

TROTSKYIST BULLETIN No. 3



In Defense of the Trotskyist Program

a polemical
exchange between
Workers Power and
the Bolshevik Tendency

Bolshevik Tendency



International Bolshevik Tendency

www.bolshevik.org

Postfach 100601, 47006 Duisburg, Germany
BCM Box 4771, London WC1N 3XX, Britain
Box 405, Cooper Station, New York, NY, 10276 USA
Box 31796, Oakland, CA 94604 USA
Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn., Toronto, Canada, M5C 1J0
Box 9671, Wellington, New Zealand

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Introduction

This pamphlet contains three documents. The first is "For Trotskyism!," the programmatic declaration of the Bolshevik Tendency (BT). This document (reprinted from *1917* No. 3, Spring 1987) restates the basic programmatic positions upon which the Fourth International was founded, while also addressing many of the questions which distinguish genuine Trotskyists from centrist pretenders in the international workers movement today.

"For Trotskyism!" was initially drafted in October 1986 by the leadership of the BT as the central document for a projected fusion with the Left Trotskyist Tendency (LTT), a left split from the late Nahuel Moreno's American affiliate, the International Workers Party (IWP). Prior to its eventual decision to fuse with the BT, the LTT engaged in discussions with Workers Power, a British centrist organization which originated as a left-split from Tony Cliff's state-capitalist Socialist Workers Party in the mid-1970's.

After a series of intensive discussions, and considerable political struggle, particularly over the question of Solidarnosc, the LTT and BT fused in November 1986. An account of the fusion, as well as the main documents upon which it was based ("For Trotskyism!" and the "Theses on Solidarnosc") were published in the Spring 1987 issue of *1917*. After the fusion, Workers Power expressed continuing interest in pursuing a discussion with the BT (particularly the ex-LTT comrades) and invited us to participate in a meeting of their international tendency (the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International--MRCI) in London in January 1987.

The second item in this pamphlet, a lengthy letter from Mark Hoskisson on behalf of the MRCI, is a follow-up to our intervention at this meeting. The MRCI letter constitutes a critique of the positions elaborated in "For Trotskyism!"--which Hoskisson refers to as the "fusion platform." The final item in this exchange is an extensive reply by the BT to the political points made in Hoskisson's letter.

In his letter, comrade Hoskisson expresses particular disappointment in the clear Soviet defensism of our theses on Solidarnosc. (This position is characterized, naturally, as "Stalinophilia" by the Workers Power centrists.) He remarks, "The discussions we held with comrades D. [of the ex-LTT] and U. removed any doubt we may have had on this question." Unfortunately, over the course of the six months which followed the MRCI conference, several comrades of the former LTT began to retreat from the hard Trotskyist positions adopted at the time of the fusion--particularly on Solidarnosc. These comrades eventually arrived at a position on this question virtually indistinguishable from that of Workers Power. After conducting an unsuccessful struggle to reverse our position on Solidarnosc, four ex-LTT comrades split from the BT in October 1987. Only one ex-LTT comrade remained in political solidarity with the BT after the split.

We consider the position adopted by the ex-LTTers to be profoundly wrong, but we recognize that theirs was a principled split--for their developing differences on the Russian question put them outside the programmatic framework of the original fusion. Our comrades learned some valuable lessons from this fight--about the issues involved, and also about the proper conduct of political struggle in a democratic-centralist organization.

The questions taken up in our polemical exchange with Workers Power are of importance for militants not presently associated with either organization. In this period one of the essential responsibilities of Trotskyists is to struggle, in a principled fashion, to clarify major programmatic questions and clear the way for a political realignment of the international workers movement.

May 1988



BT/LTT Fusion Document **For Trotskyism!**

(The following document was adopted by the fusion conference of the Bolshevik Tendency and the Left Trotskyist Tendency as a codification of the programmatic agreement reached by the two organizations.)

1. Party and Program

"The interests of the [working] class cannot be formulated otherwise than in the shape of a program; the program cannot be defended otherwise than by creating the party.

"The class, taken by itself, is only material for exploitation. The proletariat assumes an independent role only at that moment when from a social class in itself it becomes a political class for itself. This cannot take place otherwise than through the medium of a party. The party is that historical organ by means of which the class becomes class conscious."

--L.D. Trotsky, "What Next?" 1932

The working class is the only thoroughly revolutionary class in modern society, the only class with the capacity to end the insanity of capitalist rule internationally. The fundamental task of the communist vanguard is to instill in the class (particularly its most important component,

the industrial proletariat) the consciousness of its historic role. We explicitly reject all stratagems put forward by centrists and reformists, lifestylists and sectoralists which see in one or another non-proletarian section of the population a more likely vehicle for social progress.

The liberation of the proletariat, and with that the elimination of the material basis of all forms of social oppression, hinges on the question of leadership. The panoply of potential "socialist" leaderships are in the final analysis reducible to two programs: reform or revolution. While purporting to offer a "practical" strategy for the gradual amelioration of the inequities of class society, reformism acts to reconcile the working class to the requirements of capital. Revolutionary Marxism, by contrast, is based on the fundamental antagonism between capital and labor and the consequent necessity for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat as the precondition for any significant social progress.

The hegemony of bourgeois ideology in its various forms within the proletariat represents the most powerful

bulwark to capitalist rule. As James P. Cannon, the historic leader of American Trotskyism, noted in *The First Ten Years of American Communism*:

"The strength of capitalism is not in itself and its own institutions; it survives only because it has bases of support in the organizations of the workers. As we see it now, in the light of what we have learned from the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, nine-tenths of the struggle for socialism is the struggle against bourgeois influence in the workers' organizations, including the party."

The key distinction between a revolutionary organization and a centrist or reformist one is found not so much in abstract statements of ultimate goals and objectives, but in the positions which each advances in the concrete situations posed by the class struggle. Reformists and centrists tailor their programmatic response to each new event in accordance with the illusions and preconceptions of their audience. But the role of a revolutionary is to tell the workers and the oppressed what they do not already know.

"The program 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...We cannot postpone, modify objective conditions which don't depend upon us. We cannot guarantee that the masses will solve the crisis, but we must express the situation as it is, and that is the task of the program."

--Trotsky, "The Political Backwardness of the American Workers," 1938

We seek to root the communist program in the working class through building programmatically-based caucuses in the trade unions. Such formations must actively participate in all struggles for partial reform and improvements in the situation of the workers. They must also be the best upholders of the militant traditions of class solidarity, e.g., the proposition that "Picket Lines Mean Don't Cross!" At the same time they must seek to recruit the most politically conscious workers to a world view that transcends parochial shopfloor militancy, and addresses the burning political questions of the day in a fashion which points to the necessity of eliminating the anarchy of production for profit and replacing it with rational, planned production for human need.

Our intervention in the mass organizations of the proletariat is based on the Transitional Program adopted by the founding convention of the Fourth International in 1938. In a certain sense there can be no such thing as a "finished program" for Marxists. It is necessary to take account of historical developments in the past five decades and the need to address problems posed by specific struggles of sectors of the class and/or the oppressed which are not dealt with in the 1938 draft. Nonetheless, in its essentials, the program upon which the Fourth International was founded retains all its relevance because it poses socialist solutions to the objective problems facing the working class today in the context of the unchanging necessity of proletarian power.

2. Permanent Revolution

Over the past five hundred years, capitalism has created a single world economic order with an interna-

tional division of labor. We live in the epoch of imperialism--the epoch of capitalist decline. Experience this century has demonstrated that the national bourgeoisies of the neo-colonial world are incapable of completing the historic tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. There is, in general, no path of independent capitalist development open for these countries.

In the neo-colonial countries the accomplishments of the classical bourgeois revolutions can only be replicated by smashing capitalist property relations, severing the tentacles of the imperialist world market and establishing working class (i.e., collectivized) property. Only a socialist revolution--a revolution carried out *against* the national bourgeoisie and big landowners--can lead to a qualitative expansion of the productive forces.

We reject the Stalinist/Menshevik "two-stage" strategy of proletarian subordination to the supposed "progressive" sectors of the bourgeoisie. We stand for the complete and unconditional political independence of the proletariat in every country. Without exception, the national bourgeoisies of the "Third World" act as the agents of imperialist domination whose interests are, in a historic sense, far more closely bound up with the bankers and industrialists of the metropolis than with their own exploited peoples.

Trotskyists offer military, but not political, support to petty-bourgeois nationalist movements (or even bourgeois regimes) which enter into conflict with imperialism in defense of national sovereignty. In 1935, for example, the Trotskyists stood for military victory of the Ethiopians over the Italian invaders. However, Leninists cannot automatically determine their position on a war between two bourgeois regimes from their relative level of development (or underdevelopment). In the squalid 1982 Malvinas/Falklands war, where the defense of Argentine sovereignty was never at issue, Leninists called for both British and Argentine workers to "turn the guns around"--for revolutionary defeatism on both sides.

3. Guerrillaism

Our strategy for revolution is mass proletarian insurrection. We reject guerrillaism as a strategic orientation (while recognizing that it can sometimes have supplementary tactical value) because it relegates the organized, politically conscious working class to the role of passive onlooker. A peasant-based guerrilla movement, led by radical petty-bourgeois intellectuals, cannot establish working-class political power *regardless* of the subjective intent of its leadership.

On several occasions since the end of the Second World War it has been demonstrated that, given favorable objective circumstances, such movements can successfully uproot capitalist property. Yet because they are not based on the mobilization of the organized working class, the best outcome of such struggles is the establishment of nationalist, bureaucratic regimes qualitatively identical to the product of the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution (i.e., Yugoslavia, Albania, China, Vietnam and Cuba). Such "deformed worker states" require supplementary proletarian political revolutions to open the road to socialist development.

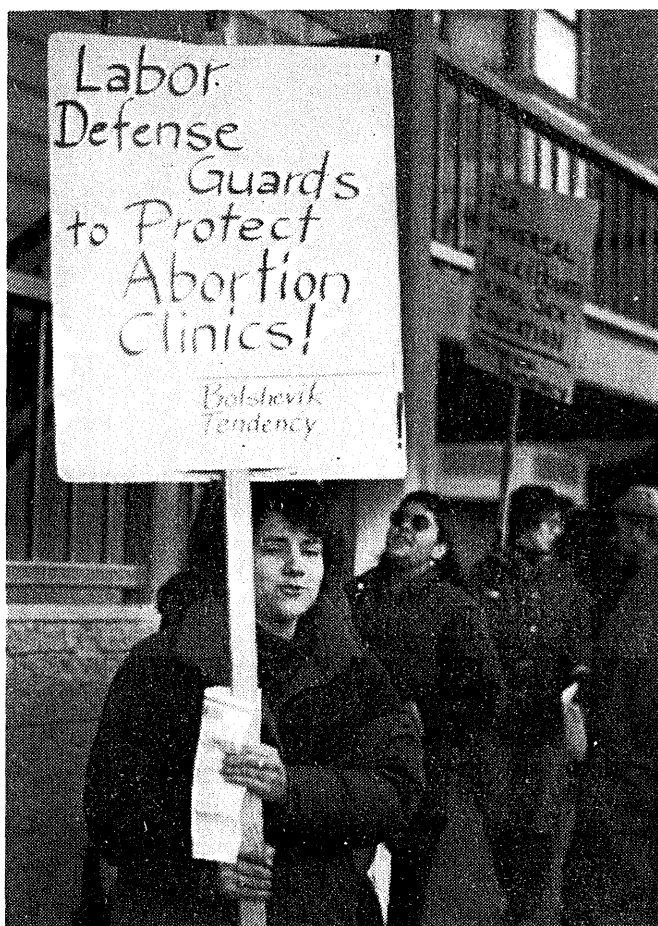
4. Special Oppression: The Black Question, The Woman Question

The working class today is deeply fractured along racial, sexual, national and other lines. Yet racism, national chauvinism and sexism are not genetically but rather socially programmed forms of behavior. Regardless of their present level of consciousness, the workers of the world have one crucial thing in common: they cannot fundamentally improve their situation, as a class, without destroying the social basis of all oppression and exploitation once and for all. This is the material basis for the Marxist assertion that the proletariat has as its historic mission the elimination of class society and with that the eradication of all forms of extra-class or "special" oppression.

In the United States, the struggle for workers power is inextricably linked to the struggle for black liberation. The racial division between black and white workers has historically been the *primary* obstacle to class consciousness. American blacks are not a nation but a race-color caste forcibly segregated at the bottom of society and concentrated overwhelmingly in the working class, particularly in strategic sectors of the industrial proletariat. Brutalized, abused and systematically discriminated against in the "land of the free," the black population has historically been relatively immune to the racist imperial patriotism which has poisoned much of the white proletariat. Black workers have generally proved the most militant and combative section of the class. The fight for black liberation--against the everyday racist brutality of life in capitalist America--is central to the construction of a revolutionary vanguard on the North American continent. The struggle against the special oppression of the other national, linguistic and racial minorities, particularly the growing Latino population, is a question which will also be key to the American revolution.

The oppression of women is materially rooted in the existence of the nuclear family: the basic and indispensable unit of bourgeois social organization. The fight for complete social equality for women is of strategic importance in every country on the globe. A closely related form of special oppression is that experienced by homosexuals who are persecuted for failing to conform to the sexual roles dictated by the "normalcy" of the nuclear family. The gay question is not strategic like the woman question, but the communist vanguard must champion the democratic rights of homosexuals and oppose any and all discriminatory measures directed at them.

In the unions communists campaign for equal access to all jobs; union-sponsored programs to recruit and upgrade women and minorities in "non-traditional" fields; equal pay for equivalent work and jobs for all. At the same time we defend the seniority system as a historic acquisition of the trade-union movement and oppose such divisive and anti-union schemes as preferential layoffs. It is the historic responsibility of the communist vanguard to struggle to unite the working class for its common class interests across the artificial divisions promoted in capitalist society. To do this means to advance the interests of the most exploited and oppressed and to struggle relentlessly against every manifestation of discrimination and injustice.



BT supporters protest anti-abortion terror

1917

The oppressed sectors of the population cannot liberate themselves *independently* of proletarian revolution, i.e., within the framework of the social system which originated and perpetuates their oppression. As Lenin noted in *State and Revolution*:

"Only the proletariat--by virtue of the economic role it plays in large-scale production--is capable of being the leader of all the toiling and exploited masses, whom the bourgeoisie exploits, oppresses and crushes often not less, but more, than it does the proletarians, but who are incapable of waging an independent struggle for their emancipation."

We live in a class society and the program of every social movement must, in the final analysis, represent the interests of one of the two classes with the potential to rule society: the proletariat or the bourgeoisie. In the trade unions, bourgeois ideology takes the form of narrow economism; in the movements of the oppressed it manifests itself as sectoralism. What black nationalism, feminism and other forms of sectoralist ideology have in common is that they all locate the root of oppression in something other than the system of capitalist private property.

The strategic orientation of the Marxist vanguard toward "independent" (i.e., multi-class) sectoralist organizations of the oppressed must be to assist in their internal differentiation into their class components. This implies a struggle to win as many individuals as possible to



British soldier searches Belfast citizen

the perspective of proletarian revolution and the consequent necessity of an integrated vanguard party.

5. The National Question and "Interpenetrated Peoples"

"Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the 'most just', 'purest', most refined and civilised brand. In place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism..."

--V.I. Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question"

Marxism and nationalism are two fundamentally counterposed world views. We uphold the principle of the equality of nations, and oppose any privileges for any nation. At the same time Marxists reject all forms of nationalist ideology and, in Lenin's words, welcome "every kind of assimilation of nations, except that founded on force and privilege." The Leninist program on the national question is primarily a negative one designed to take the national question off the agenda and undercut the appeal of petty-bourgeois nationalists, in order to more starkly pose the class question.

In "classic" cases of national oppression (e.g., Quebec), we champion the right of self-determination,

without necessarily advocating its exercise. In the more complex cases of two peoples interspersed, or "interpenetrated," throughout a single geographical territory (Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Palestine/Israel), the abstract right of each to self-determination cannot be realized equitably within the framework of capitalist property relations. Yet in none of these cases can the oppressor people be equated with the whites in South Africa or the French colons in Algeria; i.e., a privileged settler-caste/labor aristocracy dependent on the superexploitation of indigenous labor to maintain a standard of living qualitatively higher than the oppressed population.

Both the Irish Protestants and the Hebrew-speaking population of Israel are class-differentiated peoples. Each has a bourgeoisie, a petty bourgeoisie and a working class. Unlike guilty middle-class moralists, Leninists do not simply endorse the nationalism of the oppressed (or the petty-bourgeois political formations which espouse it). To do so simultaneously forecloses the possibility of exploiting the real class contradictions in the ranks of the oppressor people and cements the hold of the nationalists over the oppressed. The proletarians of the ascendant people can never be won to a nationalist perspective of simply inverting the current unequal relationship. A significant section of them *can* be won to an anti-sectarian class-against-class perspective because it is in their objective interests.

The logic of capitulation to petty-bourgeois nationalism led much of the left to support the Arab rulers (the embodiment of the so-called "Arab Revolution") against the Israelis in the Mid-East wars of 1948, 1967 and 1973. In essence these were inter-capitalist wars in which the workers and oppressed of the region had nothing to gain by the victory of either. The Leninist position was therefore one of defeatism on both sides. For both Arab and Hebrew workers the main enemy was at home. The 1956 war was a different matter; in that conflict the working class had a side: with Nasser against the attempts of French and British imperialism (aided by the Israelis) to reappropriate the recently nationalized Suez Canal.

While opposing nationalism as a matter of principle, Leninists are not neutral in conflicts between the oppressed people and the oppressor state apparatus. In Northern Ireland we demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops and we defend the blows struck by the Irish Republican Army at such imperialist targets as the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the British army or the hotel full of Conservative cabinet ministers at Brighton. Similarly, we militarily side with the Palestinian Liberation Organization against the forces of the Israeli state. In no case do we defend terrorist acts directed at civilian populations. This, despite the fact that the criminal terrorism of the Zionist state against the Palestinians, like that of the British army and their Protestant allies against the Catholics of Northern Ireland, is many times greater than the acts of communal terror by the oppressed.

6. Immigration/Emigration

Leninists support the basic democratic right of any individual to emigrate to any country in the world. As in



Striking truck drivers, led by Trotskyists, disperse cops: Minneapolis, May 1934

the case of other democratic rights, this is not some sort of categorical imperative. We would not, for example, favor the emigration of any individual who would pose a threat to the military security of the degenerated or deformed worker states. The right of individual immigration, if exercised on a sufficiently wide scale, can come into conflict with the right of self-determination for a small nation. Therefore Trotskyists do not raise the call for "open borders" as a general programmatic demand. In Palestine during the 1930's and 1940's, for example, the massive influx of Zionist immigration laid the basis for the forcible expulsion of the Palestinian people from their own land. We do not recognize the "right" of unlimited Han migration to Tibet, nor of French citizens to move to New Caledonia.

The "open borders" demand is generally advocated by well-meaning liberal/radical muddleheads motivated by a utopian desire to rectify the hideous inequalities produced by the imperialist world order. But world socialist revolution--not mass migration--is the Marxist solution to the misery and destitution of the majority of mankind under capitalism.

In the U.S., we defend Mexican workers apprehended by *La Migra*. We oppose all immigration quotas, all roundups and all deportations of immigrant workers. In the

unions we fight for the immediate and unconditional granting of full citizenship rights to all foreign-born workers.

7. Democratic Centralism

A revolutionary organization must be strictly centralized with the leading bodies having full authority to direct the work of lower bodies and members. The organization must have a political monopoly over the public political activity of its members. The membership must be guaranteed the right of full factional democracy (i.e., the right to conduct internal political struggle to change the line and/or to replace the existing leadership). Internal democracy is not a decorative frill--nor merely a safety valve for the ranks to blow off steam--it is a critical and indispensable necessity for the revolutionary vanguard if it is to master the complex developments of the class struggle. It is also the chief means by which revolutionary cadres are created. The right to internal factional democracy, i.e., the right to struggle against revisionism within the vanguard, is the only "guarantee" against the political degeneration of a revolutionary organization.

Attempts to gloss over important differences and blur lines of political demarcation internally can only weaken



Bayonets fixed, National Guard attacks blacks, Detroit 1967

and disorient a revolutionary party. An organization cohered by diplomacy, lowest-common-denominator consensus and the concomitant programmatic ambiguity (instead of principled programmatic agreement and the struggle for political clarity) awaits only the first serious test posed by the class struggle to break apart. Conversely, organizations in which the expression of differences is proscribed--whether formally or informally--are destined to ossify into rigid, hierarchical and lifeless sects increasingly divorced from the living workers movement and unable to reproduce the cadres necessary to carry out the tasks of a revolutionary vanguard.

8. Popular Fronts

"The question of questions at present is the Popular Front. The left centrists seek to present this question as a tactical or even as a technical maneuver, so as to be able to peddle their wares in the shadow of the Popular Front. In reality, the Popular Front is the main question of proletarian class strategy for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism."

--Trotsky, "The POUM and the Popular Front," 1936

Popular frontism (i.e., a programmatic bloc, usually for governmental power, between workers organizations and representatives of the bourgeoisie) is class treason. Revolutionaries can give no support, however "critical," to participants in popular fronts.

The tactic of critical electoral support to reformist workers parties is premised on the contradiction inherent in such parties between their bourgeois (reformist)

program and their working-class base. When a social-democratic or Stalinist party enters into a coalition or electoral bloc with bourgeois or petty-bourgeois formations, this contradiction is effectively suppressed for the life of the coalition. A member of a reformist workers party who stands for election on the ticket of a class-collaborationist coalition (or popular front) is in fact running as a representative of a *bourgeois* political formation. Thus the possibility of the application of the tactic of critical support is excluded, because the contradiction which it seeks to exploit is suspended. Instead, revolutionaries should make a condition of electoral support the breaking of the coalition: "Down With the Capitalist Ministers!"

9. United Fronts and "Strategic United Fronts"

The united front is a tactic with which revolutionaries seek to approach reformist or centrist formations to "set the base against the top" in situations where there is an urgent felt need for united action on the part of the ranks. It is possible to enter into united-front agreements with petty-bourgeois or bourgeois formations where there is an episodic agreement on a particular issue and where it is in the interests of the working class to do so (e.g., the Bolsheviks' united front with Kerensky against Kornilov). The united front is a tactic which is not only designed to accomplish the common objective but also to demonstrate *in practice* the superiority of the revolutionary program and thus gain new influence and adherents for the vanguard organization.

Revolutionists never consign the responsibility of revolutionary leadership to an ongoing alliance (or "strategic united front") with centrist or reformist forces. Trotskyists never issue common propaganda--joint statements of overall political perspective--with revisionists. Such a practice is both dishonest (as it inevitably involves papering over the political differences separating the organizations) and liquidationist. The "strategic united front" is a favorite gambit of opportunists who, despairing of their own small influence, seek to compensate for it by dissolution into a broader bloc on a lowest-common-denominator program. In "Centrism and the Fourth International," Trotsky explained that a revolutionary organization is distinguished from a centrist one by its "active concern for purity of principles, clarity of position, political consistency and organizational completeness." It is just this which the strategic united front is designed to obliterate.

10. Workers Democracy

Revolutionary Marxists, who are distinguished by the fact that they tell the workers the truth, can only benefit from open political confrontation between the various competing currents in the left. It is otherwise with the reformists and centrists. The Stalinists, social democrats, trade-union bureaucrats and other working-class misleaders all shrink from revolutionary criticism and seek to pre-empt political discussion and debate with gangsterism and exclusions.

We oppose violence and exclusionism within the left and workers movement while upholding the right of everyone to self-defense. We also oppose the use of "soft-core" violence--i.e., slander--which goes hand-in-hand with (or prepares the way for) physical attacks. Slander and violence within the workers movement are completely alien to the traditions of revolutionary Marxism because they are deliberately designed to *destroy* consciousness, the precondition for the liberation of the proletariat.

11. The State and Revolution

The question of the state occupies a central place in revolutionary theory. Marxism teaches that the capitalist state (in the final analysis the "special bodies of armed men" committed to the defense of bourgeois property) cannot be taken over and made to serve the interests of working people. Working-class rule can only be established through the destruction of the existing bourgeois state machinery and its replacement with institutions committed to the defense of proletarian property.

We are adamantly opposed to bringing the bourgeois state, in any guise, into the affairs of the labor movement. Marxists oppose all union "reformers" who seek redress from bureaucratic corruption in the capitalist courts. Labor must clean its own house! We also call for the expulsion of all cops and prison guards from the trade-union movement.

The duty of revolutionists is to teach the working class that the state is not an impartial arbiter between competing social interests but a weapon wielded against them by the capitalists. Accordingly, Marxists oppose reform-

mist/utopian calls for the bourgeois state to "ban" the fascists. Such laws are invariably used much more aggressively against the workers movement and the left than against the fascistic scum who constitute the shock troops of capitalist reaction. The Trotskyist strategy to fight fascism is not to make appeals to the bourgeois state, but to mobilize the power of the working class and the oppressed for direct action to crush fascistic movements in the egg *before* they are able to grow. As Trotsky remarked in the *Transitional Program*, "The struggle against fascism does not start in the liberal editorial office but in the factory--and ends in the street."

Leninists reject all notions that imperialist troops can play a progressive role anywhere: whether "protecting" black schoolchildren in the Southern U.S., "protecting" the Catholic population in Northern Ireland or "keeping the peace" in the Middle East. Neither do we seek to pressure the imperialists to act "morally" by divesting nor by imposing sanctions on South Africa. We argue instead that the "Free World" powers are fundamentally united with the racist apartheid regime in defense of the "right" to superexploit black labor. Our answer is to mobilize the power of international labor in effective class-struggle solidarity actions with South Africa's black workers.

12. The Russian Question

"What is Stalinophobia? Is it hatred of Stalinism; fear of this 'syphilis of the labor movement' and irreconcilable refusal to tolerate any manifestation of it in the party? Not at all....

"Is it the opinion that Stalinism is not the leader of the international revolution but its mortal enemy? No, that is not Stalinophobia; that is what Trotsky taught us, what we learned again from our experience with Stalinism, and what we believe in our bones.

"The sentiment of hatred and fear of Stalinism, with its police state and its slave labor camps, its frame-ups and its murders of working class opponents, is healthy, natural, normal, and progressive. This sentiment goes wrong only when it leads to reconciliation with American imperialism, and to the assignment of the fight against Stalinism to that same imperialism. In the language of Trotskyism, that and nothing else is Stalinophobia."

--James P. Cannon, "Stalinist Conciliationism and Stalinophobia." 1953

We stand for the unconditional defense of the collectivized economies of the degenerated Soviet worker state and the deformed worker states of Eastern Europe, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, China, North Korea and Cuba against capitalist restoration. Yet we do not lose sight for a moment of the fact that only proletarian political revolutions, which overthrow the treacherous anti-working class bureaucrats who rule these states, can guarantee the gains won to date and open the road to socialism.

The victory of the Stalinist faction in the Soviet Union in the 1920's under the banner of "Socialism in One Country" was crowned with the physical extermination of the leading cadres of Lenin's party a decade later. By counterposing the defense of the Soviet Union to the world revolution, the Stalinist usurpers decisively undermine both. The perspective of proletarian insurrection in order to reestablish the direct political rule of the working class is therefore not counterposed but inextricably linked to the defense of the collectivized economies.

The Russian question has been posed most sharply in recent years over two events: the suppression of Polish Solidarnosc and the intervention of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan. We side militarily with the Stalinists against both the capitalist-restorationists of Solidarnosc and the Islamic feudalists fighting to preserve female chattel slavery in Afghanistan. This does not imply that the Stalinist bureaucrats have any progressive historical role to play. On the contrary. Nonetheless, we defend those actions (like the December 1981 suppression of Solidarnosc) which they are forced to take in defense of the working-class property forms.

13. For the Rebirth of the Fourth International!

"Trotskyism is not a new movement, a new doctrine, but the restoration, the revival, of genuine Marxism as it was expounded and practised in the Russian revolution and in the early days of the Communist International."

--James P. Cannon, The History of American Trotskyism

Trotskyism is the revolutionary Marxism of our time--the political theory derived from the distilled experience of over a century-and-a-half of working-class communism. It was verified in a positive sense in the October Revolution in 1917, the greatest event in modern history, and generally negatively since. After the bureaucratic strangulation of the Bolshevik Party and the Comintern by the Stalinists, the tradition of Leninism--the practice and program of the Russian Revolution--was carried forward by the Left Opposition and by it alone.

The Trotskyist movement was born in a struggle for revolutionary internationalism against the reactionary/utopian conception of "Socialism in One Country." The necessity of revolutionary organization on an international basis derives from the organization of capitalist production itself. Revolutionists on each national terrain must be guided by a strategy which is international in dimension--and that can only be elaborated by the construction of an international working-class leadership. To the patriotism of the bourgeoisie and its social-democratic and Stalinist lackeys, the Trotskyists counterpose Karl Liebknecht's immortal slogan: "The Main Enemy is At Home!" We stand on the basic programmatic positions adopted by the 1938 founding conference of the Fourth International, as well as the first four congresses of the Communist International and the revolutionary tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky.

The cadres of the Fourth International outside of North America were largely annihilated or dispersed in the course of the Second World War. The International was definitively politically destroyed by Pabloite revisionism in the early 1950's. We are not neutral in the 1951-53 split--we side with the International Committee (IC) against the Pabloite International Secretariat (IS). The IC's fight was profoundly flawed both in terms of political framework and execution. Nonetheless, in the final analysis, the impulse of the IC to resist the dissolution of the Trotskyist cadre into the Stalinist and social-democratic parties (as proposed by Pablo) and its defense of the necessity of the conscious factor in history,

made it qualitatively superior to the liquidationist IS.

Within the IC the most important section was the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP). It had also been the strongest section at the time of the founding of the International. It had benefited by the most direct collaboration with Trotsky and had a leading cadre which went back to the early years of the Comintern. The political collapse of the SWP as a revolutionary organization, signalled by its uncritical enthusing over Castroism in the early 1960's, and culminating in its defection to the Pabloites in 1963, was therefore an enormous blow to world Trotskyism.

We solidarize with the struggle of the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP (forerunner of the Spartacist League/US) to defend the revolutionary program against the centrist objectivism of the majority. We stand on the Trotskyist positions defended and elaborated by the revolutionary Spartacist League in the years that followed. However, under the pressure of two decades of isolation and frustration, the SL itself has qualitatively degenerated into a grotesquely bureaucratic and overtly cultist group of political bandits which, despite a residual capacity for cynical "orthodox" literary posturing, has shown a consistent impulse to flinch under pressure. The "international Spartacist tendency" today is in no important sense politically superior to any of the dozen or more fake-Trotskyist "internationals" which lay claim to the mantle of the Fourth International.

The splintering of several of the historic pretenders to Trotskyist continuity and the difficulties and generally rightward motion of the rest opens a potentially fertile period for political reassessment and realignment among those who do not believe that the road to socialism lies through the British Labour Party, Lech Walesa's capitalist-restorationist Solidarnosc or the Chilean popular front. We urgently seek to participate in a process of international regroupment of revolutionary cadres on the basis of the program of authentic Trotskyism, as a step toward the long overdue rebirth of the Fourth International, World Party of Socialist Revolution.

"On the basis of a long historical experience, it can be written down as a law that revolutionary cadres, who revolt against their social environment and organize parties to lead a revolution, can--if the revolution is too long delayed--themselves degenerate under the continuing influences and pressures of this same environment...."

"But the same historical experience also shows that there are exceptions to this law too. The exceptions are the Marxists who remain Marxists, the revolutionists who remain faithful to the banner. The basic ideas of Marxism, upon which alone a revolutionary party can be constructed, are continuous in their application and have been for a hundred years. The ideas of Marxism, which create revolutionary parties, are stronger than the parties they create and never fail to survive their downfall. They never fail to find representatives in the old organizations to lead the work of reconstruction."

"These are the continuators of the tradition, the defenders of the orthodox doctrine. The task of the uncorrupted revolutionists, obliged by circumstances to start the work of organizational reconstruction, has never been to proclaim a new revelation--there has been no lack of such Messiahs, and they have all been lost in the shuffle--but to reinstate the old program and bring it up to date."

--James P. Cannon, The First Ten Years of American Communism

Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International
London, England

April 2nd 1987

Dear Comrades,

We have been waiting for the arrival of your newspaper to compare the final version of the fusion documents with those given to us by comrades D. and U. when they were in Britain. However, you have either not sent us the latest copy of *1917* or it has got lost in the post. We say this because we know from comrade M. that a new edition of the magazine has been out for some time. We know also that in that magazine you characterise us as centrist. Naturally you are entitled to your opinion and we do not get all hurt and upset, in the manner of real centrists, when groups that we would characterise as sectarian level the charge of centrism against us. However, we would have thought that given the time and money we invested in discussions with your tendency, you could have actually let us know that this was your characterisation of us and substantiated it. As far as we are aware you do not substantiate in your journal apart from making a passing reference to our support for the IRA. This is not a principled way of conducting discussions comrades. It smacks of the cheap name-calling method of polemic so typical of the Spartacists. It disappoints us that you are emulating the methods of your political parents, but it does not in the least surprise us. This letter is a response to your draft fusion documents, the ones you gave us in London (page 13 of the fusion platform was, as we informed you at the time, missing from these documents). We would ask that you do send us a copy of *1917* as soon as possible and that you display a greater degree of seriousness and principle in your dealings with us than you have done so far by responding to this letter politically.

Our overall view is that the BT's politics are based on a sectarian method inherited from the Spartacist League [SL]. The most grotesque aspects of Spartacism have been eliminated from your politics, but on key questions such as Iran and Poland there is no fundamental difference between your politics and those of the SL. Indeed your critique of Spartacism is overwhelmingly concerned with the regime question. You have extensive criticisms of the SL's organisational methods and of Robertson in particular, but you do not critically re-examine the political basis of the Robertson cult. The regime question is, as you say, a political question, but it is so in the sense that regimes are the product of definite politics, definite programmes. Rotten programmes breed rotten regimes. You approach the regime question as though it existed separately from the SL's programme. You go so far as to declare your adherence to the SL's programme until some unspecified point in the late 1970's or early 1980's, when Robertson got out of control. These Spartacist politics are manifest in the position documents you have given us.

The Fusion Platform [Trade Union Tactics]

Your fusion platform manifests a sectarian method on all the key issues it deals with. On the trade union question you write: "Our strategy is to root the communist programme in the working class through programmatically based caucuses in the trade unions."

This can only mean that you favour the building of communist caucuses in the unions to the exclusion of all other forms of organisation within the unions. It implicitly rejects the idea that it is possible to build united front rank-and-file organisations. In other words, it rejects the method of united front work inside the unions developed by the revolutionary Comintern in the early 1920's. This interpretation of your position was confirmed to us by comrade D. during discussions on the union question when he explicitly rejected the idea

of the anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement on the grounds that in present conditions such movements would inevitably fall under the leadership of left bureaucrats and thereby become an obstacle to the building of the party. This fatalism actually leads to passivity. Fear of confronting the left bureaucrats lies behind your refusal to countenance an organised united front, a rank and file movement with them and, more importantly, their supporters. Of course we are in favour of building communist caucuses, but we do not counterpose them to united front bodies. Such bodies can and do emerge as a result of the contradiction between the material interests of the rank and file and those of the bureaucracy. Workers can be thrown into struggle against their officials without automatically becoming communists, eligible for membership of the communist caucus. Do we ignore such workers until they have become communists or do we try to organise them on the basis of their first step towards an alternative to the reformist bureaucracy? The rank-and-file movement is the bridge between these workers and the communist caucus. This is particularly necessary where communists are a tiny minority in the unions. However, whether the rank-and-file movement serves successfully as a bridge is something that will be decided in struggle. There are of course risks that left bureaucrats may become dominant. But the potential of such movements far outweighs the risks. It is this potential lodged in every strike, that is the point of departure for communists who want to actually intervene to expand the influence of revolutionary ideas amongst the rank and file. We cannot abstain from this struggle until some unspecified date when the strength of the left bureaucracy has waned. To do so would be to abstain from the struggle for leadership. The BT is a small organisation. To content itself with communist caucuses in the unions is to condemn itself to isolation from the great mass of U.S. workers. It is to abandon Cannon's policy in the unions of struggling to build a fighting left wing. It is to abandon the Comintern's method as outlined to the British CP at the Fourth Congress:

"As far as Britain is concerned, we see clearly that it would be disastrous if the party contented itself with organising its forces only within its little Party nuclei. The aim must be to create a far more numerous opposition trade union movement."

--Fourth Congress of CI [Communist International] Abridged Report--CPGB
[Communist Party of Great Britain] p. 226

In place of the bridge of the rank-and-file movement you pose the ultimatum of the communist caucus. You counterpose the two in a manner totally alien to the revolutionary understanding of the relationship between the party and united front bodies. In fact you use the minimum-maximum programme method in place of the Transitional Programme's method. You declare that in the unions your comrades will fight for basic trade union principles, "militant traditions of the class solidarity" on the one hand, while on the other they will win people to "a world view which transcends parochial shop floor militance." How? You appear to be against the organisational bridge that links the two. Nor are you at all clear on how, in practice, you would fight for transitional demands as opposed to basic trade union principles. Trotsky's 1938 programme advances the call for "independent militant organisations," as bodies capable of fighting for transitional demands. In other words bodies broader in their composition than a communist caucus would be. Bodies in which acceptance of the full communist programme is not laid down as an ultimatum, but rather ones within which the communist programme can be most fruitfully fought for. We see no real differences between your position on the unions and the SL's. Of course tactical differences may exist but on the fundamental question of the united front you share their position. You reject the building of a united front movement in favour of episodic single issue united fronts (the minimum) and the communist caucus (the maximum).

[Falklands/Malvinas Conflict]

We will deal with your position on the national question in more detail later in relation to your document on the subject. However, your fusion platform does reveal the way in which sectarianism has obliged you to break with the Leninist position on the struggles of oppressed nations. Echoing the iSt's [international Spartacist tendency] refusal to take sides in 1982 when imperialist Britain fought the army of semi-colonial Argentina in the Malvinas war you argue:

"However, Leninists cannot automatically determine their position on a war between two bourgeois regimes from their relative level of development (or underdevelopment). In the squalid 1982 Malvinas/Falklands war, where the defense of Argentine sovereignty was never at issue, Leninists called for both British and Argentine workers to 'turn the guns around'--for revolutionary defeatism on both sides."

Real Leninists would not have argued such a position at all. We do not determine our position on the basis of the level of development of particular countries. That is an altogether false way of posing the question. We determine our position on wars between capitalist states on the basis of a characterization of the precise nature of those states--are they imperialist oppressor nations or are they imperialised and oppressed nations. There is no doubt that Argentina, despite its level of development in comparison with other semi-colonial countries, is imperialised, i.e., dominated by imperialism. Do you deny this? If so, please bring forth the economic data proving that Argentina has made the transition from being a semi-colony to being an imperialist nation. On the other hand there is no doubt that Britain is an imperialist nation and that it fought the war to reassert the dominance of imperialism over Latin America--one result of the war being a huge Anglo-USA military base on the doorstep of Argentina and Chile. In such a situation communists are obliged to support the semi-colonial country, irrespective of either the nature or the motives of the regime ruling that country. There is no difference at all between the case of Ethiopia, which you cite approvingly, and Argentina. The principle that led Trotsky to support Ethiopia against imperialist Italy in the 1930's is the same one that led us to support Argentina. Moreover your assertion that Argentine sovereignty was not at stake is seriously mistaken. Its sovereignty over its islands--stolen from it by Britain--was very much at stake. Its war to reclaim these islands--Galtieri's motives notwithstanding--was a just war. Leninism is quite clear on this question. In the case of a just war, support for the side whose victory would be a blow to imperialism is not merely justified, it is obligatory for communists. The necessary adjunct of defeatism in Britain was support for Argentina. In carrying through this policy we are following exactly the methodology elaborated by Trotsky in relation to Ethiopia, but also, more pertinently, that he used in relation to Brazil when the danger of war between it and Britain was posed. He argued that regardless of Brazil's reactionary regime a victory for it against British imperialism was the outcome every communist should work for and hope for. Comrades, how on earth do you square your miserable abstentionism with any of the teachings of Trotsky? Cite us your references.

[Immigration and Emigration]

On immigration and emigration your position is potentially reactionary. In particular circumstances your opposition to the "open borders" slogan could lead you into a social-chauvinist position. In an earlier statement the BT justified this position on the grounds that there were real dangers of a mass influx of people from one country (unspecified) into another (unspecified). This position is a fantasy, a racist fantasy, based on the idea that out there are millions of foreigners just waiting to flood "our" country. There is no justification for your rejection of the "open borders" slogan in your platform. Does this indicate that while the BT and former LTT agree on the reactionary slogan, they do not

yet both share the racist fantasy that it is premised on? The norm with immigration is for people from the semi-colonies to come to the imperialist countries that dominate them, or did so historically, in search of work--e.g., Pakistanis and Indians coming into Britain, Mexicans coming into the U.S., North Africans coming into France, Turks coming into West Germany. Surely you would not deny that these examples are the norm and tell us a great deal about the relationship between the imperialist countries and the semi-colonies. Now while we do not advocate mass emigration/immigration as an answer to the grinding poverty suffered by the masses in the semi-colonies, we do not allow imperialism a free rein in controlling the movement of workers to suit its needs. We take as our point of departure on this question the fact that the imperialist countries control immigration in a thoroughly reactionary, racist manner. Immigration controls as run by the imperialist countries are racist and we oppose them. We counterpose to immigration controls the democratic right for the free movement of workers across all countries. You reject this basic democratic position in favour of the maximalist position that "world socialist revolution--not mass migration" is the answer for the people of the semi-colonies. But comrades, as we British say, fine words butter no parsnips. Since when have communists posed as the immediate answer to fight a particular aspect of imperialism's policy--racist immigration controls--the revolution. Once again you demonstrate the gulf between your method and that of the Transitional Programme. We have democratic and transitional demands on this question that can help take us to the world socialist revolution. One of them is opposition to all immigration controls which means support for open borders.

You try to cover the reactionary--and potentially chauvinist--content of your rejection of the "open borders" slogan with the declaration that you are for "the individual right" of people to emigrate/immigrate. This simply reveals your confusion on the question. How are individuals, perhaps quite a few of them acting simultaneously and coming from the same country and wanting to go into the same country, to exercise this right if there are no open borders, if the imperialist states are exercising tight, racist controls on the movement of people? You need to come clean comrades, because at the moment your position is deeply confused. If you are against the open border slogan, say why, and say what form of immigration controls you favour to keep the borders closed. If you do not favour any immigration controls (which at the moment would necessarily be being imposed by the capitalist state) how do you square this with your rejection of the democratic right for the free movement of labour? To avoid the trap of social chauvinism comrades you will have to jettison altogether this particular piece of baggage brought with you from the SL.

Your position on women and the black question, as outlined in the fusion platform and as articulated by the comrades who were in Britain, show the same disregard for the method of the united front as does your position on the trade union question, and the same criticisms would therefore apply.

[Reformist Workers Parties and the Popular Front]

In your position on critical support for reformist workers you twin sectarian abstentionism with opportunism. You manage to evade altogether a statement of when you would consider voting for a reformist workers party. This omission is indicative of just how incomplete your political platform is and just how little you have to say about the problem of reformism. Moreover, given that you do not express a position on the Labour Party question either, it leads us to conclude that you have no serious tactics towards reformism. All that you have on this issue is a sectarian point of honour that you will not vote for reformists who are participants in a popular front. This negative position itself is flawed, ignoring as it does Trotsky's tactic in France of kicking the bourgeoisie out of the popular front, not simply packing up and leaving the masses at the mercy of the

popular front. Indeed, prior to the events in France in 1936 Trotsky had argued for critical support for the Belgian social democratic party, the POB, around the slogan, POB to power, despite that party's declared intention of governing in coalition with the monarchists. Critical support in these circumstances was tied to the slogan, Break with the bourgeoisie.

Your opportunist error on the question of reformism is embodied in your suggestion that somehow a reformist party in government alone is qualitatively different to a reformist party in a popular front coalition. You write:

"A member of a reformist workers party who stands for election on the ticket of a class collaborationist coalition (or popular front) is in fact running as a representative of a bourgeois political formation."

Comrades, even if a member of a reformist workers party stands on the ticket of forming a purely social democratic government they remain representatives of a bourgeois formation, a bourgeois-workers party. Social democracy in office equals a bourgeois government. Your distinction implies that the reason revolutionaries call for critical electoral support for reformists is to do with the programme they stand on. This is not the case. Both Trotsky and Lenin made clear that the sole purpose of revolutionaries calling for a vote for reformists was that if they have the support of the masses then they have to be put to the test of office. This tactic can be applied whether or not the reformist party is in an open (popular front) or concealed (social democratic government) bloc with the bourgeoisie. The decisive criteria is that party's relationship to the masses. We do not fetishise voting for reformists. There are circumstances where critical support would be inappropriate--where social democracy was in conflict with striking workers and went to the polls openly on the issue of smashing the strike, for example. But nor do we fetishise not voting for reformists in the way that you do. Your platform leaves us asking the question, when would you consider voting for the reformists?

[Revolutionary Continuity and the Fourth International]

We will deal with your position on Stalinism with regard to Poland at greater length later on. The final major criticism we have of your fusion platform concerns your position on the Fourth International [FI]. Our dispute with you is not over numbers. It is a question of whether or not there is a Fourth International or a tendency representing continuity with it in its revolutionary period. You believe that there is such a continuity through the IC [International Committee of the FI], the RT [Revolutionary Tendency] and the SL. This continuity now express itself in yourselves--the true continuators of the SL. We totally reject such a position. Continuity is not a mystical concept. If it exists then we must be able to locate it in positions taken on major questions of the class struggle, positions expressed in documents and programmes. You accept that the FI was destroyed by Pabloism, but argue that its banner was kept aloft by the IC. You accept that the manner in which the IC kept the banner aloft was flawed but you argue:

"Nonetheless in the final analysis the impulse of the IC to resist the dissolution of the Trotskyist cadre into the Stalinist and social democratic parties (as proposed by Pablo) in defense of the necessity of the conscious factor in history was qualitatively superior to the liquidationism of the IS [International Secretariat of the FI]."

This starting point is totally false. The fact is that despite Pablo's call for generalised entrism *sui generis* he did not propose organisationally dissolving the FI in 1953. The fact that organisationally he maintained the FI while his more rampant supporters like Clarke, Lawrence et al did liquidate into Stalinism should make it clear to anyone with eyes to see that the decisive issue was the political, programmatic liquidation of the FI that was really at stake. Of course the IC could not fight a communist battle against Pablo's

political liquidationism since in all essentials they agreed with him. In this sense it is difficult to know which IC you are actually talking about here. We can say categorically that the criticisms of the IS's positions on the French general strike and the East German events made by the SWP in its open letter of 1953 were correct. We would have favoured taking those criticisms to every section of the FI, not ducking out of a fight in the way the IC, on the SWP's instructions, did. Nevertheless the criticisms made by the open letter did not embody a revolutionary alternative to the IS. They were not grounds for a split. The criticisms made stopped well short of dealing with the fundamental revisionism, codified at the Third World Congress in 1951, that led to the collapse of the FI as a whole into centrism at that congress. The reason for this failure to deal with the premises of Pablo's positions on East Germany and France was that all the sections of the IC actually agreed with the substance of the revisionist positions adopted in 1951 on Yugoslavia, on Stalinism, etc. All of the sections of the IC had built elements of that revisionism into their own programs and practice. Healy pioneered entrism *sui generis* in the British Labour Party. He was in a rotten block with Bevan producing the centrist paper *Socialist Outlook* and arguing in *Labour Review* for a version of the parliamentary road to socialism (see our articles on the SLL). If this wasn't liquidation of the worst sort then we don't know what is. The French may have resisted liquidation into Stalinism in France, but, like the SWP, they were in favour of it in China. The French argued that the Chinese Trotskyists were sectarian because they failed to liquidate themselves into Mao's centrist CCP [Chinese Communist Party]. At the same time the SWP were busy repeating their opportunist errors on war by failing to go beyond a condemnation of the Korean war and a call for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Defeatism was not to be found in the pages of the *Militant* at the time. The opposition of the IC to the IS was not simply flawed. It was totally inadequate, it was purely to serve factional purposes and it shared the basic political premises of the IS's liquidationism. Moreover the IC's "fight" against Pabloism was pretty shoddy. After 1953 silence reigned, while behind the scenes Cannon urged re-unification with the IS. Only four years after 1953 did the British produce a critique of Pabloism, and that was an internal document with a limited circulation--condemned by the SWP for being issued at all. The IC operated as a completely federal body. Its first conference was not until 1958 and it was one of the great non-events in the history of degenerate Trotskyism. What common positions the IC did develop were rotten to the core--namely their hailing of Ho Chi Minh as the great and glorious leader of the Vietnamese revolution and the uncritical support extended to the inconsistent nationalist Messali Hadj on the grounds that he was the harbinger of a proletarian party in Algeria.

In the light of this we are quite clear that the thread of revolutionary continuity was definitely snapped in 1951. In 1953 the IC not only failed to re-establish continuity, they avoided a political confrontation with Pablo at the impending world congress. The history of the IC thereafter is really the history of its individual sections since it did not exist as a democratic-centralist international tendency ever. Did the RT/SL re-establish continuity? We think not. For a start this grouping was very wrong on the Cuban question. Its belief that a petit-bourgeois government in power meant that the state was not committed to defending capitalist property relations was a profound revision of Marxism (for a full critique of the RT's position on Cuba, see *The Degenerated Revolution*.) Also, the RT/SL identified wholly with the tradition of the IC. To this day the Spartacists claim to stand by the SLL's document (produced in 1961) "The World Prospect for Socialism," a document which repeats the bedrock errors of the FI on the question of Stalinism, arguing that the likes of Tito and Mao were centrists not Stalinists. That neither of these Stalinists displayed even the slightest centrist vacillation towards revolutionary Marxism did not worry the theoreticians of the SLL. The practical implications of adhering to this mistaken view of Stalinism led the IC to continue its uncritical support for the VCP [Vietnamese Communist Party] and side with Mao during

the Cultural Revolution. To identify with these politics, as Robertson did in 1966, means incorporating the errors into your own politics. And the practical implications of these politics for the iSt were eventually revealed in the gross Stalinophilia exhibited over Afghanistan when the slogan "Hail the Red Army" was raised--an explicit abandonment of the task of the revolutionary proletariat to the Stalinist bureaucracy. There is a continuity between today's degenerate fragments of the FI and 1951. It is the continuity of centrism--be it manifested in sectarian or opportunist guise. For us a revolutionary international must be refounded on a new, revolutionary programme, basing itself on the Transitional Programme of 1938. Such an International cannot be refounded on the basis of the centrist errors that litter the traditions of the IS and the IC. Nor can it be refounded on the basis of the traditions of those fragments that look to a "golden age" of either of the two major currents.

The National Question

Your view of the national question, particularly in relation to the north of Ireland and Palestine, is abstract. It does not start with the conflict between the revolutionary national struggle of the oppressed and imperialism, or its agents, but with the one-sided assertion that Marxism and nationalism are counterposed world views. At the level of strategy--of goals--and therefore at the level of political ideology and programme this is true but this cannot be translated into tactics as a virtual abstention from involvement in progressive national struggles. Progressive national struggles are those against imperialism's exploitation and oppression. The dialectic of the national struggle in the imperialist epoch and the fact that Marxists are duty bound to support and even participate in the struggles of nationalists in certain circumstances (and not just defend them against imperialism as you say) are left out of account in your analysis. Thus you approach national struggles (Northern Ireland and Palestine) with, as your main concern, the object of distancing yourselves from the nationalism of the oppressed. The purpose of this appears to us to be based on the idea that key to revolutionary victory in places like Northern Ireland, Palestine/Israel and even South Africa, is the winning of the most privileged sections of the proletariat in these countries. What else could have led the BT in their journal *1917* to declare that the white question was "key" in the South African revolution? This preoccupation with the privileged is a wrong starting point in approaching the national struggle against imperialism. Our starting point is the traditional Leninist one which does not simply counterpose the nationalism of the oppressed to Marxism but states unequivocally:

"The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content we unconditionally support."

--Lenin

And in the Comintern's theses on the Eastern Question adopted in 1922 the tasks of communists in the oppressor countries are spelt out clearly. They can be summed up in one word--solidarity. Despite the fact that the methods of the nationalists were not those of communism, the Comintern, unlike the BT, did not feel it necessary to place emphasis on the need to condemn as "criminal" (your theses on the National Question) or as "acts of cowardice" terrorist actions perpetrated by nationalist fighters, in its principal documents on the subject.

Your theses argue that there are differences between Lenin's day and now that oblige us to depart from his position on the national question. You cite the fact that the "'anti-imperialist' bourgeoisie" plays an "increasingly reactionary role." Thus we cannot extend support to all nationalist movements against imperialism. Your position on Iran and your refusal to support the anti-Shah movement led by the mullahs is the fruit of your abandonment of Leninism. You remained neutral here (and in the Malvinas war) in a real

conflict between a national movement of an oppressed nation and its oppressors (who can deny that the Shah was the loyal servant of imperialism in Iran?). Leninists support struggles against imperialism in spite of the reactionary role of the "anti-imperialist bourgeoisie." In fact this role is not something that they have only recently acquired. It was definitively revealed by Ataturk's butchery of the communists in Turkey in the early 1920's and Chiang Kai-shek's butchery of the Chinese working class in 1927. Lenin was aware of the first example, Trotsky of both, yet neither changed their position on the national question. They approached the question dialectically and with their eyes open. They had no illusions about the bourgeois nationalist leaders, just as we have no illusions about Khomeini or Arafat, the Sandinistas or Sinn Fein. Nevertheless when these leaders are pushed into opposition to imperialism we do not simply declare ourselves neutral. We take sides in the struggle and, using the tactic of the anti-imperialist united front, we seek to wrest leadership of the national struggle from the nationalist leaders in order to direct that struggle towards the tasks of Permanent Revolution. This has nothing in common with the menshevik two-stage theory of revolution. It has everything to do with struggling to overcome the masses' illusions in bourgeois democracy, in particular in bourgeois or petit-bourgeois nationalism. Counterposing Marxism and the world socialist revolution in the abstract is no substitute for the tactics developed by Lenin, the revolutionary Comintern and Trotsky. Despite the creation of, by and large, semi-colonies in place of colonies, the fundamental tenets of Lenin's position remain valid. In particular the demand for self-determination retains its validity. As on most questions your position stands in stark contrast to Trotsky's. He had none of your sectarian fear of the national question and national movements.

[Interpenetrated Peoples]

You argue that the existence of interpenetrated peoples justifies the jettisoning of the democratic demand for self-determination or, at the very least, complicates that demand. In particular you make the right to self-determination conditional upon it being exercised in a socialist fashion. Thus you argue in a maximalist fashion that, "the national question in most cases can not be resolved outside the framework of international revolution." This refusal to defend the right to self-determination of oppressed nationalities on the grounds that the peoples are intermingled is reminiscent of the position of Bauer and the Austro-Marxists. Like these reformists you are frustrated by the situation imperialism has brought about and, unable to decipher the national riddle, adopt a plague on all their houses approach. The reason for this maximalism is because for you the point of departure is that in the case of intermingled peoples there is the ever present danger that self-determination will lead to reverse oppression. Fearful of this outcome to the national struggle--and we concede that it is a potential outcome of certain national struggles, though we have different means of averting this danger--you end up abandoning a revolutionary use of democratic demands altogether. Interpenetrated peoples do not exist in vacuums, they are not historical accidents. They are the product of imperialism and serve very definite purposes for it. The existence of this phenomenon is as old as imperialism itself, finding an early expression in the Balkans. Balkanisation is the process whereby peoples are intermingled within the boundaries of a single state. In approaching such situations however we do not start with speculations about the possibilities of future reverse oppression but with the concrete facts as to whether a given people are oppressed by imperialism, whether one people is oppressing another on behalf of imperialism or, and this occurred in the Balkans and is occurring today in many countries, Cyprus and parts of Africa for example, whether peoples are engaged in oppression of each other dependent on a given military and political balance of forces. These are the decisive questions that need to be answered in dealing with cases of intermingled peoples. You do not even pose such questions. You are merely interested in selecting a couple of examples and using them as justifications for your rejection of self-determination. You are blind to the fact

that self-determination can be a means of resolving such complicated examples of the national question, preferring instead to nail your flag to the mast of those peoples, in Ireland and Palestine--which is what your theses are actually about-- who are perpetrating the oppression of another people on behalf of imperialism. That is what a refusal to utilise the democratic slogan of self-determination amounts to in both cases. The actual role of the Protestants in the North of Ireland or sections of the Jewish population in Israel and not the fear of a potential future reverse oppression is the prime concern of revolutionaries today and provides the justification for the call for self-determination where imperialism is denying that right to a nationality (the Irish or the Palestinians). To equivocate on the right of either the Irish people as a whole or the Palestinians to nationhood is to repeat the errors Lenin criticised in 1914. To abandon the call for self-determination, or as you do, to make it conditional upon the achievement of socialism "where the oppressed minority must be fully protected within the socialist federation" is to take a dangerous step towards imperialist economism. Once again we find ourselves much closer to the methodology developed by Trotsky on this question than you do. Far from despairing at the problem of the national question in the case of an intermingled people, Trotsky was able to identify the progressive and reactionary character of the nationalism of the particular intermingled peoples and distinguish between the two. We are referring to the case of Spain. Trotsky was quite clear on the distinction between Catalan nationalism and Spanish nationalism. He did not start with the abstraction that both peoples lived within the same state--Spain. He started from the actual state of the struggle and tried to identify which nationalism was a progressive factor in that struggle. Thus he wrote:

"At the present stage of developments, with the given combination of class forces, Catalan nationalism is a progressive revolutionary factor; Spanish nationalism is a reactionary imperialist factor. The Spanish communist who does not understand this difference, ignores it, does not advance it to the front rank, but on the contrary covers up its significance, risks becoming an unconscious agent of the Spanish bourgeoisie and being lost to the cause of the proletarian revolution."
--Trotsky, [*The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)*], p. 110

By the same token comrades, your failure to recognise the progressive character of Palestinian nationalism in relation to the Zionist state and Irish nationalism in relation to the British/Orange state leave you open to the same risk.

Working class leadership of the national struggle alone can prevent the revolution in the semi-colonies being halted in its tracks by the national bourgeoisie, petit bourgeois nationalists or, indeed, Stalinists. Such leadership can alone prevent the danger of reverse oppression from coming about. To achieve such leadership we advance a programme of transitional class demands in addition to, not counterposed to, the demand for self-determination in cases where nationhood is denied to an oppressed nationality. In other words we seek to win those workers currently in a bloc with imperialism or its agents--like the Protestant working class in Northern Ireland or the Jewish workers in Palestine/Israel--to supporting the right to self-determination for those whose national oppression they are currently complicit in. Winning them to such a demand means decisively breaking them from their own bourgeoisie. Linking their support for that demand to their own class struggles on the basis of transitional demands can create the conditions for a revolutionary socialist outcome to the crisis wracking both Ireland and Palestine/Israel. On the other hand if we cannot break these currently relatively privileged workers from their bourgeoisie on the question of its national oppression of a people, if we cannot win them to consistent democracy, then winning them to socialism will be more difficult, not less so. We believe that a section--its size cannot be determined in advance--of the Protestant and Jewish working class can be broken from their bloc with the bourgeoisie of their respective countries. But a resolute defence of the

nationally oppressed, a consistent democratism, combined with a focused class action programme, are the means to achieve this. If revolutionaries are only half-hearted in their defence of the oppressed then relatively privileged workers are unlikely to be inspired to take up their cause.

You do not believe any of this. Your starting point is the abstraction--the interpenetrated people. You do not state clearly that a fundamental difference exists between the two interpenetrated peoples in Ireland or Palestine/Israel. On one side of the divide are an oppressed people/community, on the other are those who gain from and therefore stand for national oppression. Your failure to start with this distinction leads you to suggest that it is the struggle of the oppressed for national rights, their nationalism, that blocks the road to socialism by getting in the way of class unity with the workers from the oppressor community/people. The reactionary consciousness of the Jewish and Protestant workers is caused, according to you, not by the material privileges afforded them by imperialism in order to bribe them and divide them from their nationally oppressed class brothers and sisters, nor by the deep-seated traditions of bigotry that have been ingrained into the consciousness of these workers by their rulers to justify their oppression of the Palestinians or the Catholics. To you these things are small beer that do not even warrant a mention in your theses on the national question. The real reason the Jewish and Protestant workers adhere to Orangeism or Zionism is because they are repelled by the nationalism of the working class because it obstructs class unity! Thus the Jewish workers cannot be won to the Palestinian cause because the Palestinians are not communists, but bourgeois nationalists dependent on other Arab bourgeoisies:

"Such dependency, complemented with the nationalist program and action of the PLO, has so far undercut united Jewish and Arab class struggle against Zionism and the Arab regimes, for at least two decades."

Not only do you blame the nationalism of the oppressed for the (reactionary) attitudes of protestant or Jewish workers, you equate the Zionist state with the Arab regimes. The undisputed gendarme of imperialism in the region, kept afloat by millions of U.S. dollars is, for you, on a par with the Arab semi-colonies. It was this standpoint that led the Spartacists into their disgraceful neutrality in the wars between the Arab regimes and the Zionist state, a neutrality that you now defend. This is nothing less than a capitulation to Zionism.

The same standpoint leads you into gross errors on the IRA. You argue that IRA actions against civilians "are done on behalf of the English and Irish bourgeoisies." These rulers certainly have a perverse way of expressing their gratitude to the IRA for the actions it carries out on their behalf. They imprison, torture and murder IRA members. To say that civilian bombings play into the hands of the bourgeoisie is one thing. To say they are carried out on behalf of the bourgeoisie is quite another. It is a travesty of the truth. Civilian bombings--and we assume you are referring primarily to those carried out in Britain--are misdirected blows against imperialism. Misdirected because they are premised on an equation of the British people with the British state, an error common to nationalism. But you go way beyond a justified criticism of such actions. You favour outright condemnation of the IRA. To justify your scandalous assertion that IRA civilian bombings are "acts of cowardice"--what a thing to say, what an accusation to make against an organisation which, despite its political errors, has fought heroically against the Orange pogromists and the British troops for years and won mass support as a result, what a disgraceful insult to the memory of fighters like Bobby Sands and Frankie Hughes whose courage was an inspiration to communists--you indulge in bouts of make believe. To read your theses you would think that the principal problem in the Six Counties was an IRA hell bent on wiping out ordinary Protestant workers and hurling a few bombs at British workers for good measure. This is not the case. The IRA is hardly ever guilty of

sectarian assassinations, that is, the killing of Protestants because they are Protestants rather than because they are members of the security corps. Sectarian assassinations are by and large the preserve of the Orange paramilitaries. The IRA's bombings, moreover, are against either military targets or "economic" targets (shops, restaurants, etc., a stupid petit bourgeois method of struggle based on the idea that you could bring the bourgeoisie to its knees by destroying its property). This latter category, far less frequent now than previously, was wrongheaded and did put civilians at risk. The IRA sought to minimise such risks and virtually always issued warnings. Civilian casualties were often the result of incompetence in acting on those warnings by the authorities. Comrades, casualties sustained by the British and Protestant workers are few compared to those sustained by the anti-unionist population. So why do your theses direct the bulk of their fire at those fighting imperialism, calling mistaken tactics criminal--the terminology of the bourgeois press and state--while the Orange pogromists and the imperialist state, far better equipped to inflict terror than is the IRA, get off lightly in comparison. We did not notice you using terms like "cowardice" in relation to the Orange gangs.

One final point we wish to make on your theses is your use of the Socialist Federation slogan. You appear to counterpose this, in relation to Ireland, to the demand for self-determination. Your slogan for Ireland is: "For an Irish Workers Republic in the framework of a Socialist Federation of the British Isles."

This is explicitly counterposed to the IRA's call for a "united (capitalist) Ireland." Does your demand for federation mean that you would oppose the creation of a united Ireland should that prove possible prior to a socialist revolution throughout the British Isles? You certainly imply that by your rejection of self-determination as an operative demand in the context of intermingled peoples. Does it mean that an Irish workers' republic depends for its realisation on a revolution in Britain? You reject this proposition elsewhere in your theses yet your operative slogan could easily imply this. Federation is not something that can be imposed or decreed in advance in the manner that you use it. An Irish workers' republic could come about without federation occurring immediately. The historic distrust of the Irish for "perfidious Albion" is something that will have to be overcome within the framework of voluntary international collaboration, assuming that Britain has become a workers' state too, not something that we would pose as a condition for the Irish workers' republic. In Britain at the moment to pose Irish independence in terms of a federation is to fudge on the national question, to pander to reactionary British nationalism. Even prior to the imperialist epoch and the brutal partitioning of Ireland, Marx posed the question of federation far more effectively and democratically than you do:

"The question now is what advice we should give the English workers. In my view they must make the repeal of the Union [which still applies to the Six Counties--WP] an article of their pronunziamento. This is the only legal and hence the only possible form of Irish emancipation which can be included in the programme of an English party. Experience must show later whether a mere personal union between the two countries could continue."

--Marx to Engels, 1867

Thus we do not make our slogan for self-determination conditional upon the creation of a socialist federation. We say, for the self-determination of the Irish People as a whole, for an Irish workers' republic, for a socialist federation of Europe. To say otherwise would be a betrayal of the anti-unionist population trapped by imperialism in the artificial state of Northern Ireland.

Poland

Your position on Poland and Solidarnosc expressed in your draft thesis on Solidarnosc reveal quite clearly that you have inherited the SL's Stalinophilia. The discussions we held with comrades D. and U. removed any doubt we may have had on this question. Unlike you, we do not think that Solidarnosc underwent a qualitative change when it formally endorsed a programme combining such contradictory elements as calls for the fuller operation of market mechanisms, greater openings to the world market, workers self-management and a self-management second chamber, and a respect for the post-war European order. Its leadership was predominately committed to policies which, objectively, would have strengthened capitalist restoration in Poland. But it was also committed to the utopian project of achieving these goals through a reform process carried out in collaboration with both the regime and the church.

In reality the proletarian base of Solidarnosc prevented the organisation ever becoming a mass force for capitalist restoration. We reject the position that a mass proletarian-based movement could ever have become the agent of capitalist restoration. The existence of a significant tendency committed to democratically centralised planning was an expression of the proletarian base. Solidarnosc remained a contradictory and often confused movement of the mass of the Polish working class against bureaucratic privilege and political repression. The contradiction between the proletarian base and the politics of the Solidarnosc leadership was once again expressed during the British miners' strike. Solidarnosc base groups in the Polish coalfields declared their solidarity with the British miners and denounced the scabbing of the Jaruzelski regime. Walesa and co. stood in stark contradistinction to this position with their reported eulogies of Thatcher (though these reports were no doubt embellished upon by the British press).

The February draft programme and the September one both expressed the contradictory nature of the aims and aspirations of the movement. The idea that it had somehow undergone a qualitative transformation in September is little more than a convenient pretext for pledging your support to the Stalinist bureaucracy's crackdown. Walesa's draft programme does indeed suggest that the role of centralised planning should be diminished and that the role of the market should be increased in relations between more independent enterprises--but then comrades, so too does Jaruzelski's programme...and Gorbachev's! There is a real sense within the Solidarnosc proposals in which the monopoly of foreign trade would be undermined. But remember it was Jaruzelski who was applying to join the IMF before his coup. The books of Poland would have been open to international finance capital, but not to the workers. Your assertion that the invitations extended to Lane Kirkland and Irving Brown are somehow proof of Solidarnosc's reactionary nature are really laughable. They echo the SL method of guilt by association regardless of circumstance. The fact is that Solidarnosc had chronic, and potentially crippling, illusions in Western trade unionism and an understandable suspicion of Stalinist stooge unions. The invitation amounted to nothing more than an expression of those illusions and a slap in the face for the Stalinist union federations. These two dignitaries were certainly not invited to Poland in order to be the advance guard of an imperialist expeditionary force bent on restoring capitalism in Poland.

We take particular exception to your smug announcement that the slogans of "free elections" and "free trade unions," voiced by the workers themselves, are the "transitional slogans of imperialist counter-revolution." Here you reveal quite how barren your sectarian method is. You never address the problem of how communists would have related to the illusions that Stalinism itself has fostered. The complete denial of political rights by the Stalinists inevitably engenders a thirst for political democracy amongst the workers. Moreover, in Poland the Stalinists maintain a bogus parliamentary form of government via

the Sejm. Workers demanded genuine elections to this body. This is not merely a democratic illusion but a potential contradiction which revolutionaries can and must relate to. As for the call for free trade unions, this demand is entirely understandable in the context of stooge police unions typical of the Stalinist regimes. It represents a desire to be free of the police, free of the Stalinist apparatus that stifles workplace organisation. You interpret working class resistance to Stalinism on these issues as restorationist. This is bankrupt comrades. How would you relate to these demands, which by the way were current as well in the Hungarian crisis of 1956 which you delight in counterposing to Poland 1980/81--by calling for unfree elections and unions? No, without compromising our defense of the property relations one bit we can advance a programme of political revolution aimed at achieving genuine soviet democracy in a way that relates to the masses' democratic illusions, not in a manner that simply scoffs at them as pro-imperialist.

The key question posed in Poland was not the defense of the property relations in the abstract. You have to talk up Solidarnosc's "plan" to seize power (based on tapes heavily doctored by the Stalinist authorities) in a ridiculous manner to try and suggest that it was. In reality what was at stake was whether or not the Polish workers could take the road of political revolution before being sold short by their compromising leadership or smashed by Stalinism. Your lack of concern with this aspect of the Polish crisis is evidenced by the fact that you do not even begin to deal with the problems of political revolution in your theses. They are theses on how best the Stalinist bureaucrats can suppress Solidarnosc. However much you may protest, a call on the Stalinists to carry out repression is the logic of your position. You refer to the September congress as a watershed, as the point when Solidarnosc became definitively counter-revolutionary. At that point you should have called for its suppression. Not to do so is a mere inconsistency on your part. Your attempt to portray your support for Jaruzelski's coup as being extremely critical when it did come is unconvincing. Your theses suggest that apart from being a little late in coming, the Stalinists' repression was perhaps a little bit too heavy handed, as though destroying the organisations of the working class was a mere overhead cost of preserving the property relations. Your position becomes ludicrous when you explain that while you defend the counter-revolutionary leaders and their supporters being suppressed, you oppose the suppression of "meetings of anti-restorationist workers." Which meetings were these comrades? We suspect they are products of your imagination designed to provide a fig-leaf for a position that is fundamentally pro-Stalinist. In the real world you supported the destruction of the elements of workers' democracy won by Solidarnosc in the interests of defending property relations that were far more at risk at the time from Jaruzelski than they were from Solidarnosc. As with Iran you fail to make any distinction between the leaders of a mass movement (who were reactionary in a variety of ways) and the base, and in failing to make this distinction, you leave yourself without any tactics to defeat those leaders.

Your position of half-hearted support to Jaruzelski, while refusing to take responsibility for the brutal crackdown he carried through, represents the dilemma you face as an organisation that has not broken from Spartacism. Your inner convictions lead you in the direction of demanding the suppression of Solidarnosc from September 1981--see thesis 3--but your fear of being branded as Spartacists leads you to only activate this demand in December. In any event it is a position that leads you to write off the working class as an independent revolutionary factor. It leads you to look to the Stalinist bureaucracy to act as the protector of the planned property relations. In short it leads you a million miles away from revolutionary Trotskyism.

Our criticisms of the BT's positions on Nicaragua and South Africa can be found in the letter we sent to the LTT before Christmas. We will not repeat them here. We look forward to hearing your response to this letter.

Yours fraternally

Mark Hoskisson (on behalf of the MRCI Secretariat)

5 May 1988

Dear comrades:

Thank you for your extensive critique of our programmatic statement "For Trotskyism." We appreciate the opportunity it affords us to elaborate some of the important methodological and programmatic questions which separate centrism from Trotskyism. Unfortunately, it has taken us longer than we anticipated to produce an adequate response to your letter.

We regret that you consider our characterization of Workers Power as "centrist" to be an example of "the cheap name calling method of polemic so typical of the Spartacists." We note that you have no difficulty labelling our positions as "sectarian"--a designation which, as Trotsky observed, can generally be taken as a compliment when it comes from a centrist.

During our debates in Oakland in the fall of 1986, it became clear that we had fundamental programmatic differences. At that time we verbally characterized your positions as centrist. Thus it came as a surprise to us when, a few months later, we learned that you proposed to include us in a purported "bloc against centrism," which you attempted to throw together with the Italian Revolutionary Workers Group (GOR) for the WRP's then-projected international conference.

According to Trotsky:

"Centrism is the name applied to that policy which is opportunist in substance and which seeks to appear as revolutionary in form. Opportunism consists in a passive adaptation to the ruling class and its regime, to that which already exists, including, of course, the state boundaries. Centrism shares completely this fundamental trait of opportunism, but in adapting itself to the dissatisfied workers, centrism veils it by means of radical commentaries."¹

The critique elaborated in your letter of 2 April provides a case study of centrism in our time: a studied repudiation of Trotskyist principles, together with an evasion of many of the central questions in dispute. Whether fetishizing the united-front tactic, bowing to Khomeini or Galtieri, blurring the line between nationalism and Marxism, or defending capitalist-restorationists in Poland, Workers Power is consistent only in its attempts to veil with radical commentaries its opportunist adaptation to the present bourgeois consciousness of the masses.

Spartacist and Revolutionary Continuity

Your "overall view" of our politics is that they "are based on a sectarian method inherited from the Spartacist League." Our group was founded by cadres from the Spartacist tendency and we regard the Spartacist League (SL) and its progenitor, the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP), as an important link in the chain of Trotskyist continuity. The Spartacist tendency, virtually alone among ostensibly Trotskyist organizations, correctly analyzed the perplexing phenomenon of the Cuban Revolution **at the time**. It recognized that while Castro's 26 July Movement did preside over the destruction of capitalism in Cuba, it would be incapable of establishing anything other than a deformed workers state on that island.

As we noted in our document, "We stand on the Trotskyist positions defended and elaborated by the revolutionary Spartacist League" of the 1960's and 1970's. We are proud of that record. The SL fought for a revolutionary perspective on all of the significant international questions which it addressed in that period. Today, however, the

international Spartacist tendency (iSt) is today no longer a revolutionary organization, but a cynical political bandit cult (see "The Road to Jimstown," *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt No. 4*).

We reject your notion that the degeneration of the iSt is traceable to its fundamental programmatic positions. Applying this formula to the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party, one arrives at the familiar conclusion, "Leninism leads to Stalinism." Surely you would agree that the bureaucratic strangulation of the CPSU was already far advanced when Stalin first enunciated his theory of "Socialism in One Country." To understand the degeneration of the Spartacist group, it is necessary to comprehend the dialectical relation between the formal programmatic positions of an ostensibly Leninist formation and its actual activity in the world--including the condition of its internal regime (which is in turn conditioned by a number of objective factors). Over time the two must inevitably converge, but this is not to say that there is a direct one-to-one correspondence at every step of an organization's development (or degeneration).

Your one-sided assertion that, "regimes are the product of definite politics, definite programmes" is an argument which Robertson and his cronies clung to for years. They claimed that their brutal, dishonest and cynical behavior internally could only be taken as evidence of a bad regime if, in the pages of the group's public press, there was evidence of overt revisionism on the Russian question, the national question, etc. In the case of the Spartacist group, the cultist and highly bureaucratized evolution of the internal regime--in itself a programmatic departure from Trotskyism--prepared the way for a series of other programmatic departures from the organization's own revolutionary tradition. We have documented a good many of the more consequential revisionist positions adopted by the Robertson leadership--from social-patriotic defense of the U.S. Marines in Lebanon to hailing Yuri Andropov, the Stalinist butcher of the Hungarian Revolution.

The 1951-53 Split

Our differences on the question of revolutionary continuity do not simply involve an assessment of the Spartacist tendency. You assert that there was no significant issue of principle involved in the 1951-53 split in the Fourth International. As we noted in "For Trotskyism" we stand on the fight of the organizations which formed the International Committee (IC), while recognizing that this fight was "profoundly flawed both in terms of political framework and execution."

Each of the components of what was to become the IC exhibited distinctive political impulses alien to Trotskyism. Cannon's arguments in favor of a federated international were completely erroneous, and the activity of the Healy group in the Labour Party was both unprincipled and in no important way different from what Pablo proposed for the rest of the international. The IC groups had also shared the earlier disorientation of the movement over Yugoslavia and China.

However, despite these problems, the bottom line is that in the 1951-53 fight, the main sections of the IC opposed Pablo's project of liquidating the Trotskyist cadres into Stalinism and social democracy. For revolutionists this is a question of principle. The sections which constituted themselves as the IC rejected the pessimistic conclusions which Pablo's faction drew from the phenomenon of the post-war expansion of Stalinism: that in the "New World Reality" Trotskyism had no necessary historic role. Pablo's objectivist conceptions, and his concomitant negation of the subjective factor in history, was captured in "Where Are We Going?" where he asserted that, "the objective process is in the final analysis the sole determining factor, overriding all obstacles of a subjective order."²

The SWP mistakenly endorsed this and other revisionist documents produced by the Pablo leadership of the international--while seeking to avoid the practical consequences by arguing for a form of "American exceptionalism" and a federated international. This was evidence that the revolutionary edge of the SWP leadership was dulling under the tremendous anti-communist pressures of McCarthyism. Yet when faced with the practical requirements of the liquidationist course demanded by Pablo on their own national terrain, the American Trotskyists asserted the historic necessity of a conscious Trotskyist leadership in the struggle for socialist revolution.

By contrast, the American Pabloists, led by Bert Cochran, called for "junking the old Trotskyism," and, after leaving the SWP, rapidly dissolved into a social-democratic literary circle. The SWP in the 1950's was isolated and besieged, with an aging cadre and no prospects of significant growth in the foreseeable future. It was visibly drifting rightward. Yet, despite its growing political disorientation, it clung to formally orthodox positions on most important programmatic questions. It was therefore, unlike the Cochranite formation, an organization which possessed the capacity for its own political regeneration.

The SWP's "Open Letter"

We find your attitude toward the formation of the IC to be light-minded. Your assertion that "in all essentials they [the IC] agreed with him [Pablo]" is followed by the glib comment that, "the criticisms of the IS's positions on the French general strike and the East German events made by the SWP in its open letter of 1953 were correct." But comrades, this was the founding document of the IC. The French general strike and the East German revolt were the two critical political events in Europe that year, which, as the SWP correctly asserted, demonstrated the irreversibly revisionist and anti-Trotskyist character of the Pablo current.

In its November 1953 letter, the SWP noted:

"In East Germany in June the workers rose against the Stalinist-dominated government in one of the greatest demonstrations in the history of Germany. This was the first proletarian mass uprising against Stalinism since it usurped and consolidated power in the Soviet Union. How did Pablo respond to this epochal event?
"Instead of clearly voicing the revolutionary political aspirations of the insurgent East German workers, Pablo covered up the counter-revolutionary Stalinist satraps who mobilized Soviet troops to put down the uprising...."

A similar divergence was evident in the orientations of the two tendencies toward the French general strike:

"In France in August the greatest general strike in the history of the country broke out. Put in motion by the workers themselves against the will of their official leadership, it presented one of the most favorable openings in working-class history for the development of a real struggle for power....
"The official leadership, both Social Democrats and Stalinists, betrayed this movement, doing their utmost to restrain it and avert the danger to French capitalism. In the history of betrayals it would be difficult to find a more abominable one if it is measured against the opportunity that was present.
"How did the Pablo faction respond to this colossal event?"

...
"As for the Stalinists, the Pabloites covered up their betrayal. By that action they shared in the Stalinist betrayal."³

The Pabloists' response to the East German uprising and the French general strike was not accidental. It reflected a profound political difference over the nature of Stalinism and the relevance of the "old Trotskyism" which the Pabloists were in such a hurry to "junk." Pablo made this clear in a December 1953 reply to the SWP's "Open Letter":

"They [the Cannon grouping] still remain on the schema and the genuine 'orthodox' faith in the politics of 1938...They preserve the same attitude towards the Stalinist organizations and movement, and the Soviet Union, as in 1938...This whole assemblage of forecasts and correct politics is now turned upside down by an entirely different course of history."⁴

It was not by accident that, at the time of the split, the IC was right against the IS on every important contested question. The Pablo faction generalized from the phenomenon of the post-war expansion of Stalinism that Trotskyism had no necessary historic function. While the Pabloists have since periodically relocated the "epicenter" of world revolution (from the Stalinist CPs of Western Europe to the Algerian FLN, the Castroist July 26 Movement, the New Left "New Mass Vanguard," Khomeini's Islamic Revolution, etc.) the fundamentally liquidationist impulse of their objectivist methodology has remained constant.

The IC was flawed by its hasty and superficial struggle against this liquidationist current, and its subsequent failure to attempt to reestablish a democratic-centralist Trotskyist international organization. But in politics, as in many other fields, it is vital to have a sense of proportion. Despite its flaws, the IC, at the time of the split, upheld the most fundamental proposition of Leninism--the necessity of a conscious Marxist vanguard at the head of the proletariat, as the **only** agency capable of leading successful socialist transformations. The SWP put it well in its "Open Letter":

"the factor that sustains cadres under the most difficult circumstances is the burning conviction of the theoretical correctness of our movement, the knowledge that they are the living means for advancing the historic mission of the working class, the understanding that to one degree or another the fate of humanity depends on what they do, the firm belief that whatever the momentary circumstances may be, the main line of historic development demands the creation of Leninist combat parties that will resolve the crisis of humanity through a victorious socialist revolution."

The respective responses to the events in France and East Germany in 1953 demonstrated **in life** the profound political distance which separated these two currents. This is why, despite our criticisms, we consider that the IC was qualitatively superior to the IS, and why we believe that authentic Trotskyists today have a side in that fight. Frankly, we find the idea that there were no Trotskyists on the planet for two and a half decades--from 1951 until your own immaculate conception in the womb of Tony Cliff's anti-Soviet "Third Camp" swamp in the mid-1970's--hard to take seriously.

The SLL and the 1963 Pabloite "Reunification"

We find your criticisms of the Socialist Labour League's 1961 document "The World Prospect for Socialism" (a document which played an important part in the crystallization of the Revolutionary Tendency within the SWP) essentially trivial. The SLL, even in its best period, was imperfect and you are correct to criticize the characterization of Mao and Tito as "centrists." A more consequential--but not unrelated--error was Healy's insistence that Cuba remained capitalist even after the expropriations of 1960. Yet at a time when the SWP was rapidly moving rightward toward "reunification" with the Pabloists on the basis of a shared enthusiasm for Castro, this document unambiguously reasserted the role of the conscious factor in history--the necessity of the Trotskyist vanguard as

the agency of proletarian revolution. This was illustrated in the critique of Mandel's shameful role as left cover for the trade-union "lefts" in the 1961 Belgian general strike:

"On the most general level the Belgian events teach that the prime necessity is to build a revolutionary cadre. This task cannot be evaded by any consideration of immediate tactical success or to win approval from centrists or other tendencies. It cannot begin if major theoretical questions are not brought forward for discussion or if efforts are made to form combinations in which principled questions are put to one side. It cannot begin by support for centrist 'personalities' or the establishment of relationships which involve concessions on principle."

The fact that the authors of this document subsequently degenerated into cheerleaders for the "Arab Revolution," the Vietnamese Stalinists, Mao's Red Guards and finally Qaddafi's Green Revolution does not negate the positive role which they played in rearming Trotskyist cadres for political battle in the struggle against the revisionist "reunification" which created the United Secretariat in 1963. We stand on the record of the RT and the revolutionary SL and seek to carry forward this struggle, and by doing so to play our part in a regroupment of revolutionaries which can once more establish "orthodox" Trotskyism as an important current in the international working class.

What Program for Trade Union Work?

You take exception to our advocacy of programmatically-based caucuses in the unions and allege that this is implicitly opposed to building "united front rank and file organisations." This, you claim, amounts to a rejection of the tradition of the revolutionary Comintern in the field of trade-union work. "Of course," you hasten to add, "we are in favour of building communist caucuses, but we do not counterpose them to united front bodies." If this is indeed the case, we can only wonder why you assert that our advocacy of programmatically-based caucuses "can only mean...the exclusion of all other forms of organisation within the unions."

The hypothetical example which you cite--of a "rank and file movement" emerging "as a result of the contradiction between the material interests of the rank and file and those of the bureaucracy"--does little to clarify your perspective for the communist caucuses which you supposedly favor. You ask rhetorically whether we should:

"ignore such workers until they have become communists or do we try to organise them on the basis of their first step towards an alternative to the reformist bureaucracy? The rank and file movement is the bridge between these workers and the communist caucus. This is particularly necessary where communists are a tiny minority in the unions....The BT is a small organisation. To content itself with communist caucuses in the unions is to condemn itself to isolation from the great mass of U.S. workers."

We are not familiar with the trade-union work of Workers Power. However your talk of "united front rank and file organisations" and your assertion that we should not be "content" with communist caucuses suggests that you share the opportunist notions of most centrists: i.e., **now** is the time to build lowest common denominator "rank and file caucuses" with left bureaucrats on a reformist program; only **later** will it be appropriate to advance a revolutionary program. We reject such stagist conceptions.

The bridge between the present consciousness of the masses and the objective necessity of proletarian state power is the transitional program. Your willingness to ascribe the role of "bridge" to an as-yet non-existent "united front rank and file movement"--which you apparently conceive of as a bloc with various left bureaucrats--is a prescription for economist liquidationism.

It is an elementary proposition of Leninism that the advanced workers can only be won to communism through the active intervention of revolutionists fighting for a Marxist program. The struggle for programmatic clarity distinguishes Leninists from all manner of opportunists and spontaneists in the unions--as in every other arena. The consolidation of revolutionary nuclei in the unions is therefore the first requirement for creating a class-struggle left wing in the working class. The Comintern was very clear on this. For example the "Theses on Tactics" adopted by the Third (1921) Congress noted that:

"For various historical reasons there was no large revolutionary movement in the USA in the period before the war and even now the Communists are still at the elementary stage of creating a nucleus of Party members and establishing links with the working masses."⁵

Or one can look to point 9 of the famous 21 "Conditions of Admission into the Communist International":

"Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International must systematically and persistently develop Communist activities within the trade unions, workers' and works councils, the consumer co-operatives and other mass workers' organizations. Within these organizations it is necessary to organize Communist cells the aim of which is to win the trade unions etc. for the cause of Communism by incessant and persistent work. In their daily work the cells have the obligation to expose everywhere the treachery of the social patriots and the vacillations of the 'centrists'. The Communist cells must be completely subordinated to the Party as a whole."⁶

The united front is only one of a variety of tactics which communist formations may use to expand their influence in the political struggle against bourgeois consciousness in the proletariat. As a tactic it must necessarily be subordinated to the strategic imperative of creating a class-conscious, revolutionary wing within the unions. The united front is not an **alternative** to class-struggle caucuses organized on the basis of the Transitional Program, but a means by which revolutionaries in such formations can expand their influence. It is therefore literally meaningless to talk of "counterposing" the one to the other.

Trotsky's 1922 document "On the United Front" poses the relationship in the following manner:

"We participate in a united front but do not for a single moment become dissolved in it. We function in the united front as an independent detachment. It is precisely in the course of struggle that broad masses must learn from experience that we fight better than the others, that we see more clearly than the others, that we are more audacious and resolute. In this way, we shall bring closer the hour of the united revolutionary front under the undisputed Communist leadership."⁷

How can revolutionaries function in united fronts as an independent detachment if they are not first organized and defined by their adherence to a particular set of ideas (i.e., a program)? Only on this basis is it possible to demonstrate the seriousness of communists in the day-to-day struggles while simultaneously exposing the programmatic bankruptcy of the centrists and reformists in the united front.

The Spartacist League concluded in the early 1970's that what the revolutionary SWP of the 1930's lacked in its work in the unions was organizational vehicles based on the full Transitional Program. These caucuses are not counterposed to united-front work, but rather its *sine qua non*. In polemicizing against this orientation, you quote an instruction from the CI at its Fourth Congress to the British section in 1922. You quote Lovosky's remarks to the British delegation:

"As far as Britain is concerned, we see clearly that it would be disastrous if the party contented itself with organising its forces only within its little Party nuclei. The aim must be to create a far more numerous opposition trade union movement."

But Lovosky was **not** arguing against the independent existence of party nuclei as you suggest. The next couple of sentences, which you omit, make this obvious:

"Our aim must be that our Communist groups should act as a point of crystallisation round which the opposition elements will concentrate. The aim must be to create, to marshal, to integrate the opposition forces, and the Communist Party will itself grow concurrently with the growth of the opposition."⁸

The Comintern's objective was the formation of a left-wing movement in the unions **under communist hegemony**. The founding conference of the National Minority Movement (NMM) in August 1924 openly declared that its aim was to:

"organize the working masses of Great Britain for the overthrow of capitalism, the emancipation of the workers from oppressors and exploiters, and the establishment of a Socialist Commonwealth; to carry on a wide agitation and propaganda for the principles of the revolutionary class struggle...and against the present tendency toward social peace and class collaboration...."⁹

In raising a program which was capped with a call for a workers government, was the NMM also guilty, in your eyes, of "being against the organisational bridge" which you imagine to be necessary to introduce revolutionary ideas to rank-and-file workers?

In the U.S. the first point of the 1922 program of the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), the Communist Party-led left wing in the unions and the analogue of the NMM, called for "the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a workers republic." Other points advocated a policy of class struggle, repudiated dual unionism, called for support to the Russian Revolution, and called for independent labor political action. On this basis, the TUEL entered into various united fronts and offered critical electoral support to trade unionists who stood on a program which broke, on some crucial question, from business unionism.

In both Britain and America our practical tasks today are somewhat more modest than those posed before the communists of the 1920's. The most that a small number of class-struggle trade-union militants aligned with a Trotskyist propaganda organization can hope to do is to show by example how victories can be won. Tactics like united fronts (or critical support in elections), must be employed by a very small vanguard to reach larger audiences of workers. But in the unions, as everywhere else, the political organization of those who agree with the communist program is a precondition for engaging in broader blocs.

The "Theses on Comintern Tactics" adopted by the Fourth Congress explicitly repudiated "attempts of the Second International to absorb workers' organizations further to the left and call this a united front" as "another opportunity for the social-democratic leaders to betray new masses of workers to the bourgeoisie." The Theses went on to explain that:

"The united front tactic is simply an initiative whereby the Communists propose to join with all workers belonging to other parties and groups and all unaligned workers in a common struggle to defend the immediate, basic interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie...."

"It is particularly important when using the united front tactic to achieve not just agitational but also **organizational results**. Every opportunity must be used to establish organizational footholds among the working masses themselves (factory committees,

supervisory commissions made up of workers from all the different parties and unaligned workers, action committees, etc.)."¹⁰

In this, as in practically all the documents of the Comintern in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, it is clear that the conception of the united front--whether based on a single issue or in the form of factory committees or soviets--is premised on the existence of independent communist formations. To attack our proposal for "building programmatically-based caucuses in the trade unions," you will have to look elsewhere than in the traditions of the revolutionary Comintern.

Programmatic Criteria for Critical Support

The united front, in the unions or elsewhere, is closely linked to the proper application of the tactic of critical support. You reject the idea that critical support for reformists has anything to do "with the programme they stand on" and tell us that, "Both Trotsky and Lenin made clear that the sole purpose of revolutionaries calling for a vote for reformists was that if they have the support of the masses then they have to be put to the test of office."

This is not in fact how Trotsky approached the question of critical support. He understood that it was necessary to have **some** point of programmatic intersection with the reformists for this tactic to be applicable. In the 1930's the SWP was too closely identified with Roosevelt's "progressives" in the trade unions. Trotsky kept probing the American Trotskyists for an approach to the Stalinist workers. With the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939, the CP struck an "anti-imperialist" posture and began to issue propaganda against the New Deal. This political turn allowed an appeal to Stalinist workers. Here is how Trotsky proposed that the SWP intervene:

"What I propose is a manifesto to the Stalinist workers, to say that for five years you were for Roosevelt, then you changed. This turn is in the right direction. Will you develop and continue this policy or not? Will you let the leaders change it or not? Will you continue and develop it or not? If you are firm we will support you. In this manifesto we can say that if you fix a sharp program for your candidate, then we will vote for him."¹¹

The CPUSA was not a mass party in 1939, although it was several orders of magnitude larger than the SWP and claimed 100,000 members.¹² When dealing with mass reformist parties like the British Labour Party, the same programmatic criterion is applicable, but operates on a different level than with the American Stalinists in 1939. The programmatic contradiction to be exploited in the BLP is between its bourgeois (reformist) formal program and the fact that by its very existence, the Labour Party represents a deformed expression of working-class political independence. This contradiction enables revolutionaries to consider critically supporting such "bourgeois-workers parties"--depending on the particular conjuncture of the class struggle at the moment. When we call for a vote to the reformists it is to put the Labour fakers to the test of office, i.e., to expose the hollowness of their pretensions to stand for the independent interests of the workers. In this way revolutionaries advance the struggle to split the base from the top.

In the 1974 British general elections, the Tories ran an openly union-busting campaign while the Labour tops postured as the defenders of the workers. In this case it was clearly necessary to call for a vote to the social-democrats while warning that Callaghan/Wilson would only betray, i.e., to **critically support** the Labour Party. But when a mass working-class party runs on a program of coalition with a bourgeois party (e.g., the Lib-Lab pact) or on its record of savage anti-working class attacks, as the Labour Party did in the general election of March 1979, it can serve no useful purpose for

revolutionaries to call for a vote to the Labour traitors, regardless of the number of workers who continue to support them. In such cases, the indicated tactic would be one of **conditional non-support**, that is, the condition for calling for a vote to any Labour candidate would be that she/he break decisively with the particular policy of overt class treason.

Communist Tactics and the Popular Front

Workers Power's call for electoral support to candidates of the popular front parallels its position on the united front. Both contain the same amalgam of strategic amnesia and tactical fetishism. In our document we quoted Trotsky's observation that:

"The question of questions at present is the Popular Front. The left centrists seek to present this question as a tactical or even as a technical maneuver, so as to be able to peddle their wares in the shadow of the Popular Front."¹³

One of the centrist ideas which Workers Power is busy peddling is the notion that a popular front is essentially **the same** as a social-democratic bourgeois-workers party. Comrade Hoskisson agrees that a vote for a candidate of a popular front is a vote to put a bourgeois political formation into office; but he goes on to assert that, "even if a member of a reformist workers party stands on the ticket of forming a purely social democratic government they remain representatives of a bourgeois formation." The denial that there is a fundamental difference between parties based on the organizations of the working class and class-collaborationist **coalitions** of reformist workers parties with bourgeois parties, is a blatant revision of one of the cornerstones of Trotskyism: the centrality of the **political independence** of the proletariat. As is usual in the history of the Marxist movement, this particular piece of revisionism did not fall from the sky. It is designed to justify voting for the candidates of the popular front.

In 1936 Max Shachtman, writing for the revolutionary SWP, explained clearly the dynamics of electoral class collaboration in an attack on the workers parties that signed on with the Spanish popular front:

"What was inexcusably criminal on the part of the Socialist party, the Communist party, and the Maurin-Nin party of 'Marxian Unification' was not only that they wrote a 'common program' with the discredited bourgeois parties--which was bad enough--and that thereby, politically speaking, they appeared before the masses in **one party** with the bourgeoisie, but that this 'common program' was dictated and written by the bourgeoisie, and that in every other respect the joint party--under the pseudonym of the 'People's Front'--was dominated by the bourgeoisie.

...

"The 'republican' bourgeoisie was so badly discredited in the eyes of the masses that it required a protective covering. In the 'united front' it was not 'used' by the workers' parties--but the workers' parties [were] used by it. It was not taken in tow by the socialists and communists--it dragged the latter in its wake....

"It is not so much the workers who needed the support of the bourgeois politicians, as the bourgeois politicians who urgently required the support and protection of the workers. They received the latter in the form of the complete subordination of the labor parties to the bourgeois parties in the 'People's Front'."¹⁴

When a "bourgeois-workers party" appears before the masses as part of a joint party with the bourgeoisie, it explicitly renounces any claim to stand for the political independence of the workers. For the duration of the bloc, the latent contradiction embodied in such a formation is suppressed. A vote for the "workers" component of a popular front is a vote for the "one party" of the bourgeoisie.

But for you the question of critical support is simply whether or not the reformists "have the support of the masses." This adaptation to the present backwardness of "the masses" is a hallmark of centrism. In 1935 Trotsky asked:

"what else is the task of the Marxists if not to raise the subjective factor to the level of the objective and to bring the consciousness of the masses closer to the understanding of the historical necessity--in simpler terms, to explain to the masses their own interests, which they do not yet understand?"¹⁵

You complain that our refusal to vote for reformists in the popular front is "flawed" and "negative." Yet Trotsky's tactic of "kicking the bourgeoisie out of the popular front"--which you applaud--is precisely our own "negative" position. In Spain, in 1931, Trotsky advocated the Bolshevik tactic of breaking the reformists' coalition with the bourgeoisie and making them assume power in their own name:

"The proletarian vanguard is fully interested in pushing the Spanish Socialists to take power into their hands. For that to happen, it is necessary to split the coalition. The present task is the fight to drive the bourgeoisie ministers from the coalition."¹⁶

If the reformists break with the popular front, and thereby destroy it as a "joint party," then, and **only** then, can revolutionists consider a tactic of critical support. This is the whole significance of Lenin's insistence that the Mensheviks and SRs break with the capitalist ministers in Kerensky's Provisional Government in 1917 as a **precondition** for any critical support from the Bolsheviks.

Trotsky and the POB: "Critical Support" to Coalitionism?

In your letter you suggest that, at least in Belgium, Trotsky was indifferent to the question of coalitionism:

"Indeed prior to the events in France in 1936 Trotsky had argued for critical support for the Belgian social democratic party, the POB, around the slogan, POB to power, despite that party's declared intention of governing in coalition with the monarchists. Critical support in these circumstances, was tied to the slogan, break with the bourgeoisie."

This appears to be a case of Workers Power ascribing to Trotsky its own policy of unconditional "critical" support to the reformist misleaders of the proletariat. The MRCI appends the slogan "break with the bourgeoisie" as a left cover for its policy of unconditional "critical" support to reformists in the popular front. For Trotsky this relationship was inverted--any support to the POB was **conditional** on its break with the bourgeoisie. In the immediate aftermath of the June 1936 French strikes, he wrote:

"The first step to an alliance with the petty bourgeoisie is the breaking up of the bloc with the bourgeois radicals in France and Spain, the bloc with the Catholics and Liberals in Belgium, etc. It is necessary to explain this truth, on the basis of experience, to every Socialist and Communist worker. Such is the central task of the moment. The struggle against reformism and Stalinism is at the present stage a struggle above all against a bloc with the bourgeoisie. For the honest unity of the workers, against dishonest unity with the exploiters! Bourgeoisie out of the People's Front! Down with the capitalist ministers!"¹⁷

We have reviewed Trotsky's remarks on the POB in the period preceding the betrayal of the June 1936 strike wave, and we find nothing to substantiate the claim that he ever advocated electoral support to the POB while it was in coalition with a bourgeois party. Workers Power may have drawn this mistaken impression from a letter dated 9 January 1934, entitled "Revisionism and Planning," where Trotsky defended the slogan "Let the Belgian Labor Party (POB) take power!" But advancing this slogan is not at all the same as calling for a vote to the social democrats in a coalition. In 1934, POB leader Hendrik de Man was talking about imposing "planning" on the market. Given the political hegemony of the POB within the working class, Trotsky said, "the whole situation must suggest to the proletariat the thought of a Social Democratic government." In calling for the POB to take power, Trotsky was well aware that the leadership of the party:

"fears power outside a coalition, as it needs bourgeois allies to be able to reject the demands of the workers.

"We know all this, but we also know that not only the capitalist regime as a whole but also its parliamentary state machinery entered into a stage of an acute crisis that bears in itself the possibility of quick (relatively) changes of mood of the masses, as well as quick successions of parliamentary and government combinations."¹⁸

The call for a POB government was designed to take advantage of the possibility of such rapid swings in mass moods to set the social-democratic base against the top over the question of coalitionism. It is important to remember that Trotsky raised this demand in a particular historical conjuncture:

"To save itself from ruin, the Social Democracy needs a **certain** movement of the workers. It must frighten the bourgeoisie to make it more agreeable. It is certainly mortally afraid that this movement might go over its head. But with the absolute insignificance of the Comintern, the weakness of the revolutionary groups and under the fresh impression of the German experience, the Social Democracy expects immediate danger from the right and not from the left. Without these prerequisites, the slogan 'power to the Social Democracy' would, in general, be meaningless."¹⁹

The call to put the POB in power when it was striking poses to "frighten the bourgeoisie" is identical in essence to the Bolshevik call for Kerensky, who claimed to represent the workers, to govern **without** the capitalist ministers. It is a demand that the reformists put their money where their mouth is. Far from being a call for a vote to a party **despite** its coalition with the class enemy, as Workers Power imagines, it is a call designed to **break** the alliance with the bourgeoisie:

"Just as de Man does not want a revolutionary struggle of the proletariat...so he does not want and fears a real struggle for the petty-bourgeois masses....Instead of this, de Man seeks parliamentary allies, shabby democrats, Catholics, blood relatives from the right who are needed by him as bulwark against possible revolutionary excesses of the proletariat. We must know how to make this side of the question clear to the reformist workers in the daily experience of facts. **For a close revolutionary union of the proletariat with the oppressed petty-bourgeois masses of the city and village but against government coalition with political representatives and traitors of the petty bourgeoisie!**"²⁰ (emphasis in original)

Comrade Hoskisson's interpretation of Trotsky's advocacy of the slogan "POB to power" as electoral support to the reformists **"despite** [our emphasis--BT] that party's declared intention of governing in coalition with the monarchists" seems positively perverse!

Leninism and Immigration/Emigration

Workers Power's hysterical denunciation of our Marxist position on immigration/emigration as "potentially reactionary" and based on a "racist fantasy" reveals in a particularly stark fashion the substrate of petty-bourgeois moralism which underlies so many of the MRCI positions. In the interest of political clarity we will nevertheless attempt to unravel some of the key elements in your argument.

First, your statement that it is a "racist fantasy" to assert that there can be cases where "a mass influx of people from one country (unspecified) into another (unspecified)" can jeopardize the right to self-determination of the host population, is a deliberate smear. Anyone who takes the trouble to read what we actually wrote can see that we "specified" three historical examples of situations where such migrations have in fact occurred: Zionist immigration into Palestine in the 1930's and 1940's; French colons immigrating to New Caledonia in the past several decades and Han immigration into Tibet in Maoist China. To imagine that such scenarios could be repeated in the future is neither fantastic nor racist. It is obvious that your attempt to label it as such is due only to your political inability to deal with our position.

Secondly, you allege that we reject "the democratic right for the free movement of workers across all countries." Again, if the comrade who concocted this nonsense had taken the trouble to read the document he polemicized against, he might have noticed that it very clearly states that we support "the basic democratic right of any individual to emigrate to any country in the world." We uphold the democratic right of individual emigration, while recognizing that it is neither categorical nor absolute. In some cases it could abrogate other democratic rights, as in the examples cited above--or it may conflict with a higher principle, such as the defense of the deformed and degenerated workers states.

Finally, you suggest that we pose "as the immediate answer to fight a particular aspect of imperialist policy--racist immigration controls--the revolution." Once again we have to refer you to what we actually wrote:

"In the U.S. we defend Mexican workers apprehended by *La Migra*. We oppose all immigration quotas, all roundups and all deportations of immigrant workers. In the unions we fight for the immediate and unconditional granting of full citizenship rights to all foreign-born workers."

Marxists unequivocally oppose all racist and discriminatory restrictions on immigration and uphold the right of individual emigration--but this does not imply support to the utopian/liberal demand for "open borders." The Marxist answer to the grotesque inequalities created by imperialism is not mass migration, but the creation of a rational, socialist world order through proletarian revolution. Rather than combat the liberal illusions which underlie the call for "open borders" and struggle to win those who raise such slogans to a Marxist perspective, Workers Power "goes with the flow" and thus compounds their confusion.

Khomeini and the "Anti-Imperialist" United Front

A similar methodology is evident in your support to Khomeini's movement in Iran in 1979. You assert:

"Your position on Iran and your refusal to support the anti-Shah movement led by the mullahs is the fruit of your abandonment of Leninism. You remained neutral here (and in the Malvinas war) in a real conflict between a national movement of an oppressed

nation and its oppressors...Leninists support struggles against imperialism in spite of the reactionary role of the 'anti-imperialist bourgeoisie'."

You assure us that you have no illusions in Khomeini but that in supporting his movement you were implementing the "anti-imperialist united front." But Khomeini's movement was in no sense a national movement against imperialism--it was a movement which sought to protect and restore the privileges and authority of the traditional rulers of Iran against the unpopular and brittle regime of the "modernizing" Shah. There is no necessary or fundamental conflict between Islamic theocracy and world imperialism.

The roots of your error on Iran were not located at the level of a mistaken appreciation of the class character of Islamic fundamentalism. What you exhibited was the classic centrist impulse to follow along behind "mass movements." The correct and necessary task of revolutionists, which was carried out to our knowledge only by the Spartacist tendency (of which we were then a part), was to warn the Iranian workers of the inevitably reactionary consequences of Khomeini in power and to seek to rally them in opposition to the mullahs as well as the Shah. The fundamental axis of this orientation was captured in the slogan "Down with the Shah; Down with the Mullahs; Workers to Power in Iran!"

Let us recall how you actually supported the **illusions** of the masses in January 1979:
 "Islamic ideology is Janus-faced. It can justify anti-imperialism, resistance to the foreign powers seeking to exploit or dismember the states of the Middle East. It can also justify black reaction--the suppression of the working class and poor peasantry. The inner connection is that like all religions it defends private property. As long as the possessing classes of the imperialised nation feel the major threat to their property to lie with imperialism then they can play a vigorous role in the struggle against it. Islamic ideology will then have a 'progressive' populist colouration and orientation. When the working class or small peasants become a serious threat not only to imperialism but to the native larger property owners it can become a cloak for bonapartist military dictatorship..."²¹

A centrist night in which all cows are black. We might paraphrase your formula as follows: Islamic ideology (preservation of the privileges of the clerical hierarchy and possessing classes; social slavery for women; the extermination of homosexuals and the eradication of the left, etc.) can have a progressive, anti-imperialist orientation until the plebian strata mobilized behind it begin to threaten the traditional social hierarchy--whereupon it assumes a reactionary character. If Khomeini's Iran proves anything, it is that Islamic ideology is a vehicle for the social subordination of the workers and poor peasants to the "native larger property owners." Your policy of "support [to] the anti-Shah movement led by the mullahs" is completely anti-Trotskyist. The lessons drawn by Trotsky from the Chinese Communist Party's prostration before the Kuomintang apply in all their force to your position on the mullahs' theocratic movement:

"The false course of the Comintern was based on the statement that the yoke of international imperialism is compelling all 'progressive' classes to go together. In other words, according to the Comintern's Stalinist theory, the yoke of imperialism would somehow change the laws of the class struggle."²²

Khomeini made no secret of his intentions--as early as 1941 he was calling for the establishment of an "Islamic government" in Iran:

"If just one article of the Constitution were to be implemented, that specifying that all laws contrary to the *shari'a* are invalid, everyone in the country would join together in harmony....

"We know that all this is unpalatable to those who have grown up with lechery, treachery, music and dancing, and a thousand other varieties of corruption. Of course,

they regard the civilization and advancement of the country as dependent upon women going naked in the streets, or to quote their own idiotic words, turning half the population into workers by unveiling them....They will not agree to the country's being administered rationally and in accordance with God's law."²³

In 1963 Khomeini was still railing against the Shah's regime--but we imagine that it is difficult, even for you, to find a "'progressive' colouration" in comments like the following:

"I have repeatedly pointed out that the government has evil intentions and is opposed to the ordinances of Islam. One by one, the proofs of its enmity are becoming clear. The Ministry of Justice has made clear its opposition to the ordinances of Islam by various measures like the abolition of the requirement that judges be Muslim and male; henceforth, Jews, Christians, and the enemies of Islam and the Muslims are to decide on affairs concerning the honor and person of the Muslims."²⁴

The victory of Khomeini's Islamic movement meant the slaughter of hundreds of thousands, and the substitution for the Iranian masses of one form of capitalist enslavement for another. Yet Workers Power ludicrously insists that what was going on was "a real conflict between a national movement of an oppressed nation and its oppressors."

The capitulation to the "Islamic Revolution" was capped by a policy of military support to Khomeini's regime when the Iran-Iraq war broke out. This shameful record is not expunged by the fact that Workers Power eventually found it expedient to withdraw its support from Khomeini's holy war (in company with virtually every other ostensibly Trotskyist current which had promoted the "revolutionary dynamic" of the mullahs in the heady days of the mass mobilizations).

Malvinas/Falklands War

Your support to Khomeini's bogus "anti-imperialism" finds its analogue in backing Galtieri's adventure in the South Atlantic in 1982. Galtieri's Malvinas gambit was deliberately intended to derail a powerful working-class mobilization with an orgy of social-patriotism. It was launched three days before a threatened general strike. Support to Argentina in that squalid conflict did not express "anti-imperialism," but political confidence in an extremely repressive bonapartist regime. For the Argentinean workers, as for the British, the main enemy was at home.

You defend your Argentine defensism in the Malvinas/Falklands conflict by claiming:

"In carrying through this policy we are following exactly the methodology elaborated by Trotsky in relation to Ethiopia, but also, more pertinently, that he used in relation to Brazil when the danger of war between it and Britain was posed. He argued that regardless of Brazil's reactionary regime a victory for it against British imperialism was the outcome every communist should work for and hope for. Comrades, how on earth do you square your miserable abstentionism with any of the teachings of Trotsky? Cite us your references."

Anyone who looks at what Trotsky actually wrote, will see that the key question in both the Italian-Ethiopian war and the projected conflict between Brazil and Britain was that of the defense of independence of the underdeveloped countries against imperialist conquest. For example, in a short note entitled "The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict" published on 17 July 1935, Trotsky stated, "When war is involved, for us it is not a question of who is 'better,' the Negus or Mussolini; rather, it is a question of the relationship of classes and **the fight of an underdeveloped nation for independence** against imperialism" (emphasis added). In "The Fourth International and the Soviet Union," 8 July 1936, he wrote: "If, for

example, they [i.e., the Fourth Internationalists] support Ethiopia, despite the slavery that still prevails there and despite the barbaric political regime, it is, in the first place, because an independent national state represents a progressive historical stage for a precapitalist country...."²⁵

Several years later, in discussing the prospect of war between Britain and Brazil, Trotsky used a similar criterion:

"I will be on the side of 'fascist' Brazil against 'democratic' Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil."²⁶

Had the sovereignty of Argentina been at stake in the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, then we would indeed have had an Argentinean defensist position. But this was not the issue in the conflict in the South Atlantic. No one thought for a moment that a British victory would result in the installation of a Thatcherite puppet regime in Buenos Aires.

In 1916, Lenin made a pertinent distinction between legitimate popular struggles against national oppression and various "sordid national squabbles" entered into by the bourgeoisies of the oppressed nations. In these latter cases, "the criticism of revolutionary Marxists should be directed not against the national movement, but against its degradation, vulgarisation, against the tendency to reduce it to a petty squabble." He continued:

"We shall not 'support' a republican farce in, say, the principality of Monaco, or the 'republican' adventurism of 'generals' in the small states of South America or some Pacific island. But that does not mean it would be permissible to abandon the republican slogan for serious democratic and socialist movements. We should, and do, ridicule the sordid national squabbles and haggling in Russia and Austria. But that does not mean that it would be permissible to deny support to a national uprising or a serious popular struggle against national oppression."²⁷

You attempt to slide around the critical question of Argentine sovereignty with the assertion that, "Its sovereignty over its islands--stolen from it by Britain--was very much at stake." Marxists are not revanchists. We do not recognize the "right" of Argentina to govern a few thousand English-speaking shepherders on the grounds that Argentina had briefly possessed the Malvinas for a dozen years in the 1820's and 1830's. The fact is that for a century and a half there had been no Argentinean presence on those islands. The population of the Falklands had no historic connection to Argentina and evinced no particular desire to become Argentineans.

Argentine workers had no stake in the junta's war--their main enemy, and the agency of their oppression by imperialism, was at home. Revolutionists therefore called on the Argentine workers to turn their guns around. Of course we would address the same call to the British workers. It is completely illogical to assert, as you do, that, "The necessary adjunct of defeatism in Britain was support for Argentina." There was no just side in the squabble over those desolate pieces of South Atlantic real estate and consequently no reason to call for Argentine workers to shed their blood in Galtieri's military adventure.

Israel and the Arab Regimes

In your letter to us, you assail the historic Spartacist position on the Middle East as placing Israel, "The undisputed gendarme of imperialism in the region, kept afloat by millions of US dollars" on "a par with the Arab semi-colonies." Israel, while considerably

more advanced than its Arab neighbors, remains a weak capitalist economy. It is dependent on handouts from America and world Zionism to maintain an artificially high standard of living. Esther Howard, in a 1983 article in *MERIP Reports* catalogued some of the features of its economy:

"a constant decline in the rate of exchange of the Israeli pound (and now the Israeli shekel) against the dollar; a steadily rising cost of living; a heavy tax burden, a negative balance of trade; a high rate of foreign debt; recurring deficits in the state budget; and, in recent years, an annual rate of inflation averaging well over 100 percent. All of these symptoms are rooted in the weakness of Israel's industrial sector."²⁸

Israel is the world's largest recipient of military "aid" from U.S. imperialism (\$1.8 billion this year), and has aspired to and to some extent has actually played the role of imperialist "gendarme" in the region. But Egypt, which aspires to play the same role, is the **second** biggest recipient. It is slated to receive \$1.3 billion in military aid from the U.S. this year.²⁹

In 1981, the U.S. saw fit to equip the Saudis with the high-tech AWACS planes despite howls of protest from the Israelis. Was this perhaps a reward for the "anti-imperialism" of the Saudi government? The semi-colonies of the Middle East can only move forward economically and socially by social struggle which destroys the regimes of the sheiks and sultans, the Ba'athist colonels and religious autocrats. The episodic contradictions which these regimes have with world imperialism are subordinate to their essential relationship as **partners** in the exploitation of their peoples.

Recognition of this relationship is at the core of the Trotskyist theory of Permanent Revolution. The Chinese Kuomintang of the 1920's was far more "anti-imperialist" than the Arab regimes of the Middle East today, yet Trotsky recognized that the contradictions between it and imperialism were far less profound than the contradictions between the Chinese bourgeoisie and the plebian masses:

"It would further be profound naivete to believe that an abyss lies between the so-called comprador bourgeoisie, that is, the economic and political agency of foreign capital in China, and the so-called national bourgeoisie. No, these two sections stand incomparably closer to each other than the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants....

...

"The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but rather strengthens the political differentiation of the classes. Imperialism is a highly powerful force in the internal relationships of China. The main source of this force is not the warships in the waters of the Yangtze Kiang--they are only auxiliaries--but the economic and political bond between foreign capital and the native bourgeoisie."³⁰

Israel today is a racist, chauvinist, class-differentiated, and increasingly theocratic capitalist society with all the attendant social contradictions. Zionism is not in the historic interests of the Hebrew-speaking workers of Israel; the Zionist state threatens to become a death-trap for the Jews, as Trotsky predicted. Our strategy is to explode the Zionist state from within through the building of a bi-national Palestinian/Israeli workers party on a program of Permanent Revolution--championing the social and national emancipation of the Palestinian people through class struggle against the Zionist state **and** the Hashemites.

The Arab-Israeli Wars

You attack us for what you characterize as "disgraceful neutrality in the wars between the Arab regimes and the Zionist state, a neutrality that...is nothing less than a capitulation to Zionism." In the first place, as we made clear in "For Trotskyism" we have an Egyptian-defensist position in the 1956 war. French and British imperialist control of one of Egypt's prime economic assets, was a real obstacle to any prospect of national development and a blatant infringement on Egyptian sovereignty. We defend Nasser's nationalization of the Suez as an anti-imperialist act, and militarily support Egypt in its conflict with Britain, France and Israel.

The wars of 1948, 1967 and 1973 had a different character. Let us remind you that the oppressed nationality in Israel is the Palestinians. What role did they play in any of these conflicts? In 1948, at the time of the birth of the Zionist state--which we oppose--it is now well established that there was active collusion between the Hashemite rulers of Jordan and the Zionists concerning the dismemberment of Palestine. In one recent account Amnon Kapeliouk reports: "According to the files [in Israeli state archives], there was an understanding of sorts between the Jewish leaders in Palestine and King 'Abdallah of Jordan concerning the division of the country between them, although no precise and definitive border had been agreed upon."³¹

The issue in 1948 was how to carve up the land of the Palestinian people. Prior to the war, only five percent of Palestine was owned by Jewish settlers--but when the armistice was finally signed, Israel possessed over eighty percent of the country.³² Most of the remainder went to Jordan with a smaller part to Egypt. To support the armies of **either** side in the 1948 war was to support the destruction of Palestine! Had there been an independent Palestinian armed force, we would of course have militarily supported it. The Fourth International correctly took a position of revolutionary defeatism on both sides in this conflict. After noting the reactionary character of the Zionist campaign for a Jewish state, the 31 May 1948 issue of the SWP's *Militant* editorialized against the Arab League:

"They are, by their anti-Jewish war, trying to divert the struggle against imperialism and utilizing the aspirations of the Arab masses for national freedom, to smother the social opposition to their tyrannical rule. That is why their war against the Jewish state lacks the progressive characteristics of a national war against imperialism and does not deserve the support of class conscious workers."³³

The Fourth International took the correct position on the 1948 war. By 1967 the Jordanian army, which twenty years before, as the Arab Legion, had been officered by the British (the then-dominant imperialist power in the region), was totally dependent on U.S. imperialism. In the 1967 war, Jordan and Egypt were fighting for a redivision of the lands stolen from the Palestinians in the 1948 war. Where was the "anti-imperialism"? The correct position in this struggle over who was to oppress the Palestinians was, as in 1948, one of revolutionary defeatism on both sides. The Pabloist United Secretariat justified its support to the Arab regimes in this conflict by characterizing the anti-working class bonapartist regimes in Syria and Egypt as the embodiment of a supposed "Arab Revolution." We reject such revisionist notions.

In 1970, Egypt accepted the American "Rogers Plan" whereby Israel would withdraw from the Occupied Territories in exchange for the suppression of the Palestinian resistance. This gave Hussein the green light to butcher some 20,000 Palestinians in September 1970. In an important sense the 1973 war was a war for American imperialism's favor. In the preceding period Egypt had evicted the Soviets and engaged in extensive "de-Nasserization" as part of an attempt to attract imperialist investment. Sadat gambled that a military victory would not only regain the territory lost in 1967, but also demonstrate

Egypt's strategic importance and pressure the U.S. to stabilize the region. The war was also seen by the Egyptian ruling elite as a means of co-opting plebian social unrest--just as Galtieri's Malvinas adventure in 1982 was dictated by the rising tempo of domestic class struggle in Argentina:

"The new policy of confrontation was also developed with the hope of co-opting the mass sentiment of nationalism and class struggle, which could turn against the government at any time....The universities were due to open in mid-October, and there was reason to believe that the restless and vocal students might again enflame the urban masses already chafing from the restriction and rampant inflation characteristic of the current stage of Egyptian development. And so Egypt went to war."³⁴

The National Question and Permanent Revolution

In your critique you devote more space to attacking our position on the national question than any other issue. You begin with the assumption that to recognize "that Marxism and nationalism are counterposed worldviews" implies, as a tactical corollary, "virtual abstention from involvement in progressive national struggles." Anyone who reads our document can see that we very clearly state, "Leninists are not neutral in conflicts between the oppressed people and the oppressor state apparatus. In Northern Ireland we demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops...." We state categorically that we side with any blows struck by the oppressed people (in Northern Ireland the IRA) against the oppressor state apparatus.

Workers Power begins from "the conflict between the revolutionary national struggle of the oppressed and imperialism or its agents." Nationalist movements of the oppressed, which engage in struggle against their oppressors, warrant the military support of revolutionists. But Trotskyists do not automatically ascribe to petty-bourgeois nationalist movements an inherently "revolutionary" character, despite the heroism of their militants and their willingness to struggle against oppression. Revolutionaries approach all questions of special oppression--whether national, racial or sexual--from the standpoint of the class struggle.

You tell us that, "Leninists support struggles against imperialism in spite of the reactionary role of the 'anti-imperialist bourgeoisie'." True enough, but unlike centrists, Leninists do not uncritically accept the "anti-imperialist" rhetoric of every "Third World" despot as good coin. Workers Power's inability to make this elementary distinction led it to support the fundamentally anti-working class mobilizations of Khomeini and Galtieri.

Today there can be no "revolutionary national struggle" standing separate and apart from the class struggle in the society in which it takes place. Only the proletariat, led by its conscious Marxist vanguard, and standing at the head of the peasantry and other toilers, can give consistent expression to the progressive national content of national liberation movements. The national bourgeoisies of the semi-colonial countries act primarily as **agencies** of imperialism within their own nations. This is the meaning of Trotsky's remark, cited above, that the "main force" of imperialism in the colonial and semi-colonial world is not in its gunships and soldiers, but rather "the economic and political bond between foreign capital and the native bourgeoisie." This is clearly expressed in *The Permanent Revolution*:

"With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving **democracy and national emancipation** is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation....Without an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry the tasks of the democratic revolution cannot be solved, nor even seriously

posed. But the alliance of these two classes can be realized in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the national-liberal bourgeoisie."³⁵

Under the pretense of "solidarity," Workers Power systematically capitulates to the nationalism of the oppressed. Since Stalin's disastrous policy of prostration before the "anti-imperialist" bourgeoisie in China in the mid-1920's, the axis of Trotskyism on the national question has been to stress the class issues posed by such struggles. The 1940 Fourth International resolution, "The Colonial World and the Second Imperialist War" made this crystal clear:

"The abortive national struggles in the colonial and semi-colonial countries from 1919 to 1931 were led, as in India and China, by the national bourgeoisie. They confirmed again, in negative form, that the national and democratic revolutions in the colonies can be successfully carried out only by the proletariat in collaboration with the workers of the advanced countries."³⁶

As against the historic positions of the Fourth International under Trotsky, you cite the "Theses on the Eastern Question" of the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922. Here, you tell us, "the tasks of communists in the oppressor countries are spelt out clearly. They can be summed up in one word--solidarity." This document was written prior to the historical experience with the Kuomintang in China which clarified once and for all the relation of the "progressive" bourgeoisie to the colonial revolution. Even so, while calling on communists in the colonies to actively participate in the fight against imperialist tyranny, the theses clearly stated that, "The objective tasks of the colonial revolution go beyond the bounds of bourgeois democracy," and insisted that, "Only when its [the workers movement] importance as an independent factor is recognized and its complete political autonomy secured can temporary agreements with bourgeois democracy be considered permissible or necessary."³⁷ This is a clear anticipation of the position subsequently adopted by the Fourth International.

"Self-Determination" and Interpenetrated Peoples

Most of the national questions posed in Lenin's time have been resolved--the former colonies of the imperialist powers have generally achieved nominal political independence, without, of course, being emancipated from the imperialist world market. Many of the national questions which remain are particularly complex because they involve situations where two or more peoples are interspersed throughout a single territory (e.g., Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine). Unlike the classical cases of oppressed nations addressed by Lenin, simply advocating the right of self-determination in such situations does not resolve the problem, because two (or more) hostile populations cannot both self-determine themselves on the same piece of land. Under capitalism the exercise of the legitimate right of self-determination by either population can only come at the expense of the other. Such a "solution" can only result in maintaining or inverting the existing relations of oppression. For nationalists this is not a problem--they are only concerned with the national rights of their own people. Workers Power adopts a similar criterion--it asserts that the right of self-determination applies only to "good" (that is, the currently oppressed) people.

Leninists oppose forced population transfers and reject the reversal of the terms of oppression as an equitable solution to the seemingly intractable problems posed by interpenetrated peoples. There is a certain romantic attachment to the PLO and IRA within the radical/liberal milieu. But the plight of other interpenetrated peoples in comparable situations receives considerably less attention. We would be interested, for instance, in knowing exactly how Workers Power proposes to resolve the labyrinth of

conflicting nationalist/communalist claims in Lebanon. Whose side do you take there? Or in Cyprus? In that case the relations of communalist oppression were actually reversed, revealing the anti-Marxist logic of simply embracing the nationalism of the oppressed in situations of intermingled peoples. Until 1974 the Turks were the oppressed. However, the invasion of the Turkish army that same year resulted in the brutal expulsion of some 200,000 Greek Cypriots from the northern portion of the island, which effectively reversed this situation. Yet in no sense was this a democratic resolution of the problems of communalist oppression.

You quote Lenin: "The bourgeois nationalism of **any** oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed **against** oppression and it is this content that we **unconditionally** support." Yet in the very next sentence Lenin continues: "At the same time we strictly distinguish it from the tendency towards national exclusiveness; we fight against the tendency of the Polish bourgeois to oppress the Jews, etc., etc."³⁸ In certain peculiar circumstances (and not in Catalonia, as you suppose), where peoples are closely intermingled, the **exercise** of the right of self-determination, the compacting of a territory to form a nation-state, can stamp a real genocidal quality upon that "tendency towards national exclusiveness." Witness the fate of the Palestinians in 1948 at the hands of the Irgun.

To say this is not to deny the abstract **right** of self-determination in such cases--merely to note that there are instances in which the exercise of such a right would not be in the historic interests of the proletariat. This coincides exactly with Lenin's approach to the question:

"The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a **small part** of the general-democratic (now: general-socialist) **world** movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected."³⁹

Catalan Nationalism and Interpenetrated Peoples

It would seem that you do not understand, or do not want to understand, what we mean by the phrase "intermingled" or "interpenetrated" peoples. This is evident from your assertion that Catalonia was a "case of an intermingled people [where] Trotsky was able to identify the progressive and reactionary character of the nationalism of the particular intermingled peoples...." But Catalans and Spaniards are **not** interpenetrated peoples. In Belfast or Beirut the hostile communities live literally within a stone's throw of each other. This is not at all the situation in Catalonia (or Quebec). In these latter cases the oppressed nationality is compacted in a separate and distinct geographical region, and forcibly incorporated within an imperialist state dominated by an oppressor nation. Consequently, the recognition of the right to "self-determination" represents a genuine solution to the problem of national oppression.

Yet even in such cases the nationalism of the oppressed does not **necessarily** contain any "revolutionary" aspect whatsoever. Indeed, the progressive historical role played by nationalist movements in certain circumstances does not derive from their nationalist ideology, but exists **despite** it. You quote Trotsky's qualified remark in May 1931 that: "At the present stage of developments, with the given combination of class forces, Catalan nationalism is a progressive revolutionary factor; Spanish nationalism is a reactionary imperialist factor." In the midst of a turbulent period of class struggle in Spain, Trotsky argued that Catalan nationalism had a revolutionary aspect insofar as it was directed against "Spanish great-power chauvinism, bourgeois imperialism, and bureaucratic centralism." In the same article he explains that only by championing the **right** of self-determination for Catalonia and "pitilessly denouncing the violence of the bourgeoisie of

the ruling nation" would it be possible for revolutionaries to win "the confidence of the proletariat of the oppressed nationality" in order to unite the proletariat of Spain across national lines in the struggle for workers revolution.⁴⁰

Trotsky returned to the question of Catalan nationalism two months later:

"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."⁴¹

Leninists recognize that the struggles waged by petty-bourgeois nationalist movements can possess an anti-imperialist character. But this does not negate the fact that their leaderships have the capacity to betray their followers by seeking accommodation with imperialism and/or inflicting national oppression on other peoples. In the epoch of imperialism, when the liberation of humanity demands the establishment of an **international** socialist economy, no nationalist ideology can play a consistently progressive historical role. Consequently, against all nationalists, Leninists welcome and seek to promote the voluntary assimilation of peoples.

Trotskyism and the National Question in Ireland

You allege that our position on Ireland is dictated by frustration at being "unable to decipher the national riddle" posed by intermingled peoples, and characterize our position as "a plague on all their houses approach." This is a grotesque misrepresentation. We are intransigently opposed to the systematic and institutionalized discrimination against Catholics in education, housing and employment; as well as the brutal oppression by the forces of "law and order" of the Orange statelet and its imperialist creators against the republican population.

Our document unambiguously asserts that we "defend the blows struck by the Irish Republican Army at such imperialist targets as the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the British army or the hotel full of Conservative cabinet ministers at Brighton." Where we differ with Workers Power is that we distinguish between blows against the British army of occupation on the one hand and communalist terror attacks on Irish Protestant (or English) civilians on the other. The latter we characterize as anti-working class acts.

Workers Power's method of "deciphering" the national riddle created by imperialism in places like Palestine/Israel or Northern Ireland amounts to simply choosing sides in the intercommunal conflict. The job of revolutionaries is to wrest leadership of these struggles against oppression from the petty-bourgeois nationalists, by posing democratic demands against oppression (and privilege) in the context of a full, revolutionary (i.e., transitional) program.

While you concede that a reversal of the present oppressive relationships "is a potential outcome of certain national struggles" you propose, in Northern Ireland, to "solve" this dilemma with the call for self-determination for "the Irish people as a whole...." But the problem is that there is no "Irish people as a whole." The population of the 32 counties is divided into two hostile peoples. Ireland cannot be "united" at this point in history without a bloody civil war between those populations. Unlike Workers Power, we believe that the working-class movement would have nothing to gain by such a conflict. That is why we advance the more algebraic formula "for an Irish workers republic in the framework of a socialist federation of the British Isles." One of the keys to breaking the

Protestant workers from Orange reaction is to undercut fears of forcible incorporation into the reactionary clericalist Catholic state.

As you point out, our call "for an Irish workers republic in the framework of a socialist federation of the British Isles" is counterposed to the IRA's call for a "united (capitalist) Ireland". You ask whether we would oppose the "creation of a united Ireland should that prove possible prior to a socialist revolution throughout the British Isles." We would have no objection to such a development if it could be achieved **without** intercommunal warfare and massive bloodletting. But at this point, it is utopian to imagine that it might.

You state that your call for a united Ireland is "not conditional upon the creation of a socialist federation." In other words, you are prepared to support the Provos' project of a **capitalist** unification of Ireland. For this there is no need to promote "working class leadership of the national struggle...." Gerry Adams, leading spokesperson for Sinn Fein, was quoted in the *Irish Times* on 10 December 1986, as stating that "socialism was not on the agenda." In his book, *Politics of Irish Freedom*, Adams said: "Republican struggle should not at this stage of its development style itself socialist Republican as this would imply that there is no place in it for non-socialists."⁴²

Marxism has its own logic, as does nationalism. But there is no logic to centrism. That is why Trotsky dubbed it "crystallized confusion." Your position on Ireland seems to us to be armchair republicanism with a "Marxist" gloss. If there is any sense at all to your hybrid call for proletarian leadership in the nationalist struggle for a united Ireland, it is to pose this as a **first stage** in the struggle for the socialist revolution.

Materialism and the Struggle Against Reactionary Ideology

The stagist implications of your theory are evident when you call for winning Protestant workers in Northern Ireland to support "the right to self-determination for those whose national oppression they are currently complicit in." You continue:

"On the other hand if we cannot break these currently relatively privileged workers from their bourgeoisie on the question of its national oppression of a people, if we cannot win them to consistent democracy, then winning them to socialism will be more difficult, not less so."

If Protestant workers want the privilege of attending a Workers Power study class on socialism, they apparently first must agree to support a Catholic-dominated "united [i.e., bourgeois] Ireland." A materialist approach to fighting backward consciousness among workers does not begin with a demand for their *a priori* agreement to renounce their bad ideas (whether national chauvinism, racism or sexism). Marxists seek to intervene in situations where the objective common class interests of these workers conflict with their backward ideology. In Northern Ireland, where unemployment has soared in both communities (while remaining disproportionately high among Catholics⁴³), revolutionists must advance a program which combines the fight against the traditional anti-Catholic hiring policies with demands aimed at expanding total employment--for example, a shorter workweek at no loss in pay.

Eamonn McCann's account of the early days of the New Left Catholic Civil Rights movement in Derry in 1968, gives an indication of the possibilities of such an approach: "During the previous months we had managed to make contact with some Protestants from the Fountain, a small working-class area which abutted the Bogside. They too had their housing problems, mostly concerned with holdups in a redevelopment scheme, and a few of them had approached us suggesting that we devote some of our agitation to

their cases. This we had done, heartened that our non-sectarian intentions had been accepted."⁴⁴

County Armagh, bordering the republic of Ireland, has an interpenetrated population which is 47 percent Catholic and 53 percent Protestant. Do you think that over half of the population in this depressed rural area is simply an agency for the perpetuation of "the oppression of another people on behalf of imperialism"? The Protestant workers and poor farmers of County Armagh do not **benefit** from imperialism--they are its victims. The reactionary Orange ideology to which many of them adhere is a form of false consciousness which revolutionaries have a duty to struggle against. The Protestants of Northern Ireland are not agents of British imperialism--i.e., a layer of colonial administrators; nor a closed color caste which benefits in a direct and qualitative fashion from the system of discrimination in the fashion of South African whites.

In America, Trotskyists, unlike New Left petty-bourgeois moralists, do not demand that white workers abandon their "white skin privilege" as a **precondition** for engaging in militant class struggle. In fact this **inverts** the real process of breaking white workers from racist ideology. In the unions, Marxists fight racism by raising demands for black equality in the context of a program aimed at improving the conditions of the class as a whole. Trotskyists must pose demands in the fight for Catholic equality which make it clear that we are not simply arguing for a redistribution of misery, but for a general raising of working-class living standards. At the same time, it is necessary to make clear that we **oppose** forced unification with the bourgeois-clericalist regime in Dublin.

In Ireland and Palestine, you accuse us of a preoccupation with the privileged strata of the working class: Protestants, and Jews. In both cases our "preoccupation," is with the proletarian leadership of struggles against national oppression. Non-sectarian workers defense guards, drawn from both Protestant and Catholic communities, can defuse nationalist outrages and unite the working class against Orange **and** Green bosses.

The fate of a communist organization that fails to fight for working-class unity in a situation of intercommunal warfare was shown in Palestine. In 1929, the Supreme Muslim Council organized a demonstration in response to a right-wing Zionist provocation at the Wailing Wall. The demonstration turned into an anti-Jewish pogrom. The Palestinian CP saw that the Muslim Council was using this incident to divert the national struggle from an anti-imperialist to an anti-Jewish course. Joel Beinen describes the CP's initial reaction:

"Bohumil Smeral, a special emissary of the Comintern in Palestine, endorsed the Central Committee's resolution on the demonstration and added that it was important 'to emphasize the harmful and destructive influence of the clerical elements in the Arab national movement and to especially note that no agreement or joint front is possible with the Mufti and his men.'⁴⁵

But Stalin's Comintern overturned what Workers Power would term "disgraceful neutrality," and directed the CP to embrace the Arab movement, regardless of its reactionary leadership. As Beinen concludes, "From this point on, the 'Jewish national' vs. 'Arab national' leanings of the PKP was a constantly recurring theme. The Party was rarely able to stabilize itself on a course between these two pitfalls for any length of time." In other words it split between Jews and Arabs, unable to unite the class against British imperialism or the Zionist conquest of the land.

For a "Fifth Column" Among South African Whites!

We note with distaste your attempt to amalgamate our position on South African whites with our attitude toward Israeli and Protestant workers. We explicitly stated that South African whites **cannot** be equated with these latter populations because they are a "privileged settler-caste/labor aristocracy dependent on the superexploitation of indigenous labor to maintain a standard of living qualitatively higher than the oppressed population." Unlike the Protestant workers of Northern Ireland, or the Hebrew-speaking proletariat in Israel, South African whites have a substantial material stake in the preservation of the racist caste system of the apartheid state.

You take exception to our observation in *1917* that the attitude toward the white population is "a key strategic question black workers in South Africa confront in their struggle for power." But you have little to say about the very real military/strategic considerations which, apart from anything else, necessitate a non-racialist program for the South African revolution.

South Africa is not Rhodesia. There are some five million whites--not a mere hundred thousand. As we wrote in *1917*:

"At this point it would be virtually impossible for the black workers to militarily defeat the forces of the apartheid state without first winning a fraction of active collaborators among the whites and politically neutralizing a larger section of that population. Otherwise the overwhelming technical/military superiority of the white minority will guarantee their capacity to inflict devastating losses on the insurgent blacks."⁴⁶

An intelligent revolutionary party within the apartheid fortress can ill afford to ignore the potentially enormous military importance of a committed fifth column operating within the *laager* in the struggle to smash apartheid. What's more, it is, as we noted in our article, a realizable prospect:

"Historically there has been an element of serious anti-racist fighters among South African whites, from the cadres of the South African Communist Party to Neil Aggett, a white organizer for a black union who was brutally murdered by Botha's cops in 1982....The demonstrations of white South African college students opposed to apartheid also suggests that there are opportunities for a serious revolutionary leadership to recruit a layer of whites willing to throw in their lot with the black workers."

In a 12 December 1986 letter to the ex-LTT, on behalf of the MRCI, comrade Hoskisson argued that, in the event that the oppressed masses in South Africa are roused "to revolutionary action":

"the masses will find arms (the insurgents in Iran captured a machine gun factory). The revolutionary mobilisation of millions neutralised the Shah's fleets of Chieftan tanks and fighter bombers. The same can be true of South Africa. This is not to ignore the military question. Demands relating to it need to be formulated now. But it is a subsidiary question which can be solved without--as a condition of victory--winning over a section of the whites...."

Perhaps it has not occurred to comrade Hoskisson that the reason the Iranian tanks and jets were neutralized had something to do with the fact that their occupants were drawn from the same population that was participating in the mass mobilizations. When the gunners in those tanks looked down their barrels at the crowds of protesters, they saw their brothers, their sisters, their cousins and schoolmates. White soldiers in the apartheid army confronting an insurgent black population will not automatically make the same identification. Workers Power's denial that the winning of a cadre of white collaborators

is "a condition of victory" is simply petty bourgeois moralism masquerading as "solidarity" with the oppressed. Worse, it is a stupidity which, if put into practice, could **abort** the black workers struggle for power.

Solidarnosc: The Acid Test

Workers Power's embrace of Solidarnosc's counterrevolution in Poland offers a veritable *embarras de richesses* in centrist methodology. We dealt with the substance of your position on Poland in our recently published pamphlet *Solidarnosc: Acid Test for Trotskyists*. Of particular note is the section in which we demonstrate that the "self-management movement" (which your letter refers to as "a significant tendency committed to democratically centralised planning") identified completely with the overtly capitalist-restorationist program adopted by Solidarnosc's 1981 congress.

Your position on Solidarnosc boils down to the proposition that if the masses have illusions in their executioners, we must support them in their illusions. This is aptly illustrated in your comparison of Poland and Iran:

"As with Iran you fail to make any distinction between the leaders of a mass movement (who were reactionary in a variety of ways) and the base and in failing to make this distinction you leave yourself without any tactics to defeat those leaders."

You deserve full marks forchutzpah! Your "tactic" in Iran amounted to prostration before the "mass movement" and therefore its leadership--that is, the Islamic theocracy. In Poland the "tactic" was similar--defending the clericalist, anti-communist Walesa leadership because it had a mass base. If the Bolsheviks had made similar distinctions in 1917 between Kerensky's Provisional Government and the illusions of the masses (a "tactic" Stalin, among others, advocated at the time), they would have found themselves defending Russia's new freedoms against Prussian militarism in World War I!

In addressing Poland, comrade Hoskisson begins with the admission that Solidarnosc's leadership was "committed to policies which, objectively, would have strengthened capitalist restoration in Poland." In this project, we are assured, they had the collaboration of the church and the Stalinist regime itself. But when we turn the page, we are told that capitalist restoration was not the issue, in fact it was never even a danger. "In reality what was at stake was whether or not the Polish workers could take the road of political revolution before being sold short by their compromising leadership or smashed by Stalinism."

Against an army of tens of thousands of priests, pro-Western Solidarnosc leaders, and presumably restorationist Stalinists, we are assured that, "the proletarian base of Solidarnosc prevented the organisation ever becoming a mass force for capitalist restoration." But Marxists do not judge movements simply on the basis of their social composition. We are also interested in their leadership, program, and the direction of their development.

Take for example Solidarnosc's call for "free elections" and "free trade unions," "voiced by the workers themselves" as you imagine. These particular demands were actually first raised by the anti-communist social democrats of the KOR. The use of these "free world" propaganda slogans reflected the rightward evolution of Poland's oppositional intelligentsia which, by the mid-1970's, was avidly embracing Jimmy Carter's "human rights" crusade. Who better to implement it than CIA labor operative Irving Brown?

You consider it "laughable" that we suggest the invitation to Brown and Kirkland was intended as a pro-imperialist political statement by Solidarnosc's leadership. Do you think that Walesa et al were unaware of Brown's widely-documented record in the European labor movement? Perhaps you think his name was picked at random from an American telephone book?

Drawing the obvious conclusion from Solidarnosc's fondness for CIA-connected "free trade unionists" is not "guilt by association," but merely placing the crisis in Poland in 1981 within the world context of a renewed cold war. You ask whether we would "relate" to the workers' demands for free elections and unions "by calling for unfree elections and unions?" This is the logic of a charlatan. We are all in favor of freedom--we merely place a **precondition** on it: "free trade unions" and "free elections" only within the context of **defense of nationalized property** in the means of production. This is the political axis for splitting the ranks of Solidarnosc from their counterrevolutionary leadership. Workers Power's willful blindness to the reality of Solidarnosc under Walesa derives from its "tactic" of embracing the mass movement as it is.

While admitting that Solidarnosc's program "does indeed suggest that the role of centralised planning should be diminished and that the role of the market should be increased," Workers Power is chiefly interested in comparing Solidarnosc's market-oriented self-management schemes with those of the Stalinists. Missing is any appreciation of the **contradictory** character of the Stalinist bureaucracy. While the parasitic ruling caste reflects the pressure of imperialism within the workers state, its interests diverge from those of the kulaks and other petty capitalists in that the bureaucrats' privileges depend on the existence of nationalized property. The bureaucracy is therefore episodically compelled to defend proletarian property forms against the dangers of capitalist restoration. It does this with its own anti-proletarian, repressive and bureaucratic methods. Gorbachev's attempt to overcome the economic irrationality of bureaucratic rule with his pro-market *perestroika* "reform" represents a grave threat to the Soviet workers and a dangerous concession to imperialism. At the same time, such "reforms" are a revolver to the head of the bureaucracy itself.

Unlike the bureaucratic caste headed by Jaruzelski, the pro-capitalist clerical nationalists leading Solidarnosc had no objective interest in defending nationalized property. Theirs was an economic "reform" subordinated to a program of bourgeois political "pluralism." This is why, in a confrontation between these two groupings, those who genuinely uphold the defense of collectivized property in Poland must bloc militarily with the Stalinists.

To resolve the historical crisis of proletarian leadership, it is necessary to forge revolutionary Trotskyist parties on the basis of the historic programmatic acquisitions of Trotskyism. Workers Power's organic incapacity to "swim against the stream" is matched by its proclivity for political accommodation to the illusions prevalent in the mass movements it is currently adapting to. A political tendency which capitulates to Labourism in Britain, to petty-bourgeois nationalism in Ireland, to Islamic reaction in Iran, and which defends capitalist-restorationist "mass movements" in the deformed workers states, can only be an obstacle in the political struggle to reforge the Fourth International, World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Fraternally,

Bolshevik Tendency

Notes

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