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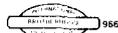
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Comment

Following the Fifth ICL Conference in 2007, there
was further discussion and reconsideration of our
appraisal at the conference that, as reported in the
article "Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the
Post-Soviet Period" in *Spartacist* No. 60 (Autumn
2007), Mexico had witnessed "a huge plebeian up-
heaval against increases in the price of basic foods."
There were indeed massive protests and bitterly
fought strikes in Mexico in the year leading into
the ICL Conference. But as a subsequent plenum of
the International Executive Committee noted, the
description of the response to the price increases was
"an impressionistic exaggeration of political motion
in Mexico." In fact, there was only one significant
demonstration against increases in the price of tor-
tillas, and the situation was defused.

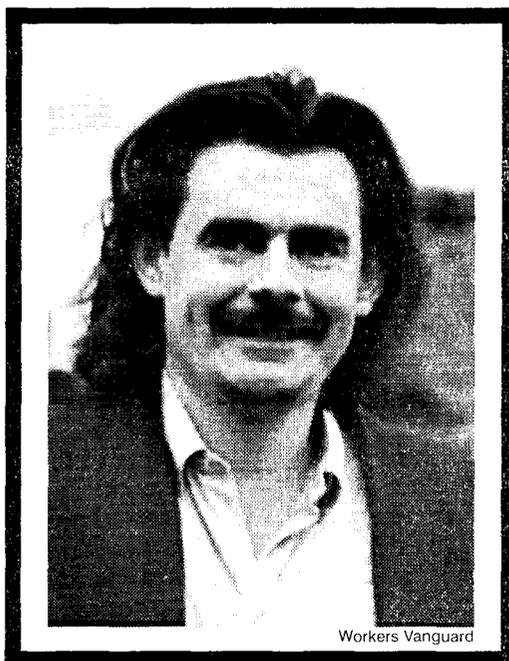
Our comrade Gérard Le Méteil died in Dieppe, France on 3 September 2007 in unknown circumstances while in police custody. A close comrade of Gérard's wrote, "The loss of Gérard is immensely painful for us all, for our party, and for each of us individually.... Everyone valued Gérard on both levels: as a comrade and as a friend. The party was his reason for living and he always put the party's needs before his own personal options. He dedicated the best 25 years of his life to the party."

Gérard joined the Ligue Trotskyste de France in April 1982 and was elected to the Central Committee at the LTF's Eleventh National Conference in December 1989. In September 1996, he was again elected to the Central Committee, on which he continued to serve until his death.

Key issues in the recruitment of Gérard, who came from the periphery of the Communist Party, were the importance of the Leninist vanguard party and the Trotskyist position in defense of the Soviet Union. During the seven years following his recruitment, he became known as an extremely energetic and talented activist on the Rouen campus. This work meant daily political combat against our opponents on the left. Constantly seeking to win people over, trying to understand

Gérard Le Méteil

1959–2007



where they came from and finding the convincing arguments contributed to the political wisdom and depth for which he was known. Gérard later brought this experience to bear in his political education of our younger comrades, several of whom have become cadres in the LTF and other sections of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

Since Gérard had been won hard to the understanding that we are above all the party of the Russian Revolution, it was completely in character that he took time off work to throw himself into the ICL's intervention into the nascent East German political revolution in 1989-90. An excellent military leader, he was often put in charge of our security squads at LTF demonstrations and interventions.

Gérard's detailed knowledge of French politics and the workers movement ex-

tended to the former and current French colonies and in particular to the Algerian War; he understood that these crimes still animate the French bourgeoisie in its racist oppression of North African immigrants, their children and grandchildren.

It is with great sadness and with the determination to continue the combat to which he dedicated his life that we, his comrades and friends, bid him farewell.

Corrections

There were several factual errors in "The Senile Dementia of Post-Marxism" in *Spartacist* No. 59 (Spring 2006). The article stated on page 27: "With a labor force of 160 million employed in manufacturing, China's working class has become a very important component of the industrial proletariat on an international scale." While there is a wide range of published figures for the number of manufacturing workers in China, the first clause would have been more accurate as follows: "With an estimated workforce of 160 million or more centered in manufacturing and also in construction, energy and extractive industries and transport and telecommunications...." On page 28, we incorrectly cited a passage by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri that asserted a "new militancy" that "makes resistance into counterpower and makes rebellion into a project of love" as coming from their book *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. In fact, the passage appeared in their earlier book *Empire*. On page 29, we spoke of Hardt and Negri "propos-

ing a 'global parliament'" in *Multitude*. It would have been more accurate to say that they enthuse over such proposals, as Hardt and Negri qualify their support by asserting that such a scheme "would be unmanageable in practice."

In "Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period" in *Spartacist* No. 60 (Autumn 2007), we observed that "France has also seen combative mobilizations by students and by oppressed minority youth of North African origin" (p. 7). It would have been more accurate to refer to "minority youth of North and West African origin." On page 15, again referring to France, we should have noted that the "student-centered protests in 2006 against government attempts to further erode the rights of young workers" rapidly expanded to include mass workers demonstrations and strikes. On page 16, we incorrectly referred to an article published in *Workers Vanguard* No. 891 (27 April 2007) under the headline "Mexico: For Labor Mobilizations Against Starvation Policies, Repression!" as a leaflet issued by the Grupo Espartaquista de México. The piece in *WV* was translated not from a leaflet but from the GEM's newspaper *Espartaco* No. 27 (Spring 2007).

Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!

Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics

The Fifth Conference of the International Communist League in 2007 adopted the position of opposition to Marxists running for executive office in the capitalist state—e.g., president, mayor, provincial or state governor—as a matter of principle. This position flows from our understanding that the capitalist state is the executive committee of the ruling class. At its core this state consists of bodies of armed men—the military, police, courts and prisons—which function to protect the class rule of the bourgeoisie and its system of production.

Communist deputies can, *as oppositionists*, serve in the U.S. Congress, parliaments and other legislative bodies as revolutionary tribunes of the working class. But assuming executive office or gaining control of a bourgeois legislature or municipal council, either independently or in coalition, requires taking responsibility for the administration of the machinery of the capitalist state. The ICL had previously held that communists could run for executive offices, provided that we declare in advance that we don't intend to assume such offices. But in re-examining this question, we concluded that standing for election to executive positions carries the implication that one is ready to accept such responsibility, no matter what disclaimer one makes in advance. For self-proclaimed Marxists to engage in such activity only lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state.

As we stated in our 2007 conference document:

"In adopting the position against running for executive office, we are recognizing and codifying what should be seen as a corollary to Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, which are really the founding documents of the Third [Communist] International [CI, or Comintern]. This understanding was attenuated by the time of the Second Congress of the CI, which failed to draw a distinction between parliamentary and executive office in pursuing electoral activity. Thus we are continuing to complete the theoretical and programmatic work of the first four Congresses of the CI. It is easy enough to pledge that you won't take executive office when the chance of winning is remote. But the question is: what happens when you win?..."

"Our earlier practice conformed to that of the Comintern and Fourth International. This does not mean that we acted in an unprincipled way in the past: the principle had never been recognized as such either by our forebears or by ourselves. Programs do evolve, as new issues arise and we critically scrutinize the work of our revolutionary predecessors."

—"Down With Executive Offices!" *Spartacist* No. 60, Autumn 2007

Behind the question of running for executive office stands the fundamental counterposition between reformism and Marxism: Can the proletariat use bourgeois democracy and the bourgeois state to achieve a peaceful transition to social-

ism? Or, rather, must the proletariat smash the old state machinery, and in its place create a new state to impose its own class rule—the dictatorship of the proletariat—to suppress and expropriate the capitalist exploiters?

Since the October Revolution of 1917, social democrats and reformists of various stripes, beginning with the Russian Mensheviks and exemplified most notably at the time by the German Social Democrat and erstwhile Marxist Karl Kautsky, have denounced the October Revolution, arguing that the Bolsheviks should not have led the proletariat to seize power. Instead, the reformists maintained that the Russian proletariat should have given the lead to and supported the liberal bourgeoisie—all in the name of defense of "democracy." *The State and Revolution*, written on the eve of the October Revolution, and its companion piece, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, written a year later, together represent a striking refutation of these views. In these works Lenin rescues Marx and Engels from the distortions and apologies of the opportunists, who selectively quoted, misquoted and, indeed, at times suppressed the views of Marx and Engels in order to justify their own anti-revolutionary course.

The revisionists and reformists are no less active today. Their politics consist of activity completely defined by the framework of bourgeois society. Such a policy was sharply characterized by Trotsky as "the actual training of the masses to become imbued with the inviolability of the bourgeois state" (Trotsky, *The Lessons of October*, 1924). Such accommodations to capitalist class rule by organizations claiming adherence to Marxism is, if anything, more pronounced today in a world defined by the final undoing of the October Revolution and the widespread acceptance that "communism is dead."

Having made common cause with "democratic" imperialism against the Soviet degenerated workers state and the bureaucratically deformed workers states of East Europe, these organizations are now even more shameless in their embrace of bourgeois democracy, by and large dispensing with even lip service to the aim of proletarian revolution. In France, the fake Trotskyists of Lutte Ouvrière (LO), the Lambertist group (now calling itself Parti Ouvrier Indépendant) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), flagship section of the United Secretariat (USec), regularly stand candidates for the semi-bonapartist presidency. The Lambertist candidate in the 2007 presidential election was a town mayor who ran as the "candidate of the mayors," while LO and LCR help finance their electoral activity with direct and substantial subsidies from the French capitalist state. In Brazil, a leader of the USec group, Miguel Rossetto, actually served as a minister in the popular-front bourgeois govern-



Oktiabr

Engraving shows proclamation of Paris Commune, March 1871, which was crushed by bourgeois terror in May. The Commune was first expression of dictatorship of the proletariat. 1921 Soviet poster reads: "The Dead of the Paris Commune Have Risen Again Under the Red Flag of the Soviets!"



V. Kozlinsky

ment headed by the social democrat Lula. The French LCR has now transmuted itself into a "New Anti-Capitalist Party" that disavows any reference to communism or revolution. In Britain, Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party (core of the Committee for a Workers' International), which in an earlier incarnation spent decades trying to reform the old Labour Party from within, now calls for a "mass workers party" defined by "Old Labour" reformism as an alternative to Blair/Brown's New Labour Party.

Among the few avowedly Marxist groups that still sometimes speak the language of the October Revolution are the Bolshevik Tendency (BT) and the Internationalist Group (IG). The BT was formed by a handful who quit our organization in the early 1980s in response to the onset of Cold War II and is led by a sociopath named Bill Logan, whom we expelled in 1979 for crimes against communist morality and

elementary human decency. The founding cadre of the IG defected from our party in 1996, following the capitalist counterrevolutions in East Europe and the Soviet Union, in pursuit of an opportunist orientation toward various "radical" petty-bourgeois milieus. These political bookends of the Cold War have come together in denouncing our line against running for executive office.

The IG denounced our position as a break in "the continuity of genuine Trotskyism" ("France Turns Hard to the Right," *Internationalist*, July 2007), alluding to our 1985 election campaign running Marjorie Stamberg, now an IG supporter, for mayor of New York. In following the practice of our revolutionary forebears, our previous position was not subjectively unprincipled. But the IG's continuing defense of such campaigns is unprincipled. The IG asserts that communists can run "for whatever post," including that of imperialist Commander-in-Chief, arguing: "In the unusual case in which a revolutionary candidate had enough influence to be elected, the party would already have begun building workers councils and other organs of a soviet character. And the party would insist that, if elected, its candidates would base themselves on such organs of workers power and not on the institutions of the bourgeois state." The BT then approvingly quoted this passage and the IG's description of our position as a "novelty," adding its own parliamentarist twist: "Perhaps the ICL comrades will eventually conclude that running for parliament is also 'an obstacle' because the winning party ends up exercising executive power" ("ICL Rejects 'Executive Offices': Of Presidents & Principles," 1917, 2008).

In allowing that communists should run for executive office, the IG leaves open, and certainly does not disavow, the possibility of taking such office "if elected," at least in a revolutionary situation. For its part, the BT obliterates any distinction between ministerialism—i.e., serving as a minister in a bourgeois cabinet—and contesting to serve as revolutionary workers deputies in a bourgeois parliament. Behind the BT's whine lurks the implicit assumption (profoundly false and expressing petty-bourgeois prejudice) that bourgeois parliaments are sovereign bodies expressing the "will of the people." Clearly what the BT has in mind is Her Royal Majesty's Mother of Parliaments. The BT intones: "Of course, the only way to 'abolish' the institutions of the bourgeois state is through socialist revolution" (*ibid.*). But this is merely a Sunday sermon for the gullible.

The IG and the BT invoke a "revolutionary situation" as a *deus ex machina*—a screen for their opportunist position. Had the Bolsheviks, emulating the Mensheviks, entered the bourgeois Provisional Government in 1917 in the midst of that revolutionary situation, it would have rendered hollow the Bolsheviks' call for "All power to the Soviets" and turned them into the left wing of bourgeois democracy. The IG and BT to the contrary, history is littered with "unusual cases" where would-be socialists and communists pleaded special

circumstances to get their fingers on the levers of bourgeois state power. Moreover, the IG and the BT willfully ignore the fact that it is historically quite *usual* for reformist workers parties to get their first experience in administering the bourgeois state through winning electoral control of municipal councils, often in the absence of any hint of a revolutionary situation. Such municipalism, or “municipal socialism,” has served not to further proletarian revolution, but to *derail* it.

In a very real sense, the question of running for executive office goes right back to an incomplete fight against ministerialism initiated by left-wingers like Rosa Luxemburg in the Second International at the dawn of the 20th century. The arguments raised by the IG and BT in defense of their line on executive office place them *to the right* of the left wing of the pre-World War I social democracy.

The proletariat finds itself in a deep trough in this post-Soviet period. In these circumstances, it is even more crucial that revolutionaries defend the vital programmatic conquests of the past and, through critical study, debate and application, deepen and extend our understanding of the Marxist program. In doing so, it is necessary to look to the highest expressions of proletarian struggle and consciousness, like the lessons of the revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871 and of the proletariat’s greatest conquest yet, the October Revolution of 1917, which demonstrated conclusively that taking executive office in a capitalist government is counterposed to the fight for proletarian state power.

Marx and Engels on the State

In the *Communist Manifesto*, drafted just before the revolutionary upheavals in 1848, Marx and Engels made clear that the proletariat would have to erect its own state as “the first step in the revolution by the working class” (*Manifesto of the Communist Party*, December 1847-January 1848). They went on, “The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, *i.e.*, of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.” As Lenin notes in *The State and Revolution*, the question of *how* the bourgeois state was to be replaced by the proletarian state is not addressed in the *Manifesto*; nor, correspondingly, is the question of a parliamentary road to socialism—universal suffrage barely existed.

By early 1852, Marx had come to the understanding that “in its struggle against the revolution, the parliamentary republic found itself compelled to strengthen, along with the repressive measures, the resources and centralisation of governmental power. All revolutions perfected this machine instead of breaking it” (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852). But it was above all the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 that led Marx and Engels to conclude that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes” (*The Civil War in France*, 1871). Marx noted in this work that the “State power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism.” The



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John Mayall

Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. Revolutionary import of their writings on the state was obscured by German SPD leaders.

first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people. The Commune, which replaced the bourgeois state power, “was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time” (*ibid.*).

Several times, would-be supporters of Marx and Engels in the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) tried to defang or deflect their revolutionary internationalist perspective, centrally on the issue of the state. Marx is scathing in his treatment of the demand for a “free state” raised in the 1875 founding program of a unified SPD. Capturing in passing the essence of the Kaiser’s Germany of the 19th century, Marx excoriated the Gotha Program for resorting to the subterfuge

“of demanding things which have meaning only in a democratic republic from a state which is nothing but a police-guarded military despotism, embellished with parliamentary forms, alloyed with a feudal admixture and at the same time already influenced by the bourgeoisie, and bureaucratically carpentered, and then assuring this state into the bargain that one imagines one will be able to force such things upon it ‘by legal means.’

“Even vulgar democracy, which sees the millennium in the democratic republic and has no suspicion that it is precisely in this last form of state of bourgeois society that the class struggle has to be fought out to a conclusion—even it towers mountains above this kind of democratism which keeps within the limits of what is permitted by the police and not permitted by logic.”

—*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875

Engels was compelled to return to this theme—and, at the same time, to denounce ministerialism—in his critique of the 1891 Erfurt Program. He wrote:

“If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown. It would be inconceivable for our best people to become ministers under an emperor, as Miquel. It would seem that from a legal point of view it is inadvisable to include the demand for a republic directly in the programme, although this was possible even under Louis Phillippe in France, and is now in Italy. But the fact that in Germany it is not permitted to advance even a republican party programme openly, proves how totally mistaken is the belief that a repub-

lic, and not only a republic, but also communist society, can be established in a cosy, peaceful way.”

—*A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891*, June 1891

Johannes Miquel was a member of the Communist League until 1852, after which he deserted to the German bourgeoisie, eventually serving as a leader of the National Liberal Party and as a government minister for a number of years.

The German SPD had grown enormously in size and influence in the last decades of the 19th century, despite the Anti-Socialist Law enacted by Bismarck in 1878, and even more so after the law's repeal in 1890. A string of electoral successes resulted in the emergence of a huge municipal and parliamentary component. A sizable party treasury and other resources and a ponderous party and trade-union apparatus all combined to exert a conservatizing influence and to provide the material basis for a strong and ever more pronounced opportunist tendency. In his manuscript of an 1891 introduction to Marx's main work on the Paris Commune, Engels wrote:

“Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

—Introduction to Marx's *The Civil War in France*, March 1891

When the book was published, the SPD editors substituted “German philistine” for “Social-Democratic philistine”!

In the years following Engels' death in 1895, leading SPDer Eduard Bernstein gave theoretical expression to the growing opportunist tendency by openly renouncing revolutionary Marxism in favor of an “evolutionary socialism” premised on gradual reform of bourgeois society. Bernstein pronounced that for him the “movement” was everything, the final goal of socialism nothing. Already by 1895, the reformist impulses in official German Social Democracy had become so strong that when Engels submitted his introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, the SPD Executive objected that the work was excessively revolutionary, and asked Engels to tone it down. He reluctantly tried to oblige.

The SPD Executive did not print the entire redraft, omitting certain passages behind Engels' back so as to make it appear that he had abandoned his revolutionary views. Most famously, they included his statement that “Rebellion in the old style, street fighting with barricades, which decided the issue everywhere up to 1848, had become largely outdated” (Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, 6 March 1895). But they excised his categorical assertion, “Does that mean that in the future street fighting will no longer play any role? Certainly not. It only means that the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavourable for civilian fighters and far more favourable for the military. In future, street fighting can, therefore, be victorious only if this disadvantageous situation is compensated by other factors” (*ibid.*). Among these factors, explained Engels earlier in the introduction, was the need for the insurgents to make “the troops yield to moral influences.... If they succeed in this, the troops fail to respond, or the commanding officers lose their heads, and the insurrection wins” (*ibid.*).

Engels' point was clearly not, as the reformists would subsequently maintain, that revolution was outdated, but that the proletarian forces had to *split* the bourgeois army. As early

as 1856, acutely aware of the large peasant base at the core of the Prussian army, Marx had bluntly noted: “*The whole thing in Germany will depend on whether it is possible to back the Proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasants' war*. In which case the affair should go swimmingly” (“Marx to Engels,” 16 April 1856).

Marx on the Question of a “Peaceful” Road

Social Democratic reformists also seized on isolated statements by Marx and Engels leaving open the possibility of peaceful transitions to socialism in certain countries. In a speech in Amsterdam, reported in the newspaper *La Liberté*, Marx said:

“We know that the institutions, customs and traditions in the different countries must be taken into account; and we do not deny the existence of countries like America, England, and if I knew your institutions better I might add Holland, where the workers may achieve their aims by peaceful means. That being true we must also admit that in most countries on the Continent it is force which must be the lever of our revolution; it is force which will have to be resorted to for a time in order to establish the rule of the workers.”

—Marx, “On the Hague Congress,” 8 September 1872

Marx based his argument on the understanding that these particular states lacked militarist cliques or significant bureaucratic apparatuses. But his speculation was in error. Britain and Holland both had vast colonial empires that required large bureaucracies, and attendant military forces to subdue the masses. During Victoria's reign (1837-1901) Britain waged, in addition to the Crimean War of 1853-56, an almost nonstop series of lesser and not-so-lesser military actions and wars, capped off by the Second Boer War, to extend and maintain its empire.

The United States was then in the midst of its most democratic period, the era of Reconstruction. But the Civil War gave an enormous boost to Northern capital, so that by the time of the Grant administration all the pieces were in place that would blossom into full-blown imperialism over the coming decades. It was in this period that American capital began in earnest its economic subjugation of Mexico (already vastly diminished in territory as a result of the Mexican-American War of 1846-48), grabbing prime agricultural land, rail and mining concessions. The smashing of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 and, in that same year, the dismantling of Reconstruction were the unmistakable signposts of this process.

At the time of the 1848 Revolution, Marx had a different appreciation of whether England could undergo a peaceful transition to socialism. Writing of the defeat of the French working class at the hands of the bourgeoisie that year, Marx stressed the need for a successful rising against the English bourgeoisie:

“The liberation of Europe, whether brought about by the struggle of the oppressed nationalities for their independence or by overthrowing feudal absolutism, depends therefore on the successful uprising of the French working class. Every social upheaval in France, however, is bound to be thwarted by the English bourgeoisie, by Great Britain's industrial and commercial domination of the world. Every partial social reform in France or on the European continent as a whole, if designed to be lasting, is merely a pious wish. And only a *world war* can overthrow the old England, as only this can provide the Chartists, the party of the organised English workers, with the conditions for a successful rising against their gigantic oppressors.”

—“The Revolutionary Movement,” 31 December 1848

Following the failed revolutions of 1848, capitalism grew



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Chartist uprising in Wales, 1839.

enormously on the continent. But while the ratios of economic power shifted somewhat, Marx's observations on Britain retained their essential validity, certainly through to the time of the Commune and later.

Whatever Marx may have speculated in 1872, we are now in a fundamentally different period of world history: the imperialist epoch characterized by the domination of monopoly finance capital, where a handful of great capitalist powers compete for world supremacy. Under such circumstances the idea of a peaceful, parliamentary transition to socialism is worse than a pipe dream: it is a reformist program that ties the proletariat to its class enemies.

As if to illustrate this point, in polemicizing against our opposition to running for executive office the misnamed Bolshevik Tendency cites an 1893 letter by Engels. Engels was replying to an émigré socialist (F. Wiesen of Baird, Texas), who argued that the practice of fielding candidates for the U.S. presidency constituted a denial of revolutionary principle. Engels dismissed Wiesen's request for a principled position as "academic," observing that the goal of workers revolution in the U.S. was still "a very long way off" and that it was premature to draw a principled line against running for Senate or president. He argued:

"I don't see why it should necessarily represent an infringement of the Social-Democratic principle if *a man* puts up candidates for some political office for which election is required and if *he* votes for those candidates, even if *he* is engaged in an attempt to abolish that office.

"One might consider that the best way to abolish the Presidency and the Senate in America would be to elect to those posts men who had pledged themselves to bring about their abolition; it would then be logical for one to act accordingly.

Others might consider this method to be inexpedient; it's a debatable point. There could be circumstances in which such a mode of action might also involve a denial of the revolutionary principle; why it should always and invariably be so, I entirely fail to see."

—"Engels to F. Wiesen," 14 March 1893

Engels' central concern was to prod the émigré-dominated Socialist Labor Party (SLP) into helping a political working-class movement get started. To that end he had some years earlier stressed the importance of the 1886 United Labor Party candidacy of single-taxer Henry George for New York mayor, viewing this as a step toward an independent workers party on the model of the social-democratic parties in Europe. In 1893 Engels did not know where principled lines would be drawn in the parliamentary arena when the hour of battle arrived. How could Engels at that point have unraveled the questions of what kind of party the workers needed to take power, of the principles of Bolshevik parliamentarism, of the dynamics of critical support to reformist misleaders? Even so, he knew enough to point the way to civil war.

Not so the BT, whose motivation in citing Engels is to engage in a backhanded defense of ministerialism. As Trotsky wrote in polemicizing against Kautsky in 1920:

"The bourgeois democratic state not only creates more favorable conditions for the political education of the workers, as compared with absolutism, but also sets a limit to that development in the shape of bourgeois legality, which skilfully accumulates and builds on the upper strata of the proletariat opportunist habits and law-abiding prejudices. The school of democracy proved quite insufficient to rouse the German proletariat to revolution when the catastrophe of the war was at hand. The barbarous school of the war, social-imperialist ambitions, colossal military victories, and unparalleled defeats were required. After these events, which made a certain amount of difference in the universe, and even in the Erfurt Programme, to come out with common-places as to the meaning of democratic parliamentarism for the education of the proletariat signifies a fall into political childhood."

—Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, 1920

Perhaps the BT will now change the name of its journal from 1917 (is the reference to February?) to 1893!

The Struggle Against Millerandism, 1900

The question of the nature of executive office in the bourgeois state was posed pointblank in June 1899, when Alexandre Millerand became the first socialist leader to accept a portfolio in a bourgeois government. In an 1894 letter *not* cited in the BT's tract, Engels had specifically warned against just such a possibility in the event that the Italian Republicans came to power at the head of a revolutionary movement supported by the Socialists. Writing to Italian Socialist leader Filippo Turati, Engels argued:

"After the common victory we might be offered some seats in the new government, but so that we always remain *a minority. That is the greatest danger.* After February 1848 the French socialist democrats (of the *Réforme*, Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanc, Flocon, etc.) made the mistake of accepting such posts. Constituting a minority in the government they voluntarily shared the responsibility for all the infamies and treachery which the majority, composed of pure Republicans, committed against the working class, while their presence in the government completely paralysed the revolutionary action of the working class which they claimed they represented."

—"Engels to Filippo Turati," 26 January 1894, Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955)

Five years later, Millerand justified serving as Minister of Commerce under Prime Minister René Waldeck-Rousseau

by arguing that the French Republic was otherwise in danger of being overthrown by a reactionary alliance of monarchists and aristocrats in league with the officer corps and the Catholic church. Sitting alongside Millerand in this government of “republican defense” was the bloody suppressor of the Paris Commune, General Galliffet.

The background to all this was the Dreyfus Affair, a political scandal that had thrown France into a profound political crisis. Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the General Staff, was convicted by secret court-martial in 1894 of selling military secrets to a foreign power and sentenced to life in prison. Soon it was revealed that Dreyfus had been framed by the army tops to hide the guilt of another officer, a member of the aristocracy. After years of captivity on Devil’s Island, off French Guiana, Dreyfus was retried and again found guilty in September 1899; he was finally given a presidential pardon later that month. Millerand had been brought into the government as a way to defuse the ongoing crisis.

Already polarized over the Dreyfus Affair, the French Socialist movement was split over Millerand’s action. One wing supported Millerand—especially Jean Jaurès, who in 1898 became one of Dreyfus’s most ardent and eloquent defenders, albeit strictly within the bounds of bourgeois liberalism. The other wing, the French Workers Party (POF), led by Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue, had refused to defend Dreyfus and opposed Millerand joining the government.

Joining in the debate on Millerandism was Rosa Luxemburg, a founder of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania who then became prominent in the left wing of the SPD, particularly through the fight against Bernstein. In her eloquent refutation of Bernstein’s reformism, Luxemburg observed:

“People who pronounce themselves in favor of the method of legislative reform *in place of and in contradistinction to the*

conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society.”

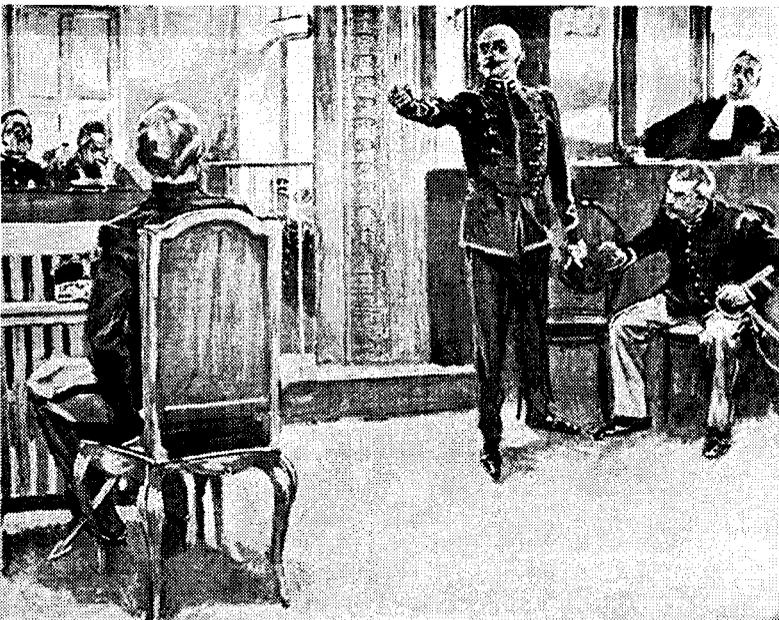
—Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, 1898-99, reprinted in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970)

Luxemburg rightly argued that socialists should defend Dreyfus, using the case to indict French capitalism and militarism and to further the class struggle. But she opposed Millerand’s entry into the government and argued:

“The character of a bourgeois government isn’t determined by the personal character of its members, but by its organic function in bourgeois society. The government of the modern state is essentially an organization of class domination, the regular functioning of which is one of the conditions of existence of the class state. With the entry of a socialist into the government, and class domination continuing to exist, the bourgeois government doesn’t transform itself into a socialist government, but a socialist transforms himself into a bourgeois minister.”

—“Affaire Dreyfus et cas Millerand” (The Dreyfus Affair and the Millerand Case), 1899, Luxemburg, *Le Socialisme en France (1898-1912)* (Socialism in France [1898-1912]) (Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1971) (our translation)

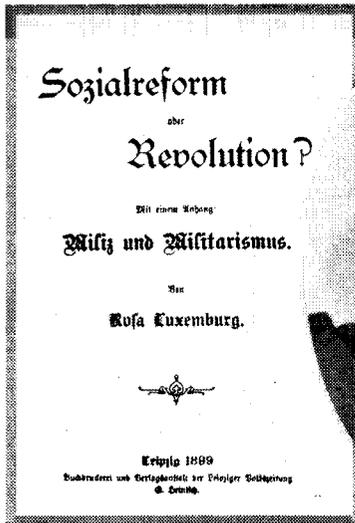
Once in government the logic of Millerandism came to the fore—preservation of the Waldeck-Rousseau government at any cost. As Rosa Luxemburg commented ironically, “Yesterday, the cabinet must take defensive action in order to save the Republic. Today, the defense of the Republic must be given up in order to save the cabinet” (“Die sozialistische Krise in Frankreich” [The Socialist Crisis in France], 1900-01 [our translation]). Following the resignation of Waldeck-Rousseau, the Jaurès group supported the Radical government of Emile Combes and voted for the ministerial budget, including funding for the army and navy.



Bettmann

Drawing of Alfred Dreyfus accusing his accusers at 1899 retrial in Rennes. Right: Satirical magazine shows Prime Minister Waldeck-Rousseau bringing together Socialist Alexandre Millerand and General Galliffet, butcher of Paris Commune, in 1899 government of “republican defense.”





Militärverlag DDR

Rosa Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution* (1899) condemned Eduard Bernstein's revisionism.

Lenin noted the evident link between Bernstein's revisionism and Millerandism:

"Millerand has furnished an excellent example of practical Bernsteinism; not without reason did Bernstein and Vollmar rush so zealously to defend and laud him. Indeed, if Social-Democracy, in essence, is merely a party of reform and must be bold enough to admit this openly, then not only has a socialist the right to join a bourgeois cabinet, but he must always strive to do so. If democracy, in essence, means the abolition of class domination, then why should not a socialist minister charm the whole bourgeois world by orations on class collaboration? Why should he not remain in the cabinet even after the shooting down of workers by gendarmes has exposed, for the hundredth and thousandth time, the real nature of the democratic collaboration of classes?"

— *What Is To Be Done?* (1902)

The discussion on ministerialism dominated the Paris Congress of the Second International in 1900, with Luxemburg, pioneer Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov, American SLP leader Daniel De Leon and other leftists pitted against the right wing, exemplified by SPDers Bernstein and Georg von Vollmar, who backed Jaurès and Millerand. Politically in the center, as was increasingly the case in the German party, was SPD theoretician Karl Kautsky, who was still widely deemed to be "the pope of Marxism" in the International. As historian G. D. H. Cole observed: "It was Kautsky's task to devise a form of words that would satisfy the centre and disarm the extreme Left without driving the right wing out of the International, and without making Jaurès's position impossible" (Cole, *The Second International 1889-1914* [London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1960]).

The compromise resolution cooked up by Kautsky is instructive as to how deeply social-democratic reformism permeated the Second International:

"In a contemporary democratic state the conquest of political power by the proletariat cannot be the work of a mere putschist action but can only constitute the conclusion of a long and laborious work of political and economic organization of the proletariat, of its physical and moral regeneration and of a step-by-step conquest of elective seats in communal representative assemblies and legislative bodies.

"But where governmental power is centralized, its conquest cannot take place piece by piece. The entry of an individual socialist into a bourgeois ministry cannot be regarded as the normal beginning of the conquest of political power but can be

only a temporary and exceptional makeshift in a predicament. "Whether in a given case such a predicament exists is a question of tactics and not of principle. Here the Congress shouldn't decide. But in any case this dangerous experiment can be advantageous only if it is approved by a united party organization and the socialist minister is and remains the mandate-bearer of his party."

— *Internationaler Sozialisten-Kongress zu Paris 1900* (International Socialist Congress in Paris 1900) (Berlin: Expedition der Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1900) (our translation)

The gratuitous warning against putschism and the arguments in favor of gradual penetration of municipal councils and legislative assemblies were intended to placate the revisionists and were recognized as such by them. The "exceptional makeshift" escape clause was also happily accepted by Millerand and Jaurès, because they shamelessly wielded that argument to support their own ministerialism. In fact, it was the bourgeoisie that embraced this socialist minister in an "exceptional" move to liquidate the political crisis engendered by the Dreyfus Affair.

The minority resolution introduced by Guesde and Italy's Enrico Ferri reaffirmed that "by conquest of public powers one should understand the political expropriation of the capitalist class, whether this expropriation takes place peacefully or violently." It continued:

"Therefore it only allows, under a bourgeois regime, for occupying elective positions which the Party can seize through its own forces, i.e., the workers organized as a class party, and it necessarily forbids any socialist participation in bourgeois governments, against which socialists must remain in a state of irreconcilable opposition."

— *Congrès Socialiste International Paris 23-27 Septembre 1900* (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1980) (our translation)

Thus the minority resolution left open the possibility of taking positions in the bourgeois regime that "the Party can seize through its own forces." Plekhanov went further, accepting the possibility that participation in a bourgeois cabinet might be a valid tactic under certain exceptional circumstances. Thus he initially supported Kautsky's resolution but tried to amend it to include at least an implicit criticism of Millerand, arguing that if a socialist is forced to join a bourgeois cabinet in extreme cases, he is obliged to leave if it reveals a bias in its relation to the struggle of labor and capital. Plekhanov himself acknowledged that on a theoretical level his amendment "cannot stand up to criticism: *what kind of bourgeois government could possibly be unbiased toward the struggle of labor with capital?*" ("Neskol'ko slov o poslednem Parizhskom mezhdunarodnom sotsialisticheskome kongresse" [A Few Words About the Latest International Socialist Congress in Paris], April 1901 [our translation]). Jaurès then deftly amended Plekhanov's amendment to say that a socialist must leave the cabinet *if* a unified socialist party deems the government biased in the struggle of labor with capital—but France did not have a unified party! Trapped, Plekhanov ended up voting with the minority while complaining that Guesde's motion was too categorical in its opposition to entering a bourgeois cabinet.

Guesde also introduced a motion opposing socialist participation in class-collaborationist coalitions with bourgeois parties. While asserting that "class struggle forbids any kind of alliance with any fraction whatsoever of the capitalist class," the motion allowed that "exceptional circumstances make coalitions necessary in some places" (*Congrès Socialiste International* [our translation]). This loophole

was large enough that even the hardened opportunists could vote for the resolution, and it passed unanimously.

Amsterdam 1904: Millerandism Revisited

The Second International returned to the subject of Millerandism at its 1904 Amsterdam Congress. A year before, at the 1903 SPD Congress in Dresden, Kautsky had joined in endorsing a resolution condemning revisionism and, implicitly, Millerandism. American SLP leader Daniel De Leon commented acerbically: "At the Paris Congress an anti-Millerandist attitude was decidedly unpopular; there Kautsky was 'running with the hares,'" while at Dresden Kautsky was "again to the fore, now 'barking with the hounds'" ("The Dresden Congress," *Daily People*, 3 January 1904).

The Guesdists then introduced the SPD resolution for endorsement at Amsterdam. As passed in 1904, the resolution "condemned in the most decisive way revisionist efforts to alter our previously proven and victorious class-struggle tactics in such a way that a policy of accommodation to the existing order of things takes the place of the conquest of political power through vanquishing our opponents" (*Internationaler Sozialisten-Kongress zu Amsterdam* [International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam], [Berlin: Expedition der Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1904] [our translation]). It proclaimed itself frankly against any "party which contents itself with reforming bourgeois society" and further declared that "the Social Democracy, in keeping with Kautsky's resolution at the International Socialist Congress in Paris in the year 1900, cannot *strive for* a share of governmental power within bourgeois society." The positive reference to the 1900 Kautsky resolution was a characteristic sop to the right wing. The rebuke of the revisionists did not lead to a parting of ways, as all wings accepted the conception of a "party of the whole class," i.e., a single, unified party of the working class encompassing all tendencies from Marxism to reformism. Nonetheless, delegates on both the left and the right at Amsterdam saw the 1903 Dresden resolution as a sharp counter to the conciliation of Millerandism in 1900.

De Leon had voted against Kautsky's resolution at the 1900 Paris Congress. In 1904, De Leon again objected to endorsing Kautsky's stand in 1900, submitting the following resolution:

"Whereas, At the last International Congress, held in Paris, in 1900, a resolution generally known as the Kautsky Resolution, was adopted, the closing clauses of which contemplate the emergency of the working class accepting office at the hand of such capitalist governments, and also, especially, PRE-SUPPOSES THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPARTIALITY ON THE PART OF THE RULING CLASS GOVERNMENTS IN THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE WORKING CLASS AND THE CAPITALIST CLASS....

"Resolved, First, That the said Kautsky Resolution be and the same is hereby repealed as a principle of general Socialist tactics;

"Second, That, in fully developed capitalist countries like



Roger Viollet

Delegates to 1904 Amsterdam Congress: Georgi Plekhanov, front row, center; back row includes Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky (third from right).

America, the working class cannot, without betrayal of the cause of the proletariat, fill any political office other than such that they conquer for and by themselves."

—De Leon, "Millerandism Repudiated,"

Daily People, 28 August 1904

Failing to get any support for his resolution, De Leon voted for the main resolution.

In allowing for the filling of political offices conquered by the workers "for and by themselves," De Leon's resolution again avoided the key issue—the necessity of smashing the machinery of the capitalist state and replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat. While De Leon took a principled stand against bourgeois ministerialism, he was also committed to electoralism. Founding American Communist and, later, Trotskyist James P. Cannon honored De Leon's pioneering role in the formative period of the American socialist movement while rightly noting that he "was sectarian in his tactics, and his conception of political action was rigidly formalistic, and rendered sterile by legalistic fetishism" (Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1962]).

As he made clear in a 1905 address originally published as "The Preamble of the I.W.W.," De Leon left open the possibility that, at least in the U.S., the proletariat could conquer political power peacefully through the ballot box, after which the new socialist government would disband itself and cede power to an administration of "socialist industrial unions" ("The Socialist Reconstruction of Society," De Leon, *Socialist Landmarks* [New York: New York Labor News Company, 1952]). According to De Leon, such unions, formed under capitalism, would grow organically, progressively seizing and wielding economic power against the capitalists. Beginning in the 1890s, De Leon's SLP faithfully, every four years, put up its own candidate for the U.S. presidency. Following De Leon's death in 1914 and the SLP's rejection of the lessons of the October Revolution as applicable to the American terrain, the party was transformed into a fossilized shell of its former self.

But in its electoralism, there was little to distinguish the SLP even under De Leon from the Socialist Party of Eugene V. Debs. From 1900 onwards, Debs was to run five times for the office of president of the United States. Debs intoned: "The workers must be taught to unite and vote together *as a*

class in support of the Socialist Party, the party that represents them as a class, and when they do this the government will pass into their hands and capitalism will fall to rise no more" ("The Growth of Socialism," 1906, *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs* [New York: Hermitage Press, 1948]). Debs ran his last presidential campaign in 1920, winning over 900,000 votes, from a prison cell in Atlanta, Georgia, where he was serving a ten-year sentence (as well as being disenfranchised for life) for his opposition to World War I. Debs' presidential campaigns as well as his great authority cemented a tradition of socialists running for Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism that was by and large uncritically accepted by all except anti-parliamentary opponents of any electoral activity whatsoever. But where Debs advocated the overthrow of capitalism, many Socialist leaders, such as Morris Hillquit, were virulently anti-Leninist reformists. Another, Victor Berger, was aptly described as a "sewer socialist" for a program of municipal reform that was nearly indistinguishable from that peddled by the bourgeois Progressive movement.

Municipalism and the Second International

Municipalism was not the preserve solely of overt reformists. The deep division between the reformist and revolutionary wings of the Second International over socialists taking responsibility for bourgeois government at the ministerial level did not extend to the municipal level. In fact, the 1900 Paris Congress was unanimous in approving a resolution on municipalism that asserted:

"In consideration that the municipality can become an excellent laboratory of decentralized economic life and at the same time a formidable political bastion to be used by local socialist majorities against the bourgeois majority of the central power, once serious autonomy has been achieved;

"The International Congress of 1900 states:

"That all socialists have a duty, without ignoring the importance of general politics, to explain and appreciate municipal activity, to give to municipal reforms the importance given to them by their role as 'embryos of the collectivist society' and to strive to turn communal services—*transit, lighting, water supply, electricity, schools, medical services, hospitals, baths, wash houses, municipal stores, municipal bakeries, food service, heating, workers' housing, clothing, police, municipal works, etc.*—into model institutions, from the standpoint both of the public interest as well as of the citizens employed in these operations."

—*Congrès Socialiste International* (our translation)

This is perhaps the most graphic example of the dilemma of the parties of the Second International—a real program of minimum reforms, and a maximum program of socialism, all too often to be dragged out for Sunday political sermons, but nothing more. Even those who were most outspoken and consistent in their opposition to Bernsteinism and Millerandism thought socialists could participate in municipal administrations. Thus Rosa Luxemburg wrote:

"The question of participating in a *town council* is entirely different. It's true that both the town council and the mayor are tasked, *inter alia*, with administrative functions that have been transferred to them and with the carrying out of bourgeois laws; historically, however, both constitute entirely counterposed elements....

"For socialist tactics the result is a fundamentally different stance: the central government of the present state is the embodiment of bourgeois class rule, whose elimination is an absolutely necessary prerequisite to the victory of socialism; self-administration is the element of the future, with which the socialist transformation will link up positively.

"Admittedly, the bourgeois parties know how to infuse their

class content even into the economic and cultural functions of the municipality. But here socialists will never get into a situation of being untrue to their own politics. As long as they are in the minority in town representative bodies, they will make *opposition* their guideline in the same way as in parliament. But if they attain a majority, then they will transform the municipality itself into an instrument of struggle against the bourgeois central power."

—"The Socialist Crisis in France," 1900-01
(our translation)

This view was in part a holdover from the period of the ascendancy of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, when the commune was a weapon of the urban classes against the feudal monarchical state. In the late Middle Ages, the communes in Italy and France served as bastions in which the mercantile bourgeoisies developed the roots of capitalism within feudal society and *against* the forces of absolutism. But after the bourgeoisie came to power, it pushed the autonomous communes aside in order to cohere a strong centralized state to defend its class interests at the national level. The adoption of municipalism by the Second International reflected not only theoretical confusion but also the fact that those reforms that were attained through class struggle in the last decades of the 1800s were often dispensed by socialist-controlled local governments.

In fact, Marx and Engels had sought to dispel municipalist illusions on several occasions. Following the revolutions of 1848, they cautioned that the proletarians "must not allow themselves to be misguided by the democratic talk of freedom for the communities, of self-government, etc." ("Address of the Central Authority to the League," March 1850). And in his writing on the Paris Commune, Marx warned against confusing the functions of the medieval commune with the tasks of proletarian socialism:

"It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness. Thus, this new Commune, which breaks the modern State power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the mediaeval Communes, which first preceded, and afterwards became the substratum of, that very State power.... The antagonism of the Commune against the State power has been mistaken for an exaggerated form of the ancient struggle against over-centralization.... The very existence of the Commune involved, as a matter of course, local municipal liberty, but no longer as a check upon the, now superseded, State power."

—*The Civil War in France*

In a similar vein, in the aftermath of the 1905 Russian Revolution Lenin denounced the "philistine opportunism" of Menshevik schemes for "municipal socialism":

"They forget that so long as the bourgeoisie rules as a class it cannot allow any encroachment, even from the 'municipal' point of view, upon the real *foundations* of its rule; that if the bourgeoisie allows, tolerates, 'municipal socialism,' it is because the latter does not touch the *foundations* of its rule, does not interfere with the *important* sources of its wealth, but extends only to the narrow sphere of local expenditure, which the bourgeoisie itself *allows* the 'population' to manage. It does not need more than a slight acquaintance with 'municipal socialism' in the West to know that any attempt on the part of *socialist* municipalities to go a little beyond the boundaries of their normal, i.e., minor, petty activities, which give no *substantial* relief to the workers, any attempt to meddle with *capital*, is invariably vetoed in the most emphatic manner by the central authorities of the bourgeois state."

—*The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution 1905-1907*,
November-December 1907

Indicative of the contradictions inherent in the support for socialist control of municipal governments by many revolu-

tionary social democrats was that Luxemburg vehemently rejected parallel arguments applied by Vollmar's cothinkers to defend voting for the budget of the Baden state government in May 1900. Citing their assertion that "the budgets of the individual German states, in contrast to that of the Reich, contain for the most part expenditures for culture, not the military," Luxemburg retorted:

"Whether the budget contains more or fewer military expenditures or expenditures for culture, such quantitative considerations would be decisive for us only were we in general to base ourselves on the present state and merely fight its excesses, as for example the military state.... In fact, we refuse to vote funding from the taxpayers for the German Reich not just because it is a military state but rather *above all* because it is a *bourgeois class state*. The last applies, however, equally to the German federal states."

—Luxemburg, "Die badische Budgetabstimmung"
(The Vote on the Baden Budget) (our translation)

The false distinction between national and state as opposed to municipal governments left the opponents of ministerialism wide open to attack by Millerand's supporters. Thus Jaurès seized on the fact that the Guesdists of the POF themselves occupied a number of executive offices at the municipal level to indict the Guesdists' opposition to ministerialism as inconsistent and hypocritical. In a 26 November 1900 debate in Lille (a city with a POF mayor), Jaurès argued:

"One speaks of the responsibilities that a socialist minister assumes in a bourgeois ministry; but don't your municipal elected officials assume responsibilities? Are they not a part of the bourgeois state?... I could say that the socialist mayor, even though he is socialist, can be suspended by the central power and disqualified from holding office for a year; I could say to you that he necessarily agrees, because he is mayor, to enforce and administer a great number of bourgeois laws, and I could say to you that if there are violent conflicts in your streets, he too is forced, for fear of it being said that socialism is plunder and murder, to call on the police."

—"le Socialisme en débat" (Socialism Under Debate), *l'Humanité hebdo* supplement, 19-20 November 2005 (our translation)

Jaurès' jibe at the Guesdists' municipalism, while in the service of defending Millerandism, was on the mark and reflected an abiding weakness in the Second International that was to carry over into the Third International.

World War I: A Watershed

The reformism deeply ingrained in the Second International manifested itself in its incapacity to sort out the questions of parliamentarism, ministerialism and coalitionism. The Second International did not assimilate the lessons of the Paris Commune on the need to smash the bourgeois state and erect in its place a proletarian state of the Commune type. Indeed, the leadership of the SPD, Marx and Engels' avowed heirs, did much to bury or obscure the lessons drawn by Marx and Engels from this epochal event.

The first interimperialist world war brought all the accumulated problems of the Second International to a head. Confronted with the onset of the war in August 1914, the International spectacularly collapsed into social-chauvinism. In the belligerent countries, only the Bolsheviks and some Mensheviks in Russia and the Bulgarian and Serbian parties opposed war funding for their governments. The social-patriots rallied behind their own bourgeoisies in the name of "defense of the fatherland," falsely claiming as a precedent national wars of 19th-century Europe in which a victory for one side or the other had represented social progress against feudal reaction. World War I signaled that capitalism had entered

the imperialist epoch: both sides were dominated by great powers fighting to redive the world among themselves. Thus Marxists opposed both sides in the war, advocating revolutionary defeatism.

World War I was a watershed, provoking a profound realignment in the revolutionary workers movement internationally. Prepared by their years-long struggle and decisive split with the Russian opportunists—the Mensheviks—Lenin and his Bolsheviks emerged as the leadership of an international movement to recapture the banner of revolutionary Marxism. Beginning with his first writings on the war in September 1914 and continuing with the Bolsheviks' interventions at the 1915 Zimmerwald and 1916 Kienthal conferences of antiwar socialists, Lenin hammered away at two intertwined themes: the need to break irrevocably with the social traitors of the



OGIZ

Organs of proletarian power erected in wake of February Revolution, 1917: Soviet militia in Kiev (above), first session of Moscow Soviet.

International Publishers



Second International and their centrist apologists and to fight for a new, Third International; and the call to turn the imperialist war into a civil war against the capitalist system. (For a documentary account of Lenin's struggle for a new International, see Olga Hess Gankin and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War*.) The revolutionary wave created by the continuing inter-imperialist slaughter broke at imperialism's weakest link, tsarist Russia. With the collapse of the autocracy following the revolutionary upheavals of February 1917, the possibility presented itself to turn the Bolshevik slogan into a reality. Key to politically arming the Bolshevik Party to lead the struggle for proletarian state power was Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, written in the summer of 1917, in which he exhumed Marx and Engels' writings on the state and the lessons of the Commune.

The call to turn the imperialist war into a civil war left no room for electoral/parliamentary coalitions with bourgeois parties. Nevertheless, great struggles by Lenin, later joined by Trotsky, were required to keep the Bolshevik Party on the revolutionary course that was to lead the workers and peasants of Russia to triumph in October of 1917, posing acutely at every step the issue of which class would rule. Illusions in electoralism and parliamentarism, growing out of a failure to recognize that the old state power had to be swept away, threatened at every turn to derail the revolution. Ministerialism and municipalism had their decisive test in the crucible of this great revolution.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the early Communist International demarcated a line of principled opposition to coalitionism. The Trotskyists upheld this line against its reversal by the Stalinized Comintern (see, for example, James Burnham's 1937 pamphlet, *The People's Front: The New Betrayal*). But the issue of executive office was not clearly resolved even by the early, revolutionary CI.

Lessons of the Bolshevik Revolution

The February Revolution, as Trotsky noted, presented a paradox. (All dates referring to Russia in 1917 are in the old Julian calendar, which was 13 days behind the modern calendar.) The Russian bourgeoisie and its liberal parties dreaded the revolution and tried to hold it back. The revolution was made with great determination and audacity by the masses who, as in 1905, threw up soviets (councils) that quickly became the masters of the situation. But these soviets were initially dominated by the petty-bourgeois Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) and the Mensheviks, who were wedded to the idea that the revolution in Russia must be a bourgeois revolution and thus sought to thrust power into the hands of the impotent bourgeois Provisional Government. Referring to these Compromisers, Trotsky wrote:

"A revolution is a direct struggle for power. Nevertheless, our 'socialists' are not worried about getting the power away from the class enemy who does not possess it, and could not with his own forces seize it, but, just the opposite, with forcing this power on him at any cost. Is not this indeed a paradox? It seems all the more striking, because the experience of the German revolution of 1918 did not then exist, and humanity had not yet witnessed a colossal and still more successful operation of this same type carried out by the 'new middle caste' led by the German social democracy."

—Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 1930

Referring to this situation of dual power, Trotsky explained, "The February overturn led to a bourgeois government, in which the power of the possessing classes was limited by

the not yet fully realized sovereignty of the workers' and soldiers' soviets" (*ibid.*). (In Germany 1918, the workers and soldiers councils remained under Social Democratic leadership and were soon subordinated to and liquidated by the bourgeois government.)

In the first weeks after the February Revolution, the Bolshevik Party had lost its revolutionary voice. In March, after ousting more left-wing Bolsheviks from the editorship of *Pravda*, Stalin and Kamenev proclaimed in the paper that the Bolsheviks would support the Provisional Government "in so far as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution" and declared: "Our slogan is pressure upon the Provisional Government with the aim of compelling it...to make an attempt to induce all the warring countries to open immediate negotiations...and until then every man remains at his fighting post!" (quoted in *ibid.*). Such declarations caused great anger in the ranks of the Bolshevik Party. Party locals reacted by demanding the new *Pravda* editors be expelled from the party. But the conciliators—the "March Bolsheviks"—stuck to their guns, with Stalin, for example, arguing that the workers and peasants had achieved the revolution and the task of the Provisional Government was to fortify those conquests!

When Lenin returned to Russia on 3 April 1917, he immediately launched a furious struggle against the March Bolsheviks and the capitulationist parties of the soviet majority. Lenin demanded a perspective aimed at convincing the workers and peasants to form a Paris Commune-type government based on the soviets. In so doing, he explicitly renounced his earlier conception that the Russian Revolution would take the form of a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." Lenin's conclusion was operationally congruent with Trotsky's conception of permanent revolution—that the Russian proletariat could win power in advance of the Western proletariat and would be compelled to transcend the bourgeois-democratic tasks of the revolution and undertake socialist measures. This congruence found expression some months later in the fusion Trotsky facilitated between the Inter-District Committee (Mezhraiontsy), in which he played an influential role, and the Bolsheviks.

Lenin was able to prevail in spite of his previous erroneous analytic formula, most fundamentally because his views were in accord with the revolutionary temper of the proletariat and because throughout the whole of its existence Bolshevism had maintained a steadfast stance of class independence and irreconcilable opposition to both the tsarist regime and the Russian bourgeoisie. It is the most graphic example of the critical role of party leadership in a revolutionary situation. Had the Bolsheviks not been able to make the turn away from being the left critics of the Compromisers, the party might well have let slip the revolutionary opportunity, which would not repeat itself for a very long time.

It is from this standpoint that the experiences of the 1917 Russian Revolution have great significance in assessing the role of parliamentarism, ministerialism and municipalism, and starkly highlight the question of contesting for executive office. The Provisional Government grew out of the rump of the old tsarist Duma. The great ministerialist of 1917 was of course Alexander Kerensky, a deputy chairman of the Provisional Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, who on 2 March 1917 eagerly and with no formal approval accepted the post of Minister of Justice in the newly minted Provisional Government. Although none of Kerensky's colleagues in the Committee were at that time eager to follow in his foot-

steps, by May 1 the majority of the Executive Committee decided (opposed only by the Bolsheviks and Julius Martov's Menshevik-Internationalists) to enter into a coalition government with the bourgeoisie. In so doing, they hoped to work for a gradual dissolution of the soviets, seeking to replace them on the local level with new municipal governments (local dumas), and on the national level with a constituent assembly. The coalition government was thus to be a bridge to a bourgeois parliamentary republic. But the soviets persisted.

The Bolshevik response to this coalition of class treason was the slogan, "Down with the ten capitalist ministers!" As Trotsky explained, the slogan "demanded that the posts of these ministers be filled by Mensheviks and Narodniks. 'Messrs. bourgeois democrats, kick the Cadets out! Take power into your own hands! Put in the government twelve (or as many as you have) Peshkhonovs [a "socialist" minister], and we promise you, so far as it is possible, to remove you "peacefully" from your posts when the hour will strike, which should be very soon!'" (*The Lessons of October*, 1924). The Bolshevik tactic was not aimed at capturing the Provisional Government, but at exposing the reformists for refusing to take power in the name of the soviet majority. The Bolsheviks sought to show the workers that this bourgeois government should be swept into the trash bin of history and replaced with a workers government based on the soviets of workers, soldiers and peasants. This was, if you will, a concretization of the slogan, "Down with executive offices!"

An integral part of Lenin's rearming of the Bolshevik Party in April 1917 was a sharp dispute over how to orient to local дума elections. Highlighting the failure of the revolutionary wing of the Second International to correctly address the question of municipalism, L. M. Mikhailov, chairman of the Bolshevik Petrograd Committee, cited the 1900 Paris Congress as his authority to advocate a classic social-democratic program of municipal reform:

"The municipality, urban public administration, has always been regarded and is regarded by socialists of all existing tendencies and shades as 'the embryo of a collectivist society.' "And even though we firmly understand and remember that the victory of a 'collectivist society' is predicated on fundamental reconstruction of the entirety of the modern class state, socialists nonetheless unanimously declared at their Paris International Congress (1900) to charge their supporters with the duty of struggling to take control of local public self-administration, seeing in this 'an outstanding laboratory of decentralized economic life and a powerful political bastion'."

—*Sed'maia (aprel'skaia) vserossiiskaia konferentsia RSDRP (Bol'shevikov), Petrogradskaia obshchegorodskaia konferentsia RSDRP (Bol'shevikov), Protokoly* (The Seventh [April] All-Russian Conference of the RSDLP [Bolshevik], Petrograd Citywide Conference of the RSDLP [Bolshevik], Minutes) (Moscow: Gozpolitizdat, 1958) (our translation)

On this basis Mikhailov argued for electoral blocs with the Mensheviks and SRs—right after these parties had meekly accepted the Provisional Government's pledge to Russia's



VAAP

Bolshevik banner on 4 July 1917 demands: "Down With the Capitalist Ministers! All Power to the Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants Deputies!"

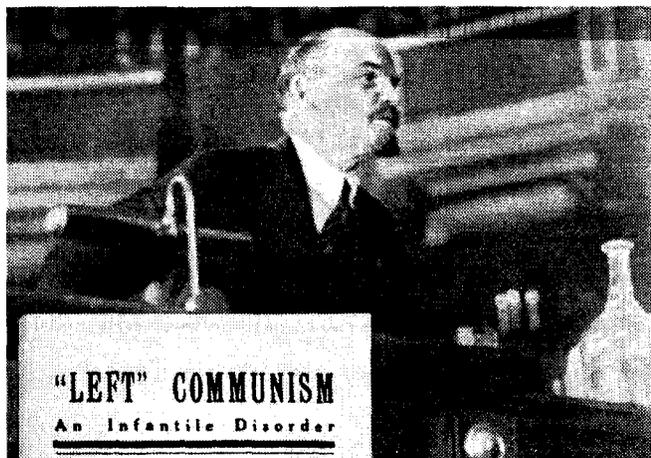
imperialist allies to keep fighting on the side of the Entente. Lenin responded by denouncing any conception of an electoral bloc with the bourgeoisie or defensists as a betrayal of socialism. Without overlooking immediate issues such as food provisioning, etc., Lenin insisted that the local дума campaign had to center on explaining to the workers the Bolsheviks' differences with the bourgeoisie and Menshevik-SR conciliators on "all present-day key issues, especially those concerning the war and the tasks of the proletariat in regard to the central power" (Lenin, "Resolution on the Municipal Question," Petrograd City Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. [Bolsheviks], 14-22 April 1917).

As is clear from Mikhailov's comments, the conflicting attitudes toward the municipal councils were merely a subset of the more fundamental conflict in the party: Would the Bolsheviks confine themselves to being the left wing of the democracy or would they struggle for proletarian power? In the new local dumas in Petrograd and Moscow, elected under the widest franchise, the Bolsheviks were a small but growing minority. The Mensheviks and SRs, the majority in both the dumas and the soviets, held the position that the dumas should supplant the soviets. But as Trotsky explains:

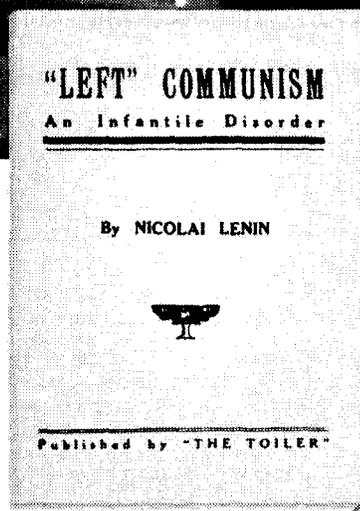
"Municipal governments, like any other institutions of democracy, can function only on the basis of firmly established social relations—that is, a definite property system. The essence of revolution, however, is that it calls in question this, the very basis of all bases. And its question can be answered only by an open revolutionary test of the correlation of forces.... In the everyday of the revolution the municipal governments dragged out a half-fictitious existence. But at critical moments, when the interference of the masses was defining the further direction of events, these governments simply exploded in the air, their constituent elements appearing on different sides of a barricade. It was sufficient to contrast the parallel roles of the soviets and the municipal governments from May to October, in order to foresee the fate of the Constituent Assembly."

—*The History of the Russian Revolution*

Following the Bolshevik-led rout of General Kornilov's abortive counterrevolutionary coup in August, the Bolsheviks



Planeta



Lenin addresses Second Comintern Congress, 1920. His polemic against ultraleftism, written on eve of Congress, advocates Communist participation in bourgeois parliaments.

were catapulted into majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. Lenin responded to the decisive surge toward the Bolsheviks and growing social turmoil, especially among the peasantry, with a series of writings centered on the necessity to prepare for insurrection. For its part, the Kerensky-SR-Menshevik bloc attempted to raise a series of “democratic” obstacles to the impending workers revolution. These included the September 14-22 Democratic Conference and its offspring, the Pre-Parliament, which opened on 7 October 1917.

Those elements in the Bolshevik Party who back in April had resisted Lenin’s perspective of a proletarian seizure of power now resisted its implementation. With Trotsky in prison and Lenin in hiding, on September 3 the Bolshevik Central Committee decided to take seats in the Petrograd Duma administration, including designating the head of the Bolshevik parliamentary fraction, Anatoly Lunacharsky, for one of three Deputy Mayor positions! In so doing, the Bolshevik fraction not only joined Kerensky’s SR and Menshevik Provisional Government partners in overseeing the city administration, but sat alongside the bourgeois Cadet Deputy Mayor, F.M. Knipovich! This despite the bluster of the Bolshevik opening statement to the Duma which renounced “any form of collaboration with patent enemies of the revolution [i.e., the Cadets] in executive organs of the city government” (cited in *The Bolsheviks and the October Revolution, Minutes of the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party [Bolsheviks], August 1917-February 1918* [London: Pluto Press, 1974]).

The Bolshevik conciliationists also joined in legitimizing the Provisional Government’s “democratic” confabs. Still in hiding, Lenin retrospectively condemned Bolshevik participation in the Democratic Conference and hailed Trotsky for having advocated a boycott of the Pre-Parliament. Denounc-

ing the Pre-Parliament as “in substance a Bonapartist *fraud*,” Lenin warned: “There is not the slightest doubt that at the ‘top’ of our Party there are noticeable vacillations that may become *ruinous*” in consummating the revolution (Lenin, “From a Publicist’s Diary,” 22-24 September 1917).

On October 11, Lunacharsky publicly solidarized with Zinoviev and Kamenev’s strikebreaking denunciation of the plans for insurrection and their declaration that a “Constituent Assembly plus the Soviets, that is the combined type of state institution toward which we are traveling” (quoted in *The History of the Russian Revolution*). Lenin and Trotsky carried the day against the vacillators and led the October Revolution to victory. But even after the insurrection, those who had flinched continued to wage a rearguard action. On November 4, Lunacharsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev resigned all their responsibilities after Lenin and Trotsky refused to accept their demand for an “all-socialist” government including the Mensheviks and SRs—a government that would, moreover, have excluded Lenin and Trotsky! As he had following Zinoviev’s and Kamenev’s strikebreaking, Lenin again called for expelling the capitulators if they maintained their course. Finding no support in the party and no Menshevik takers for a coalition government, the capitulators soon vacated their line, and Lenin advised their reintegration into responsible positions.

Critical Support vs. Ministerialism

The fundamental features of the October Revolution were not limited to Russia alone, nor was its impact. It polarized the workers movement worldwide, as revolutionary internationalists embraced the cause of October and struggled to forge new revolutionary parties based on its lessons. Bolstered by their victory, the Bolsheviks took the first steps in forging the new, Communist International Lenin had called for since the collapse of the Second International into social-patriotism.

At its First Congress in 1919, the Comintern raised the banner of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the lessons of *The State and Revolution*. The Second Congress a year later tackled among other things the issues of parliamentarism and revolutionary electoral tactics. To sift through the reformist posturers and the accidental centrist elements gravitating toward the Comintern a set of conditions was imposed on all parties seeking affiliation. On the parliamentary front, Condition 11 stated:

“Parties that wish to belong to the Communist International have the duty to review the individual composition of their parliamentary fractions, removing all unreliable elements from them, and to subordinate these fractions to the parties’ executive committees not just in words but in deeds, demanding that each Communist member of parliament subordinate all of his activity to the interests of truly revolutionary propaganda and agitation.”

—“Theses on the Conditions for Admission,” *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder, 1991)

Lenin’s *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Trotsky’s *Terrorism and Communism* and other polemics were aimed at drawing clear programmatic lines against the social democracy, especially the Kautskyan center. At the same time, Lenin sought to win over the anarcho-syndicalist and ultraleftist elements whose rejection of social-democratic parliamentarism led them to renounce as reformist *any* electoral or parliamentary activity. On the eve of the Second Congress, Lenin wrote his handbook on

Communist tactics, "*Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder* (April-May 1920). He urged that Communists adopt a posture of critical support to, e.g., the Labour Party in the pending elections in Britain. Lenin explained:

"It is true that the Hendersons, the Clyneses, the MacDonalds and the Snowdens [British Labour leaders] are hopelessly reactionary. It is equally true that they want to assume power (though they would prefer a coalition with the bourgeoisie), that they want to 'rule' along the old bourgeois lines, and that when they are in power they will certainly behave like the Scheidemanns and Noskes. All that is true. But it does not at all follow that to support them means treachery to the revolution; what does follow is that, in the interests of the revolution, working-class revolutionaries should give these gentlemen a certain amount of parliamentary support....

"The fact that most British workers still follow the lead of the British Kerenskys or Scheidemanns and have not yet had experience of a government composed of these people—an experience which was necessary in Russia and Germany so as to secure the mass transition of the workers to communism—undoubtedly indicates that the British Communists *should* participate in parliamentary action, that they should, from *within* parliament, help the masses of the workers see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice, and that they should help the Hendersons and Snowdens defeat the united forces of Lloyd George and Churchill. To act otherwise would mean hampering the cause of the revolution, since revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, a change brought about by the political experience of the masses, never by propaganda alone."

—"*Left-Wing Communism*

Lenin categorically insisted that the British Communists must "retain *complete freedom* of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Of course, without this latter condition, we cannot agree to a bloc, for that would be treachery; the British Communists must demand and get complete freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (*for fifteen years—1903-17*) the Russian Bolsheviks demanded and got it in respect of the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, i.e., the Mensheviks" (*ibid.*).

The whole point of Lenin's tactics was obviously *not* that the Communists would seek to replace a Labour majority with a Communist majority—on the contrary, Lenin insisted that "the number of parliamentary seats is of no importance to us" (*ibid.*). Rather, such tactics would assist in exposing the ref-

ormist obstacles to revolution. As Lenin put it, "I want to support Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man—that the impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens" (*ibid.*). Nowhere in "*Left-Wing Communism* did Lenin entertain the possibility of a Communist capturing an executive office in a bourgeois government, or its functional equivalent—a parliamentary majority. As he had made clear in an earlier statement:

"Only scoundrels or simpletons can think that the proletariat must first win a majority in elections carried out *under the yoke of the bourgeoisie*, under the *yoke of wage-slavery*, and must then win power. This is the height of stupidity or hypocrisy; it is substituting elections, under the old system and with the old power, for class struggle and revolution."

—Lenin, "Greetings to Italian, French and German Communists," 10 October 1919

The electoral tactics Lenin proposed were completely congruent with opposition to fielding candidates for executive office. In a document written on the eve of the Second Congress, Lenin made clear that revolutionary parliamentarism meant only having "deputies to bourgeois representative institutions (primarily the national, but also local, municipal, etc., representative institutions)" ("Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International," 4 July 1920). Only workers deputies in the legislature—Lenin never mentioned administrators, mayors, governors or presidents in the executive branch as representing workers' conquests in the enemy camp.

The Second Congress, Municipalism and the Bulgarian Communists

The draft theses on "Communist Parties and the Question of Parliamentarism" submitted by the Executive Committee of the CI (ECCI) for discussion at the Congress were in line with Lenin's documents. They likewise made no mention of taking executive office—including at the municipal level—and instead argued the opposite. However, the theses that were presented by the Parliamentary Commission to the floor of the Congress and subsequently adopted had been modified in certain critical respects. Trotsky, who,



OGIZ

Above: Bolshevik Duma fraction exiled to Siberia for opposing World War I, 1915. Right: Karl Liebknecht (second from left), while serving in German army, was also imprisoned for opposing imperialist war.



Süddeutscher Verlag



I.I. Brodsky

Drawings of Bulgarian Nikolai Shablin and Italian Amadeo Bordiga, Second Congress delegates who participated in debate on parliamentarism.

along with Bukharin, was assigned to be part of the Russian delegation to the Commission, authored a new historical introductory section, replacing the first thesis in the original draft. The third section of the theses, originally authored by Zinoviev as a separate document of instructions for parliamentary deputies and reviewed by the Political Bureau of the Russian party before its submission, was adopted with no substantive changes. But in the second section of the document, originally drafted by Bukharin, a number of anti-Marxist amendments were introduced, watering down the revolutionary intent of the draft. Thus the (renumbered) Paragraphs 4 and 6 no longer categorically rejected the possibility of Communists taking over bourgeois parliaments, but rather allowed for that possibility on a temporary basis (we have indicated amendments in emphasis):

"4. Bourgeois parliaments, among the most important organizations of the bourgeois state machine, cannot as such be taken over *permanently*, just as the proletariat cannot possibly take over the bourgeois state. The proletariat's task is to break up the bourgeoisie's state machine and to destroy it, and with it parliamentary institutions, whether republican or constitutional-monarchist.

"5. It is no different with the bourgeoisie's institutions of local government. To counterpose them to the organs of the state is theoretically incorrect. They are in reality organizations similar to the mechanism of the bourgeois state, which must be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and replaced by local soviets of workers' deputies.

"6. Thus, communism rejects parliamentarism as a form of the future society. It rejects it as a form of dictatorship by the proletarian class. It rejects the possibility of taking over parliaments *on a permanent basis*; its goal is to destroy parliamentarism. Therefore it is possible to speak only of using bourgeois state institutions for the purpose of destroying them. The question can be posed in this sense and in this sense alone."

— "Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism," *Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress*

Most significantly, the Commission added a new Thesis 13 that effectively contradicted Thesis 5:

"13. Should Communists hold a majority in institutions of local government, they must (a) organize revolutionary opposition against the central bourgeois government; (b) do everything possible to serve the poorer sectors of the population (economic measures, creating or attempting to create an armed workers' militia, and so forth); (c) at every opportunity

point out how the bourgeois state blocks truly major changes; (d) on this basis develop vigorous revolutionary propaganda, never fearing conflict with the state; (e) under certain conditions, replace municipal governments with local workers' councils. In other words, all of the Communists' activity in local government must be a part of the general work of undermining the capitalist system."

— *Ibid.*

This stands in sharp contrast to Lenin's arguments against municipalism, as in 1907, cited earlier.

The stenographic reports of the Second Congress and its associated Commissions are notoriously spotty, and we have not located any record of the proceedings of the Parliamentary Commission. But the available evidence points to the political import of the relevant amendments—a concession to the municipal practices that pervaded the work of some of the parties. In this regard, it is notable that the Commission also introduced an amendment to Thesis 11, adding the Communist Party of Bulgaria (CPB) to the examples of Karl Liebknecht in Germany and the Bolsheviks as models of revolutionary work in parliament. Only months before the Congress, the CPB, which already had a sizable parliamentary fraction, had scored a stunning victory in municipal elections throughout Bulgaria. The French Socialist Party, whose application for admission to the CI was then pending, also controlled some 1,500 to 1,800 local governments at the time; the Italian Socialist Party likewise ran a substantial number of municipalities.

The main report on parliamentarism to the Congress, by Bukharin, did not address the Commission's amendments at all. They were presented to the delegates without comment in a short supplementary report by the German delegate Wolfstein (Rosi Frölich). The ensuing discussion was dominated by a debate with the Italian ultraleftist Amadeo Bordiga, who gave a minority report opposing parliamentary activity and presented a counterposed set of theses on behalf of the Communist-Abstentionist Faction of the Italian Socialist Party. Lenin's remarks in the discussion, which allowed three speakers for and three against the majority resolution, dealt exclusively with Bordiga's arguments.

Only one of the speakers in favor of the majority theses, the Bulgarian Nikolai Shablin (Ivan Nedelkov), addressed the question of municipalism. Shablin boasted:

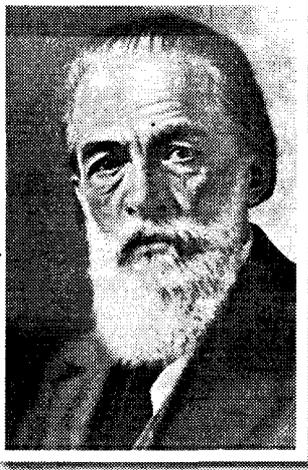
"In the local elections of December 1919 and the district elections of January 1920, the party received 140,000 votes, winning a majority in the councils of almost every city and in about a hundred villages. In many other city and village councils the party holds large minorities. For the local and district council bodies, the party has a program for organizing workers' and peasants' soviets in the cities and villages whose individual units, in time of revolution, are to replace the local and provincial representative bodies and assume their functions....

"We use campaigns in Communist municipalities to explain to the masses that they alone, through their organizations, can make the central government respect the decisions of Communist municipal councils on questions of food, housing and inflation and on all the working population's other immediate needs."

— "Parliamentarism," *Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress*

The only delegate to respond to Shablin was the Swiss Jakob Herzog, who opined that the CPB's parliamentary work was not as sterling as Shablin claimed. Herzog recounted:

"In the commission we had a long discussion about how Communist representatives on municipal councils should conduct themselves, about what they should do when they are in the majority. Comrade Bukharin said there, 'When they



New York Public Library

Dimitar Blagoev, leader of Bulgarian *Tesnyaki* (Narrows). 1914 *Tesnyaki* election poster depicts Blagoev with banner reading, "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality."

have a majority, they must try to improve the workers' conditions in order to heighten the contradiction between the Communist municipal council and the state.' That is exactly what the opportunists also tell us when they go into parliament."

—*Ibid.*

However, Herzog opposed any form of parliamentary activity and made no distinction between controlling a municipal council, which meant administering a local organ of the bourgeois state apparatus, and being a Communist *opponent* in a bourgeois legislative body. But this distinction is decisive. Trotsky's introductory section to the theses states that Communist members of parliament act for the revolutionary working class as "scouts in the bourgeoisie's parliamentary institutions." Thesis 8 in the third section of the resolution further insists:

"Every Communist member of parliament must be mindful that he is not a legislator seeking agreements with other legislators but is rather a party agitator sent into the camp of the enemy in order to carry out party decisions there."

—"Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism"

In contrast, functioning as a Communist majority in a local or national legislative body comes down to the same thing as holding executive office: it means control of the budget and administration. The question of taking control of such bodies needed to be explicitly addressed and *opposed*.

In his remarks at the Congress, Shablin himself hinted at the problem with Communists administering local governments. He asserted that the CPB's program was to replace these bodies with soviets in "time of revolution." Until that time, however, the Bulgarian Communists found themselves administering these local bodies and taking responsibility for maintaining order and rationing scarce resources within the framework of capitalist class rule. Moreover,

Shablin falsified the CPB's actual practice. The Bulgarian party was not organizing soviets to replace the bourgeois municipal administrations, but rather aimed at organically *transforming* those administrations into soviets at the time of revolution. CPB founder Dimitar Blagoev made that clear when he wrote in 1919 that

"winning the municipalities can be the beginning of the soviet system of rule.... The struggle to take over municipal power, and especially the struggle that our party will have to wage to reinforce the power of the proletariat and poorer classes wherever we run the municipalities—this struggle will in essence be for the spread of soviet power (CP), for the soviet system of rule as a whole."

—quoted in G. Tsonev and A. Vladimirov, *Sentiabr'skoe vosstanie v Bolgarii 1923 goda* (The September Uprising in Bulgaria in 1923) (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1934) (our translation)

The Bulgarian Communists were not municipal socialists à la Victor Berger in the U.S. The CPB was a revolutionary party violently sucked into the vacuum of Bulgaria's post-WWI collapse, and thrust into office by an upheaval of popular support for the Russian Revolution. The precursor of the CPB was the *Tesnyaki*, Blagoev's Bulgarian Social Democratic Labor Party (Narrow), which had suffered intense persecution for opposing the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and World War I and for voting against war credits in parliament. The CPB took municipal office not to sell out socialism, but to try to realize it in the best traditions of yesterday's social democracy and what little Bolshevism they knew. The contradictions between its aims and its position in administering the bourgeois state apparatus at a local level could not, and did not, last.

Despite its identification with Bolshevism, the CPB carried over a lot of social-democratic baggage from the left wing of the Second International. Lenin expressed deep concern over the party's abstentionist policy in the September 1918 Radomir Rebellion, a large-scale mutiny by peasant soldiers in the Bulgarian army. On the eve of this rebellion, soldiers had already begun forming soviets under the direct inspiration of the Bolshevik Revolution. Rank-and-file *Tesnyaki* joined as many as 15,000 rebel soldiers in three days of pitched battle, determined to overthrow Tsar Ferdinand. But the party opposed any organized intervention into the uprising, which subsequently helped catapult Peasant Union leader Alexander Stamboliski to power. The CPB did not take up Lenin's criticisms and Blagoev later defended the party's failure to seek to lead the uprising in the direction of a proletarian revolution. The CPB's refusal to intervene in the Radomir Rebellion reflected, in good part, its longstanding hostility to the peasantry.

The party had grown rapidly during the war and amid the postwar upheavals, though this meant an infusion of a large number of raw elements, who were not in the main industrial workers. At the same time, the CPB developed a large network of publishing houses, cooperatives and other enterprises while spawning a huge parliamentary and governmental apparatus. By 1922 over 3,600 Communists sat on municipal councils, another 115 served at a provincial level, and nearly 1,500 sat on school boards. This amounted to a hefty percentage of the CPB's 38,000 members.

The Bulgarian experience demonstrated anew that control of bourgeois municipal government was *counterposed* to the fight for soviet power. When the bourgeoisie was finally able to "restabilize" the country in the bloody

Tskankov coup against the peasant-based Stamboliski government in June 1923, the CPB was cleared out of its "municipal communes." Instead of preparing for united-front action with the Peasant Union forces against the looming right-wing coup on the basis of the Communists' own independent mobilization of the workers and peasants, the CPB veered between confidentially appealing to the regime for arms in the run-up to the coup and then refusing to oppose the coup at all once it happened.

In the aftermath, the CPB embarked on a series of adventurist military actions, including an abortive insurrection in September 1923, which simply brought down increased bourgeois repression. The party that had until then been held up as a model was physically crushed in the White Terror of 1923-25. Shablin was one of no less than 5,000 Communists who paid with their lives for the CPB's political failings. The zigzagging CI leadership under Zinoviev pushed the Bulgarian party onto its adventurist course while simultaneously establishing a Red Peasant International, the Krestintern, and supporting the formation of bourgeois "workers and peasants parties" around the world. By this time the CI was no longer the revolutionary international party it had been when it held its first four Congresses. Beginning in 1923-24 the Soviet party, and with it the CI, underwent a process of qualitative bureaucratic degeneration. This was politically codified in late 1924, when Stalin promulgated the anti-internationalist dogma of "socialism in one country."

The CI on Municipalism: A Problematic Legacy

The Second Congress began with correct insights on municipalism, but concluded by amending them into a contradictory hodgepodge that licensed ministerialism in embryo. In considering the failure to pursue this question, it should be noted that as the first real working congress of the CI, the Second Congress had to address a large number of other questions—including the basis for admission into the Comintern, the national and colonial questions, the trade-union question, etc. Moreover, the Congress took place at the height of the war with Poland and the Red Army's counteroffensive against Pilsudski and his French imperialist patrons; had the Soviet forces succeeded in taking Warsaw, they would have opened up a direct bridgehead to the powerful German proletariat. A Red Army victory in Warsaw would have rocked Versailles Europe to its foundations and possibly spread the revolutionary fires of 1920 into a conflagration across Europe. Then the question of participation in municipal administration would have been posed directly in the context of a proletarian struggle for power, as in 1917.

While the Second Congress touched on the question of executive office only implicitly, the question had been explicitly posed in the American Communist movement. Unlike the parliamentary system in Europe, the American presidential system made a clear distinction between legislative and executive offices. This distinction did not figure at all in the floor discussion on parliamentarism at the Second Congress, though a member of the Communist Party of America (CPA), the Russian-born Alexander Stoklitsky, had been assigned to the Parliamentary Commission. At its founding conference in 1919, the CPA had adopted a correct position against running for executive office. When a section of this party broke

away to fuse with the Communist Labor Party in May 1920 to found the United Communist Party (UCP), this position, argued for by C. E. Ruthenberg, carried over to the new party. The UCP founding conference asserted: "Nominations for public office and participation in elections are limited to legislative bodies, such as the national congress, state legislatures and city councils" (UCP Program, reprinted in *Revolutionary Radicalism*, Lusk Commission Report to New York State Senate, submitted 24 April 1920).

The position was controversial at the UCP conference debate: one tendency upheld the above position, while a second opposed all electoral activity and a third supported running for all offices. A contemporary account reported: "The opponents of executive elections argued that the election of Communists as Governor, Mayor, and Sheriff will corrupt them and will be detrimental to the movement; that we have no right to take upon ourselves the responsibility for the bourgeois state" (*The Communist*, 1 September 1920). However, these correct arguments were linked to an ultraleft insistence in the UCP Program that Communist representatives in legislative bodies "will not introduce nor support reform measures." In the wake of the fight against ultraleftism at the Second Congress, the American Communist movement dropped the distinction between running for executive as opposed to legislative office. In 1921, Ben Gitlow ran as the Communist candidate for mayor in New York City. The following year, a CI document for the August 1922 American Communist convention insisted, "The communists must participate as revolutionists in all general election campaigns, municipal, state and congressional, as well as presidential" ("Next Tasks of the Communist Party in America," printed in *Reds in America* [New York City: Beckwith Foster, 1924]). In 1924 the American party ran William Z. Foster as its candidate in the U.S. presidential elections.

The absence of clarity on the linked questions of executive office and municipal administration was to plague the Comintern and its affiliated parties, as seen in Trotsky's own writings. At the Fourth Congress, Trotsky authored its 2 December 1922 resolution on France, in which he amalgamated "mayors and the like" with "Communist parliamentarians, municipal councilors, general councilors" and stated that the former could likewise become "one of the instruments of the revolutionary mass struggle" ("Resolution of the Fourth World Congress on the French Question," Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International* [New York: Monad Press, 1972]). In his May 1924 introduction to *The First Five Years*, he welcomed the French CP attaining these posts: "The fact that our party received about 900,000 votes represents a serious success, especially if we take into account the swift growth of our influence in the suburbs of Paris." The French CP's "influence" in the suburbs had grown over to administration of some large number of municipalities.

It must also be noted that Trotsky did not change his views on this question. In a 1939 article (unpublished at the time), he wrote:

"The participation of the trade unions in the management of nationalized industry may be compared to the participation of socialists in the *municipal governments*, where the socialists sometimes win a majority and are compelled to direct an important municipal economy, while the bourgeoisie still has domination in the state and bourgeois property laws continue. Reformists in the municipality adapt themselves passively to the bourgeois regime. Revolutionists in this field do all they

can in the interests of the workers and at the same time teach the workers at every step that municipal policy is powerless without conquest of state power.

“The difference, to be sure, is that in the field of municipal government the workers win certain positions by means of democratic elections, whereas in the domain of nationalized industry the government itself invites them to take certain posts. But this difference has a purely formal character. In both cases the bourgeoisie is compelled to yield to the workers certain spheres of activity. The workers utilize these in *their own* interests.”

—“Nationalized Industry and Workers’ Management,”
12 May 1939

That Trotsky could refer to the PCF in the context of its control of municipalities as being “free of any sort of political obligations to the bourgeois regime” in 1924 and suggest a parallel formulation on municipalities in 1938 is not to impute to him municipal reformism, but to recognize that an unsettled problem of communist strategy has been handed down to us.

In our report on the executive office discussion at the ICL’s Fifth Conference in 2007, we noted:

“The position that communists should under no circumstances run for executive offices of the bourgeois state is an extension of our longstanding criticism of the entry of the German Communist Party (KPD), with the support of the Comintern, into the regional governments of Saxony and Thuringia in October 1923. The KPD’s support to these bourgeois governments run by ‘left’ Social Democrats—first from outside the government and then from within—helped to derail a revolutionary situation (see “A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern,” *Spartacist* No. 56, Spring 2001).”

—*Spartacist* No. 60, Autumn 2007 (executive office excerpts reprinted, along with the Germany 1923 article, in ICL Pamphlet, *The Development and Extension of Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution*, April 2008)

The KPD’s entry into these governments was prepared by the flawed and confused resolution on “workers governments” adopted at the Fourth Congress of the CI less than a year earlier. That resolution confused the call for a workers government—which for revolutionaries is nothing other than an expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat—with all manner of social-democratic governments administering the bourgeois state apparatus, and left open the possibility of Communist participation in such a government in coalition with the social democrats. While Trotsky fought for a revolutionary perspective in Germany in 1923 and insisted that the KPD make concrete preparations and set a date for an insurrection—as had Lenin in September and October of 1917—Trotsky wrongly supported the KPD’s policy of joining the Saxon and Thuringian governments, arguing that this was a “drill ground” for revolution. If these were indeed “workers governments,” as the masses had been told, then presumably extraparliamentary revolutionary struggle and the formation of workers councils and workers militias would be totally superfluous. In the upshot, the KPD and the CI leadership under Zinoviev let slip a revolutionary opportunity. The ensuing demoralization of the Soviet proletariat was a critical factor in allowing the Stalinist bureaucracy to usurp political power.

In the aftermath of the German debacle of 1923, Trotsky began an evaluation of the political reasons for the failure. In *The Lessons of October* (1924), which was implicitly self-critical, Trotsky contrasted Lenin’s successful struggle in 1917 to overcome the resistance of the Kamenevs, Zino-

viev and Stalins, who flinched when the question of power was posed, with the capitulationist politics that prevailed in Germany in October 1923. Trotsky later noted the need for a more systematic and thorough review of the CI and KPD intervention into the German events of 1923. However, he never explicitly criticized the KPD’s entry into the Saxon and Thuringian governments nor the flawed resolution on workers governments at the Fourth Congress.

A corollary to Trotsky’s support for Communist administration of local governments was his acceptance of the practice of running Communist candidates for executive office. In addition to numerous campaigns for mayor, the French CP ran a campaign for president in 1924. In Germany, the KPD ran Ernst Thälmann for president in 1925 and then again in 1932. Trotsky fought for the KPD to engage in united fronts with the Social Democrats and mobilize workers militias to smash the Nazis and open the road to a direct struggle for power by the Communist-led workers. This was the urgent task of the day, and the KPD’s 1932 electoral campaign, with its shrill Third Period characterization of the Social Democrats as “social-fascist,” was a noisy disguise for its refusal to carry out that task. Trotsky hammered away at the bankruptcy of the Stalinists’ “social-fascist” line, but he mentioned the KPD’s electoral campaign only in passing and did not criticize them for running for president.

In 1940, Trotsky explicitly mooted the possibility that

International Communist League Pamphlet

The Development and Extension of Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution

See Page Three



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International Communist League’s Fifth International Conference:
**Down With Executive Offices
of the Capitalist State!** 56

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International Communist League pamphlet comprising three articles from ICL press: “The Development and Extension of Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution,” “A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern” and “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!” These articles together constitute an introduction to the historically founded principles and program of Trotskyism (i.e., genuine Marxism).

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Robin Thompson

Limits of municipalism: Left-Labourite Poplar borough councillors in London's East End fought for minimal raise in welfare payments for poor and unemployed, 1921.

the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the U.S. run a candidate for the presidency against Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt ("Discussions with Trotsky," 12-15 June 1940). When the SWP leaders ruled this out on logistical grounds, Trotsky raised the possibility of fighting for the labor movement to launch an independent candidacy against Roosevelt. He also posed the question of giving critical support to the CP candidate, Earl Browder, who then stood in opposition to Roosevelt and the imperialist war. In the discussions, Trotsky made clear his concern that the SWP was adapting to the "progressive" pro-Roosevelt trade-union bureaucracy. What is obvious from these discussions is that neither Trotsky nor the SWP leaders considered the question of running for the presidency as controversial in principle. Beginning in 1948, when it ran a candidate against the Stalinist-supported bourgeois Progressive Party of former FDR vice-president Henry Wallace, the SWP regularly ran in presidential elections.

Trotsky's proposal regarding the Browder candidacy was quite appropriate. In the wake of Stalin's August 1939 pact with Hitler, the American Stalinists had made a temporary turn to the left—from being avid supporters of FDR's "New Deal" to posing as fighters against American imperialism. They would revert to support for Roosevelt in the name of the "fight against fascism" after Hitler invaded the USSR in June 1941. Trotsky's arguments for critical support to Browder were aimed at taking advantage of the CP's temporary anti-imperialist stand in order to expose the party before its base in the working class.

In arguing against running for executive office, the ICL does not preclude giving critical support to other workers organizations in appropriate instances where they draw a crude class line. When a Leninist organization gives critical electoral support to an opponent, it is clearly not because we think it will apply the same principles as we do. Otherwise

one could never extend critical support to a mass reformist party, because on winning an election it will inevitably seek to form the government, i.e., administer capitalism. Indeed, this argument is an essential polemical aspect of our critical support. The point in such instances is to demonstrate that despite the claims of such parties to represent the interests of the workers, in practice they betray these interests.

Their Heritage and Ours

A necessary element of maintaining our revolutionary continuity is the critical assimilation of the lessons of past struggles in the international workers movement. In our fight to reforge Trotsky's Fourth International, founded in 1938 over the political corpses of the Second International and the Stalinized Comintern, we stand on the first four Congresses of the CI. But we are not uncritical of the early CI and from the early years of our tendency we expressed reservations over the resolutions on the "anti-imperialist united front" and the "workers government" at the Fourth Congress.

In contrast, our political opponents gut or reject the principles of the October Revolution and the programmatic fundamentals of Lenin and Trotsky's Communist International and cherry-pick those "traditions" that lend an aura of historical authority to their opportunist pursuits. Such is the case with the Internationalist Group and the Bolshevik Tendency, whose lawyers' arguments in defense of running for executive offices in the bourgeois state have far more in common with the Kautskyite wing of the Second International than with Lenin's Bolshevism. As for the IG and BT's reformist big brothers, occasional references to Trotskyism notwithstanding, their tradition is that of the Millebrands and MacDonalds.

The IG and BT's feigned anguish over the supposed dilemma posed by communists winning an executive position or a majority in a bourgeois legislature reveals a thoroughly opportunist impulse. In her highly favorable account of the left-Labourite Poplar borough council in 1920s Britain, historian Noreen Branson poses much the same question: "What do you do when you get a majority? How far does the existing legal and administrative framework allow you to bring about the changes for which you stand?" (Branson, *Poplarism, 1919-1925* [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979]). Citing Branson's question, a 1982 article on municipalism by the then-centrist British Workers Power group, which has since split into two competing reformist outfits, replies by citing Thesis 13 from the CI Second Congress ("The Struggle in Poplar 1919-21: Communism vs. Municipalism," *Workers Power*, May 1982)!

The WP article enthuses over the militancy of this Labour-led council—which included two Communists, Edgar and Minnie Lansbury—in London's poor, working-class East End to promote what it describes as "the revolutionary attitude to the municipal struggle." The failure of the CI to win over the syndicalist-inclined elements in the British revolutionary movement during and after the Second Congress left British Communism stillborn and under the leadership of elements who were more than comfortable in the Labourite parliamentarist milieu (see "British Communism Aborted," *Spartacist* No. 36-37, Winter 1985-86). The two Communist councillors were in practice virtually politically indistinguishable from the rest of the Labour majority on the council, which was led by Christian pacifist George Lansbury,

Edgar's father. And this was at a time when Britain was in the midst of intense social turmoil. At the height of the Poplar Council's activity, in 1920, the country was swept by strikes and demonstrations demanding "Hands off Russia" and opposing British arms shipments to Pilsudski's Poland. The councils of action that sprang up in this campaign pointed toward the emergence of organs of dual power.

Where the burning task is to expropriate and reorganize the means of production under proletarian power, reformists simply tinker with the system of distribution. While the Poplar councillors were certainly more militant than the mainstream Labour politicians even of their day—going to jail and organizing mass demonstrations on behalf of their policies—their power and political horizons were limited to rationing the threadbare resources at their command by increasing relief payments for the poor and unemployed and raising the meager wages of council employees for a period of time. As George Lansbury put it, "The workers must be given tangible proof that Labour administration means something different from capitalist administration, and in a nutshell this means diverting wealth from the wealthy ratepayers to the poor" (quoted in Branson, *Poplarism*). In fact, control of municipal councils in working-class areas was critical to Labour's leap to becoming a party of government at the national level, as it did for the first time in 1924. When the King visited the East End in 1921, the newly elected Poplar councillors greeted him with the sign: "Poplar Borough Council expects this day the King will do his duty by calling upon His Majesty's Government to find work or full maintenance for the unemployed of the nation" (quoted in *ibid.*)!

Six decades later, when the fake-Trotskyist Militant Tendency led by Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe (who subsequently split to form separate organizations) took control of the Labour council in the clapped-out city of Liverpool, they did not even hold a candle to the Christian pacifist Lansbury and his crowd. At one point, these "Trotskyist" administrators of the local capitalist government threatened to lay off all of the city's more than 30,000 municipal workers, claiming that this was a "tactic" to deal with the budget crunch imposed by the Tory Thatcher government. We have no evidence,

however, that they petitioned Queen Elizabeth II.

Local administration has historically served as a means for integrating working-class parties into the bourgeois order. This was the case not only in Britain, but also in France, Italy and elsewhere. An exchange on "The Italian Communists & the US" observed: "Communist control of regional and city governments...were in fact important in strengthening the trend within the PCI toward a pragmatic reformism" (*New York Review of Books*, 11 May 2006). Running for or assuming executive office at any level is not a stepping-stone toward the revolutionary mobilization of the working masses but rather serves to deepen prevailing illusions in the reformability of the capitalist state and to strengthen the chains that bind the proletariat to the class enemy.

On the other hand, a Marxist workers party would actually seek to *win* some seats in bourgeois legislative bodies, where the party's deputies would use their positions to advance exemplary bills—as the Bolsheviks did in the tsarist Duma in condemning anti-Semitism and pogromism—"designed not for adoption by the bourgeois majority, but rather for purposes of propaganda, agitation, and organization" ("Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism," *Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920*). Through such means—in the U.S. or Japan, for example, proposing legislation to abolish the death penalty—and by placing the communist deputies "in the very first rank" of workers demonstrations and strike rallies, a Marxist party would use its parliamentary positions as "auxiliary bases for its revolutionary activity" (*ibid.*). Such a perspective is clearly at odds with running for or taking executive positions.

For communists, running for electoral office is not simply a propaganda effort or the political photo-op envisioned by the likes of the Internationalist Group. In periods of relative stability, and in the absence of any perceived challenge to their class rule, the bourgeoisies in the imperialist "democracies" may tolerate revolutionaries running for office, the better to reinforce illusions that the government represents "the will of the people." Or they may not: witness the fact that during the post-World War I "red scare," five Socialists duly elected by their districts in November 1919 to the New York State Assembly were denied their seats for no reason other than their membership in the Socialist Party. In the semicolonial countries, where democratic institutions are far more fragile and the masses feel the whip of imperialist exploitation, election campaigns often pose deadly clashes with the forces of the bourgeois state and right-wing thugs. To demand time and blood from the already hellishly squeezed and terrorized toilers for a candidate for executive office who vows not to take his position if elected is a mockery.

All of this serves to underline that the question of the state is a life-and-death question for a revolutionary workers party. It is the question of revolution. In adopting our position against running for executive offices of the bourgeois state and in critically reviewing the policies and practices inherited from our forerunners, we seek to illuminate the political gulf between the ICL and all the opportunists who falsely claim to be Marxists and to represent the historic interests of the working class. Our task is nothing other than the organizing, training and steeling of the proletarian vanguard parties, sections of a reformed Fourth International, necessary for the seizure of state power and the establishment of workers rule around the globe. ■

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**Against Apologists for the Treachery
of the POUM, Then and Now**

Trotskyism vs. Popular Frontism in the Spanish Civil War



Hulton-Deutsch

Militia of anarcho-syndicalist CNT, Barcelona, 1937. Revolutionary workers were disarmed and defeated by their own misleaders who joined capitalist popular-front government.

The Barcelona May Days of 1937 marked the high point of a decade of revolution and counterrevolution in Spain that began with the fall of the Primo de Rivera military dictatorship in 1930 and the monarchy a year later and ended with the crushing of the Republic by General Francisco Franco in 1939. The bulk of the bourgeoisie rallied behind Francoist reaction, which was backed by Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. The bourgeois Republican government included only the shadow of the bourgeoisie, a handful of left Republican politicians. But as Trotsky insisted, this "shadow" was key to subordinating the workers organ-

izations to the capitalist order and derailing proletarian revolution.

Alongside the military conflict between Franco's forces and the Republican militias, there raged a class conflict within the Republican camp, as the weak and fractured forces of the bourgeois state sought to rein in and suppress the armed and insurgent proletariat and the embryonic organs of power—militias, factory committees and agricultural collectives—that were created when the workers rose up to repulse Franco's military revolt on 19 July 1936. At the center of this conflict was Barcelona, capital of the

industrial heartland of Catalonia and vanguard of revolutionary Spain.

Repeated clashes between the popular-front Generalitat government in Catalonia and the largely anarcho-syndicalist workers of Barcelona came to a head on Monday, 3 May 1937. When three truckloads of hated Assault Guards, led by the Stalinist chief of police, tried to seize the Telefónica (main telephone exchange) from the National Confederation of Labor (CNT) workers who occupied and controlled that strategic communications hub, workers throughout the city poured into the streets and erected barricades. The bourgeois armed forces were rapidly routed; sailors from the naval installation fraternized with the insurgents. An eyewitness report by Lois Orr described the scene:

"Tuesday morning the armed workers dominated the greatest part of Barcelona. Montjuich fortress, which commands the port and the city with its cannon, was held by the Anarchists; Tibidabo, the port, and all the suburbs of the city where the workers live were in their control; and the government forces, except for a few isolated barricades, were completely outnumbered and were concentrated in the center of the city, the bourgeois residential area, where they could easily be closed in on from all sides as the rebels were on July 19, 1936."

—"May Events: A Revolution Betrayed," *Information Bulletin*, issued by International Bureau for the Fourth International, July 1937

Power was in the grasp of the heroic Barcelona workers. Yet by week's end, the workers had been disarmed and their barricades dismantled—a result not of military defeat but of sabotage, confusion and defeatism sown by the workers' misleaders. At the core of the capitalist Catalan government, as of the central government in Valencia (earlier in Madrid), were the Stalinists and Socialists (who had merged in Catalonia into the United Socialist Party (PSUC)) and the anarcho-syndicalists of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) and the CNT union federation it led. The centrist Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), itself briefly a part of the capitalist Generalitat, provided the left face for the popular-front government from without. The Stalinists were the first to enter the popular-front government and the loudest in proclaiming the inviolability of private property—they were "the fighting vanguard of the bourgeois-republican counterrevolution"

Contra el fascismo y la reaccion burguesa; ¡Dictadura del Proletariado!

Proletarios todos!

El día de julio el proletariado español llevó a cabo la más valerosa demostración de su heroísmo y su amor por su patria...



El camino de la victoria empieza en el Frente Revolucionario del Proletariado

A medida que la política de Franco Popular alía a un autoritarismo a una reaccion burguesa, los que queremos la emancipación de la patria...

El día de julio el proletariado español llevó a cabo la más valerosa demostración de su heroísmo y su amor por su patria...

Leninist Voice (5 April 1937), Trotskyist press in Spain. Bolshevik-Leninists fought for class rule of the proletariat against popular-front government and forces of Francoist reaction.

(Leon Trotsky, "The Class, the Party, and the Leadership," 20 August 1940, *The Spanish Revolution [1931-39]* [New York: Pathfinder, 1973]). But they could not bring down the barricades. That task was accomplished by the leaders of the CNT/FAI and the POUM, whose militants manned the barricades. The CNT leadership demanded of the workers: "Put down your arms" (quoted in Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain* [New York: Pathfinder, 1974]). The POUM leadership took its cue from the CNT, as the POUM's paper *La Batalla* (6 May 1937) exhorted the insurgents to "leave the streets" and "return to work" (*ibid.*).

"The only thing that can be said is that the masses who sought at all times to blast their way to the correct road found it beyond their strength to produce in the very fire of battle a new leadership corresponding to the demands of the revolution," wrote Trotsky in "The Class, the Party, and



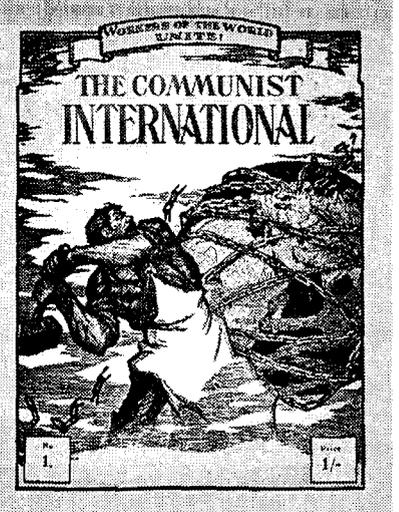
Der Spiegel photos

Madrid, 1936: Spanish Communist Party Congress with huge portrait of Stalin (left). Banner at demonstration heralding Socialist Largo Caballero, head of popular-front government. Stalinists and Socialists spearheaded defense of "democratic" capitalist rule against the working class.





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Armed workers guard Smolny Institute during Russian October Revolution, 1917. First issue of *The Communist International*, 1919, appealed to workers of the world to fight for international socialist revolution.

the Leadership”—an article left unfinished when he was murdered in Mexico by Spanish Stalinist and Soviet GPU assassin Ramón Mercader. As the insurgent workers raged against the treachery of their CNT/FAI and POUM leaders, only the left-anarchist Friends of Durruti and the Trotskyist Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain (SBLE) sought to drive the revolution forward. Though ultimately unable to break either organizationally or politically with the CNT/FAI, the Friends of Durruti urged the workers to fight for social revolution. The voice of revolutionary Marxism was raised only by the tiny SBLE, which declared in a leaflet:

“LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTIONARY OFFENSIVE

“No compromise. Disarmament of the National Republican Guard and the reactionary Assault Guard. This is the decisive moment. Next time it will be too late. General strike in all the industries, excepting those connected with the prosecution of the war, until the resignation of the reactionary government. Only proletarian power can assure military victory.”

—SBLE leaflet, 4 May 1937, *Information Bulletin*, July 1937

This *was* the decisive moment. Victory in Barcelona could have led to a workers and peasants Spain and set Europe aflame in revolutionary struggle on the eve of World War II. Defeat opened the way to intense repression, including the suppression of the POUM and the murder or imprisonment of its leaders. Having thus disarmed the proletariat, the popular front opened the gates to Franco’s forces and a bloody reign of rightist reaction.

Popular Front: The Question of Questions

Seven decades later, a critical assimilation of the lessons of that defeat remains as vital as ever in reforging a Trotskyist Fourth International. The essential starting point for such a review is the compilation of Trotsky’s writings, including many of those cited in this article, published in English in *The Spanish Revolution*. A more extensive collection appears in French in *La révolution espagnole*

(1930-1940) (The Spanish Revolution) (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1975), Pierre Broué’s edition of Trotsky’s writings. Also invaluable is the narrative account written by Felix Morrow in the midst of the Civil War, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*. A vivid depiction of the heroism of the workers and the betrayals of their leaders, Morrow’s book is grounded in a Marxist analysis and program. Several months after the Barcelona May Days, Trotsky summarized the conflict as follows:

“Two irreconcilable programs thus confronted each other on the territory of republican Spain. On the one hand, the program of saving *at any cost* private property from the proletariat, and saving *as far as possible* democracy from Franco; on the other hand, the program of abolishing private property through the conquest of power by the proletariat. The first program expressed the interests of capitalism through the medium of the labor aristocracy, the top petty-bourgeois circles, and especially the Soviet bureaucracy. The second program translated into the language of Marxism the tendencies of the revolutionary mass movement, not fully conscious but powerful. Unfortunately for the revolution, between the handful of Bolsheviks and the revolutionary proletariat stood the counterrevolutionary wall of the Popular Front.”

—“The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning,”
17 December 1937

That there was no revolutionary party to lead the workers to victory was conditioned above all by the political capitulation of Andrés Nin and Juan Andrade, former leaders of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) who stood at the head of the Trotskyist Left Opposition in Spain in the early 1930s. Nin and Andrade threw away the accumulated capital of Spanish communism in order to pursue unprincipled blocs and maneuvers, finally fusing with the right-centrist Workers and Peasants Bloc (BOC) of Joaquín Maurín to form the POUM in 1935 and going from there into the fold of the bourgeois popular front and the capitalist Catalan government in 1936. In the course of the tumultuous struggles in Spain in the 1930s, Nin and Andrade went from

being semi-revolutionary to non-revolutionary to counter-revolutionary. Their default meant that a handful of Bolsheviks were left to struggle in the fire of battle—with little in the way of experience, roots or resources—to construct anew a revolutionary vanguard nucleus on the basis of the programmatic course outlined by Trotsky.

The popular front, a coalition of bourgeois and workers parties, was the instrument for the strangulation of the Spanish Revolution. The presence of the otherwise insignificant left Republican politicians in the popular front served as a guarantor of its commitment to the maintenance of bourgeois rule, “incarnating the principles of the ‘democratic revolution,’ that is, the inviolability of private property” (*ibid.*). Excoriating apologists for the POUM who dismissed the question of this class-collaborationist coalition as a “small, temporary technical electoral agreement,” Trotsky stressed: “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” (“The POUM and the Popular Front,” 16 July 1936).

So it remains. Innumerable books and articles have been written on the Spanish Civil War; overwhelmingly, their purpose has been to alibi the treacherous policies of the popular front that paved the way for defeat. Among the few exceptions is left-anarchist Vernon Richards’ *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1953), which at least offers a frank account of the betrayals of the CNT/FAI leaders. Various pseudo-Trotskyist historians offer up oh-so-erudite accounts that quote Trotsky at great length while amnestying the POUM centrists against whom Trotsky aimed his fire. Prominent among the latter are the late Pierre Broué—who was a leading member of the French Lambert group, an editor of Trotsky’s writings in French and author of several works on the Spanish Civil War—and the British Labourites of *Revolutionary History*, a “non-party” publication supported by a spectrum of pseudo-Trotskyist individuals and groups. *Revolutionary History* has published two articles by Andy Durgan, a supporter of the reformist tendency founded by the late Tony Cliff, longtime leader of the British Socialist Workers Party (“The Spanish Trotskyists and the Foundation of the POUM,” *Revolutionary History* Vol. 4, No. 1/2, Winter 1991-92, and “Marxism, War and Revolution: Trotsky and the POUM,” *Revolutionary History* Vol. 9, No. 2, 2006).

At bottom, the reformists’ defense of Nin and the POUM comes down to the cynical worship of the accomplished fact, that the failure of the Spanish Revolution “proves” that revolution was not possible in Spain. This, in turn, is merely a reflection of their own social-democratic opposition to the fight for proletarian state power today, anywhere. Having cheered the forces of capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union and the deformed workers states of East Europe, these opportunists now take up the “death of communism” cry that the Russian Revolution proved to be, at best, a failed experiment. Thus they write off the possibility of proletarian revolution in the future and rewrite history to deny revolutionary opportunities in the past.

Our compass is the Russian October Revolution of 1917. The Spanish Revolution is an object lesson, in the negative,

of the need to forge revolutionary workers parties of the Bolshevik type. Our purpose in reviewing this critical chapter in the history of the revolutionary workers movement is to educate and arm the future cadre of the Leninist vanguard that will lead the fight for new Octobers around the globe.

The Russian Revolution and the *Trienio Bolchevista*

The October Revolution had a tremendous impact on the workers and peasants of Spain, not least because they saw in tsarist Russia a country similar to their own. There, too, a decadent monarchy had been propped up by a state church mired in medieval obscurantism and a huge aristocratic officer corps. There, too, a large peasantry had been brutally exploited by a landowning class derived from the old feudal



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Madrid, May Day 1919: Russian Revolution had tremendous impact on workers and peasants of Spain.

nobility. There, too, the urban proletariat was young, raw and combative, scarcely a generation or two removed from its peasant origins. And like tsarist Russia, Spain was a “prison house of peoples,” enforcing the national oppression of the Basque and Catalan peoples within its borders and the colonial oppression of Spanish Morocco.

Under the leadership of Lenin’s Bolsheviks, the multinational proletariat of Russia, rallying behind it the peasant masses, had seized state power, replacing the class dictatorship of the exploiters with a dictatorship of the proletariat organized on the basis of democratically elected councils (soviets) of workers, peasants and soldiers. The new Bolshevik-led government pulled Russia out of the inter-imperialist carnage of World War I and appealed to the workers of all countries to follow its example and join in fighting for world socialist revolution and a global, classless, egalitarian society.

Spain itself was in the throes of social upheaval as word of the Bolshevik victory arrived, and that news electrified the worker and peasant masses. “More than any other one factor, the Revolution was responsible for the feeling of hope—vague yet compelling—that pervaded the Catalonian masses in this era, convincing them that the advent of the workers’

society of equality and justice was no longer a dream but a possibility," writes Gerald H. Meaker in his fascinating account of that period, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914-1923* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974). "Russian fever" swept through the peasant south, particularly Andalusia, where three years of peasant uprisings were called the *Trienio Bolchevista* and workers in some towns proclaimed "Bolshevik-type" republics. Pro-Bolshevik meetings and rallies were common everywhere. During a weeklong strike in Valencia in 1919, streets and plazas were renamed "Lenin," "Soviets" and "Revolución de Octubre."

But in Spain there was no revolutionary Marxist party. The Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) claimed adherence to Marxism, but it was more akin to Russia's Mensheviks, putting off the struggle for socialism until after the realization of a bourgeois-democratic stage and rejecting the revolutionary mobilization of the working class in favor of bourgeois parliamentarism and blocs with the "democratic" bourgeoisie. While Spain was officially neutral in World War I, the PSOE leadership backed the "democratic" imperialists, Britain and France (and their autocratic Russian ally), against Germany, which was supported by the Spanish throne. While the PSOE-led General Workers Union (UGT) predated and was substantially larger than the anarcho-sindicalist CNT at the outset of the war, the most militant layers of the working class in the industrial centers of Catalonia looked not to Marxism, but to anarchism.

Spanish anarchism was rooted in the rural peasantry and among the small-scale artisans in the urban economy, who felt threatened by industrialization. The Spanish section of the First International largely went with the anarchist Bakunin when he and Marx split in the early 1870s. By the early 20th century, a substantial working class had developed in the northern areas of Spain—centrally Asturias, Vizcaya and Catalonia. But especially in Catalonia, a center of anarchism, this was based mainly on light industry, not the sort of modern factories that concentrated thousands of industrial workers under one roof, as was typical of the Vyborg district in Russia's St. Petersburg, a Bolshevik stronghold. In Spain, anarchism adapted to the rise of an industrial proletariat through the development of a syndicalist working-class movement. The anarcho-sindicalists acknowledged the unique social power of the proletariat in the struggle against capitalism but shared the anarchists' hostility to all parties and states and any form of centralized authority.

Though outlawed for three years after its formation in 1911, the CNT grew rapidly amid the social turbulence of the war years and the postwar period, boasting about 700,000 members in 1919. As the CNT grew, its leadership was increasingly divided between "pure" anarchists like Buenaventura Durruti—who embraced Bakunin's vision of a society of small autonomous communes and often operated in guerrillaist/terrorist "affinity groups"—and "pure" syndicalists like Angel Pestaña, who were essentially trade-union reformists much like PSOE/UGT leader Francisco Largo Caballero.

The impact of the Bolshevik Revolution was felt in both the Socialist and anarcho-sindicalist movements. Pacifist/neutralist elements who rejected the pro-Allies (*Aliadofilismo*) line of the PSOE majority coalesced around support to the Russian Revolution and in opposition to Menshevik stagism and political blocs with the liberal bourgeois parties; but this broad left wing was also opposed to breaking with the reformist PSOE majority. It was the Young Socialists in

Madrid, headed by Juan Andrade, who first split from the Socialists in 1920. With their relatively meager and inexperienced forces, they proclaimed the formation of the Communist Party. The following year, a wing of the PSOE centered in Asturias and Vizcaya also split in solidarity with the Communist International (CI). Organizational unity between the two parties was achieved only in 1922, after much prodding by the Comintern.

The effect of the Russian October on CNT militants was, if anything, more pronounced. Some of the initial enthusiasm among radical anarchists was based in part on a misunderstanding that the Russian "maximalists," i.e., Bolsheviks, were in fact anarchists. But as Meaker observes: "Under the spell of the Bolshevik Revolution, Spanish Anarchists began to think, as never before, about the uses of authority and the rationales of violence. The idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat began to enjoy a surprising vogue among them, and there was a growing acceptance of the Leninist proposition that revolutions had to be organized, that not everything could be left to the workings of spontaneity" (Meaker, *op. cit.*). Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (1917) reasserted against reformist Social Democracy the authentic Marxist view that the bourgeois state had to be smashed and replaced by a new form of state, a workers state. This work had a particular impact on anarchists in Spain, and internationally.

Yet no mass Communist Party was to emerge from this fertile soil. Above all, this failure was conditioned by Spain's neutrality in the interimperialist First World War. Neither the PSOE nor the CNT witnessed the sort of sharp polarization seen in the workers movement in the combatant countries. In those countries the social-chauvinist misleaders wallowed in patriotic appeals for "defense of the fatherland" and acted as recruiting sergeants for their "own" imperialist rulers, provoking bitter splits with the internationalists who held true to the revolutionary unity of the working class. (Even then, the split between the reformist and revolutionary-internationalist wings was often initially muddied by the development of large centrist formations, such as that around Karl Kautsky in Germany.) The Communist International attracted many anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists who had been repulsed by the abject bourgeois parliamentarism of the Second International—e.g., Victor Serge, Alfred Rosmer in France and a number of activists from the Industrial Workers of the World in the U.S., including founding American Communist and, later, Trotskyist James P. Cannon. The Red International of Labor Unions, or Profintern, founded in 1921, sought to intersect and work with such syndicalist elements and win them to communism.

Andrés Nin and Joaquín Maurín were leaders of the Communist-Syndicalist wing of the CNT in Barcelona and fought for the CNT to affiliate to the Communist International. Both traveled to Moscow in 1921 to take part in the founding conference of the Profintern, which coincided with the Third Congress of the CI. Maurín returned to Spain but did not join the PCE until 1924. His Communist-Syndicalists, centered in Catalonia, maintained virtually total independence from the rest of the PCE. After trying unsuccessfully to return to Spain, Nin went back to Moscow, becoming secretary of the Profintern.

As the revolutionary tide in Spain receded, the CNT became openly anti-Communist, breaking all relations with the Profintern in 1922. Faced with Miguel Primo de Rivera's military coup in 1923, neither the PSOE/UGT nor the Cata-



Workers Monthly (top), Labor Herald

Founding conference of Red International of Labor Unions, 1921. Inset: Executive Committee included former syndicalist leaders such as William Z. Foster (center) and Andrés Nin (right).

Ionian CNT would join with the PCE in united-front protest against the coup. Declaring "I have come to fight against Communism," Primo de Rivera arrested PCE leaders and closed party offices; both the CNT and PCE were driven underground. Though some PSOE leaders were arrested, the dictatorship tolerated the reformists, and UGT head Largo Caballero joined its Council of State in 1924.

The Rise of the Stalinist Bureaucracy

The isolation of the fledgling Soviet workers state, coupled with the devastation of industry and infrastructure by World War I and the Civil War which followed the Russian Revolution, facilitated the rise of a bureaucratic layer as the arbiter of scarce resources. The Bolsheviks had understood that the success of the revolution depended on its extension to the more advanced industrial countries of Europe. But the failure of revolutionary opportunities in the West, particularly the aborted German Revolution of 1923, and the ensuing wave of demoralization in the Soviet working class led to the increasing consolidation of the bureaucracy's grip on power. Beginning in 1923-24, the bureaucracy usurped political power from the Soviet proletariat.

This was the beginning of a political counterrevolution. Though the Soviet Union still rested on the collectivized property forms established by the Bolshevik Revolution, from then on the people who ruled the USSR, the way the USSR was ruled and the purposes for which the USSR was

ruled were all changed. Ideologically, this political counter-revolution was codified in the nationalist, anti-Marxist dogma of "socialism in one country," promulgated by Stalin in late 1924, which effectively denied the iron necessity of extending socialist revolution internationally. In 1926, the Soviet bureaucracy, through the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee, provided a left cover for the British Trades Union Congress misleaders as they betrayed the General Strike. In the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution, Stalin/Bukharin instructed the Chinese Communist Party to liquidate into the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang in the name of "two-stage revolution." Communist parties around the world were increasingly transformed into tools of Soviet diplomacy, aimed at pressuring their respective bourgeoisies to "peacefully co-exist" with the USSR.

Trotsky's fight against the rising bureaucracy began with the 1923 Russian Opposition. His 1928 "Critique of the Draft Program of the Communist International" (the core of *The Third International After Lenin*) analyzed the link between Stalin's dogma of "socialism in one country" and the capitulatory zigzags of the Comintern, especially the betrayal of the Chinese Revolution. Expelled from the Soviet Communist Party in 1927 and forcibly exiled from the Soviet Union in 1929, Trotsky organized his supporters into the International Left Opposition (ILO) to fight as an expelled faction of the Communist International to return it to the road of revolutionary internationalism. Among these supporters was Nin, who, while in Moscow, had been won to Trotsky's fight against the rising Stalinist bureaucracy.

Origins of the Spanish Left Opposition

Brought to power to impose capitalist order on the rebellious proletariat of backward Spain, the Primo de Rivera dictatorship came toppling down in January 1930 under the impact of the international capitalist crisis, the Great Depression sparked by the stock market crash of late 1929. The pent-up aspirations of the masses led to an explosion of protest. In May, students and workers under red and Republican flags engaged in armed combat with the police in Madrid. In December, Republican army officers staged a revolt against the monarchy. The revolt was suppressed and its leaders executed, but it signaled the death knell of the monarchy. The Socialists and Republicans swept the urban vote in the April 1931 municipal elections, King Alfonso XIII fled, and the Spanish Republic was declared, headed by a coalition government including the PSOE.

In February 1930, Francisco Garcia Lavid (Lacroix) and other former PCE members in exile founded the Spanish Communist Opposition in Belgium. In Spain, Juan Andrade and several other ex-PCE cadre also affiliated to the Left Opposition. They were joined by Nin later that year, following his expulsion from the Soviet Union. Nin was an authoritative figure in the Spanish workers movement. Yet a few years later, Trotsky was to write of Nin: "The greatest misfortune for the Spanish section was the fact that a man with a name, with a certain past and the halo of a martyr of Stalinism, stood at its head and all the while led it wrongly and paralyzed it" ("The POUM and the Popular Front," 16 July 1936).

In a 25 May 1930 letter to the exile group in Belgium, Trotsky wrote: "The Spanish crisis is unfolding at this time with remarkable regularity, which affords the proletariat vanguard a certain amount of time to prepare itself" ("Tasks of the

Spanish Communists"). The official Communist Party had no authoritative leadership, only several hundred members, and was rent by internal disarray. The PSOE, whose erstwhile opposition to bourgeois ministerialism had simply been an expression of its lack of opportunity under the monarchy, was part of an increasingly unpopular capitalist regime from 1931 to 1933. The anarcho-syndicalist CNT/FAI rejected the very idea of a struggle for proletarian state power, vacillating instead between boycotts of all political activity and backhanded support to the "democratic" bourgeoisie.

Writing from a distance, Trotsky exerted every effort at working with and guiding Nin and his comrades to take advantage of an exceptional opening. Excerpts from the correspondence between Trotsky and Nin in 1931-33 were published in a 1933 *International Bulletin* and reprinted in *The Spanish Revolution*. Unfortunately, the letters themselves are not in the Trotsky archives at Harvard and appear to have been lost. The published excerpts of Trotsky's letters are a model of programmatic clarity, probing questions and comradely persuasion, while Nin's were filled with personalism, impressionism and evasion. "Clarity, theoretical precision, and consequently political honesty is what renders a revolutionary tendency invincible," insisted Trotsky ("To Say What Is," 12 April 1931). But Nin turned his back on theoretical clarity and precision. He argued: "With people whom we have to teach the first notions of communism, we cannot begin by making Opposition propaganda" (Letter to Trotsky, 12 November 1930). Instead, Nin boasted of his personal prestige and influence with Maurín.

Reading from a legal brief that has changed not at all over the decades, Nin's many political attorneys of today berate Trotsky for his allegedly "sectarian" demeanor, for his supposed ignorance of the situation in Spain and for the "harshness" of his polemics. This was the refrain in the 1930s of some of Trotsky's erstwhile collaborators and allies—such as Serge, Rosmer, George Vereecken in Belgium and Henricus Sneevliet in Holland—who, under the pressure of democratic "anti-fascism," alibied Nin while acknowledging that he had made "errors." As Trotsky wrote in a letter to Serge:

"You are dissatisfied with our behavior toward Andrés Nin, behavior that you find 'sectarian.' You do not and cannot know the political and personal history of our relations.

"You can easily imagine how happy I was when Nin arrived abroad. For several years, I corresponded with him quite regularly. Some of my letters were veritable 'treatises' on the subject of the living revolution, in which Nin could and should have played an active role. I think that my letters to Nin over a period of two or three years would make up a volume of several hundred pages: that should indicate how important I regarded Nin and friendly relations with him. In his answers, Nin affirmed over and over again his agreement in theory, but he always avoided discussing practical problems....

"Of course, no one is obligated to be a revolutionary. But Nin was the head of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists, and by that fact alone, he had a serious responsibility, which he failed to carry out in practice, all the while throwing dust in my eyes."

—"Is a Rapprochement with Nin Possible?"

3 June 1935

A Party, Once More a Party, Again a Party

In a 1931 article, "The Revolution in Spain," Trotsky outlined the program and strategy that could have guided Spanish revolutionaries on the road to power. Trotsky put forward a series of demands aimed at linking the democratic aspirations of the worker and peasant masses to the fight for the class rule of the proletariat: confiscation of the large landed

estates for the benefit of the poor peasants; the separation of church and state—disarming the bastions of clerical reaction and turning over the vast wealth of the church to the masses; the creation of workers and peasants militias; the nationalization of the railways, banks and mineral resources; workers control of industry; the right of national self-determination for the Catalans and Basques.

Here Trotsky was applying the theory and program of permanent revolution, vindicated in the Russian October of 1917 and confirmed in the negative through the defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution. Given the belated emergence of capitalism in these countries, the tasks historically associated with the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries could be accomplished only through the seizure of power by the proletariat standing at the head of the peasant masses, which would necessarily and immediately place not only democratic but also socialist tasks on the agenda.

Trotsky stressed the importance of reaching out to the militant ranks of the CNT in order to break them from their anarcho-syndicalist prejudices and called for a unified trade-union federation. He argued that it was necessary to agitate for the formation of soviets—workers juntas—to act as organs of united proletarian struggle against the capitalist class, "rising over all the present political, national, provincial, and trade union divisions." He continued:

"The proletarian junta will become the broad arena in which every party and every group will be put to the test and scrutinized before the eyes of the broad masses. The communists will counterpose the slogan of the united front of the workers to the practice of coalitions of Socialists and a part of the syndicalists with the bourgeoisie. Only the united revolutionary front will enable the proletariat to inspire the necessary confidence among the oppressed masses of the village and city. The realization of the united front is conceivable only under the banner of communism. The junta requires a leading party. Without a firm leadership, it would remain an empty organizational form and would inevitably fall into dependence upon the bourgeoisie."

—"The Revolution in Spain,"

24 January 1931

Above all, concluded Trotsky, "For a successful solution of all of these tasks, three conditions are required: a party; once more a party; again a party!" (*ibid.*).

Yet it was the party question that most separated Nin from Trotsky. Nin initially resisted Trotsky's urgings to launch a theoretical journal to lay down clear programmatic foundations for a Bolshevik-Leninist vanguard. He likewise refused to heed Trotsky's injunctions to take seriously the political fights then taking place within the ILO, which were necessary to sort out the genuine revolutionaries from a variety of dilettantes, dabblers and others who had accidentally been attracted to Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism. Such debates were vital in forging a disciplined and politically homogeneous international tendency and combating deforming national pressures. But the Spanish Opposition leaders did not politically intervene in these debates or bring them into their section. Rather, they "let themselves be guided by personal connections, sympathies, or antipathies" (Trotsky, "The State of the Left Opposition," 16 December 1932).

Trotsky urged Nin to implement the ILO's orientation toward the CI, arguing that the Stalinist bureaucrats "must not be allowed to create the impression that the Left Opposition is hostile to the workers who follow the banner of the official Communist Party" ("Tasks of the Spanish Commu-

nists”). Despite the bureaucratic atrocities, lies and betrayals of Stalin & Co., the Communist parties continued to attract those elements within the international working class who were drawn to the Russian Revolution and wanted to fight for a workers revolution in their own countries. Moreover, it would have been a crime to surrender the banner of the Communist International to the Stalinists without a struggle or a decisive test.

Nin explicitly rejected the ILO’s international perspective, pleading Spanish exceptionalism: “In Spain the proletariat will organize its party outside of the official party (which does not exist in fact), and in spite of it” (Letter to Trotsky, 3 December 1930). Trotsky responded, “Although the official party as it is today may be feeble and insignificant, nevertheless it possesses all the external historic possibilities in it, in the USSR, and everything that is linked up with the USSR. That is why to guide yourself empirically solely on the immediate relation of forces seems dangerous to me” (Letter to Nin, 31 January 1931). Nin turned a deaf ear to such arguments, demonstratively changing the name of the Spanish group from Left Opposition to Left Communists (ICE) in March 1932.

Rejecting the fight of the Left Opposition, Nin looked instead to the former Catalan Federation headed by Joaquín Maurín. Expelled from the PCE in June 1930, the Catalan Federation was a rightward-moving centrist organization whose politics Trotsky characterized as a “mixture of petty-bourgeois prejudices, ignorance, provincial ‘science,’ and political crookedness” (“Spanish Communism and the Catalan Federation,” 8 July 1931). In March 1931, the Catalan Federation joined with the Catalan Communist Party (a petty-bourgeois grouping not affiliated to the PCE) to found a “mass” organization, the Workers and Peasants Bloc. Trotsky characterized the program of Maurín’s BOC as “pure ‘Kuomintangism’ transported to Spanish soil” (i.e., Chiang Kai-shek’s bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang) and “a new edition of the workers’ and peasants’ party” (“The Catalan Federation’s Platform,” 12 June 1931). This two-class formula had been used to justify liquidation into the Guomindang and other bourgeois-populist formations such as the U.S. “Farmer-Labor Party.”

Internationally, Maurín was aligned with the Right Opposition that coalesced around the views of former Stalin ally Nikolai Bukharin (who himself quickly capitulated to Stalin) in opposition to the policies of the so-called “Third Period.” These policies were inaugurated by Stalin in 1929 as a supposed new period in which international proletarian revolution was imminent. The Communist parties internationally began to pursue an adventurist and sectarian course, abandoning the reformist-led trade unions to build isolated “red” unions and opposing any joint actions with the social democrats, who were labeled “social fascists.” The Interna-

tional Right Opposition opposed this sectarian course from a perspective of evolving class collaboration; its chief spokesman was Heinrich Brandler, who had presided over the default of the German Revolution in 1923. At the same time, the Brandlerites defended the Stalinists’ disastrous policies in China in 1925-27 and the nationalist dogma of “socialism in one country.”

Trotsky waged repeated fights against any merging of banners with the Right Opposition. In the Soviet Union, he had intransigently opposed a bloc with the Bukharin wing of the bureaucracy, whose policies conciliated and encouraged the internal forces of capitalist restoration—the layer of well-off peasants (kulaks) and petty entrepreneurs. Inter-

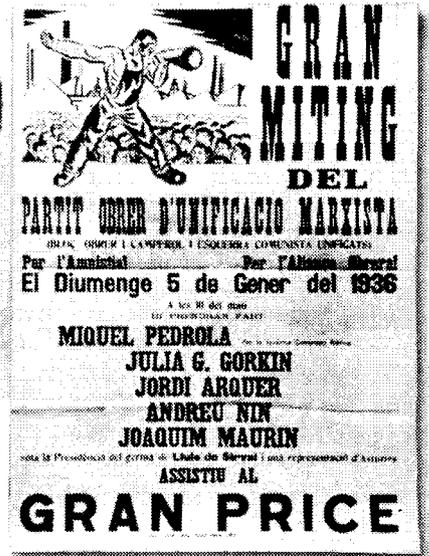


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Fundación Andreu Nin

Andrés Nin (left) broke with Trotskyism and joined right-centrist Joaquín Maurín in founding POUM, 1935. Poster announcing POUM rally in January 1936, same month as POUM signed on to popular-front “Left Electoral Pact.”



nationally, unity with the Right Opposition meant the liquidation of the fight for a communist vanguard. The correctness of this understanding was starkly demonstrated by the course taken by Nin and Andrade in their pursuit of Maurín.

The French Turn and Unprincipled Combinations

The rise to power of Hitler’s Nazis in early 1933, and the criminal passivity of the leaders of the powerful Communist and Socialist organizations of the German proletariat, sent shock waves through the working class internationally. When the German debacle failed to provoke even a hint of revolt within the Third International, Trotsky pronounced the Stalinized Comintern dead for the cause of proletarian revolution and called for building new communist parties to carry forward the banner of Leninism. “The Declaration of Four” (August 1933), which was written by Trotsky and called for the formation of a new, Fourth International, was signed by representatives of the ILO, the Sneevliet group and a second group in Holland and the German Socialist Workers Party (SAP), a left split from the Social Democracy. In 1934, the ILO reconstituted itself as the International Communist League (ICL).

The Stalinists soon abandoned the sectarian adventurism of the Third Period. Panicked by the Nazi victory, Stalin sought an alliance with the imperialist “democracies”—Britain, France and the U.S. The new order of the day was the “people’s front” against fascism, later codified at the

Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935 and realized in popular-front coalitions with the parties of the “democratic” bourgeoisies in France, Spain and elsewhere. Stalin’s strangulation of the Spanish workers revolution was in the service of his hoped-for alliance with Britain and France, as he sought to prove to the imperialists that the Comintern no longer posed a challenge to the bourgeois order.

The Nazi victory in Germany coincided with a resurgence of class struggle elsewhere after three years of the Great Depression. The radicalization of a section of workers and youth found expression in the growth of vibrant, combative left wings in the social-democratic parties and, in the U.S., in the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). For the first time in years, in 1934 Socialist militants stood at the head of proletarian revolts—in the Austrian capital of Vienna and in the mining region of Asturias in Spain. Trotsky urged his supporters to carry out temporary entries into parties of the Second International in order to intersect and win over revolutionary-minded youth and workers. First implemented in France in 1934, this tactic became known as the “French turn,” and was soon pursued in a number of other countries, including, in 1936-37, the U.S., where the Trotskyists won a sizable layer of youth and trade-union militants from the Socialist Party.

In Spain, the situation was probably the most open for the successful implementation of this tactic. *Renovación*, the Madrid newspaper of the Socialist Youth (JS), which had some 200,000 members at the time, openly appealed to the Trotskyists as “the best revolutionaries and the best theoreticians in Spain, who are invited to enter the Youth and the Socialist Party in order to bring about Bolshevization” (quoted in Pierre Broué, “Trotsky and the Spanish Revolution,” translated in *Workers Vanguard* No. 10, July-August 1972). Even the inveterate reformist Largo Caballero came out for socialist revolution and a Fourth International.

Criminally, Nin and Andrade spurned the exhortations of Trotsky and the entreaties of the Socialist Youth and refused to take their organization into the PSOE/JS. A small handful of ICE members, including the future leader of the Trotskyist SBLE, Manuel Fernández (Grandizo Munis), rejected Nin/Andrade’s course and entered the PSOE, though with little success. Munis wrote later: “But what seemed impossible for a little group could have been relatively easy for a sizable contingent of the Communist Left. There is no doubt that the CL’s [Communist Left] entry into the Socialist Party would have entirely changed the course of the Spanish Revolution” (Munis, *Jalones de Derrota: Promesa de Victoria [España 1930-39]* [Milestones of Defeat: Promise of Victory (Spain 1930-39)] [Mexico City: Editorial “Lucha Obrera,” 1948]). In April 1936, the JS was captured by the Stalinists, providing the PCE with a mass base for the first time, while in Catalonia the PCE merged with the PSOE to form the United Socialist Party of Catalonia.

Nin and Andrade were not alone in their obstinate refusal to seize a brilliant opportunity for strengthening the forces of revolutionary Marxism, though it was their failure that cost the proletariat most dearly. In the U.S., a small minority around Hugo Oehler, an effective mass worker but a sectarian bonehead, opposed the entry into the Socialist Party from an ultraleft sectarian standpoint and soon split from the Trotskyist majority led by James P. Cannon. Internationally, Oehler entered into a rotten bloc with Nin and others who

opposed the French turn on their national terrains from the standpoint of opportunist accommodationism.

The Asturias Uprising

A particular factor in radicalizing the ranks of the Spanish Socialist Party was anger over the criminal role played by its leaders in the first Republican government, whose relentless attacks on the working class and peasantry provoked widespread hatred and revulsion. The brutal suppression of an anarchist-inspired peasant revolt in Casas Viejas in January 1933 was the breaking point, forcing new elections. The CNT urged its members to abstain, and the masses overwhelmingly withheld their votes in retribution against the Republican-Socialist government. The elections were swept by the parties of clerical and monarchist reaction.

When members of the clerical-fascist CEDA (Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rightist Groups) were invited to join the cabinet in October 1934, general strikes erupted throughout Spain. The workers of Asturias rose up in insurrection, centered on the powerful PSOE-led mine workers union. Police barracks were stormed, machine guns and rifles (seized from a captured arms factory) were distributed to the workers, and the capital, Oviedo, and other areas were taken over by the insurgents. “The bitter experience of the German workers was present in everyone’s minds. The Spanish workers were determined not to repeat that experience,” wrote Manuel Grossi, a BOC member and a central leader of the Asturian Workers Alliance at the head of the revolt, in his 1935 account, *The Asturian Uprising: Fifteen Days of Socialist Revolution* (London: Socialist Platform, 2000).

Here was fertile soil for the realization of Trotsky’s insistent calls for the building of workers juntas: broad, authoritative councils democratically elected by the working class. As Trotsky put it in 1931: “Only through juntas embracing the basic core of the proletariat can the communists assure their hegemony in the proletariat, and thus also in the revolution. Only to the extent that the influence of the communists grows among the working class will the juntas be transformed into organs of struggle for power” (“The Spanish Revolution and the Dangers Threatening It,” 28 May 1931). Instead, Nin’s Left Communists signed on to the “workers alliances” launched by the BOC. These bodies were neither elected by nor did they involve the participation of the insurgent workers. The 28 March 1934 agreement setting up the Asturian Workers Alliance—which, in addition to the ICE and BOC, included the PSOE/UGT, the PCE and the regional CNT—specified: “Beginning from the date of signing of this pact, all propaganda campaigns that could give rise to or worsen relations between the different allied parties shall cease” (quoted in *The Asturian Uprising*). Far from providing a forum in which the contending parties and programs could be tested, and thus acting as a crucible in which a revolutionary vanguard could be forged around a perspective for proletarian power, the Workers Alliance was a political nonaggression pact based on the lowest common denominator of agreement among the leaderships of the various organizations.

The Asturias revolt was a harbinger of the impending revolution, and of its betrayal and defeat. It was General Franco who was called in to crush the Asturian rebels. For the first time, Foreign Legionnaires and Moorish troops from the Spanish colony of Morocco were deployed against the proletariat in Spain, troops that would later be used by Franco to crush the Spanish Revolution. The suppression of the isolated Astu-

rian commune—leaving 5,000 workers dead and 30,000 imprisoned—fueled renewed sentiment among the Spanish proletariat for unity among the workers organizations. These aspirations were channeled by the reformists and centrists into support for a new class-collaborationist coalition.

The Foundation of the POUM

At a September 1934 national plenum, Nin/Andrade's ICE piously resolved that to carry out the French turn would be to "immerse ourselves in an amorphous conglomerate" (quoted in Durgan, "The Spanish Trotskyists and the Foundation of the POUM"). A year later, in 1935, the ICE would immerse itself in a truly amorphous conglomerate, fusing with Maurín's BOC to found the POUM and join the London Bureau. An unprincipled federation of various centrist organizations—chiefly the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in Britain and the German SAP—the London Bureau vacillated between the Second and Third Internationals. The sole unifying force of this "International" was opposition to the formation of a Leninist-Trotskyist Fourth International, i.e., opposition to democratic-centralist constraints on their respective national-opportunist appetites and to the principles of proletarian internationalism.

The POUM was sectarian in form, opportunist in essence. It counterposed itself organizationally to the traditional mass organizations of the Spanish proletariat. But what lay behind this was an unwillingness to politically confront the misleaders of the PSOE, PCE and CNT. During the Civil War, the POUM set up its own militias, separating off its militants from the militias of organizations that claimed the allegiance of the mass of the Spanish working class. All the while the POUM embraced the popular front, beginning with signing on to the January 1936 "Left Electoral Pact," a class-collaborationist bloc between the Republicans, PSOE and PCE.

Trotsky laid bare the cynical hypocrisy and gross opportunism of Nin/Andrade:

"It is in order to recall that the Spanish 'Left Communists,' as their very name indicates, posed on every appropriate occasion as incorruptible revolutionists. In particular, they thunderously condemned the French Bolshevik-Leninists for entering the Socialist Party. Never! Under no conditions! To enter temporarily into a mass political organization in order to carry on an uncompromising struggle in its ranks against the reformist leaders for the banner of the proletarian revolution—that is opportunism: but to conclude a political alliance with the leaders of a reformist party on the basis of a deliberately dishonest program serving to dupe the masses and cover up for the bourgeoisie—that is valor! Can there be any greater debasement and prostitution of Marxism?"

—"The Treachery of the POUM," 23 January 1936

Here again, Nin's latter-day apologists leap to his defense. Durgan and former POUM youth leader Wilebaldo Solano, in his hagiographical *El POUM en la historia*, Andreu Nin y la revolución española (The POUM in History, Andrés Nin and the Spanish Revolution) (Madrid: Libros de la Catarata, 1999), claim that Trotsky and the ICL's International Secretariat (I.S.) approved of Nin's merger with Maurín. In Durgan's words, "The initial reaction of both the IS and Trotsky to the foundation of the POUM, it should be remembered, was of guarded optimism" ("Trotsky and the POUM").

This is belied by the whole record of Trotsky's writings on the BOC and the POUM, which makes clear his irreconcilable hostility to their centrist politics. Trotsky was hardly optimistic about the POUM. The fusion had been preceded

by a sharp exchange between the I.S. and the Nin leadership. In a July 1935 letter, the I.S. argued that the ICE was "being absorbed by the Workers and Peasants Bloc" without even having factional rights and that "in such circumstances nothing good can come out of the new party.... What will the banner of the new party be? The well-known banner of the London-Amsterdam Bureau" (reprinted in Trotsky, *La révolution espagnole* [our translation]).

Nin rejected these arguments out of hand and cut off further discussion with the ICL, swearing that Maurín accepted "all our fundamental principles" and snarling that the I.S. had a "fundamental lack of understanding of Spanish affairs" ("Letter from the National Committee to the International Secretariat," 21 July 1935; reprinted in *ibid.* [our translation]).

Durgan opines that Nin's fusion with the BOC was comparable to the fusion of Cannon's Communist League of America with the leftward-moving centrists of A. J. Muste's American Workers Party to form the Workers Party of the United States. But unlike the POUM, which adhered to the London Bureau, the Workers Party explicitly declared for the founding of the Fourth International. As the July 1935 I.S. letter noted: "If the new party that you want to found takes a clear position regarding the Fourth International (as in America and Holland), it can play a great role *on the national level* as a new pole of attraction. Under such conditions a fusion is desirable. But if the new party presents itself as an instrument of 'socialist-communist unification'...then joining such a party would mean the liquidation of our tendency." Durgan dismisses the POUM's hostility to the Fourth International as though it were a third-rate issue. In fact, it was a defining question demarcating revolutionary Marxism from all manner of centrist confusion.

Echoing Nin's false assurances, Durgan paints the Maurín group as having moved toward Trotskyism and castigates Trotsky for his "apparent unawareness of this evolution in the BOC's politics" ("Trotsky and the POUM"). Maurín was also "apparently unaware" of this evolution, as he later made clear:

"By its theory and practice, the BOC approximated to being a left Socialist party that had been able to grasp what was positive and what was negative in the Russian Revolution. The BOC was ideologically influenced by Marx and Engels, by Lenin and Bukharin, hardly at all by Trotsky, and by Stalin not at all."

—quoted in Georges Garnier, "Preface to the French Edition," *The Asturian Uprising*

Indeed, the only "evidence" Durgan dredges up of Trotsky's "guarded optimism" toward the foundation of the POUM comes not from any article by Trotsky but from an October 1935 report on the fusion by Jean Rous, who had been sent to Spain as the I.S. delegate. Rous cites Trotsky saying: "The new party is proclaimed. We take note. Insofar as that can depend on international factors, we must do everything we can to help this party win power and authority, which is only possible on the path of consistent and uncompromising Marxism" (reprinted in *La révolution espagnole* [our translation]). All this "proves" is that Trotsky offered his continued collaboration—if the new party followed the road of consistent and uncompromising Marxism! Like all opportunists, Durgan equates tactical flexibility with unprincipled conciliationism.

Nin and Andrade had broken with the ICL and presented Trotsky and the I.S. with a *fait accompli*. The question was what could be done from afar to salvage Spanish Trotskyism. Trotsky hammered away at the politics. After reading



Hulton

Workers man barricades in Barcelona. Refused arms by popular-front government, workers seized rifles and other weapons to fight Franco's forces in July 1936.

the fusion manifesto, Trotsky stressed the need to relentlessly hammer on the POUM's contradictions and evasions, focusing on the antirevolutionary significance of its adherence to the London Bureau ("Letter to a Comrade," 18 October 1935). In his January 1936 article, he warned against any confusion within the ICL on the nature of the Nin/Maurín group and stressed his implacable opposition to these centrist renegades and traitors:

"The Spanish organization of 'Left Communists,' which was always a muddled organization, after countless vacillations to the right and to the left, merged with the Catalan Federation of Maurín into a party of 'Marxist (?) Unification' on a centrist program. Some of our own periodicals, misled by this name, have written about this party as though it were drawing close to the Fourth International. There is nothing more dangerous than to exaggerate one's own forces with the aid of...a credulous imagination. Reality will not be restrained thereby from bringing cruel disillusion!"

—"The Treachery of the POUM"

Centrist Vacillation and Popular-Front Betrayal

The 1936 "Left Electoral Pact" initiated by the Republicans was a treatise in defense of private property and bourgeois rule. It guaranteed the sanctity of the officer corps and the church, rejected any nationalization of agricultural lands, industries or banks and maintained the national oppression of Catalonia and the Basque country. It affirmed the colonial occupation of (Spanish) Morocco and recommended that Spain's foreign policy follow the "principles" of that imperialist den of thieves, the League of Nations. The signatories included the PSOE/UGT, the PCE, the Syndicalist Party of former CNT leader Angel Pestaña and Juan Andrade for the POUM. Though not a signatory, the CNT encouraged its members to vote for the popular front. Trotsky wrote:

"Most of these parties stood at the head of the Spanish revolution during the years of its upsurge and they did everything in their power to betray it and trample it underfoot. The new angle is the signature of the party of Maurín-Nin-Andrade. The former Spanish 'Left Communists' have turned into a mere tail of the 'left' bourgeoisie. It is hard to conceive of a more ignominious downfall!...

"How ironic is the name 'Marxist Unification'...with the bour-

geoisie. The Spanish 'Left Communists' (Andrés Nin, Juan Andrade, and others) have more than once tried to parry our criticism of their collaborationist policies by citing our lack of understanding of the 'special conditions' in Spain. This is the customary argument put to use by all opportunists. But the first duty of a genuine proletarian revolutionist lies in translating the *special* conditions of his country into the international language of Marxism, which is understandable even beyond the confines of one's own country."

—*Ibid.*

Once again, Durgan rushes to the defense of Nin. While chiding the POUM for formally signing on to the electoral pact, he writes: "Given the political situation, the POUM had little choice but to support the pact against the right, but the only viable way to do this without confusing the party's position was to do so independently from outside" ("Spanish Trotskyists and the Foundation of the POUM"). Here again, as in the 1930s and since, support for the popular front is presented simply as a tactical maneuver rather than, as Trotsky put it, "the greatest crime"—one paid for in the blood of the working class.

The February 1936 election of the popular-front government under Republican Left politician Manuel Azaña, who had also been prime minister in the 1931-33 coalition government, opened a period of massive worker and peasant unrest, including seizures of agricultural lands and hundreds of strikes between February and July 1936. While working mightily to suppress the proletariat, the popular front could not satisfy its bourgeois masters. On 17 July 1936, Franco radioed garrisons in Spain to seize the cities. The government scrambled to make a deal with the Franco forces while working to prevent any resistance by the working class. The next day, the PSOE and PCE leaders issued a declaration loyally proclaiming: "The government commands and the Popular Front obeys." But the workers were not about to "obey" the government's efforts to lull them with lies. On July 19, CNT/FAI and POUM workers spontaneously started organizing barricades. Refused arms by the popular-front government, workers seized stocks of rifles and dynamite and surrounded and disarmed army garrisons. A revolutionary uprising had begun.

Within days, the whole of Catalonia was in the hands of

the proletariat. On July 20, a column of 5,000 dynamiters outfitted by the Asturian miners arrived in Madrid to guard the streets. Armed workers committees displaced customs officers at the borders; a union book or affiliation card from a working-class political party was the only requirement to enter the country. Important sectors of the bourgeoisie, particularly in Catalonia, either fled or were driven out, flocking to the areas controlled by Franco's army. A joint committee of the UGT and CNT took charge of transportation throughout Spain. Workers seized the abandoned factories and created factory collectives that organized production on a local level. Such collectives or cooperatives were organized in shipping, mining, electric power, transportation, gas and water supply and many other industries.

The bourgeois government continued to "govern," but power was effectively in the hands of the armed workers and their committees. This was a situation of dual power. As Trotsky wrote: "The historic preparation of a revolution brings about, in the pre-revolutionary period, a situation in which the class which is called to realize the new social system, although not yet master of the country, has actually concentrated in its hands a significant share of the state power, while the official apparatus of the government is still in the hands of the old lords." The question was whether this "twofold sovereignty," as Trotsky called it, would be resolved in favor of revolution or counter-revolution. In the period between the February and October revolutions in Russia, "the question stood thus," explained Trotsky:

"Either the bourgeoisie will actually dominate the old state apparatus, altering it a little for its purposes, in which case the soviets will come to nothing; or the soviets will form the foundation of a new state, liquidating not only the old governmental apparatus, but also the dominion of those classes which it served. The Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries [SRs] were steering toward the first solution, the Bolsheviks toward the second.... The Bolsheviks were victorious."

—*The History of the Russian Revolution*
(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932)

But in Spain there was no Bolshevik party. The Stalinists, Socialists and anarchists pleaded with the bourgeoisie, in the name of the "democratic revolution," to take back the power that the workers had wrenched from the capitalists arms in hand. As recounted by CNT leader García Oliver,

Luis Companys, head of the bourgeois-nationalist Catalan Esquerra, declared to an assemblage of anarchist leaders after the workers had repulsed Franco:

"You have won and everything is within your power. If you have no need of me, if you do not want me as president of Catalonia, say so now, and I will be just another soldier in the antifascist struggle. If, on the other hand, you believe that I, along with the men of my party, my name and my prestige, may be of use in this office in a struggle which, while resolved today in this city is yet to be decided in the rest of Spain, then you can count on me and on my word as a man and as a politician convinced that a past of shame has today been put to rest in the sincere hope that Catalonia will put itself in the vanguard of the most socially advanced countries in the world."

—quoted in José Peirats Valls, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution* (Hastings, England: Meltzer Press, 2001)

This was all the anarchist leaders needed to hear. García Oliver concludes his account: "The CNT and the FAI opted for collaboration and democracy, eschewing the revolutionary totalitarianism which would have led to the strangulation of the revolution by a confederal-anarchist dictatorship. They trusted in the word of a Catalan democrat and retained and supported Companys as president of the Generalitat."

Dual Power in the Absence of a Bolshevik Vanguard

Unlike the soviets in Russia, the various factory and militia committees in Spain were generally unelected, their composition and character varying from one place to another depending on which group was in control. It was necessary to transform them into real soviets through the election of delegates, subject to immediate recall, from the factories and barracks, and to centralize them into organs of united proletarian struggle against the capitalist class countrywide. "Only when dual power assumes such organizational proportions is there put on the order of the day the choice between the prevailing régime and a new revolutionary order of which the Councils become the state form" (Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*).

The Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias (CCMA) stood at the pinnacle of the network of workers committees in Catalonia. Set up on 21 July 1936 as a committee of 15, it included representatives not only of the CNT, UGT and other workers organizations but also of the bourgeois

Workers seized factories and other properties abandoned by bourgeoisie after 1936 defeat of Franco's forces in Catalonia, organizing workplace collectives.





August Centelles

Bourgeois Generalitat government in Catalonia, December 1936, just after expulsion of POUM. CNT and POUM participation in government was key to disarming working class.

Esquerra. Given the presence of the Esquerra, historian Agustín Guillamón argues in his valuable account of the left-anarchist Friends of Durruti: “*At no point was there a dual power situation in existence.* This is *crucial* to any understanding of the Spanish revolution and civil war. The CAMC was a class collaborationist agency” (*The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939* [San Francisco: AK Press, 1996]).

The inclusion of the Esquerra in the CCMA was an expression of the class-collaborationist politics of the reformist and anarchist leaders. But the CCMA was *not* simply an extension of the popular-front government, as was demonstrated by the fact that it was soon smashed by that government. As Morrow explained:

“Unlike a coalition government which in actuality rests on the old state machine, the Central Committee, dominated by the anarchists, rested on the workers organizations and militias. The Esquerra and those closest to it—the Stalinists and the UGT—merely tagged along for the time being. The decrees of the Central Committee were the only law in Catalonia. Companies unquestioningly obeyed its requisitions and financial orders. Beginning presumably as the center for organizing the militias, it inevitably had to take on more and more governmental functions. Soon it organized a department of worker-police; then a department of supplies, whose word was law in the factories and seaport....

“Around the Central Committee of the militias rallied the multitudinous committees of the factories, villages, supplies, food, police, etc., in form joint committees of the various antifascist organizations, in actuality wielding an authority greater than that of its constituents. After the first tidal wave of revolution, of course, the committees revealed their basic weakness: they were based on mutual agreement of the organizations from which they drew their members, and after the first weeks, the Esquerra, backed by the Stalinists, recovered their courage and voiced their own program. The CNT leaders began to make concessions detrimental to the revolution. From that point on, the committees could have only functioned progressively by abandoning the method of mutual agreement and adopting the method of majority decisions by democratically elected delegates from the militias and factories.”

—Morrow, *op. cit.*

A concrete expression of the fight against the class-collaborationist politics that were strangling the revolutionary struggles of the proletariat would have been the demand to expel the Esquerra from the CCMA. This call would have struck a powerful chord among the militant Catalan proletariat, which had been refused arms by the Esquerra in the fight against Franco only to witness the anarchist and reformist leaders turn around and embrace these bourgeois “democrats” after the workers had defeated Franco’s forces. Calling for the expulsion of the Esquerra from the CCMA would have drawn a sharp class line, elucidating the betrayals of the workers’ misleaders and thus serving as a lever to win the

proletariat to the banner of workers power and the fight to forge a revolutionary party.

At the same time, simply expelling the representatives of the bourgeoisie from the CCMA hardly exhausts the question. In fact, in its Lérida stronghold, the POUM had evicted representatives of the Esquerra from the local workers committee. But the POUM bowed to the popular front and *opposed* the formation of democratically elected juntas of workers, peasants and militiamen, rejecting the election of such committees even in the factories and militia units under its control.

Nin argued that there was no need for soviets in Spain, ludicrously asserting that such broad, authoritative organs of class struggle had arisen in Russia because the proletariat lacked a tradition of struggle: “In Russia there was no democratic tradition. There did not exist a tradition of organization and of struggle in the proletariat.... Our proletariat, however, had its unions, its parties, its own organizations. For this reason, the soviets have not risen among us” (“The Fundamental Problem of Power,” *La Batalla*, 27 April 1937, quoted in Morrow, *op. cit.*). This was an expression of Nin’s lack of appetite for political struggle with the CNT and other tendencies. Nonetheless, the POUM’s ability to speak the language of revolution gave it real authority, an authority that would be wielded in disarming the proletariat and dissolving the CCMA and the local workers committees.

The Counterrevolution Rearms

In September 1936, Nin denounced the popular-front government in Madrid and raised the call, “Down with the bourgeois ministers.” Nin simultaneously declared that Catalonia was already under a dictatorship of the proletariat! That same month, Nin himself became a minister of the bourgeois state, as the POUM joined the CNT/FAI in entering the Catalan Generalitat. Nin was appointed Minister of Justice, the same position Kerensky first occupied in the bourgeois Provisional Government in Russia! In that capacity, Nin presided over a frontal assault by the Republican government against the incipient organs of proletarian power established by the revolutionary workers of Catalonia. The centerpiece of this counterrevolutionary attack was the “militarization” of the militias: a Generalitat decree in early October ordered the dissolution of the CCMA and the subordination of the workers militias to the bourgeois state. The local committees were also dissolved and replaced with bourgeois municipal administrations. An article signed “Indegeta” in the POUM’s *La Batalla* (7 October 1936) baldly declared:

“The Central Committee of the Anti-Fascist Militias was dissolved as a logical consequence of the formation of the new government of the Council of the Generalitat. ‘Dual power,’ a

classic revolutionary phase, was completely detrimental to the course of our revolution.... Two months of civil war and revolution have shown us the evils of such a duality."

—quoted in José Rebull, "On Dual Power,"
October 1937, reprinted in *Revolutionary History*
Vol. 4, No. 1/2

This was followed by an order to disarm all urban workers. In the name of "collectivization of industry," another decree sought to eradicate the factory collectives by putting them increasingly under the thumb of a government-appointed agent.

Nin personally accompanied bourgeois-nationalist Esquerra leader Luis Companys to Lérida to oversee the dissolution of the POUM-dominated committee there. Enric Adroher (Gironella), a POUM leader, would later acknowledge that the Generalitat had "one historical mission...to liquidate the committees" and that the POUM had been "entrusted to convince the revolutionary forces" to accept this, only to be expelled from the government once this "invaluable service" had been carried out (quoted in Durgan, "Trotsky and the POUM").

Following its ouster from the Generalitat in December 1936, the POUM then appealed to this *bourgeois* government to convoke a congress of the unions, peasants and combatants. As Trotsky noted, this was merely a means by which the POUM sought to find a way back into the popular-front government:

"The leaders of the POUM plaintively try to *persuade* the government to take the road of socialist revolution. The POUM leaders respectfully try to make the CNT leaders understand at last the Marxist teaching about the state. The POUM leaders view themselves as 'revolutionary' advisors to the leaders of the Popular Front. This position is lifeless and unworthy of revolutionaries.

"It is necessary to openly and boldly mobilize the masses against the Popular Front government. It is necessary to expose, for the syndicalist and Anarchist workers to see, the betrayals of those gentlemen who call themselves Anarchists but in fact have turned out to be simple liberals. It is necessary to hammer away mercilessly at Stalinism as the worst agency of the bourgeoisie. It is necessary to feel yourselves leaders of the revolutionary masses, not advisors to the bourgeois government....

"In *La Batalla* of April 4, we find the 'thirteen points for victory.' All the points have the character of *advice* that the Central Committee of the POUM is offering to the authorities. The POUM demands the 'calling of a delegated congress of workers' and peasants' syndicates and of soldiers.' In form, what seems to be involved is a congress of workers', peasants', and

soldiers' deputies. But the trouble is that the POUM respectfully proposes that the bourgeois-reformist government itself call such a congress, which then ought to 'peacefully' substitute itself for the bourgeois government. A revolutionary slogan is turned into empty phrases!"

—"Is Victory Possible in Spain?" 23 April 1937

The Role of the Anarchist CNT/FAI

The militarization of the militias marked a turning point. The Republican bourgeoisie, emboldened by the treachery of the workers' misleaders, began to reassert its dominance. The revolutionary workers were thrown on the defensive. Franco launched his siege of Madrid, forcing the central government to move to Valencia. The CNT/FAI leadership accepted the subordination of the militias to the state in exchange for being granted four government ministries in Valencia. As Trotsky observed, "In opposing the *goal*, the conquest of power, the Anarchists could not in the end fail to oppose the *means*, the revolution":

"More precisely, the Anarchist workers instinctively yearned to enter the Bolshevik road (July 19, 1936, and May days of 1937) while their leaders, on the contrary, with all their might drove the masses into the camp of the Popular Front, i.e., of the bourgeois regime.

"The Anarchists revealed a fatal lack of understanding of the laws of the revolution and its tasks by seeking to limit themselves to their own trade unions, that is, to organizations permeated with the routine of peaceful times, and by ignoring what went on outside the framework of the trade unions, among the masses, among the political parties, and in the government apparatus. Had the Anarchists been revolutionists, they would first of all have called for the creation of soviets, which unite the representatives of all the toilers of city and country, including the most oppressed strata, who never joined the trade unions. The revolutionary workers would have naturally occupied the dominant position in these soviets. The Stalinists would have remained an insignificant minority. The proletariat would have convinced itself of its own invincible strength. The apparatus of the bourgeois state would have hung suspended in the air. One strong blow would have sufficed to pulverize this apparatus....

"Instead of this, the anarcho-syndicalists, seeking to hide from 'politics' in the trade unions, turned out to be, to the great surprise of the whole world and themselves, a fifth wheel in the cart of bourgeois democracy."

—"Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning,"
17 December 1937

Despite his incisive portrayal of the traitorous role played by the CNT leadership, Vernon Richards can situate these

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Red Army units crossing the ice on 17 March 1921 to put down Kronstadt mutiny.

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betrayals only in the “corruption of power” (*Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*). The CNT’s capitulation to Companys and the bourgeois state was a reflection, not a repudiation, of the radical idealism at the core of anarchism. Rejecting political power, anarchism posits instead that liberation from oppression is an act of moral regeneration by all persons of “good will.” As Morrow explained:

“Class collaboration, indeed, lies concealed in the heart of anarchist philosophy. It is hidden, during periods of reaction, by anarchist hatred of capitalist oppression. But, in a revolutionary period of dual power, it must come to the surface. For then the capitalist smilingly offers to share in building the new world. And the anarchist, being opposed to ‘all dictatorships,’ including dictatorship of the proletariat, will require of the capitalist merely that he throw off the capitalist outlook, to which he agrees, naturally, the better to prepare the crushing of the workers.”

—Morrow, *op. cit.*

When it had a mass base and operated under conditions of bourgeois legality, the CNT acted pretty much like any other trade union. As Trotsky wrote in 1938, “As organizations expressive of the top layers of the proletariat, trade unions, as witnessed by all past historical experience, including the fresh experience of the anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain, developed powerful tendencies toward compromise with the bourgeois-democratic regime. In periods of acute class struggle, the leading bodies of the trade unions aim to become masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless” (“Trade Unions in the Transitional Epoch,” *Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions* [New York: Pathfinder, 1969]). If the trade unions did not come under the leadership of a revolutionary party struggling for proletarian state power, they would act as auxiliaries of bourgeois democracy. The CNT leaders, notwithstanding their more radical rhetoric, demonstrated themselves to be nothing other than what they were—reformist trade-union bureaucrats.

Reflecting increasing anger and discontent at the base of the CNT in response to the dissolution of the militias, one group of anarchists, the Friends of Durruti, did finally raise the call for workers juntas. Formed in March 1937, the group took its name from longtime radical anarchist Buenaventura Durruti, a leading militant in the FAI and the head of a CNT militia at the Aragon front. In November 1936, Durruti had publicly denounced the CNT leadership’s support for the militarization of the militias; he was killed later that

month under suspicious circumstances. As Guillamón points out in *The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939*, the group represented a fusion of those radical anarchist combatants opposed to the dissolution of the militias—such as Durruti’s former collaborator, Pablo Ruiz—and anarchist intellectuals opposed to participation in the government. Among the latter was Jaime Balius, a central writer for the CNT’s *Solidaridad Obrera*. The Friends had some 4,000 or more militants and significant roots in the CNT/FAI. (See “Trotskyism and Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War,” *Workers Vanguard* Nos. 828 and 829, 11 June and 9 July 2004.)

Although the Friends of Durruti never made the leap from anarchism to Marxism, their desire to see the workers revolution through to victory propelled them to the limits of anarchist ideology. In a 1938 pamphlet, *Towards a Fresh Revolution*, Balius declared:

“We are introducing a slight variation into our program. The establishment of a Revolutionary Junta.

“As we see it, the revolution needs organisms to oversee it and to repress, in an organized sense, hostile sectors. As current events have shown, such sectors do not accept oblivion unless they are crushed.”

—quoted in Guillamón, *The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939*

This “slight variation,” recognizing the need for an organ of repression against “hostile sectors,” amounted to an implicit recognition of the need for a workers state, that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat. As Lenin put it, “Should the workers ‘lay down their arms,’ or use them against the capitalists in order to crush their resistance? But what is the systematic use of arms by one class against another if not a ‘transient form’ of state?” (*The State and Revolution*, 1917).

From the start of the Spanish events, Trotsky had emphasized the need to reach out to the CNT, which “indisputably embraces the most militant elements of the proletariat”:

“Here the selection has gone on for a number of years. To strengthen this confederation, to transform it into a genuine organization of the masses, is the obligation of every advanced worker and, above all, of the communists....

“But at the same time we have no illusions about the fate of anarcho-syndicalism as a doctrine and a revolutionary method. Anarcho-syndicalism disarms the proletariat by its lack of a revolutionary program and its failure to understand the role of the party. The anarchists ‘deny’ politics until it seizes them by the throat; then they prepare the ground for the politics of the enemy class.”

—“The Revolution in Spain,” January 1931



Solidaridad Obrera

Anarchist leader Buenaventura Durruti with CNT militia group. Durruti denounced CNT for supporting subordination of workers militias to capitalist state.

Both the ICE and Maurín's BOC initially had some forces inside the CNT. In 1932-33, the anarchist FAI consolidated its grip on the CNT, driving out most of the Maurínists (as well as the reformist syndicalists around Pestaña). Anarchist Murray Bookchin, who rails against the alleged authoritarianism and brutality of Lenin's Bolsheviks, cynically declaims of the FAI's bureaucratic stranglehold over the CNT: "No illusion should exist that this success was achieved with an overly sensitive regard for democratic niceties" (Bookchin, "Introductory Essay," ed. Sam Dolgoff, *The Anarchist Collectives* [New York: Free Life Editions, 1974]).

The CNT/FAI, Trotsky observed, was drawn in the wake of the Catalan nationalists; the Maurín group, in turn, was in the tow of the anarcho-syndicalists. And Nin trailed behind the CNT/FAI and Maurín. This politically conciliatory course came to full flower under the impact of the Civil War and the popular front. Andrade, Nin's "left" voice, openly acknowledged the POUM's bankrupt reliance on the anarcho-syndicalist leaders: "The future of the Spanish revolution will depend on the attitude of the CNT and of the FAI and on the ability which their leaders (!) will demonstrate in orientating the masses which they influence" (quoted in Adolphe, "History and Lessons of a Mistake," 28 May 1937, *Information Bulletin*, July 1937). As Morrow wrote:

"The POUM leadership clung to the CNT. Instead of boldly contending with the anarcho-reformists for the leadership of the masses, Nin sought illusory strength by identifying himself with them. The POUM sent its militants into the smaller and heterogeneous Catalan UGT instead of contending for leadership of the millions in the CNT. It organized POUM militia columns, circumscribing its influence, instead of sending its forces into the enormous CNT columns where the decisive sections of the proletariat were already gathered. *La Batalla* recorded the tendency of CNT unions to treat collectivized property as their own. It never attacked the anarcho-syndicalist theories which created the tendency. In the ensuing year, it never once made a principled attack on the anarcho-reformist leadership, not even when the anarchists acquiesced in the expulsion of the POUM from the Generalidad. Far from leading to united action with the CNT, this false course permitted the CNT-FAI leadership, with perfect impunity, to turn its back on the POUM."

—Morrow, *op. cit.*

**The Durruti Group:
Left Anarchists Without a Compass**

The POUM initially praised (seemingly uncritically) the Friends of Durruti. After the fact, Andrade dismissed the significance of this left current within anarcho-syndicalism, writing in 1986: "An attempt has since been made to depict the 'Friends of Durruti' as a mightily representative organization, articulating the revolutionary consciousness of the CNT-FAI. In reality, they counted for nothing organizationally and were a monument of confusion in ideological terms" (quoted in Guillamón, *op. cit.*). Durgan echoes: "There has also been a tendency in Trotskyist writings on the Spanish Revolution to overestimate the importance of the POUM's potential allies in May 1937, the radical anarchist group, the Friends of Durruti" (Durgan, "Trotsky and the POUM").

These are alibis for the POUM's refusal to politically combat the anarcho-syndicalists. The Durruti group was deeply confused. But it was in political motion. Had there been a Leninist party to intersect that motion, the best of these left anarchists could have been stripped of the ideological baggage they carried and won to Bolshevism. Through the experience of the popular front and the treachery of the



C. N. T.

F. A. I.

Agrupación "Los amigos de Durruti"

¡TRABAJADORES..!

- Una Junta revolucionaria. - Fusilamiento de los culpables.
 - Desarme de todos los Cuerpos armados.
 - Socialización de la economía.
 - Disolución de los Partidos políticos que hayan agredido a la clase trabajadora.
 - No cedamos la calle. La revolución ante todo.
 - Saludamos a nuestros Camaradas del P.O.U.M. que han confraternizado en la calle con nosotros.
- VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN SOCIAL... ¡ABAJO LA CONTRAREVOLUCIÓN!**

First issue of Friends of Durruti newspaper, Friend of the People (top). Leaflet issued during 1937 Barcelona May Days calls for "revolutionary junta," concludes with "Long live the social revolution—Down with the counterrevolution!"

CNT/FAI leaders, the militants of the Durruti group had begun to empirically reject key aspects of anarchist doctrine, including the "anti-authoritarianism" with which the CNT leaders justified their capitulation to Companys. Before its dissolution, the Gelsa sector of the Durruti Column at the Aragon front called on the CNT/FAI leadership to reorganize the militias under a central command responsible to democratically elected delegates, and took some steps to realize this. In a similar vein, Balias wrote in January 1937: "Everybody is starting to realize that in order for the proletariat to triumph rapidly in this struggle against fascism, it needs an army. But an army of its own, born of itself, ruled by itself—controlled at least by itself.... An army with command and discipline; workers command."

—quoted in Miquel Amorós, *La revolución traicionada: La verdadera historia de Balias y Los Amigos de Durruti* (The Revolution Betrayed: The True History of Balias and the Friends of Durruti) (Barcelona: Virus, 2003) (our translation)

In one of his last articles in the CNT's *Solidaridad Obrera* (6 December 1936), "Durruti's Testament," Balias wrote: "Durruti bluntly stated that we anarchists require that the revolution be of a totalitarian nature" (quoted in Guillamón, *op. cit.*). Balias later denied that the group ever conceived of the junta as the organ of a new class power (see Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil*



Hoover Institution

Leftist militia in Spanish Civil War. Subordination of militias to bourgeois state paved way for Franco's victory.

War [New York: Pantheon Books, 1979]). But in an April 1937 poster, the group called for a workers junta to *replace* the capitalist Generalitat government: "Immediate establishment of a Revolutionary Junta made up of workers of city and countryside and of combatants.... Rather than the Generalidad, a Revolutionary Junta!" (quoted in Guillamón, *op. cit.*).

Yet the Friends of Durruti remained loyal to the CNT/FAI throughout, and retained the anarchists' hostility to political parties. Thus they viewed the revolutionary juntas as being composed of delegates elected solely from the unions. This denied representation to the masses of unorganized workers, who were generally from the more oppressed and volatile layers of the proletariat. Moreover, the trade unions, as organizations of routine defensive struggle in peacetime, tended to act as a conservative brake on revolutionary struggle. Trotsky wrote: "The epigones of syndicalism would have one believe that the trade unions are sufficient by themselves. Theoretically, this means nothing, but in practice it means the dissolution of the revolutionary vanguard into the backward masses, that is, the trade unions" ("Communism and Syndicalism," October 1929, *Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions*).

The Durruti group's anti-political prejudice was also expressed in a false distinction between junta control of the military effort and trade-union control of the economy. Its 1938 platform, *Towards a Fresh Revolution*, specified: "The Junta will steer clear of economic affairs, which are the exclusive preserve of the unions." But there is no way to separate political, military and economic questions. The fighting capacity of the proletarian army depended on the production of weapons, food and other materials; a revolutionary junta could not prosecute the war without such considerations, nor could the unions run economic affairs without consideration of what was necessary militarily.

This was posed concretely around the question of providing the workers with adequate arms. The CNT leaders justified their support to the bourgeois state by arguing that a centralized military with modern weaponry was needed to wage the war against Franco's armies. *Towards a Fresh Revolution* observed: "The North of Spain could have been saved if the

war materials needed for resistance to the enemy had been obtained. The means were there. The Bank of Spain had enough gold to flood Spanish soil with weaponry. Why was it not done?" The CNT could not and would not seize the banks because it was itself part of the bourgeois state. The expropriation and collectivization of finance and industry was the task of a workers state based on a centralized junta power. But the Durruti group did not accept that such was the task of a centralized soviet state, and was left without an answer to its question.

Perhaps even more telling of the Friends' failure to break fully from the CNT/FAI was its line on the national/colonial question. The anarchists' hostility to all states logically led them to oppose the fight for independence for Spanish Morocco.

In its 1938 pamphlet, the Durruti group described Spain as a colony while never once calling for Morocco's independence. Vernon Richards' criticism of the CNT/FAI leaders applies with equal force to the Friends of Durruti:

"By their actions, it is clear that the C.N.T. had no revolutionary programme which could have transformed Morocco from an enemy to an ally of the popular movement, and at no time did the leaders take notice of those anarchist militants in their midst, such as Camillo Berneri, who urged that the Spanish anarchists should send agitators to N. Africa and conduct a large scale propaganda campaign among the Arabs in favour of autonomy."

—*Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*

The question of Morocco figured heavily in the birth of the CNT, which followed in the wake of a 1909 general strike against the call-up of military reservists to Morocco. Just after its founding in 1911, the CNT called for another general strike, in part against the war in Morocco. But by the end of 1936, the CNT/FAI leaders were serving as ministers of the Spanish bourgeois state enforcing the colonial oppression of the Moroccan people.

The Trotskyists proclaimed: "Morocco for the Moroccans; the moment that this slogan is publicly proclaimed it will foment insurrection among the oppressed masses of Morocco and cause disintegration in the mercenary fascist army" ("The Program of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists," July 1937, *Revolutionary History* Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1988). Franco's shock troops were made up principally of Moroccans and the Spanish Foreign Legion, as well as some troops supplied by Mussolini and Hitler. In exile on the island of Réunion, Abd-el-Krim, the leader of the 1921-26 Rif war against the French and Spanish colonialists in Morocco, asked PSOE prime minister Largo Caballero to use his influence with the French popular-front government of Léon Blum to secure his release so that Krim could return to Morocco to lead an insurrection against Franco. But the British and French imperialists whom the Spanish Republic looked to would not countenance such a move. As Morrow remarked, "Caballero would not ask, and Blum would not grant. To rouse Spanish Morocco might endanger

imperialist domination throughout Africa" (*Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*).

The Fight to Reforge a Trotskyist Nucleus

With Nin's liquidation into the POUM in 1935, a betrayal and default of historic proportions, the banner of the Fourth International disappeared from Spain for over a year. Writing immediately after the POUM signed the popular-front pact, Trotsky stated that it was necessary to "mercilessly expose the betrayal of Maurín, Nin, Andrade, and their associates, and lay the foundation for the Spanish section of the Fourth International" ("The Treachery of the POUM"). A few months later, he wrote: "Marxist action in Spain can begin only by means of an irreconcilable condemnation of the whole policy of Andrés Nin and Andrade, which was and remains not only false but also criminal." Asserting that "the truly revolutionary elements still have a certain period of time, not too long, to be sure, in which to take stock of themselves, gather their forces, and prepare for the future," Trotsky argued that the tasks of "the Spanish supporters of the Fourth International...are as clear as day":

- "1. To condemn and denounce mercilessly before the masses the policy of *all* the leaders participating in the Popular Front.
- "2. To grasp in full the wretchedness of the leadership of the 'Workers Party of Marxist Unification' and especially of the former 'Left Communists'—Andrés Nin, Andrade, etc.—and to portray them clearly before the eyes of all the advanced workers.
- "3. To rally around the banner of the Fourth International on the basis of the 'Open Letter' [Spring 1935].
- "4. To join the Socialist Party and the United Youth in order to work there as a faction in the spirit of Bolshevism.
- "5. To establish fractions and other nuclei in the trade unions and other mass organizations.
- "6. To direct their main attention to the spontaneous and semi-spontaneous mass movements, to study their general traits, that is, to study the temperature of the masses and not the temperature of the parliamentary cliques.

- "7. To be present in every struggle so as to give it clear expression.
 - "8. To insist always on having the fighting masses form and constantly expand their committees of action (juntas, soviets), elected ad hoc.
 - "9. To counterpose the program of the conquest of power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the social revolution to all hybrid programs (à la Caballero, or à la Maurín).
- "This is the real road of the proletarian revolution. There is no other."

—"Tasks of the Fourth International in Spain,"
12 April 1936

This letter was written to a supporter in Spain, but it is unclear if it ever made it to its destination, or was circulated in Spain. It was, however, published in the Trotskyist press internationally.

It was necessary to build anew a Spanish Trotskyist nucleus that would openly fly the banner of the Fourth International and turn an independent face to the masses. This required a struggle as well against conciliationist elements within the ICL. Many of the older European Oppositionist cadres—including Vereecken and Sneevliet—were under the sway of the centrist London Bureau, and they ended up siding with Nin against Trotsky. In late July 1936, the ICL held a conference in Paris, out of which issued the Movement for the Fourth International. Sneevliet walked out of this conference after a few hours, having declared that he intended to participate in a conference of the London Bureau later that autumn. By and large, the International Secretariat, based in Paris, consisted of relatively young and inexperienced elements. They, too, were subject to the pressures of popular frontism, particularly pronounced in France, which was then under the Popular Front government of Léon Blum. Jean Rous, one of the leaders of the French section, served as the I.S. representative in Spain in 1936.

Thus, as the Spanish Civil War broke out, the international center of the Trotskyist movement was new and ungelled. Above all, it was deprived of Trotsky's intervention for five

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crucial months. In late August 1936, as Moscow announced the first in a series of frame-up trials that led to massive blood purges, Trotsky was interned by the Norwegian government at the behest of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Having just completed *The Revolution Betrayed*, his definitive analysis of the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union, Trotsky was immediately faced with the task of exposing the Stalin regime's slanders of himself and the other old Bolsheviks. In December, Trotsky was deported to Mexico, arriving there the following month. His absence as an active factor of intervention in Spain during this period was an incalculable loss.

A wealth of documentary material by or about the Spanish Trotskyists and the debates in the Fourth International over Spain is now available at Harvard and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, among other facilities. But the job of reviewing it all and putting together a complete picture of the Trotskyist intervention remains to be done. We have reviewed some I.S. minutes and correspondence and reports on Spain as well as memoirs by participants and other materials published in English in *Revolutionary History* and other sources. We have also looked through the collection of Spanish Trotskyist materials compiled by Agustín Guillamón in *Documentación Histórica del Trotskismo Español (1936-1948)* (Historical Documentation of Spanish Trotskyism) (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1996). However, even the best of the memoir material, like Munis' *Jalones de Derrota: Promesa de Victoria*, says little about the internal disputes and discussions that took place between the liquidation of the ICE in 1935 and the Barcelona insurrection in 1937. Thus, our knowledge of the work of the Spanish Trotskyists is fragmentary, and we can make only some general observations. Much more work needs to be done for a thorough assessment of the work of the Fourth International in Spain in 1936-37.

Conciliation of the POUM

In the summer of 1936, after several largely unsuccessful efforts to re-establish contacts in Spain, the I.S. was contacted by the small Bolshevik-Leninist Group (GBL) headed by Nicola di Bartolomeo (Fosco). The GBL was made up largely of foreigners, many of them Italians like Fosco, who had been members of the Left Opposition in their countries and had come to Spain to fight in the Civil War. The bulk of them immediately went to the front to join the POUM militia. The Spanish Trotskyists overwhelmingly ignored what had to be their central task, getting out a journal with theoretical and polemical articles needed to programmatically arm their intervention. As Lenin stressed in his seminal work *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), a regular party press is the critical scaffolding for building a revolutionary party. It wasn't until April 1937 that the GBL's successor, the SBLE, began publishing a newspaper, *La Voz Leninista* (Leninist Voice). Only three issues were produced before the SBLE was suppressed in 1938. The lack of a regular press fundamentally crippled the Trotskyists' intervention.

Instead of putting forward its own independent face to the masses, the GBL was drawn into the wake of the POUM. Fosco, who was assigned by Nin to take charge of organizing foreign volunteers for the POUM militia, pledged his allegiance to the POUM as "the only revolutionary party" (*La Batalla*, 4 August 1936, Guillamón, *Documentación* [our translation]). When an I.S. delegation led by Jean Rous arrived in Spain in August 1936 and distributed the issue of the French Trotskyists' *La Lutte Ouvrière* containing

"The Treachery of the POUM," Fosco was no less incensed than the POUM leaders. "That alone," he later wrote, "was enough to condemn the entire policy of the International Secretariat" (Guillamón, *Documentación* [our translation]).

Rous described Fosco as "an agent of the POUM in our ranks, who facilitated the POUM's repression of us" (*Bulletin Intérieur International* No. 1, April 1937 [our translation]). Fosco was subsequently expelled from the GBL and went on to produce several issues of a French-language publication, *Le Soviet*, in league with Raymond Molinier, an unprincipled maneuverer who had been expelled from the French section in late 1935. But it was not only Fosco who denounced Trotsky for his scathing attacks on the POUM leaders. Sneevliet, Serge and Vereecken did so, too. In 1936-37, the younger elements in the I.S. were engaged in heated but often inconclusive struggles with the pronounced pro-POUM views of Sneevliet, Vereecken and Serge. Among the more solid elements in the I.S. were Erwin Wolf (Braun), a Czech Oppositionist who served as Trotsky's secretary in Norway, and Rudolph Klement (Adolphe), who had been Trotsky's secretary before that, in Turkey and France.

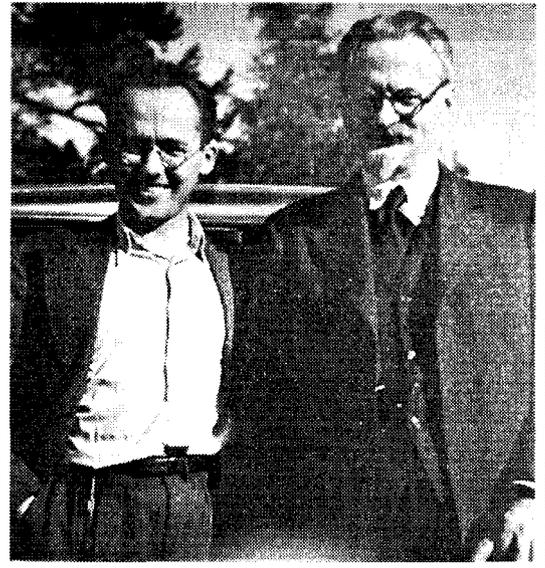
In a 20 December 1936 letter, Rous reported: "When Sneevliet came to Barcelona, he categorically and publicly condemned the political line of the I.S. in order to praise the political line of the POUM, in his position as a member of the Bureau for the IVth International" (*ibid.* [our translation]). Vereecken likewise defended the POUM. Vereecken acknowledged that the POUM had made some "mistakes," though he would not call these by their right name—betrayals. He reserved his fire for Trotsky's "criminal" denunciations of these "mistakes." When Vereecken's paper ran an article by the POUM with an introduction praising Nin & Co., Trotsky wrote in a letter to the editorial board:

"For six years, Nin has made nothing but mistakes. He has flirted with ideas and eluded difficulties. Instead of battle, he has substituted petty combinations. He has impeded the creation of a revolutionary party in Spain. All the leaders who have followed him share in the same responsibility. For six years they have done everything possible to subject this energetic and heroic proletariat of Spain to the most terrible defeats.... Such wretchedness! And you reproduce that with your approbation instead of flaying the Menshevik traitors who cover themselves with quasi-Bolshevik formulas.

"Do not tell me that the workers of the POUM fight heroically, etc. I know it as well as others do. But it is precisely their battle and their sacrifice that forces us to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Down with diplomacy, flirtation, and equivocation. One must know how to tell the bitterest truth when the fate of a war and of a revolution depend on it. We have nothing in common with the policy of Nin, nor with any who protect, camouflage or defend it."

— "To the Editorial Board of *La Lutte Ouvrière*,"
23 March 1937

In response to Trotsky, Vereecken raged: "We consider this article as well as the attitude, in general, of our Buro and of the French Section on the POUM as sectarian and harmful, and if we were tempted to use strong words, we would say criminal" (Vereecken, "For a Correct Policy in Respect to the Spanish Revolution and POUM," reprinted in *Information Bulletin*, July 1937). Vereecken echoed Nin's parochial justifications for rejecting the lessons of the Bolshevik Revolution: "A party is not a piece of goods which can be imported and exported at will. The Spanish Revolution will be 'Spanish' just as the Russian Revolution was 'Russian.'" Finally, concluded Vereecken, "What we wish to bring out with all our strength is that the POUM is the revolutionary organiza-



Pathfinder

tion in Spain," complaining, "The whole activity of the Buro is directed toward the building of a revolutionary party outside of the POUM" (*ibid.*).

Unfortunately, this was not the case. Hampered by Trotsky's unavailability and the fact that differences over the POUM were not fully fought out, elements in the I.S. initially bent to the pressures of POUM apologists like Sneevliet and Vereecken and clearly did not "grasp in full the wretchedness" of Nin & Co. This was compounded by the weakness of the forces of Spanish Trotskyism on the ground. These had been strengthened with the return in October 1936 of Grandizo Munis, one of the handful of ICE cadre who had sided with Trotsky against Nin over the question of entry into the PSOE/JS. Even then the Trotskyists in Spain were overwhelmingly foreign, politically incoherent and confronted with mass organizations of the working class in a revolutionary situation.

But this is not an argument against fighting to build the proletarian vanguard leadership that was so desperately necessary. It was the first duty of the Spanish Trotskyists to fight to split and regroup revolutionary elements from the POUM, the anarchists and other workers parties with the aim of forging the crucial instrument for victory—a Leninist vanguard party. Instead, the Spanish Trotskyists and the I.S. were overwhelmingly preoccupied with entry into the POUM as the only means through which a Bolshevik party could be forged.

In a 24 August 1936 letter, Hans David Freund (Moulin), a German émigré who became a leader of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists, described the POUM as "a centrist party," but concluded: "We must work towards the Bolshevisation of the POUM, although we cannot predict whether it will accomplish this by changing its present leadership for another one, or by the evolution of its leaders in the direction of Bolshevism-Leninism" (*Revolutionary His-*

tory Vol. 4, No. 1/2). With the support and urging of the I.S., the Bolshevik-Leninists attempted to arrange an entry into the POUM with factional rights.

Nin's response to their first entreaty was to argue that the Trotskyists could join only as individuals and to demand, "You must declare publicly that you disassociate yourselves and disagree with the campaign of calumny and defamation carried on against our party by the publications of the would-be 4th International" ("Letter from Nin to the Bolshevik-Leninists of Barcelona," 13 November 1936, *Information Bulletin*, July 1937). The SBLE tried another entry approach after this, with a sharply polemical letter to the POUM leadership in April 1937 (*Information Bulletin*, July 1937). Also published in the July 1937 *Information Bulletin* was an article by Trotsky, following the Barcelona May Days, warning against focusing on the POUM:

"The POUM still remains a Catalan organization. Its leaders prevented in its time entry into the Socialist Party, covering their fundamental opportunism with a sterile intransigence. It is to be hoped, however, that the events in Catalonia will produce fissures and splits in the ranks of the Socialist Party and the U.G.T. In this case it would be fatal to be confined within the cadres of the POUM, which moreover will be much reduced in the weeks to come. It is necessary to turn towards the anarchist masses in Catalonia, towards the socialist and communist masses elsewhere. It is not a question of preserving the old external forms, but of creating new points of support for the future."

—"The Insurrection in Barcelona (Some Preliminary Remarks)," 12 May 1937

There is no question that the Trotskyists should have sought access to the members of the POUM, which had grown from several thousand to some 30,000 in the first months of the Civil War and whose leftist rhetoric, as Trotsky put it, "created the illusion that a revolutionary party existed in Spain" ("The Culpability of Left Centrism," 10 March 1939). Needless to say, it was much more difficult to

get such access to the POUM ranks from the outside. But this was not at all like the situation confronting the Trotskyists at the time of the French turn, where they entered large parties in ferment with the aim of intersecting a short-lived opportunity and were able to put out a press openly espousing their views and principles.

The POUM had gone over to the class enemy when it signed on to the "Left Electoral Pact" in January 1936. As Trotsky insisted, the fight to win over revolutionary elements within the POUM's ranks had to begin with an "irreconcilable condemnation" of this betrayal. The demand that the POUM repudiate this pact was the only principled basis for even considering the tactic of entry. Nin's participation as Minister of Justice in the Catalan popular-front government was simply the concrete expression of its original betrayal. Although Nin was thrown out of the government in December 1936, the whole orientation of the POUM remained focused on gaining re-entry into the government. To have joined the POUM, even with factional rights, would have subjected the Trotskyists to the POUM's discipline. This would have been a betrayal in Spain 1936-37. There was no place in the POUM for Trotskyists. As Trotsky wrote in a later polemic against Sneevliet and Vereecken:

"That Vereecken should reduce the question to the simple right of factions to exist shows only that he has completely wiped out the line of demarcation between centrism and Marxism. Here is what a true Marxist would say: 'They say there is no democracy in the POUM. This is not true. Democracy does exist there—for the right-wingers, for the centrists, for the confusionists, but not for the Bolshevik-Leninists.' In other words, the extent of democracy in the POUM is determined by the real content of its centrist policy, radically hostile to revolutionary Marxism."

—"A Test of Ideas and Individuals Through the Spanish Experience," 24 August 1937

The task confronting the tiny Trotskyist forces was to build the nucleus of a vanguard party through regrouping left-wing



Agustí Centelles

Barcelona May Days, 1937. POUM and CNT leaders called for workers to dismantle barricades, betrayed revolutionary uprising.

elements from the POUM and the anarcho-syndicalists, as well as from the Socialist or Communist parties. Only by constructing such a nucleus as a fulcrum could a lever be applied for splitting the mass of revolutionary workers from their misleaders. The tactic of the united front would have been an important weapon to exploit the contradictions between the working-class base and the leaderships of the reformist, centrist and anarcho-syndicalist tendencies. The combination of unity in action against the blows of reaction and freedom of criticism in exposing the treachery of the other workers organizations would have aided in translating the political premises of Trotskyism into living reality.

The SBLE also bent in the direction of the POUM programmatically with its call for a "revolutionary front of the proletariat" of the POUM and the CNT to lead the fight against the popular front. A February 1937 SBLE leaflet declared:

"It is necessary, urgently necessary, to form a revolutionary front of the proletariat that rises up against the sacred unity represented by the Popular Front...."

"As the most powerful organizations on the extreme left, the POUM and the CNT must initiate the revolutionary front. Its objectives, as well as free access to all workers organizations that reject the disastrous policy of the popular front, must be clearly established."

—SBLE leaflet, "Workers of the CNT, the POUM, the FAI, the J.J.LL. [Young Libertarians]—Proletarians All," Guillamón *Documentación* (our translation)

The SBLE slogan was a direct echo of the POUM's call for a "revolutionary workers front," by which Nin meant sealing a political pact with the CNT leaders for the purpose of re-entering the Catalan government. Trotsky argued that a united revolutionary front of the proletariat was only possible through the creation of soviets and under the leadership of a revolutionary party. Unlike the POUM, the SBLE did raise the call for soviets. Nonetheless, the demand for a "revolutionary proletarian front" separate from soviets and under the leadership of the CNT and the POUM could only have built illusions in the anarchist and centrist misleaders.

After Trotsky arrived in Mexico in January 1937, he resumed his writing on Spain, much of it polemics against

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for international
addresses.)

apologists for the POUM. Klement and Wolf in the I.S. began to acknowledge some problems with their earlier partial attempts to address the pro-POUM opportunism of the Dutch and Belgian leaderships. An I.S. meeting in May 1937 saw a sharp fight with Vereecken and passed a self-critical resolution on the earlier acquiescence to Sneevliet's demands not to publish criticisms of him in an internal bulletin. The resolution conceded: "The I.S. regrets having lost precious time trying in vain to convince the [Dutch] RSAP leadership to accept an international discussion on these differences." Wolf, reporting from Spain, later wrote critically of "the overly prolonged silence and vacillations of the I.S. The POUM skillfully used the differences between the different sections of the IV International and weakened the force of argumentation of the Spanish BL" (Wolf, "Internal Report," 6-7 July 1937, *Documentación* [our translation]). Wolf also acknowledged, "In the past, we focused almost exclusively on the POUM. The revolutionary anarchist workers were too often forgotten, with the exception of the Friends of Durruti" (*ibid.*). Finally, in "Resolutions of the International Buro for the 4th International on the Present Situation in Spain and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninists" (undated), there appeared a categorical statement of the need to build an independent party:

"The task of building a new revolutionary leadership of the 4th International will be not to become the advisers of the leadership of the POUM, but rather, above all, to address the workers directly and explain to them the situation as it is, on the basis of the line and program of the movement for the 4th International."

—reprinted in *Information Bulletin*, July 1937

Wolf, who had volunteered to go to Spain when the I.S. could find no other cadre willing to go, was arrested shortly after by Stalinist GPU agents in Spain and murdered, as was Freund (Moulin). The following year, Klement was also assassinated by the Stalinists.

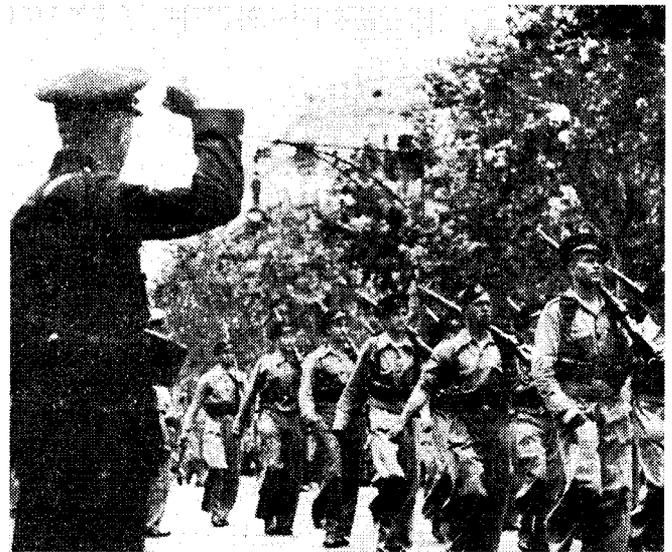
The Barcelona Insurrection

The last chapter of the POUM's treachery was played out on the streets of Barcelona in May 1937. On April 14, the bourgeoisie's pitiful commemoration of the founding of the Republic was drowned out by huge food riots by the working-class women of the city. On April 29, as Hugo Oehler reports in his 1937 eyewitness account, "Barricades in Barcelona" (reprinted in *Revolutionary History* Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1988), the Generalitat ordered that all groups "not directly dependent on the Generality Council will withdraw instantly from the streets so as to make possible the rapid elimination of the unrest and alarm that Catalonia is now enduring" (quoted in *ibid.*). The CNT, UGT, PSUC and POUM dutifully called off their May Day demonstrations. On May 3, Stalinist-led Assault Guards attacked the Telefónica occupied by CNT workers, and barricades went up throughout Barcelona and its suburbs.

The SBLE fought to offer revolutionary leadership to the CNT and POUM members who manned the barricades. In their 4 May 1937 leaflet, the Trotskyists urged the workers to seize the "revolutionary offensive" and to form "committees of revolutionary defence in the shops, factories, districts" (reprinted in *Information Bulletin*, July 1937). A POUM leaflet argued instead that "retreat is necessary" because the workers had already defeated the counterrevolutionary provocation (*ibid.*). Calling for the withdrawal of

government forces from the streets and for the working class to keep its arms, the POUM declared: "The accomplishment of these perfectly acceptable conditions can put an end to the struggle." But the bourgeoisie and its Stalinist henchmen rejected these "perfectly acceptable conditions"—and the POUM leaders nonetheless exerted every effort to "put an end to the struggle."

Despite confusion and demoralization, the workers returned to the barricades time and again. Angered by the brutality of the police, Oehler reports, on Wednesday, May 5, "With renewed energy, with fury, the proletariat attacked the class enemy." A section of the Durruti Column and some 500 POUM soldiers left the Aragon front—armed with machine guns, tanks and light artillery, to join their comrades on the barricades, but were turned back with the lie



Agusti Centelles

Barcelona, 11 May 1937: Bourgeois Assault Guards march through city after defeat of workers insurrection.

that the fighting had ended. That day, the Friends of Durruti also distributed a leaflet on the barricades, proclaiming:

"Workers! A Revolutionary Junta. Shoot the culprits. Disarm the armed corps. Socialize the economy. Disband the political parties which have turned on the working class. We must not surrender the streets. The revolution before all else. We salute our comrades from the POUM who fraternized with us on the streets. Long live the Social Revolution! Down with the counterrevolution!"

—quoted in Guillamón, *The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939*

But the Durruti group continued to look to the CNT leadership and was itself disoriented when the CNT and POUM refused to fight for power. On May 5, representatives of the SBLE met with the Friends of Durruti to discuss the possibility of coordinated action, to no avail.

On May 6, reports Oehler:

"*Solidaridad Obrera* (CNT) this morning announced, 'The CNT and the UGT have both commanded return to work.' The same issue refused all responsibility for the leaflet of the Friends of Durruti. *La Batalla* (POUM) appeared and echoed the Anarcho-Syndicalist croaking: 'Now that the counterrevolutionary provocations have been smashed, it is necessary to withdraw from the struggle. Workers, return to labour.'... When the POUM workers on the barricades beside the Hotel Falcon [POUM headquarters] saw this sheet, they raged and

refused to leave their posts. They denounced their leaders as betrayers. The Thursday issue of *Soli*, as the CNT paper was called, was burnt like previous issues on many barricades.”

—Oehler, *op. cit.*

That day, the POUM leaders meekly surrendered the *La Batalla* offices to the police, and the murdered body of Camillo Berneri, an honorable left anarchist, was found on the streets, one of the first victims of the renewed white terror. Within a few weeks, Andrés Nin was also arrested and murdered. To the end he retained his illusions in the popular front, refusing to heed a warning passed on to him by a sympathetic militiaman that he was about to be arrested. Juan Andrade later commented, “None of us believed the situation was serious enough to risk our arrest” (quoted in Fraser, *Blood of Spain*).

Oehler concludes his account with a denunciation of Trotsky’s “liquidationism,” falsely blaming the Bolshevik leader for the SBLE’s attempts to enter the POUM. But Oehler says nothing of his own, very real political responsibility for the POUM. In 1934-35, Oehler’s rotten bloc with Nin in opposition to the French turn provided Nin with a leftist political cover as he liquidated the forces of Spanish Trotskyism into the POUM. And at the time of the Barcelona May Days, Oehler was aligned with an oppositional grouping *within* the POUM, José Rebull’s Cell 72 in Barcelona. A 16 April 1937 “Eyewitness Account by Edward H. Oliver” (likely a pseudonym for Oehler), published by Oehler’s Revolutionary Workers League, uncritically praised a resolution of the Barcelona POUM Local Committee that called on the POUM, CNT and FAI, as “organizations whose objectives [sic] is the proletarian revolution,” to “form the revolutionary united front in an attempt to win the masses” (quoted in Oliver, “Sixth Anniversary of the Spanish Republic in Bar-

celona,” datelined 16 April 1937). This resolution, according to Oliver, offered “the first clear workers solution for the crisis of the Generality” (*ibid.*).

Rebull remained in the POUM through all of its betrayals. Just after the May Days, Rebull authored an earnest critique of the POUM’s governmental slogan that said not one word about the POUM’s role in dismantling the barricades and subverting the insurrection! (See Rebull, “On the Slogan of ‘A UGT-CNT Government’,” May 1937, reprinted in *Revolutionary History* Vol. 4, No. 1/2.)

Pierre Broué: Defeatism Clothed as “Objectivity”

In a history of the Spanish Civil War co-authored with Emile Témime, Pierre Broué whitewashes the role of the POUM in the Barcelona May Days, essentially retailing Nin/Andrade’s version of the events:

“By Thursday 6 May order had nearly been restored. Compa-nys announced that there were neither winners nor losers. The mass of workers in Barcelona had heard the appeals for calm, and the POUM backed down: ‘The proletariat,’ it announced, ‘has won a partial victory over the counterrevolution.... Workers, return to work’.”

—Broué and Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1970)

Far from “backing down” in the face of a retreat by the workers, the POUM itself boasted in *La Batalla* (8 May 1937) of being “one of those which have contributed the most to restoring normalcy” (quoted in Oehler, “Barricades in Barcelona”). In contrast, a Leninist vanguard would have seized the moment to break the insurgent anarchist workers from their betrayers and lead a fight for power. But Nin & Co. were a gang of centrist capitulators who joined with the traitors of the CNT/FAI in ordering the workers to “back down.”

The “Spanish revolutionaries felt isolated,” write Broué and Témime, by way of tacitly justifying the POUM’s entry into the popular front. Pointing to the Stalinist blood purges in the Soviet Union, the triumph of fascism in Germany and the alleged passivity of the proletariat elsewhere, they assert: “In 1936 the world balance of power was by no means as favorable to the Spanish Revolution as it had been in 1917-1919 to the Russian Revolution.” They then pontificate:

“One could of course hold endless discussions about the opportunities that they had of compensating for this isolation with a bold revolutionary policy. It might be thought, as Trotsky did, that the Spanish Revolution offered the possibility of a reversal of the world balance of power and that it was precisely its defeat that opened the way to the outbreak of the Second World War. The fact is that their sense of isolation was one of the elements that determined the attitude of the Spanish Revolutionaries, many of whom gave up the pursuit of the Revolution.”

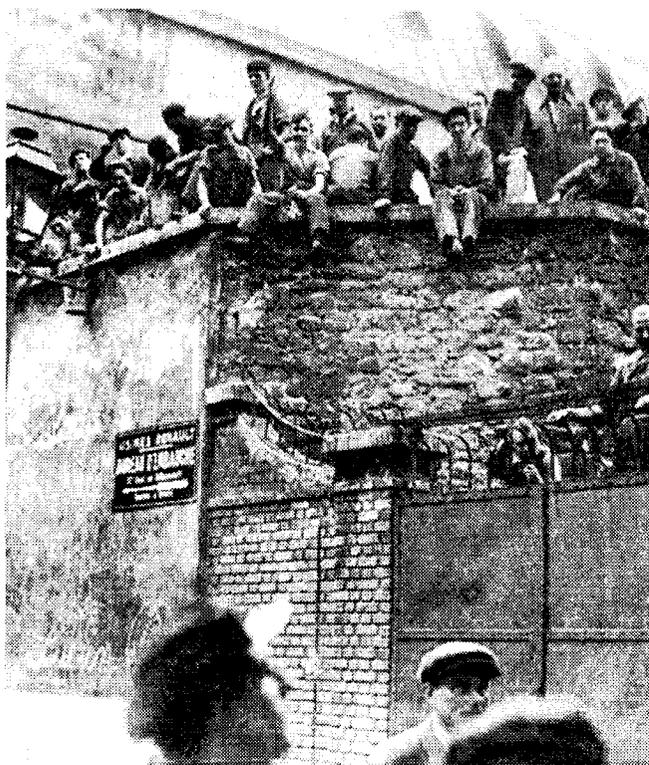
—*Ibid.*

Broué and Témime return to this theme in concluding their account of the Barcelona May Days:

“It is of course arguable [!] that the spontaneous reaction of the Barcelona workers could have opened the road to a new revolutionary impetus and that it was an opportunity to steam in reverse. Historians can merely state that the Anarchist leaders did not wish to do so and that those of the POUM did not believe that they could.”

—*Ibid.*

Like the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, a proletarian socialist victory in Spain would have inspired revolutionary strug-



June 1936: Workers occupy Renault car factory during prerevolutionary situation in France.

WORLD CONGRESS FOUNDS FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Congress Climaxes 15 Years' Struggle
Fourth International Emerge From Fight Against Degeneration in the Third International



Thirty Delegates From Eleven Countries Raise New Banner
New International Created in Spirit of European War Once Given Voice to Revolutionary Opposition to Imperialist War
YOUTH INTERNATIONAL FORMED



"The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties that paralyzed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses."
"The Class, the Party, and the Leadership"

Spartacist graphic, AP (photo)

American Trotskyist newspaper announces 1938 founding of Fourth International. In 1940 article, "The Class, the Party, and the Leadership," Trotsky drove home centrality of revolutionary leadership against apologists for the POUM and other misleaders.

gles of the working class throughout the world, upsetting the course of the then-developing second imperialist war. In 1936, France was engulfed in a prerevolutionary situation, there were massive strikes in Belgium and throughout Europe the victory of Hitler's Nazis in Germany had impelled increasing leftward motion in the working class. Even in the relatively politically backward United States, the 1930s witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of class struggle. In 1934, three major strikes—the Toledo Auto-Lite strike led by the American Workers Party, the Trotskyist-led Teamsters strikes in Minneapolis and the eleven-week strike by San Francisco

longshoremen led by supporters of the Communist Party—laid the basis for the class battles that built the CIO in the following years. The Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union was sufficiently fearful that a proletarian revolution in the West would reinvigorate the Soviet masses that it pulled out all the stops to suppress the revolutionary Spanish proletariat and drowned in blood any perceived challenge to the bureaucracy's political grip over the Soviet workers state.

In his 24 August 1937 article, Trotsky replied to Vereecken's assertion that a fight for power during the Barcelona May Days would have been pure "adventurism." Trotsky's words serve also as a response to Broué's haughty above-the-battle "objectivity":

"If the Catalan proletariat had seized power in May 1937—as it had really seized it in July 1936—they would have found support throughout all of Spain. The bourgeois-Stalinist reaction would not even have found two regiments with which to crush the Catalan workers. In the territory occupied by Franco not only the workers but also the peasants would have turned toward the Catalan proletariat, would have isolated the fascist army and brought about its irresistible disintegration. It is doubtful whether under these conditions any foreign government would have risked throwing its regiments onto the burning soil of Spain. Intervention would have become materially impossible, or at least extremely dangerous.

"Naturally, in every insurrection, there is an element of uncertainty and risk. But the subsequent course of events has proven that even in the case of defeat the situation of the Spanish proletariat would have been incomparably more favorable than now, to say nothing of the fact that the revolutionary party would have assured its future."

—"A Test of Ideas and Individuals Through the Spanish Experience"

The Fight for Revolutionary Leadership

Andy Durgan castigates Trotsky for an "almost millenarian and messianic" political view, asserting that the Bolshevik leader "seemed confident that the correct political line in a revolutionary situation could transform even the smallest of groups into the leadership of the working class" (Durgan, "Trotsky and the POUM"). The odds were certainly stacked against the small forces of Spanish Trotskyism, up against mass organizations of the proletariat in the midst of a revolutionary situation. But unlike the sages of *Revolutionary History*, Trotsky understood that, regardless of the circumstances, it was desperately necessary to fight to build a Leninist vanguard party. To do otherwise is to admit defeat in advance.

One's appreciation of the history of the workers movement and revolutionary struggles of the past is, of course, conditioned by one's own programmatic outlook. Those who rule out the possibility of proletarian victory in Spain in the 1930s do so from the vantage point of having themselves forsaken the fight for the working-class seizure of state power. They read into the past their own demoralized wallowing in the "politics of the possible"—i.e., reformist accommodation to the capitalist order. Thus, the *Revolutionary History* crowd likewise denies the possibility of a

socialist revolution in Germany in 1923, in this case to amnesty the German Communist Party leadership under Brandler (see "Rearming Bolshevism: A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern," *Spartacist* No. 56, Spring 2001).

In his pamphlet, *The Lessons of October* (1924), Trotsky exposed and refuted the numerous "objective" arguments raised in 1923 as to why a workers revolution had been impossible in Germany, noting that similar arguments would have been made if the Russian Revolution had failed. Trotsky repeated this point in his August 1940 polemical defense of a revolutionary perspective in Spain against Victor Serge and other "attorneys of the POUM." "The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties that paralyzed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses" ("The Class, the Party, and the Leadership"). The Spanish proletariat stood at a higher level in 1936 than did the Russian proletariat at the beginning of 1917. If Lenin had not been in Russia to carry out the struggles needed to politically arm the Bolshevik Party for the seizure of state power, wrote Trotsky, "There couldn't even be talk of the victory of the proletarian revolution. The Soviets would have been crushed by the counterrevolution and the little sages of all countries would have written articles and books on the keynote that only uprooted visionaries could dream in Russia of the dictatorship of the proletariat, so small numerically and so immature" (*ibid.*).

The lessons of Spain were dearly bought. We learned from and sought to avoid the political problems and weaknesses of the Spanish Trotskyists when our tendency, the International Communist League, intervened into the incipient political revolution in the East German deformed work-

ers state, the DDR, in 1989-90. Although far different—one a battle against the rule of the bourgeoisie and the other against the reinstatement of the rule of capital—both were revolutionary situations. Like the SBLE and the Movement for the Fourth International, our forces were small, although we had the advantage of international phone and fax communication and an established section in West Germany. But it wasn't primarily a question of numbers, but of political clarity, coherence and relentless political struggle for the program of Bolshevism. In this we were guided by Trotsky's understanding in his writings on Spain that "the advantage of a revolutionary situation consists precisely in the fact that even a small group can become a great force in a brief space of time, provided that it gives a correct prognosis and raises the correct slogans in time" ("The Character of the Revolution," 18 June 1931).

We established a newspaper, *Arbeiterpressekorespondenz* (Workers Press Correspondence), which appeared first on a daily and then a weekly basis and circulated in tens of thousands of copies in the DDR. We armed our supporters with theoretical and polemical propaganda, including a special issue devoted to polemics against the various pretenders to Trotskyism. For the first time in a bureaucratically deformed workers state, we made publicly available Trotsky's writings, including *The Revolution Betrayed*, his incisive 1936 analysis of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy and its origins.

The impact of our Trotskyist program was seen in the 3 January 1990 united-front demonstration of 250,000 in East Berlin's Treptow Park against the fascist desecration of a memorial to the Soviet soldiers who had died liberating Germany from Hitler's Nazis. This was a mobilization of the East German proletariat in defense of the DDR and Soviet workers states. We initiated the call for this rally. It was then taken up by the ruling Stalinist party which feared how much our program resonated among East Berlin workers and felt compelled to mobilize its base. Our comrades spoke from the platform at Treptow, marking the first time Trotskyists had addressed a mass audience in a degenerated or deformed workers state since Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union. With a green light from the Soviet bureaucracy under Gorbachev, the West German imperialists responded to the spectre of proletarian political revolution with a full-throttle campaign aimed at annexing the DDR. We did not prevail in the face of this onslaught, but *we fought*. And through that fight, we helped lay the basis for the proletarian victories of the future.

The Trotskyists in Spain were committed to the fight for proletarian state power. But they were caught in a revolutionary tidal wave with few forces, little experience and insufficient tempering, in Trotsky's words, in the "pitiless manner of posing the fundamental questions and a fierce polemic against vacillations" that "are the necessary ideological and pedagogical reflection of the implacable and cruel character of the class struggle of our time" ("The Culpability of Left Centrism"). As we honor Erwin Wolf, Rudolph Klement and the other Trotskyists who gave their lives, many at the hands of Stalin's hirelings, in the fight for socialist revolution in Spain, we condemn and refute the opportunists who apologize for past betrayals and thus prepare new ones. This is an integral part of reforging a Trotskyist Fourth International to lead the fight for new Octobers. ■

ICL Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program

The Declaration of Principles of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) is a concrete expression of our purpose: to build national sections of a democratic-centralist international which can lead the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution. This important document, which was adopted at the Third International Conference of the ICL in early 1998, was published in the four language editions of *Spartacist* and additionally in ten other languages.

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China...

(continued from page 64)

averaged 10 percent for two decades. Some 40 percent of the population is now urbanized. Over half the working population is employed in manufacturing, transport, construction and the public service sector. These are progressive developments of great historic significance that far surpassed growth in the capitalist neocolonies of Asia. India, for example, achieved national independence shortly before the Chinese Revolution, but its economy remained capitalist. India's per capita gross domestic product is now only half that of China, while China's poverty rate is half that of India. The malnutrition rate among children in China is one-quarter the rate in India. In China, almost 90 percent of women are literate, nearly twice the rate of India.

China's growth rate has been particularly dramatic in contrast to the stagnant or declining economies of the capitalist West and Japan. However, China is by no means completely insulated from the destructive irrationality of the capitalist world market. The current global financial meltdown has already had adverse effects on the Chinese economy. In particular, large numbers of workers from privately owned factories producing commodities—such as toys, apparel, consumer products—geared for export to “First World” consumers lost their jobs in 2008.

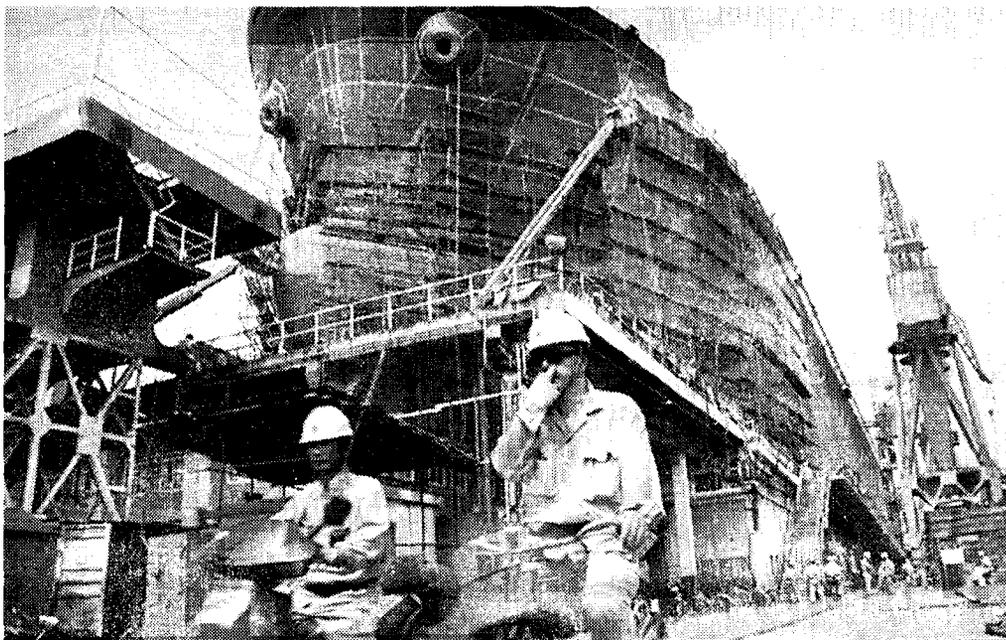
More fundamentally, China remains a nationally isolated workers state with a large impoverished peasant sector. The capital stock per person is 30 times greater in the U.S. and Japan than in China. This continuing material scarcity is a fundamental barrier to the liberation of China's women and other toilers. A communist society can be built only on the basis of the most modern technology and an international division of labor, requiring proletarian revolution in at least a number of the most advanced capitalist countries. But from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping and his successors, including today's Hu Jintao regime, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders have preached the profoundly anti-

Marxist notion that socialism could be built in a single country. In practice, “socialism in one country” has meant accommodating world imperialism and opposing the perspective of workers revolution internationally.

Socialism—a classless, egalitarian society—cannot be built in a single country but only on the basis of a huge leap in productivity within the framework of an international planned economy. As Karl Marx explained: “Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development which this determines” (*Critique of the Gotha Programme* [1875]). The emancipation of women requires the replacement of the oppressive patriarchal family by collectivized childcare and household labor. Today, the overwhelming majority of Chinese women remain trapped in the institution of the family, in which working women are subject to the “second shift,” work in the home after their hours on the job. The Stalinist embrace of the family as integral to a socialist society adds an ideological barrier to the already formidable obstacle of material scarcity.

The situation of the *dagongmei* (working sisters)—the tens of millions of young women of peasant origin who have migrated to the cities to work for largely foreign-owned capitalist enterprises—shows these contradictions with particular sharpness. Central to the market “reforms” carried out by the ruling CCP over the last three decades was the creation of Special Economic Zones and other areas where workers are brutally exploited in factories owned by offshore Chinese capitalists from Taiwan and Hong Kong, and American, West European, Japanese and South Korean corporations. These enterprises rely on a labor force consisting primarily of migrants from China's relatively impoverished countryside.

As of August 2008, the Stratfor Web site estimated there were 150 to 200 million of these migrant workers, the “floating population.” While nationally the majority are male, the assembly lines of Dongguan in the Pearl River Delta, for example, one of the largest factory cities in China, have drawn the young and unskilled and have been estimated to be 70 percent female. Mainly in their late teens and early twenties, these unmarried women for the first time leave the stultifying



EPA

Shanghai's state-owned Hudong shipyard. Industrial core of China's economy remains under state ownership and control.



Corbis



Fukada/NY Times

May 2008: Troops enter earthquake-devastated region in Sichuan province to aid in massive relief effort. Right: Enraged parents of children killed in collapse of shoddily constructed school denounce local official in Mianzhu.

conditions of the traditional peasant family and engage in collective social production, and in some cases collective social struggle.

This vast migrant workforce complements the strategic and powerful proletariat in China's largely state-owned heavy industry sector. The view presented in much of the capitalist media and echoed by the reformist left that China is one giant sweatshop for light manufacturing for export is false. So too is the claim by reformist left groups that China has somehow been transformed into a capitalist state. Despite major inroads by imperialist, offshore Chinese and domestic capitalists, the key sectors of China's economy remain under state ownership and control, as does the banking system. State-owned enterprises directly controlled by the central ministries in Beijing account for one-third of China's total national output. And that third constitutes the strategic core of China's industrial economy.

For more than a decade, China has been the world's largest steel producer and now accounts for over a third of global production. The massive development of infrastructure—railways, roads, mass transit—has been possible only because of the collectivized economy. In response to the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, the regime set in motion plans to build over a million prefabricated houses in three months, provide food for five million homeless people and rebuild or relocate flattened towns and cities. Hundreds of state-owned factories were commandeered for these tasks, and large state enterprises were ordered to increase output of needed materials. The contrast to the U.S. capitalist rulers' racist, anti-working-class treatment of the mainly black victims of Hurricane Katrina is self-evident.

Yet even as rapid economic growth has improved life for millions of Chinese, the gap between rich and poor, city and countryside, has widened. Greater resources are now available to meet the basic needs of the population, but the ruling bureaucracy has starved public health care and primary education of funds. Increasing inequality and declining social services have fueled widespread protests. Labor struggles

abound: against closures, against unpaid wages, pensions and benefits at state-owned enterprises, against conditions of brutal exploitation in the private sector. Rural areas are rife with peasant protests over illegal land seizures by local officials, corruption, pollution and other abuses. Following the Sichuan earthquake, grief-stricken parents and grandparents staged anti-corruption protests over the shoddily built schools that collapsed, killing many thousands of children.

China needs a proletarian political revolution led by a revolutionary Marxist (i.e., Leninist-Trotskyist) party to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy, a parasitic ruling caste. Bureaucratic rule must be replaced with the rule of elected workers and peasants councils committed to the struggle for international socialist revolution. The motor force for such a political revolution can be seen in the massive defensive struggles of the Chinese proletariat, such as a revolt by 20,000 miners and their families in the northeastern industrial town of Yangjiazhangzi in 2000. As miners burned cars and barricaded streets to protest the selling off of a state-owned molybdenum mine to management cronies, one said bitterly, "We miners have been working here for China, for the Communist Party since the revolution. And now, suddenly, my part of the mine is private" (*Washington Post*, 5 April 2000). These workers understood that such state property belongs to the working people. Who gave the managers the right to sell it off?

Taking their place alongside the heavy battalions of the industrial proletariat in the state sector, migrant workers—women and men—in the capitalist enterprises can play an important role in the fight to defend and extend the gains of the 1949 Revolution.

There is one path only to the social and economic modernization of China and the corresponding full liberation of women: the path of international proletarian revolution. Only the smashing of capitalist class rule in the more economically developed heartlands of world imperialism can lay a material basis to end scarcity and qualitatively advance the living standards of all, by creating a global planned economy in which social production is no longer for private

profit. A workers and peasants government in China would promote social and economic equality for women in all aspects of life, while understanding that their complete liberation—and that of all humanity—hinges on the fight to overthrow bourgeois rule on a global basis and on the vast advance in social production that would follow.

Imperialists Target China for Counterrevolution

From the 1949 Revolution and the Korean War of 1950-53 to the continued arming of Taiwan, U.S. imperialism has never ceased in its drive to overthrow the Chinese deformed workers state and regain the mainland for untrammelled capitalist exploitation. Since the destruction of the Soviet Union through capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92, the United States and other imperialist powers have made China their strategic target. U.S. bases in Central Asia are part of an attempt to surround China with American military installations. The Pentagon has actively pursued an anti-missile “defense” program in order to neutralize any Chinese response to an American nuclear first strike. In 2005 the U.S. concluded a pact with Japan to defend Taiwan, a bastion of the offshore Chinese bourgeoisie.

We support the development by China and North Korea of nuclear arsenals as part of maintaining a necessary deterrent against imperialist nuclear blackmail. In a joint statement demanding “Down With U.S./Japan Counterrevolutionary Alliance!”, the U.S. and Japanese sections of the International Communist League wrote that we “stand for the unconditional military defense of China and North Korea—as we do for the other remaining deformed workers states, Vietnam and Cuba—against imperialist attack and internal capitalist counterrevolution.... We are opposed to the Stalinists’ plan of reunification with Taiwan embodied in ‘one country, two systems.’ Instead, we advance a program for the revolutionary reunification of China, which requires a workers political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy on the mainland, a proletarian socialist revolution in Taiwan to overthrow and expropriate the bourgeoisie, and the expropriation of the Hong Kong capitalists” (“Defend the Chinese and North Korean Workers States!”, *Workers Vanguard* No. 844, 18 March 2005). In sharp contrast to the reformist left internationally, we also denounce the imperialists’ campaigns for “free Tibet” and “human rights,” which are designed to rally anti-Communist public opinion against the People’s Republic.

The bonapartist Stalinist regime in Beijing is an obstacle to defense and extension of the revolutionary gains. The CCP that under Mao led the 1949 Revolution was based on the peasantry, not the working class—i.e., the Revolution resulted in a *deformed* workers state. The Stalinist CCP cohered into a privileged bureaucratic caste resting parasitically atop an economy that was soon collectivized. This bureaucracy plays no essential role in social production. It maintains its privileged position through a mixture of repression and periodic concessions to sections of the restive workers. Opponents of the Stalinist regime face not only imprisonment but also the state terror of the death penalty enshrined in the country’s judicial code. As Marxists, we oppose the institution of capital punishment on principle, in the deformed workers states no less than in the capitalist countries.

Under the guns of hostile U.S. imperialism, Mao’s regime

initially struck an “anti-imperialist” posture, but this took the form of promoting and conciliating bourgeois-nationalist regimes in Asia and elsewhere. Mao backed the Indonesian CP’s support to the capitalist Sukarno government, a disastrous class-collaborationist policy that paved the way for the massacre of over half a million Communists, workers and peasants by the military in 1965. Around the same time, emerging tensions between the respective nationalist bureaucracies in Moscow and Beijing erupted in a bitter split between the two regimes in the 1960s. By the early 1970s, Mao had forged a criminal alliance with U.S. imperialism against the Soviet Union, even as the U.S. rained bombs on the heroic Vietnamese workers and peasants.

By the time of Mao’s death in 1976, China had built a substantial heavy industry sector, but was still an overwhelmingly rural society. Agricultural production remained technologically backward and a large fraction of the peasantry lived in abject poverty. The introduction of market “reforms” under Deng in 1978 followed a pattern inherent in Stalinist bonapartist rule. To function effectively, a centrally planned economy must be administered by a government of democratically elected workers councils. But the Stalinist misrulers are hostile to any expression of workers democracy, substituting arbitrary administrative fiat in its place. In light of the imbalances inherent in a bureaucratically administered planned economy, there is a tendency for Stalinist regimes to replace centralized planning and management with market mechanisms. Since managers and workers cannot be subject to the discipline of soviet democracy (workers councils), increasingly the bureaucracy sees subjecting the economic actors to the discipline of market competition as the only answer

Chinese-Language Pamphlet No. 8

Defend
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Workers State!
For Proletarian
Political Revolution!
**China’s “Market
Reforms”:
A Trotskyist
Analysis**

**The Russian
Revolution
and the
Emancipation
of Women**



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to economic inefficiency (see Spartacist pamphlet, “*Market Socialism*” in *Eastern Europe* [July 1988]).

The policies of the CCP bureaucracy have greatly strengthened potential counterrevolutionary forces within China, generating a new class of rich Chinese capitalist entrepreneurs as well as a technocratic/managerial layer enjoying a privileged lifestyle. The “Great China” nationalism (overlapping with Han chauvinism) promoted by the ruling bureaucracy serves to justify the growth of these hostile class forces while infecting the worker and peasant masses with bourgeois-nationalist ideology. Linking the regimes of Mao, Deng and Hu, this poisonous nationalism—dashed with occasional rhetoric about a “harmonious” socialist society—is wielded to achieve social cohesion. Both Mao-style bureaucratic commandism and the whip of the market used by Deng and his successors are squarely within the framework of Stalinist nationalism; both are hostile to and counterposed to workers democracy and the essential perspective of international socialist revolution. The revolutionary working-class party needed to lead a proletarian political revolution to victory can be built only in irreconcilable opposition to the nationalism inherent in Stalinism.

The International Revolutionary Road to Women’s Liberation

Marxists understand that the institution of the family is not an immutable, timeless institution, but a social relation subject to historical change. In his classic 1884 work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Friedrich Engels traced the origin of the family and the state to the division of society into classes. With the rise of a social surplus beyond basic subsistence through the development of agriculture, a leisured, ruling class was able to develop based on private appropriation of that surplus, thus moving human society away from the primitive egalitarianism of the Old Stone Age (Paleolithic). The centrality of the family began with its role in the inheritance of property, which required women’s sexual monogamy and social subordination. In the 10,000 years since the advent of class society, the family has taken many forms—from polygamous to extended to nuclear—reflecting different political economies and their religions. But the oppression of women is a fundamental feature of *all* class societies.

The policies of the early Soviet government under V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky toward the oppressed women of Russia were an integral component of the liberating and internationalist program of Marxism. The early Soviet state was an economically backward country in which women’s subjugation had deep roots in the productive relations of a largely peasant society based on family labor. Furthermore, Soviet Russia’s urban industrial economy had been devastated by seven years of imperialist and then civil war, ravaging the ranks of the urban workers who had made the Revolution. Yet in the face of this harsh situation, the Bolsheviks did everything they could to effect an all-around improvement in the conditions of women. Simultaneously, they fought with might and main to break the isolation of the young workers state, building the Communist International (CI, or Comintern) to promote and lead the struggles for world proletarian revolution.

Early Soviet legislation gave women full equality in every sphere, including the right to vote, to divorce and to own property. The dominant Orthodox church was officially sev-



Sidney D. Gamble

May 4th Movement, 1919: Students outside Beijing’s Tiananmen Gate protest imperialist subjugation and division of China following World War I.

ered from all state power, while an early decree established the noninterference of the government in all private, consensual sexual matters. But the Bolsheviks knew such democratic measures were insufficient. As Lenin emphasized in a 1919 speech to working women, “Owing to her work in the house, the woman is still in a difficult position. To effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of the man it is necessary for the national economy to be socialised and for women to participate in common productive labour” (“The Tasks of the Working Women’s Movement in the Soviet Republic,” September 1919).

The early Soviet regime took far-reaching measures to free women from household drudgery, including collective childcare and communal kitchens. However, these measures ran up against the barriers of poverty. For example, free abortion on demand became the law in 1920, but the country lacked the doctors, medicine and hospitals to provide abortions to all who wanted them, especially in the countryside. Preference was given to working women, causing great hardship to those women who were turned away.

The Bolshevik leaders understood that advancing to socialism and emancipating women from the oppression of the family required a huge leap in social production and looked to early revolutions in Central and West Europe. But with the defeat of the wave of working-class upsurges that followed the Bolshevik Revolution, especially in Germany in 1923, demoralization set in among the working masses. Isolation, poverty and defeat propelled the ascent of a conservative bureaucratic caste centered on Joseph Stalin that began to dominate the Soviet Communist Party and state by early 1924. Later that year, the Stalinist bureaucracy first raised the nationalist dogma of “socialism in one country,” and, as it consolidated

power over the following years, increasingly abandoned the fight for world revolution. This was to have a direct impact on the fate of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution. Domestically, the Soviet Stalinists reversed many of the gains won by women through the Revolution. In 1936, abortion was made illegal and the liberation of women declared to be the “reconstruction of the family on a new socialist basis.” (For an extensive treatment of this subject, see “The Russian Revolution and the Emancipation of Women,” *Spartacist* No. 59, Spring 2006.)

In his searing 1936 indictment of the bureaucracy, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Leon Trotsky explained why the Stalinists had come to glorify the oppressive institution of the family. Emphasizing the material backwardness of the Soviet Union, Trotsky wrote, “You cannot ‘abolish’ the family; you have to replace it. The actual liberation of women is unrealizable on a basis of ‘generalized want’.” He continued:

“Instead of openly saying, ‘We have proven still too poor and ignorant for the creation of socialist relations among men, our children and grandchildren will realize this aim,’ the leaders are forcing people to glue together again the shell of the broken family, and not only that, but to consider it, under threat of extreme penalties, the sacred nucleus of triumphant socialism. It is hard to measure with the eye the scope of this retreat.”

Trotsky’s polemic applies with equal force to the Stalinist rulers of China, which was even more backward when it emerged from the 1949 Revolution than was Russia. Following Stalinist dogma, the ruling CCP likewise glorifies the family as a “socialist” institution. Despite all the rhetoric about “equality,” women have yet to achieve either equal pay for equal work or equal access to highly skilled jobs and training. Instead, the masses are inculcated with Chinese “family values.” Chinese TV programs feature stories praising “filial children” who go through great sacrifices to provide care for their aged parents. The All-China Women’s Federation sponsors awards for the “top ten outstanding mothers” and the “Five-good Families.”

China and the Permanent Revolution

The extreme degradation of women in old China was integral to the Confucian code that weighed down the Chinese population in ancient customs and pre-capitalist social relations. A classic example of the integration of the institutions of the family, class and state, traditional Confucian China prescribed filial obedience to father, landlord and emperor. For a woman, this meant complete subjugation. She could not inherit or own land. She was socialized to be not merely submissive but invisible. Ruled by her father, her husband or her son, she could be sold into marriage, concubinage or prostitution. While the crippling practice of footbinding began as a custom of the upper classes, by the 19th century it was “vigorously accepted by the gentry and emulated wherever possible by the peasantry. As it filtered down through the masses of the peasantry, the norm of the bound foot lost its elite associations, and in many parts of China the practice became an essential criterion for any girl’s marriageability” (Susan Greenhalgh, “Bound Feet, Hobbled Lives: Women in Old China,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Spring 1977).

The historic achievements of the agrarian revolution and basic democratic rights for women—such as the right to choose a husband or to own property—are considered by Marxists to be tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions, as in Europe beginning in the 17th century. But China could not follow that road. Its native bourgeoisie was too weak, cor-

rupt and dependent on imperialism, too connected to the rural landlords, too fearful of the working class and peasant masses, to resolve the bourgeois-democratic tasks such as national liberation and the smashing of the tradition-bound landlord class that oppressed and exploited the peasantry.

In 1911, the first Chinese Revolution saw the overthrow of the Qing (Manchu) dynasty by a bourgeois-nationalist Republican movement. The nationalist Guomindang (GMD), founded the following year, addressed aspects of the wretched status of women—e.g., opposing footbinding—because any attempt to modernize Chinese society ran straight up against the woman question. But the 1911 Revolution, carried out with the assistance of the imperialist powers, left the country divided under the rule of the warlords and imperialists.

During and after World War I, China saw the development of industrial production and with it a tiny but powerful proletariat. Women workers made up a significant section of this workforce, which by 1919 amounted to 1.5 million workers concentrated in large enterprises in urban centers. Thus China became a prime example of combined and uneven development—the most advanced industry dominating the growing cities, while in the vast countryside conditions of feudal misery reigned. This posed sharply the program of permanent revolution, first developed by Trotsky for the particular conditions of tsarist Russia, which held that the realization of the tasks of the democratic revolution in countries of belated capitalist development was inconceivable other than in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the masses of oppressed peasants.

Only the proletarian conquest of power, necessarily placing socialist tasks on the immediate agenda, and the fight to extend workers rule to the advanced capitalist countries could cut the chains that bound China. The prospects for such a revolution in China began to develop in 1919, when China exploded politically with the May 4th Movement, a student-centered upheaval against the imperialist subjugation and division of the country. Out of this came the formation of the Communist Party in 1921 under the leadership of Chen Duxiu, a leading Chinese intellectual, who, inspired by the 1917 Russian Revolution, found his way from radical liberalism to Marxism. The party grew steadily for several years, then explosively after the outbreak of the second

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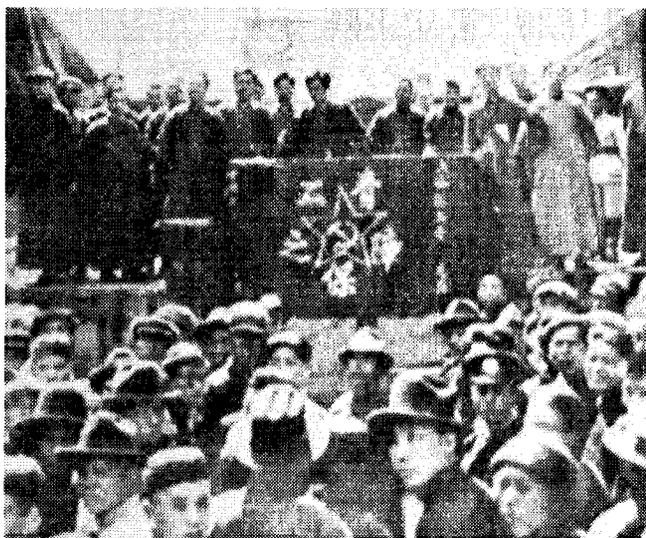


Chen Duxiu, leader of May 4th Movement and then Chinese CP. New Youth journal, founded by Chen, became an organ of early Chinese Communism.

Chinese Revolution in 1925, when it won the allegiance of hundreds of thousands of workers and layers of the radicalized urban intelligentsia.

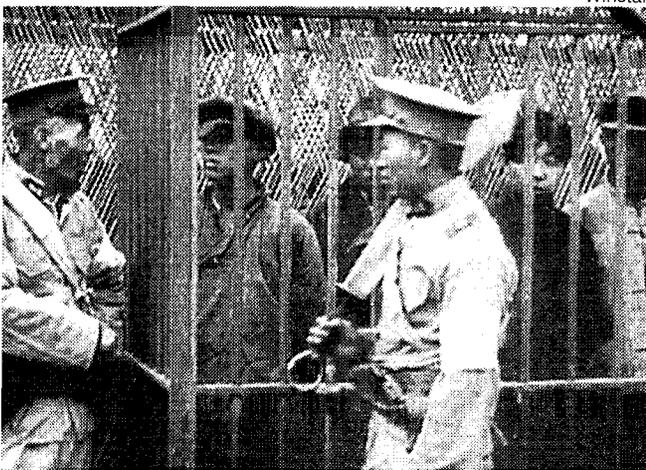
The early CCP made great efforts to win over Chinese women. It emphasized the materialist understanding that women's oppression was rooted in the institution of the family and could be eradicated only by overcoming the backwardness of Chinese society as a whole. Even before the CCP's founding congress, communists in Guangzhou were publishing a women's journal, *Labor and Women*. In 1922, the CCP set up a committee to oversee work among women, modeled on the women's section of the Bolshevik Party. It was initially concentrated in Shanghai, where women constituted over half the working class.

However, the early thrust of the CCP to seek a proletarian revolutionary solution along the lines of the Bolshevik Revolution was soon reversed. In 1922 a Comintern representative instructed the CCP to join the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang. Over the next two or three years, this developed into a full-scale liquidation of the young workers party. This meant resurrecting a retrograde variant of the Menshe-



Kelley & Walsh

Union rally during workers' takeover of Shanghai on eve of Chiang Kai-shek's counterrevolutionary coup, spring 1927. Below: Workers imprisoned by Chiang's forces, who slaughtered thousands of militant workers and Communists.



Winstar

vik theory of "two-stage revolution" that had been refuted by the Bolshevik Revolution in tsarist Russia—subordinating the interests of the proletariat to those of an imaginary "progressive" bourgeoisie, which was in fact tied to the imperialists and landlords. Trotsky fought within the Comintern against the political liquidation of the CCP, and a large section of the Chinese party leadership, including Chen Duxiu, also initially opposed this disastrous policy.

The 1927 Shanghai massacre marked the bloody defeat of the second Chinese Revolution, as the GMD under Chiang Kai-shek beheaded the vanguard of the Chinese working class, killing tens of thousands and smashing the organizations of the proletariat. Particularly savage terror was directed at Communist-led women's organizations, which threatened the foundation—family and class—of the Chinese bourgeoisie. Thousands of Communist women activists were raped, tortured and killed for the "crime" of wearing bobbed hair or "men's clothing."

The 1927 disaster led Trotsky to conclude that the theory of permanent revolution had general applicability to countries of belated capitalist development with a sufficient proletarian concentration (see Spartacist pamphlet, *The Development and Extension of Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution* [April 2008]). Trotsky wrote extensively about the crisis in China and summarized the international implications of the Stalinized Comintern's promulgation of "socialism in one country" in his 1928 Critique of the draft program of the Communist International, later published in *The Third International After Lenin* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970). His fight against class collaboration and for proletarian class independence from all wings of the bourgeoisie was joined by hundreds of young Chinese Communists studying in Moscow and by key elements in the CCP in China, including Chen Duxiu, who became the central leader of Chinese Trotskyism.

Mao's rise to leadership in the CCP followed over the next few years. Abandoning the cities for the road of peasant-guerrilla warfare, the CCP changed its very nature (see Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* [New York: Harper and Row, 1967]). As Trotsky put it, the party ripped itself away from the class. In the 1930s the CCP became a peasant-based military force with a declassed petty-bourgeois leadership. Opposing this anti-Marxist perspective, the Trotskyists remained in the cities, struggling against great odds and under conditions of intense persecution to maintain roots in the working class (see "The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism," *Spartacist* No. 53, Summer 1997).

Women's Liberation and the 1949 Revolution

As the CCP became a peasant party, this necessarily affected its policies on the woman question. The Mao leadership could not afford to affront the traditional social mores of peasant men, especially those serving in the CCP's Red Army. Thus work among women in the liberated areas was conservative in comparison to the radical Communist-led struggles for women's liberation of the 1920s centered in the cities.

In 1931, Japan invaded and occupied Manchuria. In 1935, in line with the class-collaborationist "people's front" policy promulgated at the Comintern's Seventh Congress, the CCP began calling for a broad "anti-Japanese" coalition encompassing the "patriotic" bourgeoisie and landlords. This call was consummated in a second "united front" with Chiang's



University of Washington Press photos

Xiang Jingyu, first leader of CCP women's section. Many members of Self-Awakening Society (pictured above in 1920), which emphasized struggle for women's rights, went on to become Communists, including Zhou Enlai (top row, far right).

GMD in 1937, after the Japanese imperialists began extending their hold to the rest of China. The alliance between the CCP and GMD was more on the order of a non-aggression pact, and a very unstable one at that, with Chiang's forces staging repeated attacks on the Communist-led peasant armies. While Mao agreed (on paper) to disband the "soviet" governments the CCP had set up in areas under its control and to share administration with the GMD, in practice the Communists maintained exclusive control over those areas. Thus, when Chiang's war effort became subordinated to U.S. imperialism following the U.S. entry into the Pacific War in December 1941, with American general Joseph Stillwell taking command of the GMD armed forces, Mao's Red Army continued to wage an independent struggle against the Japanese occupiers, warranting military support by revolutionary Marxists. The leading role played by Mao's Red Army in any real fight for Chinese national independence greatly enhanced the CCP's authority and influence and vastly expanded the area under its control by the end of World War II.

At the same time, Mao held religiously to his commitments to the "patriotic" capitalists and landlords in Red Army territory throughout the period of the "united front," opposing the confiscation of the landlords' property. This basically froze the old social order in the countryside, perpetuating the enslavement of peasant women to housework and husband. Only when civil war with the Guomindang erupted in 1946 did the CCP place itself at the head of an agrarian revolution, laying a basis for the social emancipation of peasant women.

Women played a key role in the final victory of Mao's peasant army. Jack Belden, an American leftist and eyewitness to the events, wrote at the time:

"In the women of China, the Communists possessed, almost ready made, one of the greatest masses of disinherited human beings the world has ever seen. And because they found the key to the heart of these women, they also found one of the keys to victory over Chiang Kai-shek."

—Belden, *China Shakes the World*
(New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949)

In the rural areas conquered by the CCP, the 1947 Agrarian Reform Law gave men and women equal rights to the land. The impact of this revolution in property relations for women was electrifying. By 1949 in older liberated areas, 50 to 70 percent of women worked on the land. In some villages, peasant women were the main activists in confiscating landlord property. When the Communists finally won the civil war, they swept away much of the feudalist garbage suffocating

Chinese women (e.g., arranged marriages, female infanticide and the selling of peasant girls into concubinage to wealthy landlords, merchants and moneylenders).

The declaration of the People's Republic of China in October 1949 marked the birth of a bureaucratically deformed workers state. The proletariat, atomized after two decades of repression under both the Guomindang and the Japanese and further weakened by the severe economic decline of the 1930s, played no role as a class in the 1949 Revolution. Extraordinary historical circumstances made possible this peasant-based social overturn, including the internal decay of the corrupt GMD regime and the existence of the Soviet Union, which gave material aid to Mao's forces. Entering the war against Japan in its last weeks, Soviet forces rapidly moved into Manchuria (remaining until May 1946) and northern Korea (where they stayed until late 1948), as well as several other Japanese-held areas.

The 1949 Revolution brought literacy to the younger generation of women through free universal education, a crucial step toward their integration into economic and social life. On May Day 1950, the government promulgated



Military Museum, Beijing

Peasant woman with bound feet denounces landlord. Women played key role in struggle against old order.



Soviet troops in Harbin, Manchuria after driving out Japanese imperialist occupiers in 1945 at end of World War II.

a Marriage Law that banned concubinage and arranged marriages while giving women the right of divorce and to own property. Many a peasant daughter, daughter-in-law or wife was able for the first time in Chinese history to choose her own marriage partner, reject a violent husband or leave an exploitative household. These newly established rights were publicized in mass agitational campaigns and popularized with such slogans as “Women hold up half the sky” and “Anything a man can do, women can also do.”

But the Marriage Law met stubborn resistance in the countryside. In the years after its promulgation, an estimated 80,000 people were killed annually over marriage issues, chiefly young women attempting to assert their rights. CCP cadre assigned to enforce the law in the villages often had family and kinship relations to male heads of household, and most bowed to the overwhelming pressure to maintain the traditional family. The formal rights of young unmarried women and those who wanted to leave their husbands were undermined by a lack of economic independence. Not only did the primitive agricultural economy provide barely enough for subsistence living, but the head of the household—in most cases the woman’s father, father-in-law or husband—had control of the land. Nor did the collectivization of agriculture and the development of the rural communes in the mid-late 1950s significantly reduce women’s economic dependence on the patriarchal family structure. Even when granted a divorce, a woman did not get a share of the property of her former husband’s family.

Peasant Women Under Mao

China under Mao lacked the economic resources to provide the mass of peasant women (and men) with employment in industry and other urban economic sectors. However, even given these objective constraints, the policies and practices of the Mao regime contributed to the continuing oppression of women, especially in the countryside. The economic strategy pursued in this period aimed to maximize the surplus extracted from agriculture and redirect it to investment in capital-intensive technologies in urban-centered industrial production. Industrial output increased from 20 to 45 percent of the net material product from 1952 to 1975. But in

the same period the nonagricultural labor force increased from 16 to only 23 percent of the total labor force (Carl Riskin, *China’s Political Economy: The Quest for Development Since 1949* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987]).

Because agricultural production methods remained so labor-intensive, peasant families had an economic incentive, reinforced by traditional Confucian attitudes, to have a large number of (preferably male) children. This further increased the burden on peasant women. Within the framework of the rural communes, families derived much of their income from sales of handicrafts and produce grown on private plots. The regulations and practices governing the communes discriminated against women, who received on average less income (work points) than men even for doing similar tasks. While income earned by women was calculated separately, the combined family income was given to the (typically male) head of household.

There was an attempt to establish communal kitchens during the Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s, a utopian adventure aimed at catapulting China to the level of the advanced industrial countries through mobilizing mass peasant labor. But the poor quality of the kitchens generated huge discontent, and they were quickly abandoned when the Great Leap collapsed, an event that led an exhausted society into one of the worst famines in history. We oppose the forced communalization of the peasantry and the elimination of all restraints on the duration and intensity of labor that characterized Mao’s disastrous Great Leap Forward.

As part of the post-Mao “market reforms,” in the early 1980s the agricultural communes were dissolved and replaced by the “household responsibility” system, a reversion to individual family farming based on long-term (up to 30-year) leases. This initially led to an increase in productivity. However, the “reforms” have had major negative effects on the conditions of peasant women, including a marked widening in the educational levels of rural men and women and the return on a significant scale of female infanticide and sex-selective abortions.

The communes had provided free primary and secondary schooling to all children. When the communes were broken up, this responsibility was transferred to the rural townships. But the central government slashed funding (which has since gradually increased), so local authorities imposed stiff tuition and other fees. As a consequence, the number of students enrolled in primary schools declined from 129 to 90 million and in secondary schools from 48 to 26 million between 1978 and 1993 (Tamara Jacka, *Women’s Work in Rural China: Change and Continuity in an Era of Reform* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997]). This decline was overwhelmingly concentrated among girls, as many peasant families were willing to make the economic sacrifice for their sons. A more recent study reported in the state-run *China Daily* (2 April 2007) shows that from 2000 to 2005 the number of illiterate Chinese adults jumped by one-third, from 87 million to 116 million—and they are disproportionately women.

Today, upon marriage a young woman still typically moves to her husband’s village and, often, into his parents’ household. The young married woman is thus subject to the author-

ity of her in-laws, especially her mother-in-law. The pre-1949 system of arranged marriages in rural areas has been replaced by semi-arranged marriages. While it is rare for couples to be forced or pressured into marrying against their will, marrying without the consent of the respective parents is frowned on. Traditional practices such as the bride price and dowry remain common, and have in fact become more prevalent in the post-Mao "reform" era as a consequence of the reversion to individual family farming. Recently, the government has announced that peasants will be able to sell their leaseholds to other peasants or various private enterprises. How this will play out in reality is to date unclear.

The Return of Female Infanticide

Despite the growing inequalities, even the average peasant woman is significantly better off today. Electrification of the countryside was a huge advance, providing greater access to labor-saving appliances such as refrigerators and washing machines, as well as basic modern technology (e.g., televisions). In the cities, those women who have gained a measure of financial independence correspondingly have a greater degree of sexual freedom. Premarital sex, once illegal under the Stalinists' puritanical moral code, is commonplace, while divorce is far more readily available. According to China's Ministry of Civil Affairs, the divorce rate has more than tripled nationwide since 1985.

But market forces have unleashed backward social tendencies that are the natural twin of exploitation, bringing a recrudescence of some of the more hideous oppressive aspects of the old China. A stark manifestation is the resurgence of female infanticide, signaled by a sharp rise of infant mortality among girl children. This has been accompanied by the now common practice of sex-selective abortions made possible through ultrasound medical technology. According to Liu Bohong, vice director of the women's studies institute under the All-China Women's Federation, China's sex ratio for newborns in 2005 was 123 boys for every 100 girls. (The international average is 104-107 boys for every 100 girls.)

As against Mao, Deng considered uncontrolled popula-

tion growth to be a major obstacle to China's modernization. In the late 1970s, the government imposed a restrictive family policy, enforced with stiff economic penalties, limiting urban couples to one child and rural couples to two (but only if the first is a daughter or born handicapped; there is no limit on the number of children among national minorities). In the mid 1980s, the Deng regime began to eliminate guaranteed lifetime employment for workers in state-owned enterprises, the "iron rice bowl," which also guaranteed a basic level of social benefits. Except for a small minority of older employees entitled to state-funded pensions, the mass of workers are now dependent in their old age on personal savings and the support of their children; since daughters typically marry out, they care for their husbands' parents in old age. Thus the "one child" policy, combined with patriarchal family structure and the far greater earning capacity of men compared to women, has resulted in a marked sexual imbalance even in the cities. For example, in Beijing 109 boys were born for every 100 girls in 2005.

The situation in the countryside is now even more extreme and in stark contrast to the period immediately after the Revolution, when the nationalization of land, its egalitarian distribution to the peasantry and the subsequent agricultural collectivization provided a minimum economic existence to all. During the first three decades of the People's Republic, the sex ratio of newborn children corresponded to the natural demographic norm. With the labor-intensive agricultural technology on the rural communes, the more members of the household, daughters as well as sons, doing farm work or related construction activities, the more work points were earned and the greater the income available to the entire peasant household.

Today, the elimination of free medical care, another important aspect of the market-oriented "reforms," has hit peasant families and migrant workers especially hard. A male child will typically be born in a clinic or hospital, a female at home; a son when sick will be taken to a doctor but not so a daughter. Since the abolition of the communes, most plots in China are so small that they can be effectively worked by one

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or two experienced peasants; having more members of the household engaged in farm work is economically redundant.

A resurgence in superstitious beliefs and religious cults (such as Falun Gong) has also accompanied the destruction of the system of free medical care, as people turn to “traditional medicine” and other holdovers from the days of old China (see “Falun Gong: Force for Counterrevolution in China,” *Workers Vanguard* No. 762, 3 August 2001).

Birth control—a key instrument in enabling women to have control over their own lives—is a critical question for a country with 20 percent of the world’s people but only 7 percent of its arable land. A workers and peasants government in China would encourage, through education, the *voluntary* self-limitation of family size. We stand for the right of individual women to decide whether to have children and how many. As we wrote over a decade ago: “In the Chinese deformed workers state with its brutal repressive apparatus, the regime has used a myriad of means to limit births, from economic incentives to rigid bureaucratic control over the masses of workers and peasants, which in the very personal matter of childbearing can be hideously intrusive” (“China: ‘Free Market’ Misery Targets Women,” *Women and Revolution* No. 45, Winter-Spring 1996).

A government based on democratically elected workers and peasants councils would make reversing the present sexual imbalance a key priority. Through central economic planning, it would seek to provide all Chinese citizens with free, quality medical care, and to make state-funded pensions available to both urban workers and rural toilers. The resources necessary to support those too old (or ill or disabled) to work should come from the collective economic surplus generated by the laboring population, and not be dependent on individual savings or the income of one’s children. A workers government would promote methods to encourage the education and training of young women as a means toward breaking down the cultural prejudice in favor of sons that has been reinforced by the market-oriented policies of the bureaucracy.

Liberating women from the patriarchal peasant family requires the rational collectivization and modernization of agriculture. With the majority of the population still living in the countryside, where production methods remain primitive and there is little modern infrastructure, such collectivization would entail a profound transformation of Chinese society.

The introduction of modern technology—from combines to chemical fertilizers to the whole complex of scientific farming—would require a qualitatively higher industrial base than now exists. In turn, an increase in agricultural productivity would raise the need for a huge expansion of urban industrial jobs to absorb the surplus of labor no longer needed in the countryside. Clearly, this would involve a lengthy process, particularly given the relatively low level of productivity of China’s existing industrial base. Both the tempo and, in the final analysis, realizability of this perspective hinge on the aid that China would receive from a socialist Japan or a socialist America, underlining again the need for international proletarian revolution.

From Young Peasant Woman to Migrant Worker

Following the 1949 Revolution, the nationalization of the economy and inauguration of central planning brought millions of women into social production for the first time.

Most, however, were relegated to the least skilled, least mechanized and lower paying jobs. They also made up the majority of cooperative factory workers as opposed to the largely male workforce in the more skilled, mechanized and higher paid state enterprises. Further, over half of some 30 million workers who lost their jobs when many state enterprises were privatized or restructured in the mid-late 1990s were women. But while women’s employment in state industry decreased, it soared in private industry, especially in factories owned by foreign and offshore Chinese capital. This development is likely to be reversed during the current global economic downturn.

Female migrant workers are overwhelmingly young and single, typically moving to the cities while still in their teens. Most endure grueling sweatshop conditions. The working day averages 11 to 12 hours, often seven days a week. Labor discipline is harsh, with wages often based on productivity and pay docked for any defects in the product. Residential segregation is common, often in crowded dormitories. Safety precautions and mechanisms are primitive or nonexistent. A government study in the mid 1990s found that toxic or other unsafe conditions were present in 40 percent of industrial enterprises in Shenzhen, a major manufacturing center in Guangdong (Tao Jie, Zheng Bijun and Shirley L. Mow, eds., *Holding Up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future* [New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004]).

Yet every year millions of young women leave their villages for the factories of urban China. And most know what awaits them, for they usually seek employment in industrial or other enterprises where relatives and friends from their village are already working. Even taking into account the higher cost of living in the cities, the economic advantages of becoming a migrant worker are substantial. In 2007, according to official government statistics, the annual net per capita income among rural families was 4,140 yuan. The same year, the average income of migrant workers was 14,400 yuan—more than three times as much. One young woman graphically described the squalor of the family farm from which she had escaped: “To lighten their [her parents’] load, I went to the mountains to collect pig feed, and then fed the pigs and the ducks; at harvest helped in the fields, all day in the mud, like a mud monkey; still couldn’t buy a decent piece of clothes” (quoted in Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999]).

Many women also seek to avoid parental and community pressure to marry young, and to experience at least for a few years the cultural advantages of urban life. When asked why they originally migrated, many young women interviewed by Australian researcher Tamara Jacka answered “to develop myself,” “to broaden my horizons,” “to exercise independence,” “for my education” or similar responses (Jacka, *Rural Women in Urban China: Gender, Migration, and Social Change* [London: M.E. Sharpe, 2006]).

In *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), Pun Ngai, a Hong Kong academic of feminist sympathies, quotes the words of one of the few relatively older women workers in the factory, a cook in the cafeteria: “We never dreamed of leaving the family and the village. Women,



AFP



Morris/Far Eastern Economic Review

Migrants wait at railway station in eastern China to return to cities where they work. Right: Taiwanese-owned electronics factory in Guangdong.

always kept at home, did all the cooking and chores, waiting to get married and give birth to sons." As harsh as factory conditions are for migrant women workers, life in the impoverished villages before 1978 was even worse. The experience of working in the cities underscores the contrast between town and country. As one migrant woman worker commented: "When you've lived in the city for a while, your thinking changes, you're constantly thinking about how to improve life in the countryside" (quoted in Leslie T. Chang, *Factory Girls* [New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2008]).

Many migrant women workers experience relative economic independence and social freedom for only a few years, after which they return to their villages to get married. But they return with a new sense of social consciousness and proletarian power, often gained through direct experience in collective struggle against the capitalist employers.

The immense potential power of China's industrial proletariat was shown in spring 2007 in a series of strikes by port workers in Shenzhen, the fourth-largest container port in the world. In 2004, Shenzhen saw labor protests involving 300,000 workers. In nearby Huizhou, women workers took the lead in a series of militant labor actions, halting production lines and blocking access roads, against Gold Peak Industrial Holding Ltd., a Hong Kong- and Singapore-based corporation that owned and operated two electric battery factories in the city.

Abolish the Stalinists' Discriminatory Hukou System!

The bureaucracy's household registration (*hukou*) system, which severely restricts urban residency, education and health care for rural Chinese, makes migrants' tenure in the city transitory and insecure. Migrant workers receive only temporary residence permits—for a substantial fee—and

some have no permits at all. If women migrants marry and especially if they get pregnant, they are likely to be fired and unlikely to be hired elsewhere. Urban men are loath to marry a woman with a rural *hukou*. Married migrant couples often pay much more for their children's health care and schooling than those with official permanent urban residency.

The bureaucracy's *hukou* system has in effect created an internal immigrant population concentrated in the lowest levels of the working class. Established in 1955 under Mao, the *hukou*'s original purpose was to ration goods in an economy of scarcity, especially by preventing a mass of peasants from flooding into the cities to seek jobs in state enterprises, where employment was restricted to legal urban residents. With the opening up of China to foreign investment, the *hukou* has taken on a different function. The spread of foreign-owned manufacturing facilities has been based on the mobility, insecure legal status and very low wages of a huge migrant workforce. While some migrants have been hired in state-owned enterprises on a temporary basis, this key sector of China's economy has largely remained the preserve of workers with an urban *hukou*. Thus the bureaucracy has served as a sort of labor contractor for imperialist capital and offshore Chinese capitalists. The *hukou* also serves to reinforce the family: it is inherited and records are kept by the household head, to be produced, for example, by the parents before a person can marry.

The migrant population is itself divided between those who have legal status and those who do not. Almost all migrant workers in factories and other major enterprises like Wal-Mart have temporary urban residency permits. However, there are millions of "undocumented" migrants—no one knows exactly how many—who eke out an existence as casual laborers, housemaids and nannies, street vendors and the like. The need to tamp down on social discontents in

both rural and urban areas and to ensure a stable labor supply has led the regime to consider reforming or replacing the *hukou* system; trial reforms have been enacted in some areas. Nonetheless, in the buildup to the 2008 Olympics, the Beijing authorities launched a crackdown on migrant workers, forcing hundreds of thousands—many of whom had built the Olympic facilities under grueling conditions—to leave the city. We oppose the arbitrary and discriminatory *hukou* system and call for migrant workers to have the same rights and access to benefits as legally recognized residents.

China's workers need a Trotskyist party to lead a political revolution that ousts the privileged Stalinist bureaucratic caste and establishes a government based on democratically elected workers and peasants councils representing *all* sectors of the proletariat and the rural toilers. Crucial questions facing the workers state can be resolved effectively only when those who labor decide. These questions range from issues of military and international policy to domestic economic policy, including such administrative measures as may be needed to deal with population mobility or particular instances of scarcity or disaster. As Trotsky put it: "It is not a question of substituting one ruling clique for another, but of changing the very methods of administering the economy and guiding the culture of the country. Bureaucratic autocracy must give place to Soviet democracy" (*The Revolution Betrayed*).

Migrant Workers and Pro-Capitalist "Democrats"

The CCP bureaucracy now includes substantial elements with familial or other ties to capitalist entrepreneurs, and in 2007 the rubber-stamp National People's Congress enacted a law strengthening private property rights for individuals and businesses. Nonetheless, the bureaucracy still rests on the material base of the collectivized economy, from which it derives its power and income. However, it defends the gains embodied in the Chinese deformed workers state only to the extent that it fears the proletariat. Faced with seething anger at the base of society, the Hu regime is treading warily, slowing down some "free market" measures in the name of building a "harmonious society" while imprisoning and even executing some officials for blatant corruption.

In 2006, the official CCP propaganda department issued a statement expressing concern over the low wages paid to migrant workers by their employers (*Face-to-Face with Theoretical Hot Spots* [Beijing: Study Press and People's Publishing House, 2006]). Worried that the terrible pay and working conditions could produce broader unrest among migrant workers, the bureaucracy has enacted a new labor law that encourages long-term labor contracts and greater access to benefits for migrant workers. The state-run All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is now organizing enterprises owned by offshore Chinese capitalists and foreign corporations.

Thus the aggressively anti-union American retail giant Wal-Mart has been forced to accept union recognition in its 100-plus outlets in China. A 2006 article in *Japan Focus* described how workers at a Wal-Mart store in Fujian fought to organize their union: "At 6.30 a.m. they declared the union branch formed and sang the Internationale beneath a banner that read, 'Determined to take the road to develop trade unionism with Chinese characteristics!'" (Anita Chan,

"Organizing Wal-Mart: The Chinese Trade Union at a Crossroads," *Japan Focus*, 8 September 2006).

A number of Western and Chinese feminist academics who have spoken out on behalf of migrant women workers claim the latter can find allies among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other "humanitarian" agencies sponsored and financed by capitalist foundations and governments. The idea that such imperialist institutions will act as friends of migrant workers is worse than a myth—it means siding with forces that represent the class enemies of China's working people.

In the course of their struggles, some migrants—for example, the 12,000 mainly women workers who staged a series of strikes against Uniden, a Japanese electronics firm, in 2005—have demanded the right to form their own, independent trade unions. The struggle for unions free of bureaucratic control is important for China's embattled working people, but defense of the workers state that issued out of the 1949 Revolution must be a guiding principle in this fight. This is especially important given the maneuvers of pro-capitalist forces who promote so-called "independent unions" in the name of Western-style "democracy"—i.e., the rule of the capitalist exploiters with a parliamentary facade.

The imperialists and their labor lieutenants seek to channel the just struggles of workers in China in such a counter-revolutionary direction. Among the forces they have championed is the Hong Kong-based *China Labour Bulletin* (*CLB*), whose leading figure, Han Dongfang, has had a regular program on the CIA-funded Radio Free Asia, where he postures as a defender of Chinese workers. More recently, citing the new labor law, *CLB* has called for people to work inside the official ACFTU unions. The political program pursued by Han and his ilk does not serve the interests of the Chinese proletariat but rather the forces of renewed imperialist subjugation and exploitation. The kind of union that he and his handlers would like to build is often compared to Polish *Solidarność*. This self-styled "free trade union," supported by Washington and the Vatican, spearheaded the capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet sphere in the 1980s. After coming to power in 1989, the *Solidarność* regime presided over the restoration of brutal capitalist exploitation, devastating the livelihoods and living standards of the work-



Hong Kong-based Han Dongfang promotes pro-imperialist counterrevolution on CIA-funded Radio Free Asia.



Peter Turnley

May 1989: Contingent from Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation arriving in Tiananmen Square. Entry of proletariat into mass student protests heralded incipient political revolution.

ing class—particularly women workers—and launching a frontal assault on women’s rights, including a near total ban on abortion.

Various reformist groups internationally give “left” cover to such flagrantly pro-capitalist forces. Thus the French Lutte Ouvrière (LO) invited an official *CLB* spokesman, Cai Chongguo, to address a forum at its annual Fête near Paris in May 2007. International Communist League comrades intervened there to denounce LO’s invitation to this counterrevolutionary and its history of support to Solidarność and other pro-imperialist forces in the USSR and East Europe.

Even more blatant is the British-based Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) led by Peter Taaffe, which maintains the *China Worker* Web site. The CWI calls for a “democratic socialist alternative” to the CCP regime. What this means in practice is shown by the CWI’s participation in a 4 June 2008 “pro-democracy” rally called by openly pro-capitalist forces in Hong Kong, ostensibly to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. *China Worker*’s report (6 June 2008) hailed this “excellent mobilisation” and quoted uncritically the speech by its organizers, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, an outfit whose “operational goals” include the call for “a democratic China.”

In Britain and other imperialist countries, the CWI acts as rank social democrats, pushing illusions in bourgeois parliamentarism—the dictatorship of the exploiters in “democratic” guise. Transplanted to a workers state, this becomes a program for counterrevolution, as shown in the Taaffeites’ hailing the Solidarność “union” in Poland 1981. In 1991 they were on Boris Yeltsin’s barricades when he ushered in the period of open capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union. Ever since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, social democracy has condemned the workers states in the name of “democracy.” The CWI’s ideologi-

cal progenitor, the German “left” Social Democrat Karl Kautsky, railed against the proletarian dictatorship and propagated the illusion of “pure democracy.” For Marxists, the question is always *democracy for which class?* As Lenin emphasized, the fight to liberate the working class means a fight for “the new, proletarian, democracy which must replace bourgeois democracy and the parliamentary system” (Lenin, “Resolution to the Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” March 1919).

Taaffe claims that “The tasks facing workers in China today are a confirmation in a new and original form of Trotsky’s theory of the permanent revolution,” and calls “to link the struggle for democratic rights with the struggle for socialism” (“China at the Crossroads,” *China Worker* online, 24 May 2007). This is an outrageous falsification of Trotsky’s theory—recasting the permanent revolution in “democratic” capitalist guise, applying it to a workers state, then turning it into a call for “democratic” counter-revolution! The fight for authentic Leninist-

Trotskyist leadership and a proletarian political revolution in China is premised on *unconditional military defense* of the workers state against the forces of counterrevolution.

For Proletarian Revolutionary Leadership

The Chinese bureaucracy’s accommodation to world imperialism has proceeded from the false postulate that if it can “neutralize” the chances of military intervention through “peaceful coexistence,” then China can become a global superpower and indeed build “socialism in one country.” But the imperialists have weapons other than military ones: one of their central objectives is to undermine the Chinese government’s control over banking and currency movements. The huge balance-of-trade surpluses run up by China have created substantial pressures within American and some European ruling circles for anti-Chinese protectionism, a policy favored by the Democratic Party in the U.S. In China, the developing global economic downturn could ignite serious social struggle.

At some point, likely when bourgeois elements in and around the bureaucracy move to eliminate CCP political power, the explosive social tensions building up in Chinese society will shatter the political structure of the ruling bureaucratic caste. When that happens, China’s fate will be starkly posed. Either the workers will sweep away the parasitic ruling elite through a proletarian political revolution that defends and extends the gains of the 1949 Revolution and makes China a bastion of the struggle for world socialism, or capitalist counterrevolution will triumph, bringing back devastating imperialist subjugation and exploitation.

The potential for a pro-socialist workers uprising was shown in the May-June 1989 upheaval centered on Tiananmen Square. Protests that began among students opposing corruption and seeking political liberalization were joined by millions of workers across China, driven into action by their own grievances against the growing impact of the

regime's market measures, especially high inflation. Workers assemblies and motorized flying squads were thrown up, pointing to the potential for the emergence of authentic worker, soldier and peasant councils.

The entry into struggle of the working class terrified the CCP rulers, who eventually unleashed fierce repression. But the bureaucracy, including the officer corps, began to fracture under the impact of the proletarian upsurge. The first army units that were mobilized refused to act in the face of enormous popular support for the protests among Beijing's working people. The massacres of June 1989, which overwhelmingly targeted the workers, could be carried out only after the regime brought in army units more loyal to Deng.

The ICL covered these events extensively in our press, calling to "Oust the Bureaucrats—For Lenin's Communism! Workers and Soldiers Soviets Must Rule!" (See "Upheaval in China," *Workers Vanguard* No. 478, 26 May 1989, and "Beijing Massacre—Civil War Looms," *Workers Vanguard* No. 479, 9 June 1989.) A proletarian political revolution in China would have posed pointblank the need to defend and extend the social gains of the workers state against capitalist counterrevolution. What was missing was Leninist-Trotskyist leadership.

The role such a leadership would play was seen later that year in the upheaval in the German Democratic Republic (DDR), in no small part influenced by the heroic struggle of the Chinese workers and students. When the East German population rose up against bureaucratic privilege and mismanagement, the Stalinist regime began to disintegrate. Up to a million people rallied in mass protests, raising slogans such as "For communist ideals—No privileges." The ICL undertook the biggest intervention in our history, fighting for workers and soldiers councils to be forged and to take power. The power of our Trotskyist program was shown in the 250,000-strong demonstration on 3 January 1990 against the fascist desecration of a monument honoring Soviet soldiers in East Berlin's Treptow Park and in defense of the USSR and DDR. We initiated the call for this mobilization, which was taken up by the ruling Stalinist party because it feared how much our program resonated among East Berlin workers and felt compelled to mobilize its base. Treptow was a turning point; in the face of the developing potential of organized working-class resistance to counterrevolution, the Soviet bureaucracy under Mikhail Gorbachev moved rapidly to give a green light to capitalist reunification, and the DDR Stalinist regime followed suit.

Our fight for workers political revolution in the DDR combined with socialist revolution in West Germany—i.e., the *revolutionary* reunification of Germany—was a direct challenge to the sellout of the DDR to West German imperialism. As we wrote in our 1992 ICL conference document: "As Treptow later showed, from the beginning we were in a political struggle with the abdicating Stalinist regime over the future of the DDR.... Although shaped by the disproportion of forces, there was in fact a contest between the ICL program of political revolution and the Stalinist program of capitulation and counterrevolution" ("For the Communism of Lenin and Trotsky!", *Spartacist* No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93). But we lacked the time and sufficient forces to sink the necessary roots into the working class.

We lost, yet our intervention showed how, when an accumulation of events in a bureaucratically deformed workers state finally produces an upheaval and a crack in bureaucratic rule, it is possible for even a small Leninist-Trotskyist nucleus with a revolutionary internationalist program to have a massive impact.

In the struggle for proletarian political revolution in China, the fight for women's liberation must be a central issue. A revolutionary workers and peasants government would expropriate the newly fledged class of Chinese capitalist entrepreneurs and renegotiate the terms of foreign investment in the interests of the working people, insisting, for example, that wages, benefits and working conditions for women and all workers are at least at the same level as in the state sector. It would put an end to bureaucratic arbitrariness and corruption. It would create a centrally planned and managed economy under conditions of proletarian democracy that would take measures to eliminate the unemployment that hits women workers particularly hard, and to provide a basic level of economic security for the whole population, while understanding that achieving material prosperity for all of China's toilers hinges on the struggle to shatter the grip of imperialism worldwide.

The fight for a Leninist-Trotskyist party in China means a fight to revive the liberating and internationalist Marxism that animated Chen Duxiu and the other founders of the Chinese Communist Party, whose starting point was the world struggle for socialist revolution. In sharp contrast to the Stalinists' glorification of the family, Trotskyists understand that the complete emancipation of women can come only with the advent of a global communist society that marks an end to material scarcity once and for all. Women will then be full participants in an undreamed-of emancipation of human potential and a monumental forward surge of civilization. As Marx and Engels pointed out more than 160 years ago, "'Liberation' is an historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, the conditions of intercourse" (*The German Ideology* [1846]).

A proletarian political revolution in China raising the banner of socialist internationalism would shake the world, not least capitalist Taiwan. It would shatter the "death of communism" ideological climate propagated by the imperialist rulers since the destruction of the USSR. It would radicalize the working class of Japan, the industrial powerhouse and would-be imperialist overlord of Asia, and spark a fight for the revolutionary reunification of Korea through political revolution in the deformed workers state in the North and socialist revolution in the capitalist South. It would reverberate among the masses of the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, the Philippines, Australia and beyond, including southern Africa and the imperialist heartlands of North America and West Europe. And it would reignite the struggle for socialist revolution in the ex-Soviet Union and in East Europe, where the ravages of counterrevolution produced a social catastrophe of ruin, disease and barbarism, resulting in a dramatic plunge in life expectancy. It is to give leadership to such struggles that the ICL fights to reforge Trotsky's Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution. For women's liberation through world socialist revolution! ■

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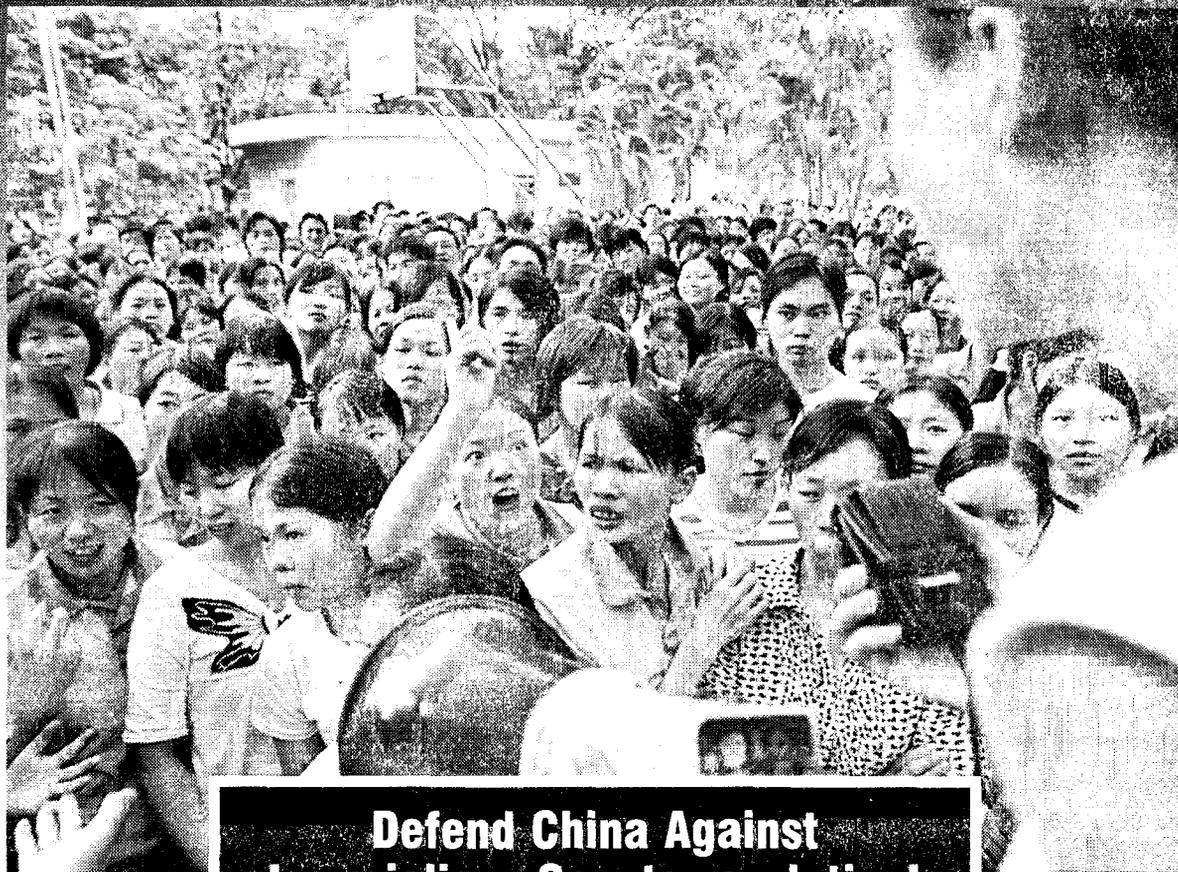
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Women and Revolution



Women Workers and the Contradictions of China Today



China Photos

**Defend China Against
Imperialism, Counterrevolution!
For Workers Political Revolution!**

Women workers at Shenzhen paper products factory demand back pay, October 2007.

The status of women today in China is a precise index of the huge contradictions in that society, a bureaucratically deformed work-

ers state that we Trotskyists defend unconditionally against imperialism and internal social counterrevolution. In the conditions of the women of China we see the enormous gains of the 1949 Revolution over the backward, imperialist-dominated and tradition-bound old China. The smashing of capitalist class rule laid the basis for a vast

growth in social production, living standards and women's rights and brought hundreds of millions of Chinese women and men out of rural

backwardness into the workforce of an increasingly industrialized society.

The advance of China since the 1949 Revolution and the ensuing collectivization of the economy, based on the expropriation of the bourgeoisie as a class, show the immense advantages of an economy whose motor force is not production for private profit. Until the 2008 global economic downturn, China's annual economic growth rate

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