

# International Internal Discussion Bulletin

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# In Reply to the IMT's Open Letter Number 2

[The following resolution on Argentina was presented for a vote by the Leninist Trotskyist Faction at the January 27-30, 1975, meeting of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International. The vote was, *decisive vote*: for—12, against—30; *consultative vote*: for—21, against—18.]

## Whose Responsibility?

### 1.

On July 26, 1974, the majority of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International published an "open letter" entitled "Whither the PST?" which was directed to the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores. The objective of the statement was to try to show that the PST was following a class-collaborationist policy in clear violation of the principles of Trotskyism.

In a reply dated August 20, 1974, "In Defense of the PST and the Truth," we deplored the decision of the majority of the United Secretariat to engage in a public attack on our party on matters that ordinarily would be discussed within the ranks of the world Trotskyist movement. We regretted that the action taken by the majority of the United Secretariat left us no recourse but to answer in public.

The majority of the United Secretariat was obviously disconcerted by our reply, which set the record straight, including criticizing ourselves for some mistakes we had made. But instead of closing the public debate on this subject and referring continuation of the dispute—if this was thought necessary—to the internal bulletins of the movement, the majority of the United Secretariat decided to publish another "open letter," which they apparently hope will prove less fragile than the first one. This was made public in the December 12, 1974, issue of *Inprecor*.

We again express regret that the

majority members of the United Secretariat have chosen to follow this course. They have assumed a grave responsibility.

We would like to stress the point all the more since the majority members of the United Secretariat have chosen in their second open letter to misrepresent our stand. They state that it was "at the request of the PST" that the United Secretariat decided to continue the public discussion.

Nothing of the kind. We took the opposite position that the debate be internal.

In addition, we have been informed that a minority of the United Secretariat, that is, the representatives of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction, whose views we share, not only opposed the contents of the new statement but argued against continuing the discussion of this subject in public and warned that it could further damage the authority of the United Secretariat. They had taken the same position on the first open letter submitted by the majority of the United Secretariat, and they contended that the resulting exchange had confirmed their forecast.

The majority members of the United Secretariat, who adhere to the International Majority Tendency, the faction that gained a majority vote at the last world congress of the Fourth International, again rejected the advice of the LTF leaders. There is thus no question that the IMT leaders knowingly assumed responsibility for opening and continuing this public attack on the PST.

## Some Questions Best Discussed Internally

### 2.

Before proceeding to issues of greater substance, we would like to call attention to the tone of the new open letter. The IMT leaders accept in the most grudging way our explanation

of why *Avanzada Socialista* mistakenly gave the impression that we had signed a document that also carried the signatures of the representatives of the Communist party and several bourgeois parties. If they found it inadvisable to criticize themselves for their suspicions, they would have done better to simply say no more and drop the matter.

Instead they decided to bring forward new grounds for throwing blame on us: "The comrades of the PST were invited to three successive meetings of the United Secretariat to explain their attitude toward the meeting and document of March 21, 1974. They did not attend any of these meetings."

The IMT leaders fail to mention that a representative of the United Secretariat visited Argentina. We explained to him how the error came to be made in *Avanzada Socialista*, and we thought that our explanation was accepted. No doubt we should have sent a formal written explanation.

However, why present such an organizational complaint to the public after acknowledging that we did not sign the famous document?

In return we would like to ask the IMT leaders to answer the following question: "In view of your recent interest in improving relations with us and making it easier to respond to your invitations to attend meetings of the United Secretariat, would it not be well to rectify your policy and end the ban you imposed on PST observers being present?"

We are referring to the fact that immediately after the last world congress and *before* we allegedly added our signatures to a class-collaborationist document, the leaders of the International Majority Tendency *specifically* barred the PST from having observers present at meetings of the United Secretariat.

This action, it is worth noting, was taken against the largest contingent

of the world Trotskyist movement, a contingent organized moreover in the difficult conditions of a semicolonial country.

We would also like to ask the leaders of the IMT about another matter. An addendum dated July 12, 1974, was attached to Open Letter No. 1. The addendum accused us of having signed a second document like the first one we were alleged to have signed. The addendum specified the exact date of the supposed crime: "June 29, 1974." It accused us further of having signed a third document of similar class-collaborationist nature. The exact place, date, and circumstances were specified: "Santa Fe . . . July 3 . . . at the request of the president of the provincial chamber of deputies." Open Letter No. 2 grudgingly acknowledges our "affirmation" that we did not sign these documents.

Now we should like to ask: "Why, dear comrades, are you silent on your reasons for having included these fabrications in an official document of the Fourth International? Why do you refrain from offering a single word of explanation?"

We called attention in our reply of August 20, 1974, to the fact that the addendum to Open Letter No. 1 "was not considered at any meeting of the United Secretariat." It was never discussed or voted on by the United Secretariat. Yet it was presented to the public as part of an official document of the United Secretariat.

Just what is the explanation of that? Or do the leaders of the IMT consider the reasons to be so obvious as not to require any explanation even after attention has been called to it?

Was it, then, approved at a faction meeting held at an as yet undisclosed place and undisclosed date? Was it at such a meeting that a decision was made to use the name of the United Secretariat to lend authenticity to these concoctions found in the bourgeois press of Argentina?

## The Real Issue— Guerrillaism Versus Trotskyism

### 3.

Let us turn now to the political arguments leveled against us by the leaders of the IMT in their Open Letter No. 2.

The essence of these arguments is simple. It consists of lecturing us on the situation in Germany in the early thirties, citing numerous quotations from the writings of Leon Trotsky on the need for a united front of the mass proletarian organizations to fight German fascism, and accusing the PST of departing from the course outlined by Trotsky and seeking instead to organize a class-collaborationist front (i.e., a popular front) in the vain hope that in Argentina this will stem the assault of the ultrarightists and their backers in ruling circles.

First, on the quotations from Trotsky. We have no quarrel with them although we note that the selection is one-sided. We agree with Trotsky's analysis of the situation in Germany in the early thirties and his conclusions as to what ought to have been done there. His position, in fact, is not new to us. We recommend what Trotsky had to say on the German situation more than forty years ago to everyone interested in the problem of stemming an ultraright advance, above all in imperialist countries.

In particular we recommend to the IMT leaders that they themselves re-study Trotsky's writings on this subject, for they seem to have missed the main point Trotsky was making—that the purpose of forming a united front of the mass proletarian organizations is to mobilize the working class and its allies *by the millions* against the fascist threat.

Insofar as it is possible to compare the situation in Germany in the early thirties with the situation today in Argentina (we note the admission of the IMT leaders that "Argentina in 1974 is not Germany in 1932"), our objective has been the same as the one projected by Trotsky—to *help mobilize the masses by the millions to carry out a socialist revolution*.

It was by hewing to this objective that we were able to build the largest national organization of the world Trotskyist movement to date and to root it deeply in the Argentine working class and its trade unions. It was this concentration on the objective fought for by Trotsky that has assured such a high proletarian composition to the membership of the PST. No other sector of the international Trotskyist movement comes near the PST in this

respect. It is a fact that ought to be weighed in judging the political course we have followed.

Why did the leaders of the IMT happen to miss the main point in the quotations they cited from Trotsky? The explanation is that since the world congress of the Fourth International held in 1969 they have been partisans of guerrilla war, or, to use the label they prefer, "armed struggle in Latin America." It is adherence to this view that lies behind their public attack on the PST, for the PST stands as living evidence of the incorrectness of their position.

Because of numerical (not political) reasons, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Combatiente) was recognized at the 1969 world congress of the Fourth International as the official section in Argentina. The PRT (Combatiente) had in reality developed a guerrillaist deviation which it was soon to carry to extreme lengths, going so far as to set up a guerrilla force, the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, that opened up "armed struggle" in complete isolation from the masses. Instead of seeking to rectify the guerrillaism of the PRT (Combatiente), the IMT leaders approved it. They held that its course was nothing less than a model application of the "turn" adopted by the majority at the 1969 world congress.

When the Socialist Workers party in the United States dissociated itself publicly in a mild way from one of the more flagrant departures of the ERP from Trotskyist principles, this dissociation was denounced by the leaders of the IMT as a gross violation of democratic centralism.

The official section in Argentina was never a Trotskyist organization, a fact that was fully known to the leaders of the IMT before the 1969 world congress. It adhered to Guevarism, Giapism, Maoism, and Kim Il Sungism. It held that the Fourth International harbored counterrevolutionaries in its ranks. It held that sectors of the Fourth International were redeemable but that a genuinely revolutionary international had yet to be built, and this was to be accomplished with the aid of other Latin American guerrilla groups plus the Cubans, the Chinese, and the Albanians.

Despite this, the IMT leaders continued to present the official section to the public as exemplary. They felt that its guerrilla actions more than compensated for its anti-Trotskyist politi-

cal positions.

It was not until the official section was on the verge of denouncing the Fourth International that the IMT finally ventured to formulate some criticisms of the course of the official section. Even then it kept its criticisms internal until the 1974 world congress.

The comradely procedure followed by the IMT leaders in relation to this anti-Trotskyist grouping stands in striking contrast to the way they have acted toward those who have sought to uphold the program of Trotskyism in Argentina.

During this same period, as mentioned above, we had to face the "normal" difficulties to be found in a semi-colonial country. In addition we had to face the complication of a guerrilla group that engaged in a highly provocative course and that was recommended to the public by the IMT leaders as a model of Trotskyism. Despite these difficulties we succeeded in building a relatively strong nucleus of revolutionary cadres.

The lesson and the result appears to us to be instructive. Nevertheless their significance was rejected by the IMT leaders. At the world congress in 1974 they reaffirmed "armed struggle" as the royal road in Latin America. Open Letter No. 2, like Open Letter No. 1, was written within the framework of this proguerrilla line and against the Trotskyist line followed by the PST for the past half decade in opposition to the guerrillism of the former official section.

The real issue is thus guerrillism versus Trotskyism. The questions of substance that have to be answered are: Is it possible to repeat the pattern of the Cuban revolution (as depicted by Guevara) elsewhere in Latin America or anywhere in the world? If so, what are the odds? Doesn't the guerrilla course followed by the Tupamaros and their kind amount to toying with insurrection, which was condemned long ago by the Marxist movement? Shouldn't the theory and practice of the guerrillas—despite the heroism displayed by many of them—be resolutely opposed as obstacles in the path of the proletarian revolution and the building of its vanguard party?

Instead of drawing the lessons that ought to be drawn, the IMT leaders prefer to follow a different course. By using dubious tidbits culled from the bourgeois press or bad formulations made by militants of the PST or the

staff of our press, they hope to persuade Trotskyists in other countries that we are crossing over to the side of the capitalist class.

If successful, this dubious enterprise would eliminate the need to determine just why the PST was able to score its notable gains and why the IMT made one of the worst blunders in the history of the Fourth International in supporting a Guevarist guerrilla group in Argentina, covering up its anti-Trotskyist views, and proclaiming it to be a model section of the world Trotskyist movement.

### Why the Relentless Search for 'Proofs'?

#### 4.

Appreciation of this background is a necessary requisite to understanding the differences held by the IMT leaders over our way of proceeding in defending democratic rights, trying to bolster Argentina's weak democratic institutions through mobilizing the masses in their defense, and fighting against the efforts of the ultraright to crush them.

For the Peronist and Guevarist guerrilla organizations, the political necessity of defending democratic rights and institutions hardly exists. They scorn bourgeois democracy. We, too, do not think it is much; that is why we propose to replace it with proletarian democracy. But we differ with such groups on whether bourgeois democracy (not the capitalist state that operates behind its façade) should be defended from attack by the ultraright. The formula of the guerrillas is to proceed, arms in hand, regardless of the situation—even if there are only a few dozen hands, even if the democratic institutions are threatened at the same time by powerful ultraright forces armed to the teeth and backed by a section of the army, and even if their guerrilla pinpricks, which they parade as "armed struggle," play into the hands of the foe as surely as if they had been planned by the rightists themselves.

The official section of the Fourth International held to this ultraleft view before it deserted; and, of course, it has maintained its ultraleft view and its ultraleft course ever since. The proguerrilla turn taken by the IMT at the world congress in 1969 and confirmed again in 1974 required adap-

tation to this ultraleftism. It is the ultraleft bias of the IMT leaders that prompts them in their Open Letter No. 2 to state that our way of defending democratic institutions leaves in question our attitude toward the *bourgeois state*. Only out and out Guevarists could have indicated more clearly the view that defense of democratic institutions against reactionary attacks equates to defense of the bourgeois state.

It is from this angle that the IMT leaders comb the Argentine bourgeois press and our publications for evidence to prove their thesis that the PST in defending democratic rights and institutions must inevitably slip, even if only "imperceptibly," toward a Kautskyist position of defending the bourgeois state. We will return to this point further on.

### Trotsky on Importance of Defending Bourgeois Democracy in General and in the Colonial and Semicolonial Countries Specifically

#### 5.

#### *In the Imperialist Sector*

In polemicizing against the ultralefts of his time on this question, Trotsky stressed the general importance of defending bourgeois democracy against reaction. The sectarians, he said, "refuse to draw a distinction between bourgeois democracy and fascism—as if the masses could help but feel the difference on every hand!" (*Transitional Program*.)

Trotsky continued: "Sectarians are capable of differentiating between but two colors: red and black. So as not to tempt themselves, they simplify reality. They refuse to draw a distinction between the fighting camps in Spain for the reason that both camps have a bourgeois character."

Trotsky spoke even more incisively against the ultralefts. Here is an example:

"These doctrinaires refuse to understand that we carry on half, three-quarters, or, in certain periods, even 99 percent of the preparation of the dictatorship *on the basis of democracy*, and in doing this we defend every inch of democratic positions under our feet. But if one can defend the democratic positions of the working class, then perhaps one may fight for them where they do not yet exist?"

"Democracy is a weapon of capitalism, our critics tell us; yes, but a contradictory one, just as capitalism as a whole is contradictory. Democracy serves the bourgeoisie, but within certain limits it can also serve the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. The unfortunate thing is that the Bordighists do not grasp democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat as historical institutions which can replace one another dialectically, but as two naked principles of which one embodies good, the other evil." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1930-31), p. 135. Emphasis added.)

In taking this general position, Trotsky, of course, placed no confidence whatsoever in the capacity of the bourgeoisie or any sector of it to offer an effective defense of bourgeois democracy. In fact he warned over and over against placing any confidence in the bourgeoisie. Revolutionary Marxists must retain complete independence from the bourgeoisie, even if marching side by side with a sector of the bourgeoisie in struggling against fascism. That is why Trotsky insisted on the use of proletarian methods to defend bourgeois democracy.

It is important to understand why it is in the interests of the working class to defend bourgeois democracy against reaction. First of all, as one of the conquests of the revolution that overturned feudalism, it is a heritage that belongs to the working class. Secondly, the greater the degree of bourgeois democracy, the easier it is for the proletariat to strengthen its own institutions and to organize for the coming socialist revolution. Thirdly, it constitutes a point of departure for the extension of democracy into the economic structure that will occur under world socialism. Fourthly, the bourgeoisie, both big and little, are increasingly incapable of defending democracy—in actuality the upper layers of the bourgeoisie tend more and more to turn against it; thus it devolves upon the proletariat to assume this task.

The necessity to defend bourgeois democracy against fascism constitutes one of the basic principles of the Trotskyist movement. Trotsky dealt extensively with this question not only

in connection with the struggle in Germany but also with those in Austria, Spain, France, the United States, and other countries.

We come now to a crucial point. The leaders of the IMT apparently consider the example of Germany to be their most telling argument. That is why they offer such extensive quotations from Trotsky on the struggle against fascism in Germany. But they simply reveal how abstract their approach is. It is true that they admit, as we noted above, that "Argentina in 1974 is not Germany in 1932." But this is only an escape clause. In exactly what way is the Argentina of 1974 not the Germany of 1932? They are mute on this, stopping precisely where they ought to have begun if they were to consider the situation concretely to develop a correct policy under the given conditions in Argentina.

Besides stating the *general* position of revolutionary Marxism in relation to defending bourgeois democracy against reaction, Trotsky took into account the division of the capitalist world into imperialist powers and colonial and semicolonial countries. From this he derived a basic distinction within bourgeois democracy between *imperialist* democracy and *colonial and semicolonial* democracy. In the imperialist countries, finance capital turns from democracy to fascism as political need dictates. In the epoch of the death agony of capitalism, democracy in the imperialist powers becomes increasingly less substantial, and the ease with which finance capital resorts to a strong state or fascism becomes increasingly marked.

#### *Colonial and Semicolonial Sector*

In the colonial and semicolonial world, on the other hand, bourgeois sectors are to be found that will offer at least a certain resistance to imperialism. In doing this they sometimes turn to the masses for support, even if only partially and for a short time. Such uncompleted democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution as *national independence* are thus thrust to the fore.

In Trotsky's time, a sector of the Mexican bourgeoisie under General Cárdenas provided an example that

is still worth studying. Another example occurred later in Argentina under General Perón.

Such cases can be considered rather rare and also evanescent. But at certain times they can be quite important tactically. Much more common, of course, are the cases in which sectors of the bourgeoisie, giving way to the latifundists or their own fears of the proletariat, serve as local agencies of imperialism. The Pinochet regime in Chile provides a good current example.

The different weight that Trotsky gave to democracy in the imperialist and semicolonial countries is clearly outlined in the letter he wrote in 1938 to the Cuban paper *El País*:

"Democracy for Mexico, for instance, signifies the desire of a semicolonial country to escape from bonded dependence, to give land to the peasants, to lift the Indians to a higher level of culture, and so on. In other words, the democratic problems of Mexico have a progressive and revolutionary character. And what does democracy signify in Great Britain? The maintenance of what exists, that is, above all the maintenance of the rule of the metropolis over the colonies. The same is true in relation to France. The banner of democracy covers here the imperialist hegemony of the privileged minority over the oppressed majority." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1938-39), second edition, p. 26.)

Trotsky was dealing in his letter with the struggle against fascism, and how this struggle in the semicolonial countries differs from that in the imperialist countries. He said among other things:

"In the same manner we cannot speak of fascism 'in general.' In Germany, Italy, and Japan, fascism and militarism are the weapons of a greedy, hungry, and therefore aggressive imperialism. In the Latin American countries fascism is the expression of the most slavish dependence on foreign imperialism."

Already we can see the insufficiency of the analogy drawn by the IMT leaders between the Germany of 1932 and the Argentina of 1974. The insufficiency is *qualitative*. It reduces the lesson of Germany to such a thin abstraction as to make it misleading if the utmost care is not used in ap-

plying it to the Argentine situation.

In the one case we are dealing with an imperialist power, in the other with a semicolonial country. The difference is decisive in determining the political course of the Trotskyists in each instance.

In Argentina we have to take into account as a prime element the struggle against a foreign imperialist power; and this affects the attitude that must be adopted toward the sector of the bourgeoisie that is inclined—however weakly and undependably—to resist imperialism and its most venal and brutal native agents. The struggle for national independence, a bourgeois democratic task, becomes one of our foremost considerations. In this our tasks differ from those of the Trotskyists in imperialist Germany, whether in 1932 or 1974.

How did the IMT leaders happen to leave this out of account in criticizing our course in Argentina? Was it just a lapse of memory ascribable to their lack of familiarity with the political problems of revolutionary Marxism in semicolonial countries?

#### *Trotsky Explains the Difference*

Let us listen to Trotsky a bit more on this question. In October 1938 he wrote an article dealing with the concessions granted by imperialist Britain to Hitler at Munich. In arguing in favor of a revolutionary defeatist policy in the imperialist democracies, Trotsky added the following proviso:

"All of this does not, of course, imply that there is no difference at all between democracy and fascism, or that this difference is of no concern to the working class, as the Stalinists insisted not so very long ago. Marxists have nothing in common with such cheap political nihilism. Only, it is necessary in each given instance clearly to comprehend the actual content of this difference, and its true limits.

"For the backward colonial and semicolonial countries, the struggle for democracy, including the struggle for national independence, represents a necessary and progressive stage of historical development. It is just for this reason that we deem it not only the right but also the duty of workers in these countries actively to participate in the 'defense of the fatherland' against imperialism, on condition, to be sure, that they preserve the complete independence of their class or-

ganizations and conduct a ruthless struggle against the poison of chauvinism. Thus, in the conflict between Mexico and the oil kings and their executive committee, which is the democratic government of Great Britain, the class conscious proletariat of the world sides wholly with Mexico (this does not of course apply to the imperialist lackeys at the head of the British Labour Party).

"As regards advanced capitalism, the latter has long since outgrown not only the old property forms but also the national state, and in consequence bourgeois democracy as well. The fundamental crisis of contemporary civilization lies precisely here. Imperialist democracy is putrefying and disintegrating. A program of 'defense of democracy' for the advanced countries is a program of reaction. The only progressive task here is the preparation of the international socialist revolution. Its aim is to smash the framework of the old national state and build up the economy in accordance with geographic and technological conditions, without medieval taxes and duties." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1938-39), second edition, pp. 64-65.)

Note what a sharp line Trotsky draws between the defense of bourgeois democracy in the colonial and semicolonial countries and its defense in the imperialist countries. In the one case it is "necessary and progressive"; in the other, it is a "program of reaction."

Lest he be misunderstood, Trotsky in the very next paragraph indicates that even in the imperialist countries, revolutionists are duty bound to defend democracy against its domestic foes:

"Again, this does not imply an attitude of indifference toward the current political methods of imperialism. In all cases where the counterrevolutionary forces tend to pull back away from the decomposing 'democratic' state and towards provincial particularism, towards monarchy, military dictatorship, fascism—the revolutionary proletariat without assuming the slightest responsibility for the 'defense of democracy' (it is indefensible!) will meet these counterrevolutionary forces with armed resistance, in order, if successful, to direct its offensive against imperialist 'democracy.'

"This policy, however, is applicable only with regard to internal conflicts,

that is, in those cases where the struggle really involves the issue of a political regime, as was for instance the case in Spain. The participation of Spanish workers in the struggle against Franco was their elementary duty. But precisely and only because the workers did not succeed in time in replacing the rule of bourgeois democracy with their own rule, 'democracy' was able to clear the path for fascism."

#### *Case of Haya de la Torre*

Trotsky did not write extensively on the problems of the Latin American revolution. It was not until his residence in Mexico that he gained firsthand acquaintance with these problems and some of the political personalities. The conditions of his political asylum in Mexico further restrained him from writing freely. From what he did write, it is clear that he was reaching insights of increasing concreteness. That he did not have the opportunity to write more on this subject was among the great losses our movement suffered from his untimely death.

Despite the tantalizing brevity of the material, we would like to call attention to his attitude toward Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, the head of the Peruvian APRA movement. Referring to a letter by Haya de la Torre published in the August 1938 issue of the Argentine review *Claridad*, Trotsky said:

"We won't apply either a Marxian or socialist criterion to this document; Haya de la Torre wrote the letter as a democrat and we shall consider it from that angle, primarily from the democratic point of view. A good democrat is better than a bad socialist, but precisely from this point of view, the letter of Haya de la Torre has great limitations." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1938-39), second edition, p. 101.)

Haya de la Torre, Trotsky explains, sees the dangers threatening Latin America not in "imperialism in general" but in only "one of its varieties, fascism." The APRA leader voices confidence in the United States. Trotsky, in contrast, sees the United States as "the most immediate danger and, in a historical sense, the most threatening."

Trotsky offers an example of what he is referring to: "The relations between Washington and Rio de Janeiro

have not become worse but indeed have improved after the coup d'etat in Brazil. The reason is that Washington considers the Vargas dictatorship a more docile and sure tool of American imperialist interests than revolutionary democracy. This basically is the position of the White House in regard to the whole southern continent."

Throughout his criticism, Trotsky refrains from demanding that Haya de la Torre take a revolutionary-socialist stand. ". . . we limit ourselves to purely democratic criteria."

Trotsky does demand, however, that Haya de la Torre, as a democrat, take a consistent stand: ". . . democratic politics demands clarity."

What is most instructive in the way Trotsky addresses Haya de la Torre is his basic assumption (the progressive nature of the struggle for bourgeois democracy in the colonial and semicolonial world), and the issue he singles out (the struggle against imperialism). He criticizes Haya de la Torre on his inconsistency as a bourgeois democrat—he ought to be a good one, that is, above all take a clear stand in opposition to American imperialism, the oppressor of Peru.

In a follow-up, in which he answers a defender of Haya de la Torre, Trotsky says further: "The democrat in France and the United States cannot, naturally, be a revolutionist; he is for the maintenance of the existing system; he is a conservative. But the democrat of a backward country, who finds himself under the double oppression of imperialism and police dictatorship, as is the case in Peru, cannot but be a revolutionist if he is a serious and logical democrat." The reproach registered against Haya de la Torre is over "his position as a defender of democracy and not because he doesn't appear to be a socialist in his programmatic letter." Haya de la Torre is an "illogical democrat." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1938-39), second edition, p. 183.)

#### *Practical Agreements*

Further on in the same article, Trotsky touches on the question of practical agreements with bourgeois democrats in semicolonial countries:

"Revolutionary Marxists can conclude practical agreements with democrats, but precisely with those who are *revolutionary*, that is to say, with those who rely on the masses and

not on the protecting hen. [A reference to the description by Lombardo Tolando, the Mexican Stalinist trade-union leader, of the imperialist United States as a hen protecting its Latin American chicks.] APRA is not a socialist organization in the eyes of the Marxist because it is not a class organization of the revolutionary proletariat. APRA is an organization of bourgeois democracy in a backward, semicolonial country."

Trotsky places the APRA in the same category as the Russian populists and the Chinese Kuomintang. "The Russian populists were much richer in doctrine and 'socialist' phraseology than APRA. However, that did not hinder them from playing the role of petty-bourgeois democrats, even worse, *backward* petty-bourgeois democrats, who did not have the strength to carry out purely democratic tasks in spite of the spirit of sacrifice and heroism of their best combatants." The Russian populists proved to be "prisoners of the liberal bourgeoisie—this good hen who protects her little ones—and they betrayed the peasants at the decisive moment during the 1917 revolution. It is impossible to forget that historical example. A democrat who sows confidence in imperialist 'guardians' can only bring bitter illusions to oppressed peoples."

Trotsky's interest in Haya de la Torre as a representative of bourgeois democracy in a semicolonial country suggests a further line of thought. Trotsky's criticism of Haya de la Torre centered on his inconsistency. What about the case of *consistent* bourgeois democrats in countries like Peru? Can any such cases be found? We grant that they are few and far between. Bourgeois democrats who display varying degrees of inconsistency constitute the average. Nevertheless we would offer as an exhibit Fidel Castro.

#### *Case of Fidel Castro*

Castro began from a petty-bourgeois position (his description) dedicated to struggling for the restoration of bourgeois democracy in Cuba. The consistency of Castro's position in favor of bourgeois democracy was shown not so much by his decision to resort to the use of arms—that was a tactical question—as by his struggle for a thoroughgoing agrarian reform. To carry that out demanded, in turn, op-

position to U. S. imperialism; and that entailed struggling for national independence, a bourgeois-democratic task.

Castro demonstrated the consistency of his bourgeois-democratic position by following this road to the end; that is, mobilizing the masses, establishing a workers and peasants government, and by means of that instrument establishing a workers state.

As has been pointed out many times by the Trotskyist movement, the logic of the course followed by Castro was the logic of the permanent revolution.

Castro himself was such a consistent democrat that in pursuing his course to the end he had to admit that he had gone beyond bourgeois democracy. With some reluctance, he said that the Cuban revolution was socialist in character.

This instructive example should show us how completely consistent it was of Trotsky from a revolutionary-socialist point of view to take an attitude toward bourgeois democracy and its protagonists in the colonial and semicolonial world quite different from the attitude he took toward bourgeois democracy and its protagonists in the imperialist countries. Trotsky's contrasting attitudes were different in principle, deriving from his analysis showing the world to be divided into three sectors (imperialist, colonial-semicolonial, and workers states).

In Argentina all of our work touching on this question has been governed by adherence to Trotsky's line of reasoning.

Criticisms addressed to us should be directed to how well we have succeeded in keeping that concept alive and applying it in practice, not to how well we have conformed to a sectarian concept that would have us apply in Argentina an attitude relevant to the imperialist sector.

## Our Opposition to Peronism

### 6.

On the most salient peculiarity of Argentine politics—the Peronist movement—we are unable, unfortunately, to turn to Trotsky for advice. Peronism developed after his death. Again unfortunately, outside of our own efforts, little is to be found on this question in the literature of the world Trotskyist movement.

The main characteristics of Peronism can be specified as follows: Its



base consists of the most powerfully organized labor movement in Latin America, one that has resisted every effort up to now to crush it. Its most contradictory feature is the difference between this base and its leadership—a bourgeois figure who exercised control through a conservative trade-union bureaucracy. A further characteristic was that Perón, somewhat like General Cárdenas, represented a sector of the Argentine bourgeoisie willing (up to a certain point) to adopt independent attitudes toward imperialism, including specifically the colossus north of the Río Bravo [Río Grande].

The Peronist movement thus presented an unusually complex problem for the revolutionary Marxist movement. On the one hand the ranks consisted of the most militant sectors of the working class that had to be gained to the cause of the socialist revolution. On the other hand appeals to the ranks had to bear constantly in mind their devotion to Perón, which was based on genuine concessions granted to the working class during his first regime.

In trying to demystify the image of Perón, it was necessary to take into account his resistance to imperialism, which, for Argentina, as we have seen, was a key issue. The task was made still more difficult by the success of U.S. imperialism in toppling Perón in 1955, in exiling him, and in replacing his regime by one that Washington considered to be a "more docile and sure tool," as Trotsky observed of the Vargas dictatorship in Brazil.

Perón in exile was regarded with reverence by the Argentine working class as a whole. We had no choice but to keep this feeling in mind in all our efforts to educate the class and help it move along the lines of independent political action. To have acted in any other way would have barred us from getting a hearing.

Throughout the long years of Peronism, the small nucleus that later expanded into the PST persevered along this course. Whatever errors were made—and we are aware that we made some—we think the attitude we took toward Peronism was in correspondence with the principles outlined by Trotsky.

After a decade and a half of regimes whose main objective was to please Washington, a new chapter was opened in Argentine politics in 1969. In Córdoba and other cities the workers took to the streets in massive dem-

onstrations that shook the military regime to its foundation. The rank and file of the Peronist movement was on the march.

In our participation in these events, we sought to follow the method proposed by Trotsky in the *Transitional Program*: the coordination and extension of mass actions, the development of militant strikes, the projection of bold initiatives and slogans that in their logic transcend capitalism. With our small forces we could not exercise a direct leadership role—most of the mass actions at the time were spontaneous—but we began to grow at a rate we had never before experienced, and we took this as a good indication that we were on the right road.

### Why Peron Was Brought Back

#### 7.

The nationwide upsurge of the working class symbolized by the Cordobazo precipitated a political crisis for the Argentine ruling class. To meet this crisis they felt compelled to make some concessions to the working class, the most important of which was restoration of at least some democratic rights.

Granting that the weakness of Argentine capitalism, coupled with the pressure of U.S. imperialism, precluded this constituting anything more than a democratic *interlude*, what should our attitude be toward this opening? We decided that we ought to take full advantage of it. That meant doing everything possible to extend democracy and to *institutionalize*, that is, strengthen it. Above all, it meant opening an intensive struggle to gain legal recognition for our party.

And that was the course we followed. In our opinion, it represented the consistent application of the basic principles of Trotskyism in a semicolonial country, specifically Argentina at a particular moment.

The Argentine ruling class, of course, intended to withdraw its concessions as soon as possible. The tactical prescription was to bring back General Perón, making this out to be an additional concession to the masses.

The chief aim of putting Perón back into the Casa Rosada was to divert the masses from taking the road of socialist revolution. Once this im-

mediate goal had been achieved, the democratic concessions would be undermined and chipped away until conditions again became propitious for another phase of open military rule or something still more oppressive, if that proved necessary. It can be taken for granted that the State Department and the CIA were privy to this blueprint and approved it, as their public posture indicated.

Perón himself began the process of hemming in the newly won democratic rights and striking blows at the political opposition that stood to gain by them. With his death, the process was considerably speeded up. The success of Pinochet in Chile helped in this.

The general political situation in Argentina, briefly put, was as follows: By proletarian methods, i.e., strikes, demonstrations, extraparliamentary methods, etc., the working class made big strides forward beginning with 1969. Because of Peronism, these actions were blocked from immediately opening up a socialist revolution. Leveling off at a plateau for the moment, they became registered primarily as gains for bourgeois democracy.

The Cordobazo and similar outbursts, it is quite clear, gave an impulse to the realization of tasks belonging to the bourgeois democratic revolution, and this occurred *against the will and the efforts of the Argentine bourgeoisie*.

In this respect, Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution was again confirmed. Likewise confirmed was the position of the PST in assiduously trying to advance the socialist revolution along *this road*, the road actually taken by the living class struggle in sovereign disregard of the schemas and dogmas of the guerrillas and their well-wishers.

### What We Actually Said

#### 8.

We have outlined the concrete circumstances we faced and the course we have followed to show how earnestly we have sought to uphold the principles of Trotskyism and to apply them in practice. Permit us to repeat that criticisms of our work ought to be directed either against the principles we chose to follow or to the gap between what we could have achieved and what we actually accomplished.

But that is not the case with the leaders of the IMT.

They do not take up what Trotsky taught our movement concerning the correct course to be followed in semicolonial countries like ours. We do not know whether they agree with Trotsky or not. If they think that Trotsky was mistaken, or that his positions have been outmoded by the theories of the practitioners of guerrilla war, it would greatly facilitate the discussion if they would state their views. However, they simply say nothing. Is it because they regard Trotsky's views on how to conduct the revolutionary struggle in semicolonial countries as irrelevant? Or insufficient?

Much of the argumentation of the leaders of the IMT is aimed at proving that we have abandoned Trotskyism and that we are proceeding like Social Democrats or a comparable variety of class collaborationists.

This explains why they disregard the many statements of our views published in our press on a weekly basis over the years concerning our opposition to Peronism, to the Peronist regime, to the capitalist state, to the capitalist parties, and to our defense of the rights of the guerrillas despite our opposition to their anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist, and anti-Trotskyist course.

Why, in attacking us, do the leaders of the IMT rely so heavily on falsifications in the bourgeois press (as they did in Open Letter No. 1) unless they believe that the bourgeois press presents a more honest view of where we stand than our own publications and statements?

This view accounts for the extraordinary importance they place on isolated errors we have made. And it explains why they read into some of our statements the opposite of what we clearly mean.

Above all, the view that we have in actuality become reformists, while trying to cover it up, would explain the strange selection of quotations from our press and the way they are presented. As an example of this, let us take the main quotation they use in Open Letter No. 2 in their effort to establish a case against us.

They quote four paragraphs from the statement made by Comrade Juan Carlos Coral at the "multisectoral" meeting held October 8, 1974, with Perón's widow, the current president of Argentina. They state that they took these four paragraphs from the text

of the statement published in the October 15, 1974, issue of *Avanzada Socialista*.

The first paragraph quoted by them does not read the same as the text published in *Avanzada Socialista*. The IMT leaders were either incapable of copying correctly, or they used a different text—maybe one taken from their favorite source, the Argentine bourgeois press.

Fortunately, the differences are not substantial ones. Unfortunately, the IMT leaders do not quote the entire paragraph. The first half was sufficient for their purposes.

We now come to the subsequent three paragraphs quoted by them. These consist of an accurate reproduction of the final three paragraphs of Coral's statement (save for one change that seems to have been introduced to correct his usage of the Spanish language). *The IMT leaders give no indication whatsoever that something came between the first sentences quoted by them and these last three paragraphs.*

This "something" consists of nothing less than 136 centimeters of type; that is, all of Coral's statement except the opening and closing sentences.

It is hard to know exactly which of Comrade Coral's phrases were considered by the IMT leaders to be the worst, but the following two probably come high on the list: ". . . will struggle for the continuity of this government, because it was elected by the majority of the Argentine workers. . . ."

In isolation the phrases can be given an invidious implication by opponents searching for ammunition. Considered in the context of our general policy, their meaning is quite plain, and completely in the tradition of the Trotskyist movement.

1. ". . . will struggle for the continuity of this government. . . ." That is, we will fight against its being toppled by a reactionary coup d'état, although we have no political confidence in this government and will continue to oppose it from a revolutionary-socialist point of view. Our position is comparable *in general* to the one advocated by Trotsky in Spain during the civil war there. Naturally, our *concrete* position corresponds to the

situation in Argentina today.

2. ". . . because it was elected by the majority of the Argentine workers. . . ." That is, our party will abide by the will of the majority of the working class and popular masses. In our opinion, the workers are mistaken in placing political confidence in a bourgeois government. Despite this mistaken attitude, caused by illusions in Perón, we will submit to majority will in our course of action (but not in our political views). We hope to win this majority to our program. Our method of doing this is outlined in the *Transitional Program*. Until we have won that majority, we are opposed to actions that play with insurrection. This includes violent *minority* actions, guerrilla war, or other "exemplary" deeds carried out by a handful of individuals divorced from the masses.

Understood in this context, it is quite clear that these "damning" phrases do not depart from Trotskyist principles.

The authors of Open Letter No. 2 admit that Coral's speech, "as reported in *Avanzada Socialista*," also contained "a condemnation of the government's 'passivity' in face of the murder of worker militants like those of the PST (a condemnation that was not reported in the bourgeois press)." But "the passages we have just quoted . . . facilitate the Peronist government's camouflage and cover-up operation instead of exposing it."

By judiciously selecting and fixing up quotations in this way, it is possible to prove anything. It is even possible to prove that while the headquarters of the PST were being smashed and its militants murdered, the leaders of the PST were so caught up in class collaborationism and were of such low political level as to engage in a tactic that "manifestly serves the bourgeoisie and the Peronist regime more than it contributes to defending the PST against the violence of the far right or the attempt to outlaw the PST."

It must be admitted that this is consistent with the view of the leaders of the IMT that the growth of the PST into the largest sector of the world Trotskyist movement is to be explained by the low political level of those Argentine workers and youth who have become acquainted with our press, our activities, and our political positions and therefore signed up as

members.

What brazenness was required to reduce the content of Coral's statement to the few sentences that the IMT leaders thought would best prejudice the PST in the eyes of the world Trotskyist movement can be judged from the fact that on the very same two-page center spread in *Avanzada Socialista* featuring the statement, an editorial denounced the butchery of Coral's words committed by the bourgeois press. The editorial, entitled "Struggle Against the Coup Without Supporting the Government," stressed once again the opposition of the PST to the Peronist regime. The editorial explained why, in face of this opposition along class lines, we nevertheless considered that a military coup would signify a political defeat for the Argentine working class.

The editorial reaffirmed the stand we had previously taken on the multi-sectorial meeting in the form of a statement by the Executive Committee of the PST distributed in mimeographed form at the meeting. It was surely known to the leaders of the IMT, since it was published in the October 10, 1974, issue of *Avanzada Socialista*. The leaders of the IMT had their own good, or at least sufficient, reasons for ignoring the analysis of the multi-sectorial meeting that appeared in that issue along with the text of the statement of the Executive Committee of the PST that was presented at the meeting. Here are the opening paragraphs of the statement:

"Our party is attending this meeting, as we did previous meetings between the government and other parties and organizations. Not because we aspire to, or believe in, the possibility of a 'national unity'—which is impossible between antagonistic social classes—but because we want to defend the democratic liberties won at a heavy price by the masses in the fight that began with the Cordobazo.

"The fundamental purpose of such democratic rights is to ensure respect for the right of the masses to decide what government they want—which in this case is the Peronist government—and the fundamental respect for the right of all political forces to present their ideas to the masses. Thus, we unhesitatingly condemn any attempt at a coup designed to bring down the current government, which has been elected by the majority of the working class.

"Starting with June 12, when the social tensions caused by the failure of the Social Pact came out into the open, provoking a resignation threat from the deceased President Perón, a period began in the country that has been marked by a threat hanging over our heads—a threat that the forces of oligarchic-imperialist reaction, the same elements that had to begin a retreat after the Cordobazo, were trying for a comeback by means of a new 1955.

"This threat, which if realized would mean the worst kind of defeat for the country and the workers, is real because the lukewarm nationalist measures and the relatively independent foreign policy line adopted by the government have not touched the powerful economic and political bases that imperialism maintains in the country."

The statement carefully distinguishes between the fascist-minded terrorists of the ultraright and the revolutionary-minded guerrillas of the ultraleft:

"We did not have to wait until the situation reached its present gravity to express our condemnation—in the name of the working class and socialism—of guerrilla warfare isolated from the masses. We have consistently opposed that desperate resort, which has been taken at times in the name of a socialist ideal and at others as a tactic designed to apply political pressure. Normally this kind of action ends up sowing the worst type of confusion in the ranks of the workers, as well as opening up the way for the most indiscriminate repression. In this case it has promoted a militarization of the country that may lead very far, that may lead ultimately to eliminating the increasingly limited democratic freedoms that the masses won by their struggles.

"But these condemnations of the guerrilla operations must not be used to cover up the causes that provoked this phenomenon nor to whitewash the fascist gangs by lumping their activity together with that of the guerrillas under some general common heading.

"We recognize perfectly the differences between the present government and the dictatorial forms that preceded it and threaten to return. We recognize that guerrilla actions and terrorism promote putschism. We proclaim our determination to fight against any attempt to topple the government by a coup. At the same time, we must

point out the responsibility for this situation that falls on the government because of its retreat on democratic rights, which began May 25, 1973."

Here are some sentences from the statement's indictment of the government for its role in the deteriorating situation:

"The attack on democratic rights is shown by the absolute impunity with which the fascist gangs act. It now culminates in the passage of the State Security Law, which contains articles designed to repress the guerrillas and uses their activity as a pretext to institute repression of strikes and leftist currents.

"This rightist course of the government, followed by its four presidents, has in itself achieved many of the objectives that a reactionary coup might shoot for. This course in our country has been an expression of the same evolution that has led to brutal repression of our brothers in another part of the Southern Cone. Continuing this orientation cannot lead anywhere but to a 'cold coup' born in the belly of the very regime in power, a reactionary take-over which, through a Bonapartist dictatorship, will end up suffocating the democratic possibilities of the parliamentary regime."

We think it high time that the leaders of the IMT begin to present to the Fourth International as a whole the "unedited" texts of our declarations expressing our political positions. Every member of the world Trotskyist movement ought to be able to draw an individual conclusion on the basis of accurate, and not truncated, biased, and distorted presentations of our positions.

We propose, therefore, that the IMT leaders meet their responsibility by giving international circulation not only to this reply but to the full text of the speech made by Comrade Coral at the multisectorial meeting, the editorial analysis of the meeting published in the October 15, 1974, issue of *Avanzada Socialista*, and the Executive Committee statement published in the October 10, 1974, issue of *Avanzada Socialista*.

Let the ranks of the Fourth International read all the material and judge for themselves.

## False Accusations Based on False Premises

9.

We turn now to arguments made by the leaders of the IMT that we have not yet dealt with.

### 'Superior' Democracy Vs. 'Inferior' Fascism

*IMT accusation:* "We reject the Social Democratic policy of lesser evilism according to which the workers are supposed to defend 'superior' or 'better' bourgeois 'forms of government' against 'less good' or 'inferior' forms of government."

*PST reply:* We, too, reject the Social Democratic view that socialism can be won by reforming capitalism through parliamentary measures until it has been legislated out of existence; and, as part of that view, of backing for office the least evil of whatever bourgeois alternatives are placed before the electorate. The Social Democratic view means placing *political confidence* in bourgeois democracy.

We are likewise against the ultraleft sectarian policy of refusing to defend bourgeois democracy against fascist attack. The fascist offensive is carried on outside of parliament, and the working class must meet this attack in a similar way.

The innuendo made by the IMT leaders brings to mind a quotation cited by Trotsky in an article he wrote during the Spanish civil war (September 14, 1937). The quotation, from a resolution submitted by the Joerger-Salemme group, an ultraleft sectarian tendency in the Socialist Workers party, was as follows:

"The Social Democrats who criminally preferred the victory of Hindenburg to that of Hitler, and got both, or the Stalinists who preferred Roosevelt to Landon, are no more politically degenerate than the Cannons and Shachtmans who prefer the victory of the Negrins over the Francos and will get either a Negrin military dictatorship or a Negrin-Franco truce." (*The Spanish Revolution* (1931-39), p. 287.)

Trotsky said in reply:

"The civil war between Negrin and Franco does not signify the same thing as the electoral competition of Hindenburg and Hitler. If Hindenburg had entered into an open *military* fight against Hitler, then Hindenburg would have been a 'lesser evil.'

We do not choose the 'greater evil,' we choose the 'lesser evil.'" (Ibid., p. 287.)

In the concrete situation in Germany, in which the differences did not extend beyond the parliamentary arena, "To support Hindenburg against Hitler meant to give up political independence." (Ibid., p. 287.)

Trotsky continued: "To affirm that to fight together with the Negrin forces against Franco is the same as to vote for Hindenburg against Hitler is an expression, I am sorry to say, of what is known as parliamentary cretinism. The war against fascism cannot be resolved by parliamentary means because fascism is an army of reaction that can be crushed only by force. That's why we were against the policy of the Social Democrats in Germany—the pure parliamentary combination with Hindenburg against Hitler. We called for the creation of workers' militias, etc. But here we do have a fight against fascism. It is true that the general staff of the 'democratic' army is capable of tomorrow making a truce with Franco, but it is not a fact today. And we can't overlook the real events. Tactically we must use the war of the republicans against the fascists for the purpose of a strategic aim: the overthrow of the capitalist regime." (Ibid., p. 288.)

In the cases of both Germany and Spain, the analogies with Argentina are of but limited usefulness. Insofar as they do apply, they plainly speak in favor of the policy followed by the PST, which was neither Social Democratic nor ultraleft, but in the tradition defended by Trotsky.

### Support Gains, Not Limitations

*IMT accusation:* On the PST's support of the struggle to institutionalize democratic rights: "Obviously, this includes parliamentary elections, the parliament, the bourgeois state apparatus, the government that comes out of these elections, etc. And Marxist-Leninists know that these institutions *also involve* defending bourgeois property, capitalist exploitation, and the apparatus of repression devoted to this defense."

*PST reply:* Obviously, the IMT leaders are disregarding the implications of their arguments. Marxist-Leninists consider themselves to be heirs to the *gains* of the bourgeois democratic revolution, not its limitations, still less its retrogressive features in the epoch of the death agony of capitalism.

For instance, in the United States Marxist-Leninists are duty bound to defend and attempt to extend the Bill of Rights which has been institutionalized in the bourgeois constitution of that country. That does not mean that they thereby become involved in defending bourgeois property, which is sanctified in that same constitution.

To take a contrary position would *also involve* defending the sectarian rejection of the positive features of bourgeois democracy, a position scored by Trotsky. True, such a sectarian position is held by some of the guerrillas in Argentina, but that is hardly a recommendation for discarding the Trotskyist stand.

### Yes, the Capitalist State Is Bad

*IMT accusation:* "It is true that the PST's August 20, 1974, declaration pronounces itself against any *political* support to a bourgeois regime or coalition. That is really the least one can demand from an organization that claims allegiance to Trotskyism. But the rejection of 'support to the policy of a bourgeois regime' combined with 'support to the process of institutionalization,' that is, the consolidation and strengthening of the institutions of bourgeois-parliamentary democracy, leaves the question of the PST's attitude toward the *bourgeois state* completely open. And it is that question that lies at the center of the controversy."

*PST reply:* We disagree that this is the question that lies at the center of the controversy. What is central in our opinion, is the question of guerrillaism versus Trotskyism.

Aside from that, it is fallacious to argue that our defense of bourgeois democracy against attack by fascists and their kind leaves our attitude on the bourgeois state "completely open." The argument should really be directed against Trotsky. It was he who maintained that the struggle for bourgeois democracy in a semicolonial country is progressive and revolutionary. We only followed him in this.

Was Trotsky wrong? Did his view on this question leave "completely open" his attitude toward the bourgeois state? Or have the leaders of the IMT left themselves completely open on the question of their attitude toward ultraleft sectarianism?

We oppose the capitalist state and support whatever democracy exists in Argentina. Is this position right or wrong?

### *The Slander on 'Political Accords'*

**IMT accusation:** On temporary practical agreements with "bourgeois liberals" in defense of democratic rights: "The August 20, 1974, document of the Executive Committee of the PST appears to say the same thing. But in sliding from the question of an occasional technical agreement for the defense of a particular democratic right to the search for an agreement with the 'liberal' bourgeoisie for the defense of democratic rights in general, the statement passes imperceptibly to the search for political accords for *the defense of the institutions of bourgeois parliamentary democracy.*"

**PST reply:** Neither in our statement nor anywhere else have we passed "imperceptibly," perceptibly, or in any other way, into searching for *political accords*. This is a slander. Not a shred of evidence can be cited to support it, unless one considers the tortured reasoning of the IMT leaders to be "proof."

In our long struggle to convince the vanguard of the Argentine working class of the necessity for independent political action, we have always been alert to the importance of our own example. Besides that, we did not care to commit political suicide.

In seeking allies in this struggle we have always sought practical objectives such as the defense of political prisoners, and, above all, concrete actions that, from our point of view, would help mobilize the masses.

It is true that our tactics and attitude have been different from that required in an imperialist country like France, Belgium, Germany, or the United States. That was because we paid attention to Trotsky's admonition concerning the difference between democrats in imperialist countries and those in colonial and semicolonial countries.

Again we ask the leaders of the IMT, was Trotsky wrong in teaching us this?

### *What 'Institutionalized' Meetings?*

**IMT accusation:** "Now, the meetings in which the PST has been participating in no way had as their objective engaging in *practical* actions for the defense of a *given* democratic right, a *given* conquest of the working class. It was a matter of meetings to affirm — in the presence of the government — the defense of the 'process of institutionalization.' Moreover, *regular* meetings

with the bourgeois opposition parties and the CP are in turn becoming *institutionalized* meetings. In political terms, that is called *an interclass political bloc against all those who 'resort to violence' in Argentina and who thereby threaten the 'process of institutionalization.'*"

**PST reply:** Let us separate out the various ingredients of this mishmash.

1. Our objectives from the beginning have been to initiate practical actions jointly with other forces aimed at helping to mobilize the masses.

2. The given democratic rights were all those won by the Cordobazo and similar mass actions, which we consider to be conquests of the Argentine working class.

3. The meetings "in the presence of the government" were intended as confrontations, as efforts at obtaining wide publicity, and as springboards for actions such as mass rallies that could lead to broader and more dynamic mobilizations of the working class.

4. Meetings with the bourgeois opposition parties "and the CP" (is the IMT, then, against meeting with leaders of Communist parties?) were neither regular nor institutionalized, nor led to any political accord, "interclass," or otherwise.

5. Our position is crystal clear. We never make strategic, programmatic, or long-term blocs with non-working-class parties. Nor do we sign common political programs, or hold joint rallies of a general political type with such parties. With such parties we conclude only "limited, specific, tactical agreements." Such tactical accords serve essentially for propaganda campaigns on well-defined individual problems and to a lesser degree and in exceptional cases for obtaining some practical gain. They therefore play only a relative role, since for our party only "the mobilization of the working class can solve all the problems."

6. As to the charge that we have formed an "interclass political bloc" against all those who "resort to violence," this is a falsification.

The PST has never declared itself in opposition to violence in general, nor has it raised the slogan "Down with violence." The purpose of this falsification is to insinuate that the PST has adopted the position of the petty-bourgeois pacifists who oppose violence even when it is exercised by

the masses.

(Certain phrases in the above IMT accusation are enclosed in quotation marks. The French translation does not follow the Spanish in this. The English version differs from both the Spanish and the French. We would appreciate it if the falsifiers would reach a common agreement on what phrases they want placed in quotation marks and what were the sources of the phrases.)

7. In political terms, this accusation leveled by the IMT leaders can be called a malicious factional construction aimed at prejudicing the rank and file of the Fourth International against the PST.

### *Workers United Front*

**IMT accusation:** "Does the PST counterpose the conception of a bloc with liberal bourgeois parties for the defense of the 'process of institutionalization' to Trotsky's conception of the workers united front?"

**PST reply:** We are against any bloc that crosses class lines. We are for practical agreements that help advance the struggle to institutionalize the democratic gains won through the Cordobazos. We are also decidedly in favor of a workers united front.

With regard to a workers united front we would greatly appreciate it if the IMT leaders could furnish Argentina with the mass Social Democratic and Communist parties of the Germany of 1932 to go along with the quotations from Trotsky's writings on this subject that they provided us.

In the absence of forces like the ones in the Germany of 1932 we have had to content ourselves with the reality at hand — the disintegrating Peronist movement and the mass trade unions, which confront us with a different set of problems from those the IMT leaders have in mind.

### *Trotsky, Kerensky and Joerger-Salemme*

**IMT accusation:** "Under these conditions, to counterpose defense of increasingly paralyzed bourgeois-parliamentary institutions in decomposition to the rise of fascism is to court certain defeat."

**PST reply:** The IMT leaders are arguing by analogy that what Trotsky said about the situation in Germany in 1932 applies to the Argentina of 1974.

But the IMT leaders are so one-

sided in their quotations that the lesson they would like to draw for Argentina does not hold for concrete situations that can arise in the struggle against fascism even in the *imperialist* democracies. Consider the following observations made by Trotsky during the Spanish civil war against the position of the Joerger-Salemme group:

"1. The difference between Negrin and Franco is the difference between decaying bourgeois democracy and fascism.

"2. Everywhere and always, wherever and whenever revolutionary workers are not powerful enough immediately to overthrow the bourgeois regime, they defend even rotten bourgeois democracy from fascism, and they especially defend their own position inside bourgeois democracy.

"3. The workers defend bourgeois democracy, however, not by the methods of bourgeois democracy (Popular Fronts, electoral blocs, government coalitions, etc.) but by their own methods, that is, by the methods of revolutionary class struggle. Thus, by participating in the military struggle against fascism they continue at the same time to defend their own organizations, their rights, and their interests from the bourgeois-democratic government." (*The Spanish Revolution* (1931-39), p. 282.)

In those years, the ultralefts did not hesitate to call Trotsky wrong, and even worse than wrong. Joerger-Salemme were as arrogant as others of their school. In his rebuttal, Trotsky did not give a millimeter:

"The difference between the Negrin government and that of Franco,' I said in reply to an American comrade, 'is the difference between decaying bourgeois democracy and fascism.' It is with this elementary consideration that our political orientation begins. What! exclaim the ultralefts, you want to restrict us to a choice between bourgeois democracy and fascism? But that's pure opportunism! The Spanish revolution is fundamentally a struggle between socialism and fascism. Bourgeois democracy does not offer the slightest solution. . . . And so on." (Ibid., p. 295.)

Trotsky continued with further concrete analysis. One of the points he made was the incorrectness in the given situation of attempting to engage in an immediate effort to overthrow the bourgeois democratic government:

"The Stalin-Negrin government is a quasi-democratic obstacle on the road to socialism; but it is also an obstacle, not a very reliable or durable one, but an obstacle nonetheless, on the road to fascism. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, the Spanish proletariat may perhaps be able to break through this obstacle and seize power. But if it aided, even passively, in tearing it down today, it would only serve fascism. The task consists not merely of theoretically evaluating the two camps at their true worth, but moreover of utilizing their struggle in practice in order to make a leap forward." (Ibid., p. 296.)

In several instructive paragraphs, Trotsky took up the example of the Bolsheviks in the struggle between the Kerensky regime and the attempted coup d'etat by Kornilov in August 1917:

"The left centrists as well as the incurable ultralefts often cite the example of Bolshevik policy in the Kerensky-Kornilov conflict, without understanding anything about it. The POUM says: 'But the Bolsheviks fought alongside Kerensky.' The ultralefts reply: 'But the Bolsheviks refused to give Kerensky their confidence even under the threat of Kornilov.' Both are right . . . halfway; that is, both are completely wrong.

"The Bolsheviks did not remain neutral between the camp of Kerensky and that of Kornilov. They fought in the first camp against the second. They accepted the official command as long as they were not sufficiently strong to overthrow it. It was precisely in the month of August, with the Kornilov uprising, that a prodigious upswing of the Bolsheviks began. This upswing was made possible only thanks to the double-edged Bolshevik policy. While participating in the front lines of the struggle against Kornilov, the Bolsheviks did not take the slightest responsibility for the policy of Kerensky. On the contrary, they denounced him as responsible for the reactionary attack and as incapable of overcoming it. In this way they prepared the political premises of the October Revolution, in which the alternative Bolshevism or counterrevolution (communism or fascism) evolved from a historic tendency into a living and immediate reality.

"We must teach this lesson to the youth. We must inculcate the Marxist method into them. But as to the people who are a few decades past school

age and who persist in counterposing to us at all times—to us as well as to reality—the same formulas (which they have, by the way, taken from us), it is necessary to recognize them publicly as incurables who must be kept a few feet away from the general staffs who are elaborating revolutionary policy." (Ibid., pp. 296-97.)

We ask those who today echo the arguments of Joerger-Salemme: Has anything occurred since Trotsky's time that would show he was wrong in calling for a policy of defending "even rotten bourgeois democracy from fascism"? Has Trotsky been outmoded? Should he be displaced to make way for the theoreticians of "armed struggle in Latin America"? Isn't it time to speak up?

*Was it Wrong for Antiwar Movement to Let American Balbins Speak?*

*IMT accusation:* "Of course, Argentina in 1974 is not Germany in 1932. There are important differences in the social structure of the two countries, in the relative weight of the different social classes, and above all in the forms of organization, political tradition, and level of political class consciousness of the workers. But no 'national particularity' can transform the Radical party of Mr. Balbín into a serious candidate for the organization of a general strike—not to mention workers councils—at the side of the workers organizations. Is it not obvious that Trotsky is defending a *different political orientation* in these propositions of struggle against the fascist threat through the workers united front leading to the united class action of the proletariat culminating in a general strike—different from the orientation that sees regular meetings with bourgeois parties, signing common declarations and communiqués with these parties, and organizing common meetings with these parties as the useful condition for 'creating the kind of social consciousness and climate needed to defend civil liberties or condemn fascism' (Avanzada Socialista, July 4, 1974)?"

*PST reply:* In listing the differences between Germany in 1932 and Argentina in 1974, the IMT leaders ought to have added that Germany belonged to the imperialist sector and Argentina the semicolonial. How do they explain having missed this capital distinction?

Despite the oversight, we think we can reach substantial agreement with

the IMT leaders on at least one point they raise. We can agree with them that Balbin is not "a serious candidate for the organization of a general strike—not to mention workers councils."

As to the rest of the accusation, it shows either bad faith or political blindness. We did not say that meeting with these parties is a useful "condition" for "creating the kind of social consciousness and climate needed to defend civil liberties or condemn fascism."

Since the IMT leaders themselves quoted us almost correctly only a few pages previously, it is easy to ascertain our views. (Perhaps a stronger word than "almost" should be used. In one of the paragraphs, an important sentence was omitted without any indication that something had been left out.) Two paragraphs of the quotation used by the IMT leaders should suffice to show our views (we have restored the missing sentence, italicizing it for easy identification):

"Our party will always agree with Balbin and the FAS lawyers in opposing by all means the suppression of the daily *El Mundo*. Balbin does this in the name of the bourgeois liberal constitution he supports. We do so in the name of workers democracy and socialism.

"These convergences with bourgeois sectors can be expressed in the form of limited agreements, documents, statements, etc. A recent example was the rally organized by our party in condemnation of the Pacheco Massacre, in which, besides the left, almost all the bourgeois democratic forces participated. All these various types of public actions, from joint communiqués to rallies, are useful and help to create the kind of social consciousness and climate needed to defend civil liberties or condemn fascism. Moreover, they safeguard and reinforce the legal rights of the revolutionary party."

It appears to us that the IMT leaders do have a serious political difference with us. They seem to be opposed *in principle* to limited agreements or public actions involving bourgeois sectors in the struggle against fascism or other ultrareactionary forces. We think that they are not alone in taking an ultraleft position of this kind.

We should like to remind them that at the height of the antiwar move-

ment in the United States, quite a few petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois figures sought to share the platform in the giant rallies that were staged at the time. The Trotskyists in the United States did not oppose this. In fact, they favored it.

But how the ultralefts screamed! They considered this to be proof positive that the Socialist Workers party had formed an "interclass political bloc" with the liberal wing of the Democratic party, thereby falling into the Social Democratic "policy" of class collaborationism. It is one of the main "proofs" still thrown at the SWP by the ultralefts in the United States (and elsewhere) to bolster the charge that the SWP has "degenerated," turned "reformist," and "betrayed" the working class.

#### *Popular Frontism in Thirties and Today*

*IMT accusation:* "Moreover, the comrades of the PST are caught in an additional contradiction. They heavily insist on the fact that they were and remain irremediably opposed to coalitions of the 'popular front' type. Excellent resolve! But they seem to forget that the popular fronts were constituted in the 1930s exactly with the aim of 'defending democratic rights' against the fascist threat. If not only *technical* agreements but also *political* agreements with liberal bourgeois parties are admissible for the defense not only of a specific democratic right but democratic rights in general, what remains of the basis of the revolutionary Marxist opposition to the 'antifascist' policy of the popular front? Is it solely the fact that the popular front also contains a governmental program? Would it then become acceptable without such a program? If agreement with bourgeois parties to defend democratic rights in general is admissible, is it not even more admissible for regaining them where they have been suppressed? What then remains of the validity of the revolutionary Marxist opposition to the policy of 'antifascist front' with the 'liberal' bourgeoisie and its political parties, as followed by the Spanish CP, the Chilean CP, and the Uruguayan CP, to cite only three examples?"

*PST reply:* This house of cards collapses at the first touch. The popular fronts in the 1930s were *not* constituted "exactly with the aim of 'defending democratic rights' against the fascist threat." That was the propagan-

distic bait used to hook the naïve and the unwary. The popular fronts of the 1930s were constructed "exactly with the aim" of drawing the working class into political collaboration with the bourgeoisie. Stalin was thoroughly aware of what he was doing in both France and Spain.

That was why Trotsky saw these popular fronts as replicas of the class-collaborationist blocs of earlier times despite the difference in publicly professed aims.

The astonishingly superficial approach of the IMT leaders on this question led them in 1974 to classify the Union of the Left in France as something different from the people's fronts of the 1930s, since the propagandistic bait used by the architects of the Union of the Left was to "win socialism" not "defeat fascism."

On the basis of that distinction, the leaders of the IMT approved the policy of the Front Communiste Révolutionnaire of calling on the French workers to vote for Mitterrand in the second round.

In Argentina, in contrast, the PST entered the elections in opposition to the Peronist candidates from top to bottom—and not only in the first round *but in the second round*.

The electoral course of the PST proved where we stood politically in relation to *all* the bourgeois parties and those in the left tied to Perón's Justicialista party such as the Stalinists and most of the guerrilla organizations.

The former official section of the Fourth International went through a crisis on the question of whether to vote for the Peronist candidates, and ended up by splitting. It is true that the official section had already left the Fourth International, so that the IMT leaders cannot be held directly responsible for this lamentable outcome.

As for the PST, we had no problem whatsoever in this question; our party demonstrated its political clarity in the most graphic way throughout the campaign.

One of the features of our campaign was rejection of all overtures to build a popular front or to help pave the way for one.

In a report approved at a special convention of the PST in July 1973, Comrade Coral denounced the bourgeois effort at establishing under Perón "the broadest alliance of classes that the country has ever known." Co-

ral's concluding remarks were as follows:

"It is not a question here of preparing the party to carry out an electoral function but of putting the elections at the service of building the party. During this period, as during any other, we will have to carry out the three-pronged revolutionary tasks described by Lenin: agitate among the masses, propagandize for our ideas, and educate the cadres. It is in this sense that we must intervene in the elections.

"What I want to point out in conclusion is that at this stage we must be conscious above all else of the urgent need to educate our cadres. For it is certain that the instability of this latest attempt at an alliance between the classes, the instability and decrepitude of the bourgeoisie and the ruling classes in the government, opens up for us a revolutionary perspective. And when this moment arrives, it is the strength of our organization and the ability of the cadres of our party that will determine whether this revolutionary crisis will end in a tragedy, like the Spanish revolution, or in a historic revolution, like the Russian revolution of 1917." (See the August 1-8, 1973, issue of *Avanzada Socialista*.)

We have followed the same line since then, scorning the overtures made in our direction by both the Stalinists and some of the bourgeois political figures.

In their Open Letter No. 2, the IMT leaders sedulously avoid considering how our electoral campaign proved the intransigence of our revolutionary-socialist stand against class collaborationism. In fact they do not even mention our campaign.

#### *Besides, the Uruguayans Are Not Guilty*

*IMT accusation:* "The question is not simply rhetorical. Already the PRT-U (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores-Uruguay), a close political ally of the PST, has pronounced itself squarely in favor of such a front for the 'reconquest of free elections' . . ."

*PST reply:* We are against the practice of determining guilt by association. We are responsible for the political course of the Trotskyists in Argentina; not those in Uruguay, Belgium, Canada, or anywhere else. Moreover, even if we were to prove the innocence of the Uruguayan com-

rades, the IMT leaders would hardly agree that this made us innocent by association.

We will say, in addition, that we consider it completely inadmissible to subject the Trotskyists, working in the most difficult conditions in the underground movement in Uruguay, to being pilloried in public this way without discussing with them in advance, without notifying them, without giving them a chance to explain their position internally, and without even quoting them in context.

Is this the way the IMT majority of the United Secretariat proposes to proceed from here on out with all the sections and sympathizing organizations of the Fourth International?

We underline the fact that the responsibility for attacking the Uruguayan comrades in public this way belongs completely and solely with the leaders of the IMT.

As to our positions on issues facing the Uruguayan revolutionary Marxist movement, we will state them after the Uruguayan comrades have had an opportunity to reply to the completely unjustified attack leveled against them.

#### *Divisions Among Bourgeoisie*

*IMT accusation:* "The PST's participation in the institutionalized meetings between the government and the so-called center-left opposition on the contrary provides left cover for a political operation whereby the Peronist regime is seeking to *camouflage its responsibility* for the organization of an antiworker and antirevolutionary repression behind the shield of verbal declarations against 'terrorism wherever it comes from.'"

*PST reply:* Of course the Peronist regime is seeking to camouflage its responsibility. Nonetheless the divisions among the bourgeoisie over the question of putting an Argentine Pinochet in power are quite real. In our opinion it is absolutely correct to try to take advantage of these divisions as part of the effort to mobilize the working class in defense of democracy against the ultraright.

To argue that the confrontations on a propagandistic level with the government representatives provided a "left cover" for the Peronist regime is nothing but camouflage for the ultra-left sectarian position that staked everything on guerrilla action in isolation from the masses.

#### *Should We Worry Over Bourgeois Press?*

*IMT accusation:* "The PST's participation in the hypocritical comedy of 'national harmonization' around support to the process of institutionalization organized by the Peronist regime is all the more fraught with consequences in that it allows the bourgeois press to distribute in millions of copies reports about the PST's *approval* of the government propaganda about the 'union of all Argentines around democratic institutions and the unanimous condemnation of violence.'"

*PST reply:* The IMT leaders have caught us red-handed; consequently we plead guilty to the charge that we have not gauged our tactics according to what the bourgeois press might say. We have resisted dropping to such a low political level.

What we have kept our eyes on, in accordance with the Trotskyist aim of building a mass revolutionary party in Argentina, has been among other things the circulation of our press, the rate of recruitment to the PST, and our becoming rooted in the masses.

Because of long years of experience under dictatorial regimes, the vanguard of the Argentine working class is accustomed to discount what appears in the bourgeois press to a higher degree than may be the case in countries where the vanguard, under imperialist democracy, has fallen into uncritical acceptance of what is printed in the bourgeois press. Consequently the references to us in the Argentine press helped to arouse curiosity as to what we had really said and done. Coupled with this were some expositions of our real positions that Comrade Coral was able to make to a vast television audience. As a result, the circulation of *Avanzada Socialista* increased by leaps and bounds.

Similarly, recruitment to our ranks proceeded at such a rate as to necessitate our putting controls on it to bring it into conformity with our capacities to educate and integrate new cadres.

Was this swift growth resulting from our political orientation and tactics bad? The guerrilla groups may think so. We do not. We are proud of the expansion in numbers and in prestige that we have been able to bring to the world Trotskyist movement.

We propose to continue what we have been doing with whatever tactical adjustments may be required in view of objective developments in the



situation. We grant the right of other revolutionists to say what they want about this. We are willing to debate with them, publicly or otherwise. But unless more compelling arguments can be advanced than those assembled by the IMT leaders, we do not intend to change our course.

## Where They Go Wrong on the Situation in Argentina

10.

### *A Superficial Survey*

The résumé of the Argentine situation offered by the leaders of the IMT is journalistic and incomplete; it lacks precise class characterizations. This summary consists of the following seven points:

1. "The replacement of the military dictatorship of Lanusse" is attributed to the struggle of the mass movement beginning with the Cordobazo. Another factor cited is "the development of multiple forms of armed confrontation" with the "military bourgeois forces" by "sectors of the masses as well as some groups of the vanguard."

2. The bourgeoisie and imperialism "by promoting the 'process of institutionalization' through the 'great national accord' . . . pursued the essential aims of averting the risk of an overall confrontation between its army and the masses" and "of reestablishing control over the workers movement. . . ."

3. ". . . the sine qua non for the success of this Peronist project was the acceptance of 'social peace' by the whole working class in exchange for 'free elections'. . . ." Minority sectors of the working class were beginning "to act independently."

4. "Under these conditions, the reestablishment of the Peronist regime inevitably involved a *growing violent and terrorist repression* not only against the Peronist far left and the groups engaged in guerrilla struggle, but also against all independent sectors of the workers movement and the working class."

5. "The resolution on Argentina adopted by the Tenth World Congress of the Fourth International (Fourth Congress since Reunification) affirmed . . . the unstable character of the new period of bourgeois democracy." At the same time this resolution pointed out it was "a curious 'democracy' that develops the white terror starting from the highest gov-

ernmental circles!"

6. "This 'institutionalized' and systematized repression, under the direct control of López Rega, the 'strongman' of the Peronist regime, reveals the hypocritical and fraudulent character of the declarations of the leading Peronists. . . ."

7. "The PST's participation in the institutionalized meetings between the government and the so-called center-left opposition . . . provides left cover for a political operation whereby the Peronist regime is seeking to *camouflage its responsibility* for the organization of an antiworker and antirevolutionary repression. . . ."

### *Startling Omissions*

This summary, which is correct as to the facts—although not in its assessment of the PST's actions—suffers from omissions and insufficiencies that are startling. Let's consider a few.

1. The IMT leaders fail to say whether the "new period of bourgeois democracy" is better for us Trotskyists than the military regimes, and whether, with the great gains scored by the masses, the workers are in a more advantageous position than under the Lanusse and Onganía governments. The PST holds that in fact the present regime in Argentina differs qualitatively from the military dictatorship, as well as the regimes of Pinochet, Bordaberry, Geisel, or Banzer, which are brutal Bonapartist dictatorships supported by the oligarchy and imperialism.

This characterization does not deny the right-wing and reactionary course of Peronism in office but does include a qualification; namely, that we have a bourgeois democratic regime although the government is in the hands of a party that is swinging more and more in a rightist and reactionary direction.

2. The lack of a precise characterization of the regime causes the leaders of the IMT to overlook the danger that a coup d'état may *wipe out the democratic gains made by the masses and the workers movement*, that is, sweep away the "new period of bourgeois democracy" mentioned in the resolution adopted at the last world congress.

The PST maintains that such a threat exists, that it is a terrible danger (although not something that is likely to happen next week, that is, immediately), and that it constitutes the gravest political problem facing

the masses and our party.

3. While the summary takes into account and defines the attitude of the vanguard of the workers movement, it fails to say a single word about the overall situation in the workers movement.

It recognizes that the workers movement as a whole does not act or think in the same way as the vanguard, by noting that the latter is "largely a minority on a national scale." But it totally ignores the level of consciousness and attitude of the working class as a whole. This omission, this failure to analyze how the entire working class thinks, feels, and acts, is impermissible, since the level of class consciousness is one of the fundamental elements required for formulating a correct policy.

4. As a result of this deficiency, the IMT leaders analyze Peronism as a government and the GAN [Gran Acuerdo Nacional—Great National Agreement] as a system, but they overlook Peronism as a mass movement and they overlook the mass support the GAN has. However, there are some figures that point up these facts clearly. The GAN, with its project of "institutionalizing the country" was voted for by 98 percent of all Argentines over the age of eighteen. More than 90 percent (95 percent comes closer) of the workers voted for the Peronists.

This current, therefore, has much greater support in the workers movement, for example, than Mitterrand in France and more than double the support for the Socialist and Communist parties in Italy.

The IMT leaders should specify whether they believe that the situation remains the same today or whether they believe that it has undergone a qualitative change. That is, does this majority of the working class, which does not follow the vanguard and does not support its independent actions, still support the government or not?

The PST holds that the crisis of Peronism in the workers movement has begun, but only just begun, and that it is developing very slowly. We do not know whether, when this crisis reaches its culmination, the workers will turn directly to the positions of revolutionary socialism, toward an independent workers party, or will remain stalled for a period at some "left" variety of popular frontism of-

ferred by the populist Peronists.

Do the IMT leaders believe that the crisis of Peronism is in its early or in its concluding stages? Is there a possibility or not that a mass popular front may arise as a result of this crisis?

5. This ignorance of what the workers movement is doing and what it seeks is shown by the fact that although they refer to the "Social Pact" as a governmental plan, they "neglect" to analyze it from the standpoint of its relation to the working class. They fail to point out that because of what this plan means (freezing wages in face of accelerating inflation), it has been and will remain the source of the most intense workers struggles.

The omission leads to a still graver oversight: forgetting the struggle of our class in general—not minority sectors of the vanguard—against the wage freeze. Nonetheless, this struggle produced three giant strike waves in 1974 and led to an important partial defeat of the "Social Pact" and the wage freeze. The class struggle has been deemed not worthy of a single line in the document of the IMT, as if it were devoid of significance.

6. An almost incredible oversight is the failure to mention the guerrillas. However, they exist and are active. The PRT (Combatiente) and the ERP launched a war to the knife against the Peronist government shortly after its installation. More recently, the Peronist left also turned to guerrilla actions against the government. The guerrillas are part of the national reality that deserves mention, and so we will devote some attention to them.

Is it politically correct to launch armed attacks against a government that had—and continues to have—the political support of the immense majority of the workers movement and a large part of the populace? Is it valid to argue that the guerrillas played no role in the stepped-up repression, because such repression is inherent in the capitalist system? Shouldn't Marxist analysis note that if the workers movement does not react against the repression this is because it is being carried out in the name of defending a government regarded by the workers as their own that is being physically attacked by a small irresponsible elite? Shouldn't it be said that this guerrilla activity provides an excuse for accelerating

the repression, provoking an unnecessarily early crackdown out of proportion to the level reached by the workers struggles; that this activity enables the bourgeoisie to isolate the vanguard sectors, which cannot find the mass support needed to resist these attacks because the masses support the government?

7. It is not made clear that in the Argentine situation the gravest contradiction is the one between the degree of militancy and organization achieved by the proletariat on the trade-union level and the degree of rotteness reached by its trade-union and political leaderships. This contradiction cannot be left out of any serious analysis, since on the subjective level it finds expression in the contradiction between the very high trade-union consciousness of the Argentine workers and their extreme political backwardness, their fanatic Peronism.

### For a Leninist-Trotskyist Political Course

#### 11.

To develop a correct revolutionary policy in our country requires taking into account the situation as a whole, of which the factors overlooked by the IMT leaders form an essential part. Thus the policy prescribed by our critics, who call on us to "resolutely orient . . . toward the line of the workers united front and the propagation and carrying out in practice of self-defense by the workers organizations themselves against the fascist terror," simply sounds ridiculous to us.

A workers united front? With whom? The relatively tiny Argentine Communist party? No, obviously a workers united front requires mass organizations, not small parties. A workers united front with the Peronist unions, which are the only mass organizations that exist? But the fact is that a whole "sector of fascism" draws its support from the Peronist unions, which in their turn support the government as do the workers. So then, should it be a united front of the Peronist unions against the Peronist unions?

"Self-defense" by the workers organizations themselves? Should we call on the Peronist unions to organize "self-defense" against their own fascist goons or against the parallel police, if the goons are part of the govern-

ment apparatus?

We would like the authors of the document to tell us exactly with what "workers organizations" (mass organizations, of course) we are supposed to achieve a workers front and promote self-defense. The key to the situation, precisely, is that the Argentine workers in their vast majority do not think or feel that there is any need *for the time being* for self-defense against the fascists. They do not think so because in their extreme political backwardness, as shown by their support for the Peronist government and movement, they do not regard fascism as their main enemy *for the time being*. They do not feel the need to defend themselves because, *for the time being*, the fascists are not attacking the mass workers organizations, or the labor movement, but only sections of the vanguard standing far in advance of the masses. The working class as a whole, *for the time being*, is indifferent to the fascist threat.

What the workers are conscious of is the threat of a coup d'etat. But precisely with regard to this danger, which is the most serious one—much more acute than the activity of the fascist groups—and which the working class recognizes, the leaders of the IMT have no line. Nowhere in their document do they mention the possibility of a reactionary coup d'etat, as if the perspective of a Pinochet seizing power in Argentina were something remote. Just at the moment when this danger begins to loom larger, they prove to have no line for confronting it. We cannot help feeling astonished at this failure by those who a year ago were predicting a reactionary coup and accusing us of lack of preparations to meet it.

Nor do our critics suggest a course to help speed up the crisis in the Peronist movement and prevent the workers movement from going through a new populist or popular-front experience.

To top off their falsifications of our positions, the leaders of the IMT go so far as to suggest that the PST thinks that the way to fight the reaction is by agreements with the bourgeoisie; and without any proof, they go on to accuse us of having a "popular front" line.

Yet when it comes to analyzing the immediate problems and formulating a line for Argentina, they leave out completely the danger of popular

frontism and what to do about it. Specifically, the IMT leaders fail to even indicate that the main slogan to advance in combating Peronism, any alternative form of populism, and a popular front is the political independence of the working class.

Another incredible "omission" by our critics with regard to what line revolutionists in Argentina ought to adopt concerns the gravest kind of "terrorism," as our party has defined it, the terrorism waged by the Peronist government against the workers in imposing the "Social Pact" and its wage freeze. We cannot understand why those who accuse us of serving as a "left cover" for the Peronist government failed to mention that one of the fundamental tasks in defending the rights of the workers against this government is to struggle against the agreement between the bosses and the union bureaucrats included in the "Social Pact."

Finally, there is another "omission" that seems to be a complement of the ironical attitude these polemicists decided to adopt toward the "process of institutionalization." They fail to take into account its effect on the consciousness of the working class. The process of institutionalization as it concerns the bourgeoisie is one thing, and our critics have correctly ascertained what this is. But institutionalization is something else again from the standpoint of the understanding, feelings, and aspirations of the labor movement and the masses who voted for it.

To the workers and the masses, "institutionalization" means the process of winning democratic freedoms for themselves besides supporting the Peronist government, which they consider to be *their* government. If this is not understood, it is impossible to understand anything at all about the present level of consciousness of the Argentine workers; and, as a consequence, it is absolutely impossible to develop a correct line.

A genuinely revolutionary line must take into account all these elements that have been "overlooked" by our critics. Our party weighed them in arriving at a policy that combines the following complementary lines of action:

1. To mount a head-on fight against the "Social Pact." Our policy is to help the working class organize strikes to win higher pay, break the "wage

freeze," and defeat the "Social Pact."

This line of struggle goes hand in hand with denouncing the government for enforcing the pact. It means seeking to unmask the government in practice; and, what is just as important, impelling the working class to mobilize massively behind an objective that it is able to undertake right now.

Our entire policy is based precisely on finding a leverage point from which the working class as a whole can be set in motion on its own against the capitalist system and the Peronist government. Given the workers' high level of trade-union consciousness, this leverage point is to be found in their readiness to mobilize against the "Social Pact." If, in struggling against the pact, the working class wins successive victories, they will in due course come to confrontations with the government and the fascists that will enable them to overcome their political backwardness. Events are proving us right in our choice of the central issue, since the largest working-class mobilizations have occurred against the wage freeze, the main pillar of the "Social Pact."

2. To engage in an energetic defense of the "process of institutionalization" as the masses understand it—not as the bourgeoisie and above all the Peronist government understand it. In voting for this "process," the workers voted for expanding democratic freedoms. We agree with the workers and with the feeling they expressed by their votes. We are pointing out to them that they must struggle to ensure that the process moves forward and not backward.

In this course, we are following the method outlined in the *Transitional Program*, which teaches us to look for the progressive substance placed by the working class in slogans that on the surface may appear to serve their interests (for example, "peace," when the bourgeoisie advance it as part of their preparations for a reactionary war).

3. To engage in a dialogue with the Peronists as long as they continue to enjoy massive support from the workers. Our purpose in engaging in a dialogue, which includes such tactics as meetings with them, is to try to accelerate the crisis of the Peronist movement. We level demands on the Peronists in the name of the working class and denounce them for the "Social Pact," the repression, the protection of fascist groups, their reactionary course, and their policy that ob-

jectively facilitates preparations for a reactionary coup. Our main accusation is that they do not defend democracy but undermine it and curtail it.

4. To continue to make "limited, tactical agreements" with any current in defense of any specific right or body of rights that is under attack or can be won. At the same time, as conditions mature for forming a real working-class united front against the fascist gangs, we will continue to propose to independent unions and left worker parties that they form united fronts and participate in united efforts of workers militias. (Although we have received only negative responses so far, the PST has been carrying out a full-fledged campaign in favor of such proposals for months, a fact systematically ignored by our critics.)

5. To continue combining the struggle for trade-union democracy with the struggle against the "Social Pact" as the best way of sweeping away the trade-union bureaucracy.

6. To continue to raise the alarm against the danger of a reactionary coup d'état and explain the need for mobilizing the workers movement to face this threat. This policy includes using proletarian methods to defend the bourgeois democratic regime against a reactionary coup d'état. That is, we fight for the continuity of the "present period of bourgeois democracy" against reactionary assaults as long as the masses are not yet prepared to go beyond it to the establishment of socialist democracy.

7. To continue to battle for the political independence of the workers movement and to oppose any slide into popular frontism. This is the axis of our entire line—class against class.

8. To continue to oppose guerrillism. In their ignorance of, and contempt for, the consciousness of the masses, for what the masses want and feel, the guerrillas fell into terrorist actions against a government that the workers are not yet ready to abandon, particularly in face of a threat from the ultraright. The majority of the working people either ignore or repudiate the terrorist actions of the guerrillas. Moreover, we will continue to explain how the irresponsible course followed by the guerrillas has helped accelerate the repression and increased the danger of a reactionary coup against a workers movement not yet prepared politically to resist and defeat such an attack. □

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Feb 2014

# THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE UNITED SECRETARIAT OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AND THE PST

by the IMT Bureau

## 1. THREE RED HERRINGS

In order to divert attention from their opportunist errors, the comrades of the PST Executive Committee introduce into their answer to the USFI's criticism of these errors three red herrings that have nothing to do with the problems the United Secretariat raised in regard to the PST's policies:

### 1. "Guerrillaism vs. Trotskyism—the real issue"?

The PST document contends that the United Secretariat's "adherence" to guerrilla warfare "lies behind" its "public attack" on the PST, that the United Secretariat's "Open Letter No. 1" and "Open Letter No. 2" were written "within the framework of this pro-guerrilla line."

From the standpoint of substance, this is of course nonsense; worse, it is a conscious distortion of the documents voted at the 10th World Congress and the January 1975 IEC Plenum, that is, of the positions adhered to by the majority tendency of the F.I. These documents make it crystal clear that what the majority tendency is concerned with when it speaks of armed struggle in Argentina is the need to prepare and organize the proletariat for *mass self-defense* against reactionary military coups like those that triumphed in Bolivia and Chile. The resolution on armed struggle in Latin America adopted by the 10th World Congress of the F.I. explicitly "rejects the Debrayist conception of the guerrilla 'foco' and related illusions long promoted by the Cuban leadership. According to this way of looking at things, the activity of small nuclei with the determination to undertake military initiatives can be a *sufficient* motive force of revolutionary struggle and replace both the activity of the Leninist party as well as the mobilization and organization of broad masses, which in the last analysis are regarded as auxiliary elements." (*Intercontinental Press*, December 23, 1974.) We say *only armed resistance by the masses* can defeat the coups of fascist murderers and torturers.

From a formal standpoint, the argumentation in the PST document is even more flimsy. The fact that the PST opposes the pro-guerrilla line is in no way a guarantee against right-wing deviations. The fact that the orientation of other currents is pro-focista or pro-guerrilla does not at all imply that their criticism of reformist illusions and Social Democratic deviations is therefore basically wrong. Throughout contemporary revolutions Social Democrats have been very vocal against "putschism." This was the cry raised by the right-wing leaders of German Social Democracy in 1918-1919 against the young communist revolutionists of *Spartakus*. No serious Marxist historian

will deny that the Spartakus comrades were indeed guilty of some adventuristic errors and even of putschism during the January 1919 uprising. But this does not in the least justify the political line of their opponents, nor does it make their criticism of the Social Democrats and centrists less pertinent.

Likewise, the "right wing opposition" of the German Communist party around Heinrich Brandler correctly criticized many ultraleft deviations of the official Stalin-Thaelmann faction of that party during the crucial years of the rise of fascism, 1930-33. But these correct criticisms of ultraleftism were no guarantee against right-wing deviations, as Trotsky pointed out again and again in harsh polemics against Brandler and his followers. In fact, the whole history of the communist movement indicates that automatic suspicion is warranted with regard to any tendency that concentrates its polemics exclusively or essentially against "ultraleftism." After all, in the world in which we live the main opponents of revolutionary Marxism within the working class and the organized labor movement, let alone within bourgeois society as a whole, are not "ultraleft putschism" or "guerrillaism," but rather class collaboration, reformism, and opportunism.

### 2. Critical support for anti-imperialist measures taken by the colonial bourgeoisie

This is another red herring; it has absolutely nothing to do with the subject under discussion. Of course, we are ready to support wholeheartedly any concrete anti-imperialist *measure* taken by a bourgeois government in a semi-colonial country, but without giving political support to that government, without creating any sort of illusion in its capacity or willingness to pursue a consistent anti-imperialist struggle, and without abandoning the organizational or political independence of the working class and its revolutionary vanguard. This issue is not involved in the discussion with the PST. We did not "refuse" to support Isabelita's war of national independence against U.S. imperialism, after the model of Trotsky's support to China's war under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership against Japan—for the very simple reason that there has been no such war and none is in the offing. Nor did we "refuse" to support Isabelita Peron's onslaught against imperialist property in Argentina, after the model of support to Cardenas's onslaught in Mexico during the 1930s—for the very same reason: No such onslaught has taken place.

In fact, we contend that Peron's return to power, far from being the expression of any serious conflict between the Argentine "national bourgeoisie" and imperialism, took place with the full support of world imperialism,

including U.S. imperialism, because imperialism considered the Peron regime as the only way to divert and break the revolutionary upsurge of the Argentine masses, which was threatening the survival of private property both in that country and in a large part of Latin America.

Whatever minor conflicts exist today between imperialism and the Argentine government are, for the time being, absolutely marginal. In fact, the new Argentine minister of economic affairs has gone out of his way to point out that he invites not only European and Japanese but also U.S. capital to flow into Argentina.

This does not exclude the possibility that sharp conflict might break out again sometime in the future. We would then adopt the traditional position of revolutionary Marxism in such cases. But to cover up *today's concessions to the Peronist government in Argentina* by referring to past or potential future conflicts between the Argentine "national bourgeoisie" and imperialism means to depart from the Marxist method. Should we perhaps conclude that the PST Executive Committee has now adopted the Menshevik-Stalinist theory of "stages" and that the PST holds that since conflicts between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism are still *possible*, Marxists should desist from their task of developing to the utmost not only the trade union struggle between capital and labor but also the political class struggle to overthrow the power of the Argentine bourgeoisie and its state machine?

The comrades of the PST raise a big hue and cry because we presumably failed to stipulate the semi-colonial nature of Argentina. This is another red herring. Of course, Argentina is not an imperialist but still a semicolonial country. But this formula can be used to create confusion instead of to clarify. The Transitional Program of the F.I. clearly states: "The relative weight of the individual democratic and transitional demands in the proletariat's struggle, their mutual ties and their order of presentation, is determined by the peculiarities and specific conditions of each backward country and to a considerable extent—by the *degree* of backwardness." From that point of view, it is obvious that Argentina today is *the most developed* of all semicolonial countries; that is, it is the one whose class structure is closest to that of imperialist countries. In fact, the weight of the industrial working class in the total active population, the absolute number of workers, and their concentration is greater than in several imperialist countries. Even real wages and average standard of living are nearer to those of imperialist countries than to the average in the colonial and semicolonial countries; in fact, they are higher than those of an imperialist country like Portugal.

In that sense, the PST document is clearly misleading when it harps on Trotsky's formula: "For the backward colonial and semicolonial countries, the struggle for democracy, including the struggle for national independence, represents a necessary and progressive stage of historical development." Trotsky makes clear what he means by "democracy" in that context: the struggle for national independence against a foreign oppressor or for agrarian revolution against feudal or semifeudal overlords. He *does not* identify that "struggle for democracy" with the defense of bourgeois parliaments against reactionary coups—in *that* respect there is no basic difference between the way democratic rights have to be defended in semicolonial countries and the way they must be defended

in imperialist countries.

Since the question at issue in the USFI polemics against the PST does not relate to any concrete conflict between the Argentine bourgeoisie and foreign imperialism or semifeudal landlords, but rather to conflicts between capital and labor and divisions within the "national bourgeoisie," the PST's references to Trotsky's positions on semicolonial countries are largely irrelevant.

### **3. The need to defend democratic rights against capitalist attempts to destroy them**

Again, this is a complete diversion. In none of its writings has the International Majority Tendency, the United Secretariat, or the International Executive Committee ever placed this elementary principle of Marxism in question. *If* tomorrow a civil war breaks out in Argentina against a fascist *coup*, we shall of course fight side by side with the workers against fascism, irrespective of the fact that Balbin or Isabelita also "fights" in the same camp (if they fight, which is a hypothesis we wouldn't stake a lot of money on). *If* tomorrow the workers organize "only" a large mass strike, or even only a big demonstration, against fascist terror or reactionary legislation, again it is elementary that we would participate in that struggle, irrespective of whoever else participates alongside the workers or leads the struggle initially. But this is not what is at stake in the current polemics. These polemics turn around a different question: Whether a revolutionary organization that is confronted neither with a civil war, nor with a massive strike, nor even with a massive demonstration against fascism, but rather with *government-organized terror against working class militants* should divert attention from that terror and pledge support to that government under the pretext that this government could be threatened by a fascist coup or overthrown by an even more reactionary regime. What is also at stake is the question of whether the mobilization of the working class to defend its democratic rights will be aided by political *blocs* with bourgeois parties and by illusions sown about the willingness or readiness of these parties to "fight fascism," or whether on the contrary such blocs and illusions demobilize the masses and thereby prevent an effective fight for democratic rights.

To claim that these questions can somehow be subsumed under the general formula of "the need to defend bourgeois democracy against fascism" means to erase in one fell swoop more than half a century of Trotskyist struggle against centrism and Social Democracy over the question of how to defend democratic rights.

## **II. THE REAL CONTENT OF THE DEBATE**

The declarations of the United Secretariat on the opportunist deviations of the PST raised a number of principled issues on which the first answer of the PST suggested the beginning of a self-criticism (hailed by the USFI as a step forward). But the second answer of the PST partially takes back these hints of self-criticism and makes the PST's revision of some of the principles of revolutionary Marxism more blatant.

## 1. Political bloc with bourgeois parties in the "defense of democratic rights"

It was and remains the contention of the majority tendency of the F.I. that by participating in a regular series of political meetings with the officially recognized parties of Argentina, including the main bourgeois opposition party, and by expressing its public willingness to sign common statements with these parties about the present political situation in Argentina, the PST was in fact entering a *political bloc* with the "liberal" bourgeoisie (and incidentally with the CP), the only basis and justification being the need to make common cause against the "threat of fascism." This raised an important issue: Is it correct to combat fascism in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, either before or after fascism takes power? The principled tradition of Trotskyism is well known and crystal clear on this question. The PST seems to depart from that position.

It is true that in its reply to the first statement of the United Secretariat the PST referred to the legitimacy of making *technical* arrangements with bourgeois forces, for the success of self-defense squads, for example. There was never any dispute about this. But no "technical" arrangement of any kind was involved in the successive meetings at the Argentine president's office between representatives of legal opposition parties—bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, CP, and PST. The answer of the PST Executive Committee accuses the United Secretariat of desperately searching through the statements of Comrade Coral and the PST, even taking sentences out of context, in an attempt to demonstrate that the PST holds that it is justified to make a political bloc with "liberal" bourgeois parties against a threatening reactionary coup. The PST leaders indignantly deny that they are looking for any political agreement with bourgeois parties. But they rather weaken their case and make their indignation less credible by stating:

"In seeking allies in this struggle we have always sought practical objectives such as the defense of political prisoners, and, above all, concrete actions that, from our point of view, would help mobilize the masses.

"It is true that our tactics and attitude have been different from that required in an imperialist country like France, Belgium, Germany, or the United States. That was because we paid attention to Trotsky's admonition concerning the difference between democrats in imperialist countries and those in colonial and semi-colonial countries." (*Intercontinental Press*, January 20, 1975, p. 73)

Again, what is involved is not the legitimacy of *technical arrangements* with "liberal" bourgeois elements in the fight against fascists. Only a fool or a scoundrel would refuse to accept money or arms given to workers defense guards fighting against fascists (whether in an imperialist or semicolonial country) under the pretext that the aid is of bourgeois origin. What is at stake here is the question of a *political bloc* with the "liberal" bourgeoisie. *In that context*, the comrades of the PST cannot marshal any evidence that Trotsky advised such a Social Democratic policy. All the quotations from Trotsky that the document of the PST's Executive Committee advance to support its case deal with critical support to the "national" bourgeoisie's *measures* of struggle against foreign imperialist domination. They do not involve any *political bloc* with such a bourgeoisie, let alone in a struggle against indigenous reaction.

When the PST document restates its position, backtracking from the backtracking of its first answer to the USFI, it concludes "categorically":

"Meetings with the bourgeois opposition parties . . . were neither regular nor institutionalized, nor led to any political accord, 'interclass' or otherwise.

"Our position is crystal clear. We never make strategic, programmatic, or long-term blocs with non-working class parties. Nor do we sign common political programs, or hold joint rallies of a general political type with such parties. With such parties we conclude only 'limited, specific, tactical agreements.' Such tactical accords serve essentially for propaganda campaigns on well-defined individual problems, and to a lesser degree and in exceptional cases for obtaining some practical gain. They therefore play only a relative role, since for our party only 'the mobilization of the working class can solve all the problems.'" (*Intercontinental Press*, January 20, 1975, p. 73)

And somewhat further:

"We are against any bloc that crosses class lines. We are for practical agreements that help advance the struggle to institutionalize the democratic gains won through the Cordobazos. We are also decidedly in favor of a workers united front." (*Intercontinental Press*, January 20, 1975, p. 74.)

Unfortunately for the PST leaders, their position, far from being "crystal clear," becomes more ambiguous, more confused, and more contradictory the more they try to explain away their obvious mistakes.

The PST is against *any* bloc that crosses class lines. Excellent! But if the word "any" has any meaning, the sentence means "each and every bloc." A few sentences before, we hear a different story. There it is said that, while being against "strategic, programmatic, or long-term blocs" with non-working class parties, the PST favors "limited, specific, tactical agreements" with them. Doesn't that imply a "bloc which crosses class lines"? Only "tactical" and not strategic? Granted! Only "specific" and not "general"? Indeed. Only "short-term" and not "long-term"? We note the difference. Nevertheless: *political agreements* between various *parties* representing antagonistic social classes, involving common tactics and common propaganda campaigns, even around "well-defined individual problems," are "tactical political blocs" if they are anything, and not simply "practical arrangements."

Please, comrades of the PST, show us where Trotsky favored the conclusion of such "tactical short-term blocs" between revolutionary organizations, reformist parties, and bourgeois parties to defend democratic rights or to struggle against fascism, either in imperialist or semicolonial countries? You will have a hard time finding such references!

The PST Executive Committee's denial that what was involved in these regular interparty meetings at the President's Palace was indeed a "political bloc crossing class lines" (be it a "limited" and "purely tactical" one) sounds extremely hollow and written without much confidence. It is dated January 7, 1975. A few days earlier, in the December 30, 1974, issue of the PST's weekly *Avanzada Socialista*, there was published an "Open Letter" to its readers summarizing the political evolution of Argentina in the previous period. We find therein the following significant passage:

“Our party was one of the promoters of the specific limited agreements by the group of the ‘Nine,’ for opposing this development (towards fascism). At the same time, we continually criticized and exposed the *procapitalist parties included in this bloc.*” (*Intercontinental Press*, February 10, 1975, p. 196. Our emphasis.)

Apparently, the categorical denial of the existence of any “bloc” is not only directed against the “slanders” of the bourgeois press, and the “slanders” culled from the bourgeois press by the United Secretariat, but also against the way the editors of *Avanzada Socialista* “slander” the PST leadership by assuming the existence of a “bloc” that allegedly never really existed except in the imagination of all the innumerable “enemies” of the PST, including the United Secretariat and the editors of *Avanzada Socialista*.

Wouldn't it be more honest and more constructive to admit that what you formed was indeed a tactical political bloc with bourgeois parties, crossing class lines, and then either make a thorough self-criticism of this grave mistake or else defend the legitimacy of such a bloc on a principled basis, instead of denying what is self-evident?

Political blocs with the bourgeoisie “against reaction” or “against fascism” generally start on a “purely tactical and limited basis” with forces that claim to be Marxist. To brazenly assert the need for a long-term strategic bloc with the bourgeoisie means obviously to become an all-out reformist. If we thought that the PST had become a reformist party like the Ceylonese LSSP, we would propose their immediate expulsion from the Fourth International. This is not the case.

What is at issue is precisely the political error of making “tactical political agreements and blocs” with bourgeois parties in the struggle against fascism. For limited purposes? Indeed. The Uruguayan followers of the PST have proposed a “limited tactical agreement with bourgeois parties” for “winning free elections” (a “limited” objective indeed). Tomorrow, we can be faced with a “limited tactical bloc” with the Junta Democrática in Spain for the liberation of political prisoners (a very concrete and worthwhile objective, if ever there was one!) What about a “tactical bloc” with the Portuguese Military Junta (including joint propaganda meetings) when democratic rights are threatened by a fascist coup?

Our opposition to such “blocs,” whether tactical or strategic, does not stem from any blind, sterile dogmatism. Tactics should be judged in the light of their results. Principled acceptable tactics are those that further the cause of the proletariat's class struggle and self-emancipation, that help to raise the proletariat's class consciousness and self-confidence. Opportunist tactics are those that lead to results contrary to these goals. There is no other criterion by which to judge the advisability or incorrectness of a tactic.

It is our contention that engaging in common propaganda campaigns with bourgeois parties against the fascist threat strengthens the reformist and class collaborationist illusion among the working class that fascism could somehow be stopped and destroyed other than through the most resolute, energetic, and direct *proletarian class action*. It strengthens the illusion that if only the bourgeoisie could become more civilized, its politicians wiser, and the potential horrors of fascism more widely understood, then all “democrats” would make sure that fascist barbarism would not win.

Historical experience, however, indicates that this illusion is completely unfounded and constitutes a heavy obstacle—sometimes, alas, an irremovable one, if the revolutionary vanguard is too weak—on the road to an effective struggle against fascism. Historical experience shows again and again that the more resolute the workers struggle by direct action against the fascists, the less “civilized,” “democratic” and “anti-fascist” the bourgeoisie becomes, the more it prefers a fascist victory to the threatened victory of the proletariat. Indeed, when the working class rises “by the millions” arms in hand against the fascists, 99 percent of the bourgeoisie, regardless of its “liberal” traditions or its support to the “institutional process,” goes over to the camp of the fascists, as it did in Spain in July 1936.

Unfortunately, the bourgeoisie has a much sharper and clearer consciousness of the *class* interests at stake in civil wars than has the working class, and it allows itself much less to be led astray by high-sounding democratic phrases, the class content of which is somehow obscured.

Now to hold a common “propaganda campaign” with bourgeois parties in defense of “democratic rights” means precisely to *hide these objective dynamics of the class struggle* that will decide the outcome of the struggle against fascism. The comrades of the PST add that in these meetings they will “denounce” the procapitalist participants. So did the POUM in Spain—and, one must admit, in a much sharper fashion than the PST, constantly shouting about the need for socialist revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, and workers militias. Unfortunately, the working class judges parties and develops consciousness not primarily in function of speeches, but in function of actions. And the “action” involved is a *common action with the bourgeoisie*, however loud the denunciation in words.

So the mass of the workers will conclude: The PST, like the CP, thinks that you can stop fascism in a bloc with the bourgeoisie. It is however more “dogmatic” and less “flexible” than the CP. Once you want a “bloc” with the liberals to oppose fascism because you believe it is indispensable, it isn't very practical to spit in the face of your indispensable allies.

All the reformist and neo-reformist arguments about the need to unite “all antifascist forces” are based around such a logic. Why make a tactical bloc with the liberals against the fascists if that bloc is not really necessary to beat the fascists? But if it is necessary and indispensable, then one obviously has to stop any policies and actions that would “drive the liberal bourgeoisie away from the antifascist front.” And since the sharpening of the workers class struggle drives the bourgeoisie into the arms of the “fascist plotters,” it is necessary to put the brakes on the workers class struggle in order to keep the “liberal bourgeoisie” inside the “tactical bloc” (pardon us: the “limited, specific, tactical agreements” with the liberal bourgeois parties). This is the logic of Menshevism and of Stalino-Menshevism, of the revolution by stages: “first the victory against reaction; only after that sharper class struggle against capital.” The PST does not follow that line, of course. But by accepting the idea of an antifascist “tactical bloc” with bourgeois parties “against fascism,” it does strengthen illusions of that type among the masses and takes the first, hesitant steps on a road that could lead to that logical conclusion.

Here again, the question of the specific class structure of



Argentine society comes into play. The nearer a semicolonial country approximates an industrialized one and the larger the weight of the proletariat in the active population, the more the political life of the country is dominated by the conflicts between capital and labor and the nearer the *concrete* forms of proletarian antifascist struggle come to those Trotsky sketched out for imperialist countries like Germany.

In fact, the Argentine proletariat has a greater weight in society today than the Spanish proletariat did in 1936, when it represented barely one third of the active population. The PST document cites Trotsky's burning verdict about the Spanish civil war, seemingly without understanding what it reproduces:

"The participation of Spanish workers in the struggle against Franco was their elementary duty. But precisely and *only because the workers did not succeed in time in replacing the rule of bourgeois democracy with their own rule, 'democracy' was able to clear the path for fascism.*" (Our emphasis.)

Yet without blinking an eye, the authors of that document draw from *that* verdict the conclusion that Trotsky taught them . . . to make a "tactical bloc" with the national bourgeoisie to stop the victory of fascism!

So terrible is the dialectical logic of political mistakes that the comrades of the PST are already taking a second (still hesitant) step on the road toward the concept of "revolution by stages." In Chile, under the reformist government of the Unidad Popular (which, in the eyes of the masses, was after all identified with an attempt at social revolution and not with a "power of the national bourgeoisie") they advocated full support to all mass movements against the government, even those by privileged sectors of the workers aristocracy. But when there is a strike by policemen for progressive trade-union demands against the bourgeois "nationalist" military government in Peru, followed by an urban uprising of slum dwellers, the magazine *Revista de America* which is sympathetic to the views of the PST, speaks about, "rightist mobs, which defiantly went out to burn and destroy public buildings, and to promote the plunder of commercial establishments. And never before did it have to safeguard institutional order [sic! the military dictatorship] taking troops and tanks into the streets and imposing a state of emergency and a curfew. Through one blow *that climate of uncertainty and chaos* which usually precedes typical coup situations was established." (March, 1975, emphasis added.)

And when the working class takes to the street and builds barricades to protest against the high cost of living and starvation wages, does this perhaps also create a "climate of chaos and uncertainty which usually precedes typical coup situations"? Isn't the CP right, after all, to state that it's the "leftists" and their unfortunate influence among the masses which created a similar "climate of chaos" that "prepared the coup" in Chile?

Look at these bitter fruits of your "tactical bloc with the liberal bourgeoisie against the threat of a coup," comrades of the PST! Think it through and return to Trotskyism, before it is too late.

The PST's Executive Committee document accuses us of "overlooking the mass support the GAN has." They accuse us of not understanding that "the government . . . continues to have . . . the political support of the immense majority of the workers movement." They heavily insist

that "if the workers movement does not react against the repression this is because it is being carried out in the name of defending a government regarded by the workers as their own." And they conclude:

"Thus the policy prescribed by our critics, who call on us to 'resolutely orient . . . toward the line of the workers united front and the propagation and carrying out in practice of self-defense by the workers organizations themselves against the fascist terror,' simply sounds ridiculous to us.

"A workers united front? With whom? The relatively tiny Argentine Communist party? No, obviously a workers united front requires mass organizations, not small parties. A workers united front with the Peronist unions, which are the only mass organizations that exist? But the fact is that a whole 'sector of fascism' draws its support from the Peronist unions, which in their turn support the government as do the workers. So then, should it be a united front of the Peronist unions against the Peronist unions?"

This whole "polemics-for-polemics-sake" then culminates in the remarkable conclusion:

"The key (sic) to the situation, precisely, is that the Argentine workers in their vast majority do not think or feel that there is any need *for the time being* for self-defense against the fascists. They do not think so because in their extreme political backwardness, as shown by their support for the Peronist government and movement, they do not regard fascism as their main enemy *for the time being* . . . The working class, as a whole, *for the time being*, is indifferent to the fascist threat." (*Intercontinental Press*, January 20, 1975, quotations pp. 78, 79.)

Hardly was this "deep" analysis published than life itself showed how wrong it was and forced the PST to make a turn. The "ridiculously sounding" slogan of a workers united front against repressive acts by the government was taken up by the PST itself; it doesn't seem to have been so ridiculous, after all! And far from being "indifferent" to the threat of repression, the working class started mass action against it, as exemplified by the admirable two months strike of the steel workers of Villa Constitucion against the suppression and subsequent arrest of their democratically elected union leadership by the government. *This was a political mass strike against government repression by a sector of the working class.* What remains of all the above polemics in the light of these subsequent events?

When the PST leadership says that the working class, *for the time being*, is indifferent to a fascist threat as currently "explained" by the PST, it proves thereby more than it intends to prove. Indeed, the working class is indifferent to such a threat, for the simple reason that the threat of fascists toppling the Isabelita-Lopez Rega regime and destroying the Peronist unions does not exist in Argentina today. The PST's tailending of the workers limited and partial support to the Peron government made it invent such a threat, in order to justify opportunist promises of "support" to that government.

But experience has already shown that the workers are in no way indifferent to the serious threat which repression against class struggle tendencies in the unions, anti-strike laws, wage freezes, mass arrests, and murders of workers cadres *by the government* represent to the labor movement. Against these real acts and threats of repres-

sion they have started to react. Was it so difficult to foresee this? Wouldn't it have been wiser to concentrate on the organization of this "workers united front" with all working-class organizations, inside the plants and the neighborhoods, ready to join such a common fight, including all those sectors of the Peronist unions ready to do so, instead of diverting attention to the "multipartidaria" and acting towards "the Peronist movement" as a monolithic bloc around a bourgeois political party? It wouldn't then have been so foolish to conceive "of a united front with the Peronist unions," not against the Peronist unions but against the fascist goons of Lopez Rega and the anti-working-class measures of the Isabelita-Lopez Rega government. For it so happens that a growing number of Peronist workers and even some union bodies are ready to engage in such a fight. But hypnotized by the general formula of the Argentine workers' "political allegiance to Peronism," not understanding the basic differences between the Peronist government number 2 and the Peronist regime of the forties and early fifties in its relations to the mass movement, the PST leadership did not foresee the inevitable process of differentiation which had to occur within that mass movement once Peron returned to power and tied itself unnecessarily in the opportunist tactical bloc with Balbin and no less opportunistic maneuver of "defending the continuity of the (Peronist) government." Simultaneously, powerful forces were already on the move toward a mass confrontation, not between the Peronist workers and "fascist anti-Peronist reaction," but between the reactionary, pro-fascist wing of the Peronist government and important sectors of the working class.

## **2. Identification between workers democratic rights and institutions of the bourgeois state**

Here again, the PST comrades evade the issue by talking about other matters or by repeating elementary truths of the Marxist tradition that nobody challenges. And here also, grave matters of principle are involved.

It has been an old Social Democratic trick (repeated by the Stalinists first during the prewar "Popular Front" period and then in a more permanent way since the early 1950s) to *identify* the democratic rights that the workers have with the "democratic institutions" of the bourgeois state. This deliberate confusion is one of the pillars on which they base their class collaborationist strategy, their line of alliance with various bourgeois political forces, and (even without that alliance) their respect for and submission to the institutions of the bourgeois state, especially when they are in the government.

By using formulas that are confused, to say the least, the comrades of the PST have taken the first step on that very same road.

The PST document states that the "process of institutionalization" involves the "institutionalization of the democratic rights won by the Cordobazo." (*Intercontinental Press*, January 20, 1975, p. 73.) Even more clearly:

"Granting that the weakness of Argentina capitalism, coupled with the pressure of U.S. imperialism, precluded this constituting anything more than a democratic *interlude*, what should our attitude be toward this

opening? We decided that we ought to take full advantage of it. That meant doing everything possible to extend democracy and to *institutionalize*, that is, strengthen it. Above all, it meant opening an intensive struggle to gain legal recognition for our party." (*Intercontinental Press*, January 20, 1975, p. 69.)

In politics it never pays to try to be too clever. You may think that by using a given word in a manner different from the great majority of people, you are "tricking" the class enemy. In reality, you are only confusing the masses and sowing not a little confusion in your own ranks, too.

In Argentina the formula "institutionalization process" was used by all political parties and all the mass media (and understood by millions of people) to mean the *replacement of the military dictatorship by an elected bourgeois government of General Peron in order to stop guerrilla warfare and mass workers uprisings like the Cordobazo*, all political and social forces submitting to the "verdict of universal suffrage and the decisions of Parliament." The PST comrades want to pick and choose, to have their cake and eat it at the same time. This may fool some factional associates of the PST in foreign lands, but it doesn't fool anybody in Argentina.

To say that you "understand" the "institutionalization process" as referring only to the "democratic rights won by the workers through the Cordobazo" and to the legalization of the PST (and other working-class parties), and not as referring to the GAN, the economic agreement blocking wages, and the possibility of the "freely elected government," "institutionalizing" the state of siege and even temporarily suppressing the right to strike means to present a completely one-sided picture of what has been going on in Argentina since the general elections, a picture that nobody apart from the PST (and perhaps some naive left-wing Peronists) will understand.

Under the given social relationship of forces in Argentina, "institutionalization" as a *political alternative bourgeois rule* to the Ongania dictatorship can only mean a *combination* of all these aspects. If the PST did not understand that from the start, it was guilty of harboring grave illusions and of spreading them among the masses. If the PST did not understand this even today, after the wholesale repression of the left-wing unions and unionists and the mass murders of revolutionists and class activists, including cadres and militants of the PST, then its case would be hopeless.

We rather think that they understand it quite well, and that they are trying by semantic sleights-of-hand to hide their responsibility for covering up before the working class an alternative form of bourgeois rule and oppression that while *partially* increasing the scope of democratic rights is *simultaneously* increasing the scope of repression against the workers. (In fact, there was less repression against class-struggle tendencies in the unions under the military dictatorship, at least after 1969, than there is today during the "democratic interlude".)

The semantic sleight-of-hand includes essentially two tricks. First the "institutionalization process" is artificially reduced to the "institutionalization of democratic rights." But this is indefensible in the light of reality. It is as if a sophist would argue: "What worker can be against a solemn recognition of the right to strike, even by a bourgeois constitution? So why be against the institutionalization of the right to strike?" Every intelligent trade unionist, let alone any revolutionary Marxist, will

answer: "Because such an institutionalization implies a *regimentation*, i.e., a *limitation*." History confirms this to be true, except perhaps under circumstances of an unfolding proletarian revolution and generalized dual power, which was not and is not the situation in Argentina, either in 1973, 1974, or 1975.

Second, the counterposition of "fascism" and "bourgeois democracy" is heavily utilized. The United Secretariat is accused of "journalistic," "incomplete," and "superficial" analysis, because it allegedly failed to take a stand on "precise class characterizations." Again and again we are asked: Yes or no, is there a "qualitative difference" between the present regime and a fascist dictatorship like Pinochet's? Yes or no, should the PST have sought legal status under the "bourgeois-democratic opening"?

The trouble with all these rhetorical questions is that in posing them the PST commits the very sin it accuses us of: superficial, journalistic, and incomplete analysis. A "fascist" regime is a precise term for revolutionary Marxists. It means a regime that completely destroys *all* working-class organizations (even the most reformist ones) and completely atomizes the working class through physical terror. In that sense, Pinochet's policies are largely fascist, but Onganía's were not. The Argentine working-class movement was not crushed under this military dictatorship as it is today in Chile or as it was under Nazi rule in Germany.

On the other hand, "bourgeois democracy" also has a precise meaning for revolutionary Marxists. It is not simply a regime under which some sort of "free elections" are held or under which *some* parties of the working class enjoy "legal recognition." It is a regime under which *the working class as a whole* enjoys the political rights conquered by the bourgeois-democratic revolution, that is, freedom for all working-class organizations, freedom of the press, unbridled trade-union freedom and the right to strike.

Applying these precise criteria, one can state (as the majority tendency of the F.I. has explained) that "bourgeois democracy" has existed for a very short time only in Argentina, in the best of cases during the Campora regime. What exists today is neither "fascism" nor "bourgeois democracy," but rather a Bonapartist regime based upon partial (and dwindling) mass support, a regime that has already destroyed many working-class freedoms and is rapidly cutting down on some of the remaining ones. To call the present regime "bourgeois democratic"—during the period of the "institutionalized" state of emergency, the anti-strike laws, the suppression of the working-class press, and the government-organized mass repression and mass murder of left militants—is to make a mockery of the term.

There are many intermediary phases between "bourgeois democracy" and "fascism," as Trotsky constantly reminded the dogmatists. Neither the Papen nor the Schleicher regime in Germany was "bourgeois democratic," but they were not yet fascist. Under the Horthy dictatorship in Hungary and the Pilsudski dictatorship in Poland there were "free elections" of a sort; there were legal Social Democratic parties (even legal "centrist" parties); there were trade unions and even some strikes. But no serious Marxist would call these regimes "bourgeois democracies" simply on the grounds that they were not yet fascist.

Does that mean that we are indifferent to the destruction of *what remains* of working-class freedom in Argentina today? Obviously not. Does it mean that we would be indifferent towards a Pinochet coup? Nobody would advance such a preposterous proposition. But it does mean *that you have to prove that a fascist coup destroying the Peronist trade unions* is on the agenda in order to justify making this threat the center of your political agitation. There is not the slightest proof of such an assumption. At this stage the Argentine bourgeoisie has neither the power nor the interest to break the CGT bureaucracy. What we are confronted with is not an imminent threat of fascism but internal divisions and struggles among the capitalists over the *degree* of repression against and freedom of the working-class movement that should be used. Indeed, the tendency that is closest to fascism, i.e., to the use of massive physical terror against the workers, *is inside the Peronist government itself*, centered around Lopez Rega. This tendency does not need a "coup" to further its goals, because it happens to be in power already. Any working-class tendency that, out of fear of "aiding" (nonexistent) fascist oppositions" concentrates its efforts on "defending institutions" (concretely of the Peron regime) that are becoming increasingly repressive is falling into a trap, for it is precisely the intensifying repression being carried out by the existing institutions that is paving the way for an even more repressive regime. *Since the Ezeiza massacre, the main duty of Argentine revolutionists has been to warn the Argentine workers that behind the cloak of "institutionalization" lies the suppression of the essential freedoms and rights of the masses, which prepares the way for a new reactionary dictatorship*; it has not been to line up behind the "process of institutionalization" against an imaginary "fascist danger"; that only disorients the workers, diverting them from the only means of stopping reaction: *defending themselves against repression now!*

When the PST continues to defend comrade Coral's formula "we will struggle for the continuity of this government because it was elected by the majority of the Argentine workers," they lay bare the whole confusion of their light-minded identification of democratic rights with state institutions. Coral's formula, they say, means:

"We will fight against its being toppled by a reactionary coup d'état, although we have no political confidence in this government and will continue to oppose it from a revolutionary-socialist point of view. Our position is comparable *in general* to the one advocated by Trotsky in Spain during the civil war there." (*Intercontinental Press*, January 20, 1975, p. 70.)

We shall come back to the fraudulent reference to Trotsky's position during the Spanish civil war. But the trouble with the PST's position is *that no civil war between the Peronist government and "fascism" was going on in Argentina when Coral went to the "multisectoral,"* nor was any civil war going on when the PST wrote its answer to the United Secretariat. The *only* blood being shed in Argentina during that period was blood of working class militants killed by paid goons in the service of the government and its police and secret police, as well as the blood of revolutionary guerrillas and members of the bourgeois army engaged in skirmishes.

To identify the defense of democratic rights with the defense of bourgeois state institutions means in practice to cover up for the incipient civil war started by the Peronist

government against the radical wing of the unions and to raise the specter of an imaginary civil war between the Peronist government and "fascism." It means to take a public stand in favor of the continuity of the government that not only suppresses the right to strike and many trade-union freedoms, but even organizes the murder of the PST comrades themselves. That is the sad balance-sheet of the confusion about "institutionalization."

We know that the PST comrades have publicly and courageously waged a campaign against the mass repression now going on against the entire Argentine left, a repression that has led to more than 3,000 arrests and some 500 murders in the past twelve months. We do not accuse them of having capitulated to the government. Our criticism stresses the contradictions of their positions and the inconsistency of their struggle against the Peronist government, which flows from theoretical and political mistakes. Beginning from the popular support that Peronism still commands, the PST draws conclusions that reduce or conceal the obvious responsibility of the Peronist leaders in organizing a wave of anti-working-class repression that is even broader and more dangerous than the repression under Onganía; the PST likewise fosters the myth that there is a "basic difference" between the "institutionalized" government and regime on the one hand and those responsible for the widespread and bloody repression on the other hand. Neither of these positions facilitates breaking the masses from Peronism or furthering the struggle against repression and for the defense of democratic rights.

### III. A REWRITING OF THE HISTORY OF TROTSKYISM

In order to bolster their incipient revision of some of the basic principles of Trotskyism on how to fight fascism, the leaders of the PST have to begin to rewrite the history of Trotskyism. There is no other way to interpret their attempt to equate their position with the position Trotsky held during the Spanish civil war.

The method used is revealing in itself. Trotsky wrote hundreds of pages on the Spanish revolution and civil war. He characterized that war not once but dozens and dozens of times as a civil war between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and not as a "war between bourgeois democracy and fascism" (the way the Stalinists, reformists, and bourgeois liberals throughout the world tried to present it). Yet the PST's answer to the United Secretariat declaration does not refer to that overall position of Trotsky, which can be easily documented but instead discovers Trotsky's "real" position in a single quotation from one of his articles in an internal bulletin directed against an obscure group of opponents in the United States. In like manner, the international minority faction found an obscure quotation in an letter written by Trotsky in 1932 to "prove" that he was a supporter of the "nationalism" of oppressed nationalities, in spite of dozens of statements to the contrary in basic books and documents. Such a method of argumentation can only be described as Sophist.

The PST leadership argues as though Trotsky considered the Spanish civil war to be a war between bourgeois democracy and fascism in which revolutionaries were duty bound to fight to defend bourgeois democracy. Here is what Trotsky really said about that civil war in his

fundamental appraisals:

"The overwhelming majority of the exploiters of all political shades openly went over to the camp of Franco. Without any theory of 'permanent revolution' the Spanish bourgeoisie understood from the outset that the revolutionary mass movement, no matter how it starts, is directed against private ownership of the land and the means of production, and that it is utterly impossible to cope with this movement by democratic measures.

"That is why only insignificant debris from the possessing classes remained in the republican camp: Messrs. Azana Companys and the like—political attorneys of the bourgeoisie and not the bourgeoisie itself. Having staked everything on a military dictatorship, the possessing classes were able, at the same time, to make use of their political representatives of yesterday in order to paralyze, disorganize and afterwards strangle the socialist movement of the masses in 'republican' territory." (Leon Trotsky: "The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning," pp. 309-310 in L. Trotsky: *The Spanish Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, 1973).

And further on:

"The commanding clique of Stalinists, in accordance with their counter-revolutionary function, consisted of hirelings, careerists, declassed elements, and in general, all types of social refuse. The representatives of other labor organizations—incurable reformists, anarchist phrasemongers, helpless centrists of the POUM—grumbled, groaned, wavered, maneuvered, but in the end adapted themselves to the Stalinists. As a result of their joined activity, *the camp of social revolution*—workers and peasants—proved to be subordinated to the bourgeoisie, or more correctly to its shadow. It was bled white and its character was destroyed.

"There was no lack of heroism on the part of the masses or courage on the part of the individual revolutionists. But the masses were left to their own resources, while the revolutionists remained disunited, without a program, without a plan of action. The 'republican' military commanders were more concerned with crushing the social revolution than with scoring military victories. The soldiers lost confidence in their commanders, the masses in the government; the peasants stepped aside; the workers became exhausted; defeat followed defeat; demoralization grew apace. All this was not difficult to foresee from the beginning of the civil war. By setting itself the task of rescuing the capitalist regime, the Popular Front doomed itself to military defeat." (Ibidem, pp. 322-323. Our emphasis.)

And shorter and to the point: ". . . only the socialist revolution is capable of crushing fascism . . ." (ibidem, p. 324).

Trotsky made this assessment from the beginning of the civil war. In July 1936 he wrote:

"Only the armed workers can resist fascism. The conquest of power by the proletariat is possible only on the road of armed insurrection against the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie." (Ibidem, p. 230.)

On July 30, 1936, he characterized the civil war as follows:

"At the present time, while this is being written, the civil war in Spain has not yet terminated. The workers of the entire world feverishly await news of the *victory of the Spanish proletariat*.

“. . . From a purely military point of view, the Spanish revolution is much weaker than its enemy. Its strength lies in its ability to rouse the great masses to action. It can even take the army away from its reactionary officers. To accomplish this, it is only necessary to *seriously and courageously advance the program of the socialist revolution.*” (Op cit., pp. 234-235. Our emphasis.)

And in the same article further on:

“A genuine alliance of workers and peasants must be created against the bourgeoisie, including the Radicals. One must have confidence in the strength, initiative, and courage of the proletariat, and the proletariat will know how to bring the soldier over to its side. This will be a genuine and not a fake alliance of workers, peasants and soldiers. This very alliance is being created and tempered right now in the fire of civil war in Spain. The victory of the people means the end of the Popular Front and the beginning of Soviet Spain.” (Ibidem, p. 239.)

Towards the end of the civil war, Trotsky summarized his view in the following passages of his moving article, “The Tragedy of Spain” (February 1939):

“The masses who had assured all the previous successes of the revolution still continue to believe that the revolution would reach its logical conclusion, that is, achieve an overturn in property relations, give land to the peasants, and transfer the factories into the hands of the workers. The dynamic force of the revolution was lodged precisely in this hope of the masses for a better future. But the honorable republicans did everything in their power to trample, to besmirch, or simply to drown in blood the cherished hope of the oppressed masses.

“. . . *The slogan of the ‘defense of democracy’ has once again revealed its reactionary essence, and at the same time its hollowness. The bourgeoisie wants to perpetuate its rule of exploitation; the workers want to free themselves from exploitation. These are the real tasks of the fundamental classes in modern society.*” (Ibidem, pp. 330-331. Our emphasis.)

A great number of such quotations could easily be amassed. In face of such evidence, anyone who seriously maintained that Trotsky regarded the Spanish civil war as a “war between bourgeois democracy and fascism” and that he urged revolutionaries to make a “tactical agreement” with “bourgeois democrats” against “fascists” would be an ignoramus or a falsifier.

How then can one explain the quotations from Trotsky’s polemics against the sectarian Joerger-Salemme group, which seem to lend some credence to the PST’s preposterous attempt to make a bloc not only with Balbin but with Trotsky too?

First, the *date* of the polemic must be carefully noted. It was written after the defeat of the Spanish workers in the Barcelona uprising of May 1937, when all vestiges of dual power, of organs of workers power in the “republican” camp, has indeed vanished, when the proletarian revolution had been beaten, and when what remained in republican territory—*contrary to the situation in July 1936-May 1937*—was indeed the shell of “decaying bourgeois democracy.” It may be said in passing that from that moment on the defeat of decaying bourgeois “democracy” (whose jails were full of revolutionaries and workers) was largely inevitable, barring a new and unforeseen upsurge of the toiling masses.

Second, attention must be drawn to the *purpose* of the polemic, which was not intended to give an overall

assessment of the Spanish civil war, which Trotsky provided in the articles quoted above. The purpose was to answer a *tactical* question that had arisen from the very victory of “democratic” counterrevolution on Republican territory after May 1937. Was the crushing of the organs of workers power and the intense repression against revolutionaries sufficient reason to desist from participating in the civil war against the fascists? Trotsky answered categorically, “No,” and we share his opinion. Even in this miserable remnant of “decaying democracy” there was greater possibility for a new rise of workers struggles and of workers’ class consciousness than there would be in the event of a victory of Franco. It was therefore necessary to continue the struggle, without any illusion in its outcome. (See the passage in “The Last Warning,” written nearly simultaneously with the polemics against the Joerger-Salemme group.) Revolutionaries never withdraw into passivity or “neutrality” as long as the mass struggle is not over. That was Trotsky’s lesson to Joerger-Salemme; it was not a reassessment of the Spanish civil war as a “war between bourgeois democracy and fascism.”

Third, the PST has carefully taken Trotsky’s quotation out of context. Reestablishing the context shows that *Trotsky meant exactly the opposite* of what the PST attributes to him:

“The alternative, *socialism or fascism*, merely signifies, and that is enough, that the Spanish revolution can be victorious only through the dictatorship of the proletariat. But that does not at all mean that its victory is assured in advance. The problem still remains, and therein lies the whole political task, *to transform this hybrid, confused, half-blind and half-deaf revolution into a socialist revolution.*” (Ibidem, p. 295)

When Trotsky said in September 1937 that the armed struggle then going on in Spain opposed two camps, one “subordinated to bourgeois democracy” (op. cit., p. 296) and the other fascist, he meant that we stand in the “republican camp” as it is, despite its rotten, traitorous leadership, precisely because those who were fighting in that camp were *not* the “liberal bourgeoisie” but the toiling masses—“confused,” “half-blind,” and “half-deaf,” but still of our class and not an alien one—whom we have to make conscious of the need to take the road of socialist revolution, the only road to victory over fascism. The very argument with which Trotsky justified the presence of the revolutionaries in the “republican camp” proves the opposite of what the PST comrades want to prove: This justification is entirely based on the *class nature of the contending forces*—in spite of their misleaders and confused ideology—and not on the “superiority” of “bourgeois democracy” in the abstract as compared to fascism.

The lengths to which the PST comrades go in rewriting the history of Trotskyism is even more striking when they quote this sentence by Trotsky in order to support their policies: “If Hindenberg had entered into an open *military* fight against Hitler, then Hindenberg would have been a ‘lesser evil.’”

This sentence, written tongue in cheek by Trotsky in 1937, raises the following questions: *Did Hindenberg fight militarily against Hitler or didn’t he? Was it accidental that he didn’t? Did Trotsky call upon the German workers in 1932 to make a “tactical bloc” with Hindenberg “if only he would fight militarily against Hitler”?* Why didn’t he make such a call? Did Trotsky call upon the German CP

leadership (not to mention the German Trotskyists) to make a public pledge of support to Hindenburg (who, after all, had also been "elected by the majority of the toiling masses" against Hitler), if he would fight against Hitler, promising to defend the "continuity of his presidency"? Did Trotsky call upon the German CP leadership or the German CP and Socialist Democratic leadership, to hold common meetings with bourgeois liberal parties in order to make "tactical agreements" for the defense of "threatened democratic freedoms"? And if this was not permissible in Germany, why is it permissible in Argentina? What has the semicolonial nature of Argentina to do with the question of how to fight native fascism?

#### IV. QUESTIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL MINORITY FACTION

At the January 1975 session of the International Executive Committee of the F.I., the comrades of the international minority faction unanimously endorsed the "general line" of the PST's answer to the declaration of the United Secretariat. Since the matters involved in this controversy are of a fundamental principled nature, we challenge the comrades who support the international minority faction and above all the cadres of the SWP and the European supporters of the minority to give us clear and unambiguous answers to the following questions and to indicate whether they maintain the implications of that endorsement.

1) Are you in favor of political blocs with "*liberal*" *bourgeois parties* against the "danger of fascism," be it "blocs" limited to "tactical political agreements" either in semicolonial countries alone or in both semicolonial and imperialist countries?

2) If you think such "blocs" are principled, can you give any evidence that either Trotsky or any authorized body of the F.I. ever expressed such approval in the past (political agreements "of a tactical and short-term nature" not being confused with technical arrangements)?

3) Do you think that any distinction between the defense of democratic rights and the defense of institutions of the bourgeois state is irrelevant or of only secondary importance; and, if not, do you believe the repeated public support given by the PST to the Peronist "institutionalization process" going on in Argentina since 1973 is compatible with principled Marxist opposition to bourgeois state institutions and bourgeois governments?

4) In several countries with large working-classes (including some countries in which the industrial working class already represents the majority of the active population) the great majority of workers have not yet attained political class consciousness and have not yet organized into separate working-class parties (even if only reformist ones), but instead support bourgeois parties both politically and electorally (like the Peronist party in Argentina, the Democratic party in the United States, or the Christian-Social party in the Flemish part of Belgium). Do you believe that these facts justify revolutionary Marxists' using toward those parties tactics similar to

those traditionally applied toward the mass reformist and Stalinist parties of the working class—for example, the united front tactic, challenging them to take power, calling for a vote for them in elections "under certain circumstances" (if they present "80 percent workers candidates," for instance)?

5) Do you believe it is principled, admissible, and tactically correct under semifascist or fascist dictatorships to call for common campaigns by working class parties and "liberal" bourgeois parties for "free elections"? If so, is this admissible only in semicolonial countries—in Chile, like in Uruguay for example—and not in imperialist countries like in Spain? What is the basis for this subtle difference in the nature of "antifascism" (not to be confused with a genuine anti-imperialist struggle)?

6) If, as we believe, you reject such policies for the USA or Belgium, do you approve them for Argentina, under the pretext that it is a semicolonial country? For what specific reason would the principle of political class independence of the working class not apply to Argentina? Do you accept the extension of the concept of the "anti-imperialist united front" to giving critical support to bourgeois *governments* with popular mass bases, different and distinct from supporting specific anti-imperialist measures by these governments? Isn't that Lora's line in Bolivia, which you strongly criticized together with us?

7) Do you think that "basically," or "to a large extent," the Spanish civil war was a war between "bourgeois democracy" and "fascism" and that therefore the primary task of revolutionary Marxists during that civil war was to defend bourgeois democracy against fascism (while, naturally, maintaining the political and organizational independence of the working class and criticizing the "insufficiencies" of bourgeois democracy, and the "inadequacy" of the military struggle and conduct of the "democrats," etc.)?

A clear and frank answer to these questions will go a long way toward indicating the extent of the political differences between the majority tendency and the minority faction inside the F.I. These questions are obviously much more important than any past or present dispute about "guerrilla warfare" or "armed struggle" in Latin America. They cannot be encompassed in the pat formula of a struggle against "ultraleftism." They touch on basic aspects of the theoretical and political heritage of Trotskyism. No diversions or polemical smokescreens can make it possible to evade answering these questions. The way the rest of the minority faction answers them will show us whether a right-wing deviation, the beginning of which was already visible during the pre-world-congress discussion, has now taken a new and dangerous dimension. An honest and thorough self-criticism by the PST, and a clear endorsement of that self-criticism by the other constituents of the minority faction, will go a long way toward convincing us that the danger of such a right-wing deviation has seriously receded.

May 31, 1975