

PATTI IYAMA'S TOUR OF AUSTRALIA

February 16-March 7

Talks with Bala

During my three-week stay in Australia, I was able to have two extensive talks with Comrade Bala and also to observe him at work. From the first day we arrived in Sydney, comrades were extremely anxious to have us tell them about the nature and extent of the differences in the Fourth International. This is because the differences between the European and American positions have been exploited by Bob Gould to back up his split with the Percy brothers (more on this internal situation later).

Anyway, Bala made it clear that (a) he basically agrees with the European position and (b) the differences basically are not that great and stem from the fact that both Americans and Europeans are young, headstrong, tactless, etc., and therefore tend to be unable to see the other side's position.

I do not know how much of the situation he revealed to the Australian comrades. He does not seem to have talked too much with the Percys, but he was staying most of the time with Ron Webb, who is extremely inquisitive and who was extremely impressed by Bala and spent many hours talking with him late at night. He talked enough that Jim Percy is very concerned to learn the American side. Since I did not know enough and had also been told by Barry not to discuss the international situation, I steered clear of all discussions on these questions with Australian comrades. I told them that it would all come out in discussion bulletins and at the next World Congress to which they could send a representative.

The first two-hour talk I had with Bala was not very satisfactory. He spent most of the time elaborating to me why he thought the differences have taken place: namely, because the Americans are too isolated in the United States and tend to think that the whole world revolves around the United States, whereas Europe is still the center, both for the revolutionary movement and for the capitalists. (In France, for example, people from all over the world -- Palestine, Latin America, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Africa, Asia -- flock to the Ligue's headquarters, so the Ligue has a much better feel for the international situation than the U.S.) On the other hand, French comrades do not fully appreciate the situation in the U.S., which is different from the European countries and the rest of the world. Both sides fail to see the other's point of view. And because they are young, they personalize their disagreements as well. For instance, Peter Camejo got up at the last IEC and called the French comrades "ultraleft." This is no way to carry on comradely discussion, to throw around names like that which do not respond to their politics. Also, Jack Barnes called a leading French woman comrade (on the Central Committee) "apolitical" during a heated discussion. He was also

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invited to attend a Central Committee meeting and after the meeting talked on the phone to someone in America when French comrades were present and described the meeting as "ten hours of bullshit." None of this was very tactful and served to antagonize the French comrades. Of course, French comrades also have been behaving childishly; they laugh openly, jeer and make comments during meetings with Americans.

In my second talk with him, I was able to get him to talk more freely about his views on the differences. I had no idea that the national office would want to hear this; I was just pursuing it for my own edification, or I would have arranged another talk with him to get more details. I asked him many questions.

Forgot that in the first talk, Bala said at the end that the SWP was also expressing its differences with the rest of the International through its finances. He understood that last year our budget was somewhere around \$250,000 (N.O.), and yet we argue that we have to adhere strictly to the Constitution and pay only \$200 a month, while the French comrades pay \$3,000 a month. But this is because we are a minority in the International and are reluctant to give our money when it will be used to back up positions we do not support. Also, he pointed out that the U.S. and France were supposed to split the cost of his airfare to the IEC (\$1800), but that the U.S. refused, so France had to carry the burden alone. Again, this is due to the fact that Bala has different politics than the SWP. On the other hand, the YSA was willing to put out the full fare of \$1800 to bring a Ceylonese comrade to the YSA convention this last December. This shows that the U.S. comrades are much more concerned with internal developments rather than with the international ones.

In the second talk, I asked what the differences were on the question of the Middle East. They seem to boil down to two: (1) The SWP gives unconditional support to Al Fatah over all the other Palestinian movements because of the strength of the Zionist movement here and the confusion of most of the public (influenced by strong Jewish minority) in equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. The rest of the International does not give more support or publicity to any of the groups in the guerrilla movement, particularly since it looks like we will soon be opening up a section of the FI among the Palestinian guerrillas. After all, it would look quite bad if our section of the FI there gets hold of a copy of The Militant or some other SWP publication and sees the American section supporting Al Fatah instead of them. (2) The second area of disagreement centers around the demand of self-determination for the Jews. The SWP is against this demand because the Jews are not an oppressed minority and also because in the U.S., where the Jewish minority is strong and vocal, the demand could be misinterpreted to mean support for the Israeli state. The Europeans argue that the Jewish people in Israel are oppressed and need a revolution as much as the Palestinians and further that it is possible to

to differentiate the people of Israel (the Jews) from the Israeli state.

I also asked about Latin America. I said that it had been my understanding that the Latin American comrades had begun to question and discuss the possibility of changing the FI line on guerrilla warfare as the strategy for revolution in Latin America. So how could the SWP be in a minority on that question? For instance, Hugo Blanco had openly questioned the validity of that line, etc. (Bala had said that the U.S. was a minority of one on just about all the major questions -- only Canada supports us and we all know that Canada is only a subsidiary of the U.S. anyway) So Bala told me that everyone agreed that guerrilla warfare was not the correct tactic. The question in Latin America had shifted from guerrilla warfare to that of armed struggle. And it was on that question that all the Latin American comrades disagree with the SWP. The SWP sees revolution in Latin America happening on the same classical model as it did in Russia (and as it probably will in the U.S.): there will be mass movements among the workers, bringing in more and more people in mass actions and culminating in a national general strike which poses the question of power, and it is only after the masses have been put into motion that armed struggle should be considered. The Europeans and Latin Americans, however, understand that this classical pattern cannot be repeated in the colonial countries. Because in these countries the imperialist army could be used (and has been) to crush workers' movements before they can pose the question of power, as in Bolivia and Argentina. Therefore, in Latin America it is necessary to arm the party way in advance. It is better to resist the repression than just to go under. The Americans do not understand this, because the conditions are very different in the U.S. You couldn't use the army to smash the radicalization within the U.S., but those same troops can still be used against Third World revolutions. This is just another example of the Americans' isolation and insulation.

On China (I asked), Bala did say that we had all agreed to disagree, that it was really an academic question since we do not have enough information and since we do not have a section there.

Bala also said that he thought that our paper on the worldwide youth radicalization was applicable to the U.S., but that he had several criticisms of it when applied internationally -- e.g., it gave students too much social weight. However, we did not have time to go over these criticisms, and he said that he would write to me further on this (I said I would send him a copy of the document and ask him to point out the sections which seemed incorrect to him).

Although he never told me directly, I got the idea from some of his comments (and comments of Jim Percy) that Bala is

rather contemptuous of the SWP and YSA. He sees our leaders as being young, inexperienced, and parenthetically petty bourgeois, especially as compared to the French comrades who although young have so much more experience with workers, not just students.... He also does not consider us to be theoretically well-grounded; he thinks that the leadership is, but the membership waits for the leadership to tell it what to do and what line to take -- i.e., too much centralism and not enough democracy.

Just my own personal comments on Bala: he is a very articulate agitational speaker. However, he tells too many anecdotes and does not deliver enough of a political message, which is probably why he was so "in" in Australia. I felt that my speeches, though not as powerfully delivered, had much greater political clarity. He tends to get rather demagogic at times; however, in all he did the Trotskyist movement in Australia a great favor and helped get our name out to the movement in general and trade unions in particular. Furthermore, his politics were quite good and supported the Australian comrades against ultralefts, etc.

But he is strangely impetuous for a person who has been in the Trotskyist movement for 30 years. I couldn't believe it when the first night we were in Sydney, after only holding a press conference and speaking to a few members of the Vietnam Moratorium Campaign, he had the nerve to say, "Well, comrades, after being here less than 24 hours, I would say that your situation here in the antiwar movement is very different from the American one and very much more similar to the European." He knocked some of the comrades over, since they have been building the antiwar movement on the model of ours in the U.S. So Jim Percy asked why, and he said that it was because of the trade union support that it had. But Jim argued that they had troops in Southeast Asia. And Bala thought that the trade unionists outweighed that. Other comrades pointed out that the trade union support was minimal and that rank-and-file were not involved enough. Bala assimilated this in silence. The last day of the conference he took up three hours of comrades' time, convincing them that (a) there is a difference between slogans and demands and (b) they should raise the demand for immediate withdrawal, but the slogan for support to the NLF or the Vietnamese revolution should also be raised. Jim Percy and Bill (from Adelaide) argued very carefully against having the antiwar movement as a whole adopt that slogan, although Jill Joliffe and Rod Quinn (from Melbourne) and Roger Barnes (rather hesitantly) seemed to agree with Bala. I couldn't intervene, but I did state the reasons why we in the U.S. do not advocate support to the Vietnamese revolution and why the demand for immediate withdrawal is objectively anti-imperialist, etc. He retreated from his original position when it became clear that the leadership of the Australian comrades thought that such a slogan would isolate the antiwar movement from trade unionists and youth. I think that Bala (a) overestimated the radicalization in trade unions

(he also tends to overestimate his own influence, but more on that later); and (b) has no concept of what it is like to work in the mass movements in advanced capitalist countries (if left to himself, he would be very sectarian and ultraleft in Australia). He also called an executive committee meeting of the Socialist Review group in Sydney to discuss their internal problems and how to solve them. Unfortunately, I was away when it occurred, so I did not witness his intervention, but Jim Percy told me that Bala advised them to clarify the relationship between the SR and the SYA, that they have to make it clear which organization is the "Trotskyist" organization (I think that he means the vanguard party when he says that, but I could be wrong), and that although some members are not so committed as others, they still have many talents which should be utilized. In both Melbourne and Adelaide, Bala again initiated discussion on the pending split in the SYA-SR group, and this is substantially what he said then, too. I was present at the latter two meetings and was urged to give my analysis of what was happening, but I said that I could not do that and could only talk about what the YSA and SWP were doing and how we functioned. For instance, I talked about the relationship between the YSA and SWP, the independence of the YSA, but also the consultation that goes on so that a person is not given conflicting assignments in the two organizations and so on. In his advice on organizational matters, I thought Bala was quite good, but I felt that he should not have intervened so directly into the movement; he should let the Australian comrades draw their own conclusions. In Adelaide, he spoke about the influence his talks with various people had had and how he was confident that people were moving to solve all the problems now that he had so clearly delineated the solutions (not his spoken words, but clearly his assumption). My evaluation was that he was overconfident of how far his influence had changed people and also of how much people understood from only one meeting. Both Jim Percy and the Adelaide comrades (the two male SR comrades, Bill and John) took his advice with many reservations, which they afterwards talked about with me; John Percy in Melbourne reacted quite defensively. I'll go into this in the section on internal developments.

Bala left Australia about the same time I did. In his travels after Sydney, he had stayed mainly with non-comrades, people connected with the Vietnam Moratorium Campaign, some CPers, some trade unionists, at least one Maoist (in Adelaide) that I know of. Although he spoke for the Moratorium, he usually made it pretty clear somewhere in his speech or in question-and-answer periods that he was a Trotskyist and member of the FI. He spoke to many trade union meetings, whereas I was concentrated on the campuses; and he was openly courted by the CPers who have split from Moscow, have some of our line, and are looking for direction (I don't think that they will be recruited, but they can be good allies in some things -- e.g., in antiwar work, they push our line of mass actions and immediate withdrawal), the Laurie Aarons-Laurie Carmichael-Mavis Robertson people.

Publicly, Bala did quite a good job; internally, though, he dabbled too much.

Bala also mentioned that he was going to propose at the next IEC that instead of being a federation of national parties, we all become one big international party. He felt that the national organization of parties cut across our functioning in an international way.

Internal Developments

In brief, this group first started out as a loose youth culture group called SCREW (Society to Create Revolutions Every Where, or something like that), around Bob Gould. In 1965, when the Pabloites split from the Fourth International, our section in Australia split, too. Nick Orglass and Denis Freney were the two main Pabloites; Nick is no longer active politically (he didn't even show up for the antiwar conference), and Denis rejoined the CPA (he had left it in 1958 or some such date to join the FI) and became editor of their paper, The Tribune. (He was going to interview me, but I couldn't fit him into my schedule, so I never got to talk with him.) Bob Gould was one of the few Germainists. Beginning in 1965, he became one of the most prominent and active builders of the Australian antiwar movement, pushing for mass actions and immediate withdrawal. He thereby gathered some youth around him, and they formed this amorphous organization SCREW. They were evidently known at that time chiefly for the great parties they threw (lots of grass and booze) and also for a small bookshop they had pooled their money into called The Third World Bookshop. They began to notice that they were attracting some rather weird people and also decided that they needed to become a more serious political group, so they changed their name to Resistance (not draft resistance, just resistance to the war and other ills of society) and took on more of a structure. They got national publicity in 1969 when they published a small pamphlet on how to get out of conscription. It wasn't much -- just a mimeographed and stapled pamphlet -- but they hit the front pages around the country and became famous overnight. The bookshop became known as THE radical bookshop and the center for all radical activity. Resistance at this time was a lot like SDS in the United States around 1965.

Then in December, 1969, John Percy was chosen to go to the U.S. to attend the YSA convention. There was some controversy about who should go; Gould wanted someone else to go, but John was elected by the Executive Committee and voted on by the membership, so he went. Conflicts had been developing between the Percy brothers (as the most articulate of the opposition and also the most politically experienced) and Gould. Gould is not very good about developing team leadership; he wants to control everything, from what the opposition says, and he felt very threatened by the new young leadership that was beginning to emerge. He himself analyzes the split as being based on

personality differences and says that the political documents that came out were all attempts to make the personal differences political ones. There was also a good deal of conflict about the bookshop, which had now become quite prosperous and which Gould was claiming as his own because he had mortgaged his house to start it and he had put the most money into it. The other side said that the bookshop belonged to the organization as a whole and should be used more as a tool of the organization (for instance, bookshops were being set up in Melbourne, Adelaide and somewhere else, and because Gould disagreed with the Adelaide people he didn't give them books on consignment -- this was in the middle of 1970). The other conflict developed when John came back all enthused about the YSA and saying that the Australians should form a youth organization like it. Gould said that now was not the time to form a Trotskyist organization but first you had to develop this general coalition of all youth, because all youth were radicalizing. The Percys wanted an organization with a basic political line for socialism, political revolution in Eastern Europe, USSR and China, support for Cuba, Vietnam, etc. The struggle continued all during 1970, and right after Andrew's tour, in August, there was a split and the Percy brothers formed the Socialist Youth Alliance and Gould kept the bookshop (right now he is saying that he will repay the people who sank money into the bookshop soon).

As of now, Gould has no organization; all he has is the bookshop. He has succeeded in antagonizing just about every political force in Australia and is extremely isolated. Even Phil Sanford's group won't work with him, and the only people Gould has are his employees. He has made no attempt to keep an organization together. I think he is still hoping that perhaps SYA will fall apart and he can have the leftovers. He has seized upon the differences in the Fourth International to make up for his lack of allies in Australia. He has published internal documents of the Fourth International and sold them in his bookshop. He has been telling everyone who is interested that Mandel's article on Leninist organization in the ISR is an indirect attack on the SWP. At the antiwar conference, after I finished speaking at a workshop on the Antiwar University, he got up and denounced me. He said that Daniel Bensaid and another French comrade had written a document which analyzed the antiwar and student movements as dead and that they said that people should go to the working class rather than participating in these "fallen" movements, and he agreed with them and not with the YSA-SWP line which was to build the antiwar movement to the exclusion of working with the workers. He said that there was a split in the FI and that he agreed with the French comrades, but the SYA agreed with the Americans. And one of his employees, Stephen Bock, got up at a general session on strategy and tactics and claimed there was a split in the FI and again went over the internal bulletin of the Fourth International where the French comrades disagreed with the Americans about the role of the student movement. He, too, agreed with

the French rather than the YSA-SWP and said that in Australia and America, the student movement has been coopted and is falling apart, so the students should begin going into the factories. (The YSA and SWP are becoming quite well known in Australia.) Anyway, Gould got only 56 votes on his proposal, while the SYA got 136, so that illustrates the relationship of forces, though it exaggerates the influence of Gould. Gould talked with me for about three hours one morning after I insisted on seeing him; he spent the whole time telling me how much he disagreed with the SWP and trying to draw me out on the differences in the FI. I kept telling him that I couldn't really say anything on that, but that the differences were only minor so far as I knew, that basically the French and Americans were proposing tactics and strategy for their countries and were correct in their own different situations, etc. I urged Gould to attend both the SWP convention (though I'm sure that if he does, he will use the internal dispute to try to discredit the SYA) and the world congress. He says that he will come to the SWP convention for sure since he will have to take a business trip to the U.S. this summer anyway; he'll pay for it and wouldn't think of asking us for help. He says that he is not so sure about attending the world congress next year; he does not have an organization for which to ask recognition. He acknowledges that the SYA will probably get recognition as a section at that time, but he says that it isn't important since in the long run he will be shown to be correct. I found out from Bala after the antiwar conference that Gould had been spreading the rumor that I had been sent out by the SWP as soon as the SWP found out that Bala was coming, so that I could counteract Bala; Bala had to tell the CPers that he and I did not have serious political disagreements and that both of us belonged to the same International. Bala characterized Gould as a political gossip and dismissed him, and I personally also think that he plays only that role and is quite ineffective in day-to-day Australian politics.