism’ and ‘the growth of the Soviet economy’. They, too, try to protect themselves from the formation of new revolutionary parties by claiming that it is *their* defensive reaction of ‘de-Stalinisation’ which assures the future of the Communist movement. Those who refer to Lenin are ‘dogmatists’! Capitulation to the bureaucracy in political questions will eventually involve a descent into their methods of thinking, in narrow empiricism and pragmatism, combined with demagogic generalisations. This is the type of thinking which underlies the present revisionist barrier to the building of the Fourth International.

The SLL’s Position on Cuba

Let us briefly now summarise the ‘refutations’ made by Hansen of our position on Cuba as stated in the document *Trotskyism Betrayed* and see how they stand up.

1. We criticised the ‘normative’ method of applying separate ‘criteria’ abstractly and unhistorically without specific historical and class analysis. We demanded instead a class analysis of the political forces and of the government and state in Cuba. Hansen replies by accusing us of ignoring the historical continuity in the discussion on the class character of the USSR, China and Eastern Europe and Cuba. We have seen above the way in which he establishes this ‘continuity’ - by finding in it justification for acceptance of petty-bourgeois formations as leaders of the working class. We have tried, in anticipation of future analysis, to lay down the general Marxist framework for a discussion. We have suggested that the analysis carried out over the last two years in *Labour Review* form the basis for a class evaluation of the nationalist and Stalinist forces in Cuba and other countries.

2. We stated categorically that the new unified party (IRO)¹⁵ of Castro and the Stalinists could not be a substitute for the construction of a revolutionary Marxist party in Cuba. Hansen does not take up this question at all. He presumably defends the position stated earlier by Cannon, that the Trotskyists should take a loyal place within the IRO. Hansen replies to the French comrades that in their writings, ‘The meaning of the attacks on the Cuban Trotskyists (by government officials and spokesmen) is exaggerated and placed at the wrong door besides not being properly balanced against the ideological influence which Trotskyism exercises in a significant sector among the Cuban revolutionary vanguard.’¹⁶

He still must explain the clear statement of Guevara that no factions shall exist in the IRO, whose ‘democratic centralism’ will thus be of the Stalinist type. He must explain who is responsible for the attacks on Trotskyists. And he must not ask us to take seriously his gentle hint that the SWP or someone else has secret influential friends by Castro’s side. When did that become a Marxist argument, and what has it got to do with the question whether a Marxist party can be built? No doubt we will also be told that in Algeria there is ‘ideological influence’ by Trotskyists like Pablo in ‘a significant sector among the revolutionary vanguard’, but we find it difficult to get excited about that. Hansen had the opportunity in this part of the, argument to expand on his earlier theme: ‘We all know the ABC - we need revolutionary parties - but the question is how to go ahead and build them.’ But he has *nothing* to say except that it is ‘exaggerated’ to defend the Cuban Trotskyists from attack by the State apparatus and that it should be remembered we have some friends in there.

3. We stated our opinion that the dictatorship of the proletariat had not been established in Cuba, and that therefore the label workers’ state was wrong. Hansen does not take the question head-on - or perhaps this is one of those old ‘norms’ of Lenin which are too old fashioned to apply. To our argument that the state machine remained a bourgeois structure *despite* the absence of the bourgeoisie, Hansen replies only with attempted ridicule, despite the fact that, as the French comrades have pointed out, this involves him in the necessity of revising Trotsky’s conclusions about Republican Spain in the 30s (*Spain-The*

¹⁵ In July 1961, the *Integrated Revolutionary Organizations* (IRO) was formed by the merger of Fidel Castro's *26th of July Revolutionary Movement*, the *People's Socialist Party* (the old Communist Party) led by Blas Roca and the *Revolutionary Directorate March 13th* led by Faure Chomón. On March 26, 1962 the IRO became the *United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution* (PURSC) which, in turn, became the Communist Party of Cuba on October 3, 1965 with Castro as First Secretary.

¹⁶ The Socialist Workers Party, while initially defending the Cuban Trotskyists against the repression of the Castro regime, had within a few months, made an about face and supported the repression. This episode remains one of the seamier chapters in the history of opportunism. An excellent chronicle of the history of Cuban Trotskyism is available in the doctoral dissertation of Gary Andrew Tennant. An extensive discussion of the repression of the Cuban Trotskyists from this document is available online at, <http://www.cubantrotskyism.net/PhD/chap7.html#sec712>

Last Warning 1936).¹⁷ The SLL, says Hansen, should revise their opinion because: the *imperialists* disagree about it being a bourgeois state; the ‘people’ of the USSR and the other workers’ states disagree(!); the Cuban people disagree; other Marxists disagree; and finally, the present SLL position was once stated by Pablo himself, before he learned better. All these arguments amount to precisely nothing (see the letter from F. Rodriguez, in this bulletin).

¹⁸

Hansen does not take up at all the question of Soviets or workers’ councils as the form of State power, and the meaning of a ‘militia’ without such workers’ self-government. He does not say how this ‘militia’, controlled in fact through the army by the centralised state apparatus, differs from ‘the people in arms’. Is it not a fact that the arms supply is regulated through the army and *not* through the militias? Through the State apparatus and *not* through workers’ councils or committees? Why does not Hansen take up our argument that the old state machine was not smashed but was staffed with personnel from Castro’s own movement, later supplemented by the Stalinist bureaucrats? Is it a ‘norm’ from Marx and Lenin which must now be dropped? We insist that so long as the petty-bourgeois leadership of Castro keeps hold of this state machine, bureaucratically independent of any organs of workers’ power, in control of *force* in Cuban society, then it will function as the main hope for the re-entry of the bourgeoisie into Cuba, nationalization notwithstanding.

4. Essentially connected with the last point was our characterisation of Castro’s government as a Bonapartist regime resting on bourgeois state foundations (*Trotskyism Betrayed*, p. 14). Certainly Castro has leant heavily on the proletariat and the poor peasantry up to now, but he also is careful to preserve a relationship with the rich peasants, and the exigencies of the economy may force him to rely on them more and more. Hansen should think out how far he is prepared to go with Castro in such an eventuality. Already Pablo, with whom Hansen wants to unite, has been working out a theoretical line to justify Ben Bella’s insistence that in Algeria the peasants are more important than the workers. If Hansen is to answer the case far saying Castro is a left Bonaparte, balancing between imperialism and the working class, then he must give an alternative explanation for the absence of proletarian democracy in Cuba. If Cuba is an ‘uncorrupted workers’ regime’ how do we explain the absence of workers’ councils? What explanation is there other than the preservation of the independence of the State power by Castro and his movement, *against* the working class as well as against imperialism? Stalin’s regime was also characterised by Trotsky as a Bonapartist one. Does that mean that Cuba, like the USSR, is therefore a workers’ state? No: we say that Stalin’s was a bureaucratic regime resting on the proletarian state foundations conquered by the Soviet workers in 1917; Castro’s is a Bonapartist regime still resting on bourgeois state foundations. If the Cuban revolution can be successfully defended from foreign invasion, then the next stage will be a short period of dual power,

¹⁷ <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/xx/spain01.htm>

¹⁸ Published separately in the same issue of Fourth International.

with the workers and peasants led in their Soviets by a new revolutionary party behind the programme of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

5. Hansen makes no reply to our statement: 'The attack on Escalante was motivated by a desire to keep power centralised in his own hands and not by hostility to bureaucracy or any other such thing.' (*Trotskyism Betrayed*, p. 14). Hansen still writes as if it does not need proving that Escalante was removed from office as a step against Stalinist bureaucratism. But we must repeat that he leaves several points unanswered. What is the significance of the fact that the majority leadership of the Cuban Stalinists also condemned Escalante, and that *Pravda* welcomed his removal as a blow against 'sectarianism'? Does it mean that they are now taking their place in Castro's crusade against Stalinism? But would not this imply that the Stalinist movement is reforming itself along the right lines? Or does it mean that the Cuban CP and *Pravda* decided to humour Castro for the time being, acknowledging his strong position in Cuba itself? In that case the nature of the relation between the July 26th movement and the Stalinists should be exposed by the SWP, and its implications for the nature of the new 'united revolutionary party' recognised.

The main basis for interpreting Escalante's removal appears to be the speech of Castro 'Against Sectarianism and Bureaucracy'. In this speech Castro gave many examples of favouritism and bureaucratic discrimination in the State administration. Escalante and his group, according to Castro, used their power to staff the state apparatus at all levels with their own (Communist Party) nominees. All this seems to be very fine, but if the speech is read carefully, and compared with earlier speeches and writings, it becomes clear that there is more there than meets the eye.

In condemning Escalante's appointments, Castro repeatedly remarks that the men appointed were not proved revolutionaries but Party intellectuals, some of whom were under their beds while the revolutionaries were risking their lives against Batista's regime. The clear implication of this part of the speech was to assert the leadership of the July 26th group over that of the Communist Party, and to *threaten* the Communist Party with calling up the sympathies of the people behind the 'real revolutionaries'. It was probably against this very real danger to their own bureaucratic positions that the Stalinists decided to join in the attack on Escalante and cut their losses. It is very interesting to compare this speech with Castro's equally well-known one, also published by the SWP, in which he claimed to have always been at least close to communism. In this latter speech, made at a stage when he was more dependent on the Communist Party for the staffing of the State bureaucracy, Castro almost apologised for whatever hostility he had shown to Stalinism in his earlier career. He explained that only his 'lack of understanding' prevented him from being a Communist; he thus glossed over the betrayals of Cuban Stalinism in the past. He called upon the militants of the July 26th Movement to learn Marxism from the old hands of the Communist Party. What else can we call these rapid changes in emphasis except the adaptation of a

Bonaparte to the changing necessities of preserving his domination? Could anyone suggest that they bear any relation to a serious or revolutionary evaluation of Stalinism as a political trend?

In this matter, do Castro's speeches to the populace bear any relation to the process of 'educating the masses' at which he is supposed to be so adept? An article from Hansen on this question would be interesting. In '*Cuba - The Acid Test*' he makes only the briefest references to the question: 'the alleged take-over of Castro's forces by the Cuban Communist Party has been sufficiently exploded by events' (p. 28).

Hansen chooses here to ignore the point that even if he was right about the significance of Castro's actions 'against bureaucratism' this would largely confirm what had been said about the dangers to the Cuban revolution of Castro's dependence on the Stalinists in staffing the State apparatus. He makes no analysis of the actual relations between the July 26th Movement and the Communist Party, and simply refers once again to 'the measures taken by the Castro regime against Stalinist bureaucratism' (*Cuba - The Acid Test*, p. 16) as if nobody could question their 'revolutionary' or progressive character. But a reading of Castro's own speech makes the matter quite clear. In condemning the bureaucratic appointment to State positions of Communist Party members by Escalante, Castro is defending *not* workers' rule, proletarian dictatorship, but the independence of *the State machine*. He insists in so many words that *the state* must have the right to place all personnel. These officials will be loyal *to the State* and not to any outside organisation. The assertion of the worth of the July 26th fighters against those who were 'under their beds' is a justification of this independent power of the centralised state apparatus itself, under the direct control of Castro's government. Guevara's speeches against workers' control in industry, and the attacks on the Cuban Trotskyists, are in the same line.

6. Hansen repeats all the arguments about nationalization carried out by the Castro government, without introducing anything new to the discussion. We had indicated that nationalization today could mean many different things, and was often carried out on a large scale by bourgeois governments, particularly in backward countries. The longer capitalism continues in the absence of proletarian victory in the advanced countries, the more capitalist economy will have to adopt measures which conform to the character of modern industry, division of labour and communication, yet still restricting the economy within the contradictions of capitalism. Hansen makes a terrible hash of the argument at that point. He says: if nationalizations like those in Cuba can be carried out by a bourgeois state, doesn't this lead you to the conclusion that capitalism can still have a progressive role? This is only the argument of the revisionists ('Capitalism can make itself work') stood on its head. Hansen is taking at their face value the claims made by the governments and capitalist spokesmen for such changes. The fact is that the economy of Cuba, or Israel, or Egypt, or any other country, will be *hindered* by such a framework from becoming part of the rationally planned international

economy of Socialism. Does the use of atomic fission prove that science and industry can still advance under capitalism, and that Marxism is wrong? Or doesn't it demonstrate that every technological advance, so long as imperialism is not abolished, turns into its opposite, i.e., that all development involves greater economic and political contradictions?

Hansen does not take up the relevance of his criteria of 'nationalization' for say, Egypt or Burma, where a military-nationalist government recently nationalized the banks and many foreign holdings. Perhaps these will have to be called workers' states, since if somebody else (bourgeois or petty-bourgeois governments) nationalized these enterprises, that might imply further progressive roles for the capitalist class and the capitalist system. We raised the question of the SWP's evaluation of these states in our earlier document, but Hansen gives no reply. On the question of nationalization of the land, one small point will show the incompleteness of Hansen's presentation. Hansen says that the alienability of land (whether it can be bought and sold) is 'beside the point in this discussion' but takes the opportunity to attack the SLL for its 'ignorance of the facts on this question'. He goes on: 'It so happens that the Agrarian Reform Law specifies that the "vital minimum" of land, to which a campesino gets a deed, "shall be inalienable". Exempt from taxes, this land cannot be attached and is not subject to contract, lease, sharecrop or usufruct. It can be transferred only by sale to the state, or through inheritance by a single heir on the death of the owner, or, in the event there is no heir, by sale at a public auction to bidders who must be campesinos or agricultural workers: Now a very interesting omission from this passage (a passage whose only meaning is that the Castro government has tried to create a stable, small and middle peasant class in Cuba) is that besides the vital 'minimum' there is also the possibility of much larger holdings, *up to a maximum of 1,000 acres*. Between the minimum and the maximum, the land *can* be sold on the market. Hansen's correction of our 'ignorance' here may perhaps serve as a model of how to start with 'the facts'.

7. Finally, we raised the question of a new revolutionary party in Cuba. Hansen ignores this completely. He prefers the 'facts'.

Hansen's Silence

In this reply to *Cuba - The Acid Test* we have restricted ourselves to the methodological principles raised by Hansen, and to a number of illustrations of the differences between us on these principles, particularly on Cuba. Other questions which we took up in *Trotskyism Betrayed* are ignored by Hansen, and we await his reply. For example, we took several pages to answer the accusation of 'subjectivism' in our evaluation of the world situation. Taking up Trotsky's *Transitional Programme* and the International Resolution of the SLL (*World Prospect for Socialism*) we showed that our evaluation of the relation between leadership and the objective contradictions of capitalism was the same as Trotsky's. Hansen makes no attempt to return to the attack on this point; perhaps

he thinks it enough to say that ‘the world setting today is completely different from what it was in 1936-39’. (p. 28). We also made a detailed reply defending our characterisation of the Algerian leadership and the Evian sell-out. Once again, nothing from Hansen in reply (see above). What kind of discussion is Hansen going in for? We try to take up all the points raised, to carry them to the end, and Hansen simply drops them. Such discussion soon becomes profitless. Similar treatment is given to the question of the Leninist approach to party-building. We tried to establish, from the documentary evidence, the falseness of Hansen’s claim that Lenin and Trotsky had built the Party primarily through flexibility and unifications. We pointed out the essential theoretical firmness and the ability to insist on splits characteristic of Lenin, and Trotsky’s recognition of this essence. Hansen replies not a word.

Finally, we take up once again the relation between the revolution in the advanced capitalist countries and in the backward nations. We especially insisted on the political implications of the SWP’s statement that ‘the pronounced lag in the West, this negative feature (was) the most important element in the current reality.’ All the talk of the revisionists about ‘favourable objective forces’ amounts *in fact* to the opposite of what it appears. Times are good, and getting better, but *for what?* Far the construction of revolutionary parties around the programme of the Fourth International? No! For the emergence of Marxists from the petty-bourgeois political groupings, a development which Trotskyists should direct all their efforts to supporting! This is the most that can be gathered from Hansen and the Pabloites. Their ‘deep entry’ and their silence on the principled questions of new revolutionary parties, Soviet democracy, and the political revolution, are designed to find ways of ‘getting in on the act’. Someone else is going to do the job, and at the moment the Stalinist bureaucracy and the nationalist leaders are getting on with it. As for the advanced countries: ‘In fact experience would seem to indicate that the difficulty of coming to power in the imperialist countries has increased if anything since the time of the Bolsheviks.’ This is used to back up Hansen’s agreement that the construction of revolutionary parties is an ‘absolute necessity in the advanced capitalist countries’. In the advanced countries it’s difficult: you need Marxist parties. But in any case the ‘epicentre’ of the revolution is elsewhere, and there it can be done by someone else. In effect the ‘parties’ of Hansen and the Pabloites in the advanced countries become cheer-leaders for the petty-bourgeois nationalists in Algeria, Cuba, etc. Hansen chooses to ignore the line of those Pabloites in Europe who ‘keep their heads down’ in the Social Democracy, hoping to be discovered as the core of some future centrist parties, rather than constructing independent parties in opposition to the reactionary leaderships.

Hansen’s document, *Cuba - The Acid Test*, is a serious warning to Marxists. It parades as a serious contribution to an international discussion, yet ignores a whole series of vital questions raised immediately before, questions concerning the whole record and orientation of Bolshevism.

In place of this, Hansen insists on 'the facts', and in particular, the fact of the Cuban Revolution. Into this part of the discussion he introduces nothing new except a demagogic distortion of the SLL's position and a crude attempt to gain something from the different evaluations of the Cuban state by the French and British sections of the IC.

All this indicates that Hansen is running away from the fundamental political questions. His insistence on 'The Acid Test' of Cuba is a plea for 'commonsense' to override theory. It is this which underlies the wholly different concepts of building the International now dividing the SWP and the SLL. Without revolutionary theory, no revolutionary party.

The great benefit to be derived from *Cuba - The Acid Test* is that it makes explicit the foundations of this abandonment of revolutionary theory, of dialectical materialism. Hansen has now placed out in the open his defence of empiricism as a method, a method which has a natural expression in the politics of opportunism. It is to these politics that Hansen's method now leads. It is for this reason that he and Cannon drive for unification with Pabloism, whose opportunist and liquidationist revisions 1953 have not been in any way corrected. All that has happened is that the theoretical stagnation of the American Trotskyists has led them inescapably to the same end.

Adapted unanimously by The National Committee of The Socialist Labour League on 23rd March, 1963.

ADDENDUM

It is characteristic of the Castro regime that not a single leading body of the ORI is elected. While Castro inveighs against sectarianism and dogmatism in the party, he is at the same time responsible for the installation of an autocratic and self-perpetuating bureaucracy.

For example, the 'reorganising process' in the ORI is carried out by the National Board - which is appointed. Who reorganises the National Board? Presumably Castro. There is no freedom for dissident tendencies and no provision for minority representation.

All policy decisions are made behind closed doors by a small clique of Castro and his supporters. There is no democratic debate and little discussion. For instance, during the last missile crisis, it transpired that 'some people' in the ORI favoured UN inspection. Who these people were and what chance they had to express themselves we do not know. We had to wait until Castro spoke to get what facts we could.

Again recently the workers of Havana were treated to a piece of organisational skullduggery without precedent in the revolution. This was the decision to

dissolve the acting Provincial Committee (37) of Havana, its executive board and Secretariat. It was replaced with a small Provisional Executive Board (11) with 'limited functions considered indispensable at this stage'.

The ostensible - and official - reason for this arbitrary action was the failure of this important leading organ to carry out the 'reorganising work' but the real reason was probably a political one - the elimination of the remnants of Escalante's forces in the ORI.

The Provincial Committee - one of the most important in Cuba - has no right of appeal to any Congress of the ORI for the simple reason that there has been no democratically convened Congress, and there is little prospect of seeing one in the future.

At the same time, too, all the party organisations in the Province of Havana have been placed under the direction of eleven Regional Commissions which are not subject to election and renewal.

The bureaucratic centralisation going on in the ORI is the antithesis of working-class democracy and is the surest symptom of Bonapartism in the revolution.

We do not wish to make a fetish of democracy - nor do we wish to minimise the importance of the ballot vis-à-vis the ballot in a revolution. But dictatorship if it is to remain popular and viable must be tempered by the widest democracy. Comrade Cannon in his own inimitable style expressed this thought succinctly when he wrote:

'When the founders of scientific socialism said the workers must emancipate themselves, they meant that nobody would do it for them, and nobody could. The same holds true for their organisations, the instruments of struggle for emancipation. If they are really to serve their purpose, these organisations must belong to the workers and be democratically operated and controlled by them. Nobody can do it for them. So thought the great democrats, Marx and Engels.' (*Notebook of an Agitator*, p. 239, Pioneer Publishers 1958).

We cannot say more.

APPENDIX:

A LETTER FROM JAMES P. CANNON TO FARRELL DOBBS,

Los Angeles, California, October 31, 1962

Dear Farrell:

Now that the crest of the Cuban crisis *seems* to have passed, everyone is assessing its outcome. This is the trend of our thinking in informal discussions here.

We must keep our eyes on the main issues and not get side-tracked by subsidiary considerations. What was the situation?

1. The U.S. naval blockade was *set* for a clash with Soviet ships which could escalate into nuclear war. Kennedy gave clear notice that the U.S. would not stop at the use of the most forceful measures.

2. The Pentagon was ready to bomb and invade Cuba and crush its revolution. Newspaper accounts report that this was one of the alternative moves considered even from the start, and it was to be put into effect if Moscow did not yield on the missile *bases*.

In the face of these direct and immediate threats to world peace and the Cuban revolution, Khrushchev drew back, agreed to pull out the missiles, and dismantle the bases under UN supervision. He received in return a suspension of the blockade and public assurances that Cuba would not be invaded.

What else could he have done under the given circumstances? It would have been foolhardy to risk setting off a thermonuclear war and daring the U.S. to come and wipe out the Cuban bases in view of Washington's evident determination to go to the limit if necessary.

In our opinion Khrushchev sensibly backed away from such a showdown, thus saving the world from war and the Cuban revolution from attack by overwhelming forces for a *time*. But this *time* is of decisive importance!

The retreat was unavoidable and the concessions, as we know about them, did not give up anything essential. Those who judge otherwise should tell us what alternative course the Kremlin should have followed on the military and diplomatic fronts at that excruciating point of decision. Should Khrushchev have defied the embargo or refused outright to withdraw the missile bases?

The crisis over Cuba is of immense importance. But we should not forget it is only one *sector* in a worldwide conflict between imperialism and the workers

states which has witnessed in the past, and will see again, advances and retreats by one side or the other. As revolutionary realists, we have not criticised or condemned heads of workers' states or union leaders for retreating and making concessions when the balance of forces was unfavorable. Lenin traded space for time at Brest-Litovsk. As we know from our Minneapolis experiences, even the most militant leadership which is up against the gun may have to give ground before the insuperable power of the employer in order to save the existence of the union and fight another day.

The grim fact was that both the Soviet Union and Cuba not only had guns, but even more fearsome weapons, poised over their heads and ready to be used.

For this reason we do not believe that Khrushchev's course was incorrect on the level of military affairs and state relations. To condemn it and cry 'betrayal' would only help the Stalinists get off the hook where they are really vulnerable. That *is* their policy of supporting Kennedy, Stevenson and other 'peace-loving' Democratic capitalist politicians. This attitude, flowing from the Kremlin's doctrine of peaceful co-existence, has again been exposed as criminal.

Although we should carefully watch their development, we should be cautious and not jump to conclusions about the relations between Castro and Khrushchev. The latter's unilateral decisions and divergent aims may have created friction between them but it would be unwise to substitute speculations for solid facts. Khrushchev's declarations have not indicated any abandonment of Cuba, and it would be difficult for him to do so with the eyes of China, the colonial peoples and the Soviet militants upon him. On the other hand, Castro deeply needs Soviet aid.

The principal point---and you make it in the editorial - is that the world, the socialist movement and the Cuban revolution have gained time. The bombs are still there. But they were not dropped anywhere. And we are heartily in favour of that!

Despite gleeful claims by the American press that Kennedy's strong stand has given a stern lesson and severe setback to 'Soviet aggression', people unaffected by imperialist propaganda have, I believe, breathed relief over the settlement and thank Khrushchev for his sanity. Bertrand Russell and Nehru expressed themselves along that line.

We must remember that nuclear war would mean the greatest defeat for humanity and socialism. We must avert that terrible eventuality, not, to be sure, by stopping the class struggle against imperialism, but by utilizing every means that will give the workers time enough to wake up and organize themselves for that purpose.

JIM CANNON