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In the document *[In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International](#)*, we specified four points of Marxist theory on the national question in the imperialist epoch, points that seemed dangerously misunderstood by the majority of the Canadian section:

1. The need to make a distinction between supporting all demands for self-determination advanced by the oppressed nationalities on the one hand, and support to nationalism, a bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology that can be used against the struggle for the emancipation

of the exploited and oppressed masses on the other.

2. The need, since the beginning of the revolutionary process in the backward countries, to consider the national question as inextricably linked to the agrarian question and to other tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution that have not been carried out in these countries; *that is, the need to avoid considering a phase of “national liberation” as a separate entity distinct from the overall process of permanent revolution in these countries.*
3. The need to make a distinction between the role of the national question (and of democratic demands in general) in the backward countries and its role in the imperialist countries.
4. The need to approach the national question, as Lenin said, by beginning:

“... 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 ...” (*Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question*, **Collected Works**, Vol.31, p.145.)

We believe that fundamental aspects of the Marxist theory on the national question are involved (not just those cited above, obviously, but rather all the aspects on which there was disagreement during the discussion). After reading Comrade Gus Horowitz's discussion bulletin, *Comrade Germain's Errors on the National Question (International Internal Discussion Bulletin, Vol.10, No.10, July 1973)*, the least that can be said is that his position is not clear in this regard. In fact, he has succeeded in covering twenty-four densely packed pages without giving the slightest resemblance of a reply to the questions that have been raised; instead he dredges up spurious quarrels over interpretations, presents us with a scholastic study of "quotations" and "counter-quotations," and refrains from dotting the i's and crossing the t's where this is required for clarity in the debate.

Unfortunately, resorting to these subterfuges can only confirm the impression that has already emerged from the documents of the Canadian section cited in *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*. We are confronted with the beginning of a revision of Marxism, a beginning whose implications are pregnant with consequences in many areas.

**Once Again: Permanent Revolution and
Revolution by Stages,
Or How to Unscramble Scrambled Eggs**

We have emphasized what in our opinion constitutes the fundamental basis of the theory of permanent revolution, that is, the fact that semi-feudal, imperialist, “national” capitalist, and other relations of exploitation *overlap* to such an extent in the backward countries that it is absolutely impossible to make a distinction between “stages” in the revolutionary process. The dynamic of the class struggle is decisive, no matter whether the revolutionary struggle first breaks out against a foreign colonial or imperialist power, whether it first breaks out against despotic “national” oppression, or whether it is first set off by the agrarian revolution or by strikes of students or workers. And if the revolutionary process is to escape being throttled by counterrevolution, its leadership must pass over to the working class allied with the poor peasantry. This is true not only because the “national bourgeoisie’s” ties to imperialism render it incapable of leading to victory the struggle for national independence, but also and above all because the peasants begin to occupy the land that belongs to them, and the workers begin to challenge the exploitation in their factories. *By virtue of its class interests the bourgeoisie inevitably passes over into the camp of counterrevolution*: this is the basic reason why proletarian leadership is indispensable for a victorious revolution, even in backward countries.

The fact that the bourgeoisie only vacillates in the struggle for national liberation is just a single and minor aspect of a much broader phenomenon: its opposition to the interests of the proletariat and the poor (and even middle) peasantry compels it to slide over into the camp of counterrevolution.

Comrade Horowitz makes solemn declarations to the effect that he is in agreement with this highly orthodox exposition of the theory of permanent revolution. He states he is completely satisfied with our outline of the *combined* character of the tasks of the permanent revolution. But once he enters the polemic, he makes it clear that what he is really trying to do is to unscramble the white of the egg from its yolk insofar as combined development is concerned:

“Two experiences are worth noting in this regard: the liberation struggles in Palestine and in Bangladesh. In both of these struggles similar democratic nationalist demands (?) were put forward and won wide mass support: ‘for a democratic, secular Palestine’ and ‘for a democratic, secular Bangladesh.’ Proponents of these demands include (!) bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists. The leadership of Fateh, for example, a petty-bourgeois nationalist organization, was the main popularizer of the demand for a democratic, secular Palestine. Naturally the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders did not have any intentions of advancing the socialist revolution. They interpreted these slogans in their own way, linking them to their own class programs which are opposed to the program of Marxism. Does this mean that revolutionary Marxists are duty bound to *oppose* these democratic demands and *counterpose* to them on all occasions specifically socialist slogans?

“No, not at all. These democratic demands corresponded to the interests of the proletarian and peasant masses: for political democracy; for separation of religion and the state; for a specific expression of national self-determination (a unitary Palestine, an independent Bangladesh).

Revolutionary Marxists have the duty to advance demands like these, at the same time to show how the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalists betray the struggle for these demands, and point to the socialist revolution as the only way to achieve them. For example, in raising the demand for political democracy, revolutionary Marxists differentiate themselves from the Menshevik-Stalinist concept for forming a classless democratic *state*, a formula which generally conceals the goal of forming a bourgeois state.

“These demands, linked with other democratic, immediate, and transitional demands indicated in our transitional program, have the potential for mobilizing the oppressed proletarian and peasant masses in struggle against their oppressors and exploiters.” (Horowitz, p.9)

Comrade Horowitz’s entire scholastic confusion is summed up in these two paragraphs.

No one in our movement has ever denied that even a struggle for an independent *bourgeois* state in Bangladesh would be progressive. We have written quite clearly that it is the duty of revolutionary Marxists to support *every* demand that expresses oppressed nationalities’ right to self-determination. The right to their own state is the most fundamental expression of self-determination. We do not understand, therefore, who it is among us that Comrade Horowitz is polemicizing against on this point.

Comrade Horowitz then manages to say in one sentence the exact opposite of what he said in a previous sentence. First he says we support the demand for a “democratic Bangladesh” or a “democratic Palestine”; then he says we “differentiate” ourselves from the Menshevik-Stalinist concept of a “classless, democratic state.” But the slogan for a “democratic and secular Palestine” or a “democratic and

secular Bangladesh” is characterized precisely by the fact that the class nature of the state has not been specified! Perhaps by this formulation Comrade Horowitz *means to imply* a workers state. But 99.99 percent of the Palestinians and Bengalis who read or heard his call for a “democratic, secular Palestine” or for a “democratic, secular Bangladesh” would understand this slogan as meaning precisely a “democratic state” without a specific class content, something that could only serve as a cover for a *bourgeois state*. Thus if revolutionary Marxists advance this slogan *themselves*, that means (whether one wishes it or not) that they are declaring themselves in favor of a bourgeois-democratic state.

Comrade Horowitz’s line of argument focuses exclusively on “slogans” and is totally propagandistic. Underlying this argument is the concept that so long as there is no mass revolutionary party it is impossible to do anything but carry out propaganda work. But once the question is approached from the point of view of *revolutionary Marxists’ intervention in the struggle*, a sage dosage of slogans is no longer the priority. It is then appropriate to *anticipate the dynamic of mass struggles*, and to emphasize in particular the aspects of the struggles that permit the dialectic of permanent revolution to unfold fully.

This means that once the Arab or Bengali revolutionary process is set in motion, revolutionary Marxists are duty bound to explain the following to the workers and peasants:

“We are opposed to all national and imperialist oppression. We support an Arab republic, an independent Palestine and Bangladesh, even if bourgeois. But we do not make a distinction between the struggle for national independence and the struggle for distributing the land. Take up the arms you are offered, seize them when they are not offered; fight the imperialist oppressor, but do not limit yourselves to fighting

the foreign enemy. Occupy the land! Form peasant leagues! Organize the workers in unions! Never forget your class interests, which are irreconcilably opposed to those of the landlords and the 'national' capitalists. Mobilize the maximum number of forces possible in the revolutionary process, *under a leadership independent of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships*. Your national and social liberation is at stake, and the one is indissolubly linked to the other."

Naturally, it is difficult to describe this language as "nationalist." But it is the language of Trotskyists who understand the *combined* character of the revolution.

At the beginning of the growth of the mass movement, no one can tell whether or not a certain line will carry the majority of the workers and peasants. In other words, no one can tell at what point in the revolutionary process the proletariat, supported by the poor peasantry, will be able to gain hegemony over the revolutionary process, wrenching it away from the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist parties. But it is certain that it is the duty of revolutionary Marxists to fight along these lines *right from the beginning*. With this aim in mind, demands for agrarian revolution and for defense of the material interests of the working class must be linked *from the beginning* with demands for national liberation. It is obvious that propaganda *focusing* on the slogans "for a democratic, secular Palestine" and "for a democratic secular Bangladesh" does not permit attaining this goal. These so-called slogans, incidentally, are not, as Comrade Horowitz states, advanced by everyone, including the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaderships of the national movement. They are *deliberately* put forward in the struggle by the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaderships in order to *separate* the agrarian revolution and the emancipation of the working class from the struggle for

national liberation. By providing a cover for this classical maneuver, by going so far as to become an accomplice, Comrade Horowitz abandons the theory of permanent revolution and goes over to the concept of revolution by stages.

What is the actual meaning of his thesis that it is necessary to support the slogans mentioned above while “at the same time [showing] how the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalists betray the struggle for these demands”? Apart from a purely propagandistic concept of the struggle (“unmask the traitors by driving them into a corner”), it involves the notion that before the role of the bourgeois leaderships can be called into question, they must first be *put to a political test* to prove that they will not go “all the way” in a struggle for national independence.

It is not as easy as Comrade Horowitz thinks to carry out this political test in a rapid and convincing manner. Consider the task of “convincing” the Algerian peasants that the leading wing of the ANL [National Liberation Army] around Colonel Boumédiène did not go “all the way” in the struggle for national independence. That will perhaps convince a few who have already made up their minds, but it will hardly sway the broad masses before they go through a number of painful experiences.

It is much easier, however, to convince them of the fact that the agrarian revolution has not been achieved. They can see this every day. But making this argument pay off politically would have required establishing an indissoluble link between national liberation and the agrarian revolution from the very beginning of the Algerian revolution.

According to Comrade Horowitz’s thesis, in the mass movement in the backward countries the differentiation between the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders of the

national movement on the one hand, and the revolutionary vanguard on the other, revolves essentially, if not exclusively, around the question of who is the best “nationalist.” We counterpose to this the thesis that the differentiation appears above all through the struggle *for specific* (peasants, workers, democratic, and even national) *demands in which class interests place the bourgeoisie and the well-to-do petty-bourgeoisie on one side of the barricades, and the workers and poor peasants on the other.* Comrade Horowitz’s thesis leads toward a “revolution by stages,” while ours leads to the classical application of the theory of permanent revolution:

“Really to arouse the workers and peasants against imperialism, is possible only by connecting their basic and most profound life interests with the cause of the country’s liberation. A workers’ strike – small or large – an agrarian rebellion, an uprising of the oppressed sections in city and country against the usurer, against the bureaucracy, against the local military satraps, all that arouses the multitudes, that welds them together, that educates, steels, is a real step forward on the road to the revolutionary and social liberation of the Chinese people. Without that, the military successes and failures of the Right, semi-Right or semi-Left generals will remain foam on the surface of the ocean. But everything that brings the oppressed and exploited masses of the toilers to their feet, inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists. The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants is not weakened, but, on the contrary, it is sharpened by imperialist oppression, to the point of bloody civil war at every serious conflict.” (Leon Trotsky: *The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin*, May 17, 1927, in **Problems of the Chinese Revolution**, p.22, University of Michigan Press edition.)

And further:

“Insofar as a victorious revolution will radically change the relation not only between the classes but also between the races and will assure to the blacks that place in the state that corresponds to their numbers, thus far will the *social* revolution in South Africa also have a *national* character.

“We have not the slightest reason to close our eyes to this side of the question or to diminish its significance. On the contrary, the proletarian party should in words and in deeds openly and boldly take the solution of the national (racial) problem in its hands.

“Nevertheless, the proletarian party can and must solve the national problem by *its own* methods.

“The historical weapon of national liberation can be only the *class struggle*. The Comintern, beginning in 1924, transformed the program of national liberation of colonial people into an empty democratic abstraction that is elevated above the reality of class relations. In the struggle against national oppression, different classes liberate themselves (temporarily) from material interests and become simple ‘anti-imperialist’ forces.” (Leon Trotsky: *On the South African Theses*, April 20, 1935, in **Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1934-35**, pp.249-50, Pathfinder Press. Emphasis in original.)

Alas, Comrade Horowitz as well is beginning to “transform the program of national liberation of colonial people into an empty democratic abstraction” by focusing his position on Palestine and Bangladesh around such slogans as “for a democratic, secular Palestine” and “for a democratic, secular Bangladesh,” and by not putting the *combination* of national, democratic, and agrarian tasks, and the defense of the

democratic *and material* interests of the workers and poor peasants at the center of the revolutionary Marxists' propaganda and agitation in the colonies, *from the very first stage* of the revolutionary process.

This has nothing to do with underestimating the importance of national demands. What is involved is an understanding of the fact *that they can only be fully realized when the poor peasants and workers rise up and organize themselves independently*. And this is only possible on the basis of defending *their own class interests*, not on the basis of some classless “nationalism.”

The deviations Comrade Horowitz's thesis can lead to was demonstrated by Comrade Tony Thomas when he sought in **The Militant** to defend Trotsky's interpretation of the Second Chinese Revolution against the Maoists. In his article, we find the following:

“The major tasks confronting a revolution to win national liberation for China included driving out the imperialists and smashing the reactionary Chang Tso-lin government; unifying the country; distributing the big landholders' lands to the hundreds of millions of peasants; establishing democratic liberties; and laying the groundwork for the industrialization and development of China. In addition to these democratic tasks *affecting the nation as a whole*, the growing working class in the cities was faced with vicious economic exploitation at the hands of both Chinese and foreign capitalists.” (**The Militant**, August 31, 1973. Emphasis added.)

To state that the agrarian revolution – the distribution of land – is a task that “affects the nation as a whole” is to close your eyes to the fact that not only the big landholders (who are also part of the nation), but also and especially the bourgeoisie, own the peasants'

land; and the fact that far from “unifying the country,” the agrarian revolution necessarily *divides* it along class lines. In an article published two weeks later, Comrade Tony Thomas correctly describes how the development of peasant mobilizations necessarily pushed the Chinese big bourgeoisie into the counterrevolutionary camp, given its ties to the big landholders. But, prisoner that he is to revisionist formulations a la Horowitz, he nonetheless persists in labeling as tasks that “affect the nation as a whole,” tasks that are really *the tasks of an irreconcilable class struggle between two parts of the same nation*.

The inextricable overlapping between national liberation and the agrarian revolution, between all the tasks faced by a revolution in a backward country, means that *national liberation in regard to imperialism cannot be accomplished without destroying national unity and class collaboration* within the oppressed nation.

This is the dialectic of the permanent revolution.

Oppressed Nationalities’ Right to Self-Determination and the Struggle Against Nationalist Ideology

We now have a better understanding of the logical connection between revolutionary Marxists’ unconditional defense of the right of oppressed nations to determine their own destiny – of the right of colonial peoples and national minorities to form

separate states if they so desire – and of all concrete demands that express this right, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, their relentless struggle against all nationalist ideology.

It is precisely because national liberation can only be achieved when the proletariat, allied with the poor peasants, has won the leadership of the revolutionary process; because it cannot win this leadership unless it organizes itself (as well as the peasant masses) independently of the nationalist bourgeoisie, on the basis of defense of its class interests; and because it can only organize itself in this way by continually developing the masses' distrust of and opposition to the "national bourgeoisie" and its petty-bourgeois nationalist appendages; it is for all these reasons that the struggle against the nationalist ideology of national unity, of national exclusiveness, of "classless" national collaboration, is absolutely indispensable. *Above all, it is indispensable even for accomplishing the national tasks of the revolution.*

Comrade Horowitz can only extricate himself by either making a pirouette and *identifying* the national-democratic demands of the oppressed masses with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist *ideology*, or by continuing to drift from Trotskyist positions to Menshevik-Stalinist positions of revolution by stages:

"It is true, of course, that the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation tries to use nationalism for its own class interests – up to a certain (!) extent and then only as a thoroughly deceptive and mystifying ideology. But what Comrade Germain fails to see is that in the era of permanent revolution, the nationalism of the masses of the oppressed nationalities tends to mesh with socialist consciousness not bourgeois ideology, because (!) the real momentum of the struggle for nationalist goals tends to mesh with the socialist revolution not the bourgeois revolution.

“Rather than ‘substituting’ or ‘covering’ for internationalism, the nationalism of the oppressed directed against their oppressors will tend to impel oppressed nations (!) in the direction of internationalism – provided, of course, that a revolutionary Marxist leadership is present to help advance the political consciousness of the masses. It is in that sense that we support the nationalism of oppressed nations.” (Horowitz, p.12.)

Thus we have “nations” oppressed as a whole, which will become internationalist provided, of course, that there is a “Leninist combat party,” the notion our international minority is so fond of. But aren’t nations, even oppressed nations, divided into social classes that are already well defined (with the exception, of course, of those we have called attention to in *In Defence of Leninism: Afro-Americans, Chicanos, South African Blacks, etc*)? Are the bourgeoisie and the well-to-do petty-bourgeoisie no longer part of the nation? Have they too become “internationalists”? Isn’t internationalism the result of educating working people in the spirit of irreconcilable class opposition, *not only in regard to imperialism but also in regard to their own bourgeoisie?* And how can workers’ class consciousness be labeled “nationalist” when it *combines* the struggle against imperialism with the class struggle against the landlords, the comprador bourgeoisie, and the “national bourgeoisie”? Does “nationalist” ideology imply a class struggle within the nation itself?

Once again, the notion underlying Comrade Horowitz's thinking is that of a revolution that first goes through a national stage. During this stage, according to his concept, all the classes are united against the national oppressor, and the "Leninist combat party" wins leadership of the national struggle bit by bit by proving it is a better fighter for "nationalism" than the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. But this concept, which is the only one that provides a logical and coherent basis for glorifying the nationalism of the oppressed nations, is in total opposition to the theory of permanent revolution, which holds that revolutionary Marxists must from the outset educate working people in the spirit of an irreconcilable class opposition toward their own bourgeoisie.

Comrade Horowitz agrees with our definition of nationalism as an ideology that was correct in the past. But what is the content of this ideology if not national solidarity, national collaboration, against foreign enemies? To deny this is to go against the whole of Marxist literature on the subject. To acknowledge it is to acknowledge that the *nationalism of oppressed nationalities, far from tending to overlap with socialist consciousness, is an obstacle on the path toward attaining this consciousness.* For socialist consciousness is a proletarian class-consciousness based on an understanding of the class struggle, whereas nationalist ideology seeks to deny or subordinate an understanding of the need for proletarians to carry out their class struggle against their own bourgeoisie, and seeks to establish supposed common national interests against the foreign oppressor, interests which, as Lenin rightly said, are actually those of the ruling classes.

Let's take up once again the example of Bangladesh. What is the content of the nationalist ideology of Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League? "East Bengal is oppressed by

Western Pakistan. Everyone will work together to create an independent Bangladesh – workers, poor peasants, kulaks, intellectuals, important and minor government officials, artisans, the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, usurers, and the agents of imperialism.” How does a revolutionary Marxist reply to this? Does he simply say, “Fine, but this struggle will only succeed under proletarian leadership”? That would be opportunism of the Maoist variety. Does he say on the contrary, “No, I disagree because we are content with defending our material interests as workers and peasants”? This would be economist sectarianism, with a good dose of opportunism (which, moreover, would become the dominant feature if this response is suggested from abroad, and still more so if suggested from a country that is oppressing Bangladesh).

In contrast to these two false responses, the correct reply is obviously the following:

“We support an independent Bangladesh 100 percent because the peasants and workers cannot liberate themselves as a class if they are still oppressed as a nation. For this reason we will be in the front lines of the fight for an independent Bangladesh. But we have no desire to exchange a pack of foreign hangmen and bloodsuckers for a ‘national’ team of hangmen and bloodsuckers. We will therefore organize independently of you, Mr. Awami League leader and Mr. representative of the exploiters. We will form our own workers and peasants organizations. We will fight with our own arms, although when necessary we are prepared to make tactical agreements with you for- an anti-imperialist united front. But we will educate the working masses in a spirit of fundamental distrust in you, because you are our exploiters. In addition to independence we want land, bread, and the cancellation of debts. You are not only incapable of giving us all this, but when the time comes you will try to disarm us and crush us completely.”

Is this language, which conforms completely to the teachings of Trotsky, the language of “nationalism” or support to “nationalism”? The word would have to be emptied of all its content in order to arrive at this unlikely conclusion. As long as the working and peasant masses remain prisoners of nationalist ideology they run the risk of following Mujibur, and over the course of several years too. They can only free themselves from this grip by learning, through independent leadership and organization, to make a distinction between the struggle for their just national-democratic demands on the one hand, and the mystification of nationalist ideology, based on the supposed solidarity of all the classes of a single nation, on the other.

In *In Defence of Leninism* we established that Lenin and Trotsky always defended this basic distinction between nationalism as an ideology on the one hand, and the defense of oppressed nations’ right to self-determination (and of every concrete demand that expresses this right) on the other. Comrade Horowitz in no way replies to this argument. In place of a reply he offers us – after a warning about scholasticism! – a bagful of quotations in which Lenin and Trotsky are opposed to nationalism and a number of others in which they seem to support it. Talk about scholastic sophistry!

The Marxist method does not consist in weighing a certain number of quotations from the classics against each other, but in understanding the *logic* and *internal coherence* of a theory in order to determine the interrelation between its different parts. It is therefore impossible to challenge the

fact that for Trotsky the importance of the national question in the colonial and semi-colonial countries is indissolubly linked to the solution he proposes, that is, a class struggle of workers and poor peasants, in a revolution based on the inseparably combined nature of the national and social tasks. The logic of such a theory leaves no room for any apology for or adoption of “progressive nationalism” on the part of revolutionary Marxists. This is why Horowitz has been unable to find a single quotation from Lenin suggesting support to the supposedly “progressive” nationalism of oppressed nations.

The two quotations from Trotsky that Horowitz gives us show exactly the contrary of what he says they mean. He was particularly unfortunate with the quotation about Catalan nationalism (Horowitz, p.13). Actually, *two pages after* the passage cited by Horowitz, Trotsky gives his thoughts on the matter in two sentences that are as clear as a rap from a billyclub, a quotation that Horowitz is very careful not to cite:

“I have already written that Catalan petty-bourgeois nationalism at the present stage is progressive – but only on one condition: that it develops its activity *outside the ranks of communism and that it is always under the blows of communist criticism*. To permit petty bourgeois nationalism to disguise itself under the banner of communism means, at the same time, to deliver a treacherous blow to the proletarian vanguard and to destroy the progressive significance of petty-bourgeois nationalism.” (Leon Trotsky: **The Spanish Revolution: 1931-39**, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p.155. Emphasis added.)

A few pages later, Trotsky speaks of the need for a “principled struggle against petty-bourgeois nationalism” in Catalonia. (**Ibid.**, p.189)

We have denounced the fact that the LSO [Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière], the Trotskyist organization in Quebec, became an attorney for petty-bourgeois nationalism and even went so far as to disguise a general strike of public workers as a “patriots’ struggle.” What was involved here was not, therefore, a matter of considering the petty-bourgeois nationalism of an oppressed nationality as progressive in relation to the bourgeois nationalism of the oppressors. It was actually a matter of introducing the fraud of “progressive petty-bourgeois nationalism” into the ranks of the proletariat and its communist vanguard. Trotsky’s verdict on this attempt by Alain Beiner, for whom Gus Horowitz is now playing the role of attorney, is clear, plain, and expressed in terms much more violent than ours.

Comrade Horowitz was overjoyed with his discovery of a letter Trotsky sent to the Indochinese Bolshevik-Leninists September 18, 1930. Finally, he has found “Trotsky’s clearest and most explicit statement in support of the nationalism of the oppressed.” (Horowitz, p.13.) Once again, scholasticism is the method.

Trotsky wrote thousands of pages on the tactics of revolutionaries in the backward countries. Is it possible to seriously believe that his “real” position on the national question in these countries has remained hidden in a 1930 letter that had never been published in English before, and not in the chapter of the **History of the Russian Revolution** devoted to the national question, nor in **The Permanent Revolution**, nor in his writings on the Chinese question, nor in his comments on the tasks of revolutionaries in India?

In July 1939 Trotsky wrote *An Open Letter to the Workers of India*. India was at that time the most populous colony in the world, and had at the same time the broadest national-democratic and anti-imperialist mass movement. If Trotsky

was really of the opinion that the nationalism of an oppressed nation is progressive, one would expect that his letter would exalt Indian nationalism, an oppressed nation if ever there was one. But this letter does not contain a single word about the supposedly progressive “Indian nationalism.” On the contrary, it educates the working people in the spirit of irreconcilable class opposition in regard to their own bourgeoisie:

“The self-same danger also menaces the Indian revolution where the Stalinists, under the guise of ‘People’s Front,’ are putting across a policy of subordinating the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. This signifies, in action, a rejection of the revolutionary agrarian program, a rejection of arming the workers, a rejection of the struggle for power, a rejection of revolution.

“In the event that the Indian bourgeoisie finds itself compelled to take even the tiniest step on the road of struggle against the arbitrary rule of Great Britain, the proletariat will naturally support such a step. But they will support it with *their own* methods: mass meetings, bold slogans, strikes, demonstrations and more decisive combat actions, depending on the relationship of forces and the circumstances. Precisely to do this must the proletariat have its hands free. Complete independence from the bourgeoisie is indispensable to the proletariat, above all in order to exert influence on the peasantry, the predominant mass of India’s population.”
(Writings of Leon Trotsky: 1938-9, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1969, p.38. Emphasis in original.)

In order to win a “free hand” in relation to the “national bourgeoisie,” to assure complete independence in regard to the bourgeois Congress Party – *for whom nationalism was the main*

ideological weapon for preventing the independent organization of the proletariat – should revolutionaries in India have applauded nationalism or criticized it, should they have exalted it or tried to eliminate it from the ranks of the working class? To pose this question is to answer it.

But what does Trotsky say in the letter to the Indochinese Oppositionists, the letter Comrade Horowitz is so enthralled with?

“The declaration states quite correctly that the nationalism of the bourgeoisie is a means for subordinating and deceiving the masses. But the nationalism of the mass of the people is the elementary form taken by their just and progressive hatred for the most skillful, capable, and ruthless of their oppressors, that is, the foreign imperialists. The proletariat does not have the right to turn its back on *this kind* of nationalism. On the contrary, it must demonstrate in practice that it is the most consistent and devoted fighter for the national liberation of Indochina.” (*Letter to the Indochinese Oppositionists, International Socialist Review*, September 1973, p.41.)

What is Trotsky saying here, if one wishes to grasp the content of his reasoning rather than engage in a scholastic manipulation of quotations?

1. That the nationalism of the oppressed colonial bourgeoisie is reactionary, “a means for subordinating and deceiving the masses.” On this important point, even in this “unique” quotation, Trotsky confirms our position, and not Horowitz’s, on this crucial point.

2. That the nationalism of the exploited colonial masses is “*the elementary form*” taken by the hatred for imperialist exploitation. There is nothing objectionable about this statement. Trotsky in no way states that the peasant masses are following a progressive *ideology*, but rather that they are making use of some elementary notions to give vent to their class indignation. The task of revolutionary Marxists begins *from* this means of expression, but it certainly does not consist in adapting to it.
3. That to grasp what there is of a positive nature in this “nationalism” of the peasant masses, the proletariat “must demonstrate in practice that it is the most consistent and devoted fighter for the national liberation of Indochina.”

We are obviously in complete agreement with this formulation. We have repeated over and over again that the task of revolutionary Marxists is to unconditionally defend the just national demands of the masses. But nowhere in this quote does Trotsky say that the proletariat “must demonstrate in practice that it is the most consistent and devoted representative of nationalist ideology”! He would be very careful not to present such a thesis, which would be in contradiction to his entire life’s work.

We see therefore that Horowitz cannot even use this unique quotation he thinks he has found in support of his thesis of *identifying* nationalist ideology and the struggle for national liberation.

In accordance with Lenin and Trotsky, our entire argument is based on the need to distinguish between the two. Comrade Horowitz never has anything to say about this distinction. All the rest is therefore just scholastic sophistry.

Nationalism, Multi-class Mass Party, and Class Struggle

In order to demonstrate that the thesis of the “progressive nationalism” of oppressed nations is only a false generalization of the specific case of Blacks and Chicanos in the United States, we have posed the following question: Can a slogan calling for a “mass nationalist party” with an unspecified class content, which the SWP has advanced for Blacks and Chicanos, be exported to a colonial or semi-colonial country that has already experienced deep class divisions?

Horowitz begins by stating that the absence of Black or Chicano bourgeoisie of any consequence is not the reason why the SWP has been able to advance this slogan. (Horowitz, p.15) But a few pages later he himself admits:

“One of our central tasks is to promote a mass break from the bourgeois parties along working class lines. This is necessary to advance the independent organization of the working class as a whole. Our call for a labor party fits into this framework. So does our call for a Black party. And in *this* regard, the fact that Black people are overwhelmingly proletarian in

composition, that there is only an inconsequential Black bourgeoisie, and a relatively weak Black petty bourgeoisie, is an important factor. Under these specific conditions, all indications are that an independent Black party would be a proletarian party, albeit in nationalist guise. (Horowitz, p.18. Emphasis in original.)

In general, the argument is acceptable. But what conclusion must be drawn from it? Obviously that wherever a bourgeoisie has already arisen in an oppressed nation, wherever the petty bourgeoisie is not so weak, wherever the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie are already making systematic use of nationalism to prevent the formation of an independent workers party, it would be criminal folly to call for the formation of “mass nationalist parties” that could only be multi-class parties controlled by the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie in its wake.

Following the logic of this correct position, Comrade Horowitz states that it would in fact be incorrect to call for a “mass (nationalist) multi-class party” in Quebec, Palestine, Bangladesh, Ceylon, etc. We are happy to learn of this conclusion, which is the same as ours. But three questions arise immediately:

- If the call for an “independent Black party” and for an “independent Chicano party” is in fact *the exception and not the rule* insofar as the oppressed nationalities are concerned, isn't it also necessary to conclude that the situation – that is, the class structure – of some oppressed nationalities is an exception in relation to

the others? This is precisely the thesis that we defended in *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*.

- If the call for an “independent Black nationalist party” is an exception and corresponds to the exceptional class structure of a few nationalities, isn’t it necessary to conclude that the character of nationalist ideology (corresponding to the objective situation and class structure) is different for Black Americans, Black South Africans, and Chicanos on the one hand, and for all the other oppressed and exploited nationalities on the other hand? How can you say in the same breath that the *class structure* is exceptional but that the *social function* of nationalism is identical?
- If comrade Horowitz holds simultaneously – like a tightrope-walker balancing on a high wire – that the exceptional situation of Black Americans justifies using the slogan “for a mass Black nationalist party” in the US but does not justify the use of a similar slogan for the greater part of the oppressed and exploited nationalities (although multi-class nationalism is supposedly “progressive” in the case of all these nationalities), how does it happen that a number of minority comrades, not quite so adept at this balancing act, lose

their footing and pass over directly to the call for a “mass, independent Puerto Rican party,” a “mass, independent Algerian party,” etc.?

At least this is what came out during the oral discussion preparing for the SWP 1973 convention. We would be happy to learn that Comrade Horowitz could categorically deny this statement, and that nothing more about it will be heard in the world Trotskyist movement. The adoption of such a line would be a disaster for revolutionary Marxists in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

It is Comrade Horowitz who is inconsistent on this point, and not the “extremists” in his faction. For if the nationalism of oppressed nations is progressive, what argument would he use to refuse to base a “mass party” on this “progressive” and highly popular foundation?

Up to this point, everything in this document has obviously been concerned with our rejection of having *revolutionary Marxists* in colonial and semi-colonial countries advance the slogan “for a mass nationalist party” of such and such nationality. It is something quite different to determine what tactic they should adopt in regard to parties or “fronts” of this sort that come on the scene independently of their own propaganda or initiative.

In this case, a class analysis must be made to determine the real nature of this mass “party” or “front,” taking into account its program; its social composition; its objective role in society; the extent to which it engages in real struggle against the imperialists, the oligarchy, and their allies; the way it intervenes in the class struggle, etc., etc. ... Support to

actions or movements launched by such formations is far from excluded. But the orientation of revolutionary Marxists would remain an orientation of promoting an autonomous organization for the worker and peasant masses, an organization that is independent of any bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist leadership. An organization of this sort could eventually arise from the left wing of such a mass “party” or “front,” and once that happened revolutionary Marxists would have to promote its consolidation and its separation in regard to the nationalist leaderships.

Among the arguments we have used against the “exploitation” of the slogan for an “independent party” of oppressed nationalities beyond the boundaries of the United States, there is one, of some importance, that Comrade Horowitz takes exception to: the possibility of the “national” bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries forming a formally independent bourgeois state that would become a powerful weapon of oppression against the worker and peasant masses. In the United States, it is impossible to conceive of the appearance of an independent bourgeois Black or Chicano state. The very formation of such a state would presuppose the total disintegration of the US society and capitalist economy. But in the rest of the world the threat of seeing essentially nationalist agitation deviate toward the creation of new puppet bourgeois states is quite real.

No, replies Comrade Horowitz: In the event of powerful workers struggles, it is “*theoretically true but unlikely*” that “there is no fundamental class interest which would prevent imperialism from transforming any such [oppressed] nationality into independent puppet states”! (Horowitz, p.7. Emphasis added.) Of all Comrade Horowitz’s arguments, this one is the most improbable. What he considers the most “unlikely” has actually occurred in more than 80 countries

around the world since the first world war, from Finland and Poland in 1918 to India and nearly all the old colonies after the second world war.

Sectarians draw the conclusion that it is better to turn one's back on the national question. They are obviously wrong. But opportunists who refuse to criticize nationalism are deaf, dumb, and blind in the face of half a century of world history. How can it be seriously denied that nationalism has been the main ideological weapon used by the ruling classes in all these countries to slow down and smother the independent class struggle of the workers and peasants? How can you call for the proletariat to organize independently and then refuse to attack the main ideological barrier on the road to such an independent organization – the ideology that says common interest “against foreign oppression” must unite the landlord, capitalist, kulak, intellectual, poor peasant, and worker?

We Have Not Changed Our Orientation

Comrade Horowitz tries, though without much conviction, to counterpose documents we have written in the past to *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*. He wishes to demonstrate that we have changed our position on the national question, in fact, that we have taken a giant step backward in relation to our previous positions. But it is sufficient to examine the documents he cites to discover that our position remains exactly what it always was.

Comrade Horowitz begins by quoting passages from our intervention in a debate with Maxime Rodinson in March 1971, reprinted in the French magazine **Partisans** (No.59-60) and in the **International Socialist Review** (March 1972). These passages state that a distinction should be made between the nationalism of the oppressors and the nationalism of the oppressed. But in *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International* we said exactly the same thing:

“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 led by nationalists – becomes objectively a support for imperialist, annexionist or racist 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 Québécois Trotskyists, not the attitude of Anglo-Canadian revolutionary Marxists.” (**International Internal Discussion Bulletin**, Vol.10, No.4, April 1973, p.33)

Does the last part of this paragraph contradict the orientation I defended in the debate with Maxime Rodinson? Not at all. Because that orientation included the following passage, which Comrade Horowitz takes care not to quote:

“I have been asked a question concerning Palestinian nationalism and my attitude *vis-à-vis* the nationalism of the countries in the Third World in general. In my opinion, this is a matter that must not be oversimplified. When we say that the struggle for national liberation of Third World people, of oppressed peoples, is a just struggle in contradistinction to the imperialist countries attempting to maintain their oppression of these countries, we are by no means saying that *every political and ideological* manifestation of this struggle is progressive ... A distinction must be made between the objective historical significance of a *mass struggle* and the various ideological, political, and theoretical currents competing for the allegiance of the society and oppressed people involve

“... the influence of reactionary ideologies must be combated in the theoretical field *within the revolutionary camp*. But the existence of these reactionary ideologies must not be used as a pretext for refusing support, support which is absolutely justified from the Marxist point of view, to the liberation struggle of a clearly oppressed people” (**International Socialist Review**, March 1972, pp.38-39.)

And in *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*, we stated in the same way:

“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.” (p.33. Emphasis added.)

It is clear that there is absolutely no difference between these two positions – the one defended in 1971 and the one defended in 1973.

The second “forgotten example” cited by Comrade Horowitz is supposedly that of the booklet I wrote against Healy in 1967. The only quotation Horowitz can produce to support his thesis that I have supposedly changed my position since then is one concerning the fact that ... the Cuban revolution both resolved the national question and liberated Cuba from dependence on American imperialism. But he “forgets” to mention that the two paragraphs concerning the anti-imperialist character of the Cuban revolution are preceded by four pages about the solution of the agrarian question. He also neglects to point out that I nowhere characterize the Cuban revolution as a “national liberation struggle,” but rather as a process of permanent revolution in which the agrarian revolution and the anti-imperialist struggle are (in that order!) the most burning tasks. There is not an atom of difference between this position and the one defended in *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*.

To discover a “difference,” Comrade Horowitz has to undertake a sleight-of-hand maneuver that comes very close to falsification:

“The booklet goes on to argue in chapter eight against the SLL’s abstentionist line toward the national liberation movements and its political myopia which says that there is no colonial revolution but only a proletarian revolution. Some of the same arguments can be directed against Comrade Germain’s latest document, which says that it is confusing to

speak of a national liberation struggle rather than a process leading to a socialist revolution.” (Horowitz, p.14.)

What did we really say in our “latest document”?

“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 ...” (*In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*, p.31. Emphasis in original.)

There is not so much as a comma here that cannot be found in the classic texts of Trotsky on this question. Horowitz comes dangerously close to the Stalinist polemicists who accused Trotsky of having substituted “socialist goals” for the “bourgeois-democratic goals” of the revolution (the notorious accusation of having advanced in 1905 the slogan “Down with the Czar; long live the workers government!”). *The only way he was able to do this was by surreptitiously substituting the words “socialist revolution” or “proletarian revolution” for the words “process of permanent revolution,”* which are in my text. Now, the process of permanent revolution is precisely the process that leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat by means of a struggle to achieve in the first place the tasks that were not accomplished by the bourgeois-

democratic revolution, above all the agrarian question and the national question.

If Comrade Horowitz finds himself caught up in a sleight-of-hand maneuver of this sort it is because – despite all the ritual references to “other democratic and transitional demands” that must be “joined with national demands” – he is being irresistably swept toward the logic of “revolution by stages” by his revisionist position on nationalism.

What he believes is that there is first a “national liberation struggle” which, without regard to the agrarian revolution and the class struggle, leads to a “socialist solution,” because the “Leninist combat party” surpasses its petty-bourgeois and bourgeois rivals in ... nationalism!

It is clear that our “changed positions” have been created out of whole cloth by Comrade Horowitz. No trace of any such “change” survives the slightest analysis of the documents.

‘Subjectivism’, Objectivism, and Class Struggle

We are now at the very heart of the debate. Comrade Horowitz accuses us of being guilty of a “subjectivist explanation for the theory of permanent revolution.” He quotes the following passage from *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International* to support his thesis:

“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 the 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.” (p.31)

Just comparing this quotation with those from Trotsky at the beginning of the present document is enough to assert that Trotsky did not reason any differently. But Horowitz now takes a more “conscious” step toward revisionism and replies with the following:

“No, Comrade Germain. It is not because we ‘refuse to postpone’ these struggles (a *subjectivist* explanation), but because the struggles for the pressing bourgeois-democratic demands including national liberation (but of course not limited to this task) are inextricably and objectively intertwined under present conditions with the socialist revolution.” (Horowitz, p.9. Emphasis in original.)

Here we have a Marxist for whom the class struggle is a “subjectivist” phenomena; we will certainly have seen everything under the sun by the end of the debate now under way within the Fourth International. We state firmly – in accordance with the experience of *every* revolution in the backward countries in this century – that the struggle of workers and peasants for their class interests will arise, *inevitably and spontaneously*, in the course of the struggle for national liberation. What is involved here is really a historical, social, and objective phenomenon, not just a case of “subjectivism.”

But is it true that under present conditions, which we suppose means the imperialist epoch, the struggle for national liberation as well as struggles for other “pressing bourgeois-democratic demands” are “inextricably and objectively intertwined with the socialist revolution,” as Comrade Horowitz says? If it is true, how do you explain the fact that *in the great majority of cases the struggle for national liberation has not led to a “socialist revolution”?*

Once again Comrade Horowitz’s accusations are like Freudian slips, revealing the dialectic of a tendency struggle in which Comrade Horowitz has been pushed further and further along a revisionist path. For by falsely accusing us of “subjectivism,” it is really his own objectivist error – an error of quite some magnitude! – that he reveals.

In reality it is absolutely false to posit that the struggle for national liberation is “inextricably and objectively intertwined under present conditions with the socialist revolution.” So long as the struggle for national liberation is led by bourgeois parties or groupings, or by their petty-bourgeois junior partners, these leaderships will do everything in their power to *prevent* not only any “link-up” between the present national struggle and a future socialist revolution, but even an independent mobilization of workers and peasants during the national struggle. There is no “objective” dynamic, “no pressure of circumstances,” “no internal logic of the historical process,” that leads to such a link. *It can only come about through the independent organization of workers and poor peasants, through the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard’s gaining hegemony in the revolutionary process, and through the political defeat of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships of the national movement.*

But in order to create the necessary political and subjective preconditions for the elimination of the bourgeois

leadership from the revolutionary process, the workers and peasants must begin without delay to struggle for their own class interests. The bourgeoisie has every interest in limiting the objectives of the emancipation movement to the sole question of national liberation. The bourgeoisie's allies and accomplices – even when they call themselves “communists,” and sometimes even “Trotskyists” (as was the case in Ceylon), and regardless of all their “socialist” verbiage – seek to demobilize and paralyze the class power of the proletariat and the poor peasantry. Their eternal refrain is: national liberation comes first, then we'll see about the rest. Stalin and Bukharin sang a version of this plaintive ballad during the Second Chinese Revolution: first, it's necessary to support the Kuomintang expedition toward the north; when the anti-imperialist struggle is won we'll start thinking about distributing the land and forming Soviets.

Revolutionary Marxists, on the contrary, use all means possible in the attempt to develop the struggle of the workers and peasants for their own class interests; they do this right from the start of the revolutionary process in a backward country, including in cases where the struggle opens around objectives of national liberation. It is all these teachings of Trotsky that Comrade Horowitz now derides as “subjectivist.” *Only if this class struggle of the poor peasants and workers leads to a powerful and massive class organization*” Soviets, in a word – will it be possible to achieve the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution through the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, allied with the poor peasants.

And only in that case – that is, if the workers, the peasants, and above all the revolutionary Marxists follow our “subjectivist” conception – will it be possible to establish in practice, i.e., in the political arena, an “inseparable” link

and an “intertwining” between the accomplishment of these tasks and the socialist revolution. To view this intertwining as an “objectively given fact” means a complete failure to understand *the struggle to the death* – Trotsky speaks of an inevitable and bloody civil war – that will arise between the bourgeois and proletarian forces within the movement for national liberation. It means a complete failure to understand the dynamic of the class struggle that dominates this entire process. It means taking a step toward breaking with Marxism.

Our Supposed ‘Errors’ on the National Question

Comrade Horowitz tries to take up the counter offensive by uncovering our supposed “errors” on the national question. But as in his attempt to demonstrate that we supposedly modified our previous positions, he comes home from the hunt empty-handed; there’s nothing in his knapsack but wind.

The first “error” he discovers is that we “underestimate” the importance of national struggles, and that we do this right in the middle of a period in which the national question has a growing importance for the world socialist revolution. This argument strangely resembles the classic Stalinist argument that Trotsky “underestimated” the peasantry. It has precisely the same merit – that is, none.

Nowhere have we belittled the importance of the national question. Comrade Horowitz would have done better to have said that we are in no way inclined to “underestimate the

national question,” inasmuch as we are from a country where two nationalities live, nationalities whose aspirations and conflicts have for decades been intertwined with the class struggle in the most diverse and manifold forms. When it came to convincing the Trotskyist movement of the crucial importance of the colonial revolution; when it came to understanding the explosive character of such problems as the Flemish question, the Walloon question, the Quebecois question, or the Basque question; when it came to grasping the importance of the Ukrainian question in the present stage of preparation for the anti-bureaucratic political revolution in the USSR; when it came to all of these questions, not only did we never show any sign of any such “underestimation,” but it would even be difficult to demonstrate that we have shown signs of being slow to raise these questions, in comparison with the leaders of the minority. Comrade Horowitz cannot provide the slightest proof to the contrary.

In *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International* we repeat again and again that it is the duty of the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard to support all mass struggles for concrete demands concerning the right of oppressed nationalities to determine their own fate. We state this over and over again in theory, and we carry it out in practice.

What lies behind Comrade Horowitz’s attack on our supposed “underestimation” of the national question is our stubborn and *consistent* refusal to *identify* support to the mass movement for national liberation with capitulation to the petty-bourgeois or bourgeois nationalist ideology that may dominate this movement during a certain phase of its development. Yes, the task of revolutionaries in the oppressed nations is to extend the most resolute and energetic support – with *methods* appropriate to proletarian

struggles – to oppressed nationalities’ struggles for self-determination, combined with an uncompromising ideological and political critique of nationalist ideology. For nationalist ideology is an ideology of class collaboration against “the common foreign enemy,” an ideology for which we try to substitute the development of proletarian class consciousness. This class consciousness is based on an understanding of the irreconcilable character of the differences between the interests of the workers and poor peasants on the one hand and the “national bourgeoisie” on the other. It is also based on proletarian internationalism, that is, on the common interests of the workers of all nations.

One supposed “proof of our “underestimation” of the national question is the fact that we state there is an important difference between the semi-colonial and colonial countries insofar as national oppression is concerned.

In advancing this argument, Comrade Horowitz forgets that we have stated quite clearly: 1) that the formally independent states formed by the “national bourgeoisie” are puppet states; and 2) that the national bourgeoisie can *initiate* the struggle for national liberation, but cannot carry it through.

To draw from all this the conclusion that the India, Algeria, and Egypt of today are oppressed nations that have yet to win their right to self-determination – in the same sense as when they were colonies – is to once again cross the dividing line between dialectics and sophistry. If colonial slavery really continues to exist after a backward country has won national independence, how can you justify the support revolutionary Marxists gave to the war in China – even under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek – against Japanese imperialism’s attempt to transform it into a colony? How can you justify the support the Fourth International rightly

gave to the Algerian war of national liberation against French imperialism? Weren't these wars justified by the fact that they led in the direction of a socialist revolution? Here it is Comrade Horowitz who verges on a position that "underestimates" the importance of the national question in a sectarian fashion, notably the importance of the struggle for *even formal independence*.

Replying in advance to Horowitz, Lenin wrote:

"... if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal definitions, or "inventing" abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state ...

"Not only small states, but even Russia, for example, is entirely dependent, economically, on the power of the imperialist finance capital of the 'rich' bourgeois countries. Not only the miniature Balkan states, but even nineteenth-century America was, economically, a colony of Europe, as Marx pointed out in **Capital**. Kautsky, like any Marxist, is, of course, well aware of this, but that has nothing whatever to do with the question of national movements and the national state.

"For the question of the political self-determination of nations and their independence as states in bourgeois society, Rosa Luxemburg has substituted the question of their economic independence. This is just as intelligent as if someone, hi discussing the programmatic demand for the supremacy of parliament, i.e., the assembly of people's representatives in a bourgeois state, were to expound the perfectly correct conviction that big capital dominates in a bourgeois country,

whatever the regime in it.” (*The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Collected Works*, Vol.20, pp.397-399.)

And further:

“The independence Norway ‘achieved’ in 1905 was only political. It could not affect its economic dependence, nor was this the intention. That is exactly the point made in our theses. We indicated that self-determination concerns only politics, and it would therefore be wrong even to raise the question of its economic unachievability ...

“In this situation it is not only ‘achievable,’ from the point of view of finance capital, but *sometimes* even *profitable* for their trusts, for *their* imperialist policy, for *their* imperialist war, to allow *individual* small nations as much democratic freedom as they can, right down to political independence, so as not to risk damaging their ‘own’ military operations. To overlook the peculiarity of political and strategic relationships and to repeat indiscriminately a word learned by rote, ‘imperialism,’ is anything but Marxism.” (*A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism, Collected Works*, Vol.23, pp.48-51.)

It is clear that we are in good company with our “spurious argument” that gaining formal national independence ends national oppression and achieves the right to self-determination. Perhaps Comrade Horowitz will accuse Lenin as well of having used a “semantic trick”?

The real substance of the question, we state once again, can be grasped quite easily despite the artificial, scholastic Comrade Horowitz has created. Throughout the imperialist epoch there are many different links between the

economic and military dependence in relation to imperialism on the one hand, and political dependence as well as national oppression on the other. This is why *complete accomplishment* of the tasks of the national-democratic revolution is only possible by wrenching a country out of the domain of international capital. But the *overlapping* of colonial slavery, economic exploitation, financial domination, and military pressure does not mean there is an *identity* between them. Semi-colonial countries cannot be identified with colonial countries without falling into sectarianism and “underestimation of the national question.” The national independence won by such countries as India, Algeria, etc., cannot be called purely “illusory.” It is the product of a process of anti-imperialist struggle, of a process that has been frozen since its inception and has not been completed, but that has nonetheless produced real results.

The colonial bourgeoisie makes careful and conscious use of nationalist ideology in order to freeze the struggle on the level of conquering no more than “formal political independence” (although acquiring a few small slices of imperialist property at the same time wouldn’t displease them). Revolutionary Marxists try to transform this struggle into a process of permanent revolution in the course of which the national democratic tasks as *a whole* will be accomplished through establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, which will then permit the revolution to go over to the solution of socialist tasks. But this is neither the inevitable product of “objective conditions” nor the natural outcome of “national aspirations.” It is the result of the unfolding of the independent class struggle of the workers and poor peasants.

The *political* significance of this analysis becomes clear right away in light of the political tasks of revolutionary

Marxists. Take once again the example of Bangladesh. When the struggle for national independence broke out under the leadership of the Awami League, what was the task of revolutionary Marxists? Was it to state that this struggle was “illusory” and that there could be no national independence without a socialist revolution? That would have been infantile sectarianism. Was it to state that the struggle for independence should have been supported “because it is inextricably linked to the socialist revolution,” and that revolutionary Marxists should try to be more nationalist than Mujibur Rahman? That would have been opportunism of a no less infantile sort. Furthermore, the two positions would amount to the same thing inasmuch as they are both incapable in practice of winning sectors of the masses away from the influence of the national bourgeoisie. The correct position would be to -support the struggle for national independence while seeking to organize the workers and peasants in an independent manner by advancing at the same time the specific class objectives already mentioned above: occupation of the land, arming of the people, cancellation of debts, expropriation of the big foreign and “national” landlords, the conquest of democratic rights for the masses, etc. Once it is actually won, national independence paves the way for the struggle for all these objectives, provided that the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard adopt a correct position at the very beginning of the struggle.

The second “error” we are supposed to have committed on the national question allegedly consists in our having “put primary emphasis in the national struggle on the danger that nationalist demands will play into the hands of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation, rather than on the proven potential that nationalist demands have shown for advancing the class struggle.” (Horowitz, p.5)

The formula “nationalist demands” belongs to Horowitz and was never used by us. We have systematically counterposed the concrete, just demand expressing the struggle of the masses against national oppression – which we support 100 percent – and nationalist ideology, which must be fought. Nor have we “put primary emphasis” on the struggle against this ideology. We have simply underscored the fact that a correct Leninist approach – that is, one that is not one-sided and takes into account all the aspects of the question – must *combine* support to the just demands of the masses with the struggle against nationalist ideology. The “error” we are criticized for is in reality a criticism of Lenin, who wrote quite unequivocally:

“The interests of the working class and of its struggle against capitalism demand complete solidarity and the closest unity of the workers of all nations; they demand *resistance to the nationalist policy of the bourgeoisie of every nationality*. Hence, Social-Democrats would be deviating from proletarian policy and subordinating the workers to the policy of the bourgeoisie if they were to repudiate the right of nations to self-determination, i.e., the right of an oppressed nation to secede, or if they were to support all the national demands of the bourgeoisie of oppressed nations.” (*The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Collected Works*, Vol.20, p.424. Our emphasis.)

For Lenin, the struggle for just national demands and the struggle against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism in the oppressed nations are the two indissoluble aspects of the same class-struggle policy. By dropping the second aspect of this Leninist orientation in practice, Comrade Horowitz little by little transforms it from a class-struggle policy to a policy of class collaboration. The “error” he has

discovered in our position is that we have remained faithful to the Leninist and Trotskyist tradition, which consists in relentlessly combining these two aspects of revolutionary policy on the national question.

On the Attempt to Apply the Theory of Permanent Revolution to the Imperialist Countries

Comrade Horowitz has committed the methodological error Lenin had already warned Marxists against fifty-three years ago, when he wrote his theses on the national and colonial question. Instead of beginning with a “precise appraisal of the specific historical situation and, primarily, of economic conditions,” and instead of making 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,” Comrade Horowitz begins with an abstract and formal principle: in the epoch of imperialism, the “nationalism of the oppressed” is progressive because it is “inextricably linked to the socialist revolution.”

The most serious consequence of this error appears in the mechanical transposition of the theory of permanent revolution to the industrially developed countries, the imperialist countries.

In *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*, we wrote as follows on this point:

“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 utmost circumspection, and in the form of an analogy.” (p.34)

This is “simply wrong,” retorts Comrade Horowitz.

“The permanent revolution can indeed be applied in the advanced capitalist countries, and the Trotskyist movement has been doing so for a long time ...” (Horowitz, p.7)

As proof, he offers us ... *one* quotation from Trotsky, taken from an internal discussion at the beginning of the 1930s concerning an American comrade, Weisbord. We are once again confronted with scholastic sophistry. To find out what Trotsky thought about the theory of permanent revolution, there is no need to study his classic works or to analyze the internal logic of his theory; it is necessary instead to collect a bunch of quotations and hunt through them for a “peg” for everything one is trying to smuggle in.

The question is so elementary that one is almost ashamed to refer to it. Trotsky’s theses on the permanent revolution state clearly:

“With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of the tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.” (The Permanent Revolution, Pathfinder Press edition, p.276. Emphasis at beginning of sentence added.)

In the **Transitional Program** Trotsky wrote:

“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* (our emphasis) and to a considerable extent by the *degree* of its backwardness. Nevertheless, the general trend of revolutionary development in all backward countries can be determined by the formula of the *permanent revolution* in the sense definitely imparted to it by the three revolutions in Russia (1905, February 1917, October 1917).” (**The Transitional Program**, Pathfinder Press edition, p.98)

This is what the programmatic documents say. Can a casual remark about Weisbord in an internal bulletin neutralize these documents?

We didn’t need Comrade Horowitz to understand that there are certain *analogies* between the *combined* tasks that confront the revolution in an imperialist country and in a backward country. We have explained this at some length in *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International* (pp.34-35). But as we said in this document:

“... it would be pure sophistry to draw the conclusion that no qualitative difference exists between the combined tasks facing the revolution in imperialist countries, 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 ...” (p.34. Emphasis added.)

Since Comrade Horowitz compels us to go back to the ABC’s, let’s refresh his memory about the *qualitative* differences between the revolutionary dynamic in the colonial and semi-colonial countries on the one hand, and in the imperialist countries on the other.

1. The most burning tasks of the revolution in the former countries are the tasks that were not resolved by the bourgeois-democratic revolution (the agrarian question, the national question, national unification, etc.). In the latter countries it is the tasks of the proletarian socialist revolution that are the most burning: socialization of industry and the banks, withering away of commodity production and wage labor, etc.
2. In colonial and semi-colonial countries the majority of the population is made up of petty-bourgeois (and semi-proletarianized) elements; in imperialist countries the majority of the population is composed of proletarian elements. Consequently, the struggle between capital and labor wholly dominates the political and social evolution of the imperialist countries, whereas the class struggle in the backward countries takes the predominant form of combining the struggle of the peasants against the landlords and usurers, and the struggle of the “national” bourgeoisie against foreign capital, with the struggle of the workers against the capitalists – making all three elements an essential part of the class struggle.
3. For this reason, every broad-based mass struggle in the backward countries

inevitably takes on the aspect of a combination of classes (only one variant of which – a worker-peasant alliance under the leadership of the proletariat – can lead the revolutionary process to victory). In the imperialist countries, every mass struggle inevitably takes on a proletarian and socialist dynamic, given the numerical preponderance of the proletariat in the nation.

4. In the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the main tasks of revolutionary strategy and tactics concern the overlapping of the revolution's bourgeois-democratic tasks and the defense of the proletariat and poor peasantry's own class interests; these are the problems of the worker-peasant alliance, of the proletariat's gaining hegemony within the national-democratic movement. In the imperialist countries, the key question of revolutionary strategy and tactics is the unification of the proletarian forces in the broad sense of the term (wage-earners as a whole) on an anti-capitalist basis *for the revolutionary conquest of power*. This makes it absolutely essential to clarify the question of the nature of the *state*, to carry out a merciless struggle against all confusion on classless "democracy," and to conduct a relentless education of the

proletariat against reformism and illusions about the “gradual,” “peaceful,” “electoral” road to socialism.

Any consideration about the specific weight of the national question in the semi-colonial and colonial countries on the one hand and the imperialist countries on the other – and of course any consideration about the objective function of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism – must be integrated into this overall theoretical view. It is clear that if the national question played a qualitatively different role in the Indian or Algerian revolution in the 1940s and 1950s than it does in the Spanish revolution of today, it is not, as Comrade Horowitz thinks, because the Basques represent a smaller percentage of the population but *because the proletariat and the heavy industry predominate in Spain to an extent that is qualitatively different.*

We repeat: stating these elementary truths in no way signifies an “underestimation” of the Basque, Irish, Walloon, Flemish, etc., national question. What it actually does is place the question in a different socio-economic framework and thereby deduce a different dynamic for the revolutionary process. To fail to understand this is to totally ignore the class structure and the class struggle as determining factors for Marxist analysis.

It Is Time to Stop Before It Becomes Too Late

When we wrote *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*, we thought that the minority represented an unprincipled bloc on the national question (and on a few other questions) between the SWP leadership – which was trying to defend a certain Trotskyist orthodoxy, although in a dogmatic way – and comrades like those of the LSA/LSO and those of the PST, who have been pulled along the path of right opportunism. We expected that the leaders of the SWP would become embarrassed by the “excesses” of their allies and try to correct them. This is sometimes a by-product of tendency struggles, and the inducement to make such adjustments is not the least of their positive results.

But this is not what happened. It was the openly revisionist forces in this bloc that began to set its tone and determine the dynamic of its political evolution. It’s not Comrades Breitman, Novack, and Hansen who are correcting the errors of Alain Beiner and Moreno. It’s Beiner and Moreno who are compelling the SWP leadership to follow in their footsteps.

In this sense, Comrade Horowitz’s article is quite revealing. If it must be acknowledged that the SWP leadership approves and supports it, an entire sector of the Trotskyist movement would then be on the path toward open revisionism on the national question.

Despite all his inclination toward scholasticism and sophistry, Comrade Horowitz is honest enough to recognize this. He writes:

“In recent years, the Trotskyist movement (?) has introduced a change in terminology, using the word ‘nationalism’ not so

much to describe its specific origins in connection with bourgeois ideology, but in a more limited sense to describe the simple concept of identification with the nation.” (Horowitz, p.12)

The unfortunate thing is that with the exception of the Black question in the United States and few rare connected cases of the same sort, this “change” was not introduced “into the Trotskyist movement” as a whole or accepted by it, but is rather now being surreptitiously slipped into documents by a few comrades who have taken the path of revising Marxism. This revision has enormous consequences.

If all that were involved were a simple question of semantics, the polemic would be of little interest. Unfortunately, the “concepts” correspond to social and political realities. If the “concept” of “nationalism” is used to designate “identification with the nation” (a vague notion, but let’s leave that aside for another time), it does not for all that eliminate the fact that these nations are divided into classes and social layers, each with its particular interests and with varying ideologies that tend to express these interests. Comrade Horowitz’s use of the “concept” of “nationalism” in a sense that is different from the way it is used by the great majority of humanity in no way changes the fact that there are bourgeois-nationalist parties, that they have their petty-bourgeois nationalist representatives, and that there are attempts on the part of the bourgeoisie of oppressed nations to prevent the working class from organizing in an independent way and from carrying out its class struggle against capitalism, etc., under the pretext of common national interests. All these phenomena, which are decisive for the daily political and social life of oppressed people, do not disappear by magic simply because Comrade

Horowitz modifies the traditional vocabulary of Marxism-Leninism. *It is these decisive social and political phenomena that we are concerned with here, and not with “concepts” or semantics.*

These are vital problems for the future of all our sections, present and yet to be formed, in the backward countries. If we were to adopt a revisionist position on the national question, if we were to abandon a merciless struggle against bourgeois nationalism and its paralyzing influence within the working class and the peasantry, we would risk transforming the Trotskyist organizations into de facto appendages of the bourgeoisie (and, let it be said in passing, into a brake on every consistent struggle for national liberation). This is a matter of life or death for revolutionary Marxists in the semi-colonial and colonial countries.

Operating on a mixture of pragmatism and dogmatism, the minority has already opened the door to a serious revision of Marxism through the theoretical implications of its way of “explaining” the victory of the Third Chinese Revolution. (The majority has sought to demonstrate this revision in its document *The Differences of Interpretation on the ‘Cultural Revolution’ at the Last World Congress and Their Theoretical Implications – International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Vol.10, No.22, November 1973.) Now Comrade Horowitz has widened the breach with his revision of the Marxist position on the national question.

But the supposedly orthodox leaders of the SWP, blinded by their passion in the struggle against “ultra-leftism,” are now the victims of the objective dialectic of factionalism. The entire history of Marxism testifies to the enormous power of this dialectic. The old German poet Goethe, a dialectician who was not without talent, had already summed it up in his time: “you think you are pushing, but it is you who are being pushed.”

The comrades of the minority would do well to stop for a moment and reflect on the objective forces that are pushing them in the direction of a revision of Marxism. There is still time to stop, but it is five minutes before the hour. Otherwise the malady can spread like wildfire and, as Trotsky reminded us, go from a scratch to gangrene.

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