

Draft Political Thoughts

By Ed Mead

Lately I've been working on my autobiography, particularly the section of it that deals with the development of the George Jackson Brigade and the politics that motivated us back in the mid-1970s. As a part of this process I have been rereading *Prairie Fire*, one of the books that served as the basis for our initiation of armed struggle. I would like to briefly talk about those politics and to share the substance of my current political thinking with you. It is my hope that doing so will help me to more accurately clarify and understand today's political realities. I would also like to talk about these areas with comrades on the outside who are struggling with similar questions.

I believe that some of the underlying political assumptions of the early 1970s have been proven false by subsequent events. Those assumptions were predicated on a viewpoint summed up by Truong Chinh, a Vietnamese revolutionary who in 1972 said: "The world balance of forces between revolution and counter-revolution has changed in favor of revolution." That may have actually been the case in back 1972, yet the condition did not last very long. Only a few years later it was clear that the strategic initiative had clearly shifted to the side of international imperialism, while the forces of socialism were in global retreat. I don't think there are many progressives who would disagree with this general assessment. It was our failure to appreciate this shift in the balance of class forces that in the lead the Brigade to

act, in the mid and late 1970s, on the assumption that a communist revolution in the industrialized West was a reasonably imminent probability.

In addition to our failure to grasp the changing balance of class forces, there was the concomitant ~~strategic~~ error involving a near classless emphasis on national liberation struggles. This mistake was made clear in our adoption of slogans such as Ho Chi Minh's quote that "nothing is more precious than independence and freedom." My point is that it was class considerations should have been primary, not nationalist ones. *Prairie Fire* billed itself as a strategy for revolutionary anti-imperialism, not class struggle. "Anti-imperialism," the book said, "defines our struggle and direction." (p. 40) The overall theory was that, "as colonized nations liberate themselves, imperialism's ability to maintain a stable economy and ideological hegemony over its own people crumbles. The decline of imperialism produces continuing crises inside the U.S." (p. 39) For us, the Vietnamese struggle provided a "strategic model" by which the process of creating more favorable conditions for revolution would unfold. I think it is now clear that any strategic viewpoint that tied our success to the victory of national liberation struggles was doomed. The peoples' successes in places like Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Nicaragua and elsewhere did not result in significantly more favorable political situation for U.S. communists. Instead, it was the Socialist Block that crumbled under the economic might of international imperialism.

Where that leaves me today is back at the basic principles of Marxism and Leninist theory, where class and economic considerations dominate the theoretical landscape. History, Marx teaches us, develops in spirals, repeating itself over and over again, although always on higher and higher levels. Globally speaking, it appears to me as if today's political reality is not too unlike conditions that existed during the pre-1914 era. That is a relatively stable economic period in which the financial competition among the imperialist powers for a redivision of the world is laying the foundation for yet another inter-imperialist world war.

The absence of a Socialist Block has heightened the international economic contradictions ^{severing as} ~~laying~~ the foundation for this war. The financial superpowers, like Germany and Japan, and their European friends, will be seeking a redivision of the world's resources and markets. While jockeying over the spoils of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union will probably hold them in check for awhile, I suspect that the conflict will become hot and more pronounced as events unfold. Just a World War One led to the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Second World War resulted in the triumph of socialism in China, so too should the looming Third World War provide socialists with the potential to organize for change. And it would seem that our line during such a period would be similar to that used in Lenin's day, that of opposing war until it comes and then working to transform the imperialist war into a class war against our respective national

ruling classes. The cradle of this next round of inter-imperialist war will likely be located in Eastern Europe, as was the case in the first and second world wars. The conflict in that region has already started. It will probably spread to the north as the level of Western intervention intensifies, and then south into a full-blown world war.

In addition to the above areas, there is still the need to explain the collapse of Eastern Europe and the breakup of the Soviet Union. I am inclined toward the notion that the absence (and violations) of socialist democracy were in no small part involved in this process. I am equally confident that this dynamic was far more complex, and dated back to the failure of the U.S.S.R. and China to have fully gone through the process of capitalist development. It was one of Marx's premises that socialism would emerge from the internal contradictions created by a fully developed and moribund capitalism. More study and discussion is needed in all of these areas. And from an ongoing reading of leftist publications, I don't see any real indication that the leading lights of communist thought are about to provide us with meaningful answers. I don't even see them asking the right questions.

Who would provide us with the political direction we so desperately need? Certainly not the essentially classless dead-end of narrow nationalism represented by the Maoists. The "Three Worlds" theory put forward by Mao in 1964 analyzed the world in national terms, by levels of development, rather than by class

considerations. This resulted in China's leadership branding the Soviet Union as capitalist, even imperialist and fascist (to date the Maoists have failed to reconcile their pre-collapse claims with the realities of unfolding economic and political events in today's so-called C.I.S.). The most modern representative of this trend is reflected in the armed struggle (class or nationalist?) now taking place in Peru. The Communist Party of Peru is guided by "President Gonzalo," the originator of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, Gonzalo Thought. Of the first three names, the PCP says, Maoism is principle because "it takes us to Gonzalo Thought which is the universal truth...." (*On the Rectification Campaign...*, p. 2)

Of course the method of dialectical and historical materialism contains no such absolute truths, but is instead a process through which we can analyze and better understand social and political realities. While I don't think we have any choice but to hold our respective noses and support the struggle in Peru, their offer of "absolute truth" isn't what I am looking for in terms of political leadership (if I want the "absolute truth" I'll attend religious ceremonies). In short, the personality cult represented by Gonzalo Thought, and its elevation of Mao over Marx and Lenin, does not impress me as a sound ideology.

(Where here from here?)