

FOR N.C. INFORMATION

(Letter from Comrade Arne Swabeck received in the National Office
January 25, 1966)

A Letter To National Committee Members Assembled at the Plenum
February 11, 12, 13.

Dear Comrades,

Since the plenum will have to deal with important questions, both international and national in character, I hope you will give serious consideration to the following contribution to your discussion.

In the school of Marxism we have all learned that the revolutionary quality of a working class party is not established once and for all; it must be submitted to constant test and verification. If the revolutionary quality is to endure, it will need constant renewal; and only through the actual practical experience in the class struggle can political and theoretical clarity and firmness be maintained. But living and direct contact with the class struggle or with the working class movement has for the party been almost totally absent over a number of years.

Now the party has become an active participant in a mass movement -- the anti-war movement. This is not yet a working class movement, but in its favor is the fact that it is already attracting important elements from the black liberation struggle.

For the party, however, the transition from the prolonged isolation of the past into active participation in a mass movement opens a new stage in its development. At the same time, this stage brings the party face to face with a new historic test of its revolutionary quality. And in my opinion, the initial concrete experience in this test does not look promising.

But the anti-war movement is in reality only one part of a larger whole. It is the American reflection of the growing polarization of world-wide conflicting class forces. The basic counterrevolutionary role of American imperialism, which Trotsky elucidated in his critique of the Comintern Draft Program, is most clearly demonstrated now by the massive escalation of the Vietnam war. The obvious imperialist aim is to establish a military base in Vietnam from which to attack and, if possible, destroy the Chinese revolution.

Washington is very well aware of the role of revolutionary China. Demonstrating its firm solidarity with North Vietnam and

the National Liberation Front, China challenges the unbridled American imperialist expansion and supports revolutionary developments everywhere. These then are the chief protagonists in all major international class conflicts -- American imperialism and revolutionary China.

The confrontation of these two mighty forces commands constantly greater attention from friend and foe alike and from all social classes. It is rapidly moving into the center of gravity of world politics, both right and left. On this question also the party faces a historic test. Failure in this test will incur the penalty of forfeiting the revolutionary concepts which brought it into being.

The increasingly hostile array between American imperialism and revolutionary China is a direct expression of the growing conflict between antagonistic social systems. And as Lenin said: one or the other of these systems must prevail.

But the clash of modern U.S. arms with guerrilla forces in Vietnam bids fair to become a decisive historic turning point. In Korea the weapon superiority could not assure victory for the imperialist forces. In Vietnam such an outcome is even more remote.

A frustrating stalemate is the very best imperialist weapons can show; and this is tantamount to a defeat which will provide new inspiration and new incentive for further revolutionary developments, especially in the colonial world. Prospects are thus brighter for the ebb-tide, recorded by setbacks in places such as Brazil, the Congo, the Dominican Republic and Indonesia, soon being replaced by a new revolutionary upsurge.

In the United States as well, the consequences of the Vietnam war signals an approaching historic turning point. What has never been witnessed before is now actually taking place -- the existence of a living and virile protest movement opposing the war while it goes on full tilt. All signs point to continued growth of this movement, especially its dynamic youth sector in which, moreover, radical and revolutionary ideas are sprouting, amplifying and proliferating with the growth of the movement.

Bearing in mind these decisive developments both on the world arena and on home grounds, the policy pursued by the party in both areas assumes exceptional importance. However one may view the actual state of the anti-war movement or the issues propounded by the participants, it should be patently clear that

the party's main duty is to provide a leverage for revolutionary thought and action. But this is not the case at all. On the contrary, the party policy so far has been a continuation of the opportunist trend displayed by the treatment of the Kennedy assassination.

In the first place, the party responded to the several issues that have arisen, some of them distinctly revolutionary in character, by reducing all debate to an organizational maneuver. That is the real meaning of the organization of the national caucus. It has laid the party open to the charge of splitting the movement and, unfortunately, with good grounds for the charge.

One thing is certain, should the other national organizations, participating in the broad movement, insist on the same special privileges that we claim, namely to set up their own separate, independent caucus with their own independent publication, the movement would be quickly torn to bits.

The center of gravity of party policy is the single issue of immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. This is an excellent demand, of course; but it appears to be acceptable to most of the dynamic sector of the movement, composed of young radicals. Facts indicate this to be the case. The Washington conference decided that the next week-end of protest, March 25, 26, is to center around the theme, "End the War in Vietnam Now." The question then arises; what basis does the party have for supporting a separate national caucus within the movement. If the party is serious about advancing this movement, it should pull out of the caucus.

Elaborate arguments have been made to show that the real menace to combat in this movement is that of coalition politics. Though this appears to have entered the debate rather as an afterthought, such reformist ideas alongside of pacifist notions of "peace" candidates, etc., are bound to arise in a movement composed of divergent tendencies; and they will present serious problems. Accepting this as a fact, the question arises; how should a revolutionary party meet it? By insisting that the movement remain imprisoned within the confines of a single issue which is acceptable to most of the young radicals who, however, have raised other, and no less important issues of opposition to the Vietnam war. This would be unworthy of revolutionary concepts.

How should the party combat coalition politics from a revolutionary standpoint? Let us consider the issues of a revolutionary character that have already been raised in the

anti-war movement. And please remember, Marxists have always regarded the counterposing of revolutionary ideas and concepts as the only correct and effective way to fight against all reformist nostrums.

Firstly, there is the question of draft resistance. Comrade Shaw was quoted, as an SWP spokesman, in the New York Times to the effect that, "we don't take positions violating existing laws." This is a totally impermissible statement, and it lends emphasis to the party's failure to follow a revolutionary policy on this question. Even the Washington conference showed better understanding. Its anti-draft workshop expressed clear opposition to "Americans serving in the armed forces in Vietnam." But since at this political juncture the various forms of draft resistance are primarily individual actions, the workshop decided that "any program relating to the draft had to be subordinated to the anti-war effort as a whole, and had to play a subordinate role."

Considering inter-imperialist wars of the past we have held the position of not resisting service in the armed forces but rather prove ourselves as good soldiers alongside of our buddies as a means to prepare a more favorable reception for our ideas.

Vietnam, however, presents an entirely different situation. There American imperialism is engaged in a counter-revolutionary action; it is attempting to crush the Vietnam revolution and establish a military basis from which to move against the Chinese revolution. Under no condition can the party hold to the view that members should be good soldiers of the counter-revolutionary forces; that would mean to shoot to kill National Liberation Front fighters who are our comrades. The party must support the draft resistance. That is what a revolutionary policy demands.

Secondly, there is the question of siding directly with the NLF. It has already been raised in the anti-war movement and many young radical participants are taking that stand.

Bearing in mind the counter-revolutionary character of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam there can be no question that the party policy must be based on the concept of revolutionary defeatism. The party should favor the victory of the National Liberation Front, recognizing that its struggle is just. It is fighting a people's war. It aims to complete in South Vietnam the revolution that began some time ago in the North. To take the stand on the basis of revolutionary defeatism is for us in the United States mandatory.

draft

But The Militant insists (Halstead article) that the anti-war movement does not have to adopt a position on the NLF. With this the party serves notice it will not raise the question and it will oppose such a proposal coming from other tendencies in the movement. What is this but the negation of a revolutionary policy? Maintaining this attitude will vitiate and pervert the role the party should play in this movement. The consequences to the party will be serious disorientation. Conversely, only by pursuing a revolutionary policy can the party attract revolutionary minded recruits.

Thirdly, the idea of linking the anti-war movement with the black liberation struggle in the slogan "Freedom Now -- Withdraw Now," was proposed to the Washington conference by the Mississippi delegates. Quite obviously and quite correctly they sought to integrate the aims and broaden the scope of both the civil rights and anti-war movements.

The Negro movement represents that section of the working class which is now in motion and capable of providing the essential link between the radicalized youth in the anti-war movement and the proletariat. The civil rights struggle, while drawing inspiration from the colonial revolution, has ignited sparks in the anti-war movement and infused the latter with some of its militant fighting methods. The system of counter-revolution that created the war in Vietnam and the invasion of Santo Domingo is the same that commits murder and oppression of the Negro people. Whether we focus attention on Vietnam, Santo Domingo, Watts, Harlem or Selma, Alabama, these various areas form but different phases of one single struggle.

What reasons can possibly be advanced for not accepting the proposal made by the Mississippi delegation? Certainly not reasons founded on revolutionary principles. Joining the issues of withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam now and Freedom Now for the Negro people in common struggle would lend vastly greater impact to both movements. At any rate, this basic idea should be accepted as a policy objective by the party. Similarly it should support the draft resistance and adopt in theory and practice the policy of revolutionary defeatism. These policy objectives are all mandatory for a revolutionary party.

The main duty of revolutionary socialists in the anti-war movement should be an attempt to crystallize and give Marxist explanation and direction to issues of this character that have already been articulated in the movement. That would be the correct and effective way to combat coalition politics. We must hold firm to the conviction once adopted that the class struggle

of the workers, merging with the colonial revolution in common struggle against imperialism, is the only genuine fight against war. To do less than this surely leads to the slippery rail of opportunism.

A great opportunity is now available. The numerous young, viable and virile elements in the anti-war movement, who are moving leftward, are precisely the ones we want to reach with our message. But one cardinal principle the party must observe if it is to remain an instrument of revolutionary thought and action. It must gear its policy and its propaganda in this situation to the revolutionary objectives on which the party was founded. In other words, the party should utilize every opportunity available in the anti-war movement to broaden and deepen the struggle against the whole capitalist system as the only really effective way to oppose the Vietnam war. The more revolutionary ideas and concepts find expression within the anti-war movement the greater the impact of its opposition to the American imperialist counter-revolutionary ventures.

But the party cannot effectively promote such a development without a basic revision of its present attitude and policy toward the revolutionary leaders and the political regimes of North Vietnam and China. This applies equally to the YSA. The attempt made more than once in the party press and now repeated in the most recent YSA pamphlet on Vietnam to picture these as sell-out artists is scandalous, unprincipled and disgraceful. This is exactly the manner in which the YSA pamphlet distorts the 1954 Geneva Agreement and the attitude of the Vietnamese and Chinese leaders to this agreement.

"The most amazing fact that emerges from all that has been written about this conference," (in Geneva) the pamphlet declares, "is that the Viet Minh settled for so little." It goes on to quote the American bourgeois reporter, Tillman Durdin, to the effect that Viet Minh leaders were not happy about the settlement and that members of the Vietnam delegation had declared openly that pressure from Chinese Communist Premier Chou En-lai and Soviet Minister Molotov "forced their regime to accept less than it rightfully should have obtained." (pp. 13,14)

How does this square with the actual facts of the settlement? Its real significance is entirely missing from this misrepresentation. It fails to note that the Geneva Agreement marked an end to French colonial rule over Vietnam, and provided for the complete withdrawal of all French military forces. This is what the guerrilla war by the Viet Minh had been all

about -- to liberate Vietnam from French colonial rule. The settlement prohibited any foreign military bases in Vietnam; and to establish the right of self-determination for Vietnam the agreement provided for free elections in 1956 in both zones. These salient facts are not even mentioned in the YSA pamphlet.

And yet, acceptance and implementation of the 1954 Geneva Agreement is precisely what the government of North Vietnam and the NLF now demand from the American imperialists. For this the people are still fighting and laying down their lives. Why they do it was well stated by the British journalist, James Cameron, whose description of the unshakable determination of the people to win the war -- on their terms -- was quoted in The Militant, December 27, 1965:

"Victory, however, has a strict definition, which is the implementation of the Geneva Agreement of 1954, which requires a Vietnam united under popular elections and the elimination of all foreign troops from both the South and the North... 'The negotiations are over', they repeat, 'the negotiations were concluded in 1954 at Geneva by international signature. There is no more to say -- except when they shall be made good'."

In view of this, I think it entirely pertinent to ask the question: How will you justify before the Vietnamese people, and the Chinese people, the attempt to picture their leaders as sell-out artists? How will you justify the policy of political revolution to overthrow the Peking regime? Would it not be better to give some thought to the necessity of revising this policy?

Comradely yours,

s/ Arne Swabeck
January 19, 1966