

Session #3- Discussions

March 29, 1998

New World to Win: A copy of the new issue was passed around, and the importance of the lead article mentioned.

BA's "Over the Hump" Series: This was the main subject for discussion. One person opened things up by saying "What's the big deal with these articles? What is new here?"

Some of us suspect that the Party almost feels like it is in danger of losing its way, and that it needs very much to stoke the fires of its revolutionary will from time to time. But perhaps that is necessary for any party during periods when little progress is being made. Still, it is a symptom of an illness.

We do agree with BA that in times of difficulty and retreat there is a tendency to "lower our sights", water down our ideology, move towards reformism and away from revolution, and so forth. It is good to point this out, keep it mind, and struggle against the tendency.

One person emphasized this point (or one aspect of it) with her excellent remark: "You have to put out an advanced line to get an advanced response." That is something that ought to be permanently etched in each and every revolutionary's brain.

It was mentioned that several of the good points made in the articles seem not to be taken very seriously by the Party in practice. For example at the end of the "lowered sights" article BA says: "We don't want to go off into a corner and refine all our understanding and only *then* speak to the masses. That would result in another case of the more we do that the *stupider* we'll get." It seems to a number of us that this is exactly what the Party *has* been doing for some time now (and the predicted result has occurred too!).

One thing in the articles that we did not go into very much was BA's criticism of Stalin's approach to preventing a bourgeois restoration. He focused on two things: 1) police repression of open opponents, and 2) putting individuals from a working class background in positions of authority. Although both of these things are necessary, Stalin relied far too much on them at the neglect of other (Maoist style) approaches. Khrushchev, for instance, is one of the working-class-background individuals who Stalin thought could be entrusted with the revolution.

The first article in the series argued that you can lose specific battles even if your political stand is correct. While none of us disagrees with this general principle, it seems to some of us as if this has become sort of an RCP mantra these days—an *excuse* for failing to make any real progress toward revolution. Instead of looking for excuses why our revolutionary work is not going so well, it would be better if we actually examined that work seriously, criticized its weaknesses, and corrected them.

One comment about the "Problem of Uneven Development..." article that we did not really get into: While it is true that only a minority will be prepared to *fully* take on the administration of socialist society at first, and that only a minority within that minority will be capable of major leadership roles, the emphasis should be on *changing that situation* as fast as possible, and recognizing that this *can* be changed within a reasonable period. I, for one, was somewhat uneasy

about the tone of that article; it seemed at times almost a bit elitist to me. We don't want to fall into the outlook of the enemy:

Those who lead the country into the abyss
Call ruling too difficult
For ordinary men.
—Bertolt Brecht

It is true that right *now* the masses are not at all prepared to govern society. But the process of making revolution will require that the masses transform themselves, to a considerable degree even before the seizure of power, and to a much greater degree afterwards. It is “revolutionizing practice” (as Marx said) that transforms the working class into what it needs to be, and it is very wrong to focus on doing things “for them” (even governing society “in their interests”), instead of leading them to learn how to do it themselves.

BA's *An End to the Horror*: We had a briefer discussion of this book, but some good points were brought out.

One person remarked that it was somewhat painful to reread this book, and see its flaws in the light of what actually happened (the collapse of the USSR without world war or revolution). We discussed how not only the RCP, but all of us, and indeed virtually everyone else in the world (including most of those in the USSR), failed to even see the *possibility* that the contention between the US and the USSR might end by the peaceful capitulation of the USSR (or as one person aptly expressed it, via a “hostile buyout”).

The very excellent question was raised: What was it that prevented the RCP, and us as well, from seeing this as at least a possibility? One person suggested that the main problem was that although we knew the US imperialists quite well, and their determination to go for broke if necessary, we did *not* know the USSR very well. That is why our analysis of the contradiction was wrong (why all of us viewed the situation as leading to nuclear war). We knew one aspect of the contradiction well, but not the other, so we could not understand the nature of the overall contradiction completely.

Nobody in the West, including we genuine Marxists, seems to have realized what a hollow shell the USSR had become—and probably not too many in the USSR itself were in on the secret. Even the CIA didn't have a clue. So we really can't blame the RCP for failing to understand this. It was an error, but a very understandable error.

Moreover, we all agreed that there *was* a reasonable possibility that the situation *might* have led to nuclear war in the 80's, if just a few small things had been different. (Perhaps a couple more bellicose personalities in the Soviet leadership?) So it was not wrong to forcefully raise the danger of world war, and to campaign with all our might against it.

Nevertheless, we (the RCP and the rest of us Marxists as well) did make an error on this question. It is important to recognize this (as the RCP is still very reluctant to do), admit it, try to understand exactly why we erred, keep this lesson in mind for the future, and try to do everything we can to keep such errors from happening again. In large part, this means paying more serious attention to the ongoing scientific study of the actual circumstances we face. This means also that we must avoid getting into ruts with our analysis, avoiding dogmatism, and really approach social reality with a scientific spirit. Gert Alexander's remark is worth repeating here again: “I want revolution so badly, I'm even willing to be scientific about it.”

One person made a remark that seems to apply to the problems raised with regard to both the “Over the Hump” series and the “End to the Horror” book: In these two cases, and even beyond them, *in general*, the basic solution to such problems is Marxist education, theory, study, and scientific investigation.

Report from NW Folks: They told us about their experiences bringing MLM to students in an alternative middle school. They also showed us a number of reports that those students had prepared which were truly amazing! The students are clearly able to pick up some very advanced ideas. This is really excellent work being done up there. Tremendously encouraging! And the techniques really need to be written up and popularized within the revolutionary movement.

Other Things: Book recommended (again): William Greider, *One World, Ready or Not* [About globalization of capitalism.]

Future Discussions: *AID* and JA’s criticisms of it. Next time we will discuss *AID* through p. 35.

