



Ernest Mandel

In Defence of Leninism

Ross Collection

Ernest Germain

**In Defence of
Leninism:
In Defence of the Fourth
International
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Since the 9th World Congress (3rd Congress since reunification) the discussion inside the Fourth International has widened and deepened. After emerging initially around the issue of the place of armed struggle in revolutionary politics in Latin America, it has now spread to the issue of the relationship between armed struggle and revolutionary mass struggles in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations in general, the present orientation towards building revolutionary parties in capitalist Europe, the evaluation of the present period and our tasks as precised by the political resolution of the 9th World Congress. While answering Comrade Hansen's arguments developed in his document *In Defense of the Leninist Strategy of Party-Building*, as well as the arguments presented by the minority document to the December 1972 IEC *Argentina and Bolivia – The Balance Sheet*, we shall try to clarify what is, in our opinion the contents and the origins of the present differences.

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I. Party Building and Armed Struggle:

The Wrong and the Correct Approach

1. A Wrong Method

The key mistake committed by Comrade Hansen in the field of the method used for defining strategical and tactical tasks, and at the same time one of the main origins of the differences which have developed between the majority and the minority of the United Secretariat and the IEC of the *Fourth International*, is illuminated by the following extract from Comrade Hansen's above-named discussion article:

“Let me repeat: There are three main positions in the ‘great ideological debate’ (in Latin America): (1) Those like the Stalinists, who believe in or argue for the feasibility of a ‘parliamentary road’ to power (2) The Trotskyists, who have been defending the Leninist concept of party building and who have been struggling to apply it; an outstanding instance being Hugo Blanco. (3) Those under the influence of the Cubans particularly, who advance the ‘strategy’ of armed struggle in opposition to both the protagonists of a ‘parliamentary road’ and the partisans of the Leninist concept.” (*International Information Bulletin*, No.3, April 1971, p.35.)

It is methodologically wrong and misleading to use the concept of Leninist party building as *an alternative* in debates about key tactical and strategical problems, posed by the development of the class struggle itself. Just to indicate how wrong this is, let us enumerate a series of such

debates initiated in the history of the international labour movement of the 20th century.

Since 1905, the revolutionary movement in the underdeveloped countries has been split between protagonists of the theory of the permanent revolution and those who defend the thesis of the revolution by stages, a bourgeois-democratic one having to be first completed before the proletarian-socialist one can start. Should we refuse to line up with the first as against the second, under the pretext that there is a “third strategy,” the “Leninist strategy of party building”?

Since 1914, the international labour movement has been deeply divided on the attitude one should adopt towards an imperialist war. Leninists defend the strategy (or should one say: the tactics?) of revolutionary defeatism. Reformists and centrists of all types say that it is possible for the workers to defend their own imperialist fatherland, provided that it isn't the aggressor, that it is politically more “progressive” than its competitor, etc., etc. Should we counter-pose a “third alternative” to the two sides in that debate, the “Leninist strategy of party building”?

Since 1917, the international labour movement has been debating whether it is necessary to destroy the bourgeois state machine and to build a higher type of democracy, called soviet democracy, as the precondition for the proletariat conquering state power and for capitalism being overthrown, or whether parliamentary bourgeois democracy and its state machine creates the necessary institutional framework for overthrowing capitalism. Should we refuse to line up with the first as against the second, under the pretext

that there is a “third strategy,” the “Leninist strategy of party building”?

Since 1930, the revolutionary movement has been deeply divided on what attitude it should adopt towards a rising threat of a fascist dictatorship. Some defend the position that it is necessary to ally with all proponents of bourgeois democracy (including the bourgeois parties and state) against the fascists. Others say that we should be neutral in the fight between fascism and bourgeois democracy, even concentrating the main attacks on the “social-fascists,” i.e., the reformist, labour fakers. Others again say that only a united front of all working class organizations could, by extra-parliamentary mass mobilization and action, crush fascism. Should we refuse to line up with that third position, and counterpose another orientation to the three main lines defended in the debate, “the Leninist strategy of party building”?

Comrade Hansen’s method of approaching the problem of armed struggle thus is wrong threefold. In the first place, it fails to understand that the problem of armed struggle in Latin America – like the problem of permanent revolution, or of soviet VS. parliamentary democracy, or of the united front tactics against fascism – is not some “false dilemma” arising out of the heads of misguided individuals, but *a problem arising out of the development of the class struggle itself*, which requires an answer from all revolutionists. You can be for or against, but you can’t evade the issue by talking about something else. To answer this question correctly, is of course *not sufficient* to assure the victory of the revolution. Trotsky could formulate the correct strategic answer for the revolutions in under-developed countries, without fully

understanding the Leninist strategy of party building. The same thing was true for not a few supporters of revolutionary defeatism during the first and the second world wars, and for not a few supporters of the concept of soviet power after 1917 throughout the world. But a correct answer to these key strategic or tactical questions is an *indispensable prerequisite* for a victorious revolution. While it isn't sufficient simply to apply the theory of permanent revolution in a semi-colonial country to guarantee victory, you can be sure you will not lead your class to victory if you evade an answer to that key issue.

In the second place, it is impermissible to detach the "strategy of party building" from correct strategic and tactical political options. There is no such thing as a "Leninist concept of party building" separate and apart from programme, correct strategic orientation and correct tactics. Those of the alleged "supporters of the Leninist concept of party building" who, in February-April 1917, were ready to ally themselves with the Mensheviks and didn't understand the need to fight for soviet power, would have led the Russian revolution to certain defeat. That is why the Leninist strategy of party building, far from being counterposed to the orientation towards armed struggle under specific conditions in Latin America today, implies the need to adopt that orientation. Without such an orientation, your "Leninist strategy of party building" is in danger of becoming what it did become in the hands of Kamenev, Molotov and Stalin before February and April 1917: an obstacle and not a motor on the road towards revolutionary victory.

In the third place, by counterposing the Leninist strategy of party building to the burning needs of the objective revolutionary struggle one does a serious disservice to Leninism. In presenting party-building as something separate and apart from the needs of the living class struggle, we are thereby helping all opponents of Leninism, all spontaneists and the like, to increase anti-Leninist confusions and prejudices. When the need for a strike picket arises in a strike, and the strikers are torn in a big debate between advocates and opponents of that method of struggle, to come along and shout that there is a “third position,” the “Leninist strategy of party building,” will certainly not help clarify the debate among the strikers. Nor will it help recruit the best strikers to the nucleus attempting to construct the revolutionary party.

So we can only restate with force the position adopted in our November 1970 document. The need to take an unequivocal stand in favour of the “method” of armed struggle, never mind whether it is a “strategy” or “tactic,” or “orientation,” hi the present period and under specific circumstances in Latin America, arises out of the very needs of the class struggle and the experiences of the toiling masses themselves. To evade the issue by taking up a “third position” does a disservice to the task of building Leninist combat parties, which Comrade Hansen correctly wants to place hi the centre of attention of the Latin American vanguard.

There was a tune when Comrade Hansen himself understood this perfectly. In his article: *The OLAS Conference-Tactics and Strategy of a Continental Revolution* (ISR, November-December 1967), he wrote:

“The question of armed struggle was thus taken at the OLAS conference as a decisive dividing line, separating the revolutionists from the reformists on a continental scale. In this respect it echoed the Bolshevik tradition.” (p.5)

And on March 1, 1963, the Political Committee of the SWP issued a statement under the title: *For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement*, which contained the following passage:

“Along the road of a revolution beginning with simple democratic demands and ending hi the rapture of capitalist property relations, *guerrilla warfare* conducted by landless peasant and semi-proletarian forces, under a leadership that becomes committed to carrying the revolution through to a conclusion, *can play a decisive role in undermining or precipitating the downfall of a colonial or semi-colonial power*. This is one of the main lessons to be drawn from experience since the second world war. *It must be consciously incorporated into the strategy of building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries.*” (**Fourth International**, No.17, October-December 1963, p.71.)

One wonders why what was true in the spring of 1963 and the autumn of 1967 ceased to be true in spring 1969, not to say in spring 1971, and why Comrade Hansen failed to answer Comrades Germain and Knoeller: in the great debate between advocates and opponents of the strategy (or tactics) of armed struggle, at present raging hi Latin America, we line up with the first as against the second. In that sense the Latin American resolution of the 9th World Congress served a useful purpose, and echoes the Bolshevik tradition. Of course, this does not end the question. It remains to precise how this strategy ties in with the strategy of the permanent revolution, with the need of organising the masses, with the building of Leninist vanguard parties, etc. But while the method of armed struggle is no panacea, it nevertheless remains a key question which has to be answered and not to

be evaded. A debate along these lines would not have led to deep divisions in the International. Comrade Hansen's way of approaching it in 1971 – opposed to his approach of 1967 – could only widen the differences.

2. Restating Our Case

All kinds of useless red herrings have been inserted into the discussion. We shall not waste too much time in eliminating them. Everybody knows that there exist opponents of the Leninist theory of organisation (not only among the advocates of armed struggle). Everybody also knows that there are still some proponents of the “*foquista*” theory around. But objectively, those positions are not defended by anybody inside the Fourth International, included the Argentine Section. So it is useless to drag the red herrings of “*foquismo*,” “*guevarism*,” fetishisation of “*rural guerilla warfare*,” not to speak of the “*strategy of terrorism*” into the discussion, because nobody is defending these propositions inside the world Trotskyist movement. Let us briefly summarise what the 9th World Congress resolution was all about, and what has been stressed quite clearly in various discussion articles since 1969 by its proponents.

Under the given circumstances, with the given social and economic instability in Latin America, the profound influence of the Cuban revolution on the vanguard of the mass movement, the decline of control of the traditional working class leaderships on that same vanguard, the explosive character of mass mobilisations which lead to rapid confrontations with the army, the emergence of the army as the mainstay of bourgeois power, not only materially but also politically, and its relative strength as

opposed to the extreme fragility of all political formations of the ruling classes, a long period of gradual rise of mass struggles under conditions of relative (be it decaying) bourgeois democracy is extremely unlikely (except, as we said, in the case of Chile). The most likely variant is that a head-on collision between that mass movement and the arm is unavoidable after a short period of emergence of mass explosions, a collision which could lead to a prolonged civil war, if the mass movement isn't crushed by capitulation or disastrous defeats. Even if the enemy succeeds momentarily in establishing a military dictatorship, such a civil war could go on, temporarily take the form of guerilla warfare, and help to overcome the lull in the mass struggles after the partial defeat. Whatever may be the various combinations of forms of struggle, it is necessary to tirelessly prepare the masses for such armed confrontations, which are unavoidable, so that the workers and poor peasants should not face the army without arms and without preparation.

There is nothing of a generalised panacea in this analysis which is above all a prognosis and a perspective. It does not apply to all countries, regardless of time and space. It is not the final assessment of a historic period. As long as there is no tumultuous rise of the mass movement, obviously civil war is not on the agenda. As long as our nuclei are so weak that they can't exercise any political weight inside the mass movement let alone help the masses to arm themselves, it would be lunacy to start "preparing for armed struggle." Where the traditional reformist petty-bourgeois or bourgeois leaderships still control the mass movement, as in many semi-colonial countries, these conclusions are also uncalled for. Where the decaying bourgeoisie still rules essentially through bourgeois democratic forms the analysis

doesn't apply either. It is specific to a given phase in a given context, in Latin America and in the present it only has practical applications in a few countries for our movement. If and when this context changes, we shall have to analyse this change and say so openly. For the time being, there is no indication that it has.

Comrades of the minority hotly deny that this was what the 9th World Congress resolution on Latin America had in mind. They interpret that resolution as a universal call to "rural guerilla warfare," later partially corrected into a call for "urban guerilla warfare." Careful study of the resolution itself does not support this contention of the minority. There is no reason to deny that the 9th World Congress resolution on Latin America contains several elliptical and synthetic formulas on rural guerilla warfare and continental civil war open to various interpretations, which try to encompass too many different variants and successive stages of struggle into a single sentence or a couple of sentences. That resolution reflected an initial, and therefore insufficient level of consciousness and of experience with a new problem with which our movement was confronted on the field of practical intervention. It would be surprising that this could have been accomplished without over-simplifications, exaggerations and partial mistakes.

Under these conditions, there is no purpose in pursuing the debate on "focism" and "guevarism" which nobody defends inside the Fourth International, instead of discussing the ideas of the majority as they are expressed by the comrades speaking for the majority itself. Wouldn't it be more intelligent for the minority to claim that it succeeded in having the majority change its initial positions – which we

would deny; for we don't share the minority's interpretation of what the 9th World Congress Latin American document was all about – and then comedown to the task of debating the expressed and not the alleged positions of the majority?

In order to go away from sterile accusations and counter-accusations of an abstract nature, it is necessary to analyse concretely the developments in Argentina and Bolivia since the last world congress – the only countries where the sections of the F. I. decided themselves to apply the orientation of armed struggle before the 9th World Congress took its well-known stand – and determine whether the evolution of the objective situation justified this orientation or has shown it to be wrong. Although none of the comrades who polemicise against the position adopted by the 9th World Congress openly tried to refute this overall assessment, we have, however, come across an attempt to question it in a covert and indirect way.

Dealing with the analysis of the economic developments in Latin America by Comrade Mandel, Comrade Anibal Lorenzo of the *La Verdad* (Moreno) group in Argentina, writes:

“These lost [two] years [in Bolivia] are sufficient, I hope, to dispel the schemas floating around about ‘growing repression,’ the ‘impossibility of using legal methods,’ Or the formula that the Trotskyist theoretician Ernest Mandel, who commits the same error, put forward in the February 1971 issue of *Cuarta Internacional*:

“But we must avoid any illusion about a return to constitutional systems of classical bourgeois parliamentary democracy, about any return to a climate in which the mass movement could organise and broaden, gradually, progressively and legally. This does not correspond to the intentions or possibilities of the military

reformist regimes, or to the interests of the “new oligarchy” that supports them.’

“For two years the revolutionists fell into the opposite error to the one Mandel warns against. The fact is that events more closely resembled the classical model of Russia (!) than the guerrillista scheme, with the decisive difference that there was no Bolshevik party to offer a perspective for insurrection.” (Anibal Lorenzo: *The Lessons of Bolivia*, *International Information Bulletin*, No.3, July 1972, p.13.)

The “errors” allegedly committed by our Bolivian comrades we shall deal with below. The attempt, however, to equate the Russian revolutionary experience with that of a “constitutional system of classical bourgeois democracy” is certainly a novelty in Trotskyist literature. The equation of two (!) years of legality in Bolivia – in reality only a few months! – with such a period is a slight exaggeration to say the least. But Comrade Lorenzo comes close to falsifying Comrade Mandel’s article, largely because of his inability to understand what we are discussing. For *immediately before* the paragraph of Mandel’s article which he quotes and *immediately after* that paragraph, the context in which Mandel makes that point is specified, and this leads to a quite different interpretation than that of Comrade Lorenzo. Here is the text of these three paragraphs:

“No more does this mean that the toiling masses and the revolutionary organisations should be indifferent as to the precise forms taken by the exploitation and the oppression they suffer. Every legal or semi-legal possibility to do propaganda, agitation or to organise the vanguard should be vigorously exploited, every new reduction of democratic freedoms of the working class organisations should be considered as an attack against the whole movement, and vigorously fought against.

“But we must avoid any illusion about a return to constitutional systems of classical bourgeois parliamentary democracy, about any

return to a climate in which the mass movement could organise and broaden gradually, progressively and legally. This does not correspond to the intentions or possibilities of the military reformist regimes, nor to the interests of the 'new oligarchy' that supports them.

“... The perspective which results from this analysis is that of a succession of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary convulsions, cut by temporary defeats and attempts by the Latin American bourgeoisie to try to apply solutions of the 'military reformism' type, but which after a certain time lead again to new convulsions and new tests of strength. The building of an adequate revolutionary leadership of the proletariat and semi-proletariat of city and countryside is the only way out of the impasse. More than ever this remains the central task. The strategy of armed struggle, in close association with the mass movement into which a growing rooting has to be achieved, is the only way to build such a revolutionary party in the present historical context of the majority of the countries of Latin America.” (pp.40-41 in *Cuarta Internacional*, No.3.)

So the opposition between Comrade Mandel's analysis and Comrade Lorenzo's does *not* consist in Mandel's alleged inability to understand the need of exploiting legal opportunities, nor in his alleged inability to link such opportunities with the rise of the mass movement at a given stage, nor \ with his lack of concern for building the party. The opposition hinges on Comrade Lorenzo's lack of understanding of the difference between a *short legal interlude* of a year or two, between periods of rising or declining military dictatorships, and a whole *period* of “constitutional systems of classical bourgeois parliamentary democracy” hi which the working class movement can organise and grow gradually, progressively and legally. They hinge, in short, on Comrade Lorenzo's inability to understand the qualitative difference between a bourgeois democracy – be it a degenerate and decaying one – and a military dictatorship (albeit a temporarily weakened one).

We know that in any country in the world, bourgeois democracy today is constantly undermined by repressive tendencies toward a “strong state.” We know that the army and the police – civil war apparatus against the workers – are constantly strengthened. We have no illusions in a “peaceful” road to socialism anywhere, even under conditions of the strongest bourgeois democratic traditions. But it is one thing to say that there is only a relative and not an absolute difference between decaying bourgeois democracy and a weakened military dictatorship, and something different again to deny that there is any significant difference between them altogether.

The most astonishing statement in this respect comes from Comrade Peter Camejo. In an article sent to the discussion bulletin of our sympathising section in Mexico, he wrote:

“It is one thing for us to note and expose the brutal repression exercised by the military dictatorship against the workers movement, its attempts (!) to intervene in the trade union, its occasional (!) direct intervention in a vanguard trade union. It is something else again to lose sight of reality, of the fact that it is easier to do revolution (!) work within the trade unions of Argentina than hi most countries hi Latin America, or Europe for that matter.” (p.7, *Comments on Comrade R’s Document*, by Peter Camejo.)

Now if we understand this to mean anything, Comrade Camejo has arrived at the point where he seriously tries to defend the position that it is “easier” to do “revolutionary” work hi the trade unions in a country where there is a military dictatorship, where all the political organisations of the left and the extreme-left including the pro-Moscow CP (and the only exception of the Socialist Parties), are illegal: where the army *often* intervenes in trade unions whenever they elect a leadership considered as revolutionary, to

depose the elected leadership; where factories like the FIAT factories hi Cordoba can be occupied by the army; where elected trade union leaders can be put and held in jail without trial for months if not years (as happened to Tosco); where revolutionary trade union militants can be kidnapped hi broad daylight, tortured and killed, as happened hi dozens of cases denounced by the press of *La Verdad* group itself. Obviously these things didn't happen in Western Europe in the last twenty years, except in countries like Spain, Portugal or Greece. Comrade Hansen, who set out on a worthy crusade against "ultra-leftism," should seriously ponder how that disease now suddenly springs up among his closest allies, in the form of the thesis that it is "easier" to do revolutionary work in the trade unions under a military dictatorship than under conditions of bourgeois democracy. As we obviously desire to do our revolutionary work in the unions under the "easiest" possible conditions, shouldn't we then actually welcome the establishment of military dictatorships of the Lanusse type, according to this typically ultraleft logic?

3. The Bolivian Test

The Bolivian case is the clearest confirmation of our thesis that under present conditions in Latin America, no protracted period of bourgeois democracy is possible. Whenever an impetuous rise of the mass movement occurs, and the vital question for this movement is to prepare for armed struggle against the inevitable and short-term attempt of the army to crush it.

When General Torres took power under conditions of rapid development of mass mobilisations and activity, this

expressed undoubtedly a temporary retreat of the right-wing forces in the army who had tried to take power under General Miranda. The rise of the mass movement had divided the army. The main task for the ruling class was now to gain some time in order to reunify the army. During this “democratic interlude,” the mass movement was to be held in check by some concessions. Torres was to fulfill that function, till the army was ready to strike its blow.

The Bolivian section of the *Fourth International*, which had begun to prepare its cadres for armed struggle during the period of the Barrientos dictatorship, and had centered its orientation towards guerilla warfare under that dictatorship, understood the necessity of making a turn as soon as the Ovando dictatorship allowed a semi-legal margin for working class activities. It started to publish a semi-legal paper, re-penetrated the unions, and raised a whole series of appropriate demands like: release of the political prisoners, re-establishment of full trade-union freedom, recuperation of all houses and properties of the COB, re-establishment of the miners’ wages of 1965 (which had been severely cut by the Barrientos dictatorship), creation of a representative organ of all the working class organisations. The party was however still illegalised by the regime, some of its main leaders in prison (they were to be released only in October 1970, when the masses stormed the prisons), some of them, together with representatives of other working class tendencies even being submitted to torture.

When Torres took over from Ovando in October 1970, the Bolivian section became legal. During the 10 months of the Torres regime – the only period of fully legal working class upsurge since the Pas Estenssoro repression of 1964 – the

FOR explained that the army was only tolerating large-scale working class activities temporarily, and that a military coup to crush the mass movement was being feverishly prepared:

“While the army, confronted with the mobilisation of the workers, authorised General Torres to organise the government in October (1970), with the task of putting a brake upon the masses and disarming them politically, this mission has now failed, and therefore the armed forces have decided to change Torres and to return to a policy of the strong hand. The situation of the Torres government is very precarious. It does not enjoy the support of the army neither can it count upon the support of the masses which have been defrauded ...

“For that reason we declare that the revolutionary process in Bolivia is confronted with two dangers. On the one hand there is the threat of a fascist *coup*, nourished by the yankee embassy and by the Argentine and Brazilian dictatorships, a *coup* which is being prepared by the divisions of the Bolivian army. On the other hand there is military and civilian reformism, which tries to lull the masses to sleep, and which has transformed itself into an obstacle to the triumph of the revolution.” (Appeal of the FOR on May Day 1971 – *Combate* new series, No.5, first fortnight of May 1971.)

This was the constant theme of all the FOR interventions from then on till the August *coup*; to warn the workers that the *coup* was impending, was inevitable, and that the workers had to organise immediately against that danger.

The political line of the FOR, while encompassing a whole series of immediate and transitional demands (including a whole programme for agrarian revolution), was centred around three key demands:

1. Transformation of the Popular Assembly into a real power organ of the workers and toiling people, through the establishment of local assemblies (i.e., Soviets), which would

elect the delegates to the national assembly and could recall them.

2. Immediate arming of the workers and the peasants.
3. Extension of the revolutionary process of the countryside

The cohesion of this line was convincing, and confirmed by events. Cut off from rank-and-file assemblies in the towns, neighborhoods, factories and mines, the Popular Assembly remained a purely consultative assembly, as Torres visualised it, without real power and without expression of the revolutionary will of the masses. Without the arming of the masses, it could be swept away by the *coup* which was being prepared by reaction. And without the extension of the revolutionary process to the countryside, the revolutionary proletariat of the mining areas and of La Paz was in danger of remaining isolated and being defeated in the armed confrontation with reaction, which was visible on the horizon.

What was the alternative to this correct orientation of our Bolivian section? It was the orientation followed by the reformists and centrists of the pro-Moscow CP, or Lora and of Lechin, who concentrated entirely upon endless debates on statutes, regulations and paper resolutions, including the composition of the management bodies of the nationalised tin mines of COMIBOL – whether the workers should be represented with 50 or 51% of members on that body – but completely neglected the question of arming the proletariat and the poor peasants. Another characteristic of this reformist, spontaneistic and syndicalist approach to the question of power was a total neglect of the agrarian revolution.

It is true that the Popular Assembly voted a resolution about a clandestine “preparation” of workers’ militias; but this was a paper resolution pure and simple, without a single step taken towards its implementation.

What was the political kernel of such criminal passivity, in the light of the open preparations for a reactionary *coup* by forces of the army? Lora’s main lieutenant, Escobar, more honest and more cynical than his leader, has expressed it clearly in the first issue of the Lora paper *Masas* which appeared after the defeat in Santiago de Chile:

“In October 1970, the working class occupied the political scene without arms, as a simple mass. From that moment on, it was clearly understood that in order to be able to win against the *gorillas* [the putchist generals] it was necessary to put a gun in the hands of the politicised workers. *And from then on it was commonly assumed – including by us Marxists (!) – that the ruling military team would distribute the arms*, given the fact that it could at least neutralise the right wing *gorillas* by basing itself on the masses and giving to them an adequate firing capacity.” (*La Contrarrevolucion de Agosto de 1971*, p.8 in **Masas**, No.400, September 1971 issue.)

Escobar’s “honesty” does not go far enough, of course, to admit that the *POR (Combate)* did not share these illusions of so-called “Marxists,” and constantly had called the masses to immediately arm themselves, warning them not to expect any arms from the Torres government.

What was the position adopted at that time by the comrades who today so severely criticise the policy of our Bolivian section? One can read *La Verdad*; one will note that the necessity to arm the Bolivian workers and peasants immediately in order to oppose the impending counterrevolutionary coup was hardly mentioned, if it was

mentioned at all. Great importance was attached to the internal debates of the Popular Assembly, great stress laid on this, the “first soviet of Latin America,” in the Lora-Lambertist style of declamation, without taking into consideration the fact that an *unarmed* consultative and powerless “assembly” without any representative rank and file bodies capable of mobilising the masses, instantaneously and transferring the masses’ revolutionary energy to it, facted with in addition an imminent reaction coup, could hardly be called a “soviet,” and that the question of immediately getting arms for the workers was the key question of overriding importance, much more important than the establishment of Assembly statutes, or the proposals for the composition of the Comibol management board.

In an attempt to evade this key issue, Comrade Lorenzo, writing for the *La Verdad* group immediately after the August 1971 coup goes into the lengthy development about the work inside the army. He agrees, he says, with our rejection of the Lora-type “spontaneous insurrection perspectives.” But he then counterposes to that “spontaneistic insurrection perspective” of Lora the perspective of insurrection based essentially on work inside the army. Here is the relevant part of his thesis:

“On the other hand, the October insurrection planned and led by Lenin and Trotsky ended by installing the first socialist government. In order to achieve this, the Bolshevik party did not limit itself to propaganda on the need for an armed insurrection but formulated a programme and a policy of carrying out the uprising based on the mass organisations. In this programme and policy, work in the army was decisive ...

“This activity which, strictly speaking, is the conscious preparation for arming the people and for the uprising, was completely ignored

by the propagandists of insurrection. Unfortunately, it was also neglected by the guerillists, who saw working in the army only as another stage and another front in their ‘prolonged war.’” (*The Lessons of Bolivia*, by Anibal Lorenzo – *International Information Bulletin*, July 1972, p.13.)

The truth of the matter is that armed workers militias – Red Guards – emerged from the February revolution, essentially organised by Bolshevik vanguard workers, long before there was any talk about “armed insurrection.” It was these Red Guards who, together with the direct election of the Soviets by the workers, soldiers and peasants, gave the Soviets the fundamental nature of real dual *power* organs. The disintegration of the Tsarist army was in the first place the result of the imperialist war and not of the Bolshevik propaganda in the army; this propaganda played an important role only in the final stage previous to the October insurrection. To believe that without Soviets, without already decisive weight of revolutionists inside them; and without the existence of armed workers and poor peasants militias, “propaganda inside the army” – always necessary of course – is the key next step forward, or even the decisive factor to prepare armed insurrection, is really to put priorities upside down.

Trotsky had something very precise to say about people who hide behind the need to develop revolutionary propaganda inside the army *in order to deny in practice the necessity of immediately starting to arm the workers*, in order to postpone the setting up of workers militias till a later stage:

“It would be puerile, however, to believe that by propaganda alone the whole army can be won over to the side of the proletariat and thus in general make revolution unnecessary. The army is heterogeneous and its heterogeneous elements are chained by the iron hoops of discipline. Propaganda can create revolutionary cells

in the army and prepare a sympathetic attitude among the most progressive soldiers. More than this propaganda and agitation cannot do. To depend upon the army defending the workers' organisations from fascism by its own initiative and even guaranteeing the transfer of power into the hands of the proletariat is to substitute sugary illusions for the harsh lessons of history. *The army in its decisive section can go over to the side of the proletariat in the epoch of revolution only in the event that the proletariat itself will have revealed to the army in action a readiness and ability to fight for power to the last drop of blood. Such struggle necessarily presupposes the arming of the proletariat.*" (*War and the Fourth International*, p.323 in Leon Trotsky's *Writings 1933-34* – Our stress.)

We see that Trotsky reverses the priorities as developed by Comrade Lorenzo. The arming of the workers and the poor peasants, far from being "prepared" by "propaganda inside the army," creates the necessary preconditions for such successful propaganda, at least on a mass scale. Indeed, if there are no armed militias of the toilers, the first symptoms of independent soldiers' committees appearing in the army might very well become the immediate signal for the counter-revolutionary coup, as the enemy understands perfectly that the army is his last-ditch defence line before a victorious revolution. This is precisely what happened in Bolivia, as it happened in Brazil before.

Trotsky draws a very clear conclusion from this reasoning:

"A revolutionary party must take upon itself the initiative in arming fighting workers' detachments. And for this it must first of all cleanse itself of all sorts of skepticism, indecision and pacifist reasoning in the question of arming the workers." (***Ibid.***, p.323.)

4. The Strategy of Armed Struggle Under the Torres Regime

Comrade Lorenzo's article, which also completely underestimates the need for the immediate arming of the workers and poor peasants during the Torres *Interregnum*, and substitutes for it propaganda in the army, presents the policy of the *POR-Combate* as if it continued to prepare guerilla warfare in isolation and thereby "lost two valuable years." This is a complete travesty of the truth. During the Torres interval our Bolivian section did *not* call for "rural guerilla warfare." They called for the immediate arming of the masses. The already cited May-Day Appeal of the *POR (Combate)* new series No.5) says in that respect:

"Let us not fool ourselves. The innumerable massacres have taught us a lesson. On the basis of that experience, the *POR* calls upon all the workers, on this first day of May, to organise their armed pickets, their proletarian and peasant regiments. In each factory, in every mine, in every peasant community, in the Universities, it is necessary to organise armed detachments, which will be the embryos of the Revolutionary People's Army. Only in this way shall we definitively crush the fascists in the crisis which they prepare, while at the same time we shall assault the positions of the capitalist regime. Only in that way will the revolution triumph, opening the road to the building of socialism."

The same issue of *Combate*, the organ of our Bolivian section, carries a special article on the organisation of armed detachments at trade union level against the fascist threat. These were no isolated incidents. The whole agitation of the *POR* in the months prior to the Banzer coup were centred around these slogans.

Nor did the Bolivian section limit itself to literary propaganda and agitation on this field. *It started to take*

initiatives in order to implement that line. In the Food Workers Union of La Paz, where our comrades had important influence, an armed youth guard was set up. Comrade Tomas Chambi, member of the Central Committee of the *POR*, was elected responsible for setting up an armed guard by the Peasant Federation of Pacajos and accomplished this task (this was the only armed peasant detachment which would come to La Paz and fight alongside the workers on August 21, 1971). Another member of the Central Committee of the *POR*, was put in charge of organising an armed militia by the miners union of Huanuni. In the province of Santa Cruz our comrades participated with other left-wing forces in the armed occupation of land carried out by several thousand peasants. In the La Paz province, attempts of a similar type began to be undertaken.

Comrade Lorenzo's above quoted article was written immediately after the Banzer coup. It appeared first in the magazine of the *La Verdad* group, *Revista de America* (July, October 1971 issue). It seems he has had second thoughts, for a year later, as author of the draft of the part on Bolivia of the minority document *Argentina and Bolivia – The Balance Sheet* submitted to the December 1972 IEC, he puts in a lot of words about the need of setting up armed militias. It is of course always pleasing to see a comrade, albeit belatedly, becoming converted to correct ideas. What is lacking however in this part of the *Lessons of Bolivia* is an essential element of the truth: to wit that the *POR* (*Combate*) not only had defended that same line 18 months earlier (when it was necessary to defend it) but had also started to apply it in practise.

Instead of that simple fact, we are served with the following piece of suppression of evidence and distortion:

“In spite of the course of the class struggle in Bolivia, the *POR* (*Gonzales*) held stubbornly to its position that a socialist revolution would occur only via rural guerilla warfare. Disregarding all the evidence before their eyes, our Bolivian comrades remained steadfast supporters of the line adopted at the Ninth World Congress a line that had ruled out almost everything happening around them (an urban insurrection, a reformist regime, open trade union work, the possibility of legal preparations, etc.).

“... As they visualised the coming sequence, Torres would fall and then would come the real struggle for power, that is, rural guerilla warfare on a new and higher plane, since the successor to Torres would be the most brutal dictator yet seen in the country. This was their real perspective. That was why they were so preoccupied with building some kind of military apparatus separate and apart from the mass organizations.” (*International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, January 1973, p.21.)

In the light of the above quotations and facts, comrades can judge for themselves what a caricature these paragraphs present of the real position adopted by our Bolivian section. It is simple nonsense to say that during the Torres regime they were preparing “rural guerilla warfare”; they were preparing and had started to organise workers and peasants’ militias. They were doing open trade union work and had conquered in a few months time important positions in this field. They were publishing legal newspapers, legal leaflets, organising legal meetings of the party. Especially they were warning the masses day after day that Torres would be overthrown by the right-wing, if the workers did not follow the party’s call to arm themselves. What remains of this whole misrepresentation by Comrade Lorenzo is the fact that the comrades of the *POR* (*Combate*) were indeed

“preoccupied with building some kind of military apparatus.” This “military apparatus” of the *POR*, small as it was *was one of the few existing in La Paz when the right-wing struck*. To it was confided the guard of the COB headquarters on the night of August 20, 1971. It was this apparatus which led the masses to storm the arsenal, to get whatever arms were ready. People who still believe that you can “improvise” military combat in a spontaneistic way can crack cheap jokes about a “military apparatus.” The workers of La Paz rather appreciated its existence on August 20 and 21, 1971. They could only regret that it was not bigger and that they had not understood the importance of such preparations earlier. They seem to have learned their lesson since. Only Comrade Lorenzo hasn’t learned that lesson yet.

Comrade Gonzales, drawing the conclusions from the failure of the reformists and the centrists to arm the workers and from the weakness of our party which couldn’t all by itself compensate the failures of most of the other working class parties, indeed predicted that under these conditions Torres’ defeat was the more likely variant. Events have proved him to be right, alas. In case of that defeat, Comrade Gonzales was sure that the Bolivian working class would not be crushed, that the struggle would continue, and that the lessons would be drawn to step up military preparations. In this too, events proved him to be rather right. But it is completely misleading to present things as if the *POR (Combate)* refused to conceive the possibility of a struggle for power under the more favourable conditions of the Torres regime, i.e., “preferred” in a certain sense the dictatorship which would open up the road for “extended guerilla warfare.” This type of slander of Stalinist origin should not be developed in the Fourth International

discussion documents, whatever may be the heat of the debate. The *POR (Combate)* did everything it could to prepare the workers for the fight against the impending coup. To blame Banzer's victory and our comrades alleged orientation towards "rural guerilla warfare" and to affirm that their policy led to a "disaster" completely distorts the historical record based on the *POR's* writings and actions between October 1970 and August 1971.

Comrade Lorenzo tries to involve us too in the presumed "mistaken political analysis" of the Torres period. He quotes a sentence of the article which we wrote together with Comrade Martine Knoeller in November 1970, and in which we warn the Bolivian workers that in spite of the fact that General Torres came to power "with the support of the left," the army would try to crush the masses as soon as it had re-established its unity. We warned the workers not to expect a protracted period of bourgeois democracy, but to prepare themselves for an immediate armed confrontation with the enemy. Nine months later this confrontation actually occurred. The fact that the army was united not by General Torres but by General Banzer is of absolutely secondary importance. What we understood was that there was only a short time left to prepare for armed confrontation, and that the workers should have prepared for this. We didn't write a word about "rural guerilla warfare," but about the need to prepare the masses for this confrontation. The *POR (Combate)* didn't say a word about "rural guerilla warfare," but likewise called upon the masses to arm themselves against the incoming semi-fascist onslaught. In that sense, we were armed, and the Bolivian *POR* was armed, by the 9th World Congress resolution on Latin America, – which is the best proof of the fact that this resolution far from projecting

a universal line of “rural guerilla warfare,” prepared all those willing to listen to the key importance of taking initiatives in the direction of armed struggle in all those forms made necessary and possible by the development of the class struggle itself.

5. Comrade Moreno, Advisor of the POR

Comrade Lorenzo and the other authors of the minority document submitted to the December 1972 IEC heap heavy irony and scorn on the “rural guerilla warfare” and the “civil war on a continental scale” line of the ELN and allegedly of the *POR (Combat)* too. They make the “orientation towards rural guerilla warfare” responsible for the (undemonstrated) political mistakes of the *POR (Combat)* during the Ovando and Torres regimes, and even for the defeat which the revolution suffered in August 1971. The application of the guerilla warfare line was undertaken by the *POR* during the Barrientos dictatorship. In the final year of that dictatorship, in 1968, Comrade Moreno had the following to say about the “strategy of armed struggle in Bolivia” (yes, Comrade Hansen: Moreno wrote about the *strategy* and not the *tactics* of armed struggle):

“In the past, we had posed the question of power in Bolivia insisting on the need that the trade unions, the COB and the workers and peasant militias take power defeating the national army or preventing its rearmament. Today this isn’t possible anymore. Even if it took a much paler aspect, the same was applied in all the other [Latin American] countries. The way in which we posed the question of power in countries like Chile, Argentina, Brazil or Uruguay was through the demand that the trade union organisations or the working class parties should organize the armament of the proletariat and the conquest of power. This was a tactical variant of the well-known strategy of the workers and peasants government. It was a nationally institutionalised way of

posing the question of power, through the great recognised organisations of the mass movement: the trade unions.

“The deterioration of the economic situation, and the generalised impossibility – with some exceptions – of defending or conquering the most minimal economic demands, leads or is leading the traditional trade union organisations to become more and more discredited. On the other hand, yankee imperialism, united with the strongest sectors of the bourgeoisie, creates bonapartist governments, supporting themselves upon the national armies and repressive forces, in order to prevent anything of this type from happening. Among these repressive forces are to be included the whole weight of the repressive apparatus of yankee imperialism itself, ready to intervene directly when these repressive forces are insufficient, as in the case of Santo Domingo. In front of this situation, the problem of power as well as the problem of the development of organs of dual power and of the conquest of power, has to be posed in different terms.

“With the Cuban revolution, and more precisely with changed policy of yankee imperialism (escalation in Vietnam), a new phase of the class struggle has opened in our continent: there are no more possibilities of the conquest of power on a national scale. There are at the present moment no more possibilities for a socialist Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Guatemala or Mexico. This does not mean that the case of Santo Domingo, with a popular and working class insurrection taking power and defeating a national army, cannot repeat itself. Such a possibility remains open. What is impossible during this stage, in which yankee imperialism will intervene with all its might to crush that variant, is the defence of power in the urban centers. It flows from there that the organisation and development of workers power transforms itself, through whatever variant, in the problem of armed struggle, of winning the population, especially the peasants and the workers, for armed struggle.

“By its very nature, such an armed struggle will be unable to respect frontiers and will tend to transform itself in a front of continental civil war. If in the past the trade-union was our organisational vehicle for posing the question of power, today OLAS, with its national combat organisations for armed struggle, is the only organisational vehicle for power. We state this, because the democratic or transitional slogans for the struggle for power:

Constituent Assembly, workers and peasant government, workers federation with Cuba, transform themselves into petty-bourgeois declamatory demands, if they are not accompanied by a concrete dynamic of revolutionary struggle in order that specific class organs might take power.”

“In the simplest way we would say that the transitional demands for power of revolutionary Marxism are always combined with a way of posing dual power, of supporting and developing organs of workers power, for the destruction of organs of bourgeois power. Lenin said: ‘Constituent Assembly,’ and together with this ‘All power to the Soviets.’ We have said: ‘All power to the CGT’ together with ‘Constituent Assembly.’ In Bolivia we said: ‘All power to the COB.’ When the slogans of power become separated from this way of conceiving dual power, they transform themselves into reformist slogans, and, in the best of cases, into super-propagandist slogans.

“Which revolutionary class organs do we propose today to take power, to combine them with ‘Constituent Assembly, Down with the reactionary governments, Federation with Cuba, etc.?’ *The trade-union organisations as in the past? We think categorically no!* The organisational class dynamics for power concretises itself in: *All power to the ELN in Bolivia, to the FALN in Venezuela*, and so on in the same way. As long as there is no armed struggle in a given Latin American country, the organisational power dynamics can be formulated in a propagandistic way on the basis of the same themes: a continental civil war, let us prepare the armed struggle; long live OLAS and its armed struggle, etc., combined with the other power demands.” (*La Revolucion Latin Americana, Argentina y nuestras Tareas; 1) La Situacion Mundial* p.12 – Our stress.)

If the 9th World Congress document really had the perspective of generalised “rural guerilla warfare” and of “civil war on a continental scale” in 1969, the least one can say is that Comrade Moreno’s 1968 document was its great predecessor. As always when he makes a turn, Comrade Moreno makes it all the way. One will look in vain, even in the most “ultraleft” documents of the international majority, not to speak of the Bolivian comrades, for such extreme

formulas as the one which makes even the most “minimal” economic concessions of the bourgeoisie impossible (our Bolivian comrades, under Ovando, were calling for the re-establishment of the 1965 wage for the miners, and after the October 1970 mobilisation this was actually achieved). One will look in vain for even the most diabolic “guerillists” in the ranks of the Fourth International repeating in 1968 Comrade Moreno’s wisdom that the unions were in a process of becoming “discredited.” Our Bolivian comrades were calling for the re-establishment of free trade unions and the recuperation of their buildings and property at the same time Comrade Moreno proclaimed unions to be going out of business.

Indeed one might ask oneself whether the lengthy and impassioned polemics which the minority document *Argentina and Bolivia - The Balance Sheet*, submitted to the December 1972 IEC, unfolds against the partisans of “universal rural guerilla warfare” as the “only road to socialist revolution,” is directed at all against the Bolivian and the Argentine sections of the FI, not to say the international majority and the 9th World Congress Latin American document – which of course never defended such absurd positions – or whether this polemic is not in fact the way in which the authors of the first draft of that document, Comrades Moreno and Lorenzo, choose to atone for their own past deadly sins, and present to the startled world Trotskyist movement a thorough self-criticism – without unfortunately mentioning the real culprits of the wrong positions they demolish.

But there is more to come. In his 1968 article *La Revolution Latinoamericana, Argentina Y Nuestras Tareas* (*The Latin*

American Revolution, Argentina and Our Tasks), Comrade Moreno furthermore develops the following detailed analysis of the prime importance of rural guerilla warfare in Bolivia, not only for the Bolivian but even for the Argentine revolution:

“The historical importance of the beginning of armed struggle in Bolivia demands from us a careful analysis and redoubled activity under this perspective. We should default as Marxists if we would not start from a concrete analysis of the present reality. The death of Che has been a grave blow for the armed struggle, but it hasn’t crushed it, and it has no more suppressed the group which started it. *Inti Peredo and his heroic comrades survive and continue to fight: they are already in fact the new leadership and power organisation of the Bolivian proletariat and masses.* On all the walls of Bolivia you can read the following slogan: *Inti will no die.* This concrete, decisive, fundamental fact is the first one which we have to take into consideration when examining the Bolivia situation. Any theoretical-political document which doesn’t put this fact first, and doesn’t consider it fundamental is a real disaster.... It would be intellectual and sectarian pedantry elevated to its extreme degree. Inti and his group survive, like Fidel and his group survived at that moment [after the Granma landing], and no Marxist analysis of the reality of the southern part of our continent, of our country and of Bolivia is possible, if it doesn’t start from this decisive, categorical, concrete and immediate fact, known by all ...

“It follows that the first task of all Latin American revolutionists in this moment, the first task of OLAS as the only organization capable of conducting armed struggle, of our party as part of OLAS in a country bordering on Bolivia, is to first save and then consolidate the ELN and Inti as its undisputed leader. There is no more urgent task than this.

“To save Inti is our principal tactical task; to develop the armed struggle in Bolivia is our principal strategic task as Trotskyists. We must demand that our International, and especially the whole Trotskyist movement of Latin America concentrates itself on Bolivia. All conditions work in favour of this continuation of the Bolivian armed struggle: a crisis of the economy without any way out; the crisis of the bourgeoisie; radicalisation of the urban petty-

bourgeoisie and growing discontent of the peasantry as a result of the new taxes imposed by the Barrientos government; revolutionary disposition of struggle by the mining and factory proletariat. Subjective conditions conspire against this: the parties which adhere to OLAS continue to be weak and disorganised; there is no programme for struggle which reflects the needs of the masses. All this is important, but in this given moment, it is abstract. What is urgent and fundamental is the need to save Inti and his group, the ELN, beginning to create a movement rooted in the mass movement which saves him and allows the ELN to develop.

“...Our responsibility is of the first magnitude. Without the direct intervention of ourselves and our international we shall not be able to play a role of prime magnitude, to save Inti and develop the ELN. A single young comrade of ours, very young and without experience, has played and is still playing a role of prime magnitude. Several much more capable comrades could do a lot! With that goal, the party must intervene with everything: money, middle cadres, logistic support from the limiting provinces for the Bolivian armed struggle. Enough talk! *Let us intervene urgently in the armed struggle in Bolivia, key of our own revolution.*” (*Le Revolution Latinamericana, Argentina y Nuestras Tareas*, Capitulo Quinto: *Nuestras Tareas*, pp.1-2) (our stress.)

It is not necessary to continue these quotes. They prove beyond any doubt that under the Barrientos dictatorship in 1968, Comrade Moreno gave our Bolivian section the advice to put itself completely under the command of the ELN and its “undisputed leader,” who were conducting a typical *foquista* form of rural guerilla warfare. He saw this *foco* as a decisive factor not only for the Bolivian but even for the Argentine and the whole Latin American revolution. He wanted to subordinate everything to develop the ELN struggle in Bolivia.

Three years later in 1972, Comrades Lorenzo/Moreno, discovering the urban mass upsurge of the Bolivian

proletariat, gave our Bolivian section the opposite advice to launch itself immediately into an urban struggle for power:

“On May 1 a Popular Assembly in which the working class movement has a majority representation was inaugurated in Bolivia. This fact has an enormous importance. It is the expression of the dual power which prevails in Bolivia. On the one side there is the government of Torres and on the other side there is the working class. For that reason we find it strange that the ELN, which has not started to organise urban actions, is of the opinion that the ‘workers parliament,’ desired by the trade unionists and the left parties, ‘only serves to contain or deviate the revolutionary process.’” (*La Opinion*, 8/5/71, p.31)

This shows no understanding of the contradictory nature of the phenomenon. It is not exaggerated to compare the appearance of the Popular Assembly with that of the Soviets which emerged during the Russian Revolution. These Soviets were, like the Popular Assembly in Bolivia, products of the revolutionary upsurge. That is the decisive fact. Torres had to “impose” this resolution upon himself, independently of the fact that the hegemony which the most bureaucratized or reformist elements exercise (over the Assembly) allow him to continue his bonapart-ist game. The present situation in Bolivia is very similar to that of Russia, when the Bolsheviks were in a minority in the Soviets and the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries capitulated shamelessly before the Provisional Government of the bourgeoisie first, or Kerensky afterwards.

“Nobody would dare to say today that the Soviets of that period ‘only served to contain or deviate the revolutionary process.’ Their capacity to precise this phenomenon allowed Lenin and Trotsky to acquire a policy for the conquest of power. It is clear that neither Lechin nor Lora are the Lenin and Trotsky of the Bolivian revolution. And if things would depend upon them, all power would never pass into the hands of the workers. But it is important to see how the Popular Assembly could become a useful medium

through which the real revolutionaries could give impetus to the process towards this fundamental goal.

“It is evident that the existence of the Popular Assembly alone does not guarantee the fulfillment of this task. The absence of a real revolutionary party, like the Russian Communist Party, is a powerful obstacle in favour of Torres and Co. Historical experience shows how highly explosive processes can become deviated or frustrated....

“...This danger likewise exists in Bolivia, for sure. But it would be criminal if, while being conscious of this aspect, we should refuse to recognise that the present legalisation of the Popular Assembly represents an extraordinary triumph of the toiling masses which has to be deepened till all power is conquered. The general situation in Latin America contributes to this perspective, independent of the efforts of Lechin and Co. for maintaining the process within the limits accepted by the Torres government. It is in this way that revolutionists should see the Bolivian panorama. Using sectarian blinkers can only help the opportunists.” (*La Verdad*, May 12, 1971)

There is indeed a 180 degree turnabout. No more all power to the ELN, but to the Popular Assembly. No more were the trade unions discredited; they had become the main motors of the revolutionary process. But the May 1971 analysis doesn't seem more adequate than the 1968 one. The absence of Soviets, the absence of arms, the preparation for a counter-revolutionary coup, the need to warn the workers about that rather than to issue empty proclamations about the “conquest of power,” the urgency of beginning without delay the arming of the workers and the peasants: all these aspects of the situation of which the Bolivian section was fully conscious somehow escape our advisor's eagle eyes.

In spite of these dizzy ups and downs of advice, the Bolivian section kept its head, understood the need to prepare for guerilla struggle under Barrientos, but refused to dissolve

itself in the ELN, refused to give in to the *foco* conceptions, maintained the necessity of close links with the miners, the urban workers and the poor peasants, and therefore was able to make the necessary turn towards the arming of the proletariat immediately after the new upsurge of the mass movement, meanwhile constantly maintaining the independence of the party, of its programme and of its political orientation. Yet the authors of the remarkable advice of 1968 and 1971, which have so well stood the test of history, have the cheek to accuse the Bolivian section in 1972 of having “missed the boat” and to be even co-responsible for the defeat of the revolution, because they were allegedly sticking constantly to “rural guerilla warfare.” A bit thick, isn’t it?

6. The Alleged Political Mistakes of the Bolivian Section

In an indictment of the political mistakes supposedly committed by our Bolivian section, the authors of *Argentina and Bolivia – The Balance Sheet* advance seven accusations against the comrades of the *POR (Combate)*:

1. They failed to understand the differences between the Barrientos and Torres regimes, between Kerensky and Kornilov.
2. They failed to participate in the “Political Command,” a united front set up by the mass organisations of the Bolivian working class.
3. They failed at each step to work out a correct political line for the unfolding mass movement.

4. They were late and hesitant in understanding the importance of the Popular Assembly.
5. They failed to launch the slogan “All Power to the Popular Assembly,” without which “all talk of armed struggle amounted to nothing but phrase-mongering or ultra-left adventurism.”
6. As a result of their previous orientation toward “rural guerilla warfare,” they were isolated from the mass movement.
7. After the defeat, they joined an unprincipled united front with the betrayers of the Bolivian revolution, the *FRA (Anti-Imperialist Revolutionary Front)*, thereby contributing to cover up for the crimes and betrayals of the bankrupt leaders of the mass movement of 1970-71. This front, in addition, has a bourgeois programme.

The indictment seems formidable. But after careful examination, one has to conclude that *not a single one of these accusations holds water*.

Did the Bolivian section fail to make the distinction between Kornilov and Kerensky, between Torres and Barrientos or Banzer? If such a “failure” would have any meaning, it could only mean one of two things: either that our comrades remained neutral when Banzer rose against Torres, refusing to fight against Banzer alongside with the Torres supporters, be it independently from them, like the Bolsheviks fought alongside Kerensky but independently from him against Kornilov; or that the *POR (Combate)* followed essentially the same line under Barrientos and Banzer as under Torres. Both implications are completely unfounded. The record shows that the *POR (Combate)* fought alongside the Torres supporters against Banzer, and played even a partially leading role in this struggle. The record also shows that

the *POR (Combate)* was legal, and followed a line of mass arming of the workers and peasants under Torres, whereas it acted illegally under Barrientos and Banzer, following an orientation of preparing armed struggle by smaller contingents. The first accusation thereby falls.

It is true that the *POR (Combate)* failed to participate in the “Political Command” of 1970. But was this a mistake? Unfortunately for the authors of the minority document, the “political Command” was not a working class united front, but a typical coalition between working class and bourgeois parties. One of its main participants was the largest bourgeois party in Bolivia, the MNR, whose top leaders have been responsible for the terrible massacres of the miners in 1964. One of its first acts was to demand ministerial posts in the Torres cabinet. Should the *POR* have joined these gentlemen in a common “political command?” We don’t think so. The second accusation thus also falls.

Is it true that the *POR (Combate)* “failed at each step to work out a correct line for the unfolding mass struggles?” We have already analysed two of these lines projected at one year’s interval. In the middle of 1970, under the Ovando regime, they called for complete restoration of trade union freedom, liberation of all political prisoners, restoration of the miners’ wages of 1965, and the setting up of an elected representative body of all working class organisations. Was this a wrong line for the “unfolding mass struggle?” It was so “wrong” that a year later, the masses had realised every single one of these demands! In the beginning of 1971, the *POR* centred its political line on the three demands quoted above: democratic elections of local and rank-and-file assemblies of the toiling masses so as to transform the

Popular Assembly into a real soviet, immediate arming of the workers and poor peasants; extension of the revolution to the countryside through the implementation of a concrete and detailed programme, published by the Party. It seems to us that these two series of demands, in 1970 and in the beginning of 1971, were fundamentally correct and corresponded to the needs of the unfolding mass struggle. The third accusation thereby falls.

Was the POR “late and hesitant” in understanding the importance of the Popular Assembly? Members of the POR participated in it since its first session. The POR as a party requested to be represented at this first session, on May 1, 1971. This request, blocked by Lora, was then transferred to a commission dominated by the pro-Moscow CP, which after much bickerings granted it during the second session of the Assembly, in July, which lasted five days (three days plenary sessions, five days commissions). The POR was to be invited as a party for the third session, called for September. This session was never convened, because of the Banzer coup. There is consequently no sign of any “hesitation” on behalf of the *POR (Combat)*, as it attempted to gain representation in the Assembly from the first day of its convening. The fourth accusation thus falls.

Was the slogan, “All Power to the Popular Assembly” the key slogan for the period May-August 1971? The case of the minority comrades is not very convincing. There were no Soviets. The peasants – three-quarters of the population of Bolivia – didn’t yet identify with the Assembly. Neither did the soldiers. Furthermore there was not even a beginning of the process of arming the masses. Under these conditions, the slogan “All power to the Popular Assembly” seems

premature, to say the least. We believe that *POR (Combate)* was substantially correct in giving priority to its three main demands, enumerated above.

But even if the minority were more correct on this question of the slogan, it is obvious that the mere 'launching' of the slogan, would not have changed anything concerning the outcome of the struggle. The military *coup* was imminent. The decisive question was to prepare the workers and peasants against the coup by arming them. *It is not true that a successful reply to a reactionary coup is impossible without a central governmental slogan.* There was no central governmental slogan in Spain in July 1936; nor was there one during the days of struggle against Kornilov either. In fact the Bolsheviks had temporarily *abandoned* the slogan, "All Power to the Soviets" after the July days, and took it up again only *after* Kornilov's defeat (see Trotsky's **History of the Russian Revolution**, Vol. 2, Chapter entitled *The Bolsheviks and the Soviets*). So the fifth accusation also substantially falls.

Is it true that in 1970-71, the *POR (Combate)* was "isolated from the mass movement," as a result of its previous involvement with "rural guerrilla warfare" (pressed upon it, as we noted, by Comrade Moreno himself as late as 1968)? This is absolutely untrue. To show the shallowness of this particular accusation, it is sufficient to indicate that out of the 180 members of the Popular Assembly representing workers and peasants unions, the *POR (Combate)* had no less than 12 (as compared to Lora's 6): 3 representatives of the Food Workers Union; 2 of the Departmental Trade Union Federation of La Paz; 2 of the Teachers Union and 5 representing different peasants federations. Even in

comrade Moreno's own publications, which partially ignore the facts because they failed to consult the Bolivian section, the *POR (Combate)* is credited with a substantial representation in the Popular Assembly (equal to that of Lora, according to these publications). The least one can say is that if today a similar popular assembly were assembled in Argentina, the **Verdad** group despite many years of "exemplary mass work" and other "successes" of which the authors of minority document are very proud, would hardly win 6.5% of the mandates, which was the proportion received by the Bolivian section, allegedly "isolated" from the masses. So the sixth accusation also falls.

Finally, is it true that the FRA (Anti-Imperialist Revolutionary Front) has a "common bourgeois programme" and serves only as a cover for hiding the bankruptcy of the reformist and centrist leaders of the 1970-71 period? It is true that the FRA launched a public appeal – which was adopted against the vote and in opposition to a draft presented by the Bolivian section – which was essentially class-collaborationist in character. The Bolivian section made a mistake in signing that appeal. The United Secretariat has stated this publicly and we stick to that today. But the following facts should be noted:

(a) That the FRA, contrary to the "Political Command," is *not* a coalition with the bourgeoisie, as not a single bourgeois party participates in it. Even the "revolutionary armed forces" under Major Sanchez state that they are in favour of a socialist revolution and adhere to Marxism-Leninism.

(b) That the *programme* of the FRA is explicitly socialist in character and purpose as appears clearly from the first three points of its fundamental Charter:

“1. The FRA is organised for the conquest of power. The Bolivian people have already reached a high level of revolutionary consciousness which has prepared them for the struggle for socialism as their political aim. On the basis of this popular political development, we begin the organisation of a political, trade-union and military mechanism which leads to the insurrectional struggle.

“2. Given the fact that the present government is an un-disputably dictatorial and fascist regime, an agent of yankee imperialism, and unable to fool any sector of the people in relation to its real character; given the fact that the Bolivian masses have an advanced political consciousness, what is necessary is to organise the action and the struggle in all its forms. With that goal it is vital to organise immediately a Vanguard Political Command with the participation of all the revolutionary sectors which unite themselves under the banner of the fight against fascism, for national liberation and the building of socialism.

“3. Our alliance has a durable and organic character and not a superficial and transitory one, because it is the indispensable instrument for the people’s victory. The struggle for national liberation and socialism is, in and by itself, indissolubly political and military, at one and the same time. For this reason, our alliance and conjunction of forces realizes itself simultaneously on the political, trade-union and military field. Our patriotic position, publicly open to an alliance with progressive sectors, does not imply any hedging over our class position, as the alliance which we establish and which will be in the forefront of the struggle for national liberation and socialism, expresses the ideology of the working class.

We state our conviction that the overthrow of the fascist dictatorship alone will not constitute a revolutionary order. Like all the other Latin American countries submitted to the regime of neo-colonial exploitation, Bolivia will have to reach the culmination of its historical process of liberation and of the building of socialism,

within the framework of a revolutionary development on a Latin American scale.”

It is impossible to call this a “bourgeois” programme. Although as Trotskyists we would have formulated some parts of it differently, it cannot be denied that the line of this Charter is substantially that of the theory of Permanent Revolution. It should be noted that even the public appeal of the FRA, which we strongly criticised, stated that the leadership of the Bolivian struggle should be in the hands of the proletariat.

(c) It is not true that, as a result of entering the FRA, the *POR (Combate)* has been forced to end all criticisms of the reformists and the centrists in relation to the August 1971 defeat. The publications of the section which appeared since the establishment of the FRA testify to the exact opposite. They contain numerous and severe criticisms of the reformists and centrists bankruptcy during the 1970-71 period.

What is true, on the contrary, is that the setting up of FRA has strengthened the Bolivian section’s political case against the pro-Moscow CP, Lora and the followers of Lechin. For by joining FRA these parties and currents implicitly or explicitly admit the correctness of the Bolivian section’s orientation prior to August 1971. This can be seen clearly from the following excerpt of the first issue of Lora’s paper in exile, **Masas**:

“The whole people, the left, were fully aware of the imminence of the coup and that this coup would transform itself into a civil war. October 1970 and January 1971 were warnings about the designs of the right. The left answered simply with speculations and not with a military people’s strategy. Nobody took the arming of the proletariat seriously. The nuclei of the left launched themselves

into a search for arms within their own organisational limits. This proved to be a drop in the sea at the decisive moment. The trade-union organisations, which had the major possibilities for organising their own militias, limited themselves to keeping the old arms taken from the 'mines police' during the October 1970 crisis (240 Mauser guns and 11,000 pieces of ammunition). There was no other plan ... This is proven by the fact that the left-wing parties didn't take any measure of arming and organising militias in every single mining centre, in every single factory, as active part of their work." (*Causes de la Derrota*, p.4 in **Masas**, September 1971.)

One should compare this quote with the one from the May 1971 issue of **Combate** which we have already quoted, to see how brilliantly the political position of the *POR* (*Combate*) becomes vindicated as a result of the turn made by other working class parties in joining the FRA. Our Bolivian section alone, through an understanding of the role of armed struggle reflected in the 9th World Congress resolution on Latin America, can face the Bolivian masses without shame with a balance-sheet of its activity in the 1970-71 period.

Under these circumstances, the *POR* leadership thought it wise to join the FRA in order to advance both objectively and subjectively the revolutionary consciousness of the Bolivian proletariat and the level of its revolutionary combat preparations. It was convinced that the incorrigible reformists would not stay long on the FRA line, would wriggle and squirm in the face of organising the real struggle, that the FRA itself would divide between a reformist right and a revolutionary left wing, that the reformists and centrists would once again base their hopes on "divisions" within the army and the dictatorship coalition, and try to substitute manoeuvres with these forces instead of preparing the masses for an armed overthrow of the dictatorship. This new experience, collectively

assimilated by the Bolivian proletariat, would strongly reduce the political influence of the reformists and centrists and utterly expose them. So they hoped.

One can have differences of opinion on the estimates of the impact of the FRA on the Bolivian working class, and, in that light, differ on the sagacity of this particular tactical move. But there is nothing wrong, in principle, in entering such a united front with working class organisations on a clear socialist orientation, under the hegemony of the working class. So the last accusation of the minority against the Bolivian section also falls.

It is necessary once and for all to end the ridiculous misrepresentation of our Bolivian section's political and practical orientation which implies that the *POR (Combate)* withdrew its essential forces "to the hills." This has never been the case in the entire existence of the *POR*. Even when the *POR* had as its main orientation the preparation of guerilla warfare, this was always conceived as being based on the mining, the urban and the rural areas together, always conceived in close links with the mass movement. That is why the *POR (Combate)* did NOT follow Comrade Moreno's 1968 advice to dissolve itself into the *ELN* and to put itself under the command of *OLAS* unconditionally. *Nearly all the comrades of POR killed in combat or by the dictatorship since 1964 were killed in their capacity as mass leaders, trade union leaders, or in struggles of a mass character.* The real debate is centred on the need or the impossibility of the Bolivian section to take initiatives for organising armed struggle in the light of a concrete perspective for mass insurrection, not a withdrawal to "rural guerilla warfare" or to "small bands in the hills."

Does this mean that the Bolivian section is faultless, that its leadership didn't make mistakes, that it has done everything which could be done to help advance the Bolivian revolution during recent years? We would give nobody such a blank cheque of approval including ourself or the entire international leadership together. We are sure that the leadership of the Bolivian section holds the same views. The *POR (Combate)* suffered and continues to suffer from many weaknesses. The main one being an insufficient strengthening of the party, an insufficient capitalisation of its broader mass influence in the form of winning additional members and cadres. Then there is the weakness of the cadre, imposing too many responsibilities on too narrow a leadership which is responsible for the insufficient practical implementation of many correct decisions of the party, including those in the field of armed struggle. The irregularity of the publication of the party paper is part of the same weakness. It is in this sense, with constructive criticism contributing to overcoming these shortcomings that the *POR* has to be helped. But strengthening the organisation, cadre building, etc., will certainly not be achieved with a wrong political line, or by eliminating what is the main political conquest of the *POR* during recent years in the eyes of the masses: its deep understanding of the need for workers to prepare themselves for armed confrontation with the enemy from the very beginning of every new stage of mass mobilisations. This theoretical and practical conquest far from being an obstacle to cadre building has shown itself and will show itself to be one of the main preconditions for strengthening the party.

7. *The Test of Argentina*

In the debate prior to the Fourth Congress of the PRT (in the spring of 1968), i.e., prior to the split between the *Combatiente* majority and the *Verdad* group, two different analyses of the dynamics of the class struggle were presented. Comrade Moreno characterised the objective situation in Argentina as one of political stability, with a united bourgeoisie and a profound decline of the mass movement, which was at its lowest level since 25 years. (*La Revolucion Latin-Americana y Nuestras Tereas*, pp.15, 17.) He drew the conclusion that the orientation of the PRT should be toward defensive struggles of the working class, combined with help to the Bolivian guerillas. The PRT majority, regardless of wrong theoretical positions which we shall discuss further on, analysed that, on the contrary, the situation was one of profound instability in which the rising discontent of the working class and the impoverished petty bourgeoisie would inevitably lead to mass explosions.

Less than a year after this debate, the first Cordobazo erupted. In fact, at the 9th World Congress, a month before the first Cordobazo, Comrade Moreno still clung to his wrong estimate of 1968. Today, after the events, as author of the *Lesson of Argentina* (the section on Argentina in the minority text submitted to the December 1972 IEC) he has, of course, no trouble in recognising the “turn of the tide” of May 1969, and the pre-revolutionary situation which resulted from that turn. The art of revolutionary politics, however, is to foresee such turns, not to be taken by surprise when they take place. It consists in not speaking of “great stability” and of “biggest decline since 25 years” of a mass

movement on the verge of erupting in its most violent convulsions of the last decade.

The impressionistic and static-descriptive character of Comrade Moreno's political method is clearly revealed in his subsequent analyses of both Argentina and Bolivia.

There is, it is true, a limit to the mass upsurge, which the minority document correctly notes, and which throws some light on the origins of the differences inside the Argentinian Trotskyist movement itself. It is true that all the six semi-insurrections which have occurred since May 1969 erupted in provincial towns and that the greater Buenos Aires region has not yet witnessed similar explosions. It is certainly no accident that at the time of the split, the bulk of the forces which aligned with the majority (**El Combatiente**) faction inside the PRT came from Cordoba, Rosario and Tucuman, where the first semi-insurrections occurred, while the bulk of the forces aligning with the minority (**La Verdad**) faction came from greater Buenos Aires, where such a semi-insurrection has not yet taken place.

All of these semi-insurrections witnessed mass confrontations with the army, the gendarmerie and the police in various degrees. Likewise, violent interventions of the army, gendarmerie and police in unions, in factories, against revolutionary groups and individuals (arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, torture, murder) have occurred without interruption during this whole period. In that sense, in Argentina too, albeit from different circumstances than in Bolivia, the question of armed struggle became posed before a broad vanguard of the working class, not as the result of

“ultraleft” speculations or “*foquista*” adventures, but as an outcome of the development of the class struggle itself.

Surely, a revolutionary party worthy of the name would see it as one of its main tasks to prepare the masses for new and bigger clashes, to organise and train armed self-defence detachments of the workers, to project and prepare – within the limitations of its own relatively weak forces – the transition from spontaneous, fragmented and locally isolated semi-insurrections into a nationally coordinated, prepared and generalised uprising. The very absence of semi-insurrections in the greater Buenos Aires region, which has been till now the main weakness of the upsurge of the Argentinian working class during the last years, is, at least, partially explained by the greater weight in the capital both of the repressive apparatus of the state and the apparatus of the Peronist trade union bureaucracy. But the appearance of simultaneous uprisings in several parts of the country would stretch to breaking point the repressive apparatus’ capacity to intervene effectively everywhere. At the same time it would lessen the weight of repression on the Buenos Aires proletariat and thus facilitate its participation in the upsurge.

The capitalist class understands this danger perfectly. Since the second uprising in Cordoba armoured cars are usually stationed in central points of the big cities, prepared for every eventuality. When the Mendoza uprising occurred on April 5-7, 1972, against the doubling of electricity rates, the army intelligence transmitted threats of similar mass eruptions in Tucuman, Rosario and Cordoba and also certain areas of Buenos Aires. Immediately on April 8, 1972, General Lanusse withdrew the decree doubling the

electricity rates. The army was not ready to face simultaneous risings in several key cities of the country.

The complex political manoeuvre which the Argentinian bourgeoisie has undertaken since then has to be understood in the light of the dangerous situation for capitalism which has resulted from the May '69 Cordobazo, and from the emergence of armed struggle groups. The Argentine working class is one of the most militant in the world. It has a tradition of innumerable general strikes – the 1964 one taking place with simultaneous occupation of numerous factories. In the past, this tremendous militancy has been thwarted by the class collaborationist outlook of Peron and the union bureaucracy, which moulded to a large extent the consciousness of the mass of the working class. But since the late Sixties, two additional factors have made the situation more dangerous for Argentine capitalism and truly pre-revolutionary. The workers spontaneously begin to take the road of semi-insurrectional mass actions, bypassing the syndicalism which characterised so many of their past actions and looking for a political solution in the form of a workers and popular government. The Peronist union leadership begins to lose control over a new vanguard, both working class and youth, which gropes towards a revolutionary road and expresses on the subjective level the spontaneous radicalisation of broader working class layers.

It is in these circumstances that the Lanusse regime projected a “great national agreement” with the political parties and Peron, to re-establish a semblance of parliamentary democracy through the organisation of general elections. The purpose of the manoeuvre is crystal-clear: to try and put a brake on the development of extra-

parliamentary mass action growing towards an insurrectional political general strike; to channel the tremendous militancy of the workers back to reformist, class collaborationist channels, to isolate and break the armed struggle groups.

The difficulties and dangers surrounding this manoeuvre from the point of view of capitalism are numerous. A real solution to the explosive discontent of the masses is impossible under the given circumstances. The economic situation does not allow the bourgeoisie to grant the kind of material concessions to the masses which could tranquilise them for a period. On the contrary, in order to find a more durable solution for its economic difficulties, Argentine capitalism would have to crush the mass movement Brazilian style and still further lower the standard of living of the workers, streamlining and “rationalising” the economy at the workers expense to get a new nook on the world market (“common market” of the Andes, increased meat export to W. Europe, etc.,). Under the present social relationship of forces this is unrealisable before a severe defeat of the working class.

On the other hand, Peron and the Peronista leadership cannot simply capitulate before the regime and agree on a military candidate for the Presidency (or another bourgeois figure identified with the bosses in the eyes of the workers), without risking loss of control over larger and larger sectors of the mass movement, which, in turn, would stimulate rather than reduce the risk of mass insurrections for the bourgeoisie.

Finally a transfer of power to Peron himself – the most “radical” solution possible from a bourgeois point of view – would combine both dangers. The workers would consider it as a victory and their militancy would result in even stronger upsurges than in 1969. They would occupy the factories, take to the streets, present their bill of unfulfilled promises and demands of the last 15 years. The repression of this movement would be much more difficult (in the beginning near-impossible). In addition, being unwilling and unable to apply radical solutions either in a bourgeois sense (crushing the labour movement) or in a proletarian sense (expropriating the capitalists), Peron’s return to power would lead to a rapid discrediting of the old fox himself in the eyes of the working class, to an accelerated differentiation within the Peronist unions and youth organisations and to the rapid emergence of a much broader revolutionary vanguard than the one which exists today.

Much of this analysis can be found, too, in the minority document’s section on Argentina, as in the analysis of the **La Verdad** group. If before 1970, there was a striking difference in analysis between the **Combatiente** and **La Verdad** factions, today many factors of the analysis are held in common by both groups. The working class upsurge and the pre-revolutionary character of the present situation in Argentina are too obvious to be ignored by anybody.

What remains is probably a difference in the appreciation of the possibilities of a *success* of the Great National Agreement manoeuvre. We believe that the possibility of actually calming down the workers impatience and militancy through elections and partial political concessions to the Peronists is rather limited and will not last long. Comrade

Moreno seems to believe that the manoeuvre can have more success. However the most important difference concerns the conclusions drawn from this analysis in relation to the basic orientation of revolutionaries. Comrade Moreno has projected a “workers and socialist pole” in the coming elections as the major intervention of his group. We believe that the main orientation should be propaganda, agitation and practical preparation for an insurrectional general strike to overthrow the dictatorship, coupled with propaganda for a workers and popular government.

The contradiction between the **Verdad** tendency’s own characterisation of the objective condition in Argentina as pre-revolutionary, and the central orientation towards parliamentary elections (held under the auspices of a military dictatorship) is too obvious to need much comment. The comrades of the Moreno group speak to the Argentine workers as if they were in a situation similar to pre-1914 Britain or the United States in 1938 or 1946, i.e. relatively stable capitalist countries, with a working class which is highly militant from the trade-union point of view, but which has not yet attained a political class consciousness. But in a pre-revolutionary situation, a revolutionary Marxist does not tell the workers that to have workers candidates in general elections is a step forward.

He should tell them to following:

“If the dictatorship is retreating, it is as a result of your powerful extra-parliamentary struggles, as a result of six Cordobazos and of the appearance of groups committed to armed struggle. Continue along this road. Build up local factory and neighbourhood committees to organise in a permanent way for your mobilisations. Start to draw together all radicalised unionists, students, women and militants who are ready to join in these preparations.

Coordinate nationally the class struggle factions in the unions and tie them in with the vanguard committees. Start to arm yourself. Beware of a continuation or a quick return to sharp repression and confrontation. Don't give in to parliamentary illusions. Argentine capitalism cannot grant you a significant increase in your standard of living. That's why the class struggle is sharpening every day. That's why you have to continue on the road of the Cordobazos. Whatever retreat the army will undertake today will only be temporary. Large-scale clashes with the army are unavoidable. Don't go towards it spontaneously and in an unorganised way. Prepare and organise yourselves for it. Prepare an insurrectional general strike."

While the **Verdad** group does not develop in the pre-revolutionary situation prevailing today in Argentina, a political orientation which conforms Leninism, it must unfortunately be said that the *PRT (Combatiente)* likewise is guilty of serious deviations. In fact, it is tragic to have to underline that, while in Argentina there is today a pre-revolutionary situation in which more people are claiming to be Trotskyists than in any other country in the world today with the exception of France, Britain and the USA, the number of comrades who apply a real revolutionary marxist orientation is extremely limited.

In order to criticise in a constructive way the orientation of the Argentinian section of the Fourth International, it is, however, necessary to clear up a whole series of distortions and misrepresentations of the PRT's activities presented in the minority document *Argentina and Bolivia – The Balance Sheet*. These misrepresentations are as much a caricature as the way in which the document presented the activities of the Bolivian section in the 1970-71 period.

To state that the PRT is only conducting armed actions and has turned its back on the real class struggle is completely

untrue. It publishes several special factory and union caucus papers – a reason, incidentally, why the “statistics” in the minority document counting the number of articles devoted to strikes in **Combatiente** alone is extremely misleading. It is engaged in united front class struggle union caucuses and has played a leading role in several important strikes during the 1969-72 period.

The way in which the minority’s “balance-sheet” tells the story of the SITRAM-SITRAC national class struggle caucus meetings is most revealing of the half-truths and distortions of the minority document. The document fails to point out that, contrary to the **Verdad** group, the PRT was represented in the leadership of SITRAM-SITRAC, the most progressive union development known till today in Argentina. It fails to point out that at the plenary sessions, the members of the PRT present were at least as numerous as those of the **Verdad** group. It fails to point out that whereas the members of the **Verdad** group present

could only act as trade-unionists, because the credit of the **Verdad** group as a political group was extremely low among the assembled militants, a woman comrade, strike leader of the current strike who publicly spoke for the PRT was given a standing ovation and immediately taken to the presidium of the conference.

To say that the military actions of the PRT and of the ERP have “isolated” these comrades from the masses, or that they have been reduced to “Robin Hood” actions plus “terrorism” is likewise ludicrous. The most important military activities of the PRT and ERP took place in close connection with the class struggle. The ERP detachments penetrated into some

30 factories where special conditions of repression existed, and where armed factory guards of the bosses and the army terrorised the workers. They disarmed the guards, convened all the workers into general assemblies and held long discussions with them on the present and next stage of the class struggle in Argentina. Each of these actions was an important success.

During the second Cordobazo, the armed detachments of the ERP actually fused with the masses and led many mass actions. The banner of the ERP flew on most of the barricades put up by the fighting masses. Thousands of people followed the coffin of a youth killed during the actions and covered this coffin with the ERP banner. So “isolated” are these comrades from the masses that the top leader of the Peronist party, Campora, chosen as Presidential candidate by Peron, was unable to get a hearing in Peronista mass assemblies after the Trelew massacre if he made any criticism of the armed struggle groups and was forced to shout “Long live the armed struggle.” So “isolated” are they that after the Trelew massacre, the Cordoba CGT proclaimed a 24 hour general strike in protest against the killing, and in several towns thousands of workers gathered behind the coffins of our murdered comrades.

So “isolated” are the PRT and ERP from the masses that the dictatorship had to organise a mass campaign of denunciations against them, covering the walls of numerous cities denouncing the “terrorist bandits.” So “isolated” are they that the question of amnesty for political prisoners of the armed groups, and suppression of the repressive laws enacted against them, has become one of the main bones of contention between the army and Peron, with the army

stubbornly refusing any concessions in this sphere. One wonders why the bourgeoisie goes to all this trouble against isolated, inefficient, and influenceless nuclei of “ultraleft adventurists” who don’t make any impact on the course of events in any case.

According to the information available, the contention of the minority document that the PRT is today much weaker than the **Verdad** group in militants is subject to some doubt too. In any case, the figure of “affiliates” to the PST creates confusion, as it concerns people who only signed an election slate, not militants in the Leninist sense of the word.

Finally to identify the actions of the PRT and ERP as “terrorist,” putting them on a par with the actions of the Russian populist/terrorists, is to misunderstand completely the situation in Argentina. The comrades of the minority who use this parallel, should ponder the following words of Lenin:

“Allow us a small digression on the guerrilla actions of the combat detachments. We think it would be false to identify them with the terror of the old type. That terror was vengeance against individual persons. That terror was a conspiracy by groups of intellectuals. That terror was absolutely unrelated to the mood of the masses. That terror did not form military leaders of the masses. That terror ... was the result ... of lack of faith in the insurrection ...

“Guerrilla actions are not acts of vengeance, but military operations. They are as little comparable to adventures as reconnaissance actions of mobile units behind the rear of the enemy army during a lull in the war on the main theatre can be compared to the assassination of duellists or conspirators. The guerrilla actions of the fighting detachments which have been formed since a long time by both factions of social democracy in all the major centres, and are mainly composed of workers, are undoubtedly linked in the most evident way to the moods of the masses. The guerrilla actions of the fighting detachments directly

educate military leaders of the masses.” (Lenin, *The Present Situation in Russia and the Tactics of the Workers Party*, pp.106-7 of the German edition of the **Works**, vol. X pp.106-7, retranslated from the German, our emphasis)

It is in that spirit that our Bolivian comrades have acted, with a real, if modest success before and during the August 1971 days. It is in the same spirit that the Argentine section tried to act, at any rate till the second Cordobazo and during the insurrection. That alone should be sufficient to discuss the views of these comrades seriously and thoroughly and not through the caricatures which the minority presents in its document. That also in our opinion reconfirms that the position of the 9th World Congress as being in the real tradition of Leninism.

8. Our Differences With the PRT

Nevertheless it must be said that the United Secretariat has made a serious mistake in not opening up a frank discussion with the comrades of the Argentine section much earlier than on the eve of the last IEC. This discussion has now started with the letter signed by some members of the United Secretariat and sent to the leadership of the PRT before the last IEC. But this is much too late. Taking into consideration the heroic struggle in which the Argentine section was engaged and the fierce repression to which it was submitted, we thought it wise first to establish an atmosphere of fraternal solidarity and collaboration with these comrades before beginning a political debate. This was a mistaken tactical delay. In the meantime the danger became precisely that the Argentine section would increase its mistakes and seriously damage its own potential growth

and influence – which had increased remarkably as a result of these mistakes.

Our differences with the PRT comrades fall into two categories: the general ideological evolution of the PRT and the concept of the revolutionary army, as developed especially since the second Cordobazo.

Ideologically, the PRT has been *from its inception and before the split*, a combination of Trotskyism and populist-semi-castroist currents. The populist semi-castroist current has several wrong concepts in relation to the existing global realities and the tasks of Revolutionary marxists in this regard. It has not fully assimilated the Trotskyist theory of the bureaucracy in relation to the Soviet and Chinese bureaucracies, although it is closer to that theory than to Castro's ideas on the Soviet Union. It adopts a concept of "the two world camps" which fails to draw the dividing line between unconditional defense of the USSR and all workers' states or any genuine revolution against imperialism and defense of the bureaucracies privileges and power and the policies arising from the latter against the toiling masses.

This led these comrades to adopt a wrong position on the invasion of Czechoslovakia; to seriously underestimate the counter-revolutionary impact of the CP's policies in France and Italy on potentially revolutionary mass movements in those countries in 1968 and 1969; to completely fail to understand the counter-revolutionary implications of Nixon's visits to Peking and Moscow with regard to the Vietnamese revolution.

The eclectic combination of the theory of permanent revolution, with which the leadership of the PRT agrees, and

some of the concepts of Maoism, has led these comrades to a false “two-possible-roads theory” in relation to the conquest of power by the proletariat which they pose thus: the road of the October revolution or the Vietnamese road. It is one thing to understand the great variety of forms the revolutionary struggle has taken and will take in the future. It is a completely different matter altogether to confuse different forms of struggle with different programmatic goals. There is no other road to the direct rule of the workers and poor peasants than the establishment of Soviet power, of power based on elected committees of workers and poor peasants. The fact that capitalism was overthrown in China through a revolution led by Mao means that from its very inception, the revolution was bureaucratically deformed in that country, that the working class has never directly exercised power there. Surely no revolutionary marxist striving to lead his own class to power can adopt such a “model” as a possible alternative to Lenin’s and Trotsky’s.

The comrades of the PRT correctly understand that the Fourth International today is only the initial nucleus of the future revolutionary mass international. On the road to that mass International, our movement will have to fuse with many revolutionary mass currents. But for us this fusion has to occur on the basis of our programme and our principles, which represent a synthesis of the experience of 150 years of revolutionary class struggle. For the PRT leadership, this fusion is envisaged with all those forces engaged in objectively revolutionary struggles throughout the world, regardless of basic programmatic differences or grave programmatic confusion.

On all these questions, it is necessary to conduct an extensive discussion with the Argentine section in a fraternal, but frank way. We cannot predict the outcome of this discussion. But it is clear to us that the problem of assimilating the PRT thoroughly to the FI has to be tackled **POLITICALLY**. There is no other way to increase the weight of Trotskyism.

While the ideological questions which we just enumerated might seem unrelated to the present revolutionary struggle in Argentina – which of course they are not – and while the PRT might seem to be in the process of correcting some of its theoretical mistakes (the adaptation to Maoism is retreating under the pressure of events), the concept of the revolutionary army as developed by the PRT leadership since the second Cordobazo has obviously grave implications for the current activities of the Argentine section. The leadership of the section has developed the concept of the gradual strengthening of the revolutionary peoples army, of which the ERP is the main vehicle, as the key factor in the struggle for power in Argentina. This concept disorients the Argentine revolutionists and risks turning them away from some of their key tasks at the present stage.

Under conditions of upsurge of a mass movement of predominantly proletarian composition, which spontaneously takes a semi-insurrectional form, the main task of the armed detachments of the party consist, as Lenin specified them, in training and preparing the military cadres of the masses themselves. Closely related to this task is the task of relating to the successive waves of mass struggles and confrontation of the masses with the enemy. The revolutionary party tries to arm the masses with the desire of

arming themselves. The armed detachments show in practice that this can be done and what difference it makes to the unfolding confrontations. The central objective to be obtained is the creation of armed militias in the factories and neighborhoods, with which the masses identify and which function openly as organs of the appropriate mass organisations (either left-wing unions, or committees of a soviet character, or combined organs of whatever form evolves out of the struggle itself). An insurrectional general strike to overthrow the dictatorship would culminate in the spread of such armed detachments, closely integrated with the mass movement.

Only in the case of this insurrection being defeated in the towns if the mass struggle and upsurge temporarily decline under the blows of repression and if the dictatorship would harden as a result, but if the party at the same time would have qualitatively changed its strength and its relationship to the masses because of the role it played in the preparation and the course of the insurrection, only then could the autonomous development of the revolutionary army be considered as the main vehicle of struggle for the next stage, as happened after 1945-46 in Vietnam. In that case the function of the army would be to harass and weaken the enemy, allow the masses to regain confidence and to restart the struggle under more favourable conditions with regard to the power of the repressive apparatus. This would eventually lead to a new mass upsurge, in the course of which the revolutionary army would again have to fuse with the arming of the toiling masses.

But to base oneself at the present stage on the inevitability of defeat of the mass upsurge in an industrialised country like

Argentina, and to act as if this defeat was already around the corner, is to seriously misestimate the tasks of a revolutionary vanguard. The examples of the factory occupation realised by the ERP and of the second Cordobazo indicate that a growing awareness by the vanguard of the masses of the need to consciously prepare themselves for insurrection, can lead at one and the same time to the strengthening of the party, to the strengthening of its ties with the masses, to a strengthening of the armed detachments, and to a growing transformation of these armed detachments into armed militias of the mass movement. This should have been the orientation of the PRT after the second Cordobazo.

The concept of building the revolutionary army as the main vehicle in the struggle for power, in an autonomous way from the mass movement, involves several serious dangers. In the first place it leads to militarist deviations, which systematically give preference to military operations independent from the needs of the mass movement and from the moods of the masses, thereby actually weakening the political effects which armed detachments could exercise if and when they are more closely linked to the mass struggle. Military operations then run the danger of becoming goals in themselves, instead of means for helping the working class to raise its consciousness and the forms of its struggle to the levels required by the objective situation.

Such a militarist deviation tends to underestimate the importance of closely relating the armed actions with party building based on a clear political programme. Party building could become reduced to attracting people by the prestige of the armed actions on their own and the political

physiognomy of the party then risks being considerably weakened. A sharp turn in the mood of the masses, temporarily taken in by some enemy manoeuvre, would then leave the party unprepared to provide adequate political answers and would create the danger of opportunist adaptation.

In the second place, the concept of building the revolutionary army as the autonomous vehicle in the struggle for power could lead to a substitutionist deviation in which the party seriously overestimates its own possibilities and undertakes tasks which it is not strong enough to tackle. The preparation of armed detachments, the training of dozens or even hundreds of cadres in armed struggle, can produce wonders in an insurrectional mass movement, when these cadres become the natural leaders of tens of thousands of workers fighting the army and the police. But for small detachments to take on all by themselves, in single combat so to speak, a powerful army and state apparatus based on tens of thousands of armed individuals, is to run the risk of heavy and unnecessary losses. The function of armed detachments is "to help prepare the arming of the masses so that they can participate in the solving of their own tasks which only they can solve.

In the third place, the concept of building the revolutionary army as an autonomous vehicle for seizing power leads to a gross oversimplification of the tasks of the revolutionary vanguard, i.e., to a gross over-simplification of the prerequisites for a victorious socialist revolution in Argentina. It is true that the militancy of the masses in that country has reached an exceptionally high level, and that only the power of the army stands in the way of the pre-

revolutionary situation transforming itself into a revolutionary one. But a revolutionary situation by no means guarantees a revolutionary victory. What will be decisive will be the level of consciousness reached by the masses and the political and organisational strength of the vanguard party. To educate the masses in the need to build their own organs of power, to distrust all kinds of parliamentary combinations, to reject class-collaborationism and conciliationism in all its forms, to distrust reformism, Stalinism and peronism: this is as important as arming the masses. The current activity of a revolutionary vanguard in the given pre-revolutionary situation in Argentina must attach at least as much importance to these tasks of education, propaganda, mass organisation and *politically* arming the masses as it does to the task of strengthening the armed detachments of the party. To conceive of these armed detachments as a revolutionary army, which will in the long run lead the masses to power, turns attention away from these burning tasks.

It is because we highly appreciate the contribution which the comrades of the PRT have made to the development of the Argentine Revolution and to the influence of the Fourth International in Argentina and in Latin America, because we have the highest admiration for their single-minded devotion to the socialist revolution and for their exemplary courage and heroism, that we feel the urgent need to come to grips with the serious political weaknesses they have displayed in applying the strategy of armed struggle in Argentina during the latest phase of their activity. If they do not correct these mistakes, much of their heroism will have been in vain and will not contribute decisively to leading the Argentinian proletariat to the conquest of power. If they

correct their mistakes and thoroughly assimilate the lessons of history thus grasping the obstacles which have up till now impeded impetuous proletarian mass movements from actually overthrowing the bourgeois state in Argentina, they could write a decisive chapter in the history of the Argentinian revolution and in the history of the Fourth International.

9. The Forgotten Peruvian Example

It is our contention that the way in which comrade Hansen has opposed the building of a Leninist vanguard party to the orientation of armed struggle makes a clarification of the tasks of Latin American Trotskyists impossible. The analysis of the Bolivian and Argentinian class struggle since the 9th World Congress has convincingly shown that the problems of educating and preparing the masses for armed struggle were key problems of the class struggle itself. Initiatives correctly taken in that sense by Trotskyists, far from implementing any “underestimation” of the problem of party building, represent an indispensable prerequisite for building a revolutionary vanguard party in pre-revolutionary or revolutionary conditions.

The analysis made by comrade Hugo Blanco of the peasant struggle in the Convencion valley in Peru is another confirmation of our position. In his book **Land or Death**, comrade Blanco insists on the fact that the main cause which made it impossible to extend the peasant uprising beyond a certain point was the weakness, nay, the near-absence of a revolutionary vanguard organisation. That organisation, the FIR, was weaker and much less influential on a national scale than the Bolivian or Argentinian sections of the Fourth

International. Of course we fully agree with him. We have never defended the idea that “armed struggle” is a substitute for party building, or that you could have a victorious socialist revolution merely thanks to some weapons and without a revolutionary organisation rooted in the masses.

But there is another side to Hugo Blanco’s story, which the comrades of the minority are much too eager to overlook. Although the upsurge of the peasant movement in the valley of La Convencion was still regionally limited; although the overall situation in Peru was far from equalling the type of pre-revolutionary situation characteristic of Bolivia or Argentinian; although there was no question yet of a generalised mass upsurge of the working class in the country, *armed confrontation and armed struggle inevitably grew out of this even limited example of upsurge of the peasant movement*. Can one find a better confirmation of the key thesis we have constantly and consistently defended since the 9th World Congress?

On page 39 of **Land or Death**, comrade Hugo Blanco dealing with the initial strengthening of the FIR when three Argentinian Trotskyists came to help it, states:

“In addition, it gave serious impetus to the preparation for armed struggle. Although preparation had begun earlier, it was clearly becoming urgent to step it up *in view of the advanced level of the class struggle in the countryside*.” (my emphasis – E.G.)

In chapter 5 dealing with the dual power situation which arose, Hugo Blanco correctly stresses that such a situation cannot last for long and that inescapable conclusions flow from that understanding, from the point of view of the class struggle:

“Many of our hastily arrived at positions regarding La Convencion and Cuzco, taken without adequate preparation, had their origin precisely in our completely clear understanding that ‘this state of affairs cannot last.’ The bank expropriations were not designed to ‘stabilise’ the situation, but to buy arms for the revolution. In July or August of 1962, I wrote to the comrades, showing them that this situation would not last more than six months. Why did we turn to guerrilla warfare without sufficient preparation? Precisely for that reason! Because we knew that the moment had arrived in which, if we did not make a decisive move, they would fall upon Chaupimayo and crush us.” (pp.56-57)

Describing the final stage of the struggle, Hugo Blanco writes:

“We had to choose between dying of malaria and going down fighting. We chose the latter, not through romanticism, but for a political reason. We considered it necessary to educate the masses, to show them how the peasantry must fight the armed force of the enemy to the last; to show them that although the peasant fell under bullets, the enemy could meet the same fate; to show them that the military uniform is largely a fetish, that it is not an impenetrable armor, as the people tend subconsciously to believe.” (p.68)

Isn't that exactly the same spirit in which the Bolivian and Argentinian comrades developed their turn towards the armed struggle? One could think that this is a pure description of what Hugo Blanco actually did and thought in 1962; that since, familiarising himself with the writings of comrades Hansen and Moreno in the present debate, he has developed doubts about his past activities and their correctness and is wondering whether or not he was an “ultraleft and terrorist.” But comrade Blanco, drawing the balance-sheet of this past experience, comes TODAY to the following conclusion:

“Nevertheless, I still think it was correct to choose the armed confrontation, even if all the guerrillas had been massacred and the

repression against the peasants had been even more severe. The error was not in turning to guerrilla warfare. It was in having neglected from the start to build the party, which would have organised, extended and centralised all aspects of the struggle (armed struggle among them) in all their variations.” (p.60)

If it hadn't been an error to turn to armed confrontation growing out of a regionally limited mass movement as was that of the La Convencion valley in Peru, how can one argue that it was an error to turn to armed

confrontation growing out of the mass struggles in Argentina and Bolivia which were much wider and more generalised than those of the 1962 peasant movement in which comrade Blanco was involved?

Thinking over the more general problem of the orientation towards armed struggle, comrade Blanco writes:

“Nevertheless, in both instances (Russian and Cuba) it (the armed struggle) developed after *the masses* had come to see that armed struggle was the only solution. I emphasize the role of the masses because that is the part which the ultralefts do not understand; they believe that what is necessary for *us*, the revolutionaries, is to understand that the revolution will have to employ violence.

“In Cuba, it was Batista who convinced the masses with his brutal tyranny that no legal recourse remained open to them. When the guerrilla *foco* arose, the people understood that it was the only road to their liberation.” (pp.62-63)

The method of approach seems to us substantially correct. The key criteria is whether the masses *understand* the need for armed struggle. This was the yardstick applied by Lenin in 1906. Comrade Martine Knoeller and myself used the same method in our contribution to the discussion entitled, *The Strategic Orientation of Revolutionists in Latin America*. The question thus becomes concrete: Did

the” brutal tyranny of Barrientos convince large sectors of the Bolivian masses that armed struggle against the armed violence of the enemy was necessary? Did the brutal Onganía dictatorship convince the Argentinian masses likewise? Was the turn of the Bolivian and Argentinian comrades therefore timely or not, according to that criterion? Didn’t the behaviour of the masses who themselves started to participate in semi-insurrectional upsurges provide a confirmation of the correctness of our comrades’ assumptions? Isn’t that exactly the line of the 9th World Congress on Latin America? Isn’t it significant that when thousands of miners came to La Paz in January ‘71, they caused a panic among Torres supporters and their shame-faced reformist and centrist allies, because they demonstrated under the banner and slogans, “Let Us Struggle for Socialism” and “Revolutionary War,” and their main immediate demand was for arms? Can one deny under these circumstances that our comrades’ orientation toward armed struggle corresponded to the understanding of the masses, namely, that armed struggle was necessary?

10. A Second Forgotten Example; China 1925-27

In reality, the inter-relationship between an orientation towards armed struggle and the building of the revolutionary party – instead of the mechanistic opposition of one to another – is nothing new in the history of revolutionary Marxism. It was already posed albeit in a limited way, during the final stage of the Russian Revolution in 1905. It was explicitly enunciated by Trotsky in his critique of the Stalin-Bukharin line pursued during the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27.

Trotskyist cadres have been educated in the essential lessons of the experience. By abandoning the independent political organisation of the Chinese Communist Party and submitting to the bourgeois Kuomintang; by refusing to fight for proletarian hegemony and proletarian leadership over the toiling masses of city and countryside, thereby taking the lead in the struggle for the most burning tasks of the unfulfilled bourgeois-democratic revolution (the anti-imperialist task of national independence and unification and the tasks of the agrarian revolution, of the emancipation of the peasantry); by following the Menshevik theory of stages, Stalin-Bukharin imposed on the Chinese Communist Party a course which led to the victorious counter-revolutionary coup of April 1927 in Shanghai, ending the second Chinese Revolution in bloody defeat.

The world Trotskyist movement has paid less attention, in the last few decades, to the more detailed analysis of Trotsky's evaluation of the motive forces of the second Chinese Revolution, their interrelationship and the revolutionary tasks which flowed from them. Especially in the debates with the Maoists, but also for the correct education of our own cadres in semi-colonial countries, this analysis is of the utmost importance.

Nowhere did Trotsky advocate a line of the conquest of power by the Shanghai proletariat separate and apart from peasant uprisings. Such a proposition, which would have opposed the relatively small vanguard of the Chinese proletariat to a powerful army, even bigger than it in numbers, would have been pure suicide. It conforms to the Stalinist legend of Trotsky's alleged "underestimation of the peasantry," and is unfortunately repeated – in a "positive"

sense! – by some sectarians who claim to be the “followers” of Trotsky, in spite of all historical and documentary evidence.

In fact, as far as organising the Shanghai proletariat, of doing “mass work,” of organising unions and strikes was concerned, the leadership of the CCP following the Stalin/Bukharin line were not so much at fault. They certainly didn’t lack success in that field during the months leading up to the successful workers insurrection which opened the gates of Shanghai to Chiang Kai Shek’s army. Even on the question of arming the Shanghai workers, the then leadership of the CCP showed itself much more advanced and much nearer to Bolshevism than the Moreno group in Argentina today, although later on the terrible mistake was made of surrendering part of the arms to Chiang’s henchmen, for the sake of “keeping the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal united front” (*another example of dual power being based on armed workers from the start and losing its character of dual power when the arms disappeared*).

What then was the most fatal consequence of the Menshevik line of “revolution by stages” applied by the Chinese CP in 1925-27 in relation to the basic revolutionary social forces at work in China hi that period? It was the refusal of the Chinese CP to stimulate, organise, coordinate and arm the peasant uprisings, and tie them together with the communist-led urban working class to create a powerful alliance against which the Chiang army would have beaten itself to death, nay, which would have started to disintegrate Chiang’s army. This is no new variant of “Pabloite revisionism” or “ultraleft Guevarism.” It is the opinion of

Comrade Trotsky himself. Here is what he had to say on that crucial experience:

“Had the Comintern pursued any sort of correct policy, the outcome of the struggle of the communist party for the masses would have been predetermined – the Chinese proletariat would have supported the Communists, while the peasant war would have supported the revolutionary proletariat

“If, at the beginning of the Northern expedition, we had begun to organise Soviets in the ‘liberated’ districts (and the masses were instinctively aspiring for that with all their might and main), we would have secured the necessary basis and a revolutionary running start, we would have rallied around us the agrarian uprisings, we would have built our own army, we would have disintegrated the enemy armies; and despite the youthfulness of the Communist Party of China, the latter would have been able, thanks to proper guidance from the Comintern, to mature in these exceptional years and to assume power, if not in the whole of China at once, then at least in a considerable part of China. And, above all, we would have had a Party.” (Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, pp.185-86.)

One should know that Trotsky was speaking of a party of only 10-15,000 members in a country of then some 450 million inhabitants. More than half, if not two-thirds, of these party members were in the big cities. He was, thereby, regretting that a few thousand communists, no more, didn’t start to organise a communist-led peasant army behind the rear of Chiang’s troops. He stated clearly that, in his opinion, the disintegration of Chiang’s forces, i.e., the possible victory of the Shanghai workers in an open confrontation with them, was dependent on the prior organisation of that army. And he even went so far as to clearly state that the building of a really *revolutionary* party was conditioned upon its capacity to lead, organise, arm and steel the peasants uprising into a real army of the toilers. Comrade Hansen’s simple rule of counterposing “Leninist party building” to the

preparation of armed struggle is completely overturned. Trotsky answers Hansen: under specific circumstances you have to organise a revolutionary army before you even have the right to believe that you have got a revolutionary party.

Why this surprising though utterly correct analysis? Because Trotsky, as every revolutionary Marxist should, always starts from the objective dynamics of the class struggle, from the objective dialectics of the social relationship of forces, and from the political, tactical and strategical needs which flow from that analysis. Any other method is subjective, idealistic, and doomed to failure. It is impossible to subordinate huge social forces to some alleged “intrinsic” needs of “party building,” divorced from the needs of the live vanguard of the workers and poor peasants. If class collision has matured to the point where these forces are taking up arms, it is impossible for revolutionists to say “Stop immediately, because we are not yet ready and strong enough; go back to more ‘patient’ forms of struggle till the moment when we are strong enough to guide you towards victory.”

Trotsky’s analysis of the dynamics of the 1925-27 revolution could only be proven wrong if one could demonstrate that these peasant uprisings were much too scattered and isolated to create the basis for a real revolutionary peasant army; if one could demonstrate that some other political force outside of the Communist Party had such overwhelming support among the toiling peasants that they would never have followed the leadership of the CCP; and that, therefore, for objective reasons independent of the will of the CCP, an alliance between the proletariat and the poor peasantry was still premature (as it proved to be in Russia in 1905) and for the same reason the defeat of the revolution

inevitable. But given that this demonstration has never been made, the strategic line as summarised by Trotsky in the above quotation, and which turns on the building of a revolutionary army, was the only possible way to victory in the second Chinese revolution.

Likewise, any attempt to contradict the strategic line we project for the Bolivian and Argentina revolution will have to indicate either that there is much more objective scope for “appeasing” the Argentine (not to speak of the Bolivian!) workers through economic reforms than we believe, or much more possibility for the spontaneous collapse of the bourgeois army under the pressure of “peaceful” mass mobilisations. If this cannot be demonstrated then the conclusion which flows from our analysis of the basic correlation of class forces for Bolivia 1970-71 and for Argentina today implies in the short term the inevitability of an armed showdown between the army and a rising mass movement and hence the uttermost importance of preparing, organising and arming the workers for such a showdown.

11. Third Forgotten Example, or How Comrade Camejo Rewrites the History of the Cuban Revolution

Another very telling precedent of the key role played by the armed struggle, under specific circumstances, in a genuinely revolutionary mass process, is of course the example of the Cuban revolution. In the **ISR** of November 1972 Comrade Peter Camejo treats us to a rather original interpretation of that experience. “*It is important to briefly review what actually happened in Cuba and why it was possible for the Cuban revolution to triumph,*” he writes. We can summarise

Comrade Camejo's opinion of "what really happened in Cuba" in his own words:

"Let us summarise the factors that made possible the triumph of the Cuban revolution: 1) Mass support to the July 26th Movement's central demand, DOWN WITH BATISTA; 2) a substantial apparatus throughout Cuba, and in the colonies of Cuban exiles, capable of raising large sums of money and providing supplies to the guerillas; 3) demoralisation of the army ranks and lower ranking officers in response to popular hostility to the regime, resulting in a hesitancy to enter combat; 4) semi-neutrality of US imperialism and a divided national bourgeoisie; 5) the development of support among the peasantry of the Sierra Maestra and general peasant sympathy based on the demand for land reform; 6) the complete dismantling of the army and the police after the triumph of the guerilla army; 7) the use of governmental power after January 1, 1959, to mobilise, organise and arm the masses, above all the urban proletariat; and 8) the existence of other workers states." (ISR, November 1972, p.13.)

The inadequacies of this "summary of what actually happened in Cuba" are manifold and striking. The formula "semi-neutrality of US imperialism" is simply grotesque. Washington was arming and financing Batista till the very eve of his downfall. In exchange "liberal" imperialist journalists like those of the **New York Times** and the television networks wrote and spoke nicely about the "bearded revolutionists." If this is "semi-neutrality," one might as well argue that British imperialism had been "semi neutral" in the Vietnam war.

Mass mobilisations did not start only after the "workers and peasants" government was formed. Nor is it correct to say that "mass participation was organised after the seizure of governmental power." In the first place, the government formed after January 1, 1959, was itself a coalition government and mass mobilisations only occurred on the

call made by part of that government. But what this analysis leaves out was the successful general strike of January 1-3, 1959, which started *before* Fidel's revolutionary army reached Havana, and which played a decisive role in preventing the Cuban bourgeoisie from setting up an alternative bourgeois regime, an alternative military power and an alternative army leadership after Batista's downfall. Comrade Camejo also fails to point out that the mass mobilisations which continued in January and February had largely a spontaneous character, and were by no means made possible by the "use of governmental power."

We cannot, go on mentioning many other inaccuracies in this "summary." Its main weakness does not lie in these factual inaccuracies, but *in the near complete absence of social forces and of political strategy from this analysis.* Everything seems to be a function of clever manouvres on the side of Castro's apparatus and stupid mistakes on the side of his opponents.

There are at least half a dozen ways to untangle this mystified version of what "really happened in Cuba." Castro won "general peasant sympathy" on the basis of his demand for land reform, writes Comrade Camejo. Why then was this support denied to the Cuban CP, which certainly didn't fail to call for land reform as well? The masses were mobilised for democratic demands: that's where Comrade Camejo sees the main lesson of the Cuban revolution, the only one which can be repeated elsewhere too! But did the Cuban CP fail to fight for the "restoration of bourgeois democracy"? Camejo makes a lot about Castro's bloc with the national bourgeoisie. But didn't the Cuban CP strive with all its might for such a bloc too? Indeed, if one follows Comrade Camejo's

analysis, one is left with an insoluble mystery: why didn't the Cuban CP, which at the outset had a much bigger mass influence and a much bigger apparatus than Fidel's July 26th Movement, lead a successful revolution in Cuba? Perhaps because it didn't court enough support and "semi-neutrality" on behalf of American imperialism, or could it be that it wasn't opportunist enough?

The mystery is cleared when one passes from the mystified to the real history of the Cuban revolution. Castro's growing popularity and support among the Cuban masses was not based on the "use of democratic slogans," *but on his actual armed struggle against the dictatorship*, as compared to the cowardly manoeuvres, shameful capitulations and impotent declamations of the Stalinists, reformists and other fake "oppositionists." His growing support among the peasantry was not based on any vague "demand" for land reform but on the actual *implementation* of land reform in the areas liberated or protected by the rebel army in the Sierra Maestra. Fidel and Che's main contribution to the unfolding gigantic mass mobilisations which determined the course of the Cuban revolution – and which Camejo has the effrontery to call "limited" (*ISR*, Nov. 1972, p.14) was not the manipulation of the government apparatus – that was the way American bourgeois journalists sneered at Fidel's "television democracy" – but the destruction through armed struggle of the huge repressive apparatus, which enabled the tempestuous rise of the mass movement. And the demoralisation and subsequent disintegration of the bourgeois army was not a result of "popular hostility" (one wonders why the Brazilian army is still intact. It certainly is as unpopular as the Batista army ever was!), but by the very

real material blows delivered to it by the rebel army, with the help of a growing sector of the masses.

In other words: the Cuban revolution – like the Chinese revolution of 1925-27 (potentially and to a certain point actually) – which contrary to the Russian revolution of 1917, did not coincide with the breakdown of the ruling army through defeats in an international war, *saw a typical interaction between the unfolding of armed struggle and of mass mobilisations, each feeding and strengthening the other.* The weakening of the repressive apparatus through the blows of the revolutionary army, the rise of the mass movement, the collapse of the enemy army's central apparatus, the political general strike, the disintegration of the bourgeois state apparatus, the rise of centres of workers power: like cogs in a cog wheel these elements integrate with each other to explain what happened in Cuba between 1957 and the spring of 1959.

Is this a “model” which can be repeated? In some parts it can, in others it probably won't. Instead of speaking about imperialism's “semi-neutrality” during the civil war, it would be more correct to speak about imperialism's hesitations after Fidel's military victory. This is certainly unlikely to repeat itself. Rapid if not instantaneous intervention by US imperialism or its continental relays, is the more likely variant now, as the case of Santo Domingo indicated, as would have happened if the workers and poor peasants had won the confrontation in August '71 in Bolivia (the Brazilian army was ready to intervene any minute in that case). That is precisely why it is correct to raise the perspective of “prolonged civil war,” with a possible retreat from the cities where the revolution has already triumphed, if one

understands what such an imperialist intervention could mean.

On the other hand, the absence of a revolutionary party based on a revolutionary Marxist programme and tradition in Cuba was the main factor why direct power organs of the toiling masses – Soviets – did not develop in January-March 1959 in town and countryside, as they most probably will wherever Trotskyists play an important role in the phase during which the repressive apparatus of the dictatorship is overthrown.

But the specific interrelationship between the mass movement and armed struggle which characterised the Cuban revolution (not necessarily in the form of rural guerilla warfare, or rural guerilla warfare only; different combinations will be possible under different social and geographic conditions in different countries) is likely to occur again wherever the basic starting points of the Cuban revolution are repeated, in other words wherever a repressive dictatorship suddenly stopping the rise of the mass movement in its tracks, will be challenged by a determined revolutionary vanguard, progressively gaining mass support and helping to relaunch mass mobilisations till the point of a successful overthrow of the dictatorship.

12. The Experience of the Struggle Against Fascism

Comrade Hansen has some doubt about the use of armed struggle in the struggle against fascism too:

“Note, for instance, how the example they cited of ‘exemplary actions by autonomous armed detachments’ suggest an approach to the struggle against fascism that differs from Trotsky’s, as

presented in the *Transitional Program*. Trotsky emphasized the mobilization of the masses by the tens of millions, starting in the plants with the formation of picket and ending in the streets with massive confrontations – all under the slogan of self-defence.” (*In Defence of the Leninist Strategy of Party Building*, p.52.)

This is a slight over-simplification of Trotsky’s position on how to fight fascism. Trotsky raised the question of mobilising “tens of millions” against triumphant German fascism, which had already seized state power in the major industrial country of Europe. He never said that before Hitler came to power, it was necessary to mobilise first “tens of millions” before risking a confrontation with the Nazis. And he certainly never said that you had first to organize pickets in plants before you could challenge the fascists in the streets. Here is what he concretely and specifically said on that issue:

“The slogans of the party must be placed in quarters where we have sympathizers and workers who will defend us. But a party cannot create an independent defence organization. The task is to create such a body in the trade unions. We must have these groups of comrades with very good discipline, with good cautious leaders not easily provoked because such groups can be provoked easily. The main task for the next year would be to avoid conflicts and bloody clashes. We must reduce them to a minimum with a minority organisation during strikes, during peaceful times. In order to prevent fascist meetings it is a question of the relationship of forces. We alone are not strong, but we propose a united front.

“Hitler explains his success in his book. The social-democracy was extremely powerful. To a meeting of the social-democracy he sent a band with Rudolf Hess. He says that at the end of the meeting his thirty boys evicted all the workers and they were incapable of opposing them. Then he knew he would be victorious. The workers were only organised to pay dues. *No preparation at all for other tasks*. Now we must do what Hitler did except in reverse. *Send forty to fifty men to dissolve the meeting*. This has tremendous importance. The workers become steeled, fighting elements. They become trumpets. The petty-bourgeoisie think these are serious

people. Such a success! This has tremendous importance, as so much of the populace is blind, backward, oppressed, *they can be aroused only by success. We can only arouse the vanguard but this vanguard must then arouse the others.*" (Discussion with Crux (Trotsky) on *The Death Agony of Capitalism*, May 1938, pp.14-15. Our stress.)

"Forty to fifty people." *"We can only arouse the vanguard, but this vanguard must then arouse the others"*: this is quite different language from Comrade Hansen's. It comes from that notorious defender of "rural guerilla warfare" and "vanguardism," Leon Trotsky. And it happens to embody the whole historical experience of the fight against fascism in Europe.

Revolutionists will never stop the rising tide of fascism, when conditions are ripe for it, if they limit themselves to writing articles, resolutions and speeches calling upon mass organisations to mobilise against the fascists. The more the working class organisations – included their vanguard groups, which it would be entirely correct to call for that reason *"so-called groups"* – are content with using only words and empty threats to the material and violent successes of the fascists, the readiness of the working class to act against the fascists, not to say its capacity of drawing petty-bourgeois masses away from the fascists, will decline, and the more conditions for a fascist victory will become riper and riper.

Only by *successfully breaking the fascists' terror* first in a few meetings and neighbourhoods, then in key towns and provinces, and finally in the whole country, are the preconditions created for *"mobilising tens of millions."* This Trotsky understood perfectly – thereby also understanding the key role of the vanguard. To fail to do this under the

pretext that the “*vanguard cannot substitute itself for the masses,*” is to make the victory of fascism certain.

When the Spanish fascists rose on July 17, 1936, the first blow against them was not made by “*tens of millions*” but by a few thousand vanguard fighters, who had arms, had learned how to use arms during the previous year, and were ready to act immediately, instead of waiting for mass assemblies to vote on this or that resolution. Their armed response took the fascists completely by surprise and changed the situation by one stroke. Thanks to this unforeseen fact, broad masses were rallied to the struggle, hundreds of thousands rose, and the fascists were beaten in a few days in practically all the industrial towns of the country. But without that instantaneous armed answer of a limited vanguard, the danger of a fascist walk-over victory, following the Italian and German pattern, or the pattern of the Greek *coup* of 1967, was very real.

The minority document submitted to the December 1972 IEC session takes the weekly of our Belgian section, **La Gauche**, to task, because that paper wrote:

“The possessing classes must be made to know that after the experience of the barbarous Nazi atrocities, the young vanguard throughout the world will never again tolerate the most abject form of civil war: that in which one camp is armed to the teeth, and murders, tortures and oppresses without mercy, while the other camp is physically, psychologically and politically disarmed, and resigns itself passively to the role of victim. The example of Argentina demonstrates that this vanguard is already sufficiently strong and resolute so that such an ignominy will not be repeated again.”

The minority comrades add to this the following comment:

“We pause to wonder before the ramifications of what this suggests. Guerrilla war can stop *fascism*? Then what about the course Trotsky advocated in battling against the rise of Hitler? Why didn't he advocate guerrilla war in the style of the *PRT (Combatiente)* or the *Tupamaros*? Did he, after all, miss the key to the German situation in the early thirties.

“... What does this alleged lesson of ‘universal importance,’ discovered by the editor of **La Gauche**, suggest to the young comrades of our movement, not only in Argentina, but throughout the world, including Europe? “The answer is that they begin to think, quite logically, that armed actions of an autonomous and clandestine type, such as those being carried out in Argentina, are applicable in other parts of the world. In Europe, for instance, it is quite clear that Greece, Portugal and Spain have dictatorial regimes that are worse than the one in Argentina. Moreover, the bourgeoisie are quite capable of setting up similar regimes in rather advanced countries, as is shown by the current trend towards the establishment of ‘strong’ states.” (**International Internal Discussion Bulletin**, January 1973, pp.48-49)

Let's not dwell on the confusion between fascism and the “strong state,” between the struggle against a “rise” of fascism and the struggle against a fascism which has already conquered power. What is saddening is the minority's distortion of what is said and intended by **La Gauche**, in the most classical Trotskyist tradition. Nowhere does **La Gauche** speak about “*guerrilla warfare*” against a fascist take-over. Nowhere is there any mention of “*clandestine armed actions*.” What we mean is something quite different, but perhaps equally “terrifying” for the comrades of the minority. It is the capacity of our comrades, wherever they have reached a minimum strength, to take the initiatives of open confrontation with the fascists, which the mass organisations still fail to take. It is the action by the *Communist League* against the fascists of *Ordre Nouveau* holding their mass meeting at the Paris *Palais des Sports*. It is the action of the comrades of the *Communist*

League against the terror of the fascists in the Rennes Citroen plant, preventing the distribution of leaflets there even by the trade union. There is nothing “clandestine” in this. It has nothing to do with “guerrilla action,” but has something to do with taking *appropriate initiatives in action* against the fascists.

The minority document submitted to the December 1972 IEC tries to exploit a couple of lines from an article submitted to the **Internal Bulletin** of the *Communist League* of June 1972 by comrades Anthony, Arthur, Jebrac and Stephane, to suggest that these comrades “apparently” project a guerrilla war orientation for France too. This is not a serious method of discussion. Abstraction made even of the fact that these comrades disavowed that passage nearly immediately after it had been written; abstraction made of the fact that comrade Jebrac has voted at the IEC for the European thesis which clearly states that isolated defense against state repression in Western Europe would be suicidal and that our European sections should follow a line of creating the broadest possible united front against such repression, involving the whole labor movement, how can one judge the policies of the *Communist League* and of other FI sections in Western Europe on the basis of a paragraph in a discussion bulletin, and not on the basis of their actual day-to-day activity since 1969? We are waiting for the proof the minority has apparently assembled that the *Communist League* is actually preparing guerrilla warfare in France. If that proof does not exist because the allegation is of course totally unfounded, as the minority comrades themselves know, what’s the use of this type of misleading polemics?

We repeat: what we threaten the fascists with is not “guerrilla war,” but civil war of the Spanish type, which, let us repeat again, was started by relatively limited vanguard forces. What we demonstrate to the fascists is that the vanguard is strong enough; that ignominious capitulation without struggle by the large bureaucratic apparatus will not be identical to capitulation without struggle by the whole class. “January 30, 1933 will not repeat itself; in the best of cases, what you could expect is July 1936 in Spain.” That is our “message” to the fascists.

We will spare no effort to educate the new generation of European revolutionists in the lessons of the terrible experience which cost mankind 60 million dead. It will be the pride of the Fourth International, that such a turn of events will not repeat itself wherever we have sufficiently strong sections. We cannot assure victory; that depends on the relationship of forces. But we can assure that there will be no ignominious capitulation before fascist murderers, following the pattern of German social-democracy and German Stalinism. Comrade Hansen might interpret this as a result of our adaptation to “guerrillaism” and “guevarism.” We see it rather as a fulfillment of Trotsky’s heritage. For it was in answer to the Comintern’s capitulation without a struggle before Hitler that Trotsky raised the cry: “The Third International is dead; we must start to build the Fourth International.”

II. The Danger of Opportunist Tail-Ending

13. Is Ultra-leftism Today the “Main Danger” Inside the Fourth International?

The rationale of the tendency struggle which the minority started in the Fourth International is that the world Trotskyist movement is threatened by the universal danger of “ultra-leftism.” Starting with the “guevarist” concept of “rural guerrilla warfare,” the FI majority is said to be rapidly turning away from orthodox Trotskyism in one field after another, supporting and extending “terrorism” into more and more countries, covering up for the “ultra-left” IMG (British section), turning its back upon the struggle for democratic demands in more and more countries, refusing to apply the transitional programme, etc., etc. The fact that these accusations are completely unfounded, does not need to be developed here in detail. “Rural guerrilla warfare” is neither the line of the 9th World Congress document, nor has it been applied up to now by any of our sections (including the Argentine section). Our support for the transitional programme and “Leninist combat party building” is a bit firmer, more principled and more applied in practice than that of some of the most prominent supporters of Comrade Hansen, as we shall have occasion to prove very soon. But what about the central thesis of “ultra-leftism” as a universal, or in any case the “main danger” facing the world Trotskyist movement?

There is no reason to deny that a sudden influx of thousands of new members – many of whom are of student origin – into revolutionary organisations, in a period of rising and not declining revolutionary tide certainly carries with it several political dangers, of which a mature leadership should be conscious and to which it should react in an appropriate way. Ultra-leftist tendencies are certainly one of these dangers. Wherever they manifested themselves – e. g., in the attitude of some British comrades to the slogan “Vote Labour” at the 1970 general elections; in the attitude of the Spanish comrades towards the struggle for democratic demands – the International leadership has reacted quickly and firmly. We shall certainly react in the same way in the future, if sections or groups inside sections want to revise in an ultra-left sense the programmatic, strategic or tactical legacy of revolutionary Marxism.

But ultra-leftism is by no means the only danger for groups which are in the process of rapid growth – especially not in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations. The large influx of new members into the Comintern after its first year of existence did not create exclusively or even mainly ultra-left, but rather opportunist deviations. There is a general logic about this, which Comrade Cannon has expressed admirably in his **Letters from Prison**:

“There is a somewhat disturbing consistency in the various issues raised or adumbrated by the opposition. In addition to the differences over perspectives, masked as a dispute over democratic demands, we hear the astonishing contention that the Fourth International must be on guard against the left danger. If the perspective is revolutionary, if we are witnessing the beginning of a great revolutionary upsurge, we must rather expect manifestations of the right danger in the sharpest form. That is a historical law.

“Leaving aside individual aberrations and judging by main currents, we see this law demonstrated over and over again in every new crisis. ‘Leftism’ is fundamentally a sickness of the labor movement at ebb tide. It is the produce of revolutionary impatience, of the impulse to jump over objective difficulties, to substitute revolutionary zeal and forced marches for the supporting movement of the masses. Opportunism, on the other hand, is a disease which strikes the party in the sharpest form at the moment of social crisis.”

And in an even sharper way, Comrade Cannon writes:

“In the light of historical experience, it seems incredible that anyone should see ‘leftism’ as the main danger at the beginning of the revolutionary crisis. If history teaches us anything, such a posing of the question must itself be characterized as an opportunist manifestation.” (James P. Cannon: **Letters from Prison**, Merit Publishers, 1968, pp.309-310).

The history of the FI during the last decade or more bears out this analysis. When the movement was isolated and stagnating, or growing very slowly, ultra-left tendencies came to the forefront. Most of the splits (Healy, Posadas) took place on an ultra-left basis. But as soon as the climate changed, as the isolation of the movement ended, the opportunist danger of adapting to the mass movement and tail-ending it, came to the forefront. Even the ultra-lefts of yesteryear – like Lambert and Posadas – turned into right-wing opportunists of the tailist variety. Likewise the big political betrayals by people claiming to be Trotskyists occurred in Ceylon (by the reformist LSSP) and in Bolivia by Lora not in the direction of ultra-leftism, but of right-wing opportunism and capitulation in the face of reformism and Stalinism.

The record, therefore, does not bear out the assessment of Comrade Hansen, of ultra-leftism being the universal danger

menacing the Fourth International against which a merciless crusade must be organised. And if we look somewhat closer into the record of several tendencies, groupings or individuals who appear to be the staunchest supporters of Comrade Hansen's crusade, we shall discover that they are guilty of not a few examples of crass right-wing opportunism and tail-endism, in direct opposition to some important principles and traditions of Leninism. And *we shall find that Comrade Hansen, moved by his all-consuming passion to root out "ultra-leftism" has kept strangely quiet about these right-wing opportunist deviations, has not raised them at all in the international debate, has covered up for them and has entered, for all intents and purposes, into an unprincipled bloc with those who are guilty of them, against the "main sinners" who want to transplant "rural guerrilla warfare" into the factories of Paris, Turin, Liege or Birmingham.*

14. Tail-Ending Reformism

The position which the LSA/LSO (Canadian section) leadership – and staunch supporters of the minority position on Latin America – has adopted towards the reformist social-democratic party, the NDP in its country, and its position on the October 30, 1972 general elections in Canada in particular, expresses a clear tailist deviation from Leninism. In a leaflet distributed on a large scale before these general elections, we can find the following gems:

“In order to bring about positive changes, we need a party that acts in our interests. The New Democratic Party is the only one that speaks for the majority – the working class and the other oppressed of society. It does not get any support from the E.P. Taylors. In fact, big business hates it. It is financed and supported

by working people. It has been built by working people, struggling for a better life.

“The NDP is the only alternative to the status quo in this election. The Lewis attack on the ‘corporate welfare bums’ shows whose side the NDP is on. Because it is a party of the working people, the NDP has been deeply affected by the ongoing struggles of students, women, antiwar activists and other people fighting for a change. Its program includes free tuition for students, US out of Vietnam and an end to Canada’s complicity in the war, repeal of all anti-abortion laws, free community-controlled daycare centres.

“The Liberals and Tories can only block our struggles. The NDP can propel them forward. An NDP victory would inspire and intensify the different movements of the oppressed. A Labor government could win concrete gains for the working people, and open the way for fundamental social change.

“This is why we’ve got to campaign for an NDP government and use the 2.8 million new votes we hold to bring it about.

“The NDP has limitations. Its conservative leadership wants to reform this profit system, not end it. The leadership also sees the parliamentary road as the only way for change, and they sometimes even oppose demonstrations, mass meetings, strikes, etc.

“But you don’t get anything readymade. You can either stand on the sidelines and complain that even our party, the NDP, isn’t what it should be, or you can join the struggle to make it effective. In order to change the world, we must organise to see our needs fulfilled.” (my emphasis – E.G.)

It is true that this astonishing prose is only published in the name of the Canadian Young Socialists, and not in the section’s own name. But the prose of the Canadian section itself is hardly more edifying. Here is what we can read in its central organ’s editorial on the general elections, entitled *For the labour Alternative: Vote NDP Oct. 30!*

“The NDP is a class alternative to the capitalist parties. Its election to power promises not only many needed reforms for working people and the poor; not only class legislation aiding the organisation of the unorganised workers and the bargaining struggles of the organised; not only legislation repealing discriminatory laws – but the election of NDP governments to power constitutes big strides in the path that the working class of this country are going to take *towards breaking not only from capitalist electoral politics but from capitalism as a system.*

“The working class and the oppressed in Canada, organised politically in a Labour Party based on the trade union movement is a powerful potential force against capitalism. Through the NDP, the lessons of the radicalisation among youth, in the women’s liberation movement, the lessons of the Quebec and Native liberation struggles, are being transmitted to, discussed and debated among the advanced workers of the country. *It is through the NDP that the political consciousness of the working class in Canada is being forged and shaped.*

“That is what the profiteers and the bosses of this country fear. And that is what socialists support. Vote class. Vote NDP on October 30. Build the NDP.” (**Labor Challenge**, Sept. 27, 1972 – my emphasis – E.G.)

In a certain sense, the LSA/LSO appeal is even worse than the YS one. For while it prudently leaves out the most extreme pro-reformist formulations of the leaflet, it doesn’t even include the pious reference to the “conservative leadership” of the NDP and its parliamentary illusions. *In fact, it doesn’t contain a single word of criticism of reformism and electoralism, not a single word of differentiation from social-democracy!*

We are not dealing here with a hypothetical Labor Party, arising from a young rebellious and still partially democratic trade-union upsurge, similar to the one Trotsky projected in the late Thirties for the USA in relation to the rise of the CIO. We are talking about a social-democratic party, with a

programme well to the right of even British social-democracy, not to speak of the French and Italian socialist parties. We are talking about politicians who abhor revolution, extra-parliamentary struggles for overthrowing capitalism, and whose horizon is totally limited to that of winning reforms within the framework of capitalist economy and the bourgeois state.

We are talking about people who are 100% in favor of class-collaboration politically, economically and socially. In the best of cases, a coming to power of the NDP would lead to what Trotsky called a miserable comedy, like the first MacDonald governments in Britain. If things go worse, it could lead to big defeats and demoralisation of the working class, if a powerful revolutionary party does not exist to lead the workers' struggle beyond social-democratic reforms and towards socialist revolution.

All this is ABC for any Leninist, and any supporter of the Fourth International. Obviously, it is ABC for the leadership of the LSA as well. Why then do they write the exact opposite of what they believe on these questions? For "tactical" reasons? Is it part of Leninist "tactics" to hide the truth from the workers (leave alone the radicalised vanguard whom you can't fool for a minute, and who don't believe that reformist rubbish anyway)? Where did Lenin ever advise revolutionary socialists and communists to call social-democracy an "alternative" to the bourgeois status quo? Where did he ever say that big business hates social-democrats (does British capital "hate" Wilson, not to mention Roy Jenkins)? Did Lenin ever say that a social-democratic government would open up "the way for fundamental social change"? What is this strange animal anyway, supposedly different from a

socialist revolution, in the epoch of imperialism? Did Lenin ever consider that *political* class consciousness grows inside the working class through a strengthening of the reformist mass parties? Isn't it a serious deviation for a revolutionary socialist to seriously write that the election of a reformist government, which will manage bourgeois society and capitalist relations of production like all its counterparts have done since 1918, "constitutes big strides in the path of the working people ... towards breaking ... from capitalism as a system"? What has any of this in common with Leninism?

Of course, our criticism does not imply that it would be incorrect for Canadian revolutionary Marxists to call upon the workers and other oppressed layers of society to vote NDP. Lenin taught us to support social-democratic candidates in elections under certain conditions "like the rope supports the hanging man." He specified that this task poses itself especially when it is a question of winning a majority of the workers to a communist party which has already set itself upon the road to such a conquest. He underlined that *before* setting upon that course, it is imperative to assemble, steel and educate the vanguard. And he specifically lay down the *conditions for denouncing reformism* which had to accompany any such electoral support, lest it lead the masses closer to the reformist fakers, the labor lieutenants of capital (to whom our comrades in Canada now refer to, for shame, as "the party of the working people"!) instead of helping them to free themselves from reformist illusions and traitors:

"If we are not a revolutionary group, but the Party of the revolutionary *class*, if we want the *masses* to follow us (and unless they do, we stand the risk of remaining mere tallers) we must first help Henderson or Snowden to beat Lloyd George and Churchill

(or to be more correct: to compel the former to beat the latter, because the former are *afraid to win*); secondly, help the majority of the working class to become convinced by their own experience that we are right, i.e., that the Henderson's and Snowden's are utterly worthless, that they are petty-bourgeois and treacherous and that their bankruptcy is inevitable; thirdly, bring nearer the moment when, on the basis of the disappointment of the majority of the workers in the Hendersons, it will be possible with serious chances of success to overthrow the government of the Hendersons at once ...

“... The Communist Party should propose to the Hendersons and Snowdens that they enter into a ‘compromise,’ an election agreement, viz., to march together against the alliance of Lloyd George and the Conservatives ... while the Communist Party retains *complete liberty* to carry on agitation, propaganda and political activity. Without the latter condition, of course, no such *bloc* could be concluded, for that would be an act of betrayal; the British communists must insist on and secure complete liberty to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (for fifteen years, 1903-1917) the Russian Bolsheviks insisted on and secured it in relation to the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, i.e., the Mensheviks.” (V.I. Lenin, **Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder**, Coop Publishing Society of Foreign Workers, Moscow 1935, p.84.)

And further:

“If I as a Communist come out and call upon the workers to vote for the Hendersons against Lloyd George, they will certainly listen to me. And I will be able to explain in a popular manner not only why Soviets are better than parliament and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (which is concealed behind the signboard of bourgeois “democracy”), but I will also be able to explain that I wanted to support Henderson with my vote in the same way as the rope supports the hanged – that the impending establishment of a Henderson government will prove I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will accelerate the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens as was the case with their friends in Russia and Germany.” (**Ibid.**, pp.86-87.)

In other words: while Lenin posed as a condition for a call to vote labour the simultaneous denunciation of their leaders as worthless, petty-bourgeois and treacherous, moving towards inevitable bankruptcy; while he called upon the British Communists to use the hearing they could get from Labour workers to make communist propaganda in favor of workers democracy and Soviets, against parliamentary and reformist illusions, the Canadian section of the Fourth International, while calling on the workers to vote NDP, *abstains from* any such revolutionary propaganda, and indeed increases the hold of reformism upon the workers by presenting things as if a “fundamental social change” and “breaking from capitalism as a system” could be conquered by the masses through an electoral victory of the NDP. How, under such circumstances, these same masses could be capable of breaking with reformism after their experience with the bankruptcy of an NDP government, and how they could be won over to revolutionary Marxism remains a mystery.

The trend of the electoral policies of the LSA/LSO is clear. It can be summarised in one formula: tail-ending reformism.

15. Tail-Ending Electoralism

We have already dwelt, in the first section of this document, on the ways in which the military dictatorship of General Lanusse decided to switch from a policy of increased repression to a policy of diverting the mass movement towards electoral goals, and the way in which it tried to use the Peronist union and party bureaucracy, as well as the personality of Juan Peron itself, to eliminate the one threat which was uppermost in its mind: that the toiling masses

would in increasing numbers take to the streets, that the general strikes would become semi-insurrectional or even insurrectional general strikes, and that in this way the overthrow of capitalism and of the bourgeois state would become an immediate possibility.

In that precise situation, the group of Comrade Moreno choose to make participation in the elections called by the Lanasse regime its main immediate goal and the main line projected before the mass movement. There is of course nothing wrong on principle in participating in bourgeois elections, even under dictatorial regimes, under rigged election laws and under conditions where real power – even formal political power – remains firmly in the hands of the military. After all, the Bolsheviks also participated in some of the Duma elections under conditions of Tsarist autocracy. Nor is such participation in itself a matter of principle either. Whether to participate at all, under which conditions to participate, is entirely a matter of tactics depending on the concrete analysis of the concrete situation in the country, the relationship of forces between the contending classes, the needs of the mass movement, etc.

But in order to be principled, participation in such elections must be used as a means of telling the truth to the toiling masses. Telling the truth does not mean advancing only some economic demands and making general propaganda for socialism, but also to denounce the very existence of the dictatorship and to denounce the fake character of the “elections” being organised by the military dictatorship. To remain silent about the existence of the dictatorship – under the pretext that in this way you ‘gain’ the possibility of legal propaganda – is an unacceptable concession to electoralism.

Marx and Engels denounced it in German social-democracy, when that party, in order to comply with reactionary legislation kept quiet about the undemocratic imperial structure of the German Reich. The Bolsheviks – in contradiction to the Mensheviks – did not simply demand a constitution, but when they participated in the elections for the Fourth (1913) Duma, raised as their *first* slogan: “Down with tsarism. Long live the democratic republic.”

When the **Verdad** group absorbed the skeleton “Socialist Party” of Corral, which was entirely without mass influence or even membership, with the only purpose to get a legal basis for participation in the Lanusse elections, it published several platforms both for its own campaign and its proposals for the mass movement. In *none* of these was the fraudulent character of the elections – which violate on many counts even the official reactionary bourgeois constitution of Argentina – denounced. This led to the sad spectacle of **Avanzada Socialista** interviewing the trade-union leader Tosco, just released from prison, asking him what he thought about the idea of a workers slate in the elections, and receiving the answer from Tosco that first of all one had to say that these were fraudulent elections. Trotskyists being taught such an elementary lesson by a CP sympathiser. What a humiliating experience for comrade Moreno!

The key question on which **Avanzada Socialista** has been harping incessantly since the takeover of the Corral PSA by the **Verdad** group (now known as the PST) has been the need for independent working class candidates in the coming elections. Again, there is nothing wrong in principle with such a propaganda theme. But whether it should or

should not be the main axis of the political activity of revolutionary marxists depends entirely on the objective situation and the dynamics of the class struggle. The Communist International did not dream of making that the main issue in Germany or Italy 1919, because the central question thrown up by the stage reached at that time by the class struggle in these countries was not independent working class politics as against workers supporting bourgeois parties, but it was socialist revolution, i. e., revolutionary as against reformist policies. One can hardly visualise Trotsky explaining to the French workers in April 1936 or to the Spanish workers in January 1936 that the key solution to their problems was the setting up a “workers and socialist pole” in the coming elections (which were held under conditions of bourgeois democracy much freer and more advanced than those of Argentina today). The task of revolutionary marxists under such conditions is to increase the distrust of the masses towards bourgeois elections and bourgeois parliaments, is to explain to them that their key orientation should be towards extra-parliamentary mass actions not only for immediate economic demands but also for solving all their political problems.

In our opinion, the misjudgement of the objective situation in Argentina and the dynamics of the class struggle which comrade Moreno’s fraction and later his independent organisation have been guilty of in 1967-1968 shows itself rather revealingly in the fact that under the present circumstances – when he himself recognises the situation as pre-revolutionary – he makes the question of independent working class candidates in fraudulent elections under a decaying military dictatorship and not the question of how to overthrow the dictatorship (how to generalise the

Cordobazos into an Argentinazo), the main axis of his political activity.

As late as May 18, 1970, **La Verdad** wrote commenting on the various concessions made by the dictatorship to the masses:

“It is certain that with these measures it tried to isolate and slow down for a few months the process of mobilisations which had reached an explosive stage. But as we warned repeatedly in our paper, far from being in retreat, the working class continued its upsurge during these months, learning from the experiences of May, June and September (1969) and started to tackle the two great tasks which have to be solved so that the next *Cordobazo could become a triumphant insurrection in the whole country*: to win the proletariat of Buenos Aires and the rest of the country for the mobilisation, and to fundamentally build a class leadership, to replace the treacherous bureaucrats and lead the working class and the people in its merciless struggle against the government and the employers.”

Although the formulations are incomplete, they give a much more correct orientation than the turn towards a “workers and socialist pole” in the elections. How was Argentina ripe for generalised insurrection in May 1970 and not ripe in the beginning of 1972?

Nevertheless it is a matter of principle to educate the working class on the necessity of organising independently from all political parties and machines of the bourgeois class. Proclaiming that correct principle can only be welcomed. One therefore would tend to agree with the draft minority document written by comrades Moreno and Lorenzo where it states:

“At the same time the illusions among the masses concerning Peron and Peronism constitute a standing danger to our own movement, since our own ranks cannot be sealed off from the

milieu in which they work. This requires absolute clarity on the nature of Peronism and constant alertness to its invidiousness. "This problem is well understood by the *PRT (La Verdad)* in view of the rich experience in mass work in organisations dominated by Peronism. The *PRT (La Verdad)* teaches its members in the Marxist tradition of insisting on the independence of the working class movement against any and all blocs with the national bourgeoisie. Precisely because of the opening which has been developing on the electoral front, the *PRT (Verdad)* has been stressing its opposition to any populist, nationalist or popular-front formation that seeks to induce the workers into turning away from independent action and voting for bourgeois candidates as in the case of the Frente Ampilio in Uruguay or the Unidad Popular in Chile." (*International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Jan. '73, pp.38-39)

But hardly had the ink dried on the mimeographed copies of comrades Moreno and Lorenzo's draft presented to the December 1972 IEC, when briefly, Peron, returned to Argentina and was greeted by a big wave of mass enthusiasm as could easily have been foreseen. The **Verdad** group immediately bowed under Peronist mass pressure, contrary to all its lofty and principled proclamations. The November 15th, 1972 issue of **Avanzada Socialista** appeared with a headline covering the whole first page: "GENERAL PERON: Let Him Propose a Plan of Struggle and 80% (sic) workers' Candidates." The main article in the paper, under this headline, ended as follows:

"There are peronist comrades who, while accepting this danger [that Peron aligns himself with the right-wing bureaucracy of the CGT under Ricci – *E.G.*] say that Peron has been forced into that position, he has been encircled by trade union bureaucrats and by Campora and Osindi. We believe that unfortunately that is not true, and that fundamentally Peron defends the employers and accepts the agreement consciously. But even if these comrades were right and we were wrong, *the way out for the labour movement can only be the following one.*

“Let us demand from Peron a plan of struggle for a wage increase of 50.000\$ and a minimum wage of 120.000, readapted every two months, and against unemployment!

“Let us ask him that he keeps open 80% of the candidates of the Partido Justicialista [Peron’s party – *E.G.*] so that the workers can themselves elect their candidates!

“If the fault doesn’t lie with Peron, we shall thereby help him to break the encirclement by the bureaucrats. If unfortunately things are like we believe them to be, the workers themselves should impose the plan of struggle and the workers candidates.”

So it was sufficient only for Peron to make a brief trip to Argentina for all the big pledges in favour of working class independence to be forgotten and for the presentation of 80% workers candidates by the bourgeois Justicialista Party, which stands for class collaboration and class peace, and never had any Marxist, socialist, not to say revolutionary, communist plank in its programme, to be presented as the “only way for the Argentine labour movement.” The logic of tail-ending, and of tail-ending electorism, is harsh indeed!

This is no isolated accident in the history of the Moreno group. There is another example of Comrade Moreno dabbling in electoral popular fronts: the case of the Uruguayan grouping (PRT–U) participating in the ill-famed Frente Amplio during the 1971 general elections. The minority draft presented to the December 1972 IEC publishes a couple of embarrassed paragraphs on this subject, which can only be called distorting facts by omission.

While the authors of that draft correctly remind us that comrade Hansen wrote – a rather mild – criticism of that opportunist manoeuvre, they fail to mention:

- a. that the United Secretariat of the Fourth International condemned outright this form of class collaboration, which implied calling upon the Uruguyan workers to elect bourgeois general Serengi as President of the Republic.
- b. that the PRTU is led by a member of the central committee of the Verdad grouping – a “cadre of long standing” of the organisation led by comrade Moreno as was stated by the latter at the December 1972 IEC.
- c. That **La Verdad** had publicly supported that opportunist maneuver before, during and after the event and, to our knowledge never corrected that mistake in public.
- d. that the chief justification for the participation of a group claiming to be Trotskyist in a popular front with one of the main bourgeois groupings of Uruguay was the excuse that without supporting the Frente Amplio slate it would have been “technically impossible” to present “Trotskyist candidates” in the elections. This is, once again, a typical case of tail-ending electorism, where the participation in the elections becomes a goal in itself, blown up to the point where it takes precedence over matters of programmatic principles. In fact this very same argument of electoralist expediency was used by the POUM in 1936 to justify its participation in the Spanish Popular Front – we all know with what disastrous effects.

16. Tail-Ending a New “Stage-Theory” of the Revolution

The tendency towards opportunist tail-ending has manifested itself in the Canadian section not only through its attitude towards social-democracy but also via its attitude towards the national question in its own country. In the September/October 1972 issue of **Liberation**, the organ of the LSO, we find the following statements signed by

Comrade Alain Beiner, in relation to a recent split which occurred within the LSO:

“Au contraire des positions de Lénine et Trotsky sur la lutte nationale d’un peuple opprimé, la tendance refusait de soutenir inconditionnellement le nationalisme québécois. La tendance n’acceptait pas la théorie de la Révolution permanente formulée par Trotsky et confirmée par la Révolution russe; selon laquelle la bourgeoisie nationale d’une nation opprimée (comme le Québec) est incapable a cause de sa dépendance de l’impérialisme mondial, de rompre tout lien avec lui pour diriger une lutte de libération nationale a bonne fin contre l’oppression étrangère. Pour la tendance les ‘dangers’ d’une ‘récupération facile’ du nationalisme et des luttes nationales au Québec par la bourgeoisie et ses partis (comme le PQ) primaient sur la portée tout à fait révolutionnaire de la lutte d’émancipation nationale.” [1]

We shall deal furthermore with the completely non-Leninist identification of “national liberation” or “the right of self-determination of nations” on the one hand, and “nationalism” on the other hand. Let us first of all clarify what is programmatically wrong in Comrade Beiner’s summary of what he thinks to be Trotsky’s theory of the permanent revolution, and what is in reality a revision of that very same theory.

Is it true that, because the national bourgeoisie is dependent upon imperialism, it is unable *to break all ties with imperialism and therefore* cannot lead a victorious struggle against foreign *oppression*? This is completely wrong. The struggle against national oppression is not an anti-capitalist struggle. It is a struggle for a bourgeois-democratic demand. The existence of the world capitalist system is not an absolute obstacle to the overthrow of national oppression, under conditions of imperialism. Indeed, in the very debate with Rosa Luxemburg in favour of the support for the right

of self-determination of oppressed nationalities, Lenin pointed out that it was *not* impossible for this right to be gained in the struggle, before the overthrow of world imperialism. In fact, from the case of Norway cited by Lenin, to that of Poland and Finland who conquered their national independence in 1918, to that of most of the former colonial countries of Asia and Africa who conquered independence after 1947, the history of the 20th century has confirmed that it is not necessary to “break all ties with imperialism” in order to eliminate foreign national oppression.

Of course, under imperialism – especially in its epoch of decay – the struggle against national oppression becomes more and more difficult on a global scale. New forms of national oppression arise constantly, even when old ones are partially eliminated. Where foreign *national oppression* is eliminated, foreign *economic exploitation* remains and increases. The inability of the national bourgeoisie to start a process of cumulative industrialisation makes it in many cases impossible to create a national market and thereby to bring to an end the process of formation of a classical nation in the historic sense of the word. But all this raises questions which are far beyond the realm of “foreign national oppression.” To say that India, Indonesia or Nigeria, not to speak about Brazil, Argentina, Finland or Turkey, are today countries in which *foreign national oppression* by imperialism reigns would be obviously misleading.

Trotsky never stated that in the epoch of imperialism, the “national” bourgeoisie in a backward country is unable to *begin* waging a struggle for *some* of the historical demands of the bourgeois democratic revolution. On the contrary, he stressed time and time again that the beginning

of such a struggle under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leadership was nearly inevitable. Such was the case not only in Poland and Finland, but in nearly all the colonial countries of Asia and Africa. Where he opposed himself sharply to “marxist orthodoxy” as it had been represented up to 1906 by the whole of international social-democracy was in his understanding that it was basically wrong to *separate* different revolutionary tasks as if they presented themselves in different successive stages of mass struggle. The theory of the permanent revolution was born from the discovery of the law of uneven and combined development, i.e., of the *combination of tasks* with which the masses in a backward country are simultaneously faced under conditions of imperialism.

The discovery of this law of uneven and combined development results from an analysis of the sum total of social and economic relations which prevail in these countries in the 20th century. The national bourgeoisie is not only tied to imperialism but also to the landlord-moneylender-compradore class. The national question is not the only key question of the bourgeois democratic revolution which remains unfulfilled in backward countries in the 20th century. Apart from the question of democratic political rights of the toiling masses and of initiating a process of cumulative industrialisation, there is the decisive question of the agrarian revolution. But when the peasant masses rise to overthrow the landlords-usurer-merchant alliance, they not only often attack direct property (capital investments) of the “national bourgeoisie” too, but they also create in the country a revolutionary situation which challenges the rule of propertied classes in general, thereby assisting the

challenge of the proletariat against the private property of the national bourgeoisie itself.

All these reasons have to be added to the “national” bourgeoisie’s links with imperialism in order to understand why, while it can certainly *start* the struggle for *some* demands of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, it cannot fulfil them *all*, especially not the agrarian revolution and the break with the capitalist world market as a necessary precondition for a cumulative industrialisation process. More: because it fears mass uprisings of peasants and workers, and because the process of revolution, even when it starts around the demand of national independence, inevitably will bring large masses of peasants and workers to struggle for their own immediate and historic class demands, the “national” bourgeoisie will inevitably go over to the camp of the counter-revolution at some stage of the struggle. Therefore the choice before the revolution in a backward country is either the victory of counter-revolution, if the “national” bourgeoisie remains in the leadership – and in that case essential parts of the historic tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution remain unfulfilled – or the conquest of hegemony in the revolutionary struggle (i.e., over rural and urban petty-bourgeois masses) by the proletariat and its independent revolutionary party. In that case the revolution can triumph. Through the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat allied to the poor peasantry it will combine the thorough realisation of the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution with the fulfillment of the essential tasks of the proletarian socialist revolution.

This whole analysis of concrete social forces and their mutual inter-relations hinges precisely upon the *refusal to separate* any stage of “national liberation” from a subsequent “stage” of agrarian revolution, and a still later stage of “independent working class struggle.” The whole essence of the theory of permanent revolution derives from the understanding that all these tasks are *combined and intertwined* from the beginning of the revolutionary process, as the result of the class reality and the class relations prevailing in these countries.

It was the Comintern leadership under Stalin-Bucharin which formulated the theory of a “first stage of national liberation struggle,” in which the “main” enemy was supposedly foreign imperialism, and in which *for that reason* the struggles of the workers against capitalist property, and the struggle of the peasants against the class alliance of their exploiters, had to be subordinated to the “common and most pressing goal” of conquering national independence. Revolutionary marxists do not reject this Menshevik theory of stages only or mainly because they stress the inability of the national bourgeoisie to actually conquer national independence from imperialism, regardless of concrete circumstances. They reject it because they refuse to postpone to a later stage the peasant and workers uprisings for their own class interests, which will inevitably rise spontaneously alongside the national struggle as it unfolds, and very quickly combine themselves into a common inseparable programme in the consciousness of the masses.

It has become the Stalinist line towards the colonial revolution that there has been after 1945 a “stage of national

liberation struggles,” which is supposed to solve the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, as it remains common Stalinist theory that the “bourgeois-democratic revolution” was fulfilled in Russia in February 1917, thereby opening the stage for the “socialist October revolution.” Trotsky and Trotskyists categorically reject this theory of “stages.” The tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution cannot be reduced to national independence or the suppression of foreign national oppression, any more than they can themselves be separated into successive stages. It is because the agrarian question was not solved by the February revolution, in spite of the overthrow of the tsar, that the October revolution was objectively possible, i.e., that the proletariat was not isolated from the great majority of the peasantry. It is because the agrarian question is not solved today in any of the semi-colonial countries which conquered national independence after World War 2 that in spite of the minority situation of the proletariat, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat allied to the poor peasantry remains a realistic perspective.

For that reason, it is confusing, to say the least, to present any revolution in a backward country – be it the Algerian revolution, the Cuban revolution, the Vietnamese revolution, the Palestinian or the Arab revolution – as a “national liberation struggle.” The Trotskyist way of looking at these revolutions is as *processes of permanent revolution* in which the struggle for national liberation, for agrarian revolution, for full democratic freedoms for the masses, and for defence of the class interests of the working class are *inextricably combined and intertwined*, whatever may be the aspect of that struggle which appears in the forefront (and very often appearance and reality are at variance with

each other. In South Vietnam, to take that most telling example, the liberation struggle of the peasantry against their exploiters has probably mobilised more people and covered more ground since the early fifties than the struggle against foreign counter-revolutionary imperialist intervention).

If we reject any theory of stages even in backward colonial and semi-colonial countries, we have to reject them all the more in advanced imperialist countries, in which unsolved problems of national oppression survive or newly arise. As Trotsky pointed out in *The Transitional Programme*, even in fascist countries, a revolutionary programme should base itself on *the dialectics of the class struggle*, and not on episodic aspects of the political superstructure:

“Of course, this does not mean that the Fourth International rejects democratic slogans as a means of mobilising masses against fascism. On the contrary, such slogans at certain moments can play a serious role. But the formulas of democracy (freedom of press, the right to unionise, etc.) mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans *in the independent movement of the proletariat* and not a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie’s agents (Spain!). As soon as the movement assumes something of a mass character, the democratic slogans will be intertwined with the transitional ones; factory committees, it may be supposed, will appear before the old routinists rush from their chancelleries to organise trade unions ...” (p.44 of the 1939 edition by the SWP) (our stress)

Neither in imperialist countries with a fascist regime, nor in imperialist countries which, under conditions of decaying bourgeois democracy witness phenomena of oppressed national minorities within their boundaries, can there be any “stage” of “democratic revolution,” of “national liberation,” separate and apart from the general upsurge of the proletariat which represents the majority of the population

of these countries. The “formulas of democracy” (and national liberation is a formula of democracy) becomes intertwined with proletarian, objectively socialist goals, as soon as *the movement assumes a mass character*. The experience of Quebec admirably bears out this prediction of Trotsky’s: As soon as a significant (although still minority) sector of the Quebecois working class was drawn into large mass actions, the nature of the mass movement took on more and more clearly defined proletarian, i.e., objectively revolutionary socialist aspects.

The public service employees organised a general strike in May 1972. Examples of workers control – probably the most advanced ever seen in North America – arose. Radio stations were seized and occupied by the workers and transformed into weapons of strike propaganda. Even a whole town was seized by the strikers for more than 48 hours. Yet prisoners of their backsliding into a new version of a theory of stages, the editors of the July/August 1972 issue of **Liberation** blandly present in a huge headline this issue general strike as an example of “the struggle of the Quebecois for national liberation” on the same level and in the same spirit as the “patriots rebellion” of ... 1837!

There is no justification for comrade Mill’s group’s split from the LSA-LSO. In our view, comrades who have serious differences with the majority line of their national sections should fight for their political views inside these sections.

But this being said, objectivity demands to state unequivocally that Comrade Mill has been proved right against the majority leadership of the Canadian section in both instances where he differed with it on the national question. He requested the section to take up the demand for an independent Quebec several years before the leadership came around to that position. Thereafter he requested the leadership to acknowledge the dynamics of the

class struggle in Quebec, which he understood correctly to be the most advanced in North America, and to combine more and more in its propaganda and its agitation socialist with national demands. In the first instance, the leadership of the section stubbornly refused to raise the independence slogan till the very eve of the outbreak of an independentist mass movement. In the second instance, the leadership of the section stubbornly clung to the concentration on the language slogans in spite of a general strike of 200,000 workers with the appearance of workers control.

In both cases the roots of the mistake are evident: tail-endism. The majority leadership of the LSA-LSO waited till the masses had already clearly shown a given “mood” before they were ready to adapt their slogans to that mood. This is, to say the least, a bizarre application of the concept of a “Leninist *vanguard* party.” Should the main distinctive quality of communists inside the mass movement not be the one to understand and spell out the direction in which the movement has to develop because of its objective logic, and the historical class interests which it represents, rather than to wait until the masses spontaneously discover this logic and start to act upon it, before daring to unfold it before their eyes?

In its so-called *Action Programme*, of July 1972, which the LSO leadership never officially repudiated, the reversal to a new edition of the Menshevik “theory of stages” of the Quebecois revolution is pushed to its logical extreme. The programme culminates in the demand for a “democratic republic,” complete with blueprint how to organise bourgeois democracy (with a president of the Republic, a National Assembly and the like) in Quebec.

And this under circumstances where, as that same LSO leadership admits, “since 1970, the fiercest attacks on the Quebec working class’s standard of living and rights have

been made by the Quebec bourgeoisie and the Quebec government” (*Draft Quebec resolution* submitted to the Political Committee of the LSA-LSO, **Discussion Bulletin of the LSA-LSO**, December 1972, p.6).

Presumably, what the Quebecois Trotskyists should concentrate their fire on, is not this fierce attack of the Quebec bourgeois against the workers’ interests, but the “inability” of those “national traitors,” the bourgeoisie, to cut themselves loose from imperialism in order to create an independent bourgeois state of French Quebec. That is the logic of tail-ending a new “stage-theory” of the revolution.

Footnote

1. The following is the English translation from the French:

“Contrary to the positions of Lenin and Trotsky on the national struggle of an oppressed people, the tendency refused to support Quebec nationalism unconditionally. The tendency did not accept the theory of permanent revolution, formulated by Trotsky and confirmed by the Russian Revolution, according to which the national bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation (like Quebec), owing to its dependence on world imperialism, is incapable of breaking all imperialist ties in order to lead a national liberation struggle against foreign oppression to a successful conclusion. For the tendency, the dangers of an ‘easy cooption’ of nationalism and the national struggles in Quebec by the bourgeoisie and its parties (like the PQ) outweighed the thoroughly revolutionary significance of the struggle for national emancipation.”

17. Tail-Ending Petty-Bourgeois Nationalism

There is another aspect to the LSA-LSO error on the national question which expresses itself in Comrade Beiner's article quoted above. This is the identification of the right of national self-determination, and the mass struggles evolving around that right, i.e., concrete demands and slogans which express it, with "nationalism." This identification leads Comrade Beiner to the preposterous statement that the "positions of Lenin and Trotsky" imply "unconditional support for Quebecois nationalism" (or for nationalism of any oppressed nation). This is absolutely untrue.

Both Lenin and Trotsky, in all their basic writings on the national question, draw a clear distinction between the need for Marxists to defend the right of self-determination of nations which do not wish to remain within a given bourgeois state boundary – otherwise, Marxists become objectively accomplices to annexionism – and the principled opposition which they have to maintain to bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalism. Nationalism is an ideology, the ideology of national solidarity irrespective of regional, ethnic or social differences. This ideology played a progressive role essentially in the 16th, 17th and 18th century, i.e., in the classical period of bourgeois-democratic revolution of the pre-industrial era, when the bourgeoisie was historically a revolutionary class. It was a powerful ideological and political weapon against two reactionary social forces: particularistic feudal or semi-feudal regional forces, which resisted their integration into modern nations; native or foreign absolute monarchs and their aids and props, which resisted that emergence even more desperately. With the development of capitalist industry in the 19th century,

nationalism gradually loses its progressive character. The triumphant bourgeoisie uses that ideology now less against – rapidly disappearing – pre-capitalist reactionary social forces, and more and more against its foreign capitalist competitors (or worse: other nations whose territory it wants oppressively to include in its own “home market”) and against the working class. “National solidarity” is called upon to stifle the rise of the proletarian class struggle.

With the epoch of imperialism, nationalism as a *rule* becomes reactionary, whether it is “purely” bourgeois or petty-bourgeois in character. The universal idea of *independent* organisation of the working class, of the autonomous class goals followed by the proletariat and the poor peasantry in the class struggle, of *international class solidarity of the workers of all countries* and all nationalities, is opposed to the idea of national solidarity or national community of interests. In the best of cases – when advanced among oppressed nations – it is a narrow, parochial substitute and cover for the programme of the permanent revolution, i.e., national and social emancipation. In most cases – when advocated by the capitalist class or its ideological representatives – it is a thoroughly deceptive and mystifying ideology to prevent or retard independent class organisation and class struggle by the workers and poor peasants.

Sectarians and opportunists alike fail to make this basic distinction between the struggle for national self-determination and nationalist ideology. Sectarians refuse to support national self-determination struggles under the pretext that their leaders – or the still prevalent ideology among their fighters – is nationalism. Opportunists refuse to

combat bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalist ideologies, under the pretext that the national-self determination struggle, in which this ideology is predominant, is progressive. The correct Marxist-Leninist position is to combine full support for the national self-determination struggle of the masses including all the concrete demands which express this right on the political, cultural, linguistic field, with the struggle against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism.

This principled opposition to nationalism does not imply an identification between nationalism of oppressor nations – nationalism of scoundrels, as Trotsky used to call it – and the nationalism of oppressed nations. It especially imposes on communists who are members of oppressor nations the duty to concentrate their fire upon their own oppressive bourgeoisie, and to leave the struggle against petty-bourgeois nationalism of the oppressed to the communist members of the oppressed nationalities themselves. Any other attitude – not to speak of the refusal to support national self-determination struggles under the pretext that they are still lead by nationalists – becomes objectively a support for imperialist, annexionist or racialist oppressors. But all these considerations do not imply a support for bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalism by revolutionary Marxists of the oppressed nationalities, leave alone “unconditional support.” After all, Alain Beiner like Michel Mill were discussing the attitudes of *Quebecois* Trotskyists, not the attitude of Anglo-Canadian revolutionary Marxists.

Lenin’s position on this question is unequivocal. In his major contribution to the national question, his 1914 article *The Right of Self-Determination of Nations*, Lenin

makes crystal clear that “workers are hostile to all nationalism” (p.434). He says that it is impossible to march towards our class goal, socialism, without “fighting against all and every nationalism” (p.436). He stresses that to struggle against capitalist exploitation, the proletariat must be alien towards all forms of nationalism, included that of oppressed nations (p.448). He concludes his article by saying that the proletariat has the dual task of struggling for national self-determination and of combating all nationalism (p.480). It is often overlooked that, while chiding Rosa Luxemburg for not accepting that the Russian Marxists should proclaim and support the right of self-determination of Polish, Finnish, Georgian, and other nationalities oppressed by tsarism, he lauds her for struggling, as a Polish Marxist, against Polish nationalism (pp.454, 458.) All references are to the French edition of Lenin’s **Works**, Vol.20, Editions Sociales, Paris 1959).

In his next major article devoted to that same question, written in the midst of the first imperialist war (*Results of the discussion on the right of self-determination*, October 1916), Lenin fully maintains the same position. And in his final major contribution to the question, which has programmatic value, his *Thesis on the National and Colonial Question*, written for the 2nd Congress of the Comintern, we read the following illuminating passage:

“Le Parti communiste, interprète conscient du prolétariat en lutte centre le joug de la bourgeoisie, doit considérer comme formant la clef de voûte de la question nationale, non des principes abstraits et formels, mais: 1) une notion claire des circonstances historiques et économiques; 2) la dissociation précise des intérêts des classes opprimées, des travailleurs, des exploités, par rapport a la conception générale des soi-disant intérêts nationaux, qui signifient en réalité ceux des classes dominantes; 3) la division tout

aussi nette et précise des nations opprimées, dépendantes, protégées – et oppressives et exploiteuses, jouissant de tous les droits, contrairement à l’hypocrisie bourgeoise et démocratique qui dissimule, avec soin, l’asservissement (propre à l’époque du capital financier de l’impérialisme) par la puissance financière et colonisatrice, de l’immense majorité des populations du globe à une minorité de riches pays capitalistes.”

“C’est la pratique habituelle non seulement des partis du centre de la II Internationale, mais aussi de ceux qui ont abandonné cette Internationale pour reconnaître l’internationalisme en paroles et pour lui substituer en réalité dans la propagande, l’agitation et la pratique, le nationalisme et le pacifisme des petits-bourgeois. Cela se voit aussi parmi les partis qui s’intitulent maintenant communistes ... Le nationalisme petit-bourgeois restreint l’internationalisme à la reconnaissance du principe d’égalité de nations et (sans insister davantage sur son caractère purement verbal) conserve intact l’égoïsme national ...”

“Il existe dans les pays opprimés deux mouvements qui, chaque jour, se séparent de plus en plus: le premier est le mouvement bourgeois démocratique nationaliste qui a un programme d’indépendance politique et d’ordre bourgeois; l’autre est celui des paysans et des ouvriers ignorants et pauvres pour leur émancipation de toute espèce d’exploitation.

“Le premier tente de diriger le second et y a souvent réussi dans une certaine mesure. Mais l’Internationale communiste et les partis adhérents doivent combattre cette tendance et chercher à développer les sentiments de classe indépendants dans les masses ouvrières des colonies.” (**Manifestes, Thèses et Résolutions des quatre premiers congrès de l’Internationale communiste**, Librairie du Travail, Paris 1934, pp.57, 58, 60.) [2]

Trotsky, like Lenin, counterposes support to national self-determination demands to the duty to fight against nationalism (e.g. *History of the Russian Revolution*, vol.2, p.357 of the German edition). In his writings on the Spanish revolution, several times we find that while stressing the need for Spanish Marxists to support the right of the Basque and Catalan nationalities for self-determination, there are at

the same time severe attacks against the right-wing “Catalan Federation” of the CP, which later, after its break with Stalinism, renamed itself the “Workers and Peasant Bloc” and finally fused with the majority of the Spanish Left Oppositionists to become the main force of the POUM, which was born from this fusion. Trotsky heaped scorn upon the “Catalan nationalism” of these right-wing opportunists.

The materialist basis of this struggle against contemporary nationalism is admirably clarified by Trotsky in the following passage:

“The task of complete national determination and peaceful cooperation of all peoples of Europe can be solved only on the basis of the economic unification of Europe, purged of bourgeois rule ...

“It must be clearly understood beforehand that the belated revolutions in Asia and Africa are incapable of opening up a new epoch of renaissance for the national state. The liberation of the colonies will be merely a gigantic episode in the world socialist revolution, just as the belated democratic overturn in Russia which was also a semicolonial country, was only the introduction to the socialist revolution” (*War and the Fourth International*, **Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34**, pp.305, 306).

This Leninist opposition to nationalism is not an abstract and formal principle, but starts, as Lenin indicates, from a “clear notion of the historical and economic circumstances.” That is why there can be some exceptions to the rule based upon exceptional “historical and economic circumstances,” i.e. those of oppressed nationalities which do not yet possess their own ruling class, or which have only such a miserable embryo of a bourgeois that, in the given and foreseeable situation, it is excluded that this embryo could actually become a ruling class without a complete disintegration of

the imperialist structure. The best example of such exceptions are of the black and Chicano nationalities inside the United States. We shall discuss them in more detail in the final section of this text.

But it is clear that neither Quebec, Catalonia, the Basque country, India, Ceylon nor the Arab nation, can be classified as exceptional. All these nations have their own bourgeois class. Many of them even have their own semi-colonial bourgeois state. To support nationalism within these nationalities, under the pretext of supporting anti-imperialist liberation struggles, or even to defend the doctrine that “consistent nationalism” would automatically lead to a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, is to lose the “clear notion of the historical and economic circumstances,” to lose sight of the class structure, the class decisions and the irreconcilable class conflicts inside these nations, which national oppression or economic exploitation by imperialism in no way eliminates but, in a certain sense, even exacerbates when compared to what occurs in non-oppressed nations. To defend the notion of “unconditional support” for Quebecois nationalism, Arab nationalism, Indian nationalism, or Ceylon nationalism, is to disarm the workers and poor peasants of these countries in their class struggle against their own bourgeoisie, is to make the conquest of power by the proletariat in the course of the anti-imperialist struggle – i.e. the whole process of permanent revolution – more difficult if not impossible, and puts a big obstacle on the road of building Leninist parties among these nationalities.

An analysis of the concrete historical and economic circumstances in which national oppression presents itself is

a vital starting point for adopting a correct position towards the national question. In that sense it is inadmissible to identify national oppression inside imperialist countries with national oppression inside colonial countries. The whole notion of applying the formula of permanent revolution to imperialist countries is extremely dubious in the best of cases. It can only be done with the utmost circumspection, and in the form of an analogy.

Not a single bourgeois-democratic revolution in the past has solved all its historical tasks. The survival of bourgeois society under conditions of the growing decay of capitalism has wholly or partially destroyed some of the conquests of past victorious bourgeois revolutions as well. Under these circumstances, there is undoubtedly an element of combined historical tasks with which the proletarian revolution will be faced in every country. The very fact that all revolutionary Marxist organisations in all countries have to struggle in different proportions for certain democratic demands bears testimony to that combined character of all contemporary revolutions.

But it would be pure sophistry to draw the conclusion that no qualitative difference exists between the combined tasks facing the revolution in imperialists, and those facing it in colonial or semi-colonial countries, simply because of the undeniable fact that some tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution remain unsolved in the most advanced imperialist nations, or rise up again there, whereas all the basic tasks of that revolution remain unsolved (or solved only in a miserably uncomplete way) in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Trotsky pointed out in the **Transitional Programme** that

“the relative weight of the individual democratic and transitional demands in the proletariat’s struggle, their mutual ties and their order of presentation, is determined by the peculiarities and specific conditions of each backward country and to a considerable extent – by the degree of its backwardness.” (*ibidem*, p.41).

This concept is already sufficient to indicate how inadmissible it is to ascribe to the national self-determination struggle of the Quebecois or of the Basque nationality a similar weight in the Canadian revolution or in the revolution on the Iberian peninsula as, say, the national self-determination struggle of the black people in the revolution in Southern Africa.

Both the objective and the strategic aspects of this difference need clarification. Trotsky clarified the objective significance of the struggle for national independence in colonial and semi-colonial countries in the following way:

“Japan and China are not on the same historical plane. The victory of Japan will signify the enslavement of China, the end of her economic and social development, and the terrible strengthening of Japanese imperialism. The victory of China will signify, on the contrary, the social revolution in Japan and the free development, that is to say unhindered by external oppression, of the class struggle in China” (**Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-38**, p. 108).

Inside imperialist nations, national oppression does not have the same function. The oppressed Polish and Finnish nationalities, far from being on a lower historical plane than Tsarist Russia, were in fact economically and socially richer and industrially more developed than the oppressor nationality. In no way can one say that national oppression meant for them “enslavement” and “the end of economic and social development.” The same applies for the Basque and Catalan nationalities inside Spain, before 1936 and

partially even today. National oppression has not stopped or thwarted capitalist development or industrialisation in these oppressed nationalities.

Strategically, the implications are even more far-reaching. In semi-colonial and colonial countries, democratic demands have generally the weight of transitional demands. It is impossible to realise them under capitalism, at least in their collective essence. In imperialist countries, this is not true. Democratic demands will normally not be granted by the decaying imperialist bourgeoisie. But nothing organically, economically, socially, (i.e. in terms of basic class relations), prevents the bourgeoisie from granting them as a “lesser evil” in order to avoid a mass movement approaching a victorious socialist revolution. Organically, the “national bourgeoisie” of the colonial world cannot solve the agrarian question without to a large extent expropriating itself. There is no fundamental obstacle of the same kind to prevent the realisation of free abortion on demand, or freedom of the press, or even a democratic electoral law in an imperialist country. Given a powerful mass upsurge with a revolutionary potential, the imperial bourgeoisie can grant these concessions precisely in order to avoid expropriation.

In normal circumstances, imperialism was in the past never willing to grant national independence to Poland or Finland; nor is it prepared to do so even today to Quebec or Ireland. But given a pre-revolutionary situation, a powerful upsurge of the workers’ struggle, a concrete danger of a “workers’ republic” being set up, there is no fundamental class interest which would prevent imperialism from transforming any such nationality into independent puppet states.

For these reasons the danger of a mass struggle in an imperialist country based solely on demands for national self-determination being absorbed by the bourgeoisie is very real. That is why revolutionary marxists must constantly combine in their propaganda and agitation, demands expressing the right of national self-determination for oppressed minorities with demands of a proletarian and socialist character in order to make this absorption much more difficult. To relate the proletarian demands to a 'later stage,' presumably when the mass movement is "more advanced," is to objectively increase the danger of diversion. This is what Trotsky meant when he argued that we must prevent democratic demands in imperialist countries from becoming "a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat."

18. Tail-Ending Imperialist Nationalism

During the summer of 1972, we were confronted with an extraordinary spectacle. Within the space of a month, the Central Committee of the Canadian section, the LSA/LSO, first nearly unanimously adopted the general line of a political resolution expressing support for "Canadian nationalism" as against "US domination of Canada," and then rejected the very same line by an overwhelming majority.

We don't want to concentrate on the somewhat disturbing formal aspects of this development. How is it possible that without a word of explanation a majority of Trotskyist leaders can adopt two completely conflicting positions, within a few weeks of each other, one of which is totally alien

to the tradition of Leninism? Canada is an imperialist country. The fact that there is a strong economic weight of foreign imperialists inside Canada does not modify in the least this basic character of Canadian society. Nationalism in imperialist nations is essentially a weapon of inter-imperialist competition (and secondarily a weapon of annexionism). Foreign imperialist influence in Tsarist Russia was as big as it is in Canada today. Can one imagine Lenin under any circumstances supporting Great-Russian nationalism in Tsarist Russia because of that economic situation, e.g. Great-Russian nationalism against “foreign domination” by French, British, German, finance capital?

How could an experienced Trotskyist leader like Comrade Ross Dowson, trained for decades in the Trotskyist programme, arrive at such a gravely wrong position? Why did the large bulk of the Central Committee of the Canadian section follow him at first on that line? Because the method of approach to the national question in an imperialist country was wrong – and had been wrong too in the approach to the Quebecois question. Because, contrary to Lenin’s advice, the Canadian comrades did not start from “a clear notion of historical and economic circumstances,” i.e. from an *analysis of objective class relations*, but from speculations about the moods of the masses. What inspired Comrade Dowson to move to this wrong position was the fact that growing mass support seemed to manifest itself for concrete demands oriented against US imperialism. At the root of his revisionism is the same deviation of tail-endism.

Within imperialist nations, nationalism is one of the main ideological instruments with which the bourgeoisie (and its petty-bourgeois hangers-on) try to weaken and paralyse the

proletarian class struggle. In the first world war, “the Kaiser” and the “bloody Tsar” played that role in both imperialist camps. In the second world war, “fascism” and “western plutocracies” were used for the same purposes. Since the late forties, with the help of the CPs and the maoists, the European bourgeoisie is using the same ideological weapon to confuse and divide the workers. The “main enemy” is supposed to be US imperialism (or the Common Market, or some other “foreign” factor. Some extreme maoists even say today that the “main enemies” is “soviet fascist social imperialism”) – but never the imperialist rulers of one’s own country.

To this nationalism, communists have always countered with the slogan: the enemy is in our own imperialist country! It is the task of the workers of each imperialist country to overthrow their own ruling class and its state power, irrespective of the relative importance of that ruling class in the imperialist hierarchy. *The only way* in which the Canadian working class can decisively further the world struggle against imperialism – including the struggle against US imperialism – is by overthrowing Canadian capitalism and its bourgeois state. Canadian nationalism, by diverting attention from that task towards the supposed priority of struggling against “predominant” US imperialism, creates an ideological and political obstacle on the road towards class consciousness and class organisation of the Canadian proletariat, thereby making the overthrow of the Canadian bourgeois state more difficult, and, incidentally, in the long run reducing the contribution which the Canadian working class could make towards a socialist revolution inside the USA, the only development which can effectively and totally destroy US imperialism.

There are no doubt some “progressive elements” in “Canadian nationalism.” But then, there are also “progressive elements” in proletarian social-patriotism as well, as Trotsky points out in the **Transitional Programme**. When workers say they want to defend their imperialist fatherland, it is obviously not for the same reasons as those which make the imperialist bourgeoisie raise the banner of patriotism. But does one draw from that the conclusion that, because there is “some progressive content” in workers’ social-patriotism, revolutionary Marxists should advocate social-patriotism? Isn’t the correct conclusion rather that it is necessary to *separate* the content of these “progressive elements” (by means of *concrete* immediate, democratic or transitional demands) from their form, social-patriotism, in order to wage a more efficient war against that *reactionary* form? Why should we depart from that standard procedure in the case of English-Canadian nationalism?

The US capitalists’ stranglehold over Canadian economic life is not something peculiar to the USA as a nation or to the US rulers. It is the result of a specific relationship of forces in the framework of world-wide inter-imperialist rivalries. Yesterday, the Canadian economy was dominated by British imperialism, a domination which was no more “progressive” than that of the US overlords. To-morrow, it could become a big arena of contest between US, European, Japanese and “autonomous” Canadian capitalists. What we oppose in Canada is not “foreign monopolies,” but monopoly capitalism *tout court*. What Canadian workers should overthrow is the stranglehold of Big Business, and not just of US Big Business. We struggle for the expropriation of all capitalist property, not just US or foreign-owned property.

When he used the formula “Canadians resent blatant violations of Canadian law by US based corporations leading to loss of jobs and trade by Canada” (p.21 of the **Discussion Bulletin of the LSA-LSO**, No.5, 1972) Comrade Dowson made an additional step of converting himself from a defender of the “progressive” into a defender of the reactionary content of “Canadian Nationalism.” Since when is the working class worried by the “loss of trade” of its own imperialist bourgeoisie? Since when do Marxists counterpose solidarity with the trade interests of their own bourgeoisie to international solidarity of the workers of all competing capitalist countries, against all capitalist competitors? Since when are we worried lest Canadian bourgeois law is violated? How can you ever make a socialist revolution in Canada without violating bourgeois law? Do you educate the workers of your country towards understanding the need for a socialist revolution, if you instill in them simultaneously worries about loss of trade by Canadian capitalism and the sacred character of Canadian bourgeois law?

The main argument used by Comrade Dowson to justify his tail-ending of Canadian nationalism is the assumed inability of the Canadian bourgeoisie to use in its own interests the nationalist sentiments developing in certain strata of the masses, because its fate in “inextricably bound up with the fate of US imperialism.” This argument is completely wrong. The Japanese, West German, British, French, Italian bourgeoisies are as conscious as the Canadian one that “their fate is inextricably bound up with the fate of US imperialism.” But that does not prevent them from developing all kinds of “nationalisms” *in order to modify the relationship of forces* (the way profits, burdens and spoils

are being divided) *inside the imperialist alliance*. We have for years correctly analysed the situation inside the world imperialist camp as that of inter-imperialist rivalry and competition within the framework of an alliance. Events during the last years, e.g. around the “dollar crisis,” have completely confirmed the correctness of that analysis. But it then follows that the second half of Comrade Dowson’s formula in no way results from the first half. On the contrary: *in spite* of them being conscious of the fact that, ultimately, they have to hang together in order not to be hung separately, the different imperialist powers, including Canada, certainly try to use all kinds of economic, political and ideological weapons (“Nationalism” and “anti-Americanism” being one of them) in order to further their own specific competitive interests and to weaken the class struggle in their own country.

It follows that anti-US Canadian nationalism has no automatic “anti-imperialist” or even “anti-capitalist” thrust, as Comrade Dowson tries to imply. It could have this only under very concrete conditions of *conscious political* working class hegemony inside the mass movement, i.e. hegemony by conscious revolutionary Marxist forces, by the Canadian Trotskyists. To consider this hegemony as guaranteed in advance is to be guilty of a gross over-optimism. In reality, there will be a constant *struggle* between revolutionary and reformist (i.e. objectively pro-class collaboration and pro-bourgeois) political forces inside that mass movement. In this struggle for political hegemony by the revolutionary Marxists, confusion on the issue of nationalism is going to make things easier for the petty-bourgeois reformist and class

collaborationist forces, and certainly not for the revolutionary Marxist ones.

Just to mention one example: nationalisation under workers control is not at all the only possible alternative to US domination of Canadian factories. Other ways are to strengthen “our” businessmen in their competition against the American ones (helping them make larger profits and therefore accepting voluntary wage restraints). Another way again would consist in bringing in stronger partnership with British, West-European and Japanese capital. Still another one would be the takeover of certain American-controlled corporations by the Canadian bourgeois state, without workers control, in the interests of “independent” capital accumulation by the private Canadian imperialists. Do we consider any of these alternatives “lesser evils” which we have to support “critically” as against US ownership or control? If not, how can we cover that whole complex situation by supporting “Canadian nationalism”?

The basic weakness of this whole argumentation is its static character. It deals with the question of Canadian nationalism exclusively from the point of view of political forces as they are – or more correctly: as they appear to be – to-day. But in the coming years, there will be many shifts and upheavals in Canadian political life, some of momentous character, as the class struggle sharpens and the crisis of Canadian imperialism and its pluri-national state deepens. It is unwise and unrealistic, to say the least, to exclude under these conditions the desire or ability of sections of the Canadian bourgeoisie to use nationalism in a “gaullist” way, in order to canalise and divert temporarily a mass explosion towards channels compatible with the survival of the

capitalist relations of production. To exclude that possibility is to eliminate the difference between Canada as imperialist country and backward semi-colonial and colonial countries. Comrade Dowson's grave mistakes on the question of Canadian nationalism flow from the wrong method used by the majority of the Canadian section's leadership in determining its position on Quebecois nationalism too, – a method of tail-ending mass moods, instead of starting from an assessment of the dynamics of class relations and class struggle.

19. Tail-Ending Elevated to the Level of Principle

In his article *Why Guevara's guerilla strategy has no future*, Comrade Peter Camejo does not limit himself to rewriting the history of the Cuban revolution in order to strengthen his case against "terrorist guevarism." He also gives a summary of what the "essence" of "Lenin's concept of a combat party of the working class" is like in his opinion. Here is this "essence" in his own words:

"1. The party is built around a revolutionary programme. Only those in agreement with its Marxist programme and willing to accept its discipline in action can be members.

"2. In the day-to-day struggle of the working class, individual workers are radicalised. The party seeks to recruit these workers, train them in its programme and organisational methods, and unite them in a single national organisation that acts in a disciplined manner on a national scale.

"3. The party spreads into all the oppressed layers of the population, including the non-working-class sectors. It tries to promote mass struggles and give the masses confidence in their own strength by mobilising them around transitional, democratic, or immediate demands related to their present level of consciousness.

“4. The party promotes whatever forms of struggle are appropriate, using tactics ranging from peaceful marches to armed struggle (including guerilla warfare).

“5. The party seeks to lead the working class and its allies to state power as its fundamental goal, but does not try to substitute itself for the masses.

“6. Each national party is part of a single international party of world proletariat.” (ISR, November 1972, p.33.)

What is striking about this “essence” of the “Leninist concept of the combat party of the working class is that there is nothing specifically “Leninist” about it. Every single one of these six “essential” aspects of Pete Camejo’s “concept of the combat party” could have been gladly supported and sincerely accepted by all the top leaders of classical pre-1914 social-democracy, with Kautsky, Bebel and their companions in the lead.

A revolutionary party programme? After all wasn’t the Erfurt programme of German social-democracy corrected and accepted by Engels himself? Accepting party discipline? What German social-democrat worthy of that name would have rejected that? Recruiting workers “radicalised in daily struggles”: didn’t German social-democracy do this on a scale much wider than the Russian pre-1914 Bolsheviks? Training them in the programme and the organisation methods, uniting them into a single national organisation: wasn’t that also done in an exemplary way? Spreading to all oppressed layers and trying to promote mass struggles and giving the masses self-confidence: who had more success in that field than pre-1914 German social-democracy? Using all forms of tactics, and “promoting whatever forms of struggle are appropriate,” to the point of not even excluding armed insurrection: Bebel and Kautsky agreed wholeheartedly. (In

the case “they” took away universal franchise, they were in favour of insurrection). The conquest of state power? Classical German social-democracy repeated that to be its main goal day after day. The need to be part of an “international party of world proletariat”: wasn’t German social-democracy the mainstay of the Second International?

So Pete Camejo has achieved the amazing feat of reducing Lenin’s concept of the vanguard party to that of pre-1914 classical German social-democracy, whose big historical triumphs are known to all. Lenin equals Kautsky: that is the uttermost “essence” of Comrade Camejo’s new message. This is certainly not orthodox Trotskyism, as understood by Trotsky himself. Nor is it Leninism, as developed by Lenin himself. But at least it gives a clearer and more rounded expression of the kind of tail-endist current which are developing today inside the world Trotskyist movement – and to which Comrade Hansen, seized by his all-consuming passion for tracking down and slaying the dangerous dragon of “rural guerilla warfare” and “terrorist guevarism,” turns a strangely blind eye.

What is missing from Comrade Camejo’s definition of a Leninist combat party are precisely the three essential differences between classical social-democracy (i.e., Kautskyism) and Leninism.

First: in the six point definition of Comrade Camejo, revolutionary perspectives and revolutionary struggles are completely missing: The word “revolution” is mentioned only once in relation with the programme. But a party can have a revolutionary programme – whose realisation will be

postponed to the distant future, because of the absence of a revolutionary perspectives and revolutionary struggles.

Of course, a party cannot artificially “create” revolutionary perspectives and revolutionary struggles when objective conditions are not ripe for it. This is why before 1905, the degeneration of German social-democracy was only incipient. But once the objective situation changes, once revolutionary perspectives are objectively opening up, the clear understanding of these perspectives, and the *preparation of the party for the revolutionary struggles which will inevitably occur*, becomes the first major task of revolutionaries, the key difference between Kautsky’s centrists and Leninists. To concentrate all the party’s effort on the preparation for the coming revolution: that was the key aspect of Lenin’s concept of a *revolutionary* combat party.

Comrade Cannon starts his article *The Vanguard Party and the World Revolution* (in **Fifty Years of World Revolution 1917-1967**) with the sentence: “The greatest contribution to the arsenal of Marxism since the death of Engels in 1895 was Lenin’s conception of the vanguard party *as the organiser and director of the proletarian revolution.*” This key aspect of Lenin’s concept of the party is forgotten in Comrade Camejo’s “essence.” The understanding of the *revolutionary* character of the epoch, the deep assimilation of the “*actuality of the revolution,*” is flesh and blood of the revolutionary combat party which Lenin built.

Second: the relationship between the vanguard – the party – and the working class is presented unilaterally and

mechanically. The party “Tries to promote mass struggles ... by mobilising the masses” around demands “related to their present level of consciousness.” It “seeks to recruit individual workers who become radicalised through these struggles and train them in its programme.” One can summarise this concept as: intervening in mass struggles and cadre building general socialist propaganda and education. But this formula creates more questions than it answers. Does it mean that no revolutionary struggles are possible as long as the party has not recruited enough “radicalised workers” in its own ranks and educated them in its programme? What is this “present level of consciousness” of the masses? Is it always the same? Can it shift rapidly? If yes, has the combat party to wait till it has shifted before it “adapts” its demands? Or can it foresee these shifts and act accordingly? In function of what factors can it foresee these shifts? Will the “present level of consciousness” itself not be to a certain degree a function of the role of the “combat party” inside the mass movement? But if one of the main purposes of the “combat party” is to *raise* the level of class consciousness of the working class, how then can the “present level of consciousness” in itself be a decisive criterion for determining what kind of demands the party should raise before the masses?

Trotsky, long ago, answered this question in a way which Comrade Camejo doesn't seem to have understood:

“We know that the mentality of every class of society is determined by objective conditions, by the productive forces, by the economic state of the country, but this determination is not immediately reflected. The mentality is in general backward, in relation to the economic development

...

“The programme must express the objective tasks of the working class rather than the backwardness of the workers. It must reflect society as it is and not the backwardness of the working class. It is an instrument to overcome and vanquish the backwardness.” (Discussion with Trotsky on **The Death Agony of Capitalism**, May 1938.)

And in order not to be taken in by any alleged distinctions between the party programme – Trotsky has in mind here not the general programme but the programme of transitional demands for which the party fights on a daily basis, immediately – and the demands raised by the Leninist combat party, Trotsky reminds us of the following:

“What can a revolutionary party do in this situation? In the first place give a clear honest picture of the objective situation, of the historic tasks which flow from this situation, irrespective as to whether or not the workers are today ripe for this. *Our tasks don't depend on the mentality of the worker ...* We must tell the workers the truth, then we will win the best elements.”

In other words: the function of the **Transitional Programme** is not limited to raising demands “related to the present level of consciousness” of the masses, *but to change that level of consciousness in function of the objective needs of the class struggle*. That is the key difference between transitional demands on the one hand, and democratic and immediate demands on the other hand (which of course should not be neglected or abandoned by a revolutionary party). Transitional demands form a bridge between the present level of consciousness and the objective historical needs for a socialist revolution. They are transitional precisely inasmuch as they unleash such types of struggles through which successive sectors of the masses learn to understand the need for a socialist *revolution*, i.e., overcome, in action first, and in consciousness afterwards,

the inadequacy of their class consciousness, i.e., the inadequacy of their “present level of consciousness.”

Obviously, if the demands advanced by the vanguard party are *unrelated* to the given level of consciousness of the masses, they will fail to unleash mass struggles – and in that case the level of consciousness of the masses will not be raised. But on the other hand, if the demands simply express that given level of consciousness, there is no raising of that level either. What is *transitional* about transitional demands is precisely the *movement from* the given level of consciousness *to a higher level*, and not a simple adaptation to the given level.

This key idea of the **Transitional Programme**, which permeates the first pages of the document itself and all of Trotsky’s writings of the years 1936-40 on the nature of the epoch, are completely missing from Comrade Camejo’s “essence” of a Leninist party. This essence is thereby reduced to tail-ending – only launching such demands and such struggles which are “adapted” to the given (very often backward) mentality and moods of the masses, not to the objective necessities.

The vanguard role of the party inside the mass movement thereby disappears. Tail-endism becomes elevated to the level of a principle, or a fine art, and this is served up as the “essence” of Leninism. One can be sure that, reading Camejo, Lenin would have answered, following an illustrious example: “Sorry, if that is the case, I’m not a Leninist.”

Third: Another essential dimension of the Leninist concept of the revolutionary party is missing from Comrade Camejo’s “essence”: the dimension of *revolutionary*

initiative. It is true that Comrade Camejo wants the party to “promote mass struggles by mobilising them” around a certain number of demands. But this is formulated in such a vague way, immediately weighed down with the consideration of the “present level of consciousness” of these masses, and further restricted by the warning against “the party substituting itself for the masses,” that the absence of the word “initiative” is by no means an accident.

The very difference between a revolutionary *party* and a propaganda group is the capacity of the former of becoming a force “influencing, organising and directing broad masses in action.” (James P. Cannon: *The Vanguard Party and the World Revolution*, **op. cit.**, p.357) “Promoting” mass struggles in different ways, starting from being good trade unionists and having cadres who are accepted by the workers in the shops as good union leaders, is one thing. Taking the initiative to organise and being capable of leading anti-capitalist mass struggles *as a revolutionary party*, is something quite different. As long as you have not reached that stage, you do not have a Leninist party in the real meaning of the word. This third key dimension of the Leninist concept of the revolutionary party is again completely missing from Comrade Camejo’s “essence.” One of the “essential” characteristics of the classical centrism of the Kautsky-Bauer school was precisely this inability of perceiving the need of revolutionary initiatives by the party, “relationship of forces,” “objective conditions,” “the mood of the masses” deciding everything always in a fatalistically predetermined way. Leninism separates itself from that type of centrism precisely by its capacity to understand how revolutionary initiatives can *modify* the relationship of forces. Of course it cannot do so regardless of concrete

conditions and circumstances; it cannot replace scientific correct analysis of the co-relationship of forces by adventuristic miscalculations and voluntaristic day-dreaming. But the goal of the analysis is always to *change* existing conditions in favour of the proletarian revolution, not to adapt to the given situation. All this Comrade Camejo doesn't seem to include in the "essence" of Lenin's concept of the party ...

Part 3

Footnote

2. The following is the English version of the French. The first two paragraphs were taken from the English version of Lenin's **Collected Works**, Vol. 31, pages 145 and 148. The last two paragraphs were translated from the French as they do not appear in the English **Collected Works** of Lenin.

"... the Communist Party, as the avowed champion of the proletarian struggle to overthrow the bourgeois yoke, must base its policy, in the national question too, not on abstract and formal principles but, first, on a precise appraisal of the specific historical situation and, primarily, of economic conditions; second, on a clear distinction between the interests of the oppressed classes, of working and exploited people, and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class; third, on an equally clear distinction between the oppressed, dependent and subject nations and the oppressing, exploiting and sovereign nations, in order to counter the bourgeois-democratic lies that play down this colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's population by an insignificant minority of the richest and advanced capitalist countries, a feature characteristic of the era of finance capital and imperialism."

"Recognition of internationalism hi word, and its replacement in deed by petty-bourgeois nationalism and pacifism, in all propaganda agitation and

practical work, is very common, not only among the parties of the Second International, but also among those which have withdrawn from it, and often even among parties which now call themselves communist ... Petty-bourgeois nationalism proclaims as internationalism the mere recognition of the equality of nations, and nothing more. Quite apart from the fact that this recognition is purely verbal, petty-bourgeois nationalism preserves national self-interest intact ...”

“In the oppressed countries, there exist two movements that each day move further and further apart: the first is the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement that has a program of political independence and bourgeois order; the other is the movement of the poor and backward peasants and workers for their emancipation from all forms of exploitation.

“The first attempts to lead the second and has often succeeded to a certain extent. But the Communist International and the parties belonging to it must combat this tendency and seek to develop independent class sentiments in the working masses of the colonies.”

III. The Significance of the Present Discussion in the Fourth International

20. Caught in an Objective Dialectic

Comrade Hansen and the leadership of the SWP should ponder the situation in which they find themselves at this stage in the discussion. How does it happen that inside the world Trotskyist movement, in which presumably “adaptation to ultra-leftism,” if not “universal extension of rural guerilla warfare to all countries, including the workers states” was the main and only danger which had to be fought against, they find themselves in an unprincipled bloc with comrades, groups and tendencies which are characterised by various degrees of opportunist tail-endism; throwing overboard some key aspects of Leninism and of the Trotskyist tradition, questioning the very nature of the Leninist party and of the transitional programme for which the SWP and Comrade Cannon especially have fought so consistently for so many years? What is the objective dialectic which has caught them in its net? What are the origins and motive forces of that dialectic? Perhaps, after all, “adaptation to ultra-leftism” was not the only or even the “main danger” at this stage? Perhaps, after all, the majority of the leadership of the FI was not wedded to universal guerilla warfare, nor to liquidating “the Leninist strategy of party building”? Perhaps the whole discussion was started on a wrong footing, and it should be wise to re-examine the

positions adopted on all sides, in the light of the subsequent developments of that discussion?

The way in which the debate around armed struggle has evolved is an excellent example of this objective dialectic in which Comrade Hansen personally, and the present leadership of the SWP collectively, have been caught and forced to evolve independently from their intentions.

When in the article written together with Comrade Martine Knoeller, we asked Comrade Hansen whether he thought that armed struggle was only admissible in the final, insurrectional phase of the struggle for power, he answered negatively and repeated the formula from the Reunification Congress document that guerilla warfare was a permissible and useful means of struggle to apply by Marxist revolutionaries under certain circumstances. We were glad to read that answer, as it confirmed our impression that the differences on armed struggle were not of a principled nature, but simply a matter of estimate and analysis of specific situation.

Likewise Comrades Moreno and Lorenzo, in the amendment which they submitted to the 9th World Congress political resolution, categorically stated:

“ One of the conquests of the past thirty years of the movement of the colonial masses is the demonstration that armed struggle and guerilla war are not a slogan and a method that is applicable only at the culmination of the rise of the mass movement to take power, but are applicable at any particular moment of class struggle, mainly when the exploiters themselves open a stage of civil war against the mass movement.”

Even Comrade Peter Camejo in his article *Why Guevara's Guerilla Strategy has no Future* (ISR, November 1972),

ranged armed struggle, including guerilla warfare, among “appropriate forms of struggle” – an indication incidentally, that by no means everything in that article – parts of which we have been compelled to criticise heavily in our present contribution to the international discussion – is wrong.

But hardly had Comrade Camejo’s article appeared that one of the staunchest supporters of the SWP positions, a member of the present majority of the Canadian section, published a contribution in the Canadian Internal Bulletin entitled: *Terrorism, Guerilla Warfare and the “Strategy of Armed Struggle”: The Leninist View* (**LSA/LSO Discussion Bulletin 1972**, December 1972, No. 19), in which the *conjunctural* analysis made by Lenin and Trotsky of the *specific* tasks of the *European* Communist Parties, in a *specific* situation of partial *retreat* of the revolution in 1921, at the Third Congress of the Communist International, which implied a warning to these communists not to let themselves be provoked into premature massive armed confrontations with bourgeois state power, is transformed into a general principle: don’t engage in armed struggle as long as you number only a few hundred thousands! The implication is clear: armed struggle is only an appropriate means of struggle at the eve of the conquest of power or after that conquest, when you have won already the majority of the toiling masses to the revolutionary party. But this presentation – which contradicts Comrade Hansen’s, Comrade Moreno’s and Comrade Camejo’s position – flies in the face of the whole tradition of Leninism and Trotskyism. It transforms into “ultra-left adventurers” or even “terrorists” not only the Cuban revolutionists and the Algerian revolutionists, not only the Yugoslav Communists of 1941 and the Palestinian revolutionists of 1967, all of

whom started armed struggle when they only numbered a few thousands, but also the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks of 1905, who were probably not more than 10-15,000 when they set up armed detachments, not only the Lenin of 1906 advocating the setting up of the partisan detachments precisely by the party; not only the Austrian social-democrats when they took arms with a few thousand fighters against the Dollfuss clerico-fascist coup in February 1934, but Trotsky himself who advocated resistance against the fascists' rise to power which had to start from *vanguard actions*, Trotsky who advocated guerilla warfare against the Japanese invasion of China and the Russian Bolsheviks of February 1917 who set up armed detachments of workers in the factories when they were still a rather limited minority of the Russian toiling masses but were strongly supported by the *vanguard workers*. In all these instances Comrade Angus, with his logic, would have used that famous formula: "We shouldn't have taken up arms"! which wasn't exactly Lenin's.

How is it that Comrade Hansen's alleged defence of "orthodoxy" can produce such "unorthodox" fruits? We repeat: let the leading cadres of the SWP seriously ponder that question.

The question also applies to the positions adopted by the SWP itself. Why, when the Cuban revolutionists were struggling against Batista, in the course of which struggle not a few "kidnappings" happened to occur, did **The Militant** not denounce them as "terrorists" and "ultra-left adventurers"? Why, when the El Fatah fighters were sometimes brought to use much harsher methods in their struggle, was there no such denunciation in the pages of **The**

Militant? Why didn't **The Militant** publicly denounce and condemn the guerilla struggle organised by the comrades of the Peruvian FIR in support of Hugo Blanco's struggle? Had Hugo Blanco already succeeded in building a "mass Leninist party"? Had he already conquered a majority influence among the Peruvian masses? Was there any qualitative difference between the situation then in Peru and the situation in Argentina now? Or was the SWP of the opinion that, although they rather disliked actions of that sort, it would be wrong to brand the Peruvian comrades for that reason publicly as "terrorists" and start to make concessions to the "anti-terrorist" hue-and-cry, which after all imperialism and petty-bourgeois reformism have been consistently using against Bolshevism for more than fifty years, calling Lenin, Trotsky and all their followers the world over "terrorists," "blanquists," etc.

Wasn't the SWP at that time of the opinion that you had to look upon the struggle of the Peruvian comrades and their Argentinian supporters in its totality, and that in that totality the facts like the shot policeman, were incidents perhaps regrettable but upon which judgment was impossible without very detailed knowledge of all factors involved, and couldn't be decided upon thousands of miles away? Isn't that the position adopted by the United Secretariat of the FI towards the Sallustro affair? We have said that it would be slanderous to brand the Argentinian comrades as "terrorists"; that nobody in good faith could say that they had elevated the execution of capitalists into a "strategy"; that armed struggle or guerilla warfare has nothing to do with such executions; that therefore the Sallustro affair was only a minor incident in the framework of a complex struggle, and that we refuse to be drawn into

“approving” or “condemning” individual incidents of such a struggle, be it only because on lack of sufficient information necessary to judge them.

Why did the SWP *change* its position in that respect? Why the *different* attitude toward similar, if not identical events in Peru and Argentina? What are the objective motive forces behind this change?

21. The Turn of the Ninth World Congress

Comrade Hansen’s implicit answer to this question is “the danger of adaptation to ultraleftism.” We have already tried to show that this alleged “danger” can only be construed out of a one-sided, mechanistic and unrealistic analysis of the evolution of the world Trotskyist movement during the last 5-6 years, which glosses over a series of mistakes and inclinations of right-wing opportunist and tail-endist nature. A blindness towards this danger drives the leadership of the SWP and Comrade Hansen into unprincipled blocs with opportunist tendencies, justified by the “priority” of fighting the “main danger.”

The problem can be clarified if the question is asked: what has the leadership of the Fourth International tried to accomplish since the May ‘68 events in France? What has been its general line? In what consists the “turn of the 9th World Congress,” to which Comrade Hansen now refers on several occasions? Is it a universal turn towards “rural guerilla warfare,” or even a universal turn towards “the strategy of armed struggle?” Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Ninth World Congress' general political resolution correctly pointed out that the May events in France, seen in their global context, linked to the serious deterioration of the economic situation of world capitalism, with the strong upsurge of working class struggles in Western Europe, and with the new deepening of the crisis of Stalinism, both inside the bureaucratised workers states and inside the CPs in the capitalist countries, reflected the beginning of a new upsurge of world revolution, which for the first time since 1923 was occurring under conditions in which the hold of the traditional bureaucracies on the mass movement, although still strong, was seriously weakened by the appearance of a mass vanguard ready to act independently of the reformists, the Stalinists and the traditional nationalist leaderships in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

From this basic analysis, we drew two essential conclusions: that the general trend of mass struggles, of revolutionary explosions *the world over* would come nearer to the "Leninist norm of proletarian revolution," that the building of Trotskyist parties could make a qualitative leap forward, provided they knew how to profit from the existence of that mass vanguard to outgrow the phase of propaganda groups and to become organisations capable of political initiatives of a mass character, which could trigger off even broader advanced mass struggles (advanced both in the nature of their demands and in their forms of organisation).

This was the "general line of the Ninth World Congress," as it was clearly and explicitly expressed by the reporter for the political resolution, accepted unanimously by the Congress with only Comrade Peng dissenting.

If one regards the text of that political report to the Congress, one will understand why, contrary to Comrade Hansen, all those who voted for the resolution on Latin America (myself included), did not see any contradiction between the “general line” and the Latin-American resolution. In our eyes, what was involved in Latin-America, was a specific application of that general estimate to specific circumstances. As we were convinced that in countries like Bolivia and Argentina armed confrontations between the masses and the strong bourgeois armies were inevitable, *because* of the increasing probability of explosions “much closer to the Leninist norm of proletarian revolutions,” we naturally drew from that analysis the conclusion that it was of key importance for the building of strong Trotskyist parties in Bolivia and Argentina, that our forces in these two countries, which were the strongest we had in Latin-America, and which were not insignificant compared to other vanguard tendencies, should take initiatives for the preparation of armed struggle, initiatives which would pay off inside the mass movement if the assumed turn would actually occur.

We remain convinced that these projections were confirmed by events, and that the said preparations, whatever have been their insufficiencies, their one-sidedness, the inevitable mistakes which accompanied them, inasmuch as they were the first experiments of the FI in that field since its inception, have paid and will continue to pay an important dividend, both in the field of political mass influence and in the field of party building, i.e., of winning vanguard elements, advanced workers and radicalised students, for our sections. Comrade Hansen strongly disagrees with that assessment. But independently from the difference in

judging the balance-sheet of events and interventions since 1969 on Bolivia and Argentina, he should admit that a careful rereading of both the political resolution adopted at the 9th World Congress and of the political report and summary of the reporter for that resolution confirms the version that there was not the slightest intention of projecting any “universal turn towards the strategy of armed struggle,” or even worse “a universal turn towards the strategy of rural guerilla warfare.” What was projected was *a turn towards the transformation of Trotskyist organisations from propaganda groups into organisations already capable of those political initiatives of a mass vanguard level which are required by the dynamics of the class struggle itself.*

Was *that* real turn justified or not? We think it was. We think it has started to transform the Fourth International into a qualitatively stronger organisation than in the pre-1968 period (a transformation which is of course a still very limited and insufficient expression on the level of the subjective factor, of the “new rise of world revolution” we were all convinced of witnessing since May ‘68). We shall give four instances where the effects of that “turn” have been striking.

1. The role played by the French Trotskyists in the May ‘68 events as organisers and unifiers of the revolutionary student upsurge, the initiatives taken on the barricades and after the barricades, have had mass consequences which have changed the political situation in France. They have contributed to triggering off a general strike of 10 million workers, to politically influencing and occasionally drawing into action a mass vanguard of tens of thousands of militants, to redeveloping inside the working class the seeds of self-organisation through elected strike committees (nuclei

of future factory committees) and to influence and even organise a whole series of strikes along these lines in the subsequent years.

Of course, the reformists and neo-reformists of the CP are still the dominant influence in the French labour movement. We are still far from having built a revolutionary mass party. But the qualitative difference between this type of initiative in the mass struggle and its results – both politically and organisationally – from what was possible before 1968, is obvious.

2. The role played by the American Trotskyists in stimulating and helping to organise a mass antiwar movement in the USA expresses a similar transformation. This mass antiwar movement, which started on a modest scale – some comrades have forgotten this now – but which succeeded at its height to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people, became a political factor of great importance in the world relationship of forces helping the struggle of the Vietnamese revolution against the counter-revolutionary war of imperialism. The SWP and the YSA witnessed an important organisational growth as a result of the bold and successful initiatives taken in this field. Again this has in no ways created in the USA a revolutionary mass party, changed the level of consciousness of the majority of the working class or broken the hold of the reactionary labour lieutenants of capital over the unions. But the qualitative difference between this type of political initiative on a national scale, and its results, from what was possible for American Trotskyists in the previous period, is obvious.

3. The Spanish Trotskyists, who had hardly begun building their young Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), when confronted with the elections for the fascist “vertical” trade unions in 1971, correctly assessed the qualitatively changed situation among the advanced workers, understood that after the success of the struggle to save the lives of the ETA prisoners condemned to death by the fascist court at Burgos, the more conscious sectors of the working class would not accept any more the opportunist CP line of participating in those elections. Together with other vanguard

groups, they started a campaign to boycott these elections, and by daring propaganda initiatives became the most dynamic proponents of the boycott. The results were startling. Notwithstanding the regimes and the mass media's pressure in favour of participating in the elections; notwithstanding the CP's still hegemonic weight in the working class, the majority of the workers of Catalonia and of the Basque country, and significant minorities of the working class in Madrid, Asturia, and other industrial sectors, actually boycotted the elections, thereby strengthening the general upsurge of the working class movement, both against the dictatorship and against capitalism.

4. In Ceylon, under difficult conditions of repression and "state of emergency," our comrades contributed in a decisive way to an initiative to break the passivity which had paralysed the stunted masses after the successful army crushing of the revolutionary youth movement (JVP) of the island. This initiative, which reflected the beginning of a revival of the mass movement, took the unusual form of a 24 hour general hunger strike instead of a general strike. But its success – one million hunger strikers, hundreds of thousands of workers actually stopping work a whole day – was striking and amazing. Again the initiative of a small group of revolutionists, understanding the loss of control of the traditional workers parties over a large mass vanguard, if not over important sectors of the masses themselves, triggered off an action by thousands of people.

We have deliberately grouped together examples of strikes and hunger strikes, of peaceful demonstrations and rather violent action. The Bolivian Trotskyist role on August 20-21, 1971, can be placed in the same category. It is obvious that the capacity of Trotskyist organisations to take initiatives of action which draw into movement masses of vanguard workers and students, and sometimes even large sectors of the working class, have to be conceived in the framework of the concrete situation of each country, have to express the objective key needs of the class struggle at a given stage, and

that these situations and key needs differ widely from continent to continent and from country to country. No general rule applies to all and every country, certainly not “armed struggle.” And to transform this *real* history of the “turn of the 9th World Congress” into a universal appeal for “guerilla warfare” is a bad joke which the leading comrades of the minority cannot seriously believe themselves, and which is just a way to avoid the real debate.

All sections of the FI cannot yet make that turn. The question of passing a first threshold of organisational and political strength is essential for the capacity of even conceiving the correct initiative, let alone applying it successfully. It is also evident that the amount of initial forces involved greatly influences and pre-determines the organisational outcome of the initiative. That is why the initiatives taken by the French and American Trotskyists who at the outset had a much stronger organisation at their disposal than the Spanish, Bolivian and Ceylonese comrades, brought much higher organisational gains than in the latter countries.

But all these considerations do not modify the nature of the turn nor its significance. It is not at all a turn away from any basic tradition of Leninism, of building proletarian revolutionary vanguard parties, but on the contrary a turn toward seizing the opportunities of speeding up the building of such parties by becoming still small but already significant factors of initiative in the mass struggle itself.

Why is the word “turn” justified? Because the capacity for initiative in action contrasts with the propaganda group approach, which was predominant in the previous period,

not because of any mistake or weakness of our movement, but as a reflection of objective conditions and especially of the predominance of the traditional working class organisations (and nationalist leaderships in the colonies and semi-colonies) in the mass movement.

Under conditions of such predominance, the normal “propaganda group” approach of small nuclei of revolutionists would have been to struggle inside the trade unions (or the CP and SP) for them to take the initiative: for defending the students in May ’68 in France; for organising the antiwar movement in the USA; for arming the workers in August 1971 in La Paz; for switching from participation toward boycotting the elections in Spain; for organising the struggle against the repression in Ceylon. We do not underestimate the need to continue this type of activity even today, even in the above mentioned cases. But it has ceased to be the main axis of our activity. In France, we did not limit ourselves to vote resolutions calling upon the CGT to do this, that or the other: we organised the defence of the students ourselves. In the USA, we did not limit ourselves to presenting resolutions at union conferences calling upon the AFL-CIO to organise the antiwar movement; we started to organise it ourselves. In Bolivia, we did not limit ourselves in presenting resolutions to the COB or the Popular Assembly to arm the workers; we started to act ourselves. In Ceylon, we did not call upon the LSSP and CP-led unions to organise the fight against the repression; we took the initiative of the struggle ourselves. And we believe that these initiatives in action contribute more than a hundred debates and resolutions to shift the relationship of forces inside the traditional mass organisations as well, a shift which still

remains essential to influence the attitude of the majority of the working class.

The opposite policy is that of the Lambertists (and partially of the Healyites), who stick to purely propagandistic orientation and try to theoretise with their “united front strategy of party building.” When repression struck the Paris student movement in the beginning of May ’68, they opposed the militant student demonstrations and the building of the barricades. Their line was to pressure the trade unions to organise a “mass demonstration of 500,000 workers in front of the President’s palace, in defence of the students.” Against imperialism’s counter-revolutionary war in Vietnam, the American Healyites tended equally to substitute for initiatives in action calls upon Meany and other top bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO to do this, that or the other (build a labour party, organise a general strike, the variants were numerous), which, under the circumstances, had to remain purely on paper. In Ceylon, the Healyites opposed to the mass actions initiated by our comrades against the repression, calls upon the LSSP and CP-led unions to “organise actions” against the repression, or even calls to the LSSP and CP ministers who share the responsibility in the repression, to take various initiatives. And in Bolivia – most tragic and treacherous example of all – the Lora variant of Lambertism substituted for the vital task of arming the workers against the impending military coup, the empty expectation that General Torres, in the hour of need, somehow would arm the workers himself.

As long as the new rise of world revolution continues and is not broken by grave defeats of the working class, in important sectors of the world; as long as the mass vanguard

capable of acting independently from the traditional treacherous mass leaderships exists, and as long as in a series of countries the growth of our movement enables us to pass the threshold of primitive accumulation of cadres which makes such initiatives in action realistically possible, the “turn of the 9th World Congress” remains vital for building the Fourth International under the present conditions. It is no shortcut to “get rich quick.” It is no substitute for patient expansion of the cadre of our sections, for them gaining influence among larger sectors of the masses, for the crystallisation of national leaderships which are politically and organisationally maturing in the process of party building itself. But it is a precondition for efficiently exploiting the main opportunities which have opened up for revolutionary Marxists through the deepening of the twin crisis of imperialist and Stalinism. It is today the main source of our recruitment. It forms an important lap of the road which leads our movement from the status of propaganda groups to that of revolutionary mass parties.

22. Uneven Development of World Revolution Catches Up with the Fourth International

As long as the Trotskyist organisations were condemned by events and size to be essentially propaganda groups – with only conjunctural possibilities to pass to a higher stage of activity on local levels, in a given branch of industry, city or region – the homogeneity of the movement was essentially of a programmatic nature. Trotskyists in Berlin and in La Paz, in Tokyo and in Paris, in New York and in Johannesburg could write the same articles about the crisis of imperialism, the nature of Stalinism, the need to defend

the Soviet Union against bourgeois armies, or the theory of the permanent revolution. Application of the common programmatic outlook to current conjunctural developments was done more or less successfully, depending on the degree of maturity and experience of the cadre and the sharpness of the turns in the world situation.

When significant sectors of the world movement started to transform themselves from propaganda groups into organisations capable of political initiatives on a mass level, this homogeneity was submitted to a new and more difficult test. The nature and the form of the initiatives in action are a function of specific national objective conditions, of specific relations between the mass vanguard and the broader mass movement, of specific weight of our own forces inside the mass vanguard, and of specific perspectives for the development of the mass movement (i.e., of the degree of understanding of concrete short-and medium-term dynamics of the class struggle). They differ from country to country and from sector to sector of world revolution. The less our forces understand these concrete conditions, the less they will be capable of action, the more they will remain pure propaganda groups. But the more they understand these peculiarities, the more they have to take them into consideration in order to work out initiatives and plans of action, the more they will tend to be influenced and moulded in their general outlook, at least partially, by these peculiar national circumstances of the class struggle.

In other words: in the process of transformation of our sections from propaganda groups into organisations capable of political initiatives in action, the different objective and subjective conditions of the mass movement in different

parts of the world threaten to become a factor of differentiation of the Fourth International, in spite of its common programmatic basis. The uneven development of world revolution threatens to reflect itself inside the world Trotskyist movement through different approaches to similar problems of orientation, which are a function of different objective conditions in different parts of the world, which express themselves in different experiences in action of our cadres in these different sectors of the world.

There is a real danger that cadres recruited, educated and experienced essentially through actions determined by these national peculiarities will tend to generalise them on an international scale; that methods of party building, of tactics and of orientation in the mass movement which may be adequate in the United States will apply to Argentina or Bolivia where they are inappropriate to the needs of the given stage in the class struggle; that Argentine comrades will commit the same mistakes by generalising their own experience to the whole of Asia or Southern Europe; the European comrades will tend to export their own experiences to Chile or to Mexico.

What we are dealing with here are not general principles, the common programme, the universal strategical and tactical rules distilled by the classics of Marxism-Leninism from a century and a half of experience of revolutionary class struggle. We are dealing with more detailed and more precise problems of political orientation and methods of party building, where these national (or sectoral) peculiarities have a large weight.

Two examples will illustrate the danger we refer to.

One of the greatest political achievements of the SWP in the last 15 years has been the correct understanding of the peculiar way in which the national question – the question of the oppression of the Black and the Chicano people – poses itself inside the United States. Given the fact that both these nationalities-in-information do not have “their own” ruling class in the real sense of the word, and cannot acquire such a ruling class – not to speak of their own bourgeois state – without a complete disintegration of US imperialist economy and society; given the tremendous weight of oppression, humiliation and demoralisation which centuries of slavery and semi-slavery have brought down on the Black people in the United States, the specific character and dynamics of the Black (and the Chicano) liberation struggle in the United States was correctly understood by the comrades of the SWP. The analysis and projections made by Comrade George Breitman in that respect were among the most important creative contributions to Marxist thought realised by the world Trotskyist movement since the murder of Leon Trotsky. The conclusion was obvious: Black (and Chicano) nationalism in the United States are objectively progressive forces which revolutionary Marxists had to support, stimulate and help organise independently from the two big American bourgeois parties and from the still non-existent labour party.

But this positive attitude towards Black (and Chicano) nationalist is an exception to a general rule. It corresponds to specific circumstances in the history and the structure of US bourgeois society. To extend the same method of approach to Quebecois nationalism, Arab nationalism, Bengali nationalism, Ceylonese nationalism, not to speak of “anti-US imperialism,” Canadian or European nationalism,

means to court disaster. In all these cases potential, developed or already extremely powerful bourgeois ruling classes do exist, which already have or could conquer state power under given circumstances. To educate the toilers in a “nationalist” spirit, and not in a spirit of total distrust to their own bourgeoisie, means to make the conquest of proletarian hegemony in the mass movement more difficult, and thereby contributes to the risk of defeat of future revolutionary developments.

The political test is easy. In function of the specific analysis of the Black and Chicano national question in the USA, the call for independent mass parties of the Black and Chicano people corresponds to the positive attitude towards Black and Chicano nationalism. But what Trotskyist would issue a call for an “independent Quebecois mass party,” or an “independent Palestinian mass party,” or an “independent mass party of Bengalis” or “Sinhala speaking people,” instead of struggling for the independent organisation of the workers and poor peasants in these countries, i.e., for an organisation along *class lines and not along national lines*?

A second example is of a more conjunctural but no less revealing nature. In the wake of the rise of the youth radicalisation in North America, ultra-left tendencies, completely misjudging the objective situation in the country, the correlation of forces, the immediate perspectives of the class struggle, the level of consciousness of the masses, wanted to use methods of open confrontation or even armed struggle with the most powerful bourgeois state apparatus in the world. The SWP-YSA were correct to oppose the irresponsible adventurism inherent in these tendencies. Isolated confrontations between small groups of dedicated

revolutionaries and the powerful state apparatus of the imperialist countries, under conditions where the class struggle has not reached a point where broad masses of workers understand the inevitability of such confrontations, and are ready to take part in it, can only end in political disaster and threaten to lead to the destruction (included sometimes the physical destruction) of the revolutionary nuclei which, through impatience and lack of understanding of the dialectics of the class struggle, let themselves be drawn into such desperate adventures.

Such an opposition to premature use of armed struggle methods is correct not only in the USA and in other imperialist countries where similar conditions prevail, but obvious also in the bureaucratised workers states and in all those semi-colonial and colonial countries where the necessary pre-conditions have not yet been attained, that is to say where the class struggle has not reached the point where broad masses can understand, on the basis of their own experience, the necessity and inevitability of armed confrontations with the class enemy and his state – because it is using violent oppression against the masses on a scale qualitatively different from that of the USA or Canada – and where revolutionists have therefore the duty to propagandise the preparation for such confrontations and to take initiatives in this sense as soon as they have passed a given threshold of organisational strength.

But to oppose propaganda for armed struggle and the beginning of preparation for armed struggle in Bolivia and Argentina because one opposed the Weathermen and their like in the USA, is to throw overboard the necessity of determining the correct political orientation and method of

party building in function of the concrete dynamics of the class struggle in each country.

In Bolivia after the 1964 and 1967 massacres; after the experience of Che's guerrillas; after the experience of the Barrientos dictatorship – and now after the experience of the August 1971 coup and the Banzer dictatorship – the need for armed struggle is understood by broad masses and started to become practised by them. Likewise in Argentina, after the Onganía dictatorship, after the massive arrests, kidnappings, tortures and murders of left militants, after the constant interventions in the unions by the military the need for armed struggle began to be understood by the masses and started to be applied by them in the semi-insurrectional local uprisings. *Under these specific circumstances* the approach towards armed struggle by revolutionary Marxists had obviously to be different from what it was in the USA and Canada. To have an identical approach to this problem in North and in South America means to generalise nationally limited and determined experiences into universal rules. In our opinion, this is to a large extent the origin of the present discussion between the leadership of the SWP and the majority leadership of the Fourth International.

23. The Struggle for a Proletarian Party

For the same reason we view with great misgivings the rejection, by the minority members of the United Secretariat, of the draft theses on the building of revolutionary mass parties in capitalist Europe. Obviously, this rejection has opened a new stage in the international

discussion. It has at the same time drawn the rug from under the feet of Comrade Hansen and other spokesmen of the minority.

Carefully reading the draft thesis, nobody can honestly say that they tend to make a “turn” towards “rural guerrilla warfare” nor do they project any orientation towards universal “urban guerrilla warfare.” To counterpose to these theses the concept of “Leninist combat party building” or the **Transitional Programme** would be ridiculous: the theses are entirely centered around these two concepts. In the light of this document, and its rejection by the international minority, the whole thesis of Comrade Hansen presenting the “crisis” in the Fourth International as an opposition between comrades who make concessions to “Guevarist,” “ultraleft terrorist” and “guerrillaist” pressure, and comrades who staunchly defend the traditions of Leninist party building with the methods of the **Transitional Programme**, completely collapses.

But perhaps the thesis is making basic concessions to “ultraleftism” in other fields than “guerrilla warfare”? If this would be the contention of the minority, the least one can say is that no serious evidence has been advanced in that field. The embarrassed justifications of the minority for their negative vote have centered up to now on minor aspects of the thesis like the contention that they give a historical version of the reasons for postwar entryism (twenty years ago!) which the minority disputes, that there is an underestimation of the potentialities of the women’s liberation movement and the youth radicalisation, etc., etc.

We call these minor matters because experienced comrades like those of the SWP leadership understand perfectly well the differences between the general line of a thesis, and all kinds of other questions which get involved – over-estimated or under-estimated – at the initial stage of a discussion, when a rounded medium-term perspective for a whole sector of the world revolution, and for our movement working in that sector, is being projected. Surely it would have been easy for the comrades of the minority to present half a dozen amendments on all kinds of disputed minor matters, while at the same time unequivocally stating their attitude towards the general line of the European Perspectives Document. The fact that they hide behind these other questions in order to avoid a clear cut answer whether the general line projected by the European thesis is right or wrong, is revealing for the embarrassment in which the minority finds itself, for the impossibility to maintain the myth of a dispute between “Comrades-giving-in-to-Guevarist-pressure” and “orthodox Trotskyists,” and for the need to come to grips with the real problem raised by the international discussion: how to approach and to solve the transformation of the Trotskyist organisations from propaganda groups into organisations already capable of political mass initiatives with effects on the development of the class struggle, in different countries and different sectors of world revolution.

The answer to that question which the European document projects for the imperialist countries in Europe is the following: as the economic and social crisis in these countries will continue to deepen in various degrees; as the general trend of working class struggles will be to widen and to reach in a series of countries heights rarely or never

attained in the past; as a mass vanguard of young workers and students has appeared ready to act independently from the treacherous traditional working class leaderships; and as the tight control of these leaderships on the mass actions of the proletariat – independent of electoral ups and downs – is weakening, the fundamental orientation of the European Trotskyists must be to implant themselves in the working class, to use the weight of the mass vanguard to modify the relationship of forces between the bureaucracies and the advanced workers in the unions, the factories, the offices and on the streets, and to concentrate their propaganda and whenever possible, their agitation, on the preparation of these advanced workers for the appearance of factory committees, of organs of dual power, at the height of the next wave of generalised mass struggles massive strikes, general strikes, general strikes with factory occupations.

In other words: the European perspective document spells out in the terms of party building and party activity the logical conclusions to be drawn, under conditions of growing mass upsurge of the European proletariat, from the analysis of the 9th World Congress accepted by the SWP leadership, that the “new rise of world revolution” was reverting to the “Leninist norms of the proletarian revolution.”

A new attempt at diversion made by some representatives of the minority at the last IEC consisted of accusing the majority of projecting a “short-term-struggle-for-power-perspective” for our movement. This is completely unfounded. We are not fools, (and nobody should present us as fools) who seriously consider orienting towards a “struggle for power” with some hundreds or, in the best of cases, some thousands of Trotskyists “leading” millions of

European workers. There is no trace of such a childish illusion in the Thesis on the building of revolutionary parties in capitalist Europe.

We speak about something entirely different, something which belongs to the main conquests of the **Transitional Programme**, as developed by the Third International first, and as embodied by the Programme drafted by Leon Trotsky later: that *before* they have already reached a revolutionary mass party capable of victorious leading a struggle for power, revolutionists should try by all means to transform generalised struggles of the working class into struggles where the question of power *starts to become posed before the masses*, where they start to build their own power organs as opposed to the organs of the bourgeois state. In other words: that revolutionary Marxists should prepare themselves and the masses to have soviet-type committees, organs of dual power, arise out of general strikes. With Trotskyist groups much weaker than the present sections of the Fourth International, Trotsky projected such a line for countries like France, Belgium, Spain, between 1934 and 1936, because he correctly foresaw similar developments of the class struggle. By projecting a similar line today in Western Europe, we remain in the strictest Leninist-Trotskyist orthodoxy, under conditions of a gradually unfolding pre-revolutionary situation in highly industrialised imperialist countries.

When millions of workers are on strike or prepare to go on strike; when successive layers of advanced workers become politicised and drawn into large-scale debates around the need to overthrow capitalism, to build socialism, and the ways and means to do this; when even notorious social-

democratic labor fakers as those of the French social-democracy are forced, under such conditions, to involve themselves in byzantine discussions about “workers’ power,” “workers’ self-management” and “the road to socialism” (we say “byzantine discussions” because these gentlemen have not the slightest intentions of actually breaking with capitalism), obviously the *general line* of Trotskyists should be to involve themselves in this main radicalisation process, and to view the forces they devote to the women’s liberation movement, the radicalised student movement, the high school student movement – and in several countries these forces should be considerable – as part and parcel of a general orientation toward intervention in working class struggles, implantation in the working class, and attempts to build a proletarian vanguard party.

We said that we viewed with grave misgivings the rejection, by the international minority of the European thesis, because this rejection at least implies the danger that its general line is being rejected. By rejecting that general line (without proposing any coherent alternative) the comrades of the SWP would be spitting into the well from which they’ll have to draw all their water in the coming years.

It is evident that there is an important time-lag between the rhythm and the scope of working class radicalism in key countries of Western Europe since 1967, and the rhythm and the scope of working class radicalism in other imperialist countries of the world: Japan, Australia, Canada, the USA. But Marxist analysis goes from the general to the particular, tries to understand the overall trend before it incorporates national peculiarities into this analysis. For reasons many times explained, the general trend is towards

a growing crisis of bourgeois society in all imperialist countries, including the US, towards a growing radicalisation and self-activity of the working class – especially the younger workers – everywhere, including the US. As we said after May 68 paraphrasing a formula of Marx's (and at that time there seemed to be general agreement about that statement): if the USA is the industrially most advanced country of the world, and show other capitalist countries their own industrial future, France is the politically most advanced country, and shows what is going to happen tomorrow politically in Britain and the day after tomorrow in Japan and in the USA.

The time-lag in the radicalisation of the American working class as a class, compared to the radicalisation of other sectors of the world proletariat, has already had grave consequences from an objective point of view. While we are finishing this article, several trade-unions in Australia in Italy, in Denmark have started or proposed industrial action on a high level against US imperialism's crimes in Vietnam. If the American working class had been ready to act the same way, the Vietnamese revolution would be victorious within a month. Similarly, the time-lag in the rhythm of maturing of the political revolution in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and in the USSR enabled the bureaucracy to inflict a grave defeat on the Czechoslovak working class in August 1968. The fact that the two numerically strongest sectors of the world proletariat – the American and the Soviet working class – have not yet joined the rising tide of world revolution, still gravely impedes and limits the upsurge at the present stage. And subjectively, this fact reflects itself also inside the world revolutionary movement,

inside the Fourth International. The present discussion is a partial expression of this fact.

As long as the proletariat is not yet entering the radicalisation process as a class, in the factories, it is understandable that the SWP Comrades attach great importance to subsequent waves of radicalisation at the periphery of the industrial society of the USA. A correct intervention in these successive waves will help to strengthen and train a larger cadre of revolutionarists, who in the next stage would then be able to intervene with increased strength in the key centres of the class struggle. The radicalisation processes among black people, among Chicanos, among youth, among women inevitably also has a growing impact inside the working class itself, as not a few workers after all are black, chicanos, young or women, themselves. It's not for people living thousands of miles away from the cities and brought where these interventions are being made to judge whether all tactical aspects of them have been correct or not.

While the need to give priority to participation in the existing and unfolding process of radicalisation seems to us to have been correctly assessed, we wonder whether this has been sufficiently combined with the need for deliberately trying to win to the party the vanguard elements which are thrown up by such a radicalisation process. After all, the impact of the **Transitional Programme** lies primarily in its overall answer to the crisis of society. To limit the activity of revolutionary party essentially to providing answers to particular needs thrown up by sectors of the masses which progressively are drawn into the radicalisation process cannot satisfy the more radical elements. The whole idea of

“transitional programmes” for sectors of the masses must at least be submitted to a critical discussion, as the very nature of the **Transitional Programme** lies in its function to bring the masses through their own experience to a *single* conclusion: the need to struggle for power, to make a socialist revolution.

In the same sense, we wonder whether e.g. in the mass antiwar movement, which the SWP has helped to organize in such an exemplary way, it wouldn't have been necessary *to combine* a general united front approach toward mobilizing the maximum number of people for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam, with a more specific propaganda directed to a more limited vanguard, explaining the need to support the Vietnamese revolution till its final victory (i.e. the need to support the process of permanent revolution unfolding in Vietnam). While the largest possible mass demonstrations for the withdrawal of the US troops were undoubtedly the best contributions which American revolutionists could make to the victory of the Vietnamese revolution – and in that sense we entirely approved and approve the SWP's line in the antiwar movement – withdrawal of troops does not *equal* victory of the Vietnamese revolution, as subsequent events have stressed sufficiently. To continue a more limited solidarity movement with the Vietnamese revolution, once the US troops had been withdrawn, could have been prepared by a more combined approach to agitation and propaganda, which, incidently, would have helped recruitment among vanguard elements too.

Whatever may be the opinion one arrives at on the question, the pre-conditions of the “single-issue-campaigns-

orientation” should be correctly understood and not idealised, so as not to make a virtue out of what could be considered, in the last hypothesis a dire necessity. In his contribution to the 1971 pre-convention discussion of the SWP Comrade George Novack expressed the problem in a nutshell:

“At the present stage of development, the best way to strengthen our forces for reaching the working class is to deploy our cadres, as we have been doing for the past ten years of our growth, in those sectors of social struggle that are presently more intensely radicalised and open to rapid recruitment. Success in this endeavour will prepare our party for more extensive and intensive activity among the organised workers when and as their insurgency manifests itself and begins to match that of the more aroused and advanced contingents of the populations already in motion.

“... All the fruitful work that can be done among the organised workers is integral to our line. We have several hundred union members who are conducting political activity, as far as possible among the militants they are in contact with. We are likewise involved in several struggles on a local or national scale in the building trades, railroad workers, auto, teachers and other public employee unions. However important they are in themselves and for the future, these continuing activities perforce occupy a secondary status in our total operations, and, while they can be expected to expand, will not command priority until and unless large sections of the industrial workers go into action.”
(George Novack, *Schematism or Marxism?*, **SWP Discussion Bulletin**, Vol.29 No.14, July 1971, p.3)

Once the SWP leadership accepts this method of approach, it must accept the correctness and timeliness of the turns towards the industrial working class implies in the European perspectives documents, lest doubts are cast on its own ability to make a similar turn in the US “when the conditions ripen for such an orientation.”

After all, during the last four years we have had more than 10 million workers on strike in France, (the largest part

participating in a general strike), more than 15 million in Italy, at least three million in Britain and more than a million in Spain. In several other Western European countries like Belgium, Sweden, West Germany, Denmark and Holland, the working class upsurge and radicalisation, while having been slower and more modest, is nevertheless real and strikingly opposed to the downward trend of working class struggles and consciousness during the preceding years. "The insurgency of the organised workers" has certainly manifested itself and more than matched that "of the more aroused and advanced contingents of the population already in motion." Conditions are certainly ripe for such an orientation towards the industrial workers under circumstances where "large sections of the industrial workers have already gone into action." Under these circumstances isn't the general line of the European perspectives document absolutely in conformity with the very projections the SWP leadership makes itself for a future stage of its own orientation inside the US, "when and as" the radicalisation process pushes the proletariat as a class to the forefront of the mass movement? Which doesn't imply either that you have to wait to millions of workers are already on the move, before making a decisive turn in that direction.

Once the working class gets into motion, an extremely powerful centripetal force is introduced into all rebellious mass movements in an advanced industrial country, precisely because of the overwhelming weight of the industrial proletariat in society. In most of the European countries, to have a correct and practical orientation towards the working class and towards industrial action becomes a precondition for an efficient intervention in the student and high school field, because when massive strikes

occur again and again, when the confrontation between Capital and Labour is in the centre of political debate, controversy and polarisation, students increasingly view even their own particular demands as tied in and integrated with the broader issues around which the test of strength between the working class and the capitalists is developing. To hesitate or waver in applying an orientation which gives priority to interventions in working class struggles under such conditions means to reduce even the possibilities of recruiting students or high school students to the revolutionary organisations.

Instead of rejecting the general line of the Thesis on the building of revolutionary mass parties in capitalist Europe, the leadership of the SWP should have carefully studied this document, and the overall experience of the European Trotskyist movement during the last couple of years which it summarises, because such a study would enable it to have a preview of some of the questions with which they will be confronted in the coming years in the US, when the radicalisation of the industrial working class will gather momentum. They should especially ponder one of the key lessons which experience has taught the European Trotskyist cadres and which is likely to repeat itself in the US, to wit the important role which the young workers, less controlled by the union bureaucracies, will play in the coming working class upsurge in the USA, the first signs of which are already visible.

The relationship of these young workers to the established unions is more complex than that of the generation of the thirties and the forties which built the CIO. It is undisputed that no large-scale radicalisation of the American working

class is possible without a tidal wave of upheaval expressing that radicalisation inside the trade unions.

But one cannot dismiss in advance that, given the extreme degree of bureaucratisation of some trade-unions, the close collaboration of some of their leaders with the bourgeois state apparatus, and the extreme resistance to change which many of these bureaucrats show, the insurgency of the young workers could in some cases – like in the thirties – bypass the existing union channels and take several new directions, either that of new unions or that of setting up factory committees directly. The rich experience of new organisational forms thrown up by the upsurge of the Western European working class during the last years – of which the elected “conveyor-belt-delegates” of the Italian metal workers union, elected by the unionised and non-unionised workers alike, but recognised by the unions as representatives of all the workers, are the most impressive one – should be carefully studied by the American Comrades. The discussion around the European thesis should be used for an educational discussion around these fundamental issues, which are extremely important for the future of the SWP itself, and not for throwing in red herrings of “ultraleftism,” “short-term-conquest-of-power-perspectives,” or “missing-the-opportunities-of-the-women’s-liberation-movement” type. After all, Comrade Cannon’s most important contribution to the development of Trotskyist theory is entitled **The Struggle for a Proletarian Party**, not **The Struggle for a Single-Issue-Campaigns Party**.

24. The Meaning of the Transitional Programme

Both the question of the concrete intervention in mass struggles developing in various parts of the world, and the question of building a proletarian party, evolve in the last analysis around the correct understanding of the function of the **Transitional Programme**, a problem which we have encountered in judging the differences on Latin America as well as the turn of the 9th World Congress, the meaning of the European Thesis as well as the underlying reasons for the SWP leadership's resistance to accept the general line of that thesis.

The question boils down essentially to this: is the function of the **Transitional Programme** exclusively or mainly a function of recruiting individual militants to the revolutionary vanguard organisation, a function of assisting Trotskyists in cadre building? Or to pose the question even in a more general way: what is the nature of the inadequacy of the subjective factor which, in spite of historically favourable objective conditions, has till now prevented the victory of socialist revolutions in the industrialised countries of the world?

Trotsky himself answered the question without ambiguity: the subjective immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard. The two factors – the insufficient level of proletarian class consciousness, and the weakness of the revolutionary party – are, from a Marxist, i.e., dialectical point of view, intertwined. The solution of the crisis of proletarian leadership is the product of a dual process: the raising of the class consciousness of the proletariat and the building of a revolutionary mass party. Neither one can be

solved without the other being solved too. A powerful revolutionary party cannot trick an essentially reformist working class into “making a socialist revolution without really trying,” or without even noticing it. A powerful party claiming to be revolutionary which has not succeeded in raising the level of class consciousness significantly above its present level would be in serious trouble to prove that it has done its revolutionary duty, i.e., that it has really acted like a revolutionary party. And where could such a powerful revolutionary party originate from if not from the rapidly increasing class consciousness of a growing number of layers of the working class, itself made possible by a growing crisis of capitalism and growing mass activity, but by no means a mechanical reflection or a simple product of these objective conditions?

It thus follows that the key task which the **Transitional Programme** lays before revolutionary cadres is the task to raise the level of consciousness, of subjective maturity, of the working class. And while it encompasses also several other essential tasks, at least One of the key tasks of building a revolutionary Leninist party boils down to the same function likewise. This implies something quite different from adaptation to a given level of mass consciousness in order to organise mass actions which are as broad as possible. It gives a special stamp to those kinds of mass actions, around those kinds of slogans, which in given concrete objective situation, in function of a given objective dynamics of the class struggle, assists in the most efficient possibly way significant sector of the working class to understand, through their own experience the need for a socialist revolution, the need for a decisive break with capitalist

relations of production, the need to set up their own organs of power (Soviets and workers militias).

In the light of this analysis of the dual function of the **Transitional Programme**, the “general line of the 9th World Congress” becomes integrated into an overall estimate of the world situation and our tasks. What this “general line” helps us to understand, is *the specific form of “party-building” and of “cadre-building” which is both possible and necessary, once a pre-revolutionary situation starts to unfold*, and a mass vanguard starts to appear, capable of acting independently from the control of the traditional labour bureaucracies. Class struggle initiatives taken by our sections, related to our view of the dynamics of the mass upsurge which is unfolding, can only help us recruit these elements for our organisations which have the ability to become revolutionary mass leaders, if and when these initiatives correspond to the needs of the most militant sectors of the masses, which will be tomorrow recognised by much broader masses as their needs as well. This is not a restrictive formula. It does not mean that we should only take initiatives in the field of workers control struggles in Western Europe, to take that most obvious example. But it means that the vanguard role of the party will only be recognised by the mass vanguard inasmuch as the party responds to those new, revolutionary trends of the objective situation, and shows itself capable of initiative and centralization on these fields. And only through organised initiatives in action can a real contribution be made to significantly raising the level of class consciousness of broader masses; propaganda alone cannot achieve important results in that key field.

This does not mean, needless to say, that a revolutionary vanguard can, under favourable conditions, artificially “electrify” the workers into sudden leaps forward of their class consciousness. A sober and realistic assessment of immediate perspectives and possibilities of the class struggle, based on correct assessment of the correlation of class forces, both economically and politically, on the depth and immediate dynamics of the contradictions of capitalism and the way in which different classes of society react to them, is essential to solving that task. This is why the call to the formation of a tendency which 19 members of the IEC issued during the December 1972 IEC session underlines that the role and the function of the **Transitional Programme** in a pre-revolutionary (and revolutionary) situation needs to be clarified. But the SWP leadership has to seriously ponder whether its objections against the armed struggle orientation of the Bolivian and Argentine sections; whether its objections against the European Thesis; whether its tendency to extent exceptional characteristics of the Black and Chicano liberation struggle in the USA to a generalised concept of “Trotskyism = consistent nationalism” in all kinds of oppressed or semi-colonial nationalities around the world; whether the blind eye it turns on obvious right-wing tail-endist deviations of the Canadian section’s majority, of the Moreno group and of the minority tendency of the IMG, do not fundamentally originate from a wrong onesided concept of the function of the **Transitional Programme** under conditions of growing working class upsurge, of imminent or already real pre-revolutionary crisis in society.

25. The Need to Build an International Leadership

One of the most fundamental characteristics of Leninism is its quality of posing consciously and deliberately all aspects of the subjective factor in history, not only the problems of party building but also the problems of the party leadership. We have to add today to this classical formulation: not only the problem of building a new revolutionary International, but also the problem of building an international leadership.

Leninism abhors spontaneism and the resigned expectation that “somehow things will arrange themselves in the long run.” Nothing “will arrange itself which is not consciously conceived, planned, prepared and striven for. The time has come to draw the necessary conclusions from this elementary truth of Leninism on the level of building the leadership of the International too.

When we said that there is a real danger that with the growth of the world Trotskyist movement, its deeper involvement in mass movements of various countries not only in a propagandistic or commenting but in an active leadership capacity, the uneven development of world revolution would start to express itself in our own ranks, we approached the problem from the materialist hypothesis that social existence, social reality, determines consciousness, and not the other way around. Conscious revolutionists try to remain masters of their own political and theoretical evolution – that’s after all the first function of a correct, scientific programme and method of political analysis. But they would not be fully conscious Marxists,

materialists, if they wouldn't be simultaneously conscious of the objective limitations imposed on that mastery.

Therefore, if we want to avoid a growing process of differentiation inside the movement, expressing growing differences in actual experiences of party building and interventions in mass movements – in the last analysis in function of growing unevenness of the world revolutionary process – we should strive to create the best possible conditions to overcome these limitations. These best possible conditions imply the creation of a collective day-to-day international leadership, working as a political team, trying to *integrate* at the highest level of consciousness which our movement is today capable of reaching (and of which we all feel the inadequacies compared to the needs of the epoch: there are alas no new Marx, no new Lenins and no new Trotskys around) the constantly changing and varying experiences in intervention in the class struggle and in party building on a world scale.

We say deliberately working as a *team*, and working as a *political* team. The problem thrown up by the development of the Fourth International since 1968 itself cannot be solved on the level of collaboration between national leaderships. It cannot be solved on the level of creating a stronger international administrative apparatus. All that is absolutely indispensable. Any progress made in that direction should be welcomed. But the key problem is not there. The key problem is that of creating a team, each member of which deliberately tries to *transcend* his national experience of class struggle intervention and party building, in order to judge in a more mature way the problems of class struggle intervention and party building on an international scale. It

means, in other words, a conscious attempt to transform the uneven development of the Fourth International, which expresses the uneven development of the world revolutionary process, into a less uneven and more combined development, which would be a source of tremendous strength and unity for our world movement. Needless to say, the leading cadres of the North American Trotskyist movement could play an extremely important role in the building of such a team, provided they understand the need for this deliberate and planned worldwide integration of experience and revolutionary consciousness. Common programme and common principles are obviously necessary preconditions for such an endeavour. But such a common programme and common principles exist today. Majority and minority tendencies alike share the same views on the nature of capitalism and socialism, on the necessity of a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, on the theory of permanent revolution, on the necessity of political revolutions in the bureaucratised workers state, on the nature of labour bureaucracies, both in the unions and revisionist mass parties of the capitalist countries and in the bureaucratised workers states, i.e., on reformism and Stalinism, on the Leninist theory of organisation and of the state, on the Transitional Programme, on the need to build revolutionary vanguard parties of the proletariat, on the need to conquer the majority of the toiling masses before power can be wrested from the ruling classes, on the way to build a classless society. Important differences exist on the field of political analysis and evaluation of various orientations of intervention in the class struggle, in some parts of the world. But these differences do not destroy the programmatic unity of the movement.

As a matter of fact, a few months ago, leading representatives of the majority and the minority tried to edit together a full programme for the Fourth International, encompassing, in addition to the transitional programme, an analysis of class society, capitalism, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the building of a classless society, following indications of Trotsky of 1938. They agreed without too many difficulties on practically the whole draft, except a couple of paragraphs concerning the exact formulations relative to the place of armed struggle in the class struggle and the building of the revolutionary party. These differences in formulation reflect the differences at present discussed in the pre-world-congress discussion. But they likewise reflect the large field of programmatic agreement which ties the world movement together.

Precisely because the differences reflect various methods and experiences of class struggle intervention in various parties of the world, and possible differences in analysis of given situations and perspectives, the building of an integrated international leadership team which deliberately tries to transcend limitations of purely national experiences in this field, would be the most efficient way to try and consciously overcome them. Not by sweeping the real differences under the carpet or trying to “solve” them through compromise formulas: but by re-examining them and (at least we hope in the future) limiting them, by looking upon them deliberately not in the light of abstract principles but in the light of concrete class struggle experiences and different class struggle needs in various parts of the world.

If such a deliberate attempt is not undertaken, the danger that various parts of the world movement grow more and

more apart under the pressure of a different *praxis* of class struggle intervention and party building, reflecting the unevenness of the world revolutionary development, becomes very real.

What we call for is not the long-term “uprooting” of nationally leading cadres of the movement. Experience has shown the dangers of such an uprooting. In addition, it would lead to a nucleus of a world leadership much too small to tackle the tremendous job which must be fulfilled today. Rather what we have in mind is a rotation system in which the strongest sections of the movement and the most qualified leading cadres participate 3-4 years in the international leadership, living and working together in the same town, and forming a daily leadership team of the world movement. The movement has today the resources to make this solution possible. Anything less than that solution will increase the difficulties instead of solving them.

What this also implies is the deliberate attempt for each of the members of that team not to operate as the representative of “his” section, or “his” continental sector of the world movement, but to acquire a global outlook towards the problems of development of the world revolution and of building the Fourth International. Of course, nobody can request of any leading cadre that he should cut himself arbitrarily off from his own national organisation, his own experience and his own background. That would not only be impossible. It would be counter-productive, as the capital of experience which he has to bring to this team is essentially of a national character. But it means that a deliberate attempt be made to transcend the inevitable limitations of that national background, and to integrate the various

different and sometimes conflicting national experiences into a higher body of understanding and consciousness.

The main function of such an international leadership would be fourfold:

1. To step up and to centralise the work of analysis of global and international developments, substantially increasing thereby the aid to the sections and the political impact of our movement in the world vanguard. Our political and theoretical superiority is still by far the strongest weapon of our movement. It is insufficiently husbanded and applied to uses of party building and expansion the world over.
2. To determine priorities in the use of existing resources for international expansion of the Fourth International to areas where viable sections or even initial nuclei do not yet exist, and where the importance of unfolding or expected development makes a physical presence of our movement vitally necessary.
3. To co-ordinate all those activities among those sectors of the world movement where the development of the international class struggle makes such a co-ordination urgently necessary (anti-imperialist work, industrial work in multinational corporations, solidarity work with unfolding revolutionary struggles, defence work for victims of repression, work among immigrant workers and students, etc.).
4. To assist those sections and sectors of the world movement who ask for such assistance, in solving current political and organisational leadership problems by bringing broader collective experience to bear upon them.

It would be a tragedy if the Fourth International, which embodies the highest level of internationalist consciousness of our epoch, would be less capable of international integration of forces, and international establishment of priorities, than international capital, the Stalinist

bureaucracy or even the trade union bureaucrats who, by their very nature, are torn apart by conflicting material interests and national narrowness of outlook. It would be a tragedy if the Fourth International, in the epoch of multinational corporations, of world banking, of global military strategy and of space travel, would be unable to make this modest next step in the direction of international organisation, which is the building of a permanent day-to-day international leadership team.

26. The Present Discussion and the Building of the Fourth International

The discussion starting around the orientation and methods of intervention and party building in Latin America and extending now to Europe has been going on for more than three years. It has led to the call for the creation of two international tendencies inside the world movement. All experienced cadres understand the gravity of such a call, and the dangers which arise out of it for the unity of the International. At the same time, the way in which the Fourth International will go through this experience could make an important contribution, not only to its own strengthening, but also to the re-education of the whole young mass vanguard on a world scale, in the superiority of the Leninist concept of democratic centralism – and not its various bureaucratic caricatures – as the organisational framework for the revolutionary movement

In spite of the youthful character of the great majority of the membership of the world movement at the present stage, and in spite of elements of immaturity, impatience and inexperience which inevitably accompany this youthfulness, our movement is perfectly capable of a worldwide organised fully democratic discussion, in which all the key issues in dispute are presented before the membership, in which the

membership can read and listen to the full debate in swing, then make up its mind and elect a world congress which scrupulously respects all the rights of national and international minority tendencies, whichever they may be in the present debate. There is some delay in the publication of document in some key languages; this delay can be and will be rapidly overcome, taking into consideration the – for our movement – exceptional dimension of the literary contributions and the limited resources of smaller language sectors of the world movement. There is time enough left before the World Congress to enable all sectors of the world movement to familiarise themselves with the key issues and to decide themselves the outcome of the discussion at this stage. Whatever may be the misgivings we can have in front of the appearance of two international tendencies, they represent at the same time to a certain point a guarantee of the unity of the movement. The constitution of the minority tendency means a call for a change of political line of the world movement, and for a change of leadership. This is entirely legitimate. But it would be platonic and a waste of time, if decisions of world congresses of a general political nature would stop being considered binding for international minorities. Surely nobody can be naive to the point to think that he could impose majority decisions when he is in a majority, while refusing to apply them as long as he is in a minority.

The call for the constitution of a minority tendency therefore has only a meaning inasmuch as it implies the recognition that within certain limits, determined by the statutes, world congress decisions are binding for the whole world movement.

In this sense, the constitution of the two international tendencies is a step forward compared to a situation in which differences arose essentially between national

sections, or between national sections and the international centre. When two international tendencies confront each other in the world movement on an international basis, this means in reality that a given degree of democratic centralism on an international scale becomes recognised as an indispensable organisational infrastructure of the world Trotskyist movement.

In that field, it is necessary to advance cautiously and with the utmost tact and sense of responsibility. The Fourth International, contrary to the First, the Second and Third one, does not dispose of any material basis which exercises a restraining influence on centrifugal tendencies. We are neither based on mass trade-unions nor on mass parties nor on workers states. The only form of discipline which is applicable in such a movement is discipline which Comrades freely accept to apply. This might seem a weakness compared to the material strength of previous international organisations. In the long run it will appear as a tremendous source of strength, because it expresses freely accepted discipline based on a much higher degree of programmatic agreement, i.e., of class consciousness, than was the case in any of the previous international organisations of the working class.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the pressure to which the unity of the movement is submitted under conditions of growing political differences – be they of a conjunctural and non-programmatic nature – can only be safely wintered if the two key conditions of democratic centralism are respected: if minority is convinced that it enjoys unrestricted democratic rights in discussion periods to develop its points of view before the membership, to get a fair hearing and thereby has a chance of gradually convincing sectors of the movement of the correctness of its ideas, providing events and experience confirm that correctness; if the majority is

convinced that the minority does not claim rights without duties, is willing to recognise majority decisions, to loyally accept the majority leadership leads the movement after a democratic discussion has established who is the majority and who is the minority, and gives the majority a chance to prove in practice and through experience that its point of view was correct.

There are no reasons why these two key conditions should not be respected in the world movement today. We underlined already that the broad programmatic agreement which unites the two tendencies is a guarantee that this unity remains a principled one. We should add another consideration, which the most responsible Comrades on both sides certainly understand and include in their perspectives: regardless of exceptional circumstances in this or that country, where there either are not yet Trotskyist organisations or where these are numerically very weak, the great bulk of the cadre of the world Trotskyist movement is today inside the organisation of the Fourth International and its co-thinkers. Even if differences in the approach to class struggle intervention in this or that country are important, surely the existence of Trotskyist cadres is the prime precondition for the efficient application of any tactic of party building. Surely experience has taught us that it takes many years to educate an experienced revolutionary Marxist cadre. The hope to get better results for this or that specific tactic by by-passing the existing cadre – what we are in the habit of calling organisational sectarianism – which has been at the basis of so many splits in the world Trotskyist movement during the last 25 years, has proved itself utterly Utopian in 9 out of 10 cases. On a world scale it is 100% utopian.

Therefore, there exists a strong principled objective basis for safe-guarding the unity of the world movement in spite of

the heated discussion now going on, provided the key conditions of democratic centralism which we mentioned above are respected on both sides. We ourselves will do whatever possible to have them respected.

In the process of transformation of the world Trotskyist movement from propaganda groups into organisations capable of political initiatives in the class struggle, the coherence and the growth of the Fourth International is a key element of strength. Besides our programme, the existence of our international organisation – which is part of our programme – is our main distinctive feature. There are many nationally organised centrist or ultra-left groups in the world, many weaker than our national sections in the given country, some a bit stronger. But there is only one really functioning international organisation: the Fourth International. This has been a source of great confidence and appeal for Trotskyists the world over, since the reunification congress. At a time when the world Stalinist movement has fallen apart into at least half a dozen rival “centres”; when the maoist groupings are hopelessly split in nearly all countries and haven’t even been able to create a semblance of an international body, when Healy splits with Lambert who can’t even agree with his closest ally, Lora – the cause of his split with Healy – the existence and the strengthening of the Fourth International is an absolute precondition for the continuation, not to say the acceleration, of the pace of growth which we have been enjoying since 1968.

Let us show to the revolutionary mass vanguard the world over the validity not only of the Leninist programme but also of the Leninist organisational principles. Let us demonstrate, by the way in which we conduct ourselves in this international debate, that revolutionary Marxists who, against the heaviest odds in world history, have already been

capable of building a world party which today counts thousands of members and influences hundreds of thousands of people, are apt to organise a democratic discussion on disputed question, apt to respect the rights of tendencies, apt to guarantee the freest discussion which ever existed inside the international labour movement, and in the same time capable of maintaining unity of action on the basis of majority decisions and majority leadership, thanks to a common programme and a community of principles and of revolutionary goals. If we can achieve that, and understand the wise point formulated by Lenin that in every discussion one will learn something, because errors themselves are sources of higher consciousness as they generally reveal new aspects of reality but in a one-sided and exaggerated way, the present discussion will prove itself to have been a fruitful stage in the history of building the Fourth International, in the history of solving the crisis of proletarian leadership which is more than ever at the root of the crisis of mankind today.

January 5, 1973

E. Germain

