



Discussion Bulletin

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ON BROCHURES AND FRACTIONS

By George Breitman

Some years ago the national office of the YSA began to misuse a word (brochure) because it did not understand its meaning. The practice spread through the YSA and then began to appear in the party. In the hope that it can be stopped before it goes any further, the following explanation is offered:

In American English there are leaflets, pamphlets and books. Pamphlets and books are usually differentiated by the quantity of pages; when it has enough pages, a pamphlet can be mistaken for a book. Leaflets and pamphlets, however, are distinguished from each other in another way: A pamphlet is stapled or stitched, while a leaflet is a single sheet of paper and does not require either stapling or stitching. A leaflet can be printed on both sides or can be folded so as to have 4, 6 or 8 pages; but if it is a single sheet of paper and does not require metal or string to hold it together, the proper word for it is leaflet.

What is a brochure? That is a French word, also used in other European languages, for pamphlet. It comes from the word "brocher," which means to staple; that is, it is a stapled piece of literature, a pamphlet.

Some years ago the YSA began to publish folded leaflets. But instead of designating them as leaflets, they gave them the fancy name of brochure. They did not mean to call them pamphlets, but since they didn't know what brochure meant and brochure sounded nice to them, they used that term for their folded leaflets.

But the meaning of words cannot be changed arbitrarily; at least not by a small group of people. When words are misused, the result is confusing at least and sometimes actually harmful.

Brochure is a fine word in Europe; its American translation and equivalent is pamphlet. Let Europeans use the word they understand, let us use the word we understand, and let us all avoid unnecessary confusion.

I probably wouldn't have mentioned the brochure misuse except that I now see another and more important word beginning to be mangled: fraction. It is obvious from listening to some of the new members that they have confused and contradictory conceptions of what a party fraction is. I think this points to some failure in our educational work among potential recruits and new members. A committee, a caucus, a fraction are not the same thing; and a party member will not function effectively until he knows the nature and purpose of each and the difference among them. I think occasional branch educationals should be organized to clarify these questions.

It always helps when we have a common understanding of what we are talking about. Capitalism encourages and revisionists are inherently attracted to imprecision, but revolutionaries should always strive for precision in nomenclature.

August 2, 1969
New York

CUBA REPORT

By Peter Camejo

Printed below is the summary of a report I gave to the Political Committee on March 21, 1969 upon my return from Cuba. There is nothing particularly new in the report. It confirms our general evaluation which has been stated publicly in The Militant on various occasions. Some of the specific information in the report may be of interest. For that reason I have submitted it to the pre-convention discussion.

Harry Ring pointed out to me that the report tends to exaggerate somewhat the amount of money in the hands of workers. In a case where a worker is earning the minimum of \$85 a month and has a family he must support there would be little money left over each month. It is difficult to know how big this category is but we can assume it is not insignificant.

Also, the CTC is really no longer functioning in the classical role solely as a trade union. An action like a strike is out of the question. The CTC is far more an apparatus for the implementation of governmental policy rather than for workers' protection.

* * *

What bureaucratic deformations exist in Cuba? Are there any forms of workers democracy? Is Cuba moving towards workers democracy or towards a deformed workers state? These are among the most important questions about Cuba on the minds of comrades.

During the nine weeks I spent in Cuba I tried to find out as much as possible along these lines. This was quite difficult. Reliable information on most social questions is the by-product of conflicts, debates, contending viewpoints each probing the weak points of the other's arguments. We are so used to this, both within our own movement and under bourgeois democracy, that it is hard to grasp the difficulty of checking impressions where there is no open debate, no competing arguments. This difficulty in answering the question already gives us part of the answer.

Also, one must be careful not to generalize from a few impressions. This is especially true since our study of the history of the Russian Revolution has taught us the interconnections between international and national policy, bureaucratic privileges and workers democracy.

From the history of the Russian Revolution we have noted how the rise of a privileged bureaucracy leads to the abolition of workers democracy and interna-

tionalism. Material incentives, individualism, and anarchy in economic planning were some of the other by-products in Russia of the rise of the privileged bureaucracy. With this model in our minds it is easy to begin extrapolating from partial information.

In this report I will attempt to outline some of the information which I feel is relatively accurate.

Internationalism

Internationalism permeates the whole society. The emphasis is on the colonial world and especially the struggle in Vietnam. Cubans are very proud of their material support for revolutionary struggles in other lands. Under the morality of the Cuban Revolution the highest honor is to go fight outside of Cuba's borders. There is no indication to my knowledge of a change in Cuba's internationalism since Che's death. There may be some rethinking of their general strategy for revolution in Latin America.

Coupled with their internationalism is a somewhat rigid concept of revolutionary struggles. Generally speaking an amalgam is made between armed struggle and revolutionary politics, and reformism and non-armed political activity. There are two important conclusions to be drawn from Cuba's differentiation between reformism and revolutionary struggles in terms of tactical questions. One is that they favor a revolutionary line. The other is that they turn a tactic into a principle which leads to a one-sidedness and therefore incorrect strategy throughout the world.

The only comparable historic situation to my knowledge was the Bolshevik line in 1905. Accepting the same analysis of the Mensheviks (bourgeois revolution) Lenin attempted to differentiate between the two tendencies (reformism and revolution) by tactical differences. Lenin stressed the preparation for armed insurrection by the party to such an extent that this tactical question literally became a principle resulting in some serious errors. Among these errors were such positions as opposition to the formation of Soviets, refusal to participate in Duma elections in the post-1905 period. Looking back at the Bolsheviks of the 1905 period Trotsky said that it wasn't that they were wrong but incomplete, one-sided. Our attitude towards Cuba's international strategy, I think, should be the same. It is not that it is wrong but insufficient.

Egalitarianism

The prevailing morality in Cuba is that all people should have equal material wealth. Cuba is attempting moral incentives rather than material incentives in order to carry out the necessary socialist accumulation. They are attempting to increase the number of social benefits provided by society rather than increasing individual pay. Thus they are moving away from the individualist (capitalist) concept of pay and wealth relating to the individual's job and work. The revolutionary government is attempting to make more and more social benefits free.

The above in no way means that differences do not exist. But I think it is fair to say that they exist in spite of the efforts of the revolutionary government not because of its policies.

The concept being practiced to develop equality is one of raising the bottom up, not lowering those who have a higher standard of living. All differences which exist reflect remnants of capitalist society. Housing is one of the more obvious cases. Some people are living in nice apartments while others live in mud huts. The government does not build any luxury apartments nor spend any substantial amount in repairing the better homes. Instead it concentrates on building good but cheap apartments which are for those living in the poorest housing. Undoubtedly there are abuses in carrying out this policy but the intent appears to be clear.

Minimum pay is \$85 a month for a full time (44 hours a week) job. Maximum pay in industry is \$250. Some very special categories such as doctors with a certain number of years behind them get \$350. However, if one was earning more pay before the revolution an adjustment or bonus is added called "historic" pay. Thus some earn \$800 a month or even more.

What this money means in terms of a standard of living is not the same as under a capitalist economy. An individual's food ration adds up to about \$15-20 a month. Rent is about 10%, to be abolished next year. Medicine and education are free. Thus any worker has more money available than he can spend. This is especially true for families with more than one person working. The result is that those with a higher income can eat out at expensive restaurants more often and at most a few other things.

Vacation time is one month for everyone equally. Cheap (\$5 a day) resort places are provided with room and board. Many of these are places taken from the bourgeoisie. Some luxury hotels are more expensive.

Volunteer Work

There is no doubt that huge amounts of volunteer work are being done. But it is hard to determine exactly what this means. For instance, large numbers of workers do a little overtime, possibly to only cover themselves from the moral pressure. Likewise it is unknown if some work centers after increasing work hours drop in labor productivity thus minimizing the advantage of overtime.

The daily papers endlessly report the factories which vote to do overtime without pay. This overtime is voluntary as far as I could ascertain. I found at least two cases (Sugar Mill Venezuela employing 1,712 workers and Victoria de Giron ship-building center employing 660 workers) where the workers voted against overtime without pay. At the sugar mill the workers are in a lower pay category and simply rejected the proposals of the party and management. At the Victoria de Giron ship-building center they agreed to work a ten-hour day until certain projects were finished but with pay. In each case the more revolutionary workers do overtime without pay on their own. I never saw a daily paper report a factory where the workers do not vote for the plans nor mention any opposition to the proposals. I was quite pleased to find factories where the workers had rejected the proposals.

I found that many people, if not the majority, like to go out to do volunteer work in the fields. It is a way of escaping from the routinism of life in a city job. Few, however, want to do agricultural work permanently. The government's plans to move people out of Havana, to move peasants into small urbanized centers, to bring all land under state control are carried out on the basis of voluntary choice. Some indirect methods are used to facilitate these plans such as only building new homes where the government wants people to go.

Internal Organizational Structures

First on the formal structural setup.

Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR): The CDR now has a membership of over 2,500,000. This is about 50% of the adult population. There are dues of 5-25 cents per month, plus once a month guard duty which defines membership for borderline cases. The CDR has continued to grow. This may possibly be a barometer of support for the regime.

The CDR is organized block by block. The base committee elects democratically a steering committee. Each post on the steering committee has a functional role.

Various base committees form a zone committee, zone committees a region, regions a province, six provinces the nation. For each level there is a committee of the CDR. However, the whole structure is by appointment from the top down. To become a member of a zone committee you have to be a member of a base steering committee. Then generally speaking you have to belong to a lower committee to be appointed to the next committee. Thus to be appointed to a provincial committee you have to have been functioning on a regional committee.

Cuban Workers Central (trade unions -- CTC): The CTC has a formal democratic structure. A mass meeting of all workers is held once a month in each work center. (Membership in CTC is voluntary but very few workers are not members.) Elections are held for a steering committee. In the elections there is a post called president. The president is automatically the representative to the next higher body. The next body then elects within itself a president, etc. The structure is the same as the CDR except there are no zone committees. National conventions are held with delegates elected at the base and local presidents being delegates. The national convention is structured both by regions and industry. All votes are by secret ballot.

At CTC elections each factory also elects a justice committee to handle complaints.

There is a great deal of discussion and plans for restructuring the CTC. A planned national convention in 1970 will probably institute new forms. This should not imply either movement away from or towards more democracy.

The national committee of the CTC participates with the Ministry of Labor in formulating all labor laws. Proposed laws are discussed at mass meetings and voted on. The changes are passed back up to the ministry which then makes the final decision. There's no indication that the ministry is not responsive to the suggestions.

Cuban Communist Party (PCC or in English CCP): To become a member of the party you have to be an advanced or "exemplary" worker. These are workers elected by each work center on the basis of their social attitude, morals, and work. From the advanced workers the base party committees pick their members. The party's decision must then be presented at a mass meeting where the workers can challenge the decision. The final decision is in the hands of the party. From the base committees on up the party is structured through appointments from the top down.

There is no doubt that the base members are self-sacrificing workers with exemplary socialist morality. There is also no doubt whatever that, although not formally proscribed, no tendencies are permitted.

Government: Cuba has a government made up of 8 individuals. They are the ministers. All formal governmental decisions are in their hands; in practice the party plays the role of the government.

Factory Management: Each factory is managed by a combination of the local CTC, work center party base committee and management committee appointed through the structure of the ministry.

Tendencies

This question is crucial to understanding Cuba. All power is heavily centralized. Although there is no formal proscription, there is no right of tendency in any organization -- including the party. It is true that any individual may stand up at a meeting or at an informal gathering and say anything, including speak for counterrevolution. But if a few people get together and try to put out their own paper they will be suppressed regardless of how revolutionary they may be. This suppression need not be violent. They may only be moved or their means for printing a paper taken away. But it also could be violent and include imprisonment. There is no way for the people to know. Arrests are not reported.

Thus police functioning against counterrevolutionary activity also spills over into checking for the existence of groupings within revolutionary organizations. There is a tendency to make an amalgam between disloyalty, counterrevolution, and opposition to the line of the party.

The lack of tendencies, of organized criticism, limits the meaning of all formal democracy which does exist at work centers and within the CDRs. It turns all organizations including the party into organs of implementation only. Thus most mass meetings discuss how to implement matters already decided. The press likewise concentrates on discussing how to implement, not the merits or problems regarding decisions.

Privileges

It is very difficult to ascertain whether and to what degree privileges exist. This fact alone indicates that privileges are neither institutionalized nor very widespread. There is no doubt in my mind that privileges of a minor na-

ture (more accurately abuse of authority) exist throughout the various administrative and other organizational apparatuses. This does not mean that there is a privileged bureaucracy entrenched in power. On the contrary, all indications are that the self-sacrificing administrator or party member is not likely to be shut off or pushed aside but promoted. A very critical administrator or party member is another thing.

I cannot say whether leaders eat differently from the masses. I suspect they do a little. They certainly may have better housing than the masses. But this does not imply real abuse. There are no special houses built. The highest standard of living is provided for foreign technicians, especially from the Soviet bloc.

However, the interrelationship between the party and government and the lack of democratic control over functionaries lends itself to bureaucratic abuses. There is a general faith in the central leadership, specifically Fidel Castro's determination not to permit a privileged bureaucracy to develop.

Direction

It was literally impossible for me to sense any general movement towards workers democracy or towards a privileged bureaucracy. On the contrary, I had the impression that the present contradictory situation could remain for a substantial period. In any case, I think it would be wrong to conclude that any variant is closed.

Presenting Our Position on Cuba

There are many facets to a correct presentation of our position on the Cuban Revolution. Here I only want to mention the importance of making clear that we do have differences with the Cubans. The lack of workers democracy and their position on Czechoslovakia involve questions of principles for us. For those comrades who wish to see an example of how to present our criticisms in a positive manner I would suggest you re-read Harry Ring's articles from last year's (1968) Militant (Sept. 13, 20 and 27) which deal with workers democracy and Joe Hansen's recent article on Castro and Czechoslovakia.

August 4, 1969
New York

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO CONSTITUTION

By Evelyn Sell

Article VII, Section 2 of the Constitution reads: "Each member shall pay monthly dues of Two Dollars (\$2.00). In addition, all members are expected to make regular voluntary contributions according to their means." Section 3 continues: "Unemployed members or housewives, not otherwise employed, shall pay One Dollar (\$1.00) per month."

I am recommending to the Convention's Constitution Committee that it consider amending those two sections so that dues are equalized for employed and unemployed members alike, for example: "Each member shall pay monthly dues of ** (**). In addition, all members are expected to make regular voluntary contributions according to their means." I would further suggest that the Committee consult with appropriate comrades in the national office in setting the precise amount of the dues.

Present definition of "unemployed members or housewives, not otherwise employed" varies from branch to branch, treasurer to treasurer, organizer to organizer. Judgments must be made on the basis of: part time work, occasional work, partial month's employment, differing situations for housewives within the same branch, etc. Treasurers must

keep track of each comrade's employment situation or depend on being told of changes (some comrades are constantly changing from one dues status to the other) which is a waste of human energy, creates too many problems when comrades forget to notify treasurer, and necessitates readjustments due to incorrect information. In short, the present dual dues system is arbitrary, i.e., according to the American College Dictionary: "subject to individual will or judgment; discretionary...capricious, uncertain..." It would be more practical, in terms of definition, and much simpler, in terms of bookkeeping, to have everyone pay the same amount of dues. I am sure that the Convention can arrive at a reasonable figure within the context of today's economic situation.

Regular voluntary contributions should reflect the differing employment situations of the comrades; dues should reflect the same membership situation.

(When the Constitution Committee takes up this question, it should check Section 4 of the same article since it, too, will be affected.)

August 7, 1969
Austin