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Political Committee:

Dear Comrades,

I wish to express my opposition, as a member of the National Committee, to the change in line on Africa recently voted upon by the majority of the Political Committee and expressed in David Frankel's Militant article "Behind Washington's Threats Against Africa & Cuba" (July 7, 1978).

This new position of the Political Committee brings into question our principled position on the right to self determination as it applies to Africa. For this reason a National Committee discussion is now in order. If the National Committee does not reverse the Political Committee's position, then a National Convention decision will be needed.

This new position on Africa is clearly based on a theoretical position on the nature of Cuba today. This position, that Cuba is a workers state still lacking a hardened bureaucratic caste, has now been put forward in an authoritative fashion by Joseph Hansen in "The Dispute Over Cuba's Role in Africa" (June 26, 1978 Intermontinental Press). However, this position has yet to be discussed or voted upon by the Political Committee or any other party body. It is regrettable that the Political Committee has seen fit to change our line in Africa on the basis of a theoretical position--in dispute within the leadership--which has yet to be voted upon. Clearly a more proper position would be to discuss the fundamental question and then proceeded to secondary expressions of this fundamental question as related to Africa and elsewhere. This was the way in which Comrade Trotsky and Comrade Cannon sought to guide the discussion in 1940.

It is first necessary to restate our basic position on Africa and self-determination. The present African nations are the result of the imperialist carve up of Africa. Because of this in almost every national state there exists oppressed nations. We are not partisans of any existing African state structure and apply the right of self determination in Africa quite independently of the various boundaries. We do not take sides in boundary disputes or even wars between the dependent Black African states. We defend all these states, despite their capitalist nature and leadership against imperialism. Our only exception is the white settler states of Southern Africa which are imperialist in their own right. We support unconditionally the struggle of the Black masses within these states against the states as well as defend the Black African nations from their encroachment.

Our overall goal in Africa is a United Socialist States of Africa or regions thereof, the boundaries of such states to be determined democratically by the people themselves.

Ethiopia fits within this framework with its own peculiarities. Modern Ethiopia (if that term can be used) is a capitalist state with many feudal hangovers created out of any old feudal empire with the cooperation of imperialism. It has been dominated for

centuries by an Aramaic Coptic Christian minority which has oppressed peoples of other religious and national characteristics. The recent army coup has not changed this as the officer corps represents simply another layer of this ruling minority.

Eritrea is an interesting example. While originally a feudal holding of the Coptic Christians, it was ruled since the late 19th Century by Italy. During World War II it was occupied and administered by Great Britain. After the war it was turned over to Haile Selassie, a submissive imperialist tool. At no time were the wishes of the Eritreans considered. A similar case could be made in relation to the Somalian peoples of the Ogaden.

Next we must consider the general policy of the Soviet Union and its allies in Africa. The USSR, proceeding on the basis of the theory of socialism in one country, has sought to counterbalance military pressure from imperialism, by encouraging semi-colonial bourgeois countries in Africa and elsewhere to take a degree of independence from the U.S. through acceptance of military and other aid. The results have been exceedingly temporary for the USSR. The best example of this is Egypt, which after years of relatively heavy reliance on the USSR, has switched back to the U.S. undermining the USSR's strategic position in the Middle East and the Northern African region (which explains the USSR's present active policy in much of the rest of Africa.)

Our position should be crystal clear. We maintain our principled unconditional defense of the USSR despite its maneuverings in Africa or elsewhere. However, we are not partisans of those maneuverings. To do so would undermine our support to the right of self determination, set back the socialist revolution in Africa and elsewhere, and in this way hurt the defense of the USSR. We defend the USSR with our principled class struggle methods of advancing the world revolution.

Angola illustrates very clearly our principled approach to these related problems of imperialism, Stalinism, self determination and the African socialist revolution. We did not, as did some within the Fourth International, support the MPLA from the beginning in its civil war against rival nationalist groups in Angola simply because Cuba and the USSR supported the MPLA. Yet, when South Africa, with U.S. support, sent troops into Angola AGAINST the MPLA we gave military support to the MPLA. Now we stand as opponents of the Neto capitalist government which maintains relations with imperialism and suppresses the workers movement within Angola. Yet, should imperialism attempt an invasion of Angola, we would again before Angola's unconditional defense.

The current situation in Ethiopia is an excellent example of the impossibility of developing a correct Marxist policy if one simply tails the machinations of the Kremlin. Ethiopia has been conducting an internal war against two oppressed nations --the Eritreans and the Somalis of the Ogaden--for a long period of time. Under Selassie this war was largely lost. The army coup was in part directed against this failing of Selassie. The current junta has attempted to step up that war. We have traditionally supported the Eritrean and Somalian freedom fighters.

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The Kremlin has traditionally given at least some military aid to the rebels because of the strong commitment of Ethiopia to the U.S. After the coup, the Kremlin reassessed its policy and decided to extend aid to Ethiopia against the rebels. This was not a matter of principle but of the narrowest political self-interest. Following the victory of the MPLA in Angola, Cuban troops were shifted, with Soviet support, to the Ethiopian front. There they have been used in a drive against the Somalis in the Ogaden, which in turn received aid including troops from Somalia. This joint Ethiopian-Cuban-Soviet campaign has proved successful. In the interim Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, has been occupied and an offensive is being planned against Eritrea. At this moment Ethiopia is hoping to use its victory in the Ogaden together with its Soviet and Cuban support, to force a negotiated settlement on the Eritreans. Should that fail, we can expect a new military offensive against Eritrea and we can expect Cuban troops will play a crucial role in that reactionary effort.

Now the Political Committee wishes to interpret these events differently so that the party is put in the position of tailing the shifts in line of the Kremlin as reflected through its ally, Cuba. Frankel states: "...it was necessary to support Ethiopia against the Somali invasion."

We must ask Frankel several questions not really answered in his lengthy Militant piece. Was there actually a Somalian invasion? That is did Somalia occupy a territory against the will of the people to live there--the Somalis who share a common religion, language and culture with those of Somali? Frankel offers no evidence that the people native to Ogaden opposed the influx of Somalian troops. The facts suggest that the Somali troops were invited there and welcomed by the indigenous population. The invasion in our opinion was only an "invasion" if one accepts as sacrosanct the national borders of Ethiopia. However this--the position of Castro and the Kremlin, is not a Marxist position.

Our second question is: can we really equate the Ogaden events with Angola at the time of the South African intervention as Castro and the Kremlin seek to do and as Frankel echoes? We think not. South Africa is a white settler imperialist nation. Somalia is a backward semi-colonial capitalist nation which receives aid at one moment from the workers states and at another from imperialism. Even Frankel claims that present military aid to Somalia from the West has been insubstantial, that no American or other imperialist troops took part in the Somali action.

Our third question is: even if there actually was a Somalian invasion, if what was taking place was simply a war over territory between Ethiopia and Somalia, on what Marxist basis would we support Ethiopia in that war? Traditionally we do not take sides in wars between semi-colonial capitalist states.

Next we must deal with the question of Eritrea. The Political Committee claims to still stand for the self-determination of Eritrea even though it has abandoned the self-determination of the Somalis of Ogaden. However, the two questions cannot be separated in reality. The Soviet Union and Cuba have chosen to support the Mengistu capitalist government. By so doing they aid it against the Eritreans as well as the Somalis. The EPLF, the more radical of the two Eritrean nationalist groups, claims there are 4,000 Cuban troops in Asmara, the occupied capital of Eritrea.

They also claim that Cuban soldiers and engineers are building new airfields in preparation for an Eritrean campaign and that Cuban troops together with Ethiopian troops are amassing at the border.

Castro has already developed a political rationale for an offensive against Ethiopia and Hansen has obligingly reprinted this rationale with editorial comment: "...objectively, this movement which began as a just revolutionary movement became transformed into an instrument for the reaction and imperialism to liquidate, or help to liquidate, the Ethiopian revolution. That's the way we see the problem." (IP June, 19, 1978). We cannot accept this rationalization. We do not withdraw our defense of the right of self determination of a people simply on the basis of what government may or may not for whatever reason offer aid to the leadership of oppressed peoples.

Clearly this "tilt" in line, as the PC calls it, is an attempt to find some evidence in world politics of a revolutionary role for the Castro government. Such a role in Africa can only be found by distorting the facts there and abandoning our principles in relation to the right of self determination.

So far supporters of this position have produced no evidence of any independence in the line of Castro as distinct from the line of the Kremlin. In fact the entire African operation is an example of the closest collaboration of Castro with the Kremlin. It would not have been possible for Cuba to deploy so many troops there if it had not been for receiving substantial military and economic aid in return from the USSR. Are Hansen and the PC suggesting that counter-revolutionary Stalinism is in the business of subsidizing revolutionary endeavors?

I wish to take particular exception to a line of argumentation which appears in Hansen's recent writings which borders on slander. Unable to produce any positive evidence of a difference between Cuba and the USSR over African policy, Hansen suggests that those who hold that Cuba and the Kremlin act in concert in Africa are repeating a State Department view. This is a line of reasoning more at home in the Stalinist movement than in ours. Our movement opposes the trials and persecution of the Soviet Dissidents. Carter and the State Department also oppose these trials for their own reasons. Does this mean that our defense of Soviet dissidents is a State Department point of view?

This is not the place to discuss the nature of Cuba today. I have made my views clear on that question in my document of last year--Cuba is a deformed workers state. Recent events in Africa do not in themselves prove this theory to be correct. But they certainly do not prove the opposite. The recent events in Africa represent additional verification, if any were needed, of the character of Cuba as a deformed workers state. Those holding this view are able not only to correctly explain these events, but more importantly, to advance the world socialist revolution through taking a correct position on the right of nations to self determination while defending semi-colonial countries and the workers states against imperialism.

Clearly those who continue to cling to a 17 year old formula which bares no relationship to reality in Cuba or in the world, no longer are able to sustain a correct revolutionary line in Africa. I suggest

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they abandon this theory in the upcoming discussions on the nature of Cuba.

Please distribute this letter to my fellow NC members at the time of the upcoming NC plenum. Hopefully a discussion on Africa can take place at that time to change this wrong line of the PC. In any event NC members are now acquainted by way of the press with the line of the PC and have a right to read a different line from an NC member. I would also like this letter distributed along with the rest of my material on Cuba at the upcoming expanded PC meeting.

Comradely,


Tim Wohlforth