

TROTSKYISM, CENTRISM AND THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

Bruce Landau

Document of the Revolutionary Tendency of the International Socialists (USA)

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Around the world, capitalism and Stalinist class societies have embarked upon a period of sharpening crisis. Neither is capable today of all-round development. On the contrary: growth in one sector or one country comes increasingly at the expense of another sector or another country. Concessions granted to workers with one hand are withdrawn with the other; gains won by workers today are taken back tomorrow.

The growing decay of class society produces a parallel rise in the struggle between the classes. The political passivity which enshrouded the workers' movement in much of Europe -- and most clearly in the United States -- during the post-war period is being blown away. At an uneven rate, to be sure, workers are being drawn by the millions into political struggle against their rulers.

The dimensions of the elemental explosions are impressive. The events in France, Italy, Britain, Bolivia, Chile, Bangla Desh, Quebec, Ceylon, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Argentina, China, South Africa -- even the wildcat movement in the United States, albeit on a lesser scale -- testify to the tremendous power, energy, and resourcefulness of this spontaneous upsurge.

But revolutionary socialists learned long ago that elemental movements of the working class which do not come under revolutionary socialist leadership are desperately limited. The ruling class is well-trained and ruthless. The principles and goals of the workers themselves are many and diverse. The entrenched "leadership" of the class -- both party and trade-union -- are committed to preserving the power of the ruling class and, therefore, to derailing any movement which threatens that power. Left to their own resources -- anger, energy, courage -- "spontaneous" upsurges always spend themselves eventually in confusion, frustration, futility, and defeat.

There is only one solution. The international workers' movement must produce a new leadership, one which is educated in the principles of Marxism and therefore capable of mapping out the strategy and tactics necessary to overcome the uneven consciousness of the masses, the resistance of the ruling class and its state, and the betrayals of the workers' reformist leaders. The working class needs a revolutionary vanguard party.

Today's revolutionaries have a key responsibility in bringing such a party into being -- in building the leadership which the workers so desperately need. We must educate and train a firm cadre; we must actively and effectively intervene in the struggles of the working class; we must train, learn from, and cohere the most advanced elements in the class. These are the preconditions for our success. To achieve these preconditions, we must above all clarify and elaborate the program and principles which define us as a group.

Our importance today does not stem from our numbers; we are all too few. Our importance does not derive in the first place from our own practical experience; this is still painfully meager. We are important insofar as we embody the theory of the proletarian revolution, i.e., insofar as we are the organizational embodiment of Marxism. In a period like this one of rising

social struggle, even a very small group, armed with a clear theory and a correct orientation can overcome its weaknesses and fulfill its responsibilities.

But if such a period can be kind to a clear-sighted and well-trained group, it is pitiless toward an organization without such clarity and training. The history of the international workers' movement is littered with groups that were held together during relative social peace by an unclear, ambiguous or simply false perspective. The onset of social struggle smashed these groups into splinters, their disoriented leaders and ranks alike stumbling off in shock in a dozen different directions.

The International Socialists have refused to shoulder the necessary tasks, to answer the vital questions. The immediate, practical questions of the period remain. How best can we intervene in the struggles of the working class to bring about the revolution? What is our role in the period stretching from today to the seizure of power? What general perspectives unify the various aspects of our work? What kind of revolutionary party are we for? How is it to be built? What must be its program? What is our program today?

On these and scores of other pivotal, immediate questions, the IS is either silent, united in an unclear and ambiguous consensus, or rent four ways from the middle. Hopes of "muddling through," "learning from the struggle," being "non-sectarian," taking "first things first," substitute for political clarity and precision. Such a condition -- and such an attitude -- can only leave the IS completely unprepared for events and at their mercy. Instead of leading the class the IS will become its tail. Instead of harnessing spontaneity and giving it a direction, the IS will simply capitulate to it.

II

The weaknesses of the IS are inherited weaknesses. They can be traced back into the SWP of the 1930s and especially in the Workers' Party and the Independent Socialist League of the 1940s and 1950s.

We believe that any thorough and serious examination of the historical record will show that the American Trotskyist leadership of the 1930s failed in large measure to understand and internalize the basic principles of Leninism and Trotskyism -- of the theory and practice of revolutionary working-class leadership. This failure is perhaps clearest in the trade union work of the SWP, which Trotsky sharply criticized in his discussions with party leaders in June of 1940. The SWP, he said, was behaving like "an advisor to the progressive bureaucrats" rather than as a "competitor" against those bureaucrats for the political allegiance of the rank and file. He charged that the SWP leaders "propose a trade union policy, not a Bolshevik policy." He saw that in their policy "the danger -- a terrible danger -- is adaptation to the pro-Rooseveltian trade-unionists." The SWP's Minneapolis newspaper, the Northwest Organizer, said Trotsky, "is a photograph of our adaptation to the Rooseveltians" (Writings of Trotsky, 1939-40, pp. 58-64).

The Shachtmanite Workers Party (product of the 1940 split in the SWP) epitomized this policy of adaptationism. It quickly became unable to compete with "progressive" trade union leaders for the support of the rank and file because it feared that such competition would result in its own isolation from that rank and file. Thus its support of types like Walter Reuther went rather quickly from an attempt at critical support -- i.e., support in order to win away Reuther's rank and file to revolutionary socialism, support which "supports like a rope supports a hanged man" (Lenin) -- to support pure-and-simple with complaints and suggestions thrown in. For the WP-ISL, it was but a short step to the position of loyal left wing of the Reutherites and of the international social democracy. In the 1950s, as the trade union leaders moved rightward, the ISL scurried after them, still fearing "sectarian isolation." Its industrialized membership went in two directions. The majority left the labor movement entirely as the WP-ISL de-emphasized the task of building an independent revolutionary current in the unions. The rest entered the ranks of the trade union bureaucracy itself -- for the very same reason.

The method of saying to the labor movement's rank and file only what the ranks -- and their current leaders -- wished to hear ate away faster and faster at the revolutionary intentions of the WP-ISL membership. The late 1950s found the ISL leaders ridiculing the fight in the unions against supporting Democratic politicians -- because such a fight would alienate ISLers from their audience. It was only a matter of time, therefore, before the ISL liquidated itself completely into Norman Thomas's Socialist Party and from there into the Democratic Party and then into the DP's right wing. By the 1960s the Shachtmanites were serving as chief cheerleader in the labor movement for Lyndon Johnson's Viet-Nam war.

The young Independent Socialist Clubs retreated in shock from the most drastic consequences of Shachtman's adaptationist method -- without abandoning the method itself. Instead of struggling to reach the advanced layer of the working class and to educate it and cohere it into cadre through Bolshevik methods -- "saying what is" in a program which reflects what actually needs to be done to make the socialist revolution -- the ISC time and again opted for adaptationism (or "non-sectarianism" in current jargon). It repeatedly adapted itself (politically; not just pedagogically) to the consciousness of its petty-bourgeois audience. Its program for the petty-bourgeois movements was always "just to the left" (whatever that meant) of whatever its current leadership was supporting. The Peace and Freedom Party exemplified this method. Revolutionary socialists deny the efficacy of reformist parliamentarism. In recommending that the SWP call for a labor party, Trotsky took pains to indicate what that did not mean: "are we in favor of the creation of a reformist labor party? No. . . It can become a reformist party -- it depends upon the development. Here comes the question of program. I mentioned yesterday and I will underline it today -- we must have a program of transitional demands, the most complete of them is a workers' and farmers' government. We are for a party, for an independent party of the toiling masses who will take power in the state. . . This program we must develop parallel with the idea of a labor party in the unions, and workers' militia. Otherwise (the labor party slogan) is an abstraction and an abstraction is a weapon in the

hands of the opposing class." (pp. 14-15, Trotsky on the Labor Party). In advancing the labor party slogan, revolutionaries can never give an inch to parliamentary illusions among its listeners.

Was this method, the one outlined by Trotsky, the method of the ISC in building the Peace and Freedom Party? To ask the question is to answer it. The program which the ISC advanced for the PFP -- for immediate withdrawal and black liberation (programmatically undefined) -- was a reformist program. Thus its conception of the PFP itself was only a permutation of the ISL's old call for a reformist labor party (though now it was not even to be a party of labor). The program advanced did not correspond with what had to be done to achieve black liberation in fact or an end to US imperialism. Instead, it was pre-tailored to fit the prejudices of those whom we hoped to reach.

The same method characterized IS's 1970 position for "black nationalism." The newest invention -- "revolutionary feminism" -- brings the IS's approach to women's liberation neatly into line with this method.

The IS failed to bring revolutionary working-class politics to the middle-class movements. The IS advocated building those movements on a non-revolutionary (i.e. reformist) basis. The IS then compounded the damage. It demanded that these movements bring their reformist, petty-bourgeois politics to the working class; it demanded that they propagate their reformist illusions among the working class! That is the real significance of the demand that frankly reformist parties and organizations "orient to the working class."

In brief, the failure of the WP-ISL-ISC-IS tendency is definable as a retreat from the politics, strategy, and organizational principles of Leninism. For Leninism, it substituted adaptation and capitulation to "spontaneity" -- i.e., backward consciousness.

And just as it adapted its external work politically to its milieu, so has that adaptation reflected itself internally in the IS. The IS's membership is extremely heterogeneous in terms of political maturity. The organization of internal education has never been approached seriously on the national level. The attitude toward leadership has always been reprehensible. Political leaders -- those who actually guide the organization's work -- are loathe to accept leadership positions. The formulation of the IS's positions is approached in a slipshod fashion. Political differences within the organization abound on the most fundamental question, but the precise outline of those differences are kept murky, clouded.* In the absence of political clarity, political unity, and firm and defined political leadership, democratic centralism becomes a joke. The IS is a dozen or more different organizations each charting its own way. The IS as a whole, consequently,

*Although the real answer to the problems of political unevenness and confusion is political education and clarification, organizational gimmicks are seized upon by the IS instead -- such as the constant call for "a women's caucus" based not on a political platform but on sexual identity alone.

exudes an understandable lack of self-confidence.

A tendency which is serious about its program and which believes itself to have a key role in building the cadre for the future revolutionary party does not function in this way. It places the highest priority on giving new members a thorough political education and integrating them into the life of the organization. It takes the responsibility of leadership seriously. The de facto leaders are elected to and willingly assume - no, campaign for - leadership positions. The rank and file can have confidence in its leadership and look to it for clarity and direction. The formulation of the organization's analysis is undertaken by the true political leadership; it is not tossed upon any available set of shoulders. Political documents are not written simply pro forma, to give an NC or convention an excuse to convene. Political debate is sought, not shunned, in order to clarify as sharply as possible the differences which really exist so that the membership as a whole can understand the more clearly what is really at issue. The leadership seeks to sharpen and make more obvious those differences and thereby to lead the membership through the debate to the correct conclusions; it does not strive to hold together a hollow but peaceful "consensus" based on ambiguity and non-intervention.

The ISC-IS, however, has not taken such tasks seriously because it does not take itself seriously. It allows "the mass movements" or "the struggle" to dictate the message it must communicate to the movement, which it must inject in the struggle. Neither the IS, its program, nor its members are seen as particularly important in re-directing the course of events or in building a revolutionary party. The consequences follow from this adaptationsim. Why take care in training your cadre if their independent role in the mass movement is secondary to what "the struggle" produces? Why clarify politics internally when you believe that the outside world will dictate your politics to you -- that "our program and demands normally . . . arise from the struggle itself." (Geier)? The creation of a cadre organization is posed in the most trivialized way (the Bradley amendments), while all attempts to lay the political basis for steeling the IS are attacked as "sectarian," "inward-turning," "mechanical," even -- don't laugh -- "undialectical"!

V

What is the relation of the party to its program?

In discussing the Transitional Program of 1938, Trotsky explained: "The significance of the program is the significance of the party." He added, "Now what is the party? In what does the cohesion consist? This cohesion is a common understanding of the events of the tasks, and this common understanding -- that is the program of the party." Not surprisingly, therefore, it was a favorite nostrum of Trotsky's that "It is not the party that makes the program -- it is the program that makes the party."

The program is not a shopping-list of demands for "what would be nice." It is not even simply a list of the best demands strung all together. The program, which includes demands, is the expression of the party's "common

understanding of the events, of the tasks "which the workers must accomplish to take power and thereby put an end to the developing social crisis. The program embodies and concretizes the Marxist party's strategy for making the socialist revolution. It includes an analysis of the events, demands, and tasks on which that strategy is based. Thus, the program is not a grab-bag of attractive demands; it is not simply a tool useful for "mobilizing the masses for the revolution;" it is not a "propaganda program." It is the basis, the political definition, of the party itself. The question of its uses and applications -- education and propaganda, agitation and mobilization -- this is a secondary question and does not define the program as such.

Thus it is on the basis of the program and in order to struggle for it that the party itself is built.

To serve as a real guide to the party and the class, the program must be based fundamentally on objective reality, and not on what the party's audience wants to be told. Thus, whether the workers wish to or not, they must arm themselves. No matter how unpopular it makes them -- no matter how "lunatic" or "sectarian" they may seem -- the revolutionaries must place the arming of the workers in their program. The same is true of the need to take over the industry, the banks, to create soviets, and so on. A program drawn up in order to attract to it the largest possible following today would include none of these points. A program which honestly sets forward for the proletariat what it must do to save itself must include them all.

Naturally, "the events, the tasks" appear differently to different people and to different classes. To a revolutionary Marxist, they appear fundamentally different from the way they appear to a liberal, a reformist. Consequently, the programs of Marxists and of reformists are fundamentally in conflict with each other, negate each other -- despite the fact that they may contain some common demands and reflect, on the most abstract level, similar aspirations. The program of reformists are not simply "shorter" than the Marxist program; they are not "incomplete" programs because they fail to include all the Marxist program's demands. The reformist program accepts and supports capitalism. Its strategy for change is premised upon this support. All the demands it contains are compromised - gutted - for this reason. Its seeming "brevity" reflects a refusal to undermine capitalism.

For the working class to accomplish its tasks, it must repudiate reformism. It must repudiate reformist leaders. It must repudiate reformist programs. The Marxist party and program leads the fight against reformist and all other non-Marxist ideologies, leaders, and programs.

The struggle against reformist and all non-Marxist programs requires that in all their work, the Marxists counterpose their programs -- their "common understanding of the events, the tasks" -- to all others. This does not mean that the revolutionaries themselves stand back from mass struggles, refuse to cooperate with reformist leaders, or even refuse to join openly reformist organizations. On the contrary, any and all these tactics are necessary to carry on the fight for the Marxist program, to win

the workers presently following reformist leaders over to active support for the Marxist program and the Marxist party. Whether the tactic is the united front, critical support, or entry into reformist organizations, the political independence of the Marxists' politics -- of their program -- remains the key.

In explaining the united front to the ranks of the Comintern, Trotsky explained:

The tactic of the united front demands from the party complete freedom in maneuvering, flexibility and resourcefulness. To make this possible, the party must clearly and specifically declare at any given moment just what its wishes are, just what it is striving for, and it must comment authoritatively, before the eyes of the masses, on its own steps and proposals.

(First Five Years of the Communist International, vol. 2, p. 106.)

In no case can the party renounce its unconditional independence, its right to criticize all the participants in a joint action. It must always seek to take and keep the initiative of these movements as well as to influence the initiative of others in the spirit of its own program. (Ibid., p. 286)

Under some circumstances, a full-scale front may be impractical. "Critical support" of another group may be called for. But the strategic principle remains the same. Lenin explained the method of critical support vis-a-vis the British Labour Party:

At present, British Communists very often find it hard to approach the masses, and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a communist and call upon them to vote for Henderson and against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing. And I shall be able to explain in a popular manner, not only why the soviets are better than a parliament, and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (disguised with the signboard of bourgeois 'democracy'), but also that with my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as a ropet supports a hanged man -- that the impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons and the Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany." (Collected Works, Vol. 31, p.88).

Under extreme conditions, it may even be necessary for the party to enter as a whole into a reformist or centrist party (as did the Trotskyists during the mid-1930s). But as any reading of the debates which this turn produced will make clear, "entrism" was counselled not in order to muffle the politics or hide the program but to enable the revolutionaries to propagate them all the more openly and effectively. Thus Trotsky wrote:

The more flexible, many sided, and, above all, daring our policy of penetration into the mass organizations, all the more intransigent must be our general policy, all the more aggressive must it

be against all centrist ideologies, both those already hardened and those crystallizing. The banner of the Fourth International must be immutably opposed to all other banners. (Writings, 1934-35, p. 316.)

VI

To be a real and useful guide, the program must be based on the actual state of society. The most fundamental determinants of society's condition -- changes in which mark off one historical "epoch" from another -- are the fundamental guidelines for the formulation of the program. Within the epoch of capitalist decay, naturally, different "periods" mark off changes not in the fundamentals of society (in this epoch, the basic contradictions which bar further progress except by way of exception -- and then only on the basis of devastating world wars and the massive human and material destruction which these wars engender), but in secondary characteristics (temporary stabilizations and even partial expansion on the basis of wars and catastrophes, the political movement of the masses rightward, growing state intervention attempting to prop up a basically unhealthy economy). We can trace the nature of the changes in the program which changing periods can make necessary by following the evolution of the Marxist program from that of the Bolshevik Party, through the documents of the first four congresses of the Comintern, Trotsky's programs for France, Germany, and Spain, down to the "Transitional Program" of 1938.

The party's program is the proletarian program -- independent of how many workers accept it on any given day -- because it alone represents the common interests of the proletariat, the socialist revolution. Consequently, it is the only program on which the diverse social layers and groupings within the proletariat can politically unite in their own interests.

The proletariat, Marx wrote, was the only socialist class because, by its very definition, its social liberation could be achieved only through the liberation of mankind as a whole from social chains. All previous rising classes had presented themselves in this light. The proletariat is the first and last class to actually embody the interests of the entire human race. This is true despite the fact that the proletariat itself is extremely heterogeneous in terms of living standards, degrees of oppression, consciousness. What is crucial is what they have in common -- their character as members of a class which can fundamentally improve its position as a class only by abolishing class society itself. It is **this** defining characteristic which makes the proletariat the only revolutionary class in society. It is this defining characteristic upon which the transitional program is based. It is only this defining characteristic -- this common class interest in socialist revolution -- which can unite the working class for the achievement of its liberation.

Given the varied circumstances in which the different strata of the proletariat live and work, of course, their conditions and consciousness will approximate this defining character to a greater or lesser degree. The

programmatic -- i.e., political -- unity of the working class must occur on the basis of the needs of those placed in the most exploited and most oppressed conditions. Their needs are most demonstrably the underlying needs of the class as a whole -- i.e., the need for a new social system. No relative privilege gives them any stake in capitalism.

It is true, of course, that in real life the hardest oppression does not always result in the greatest self-consciousness. Nevertheless, the condition of the most oppressed and exploited prohibits them from being neutral in the class struggle. When they are inert, they prevent the struggle from broadening into a class-struggle. If only the relatively well-off and well-organized sectors are in motion, the struggle is inevitably divided, sectional, localized. But if the masses of the oppressed go into motion, then the struggles of all proletarian layers can be much more readily linked to a class-wide program. (In other words, a true, full-scale, class-wide program best fits the needs of blacks; it is not simply a mechanism with which blacks can gain the support of whites -- though it can and must accomplish this task as well.)

VII

To formulate and propagate the necessity for revolution and its program is critical. But it is not enough. The working class, we repeat, is variegated in its condition and consciousness, reflecting the uneven and combined character of international development.

In the eyes of most workers, the achievement of their aspirations for a human life does not seem to require a socialist revolution. What seems to them necessary is only the realization of partial reform demands (such as higher wages, shorter hours, better social services) and democratic demands (racial and sexual equality; republican government; free speech, press, thought; division of the land; etc.). Consequently, workers usually go into struggle not at first under the banner of the socialist revolution, but in order to win these partial and democratic demands.

Capitalism, however, is never able to grant full democratic rights, even at the zenith of its development, in contrast to the ideology of the "rights of man" that arises in the struggle for capitalist property relations. Now, in the epoch of its decline, it is all the less able to grant either democratic or partial demands. Trotsky saw that this was especially true for the more backward countries of the world -- those which were brought into the world capitalist system only once that system had begun its historic decline. There, capitalism was the most glaringly incapable of granting full democratic rights and even partial demands for "more."

But the ills which world capitalism suffered earliest and most severely at its extremities extend inward as well -- to the heart of imperialism. There, too, capitalism is decreasingly able to grant social equality, even within the ranks of the proletariat. Willy-nilly, it must graft caste systems

-- sexual and racial discrimination -- onto "pure and simple exploitation." More and more, democratic and partial demands must be denied, granted only temporarily, or emptied of their real content (e.g., higher money-wages are devoured by inflation; shorter hours are cancelled out by growing intensification of labor). Even under the most favorable circumstances -- when democratic demands like "equal opportunity" are formally won -- it quickly becomes apparent that the fundamental, social-economic basis of human misery remains untouched.

For us, this means one thing. To successfully fulfill the aspirations which motivate the fight for partial and democratic demands, that fight must be extended into a class-wide fight for transitional demands, for the socialist revolution. Only the liquidation of capitalism can alleviate special oppression and growing exploitation. Only a program which aims toward a socialist revolution can guide such a struggle. Only those committed to carry the fight through to the end -- to destroy capitalism and thereby make possible full, equal, human lives -- can successfully lead the struggles of capitalism's victims. And by the same token, any movement, any program, any leader which refuses to chart a revolutionary-socialist course for democratic and partial struggles -- such movements, programs, and leaders will inevitably betray the confidence of their supporters, regardless of their own subjective intentions. Revolutionary socialists are the only consistent fighters for democratic and partial demands not because they are more courageous, more dedicated, more honest than anyone else. No -- they are the most consistent fighters because only they are politically capable of leading those struggles to victory. . . in the socialist revolution. And this they can do only on the basis of a Marxist program. This is the dynamic of the Permanent Revolution - applicable no less to imperialism's heartland than to imperialism's periphery.

Historically, there have been tendencies in the socialist tradition which - having grasped that capitalism is incapable of fully granting democratic and reform demands -- have repudiated the struggle for such demands and have refused to participate in them. They preferred to stand aside and passively explain the necessity of socialist revolution.

This was not the method of Lenin and Trotsky. To bring the workers from the socialist revolution requires that socialists support the partial and democratic struggles. Revolutionaries do so because these struggles can increase the combativity, the confidence, and the organization of the working class. We do so because the more formal democratic or partial ("higher wages") demands are won, the more it will become clear to the workers that what they need is not reformed, "democratic" capitalism but an end to capitalism once and for all. Thus working class women will see, for example, that

(n)otwithstanding all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real emancipation of women, real communism, will

begin only where and when an all-out struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the state power) against this petty housekeeping, or rather when its wholesale transformation into a large-scale socialist economy begins.

(Lenin, On the Emancipation of Women, pp. 63-64)

We will struggle for the realization of democratic demands so that workers will come to understand what we warn them in advance, that

democracy does not abolish class oppression. It only makes the class struggle more direct, wider, more open and pronounced, and that is what we need. The fuller the freedom of divorce, the clearer will women see that the source of their "domestic slavery" is capitalism, not lack of rights. The more democratic the system of government, the clearer will the workers see that the root evil is capitalism, not lack of rights, etc. (Ibid., p. 43).

Finally, revolutionaries support the struggle for democratic demands in order that we may the more easily explain to the workers while fighting alongside them that to achieve and defend even the democratic and reform demands requires fighting for a transitional program -- fighting for the socialist revolution. The struggle for partial and democratic demands can thus grow over into the struggle for the socialist revolution -- providing that socialists intervene in that struggle and help the working masses to draw the necessary conclusions from their experiences in the struggle. Our support for these struggles will aid the working class only if we declare openly and honestly from the start that such struggles are incapable of fulfilling the hopes of those involved so long as they remain limited. The only road to the achievement of real social equality and a human life for all is the road of the socialist revolution, of the comprehension and the struggle for the transitional program.

. . . (The) masses undergo their own experiences that permit them to choose and to progress along the revolutionary road, but on condition that they find a vanguard that, at every stage of the struggle, explains the situation to them, shows them the objectives to be obtained, the methods to use and the ultimate perspectives (Trotsky, Writings 1933-34, p. 292).

The question of the independent organization of the especially oppressed must be placed in this context. Given the domination of blacks by whites, women by men, it is often necessary for blacks and women to organize independently of whites and men in order to engage in struggle and develop political perspectives. Consequently, we may call for and support independent black and women's organizations, depending on the circumstances. This, however, is only the first step. For this organizational independence to produce the necessary political results, revolutionary socialists must fight within those organizations for their program. If they fail, these groups (though organizationally independent) will become politically subordinated to the bourgeoisie and will hold back the struggle for equality and socialism.

VIII

The Leninist-Trotskyist attitude toward movements of non-proletarian classes and social strata reflects the centrality of the proletariat and its program in the fight for socialism. We support the struggles of peasants for the land. We support the struggles of middle classes against all the evils of capitalism. But only the proletariat is a revolutionary class. Only the proletariat can lead the fight for socialism. Consequently, all our work among non-proletarian strata and classes is an attempt to win those elements to socialism, to the proletariat, and to the proletariat's revolutionary program.

IX

The body of theory known as Trotskyism is the continuation and concretization in today's world of Marxism and Leninism. Trotskyism developed an independent life first of all in the struggle against the perversion of Marxism and Leninism by the Stalinist bureaucracy and the Stalinist parties. Trotskyism continued the fight against reformism, social-chauvinism, and centrism. It achieved its sharpest and clearest expression in the struggle to rebuild a world revolutionary-socialist leadership, to crystallize an international vanguard party (the Fourth International) on the basis of a revolutionary Marxist program ("The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International").

The goal of revolutionary Trotskyism is socialism, in which the workers themselves control the workers' state, and ultimately communism, the abolition of classes and the withering away of the state.

The Trotskyist movement was not the only tendency to organize independently of the two renegade Internationals. A sea of centrist groupings appeared as well, each proclaiming itself to be revolutionary-socialist, Marxist, even Leninist. Some even declared themselves in support of the theory of the Permanent Revolution, like the Spanish P.O.U.M.

The centrists were distinguished from the Trotskyist movement in at least one critical respect, however; they refused to "say what is" to the working class. To avoid the appearance of "sectarianism," these parties tailored their political programs to reflect -- not the inescapable tasks facing the proletariat -- but the current illusions of their audiences. Trotsky insisted that revolutionaries frankly chart the road forward in their program and then patiently explain their program in the most persuasive, dynamic, and comprehensible way possible -- joining in and drawing upon the struggles of the masses to do so.

The centrists, in contrast, transformed their program itself in the interests of "comprehensibility."

Thus Andres Nin -- a believer in the Permanent Revolution -- fused the Spanish Trotskyists with the more numerous Spanish Bukharinists, and

signed his name to a program based on the Menshevik "stage theory" of revolutions. Thus the POUM itself -- which was hostile to capitalism -- signed its name to the program of the Spanish Popular Front, which aimed at resuscitating Spanish capitalism. And thus the POUM -- which knew and repeated the gist of State and Revolution -- entered the bourgeois government in Barcelona. All this, according to the POUM-ists, because any other course would have doomed them to isolation, would have appeared to the workers as "sectarian." Trotsky explained the source of the POUM's betrayal:

The leaders of the POUM did not pretend for a single day to play an independent role; they did everything to remain in the role of good 'left' friends and councillors of the leaders of the mass organizations. This policy, which flowed from the lack of confidence in itself and its ideas, doomed the POUM to duplicity, to a false tone, to continual vacillations that found themselves in sharp contradiction with the amplitude of the class struggle. The mobilization of the vanguard against the ((Loyalist)) reaction and its abject lackeys, including the anarcho-bureaucrats, the leaders of the POUM replaced by quasi-revolutionary homilies addressed to the treacherous leaders, declaring in self-justification that the 'masses' would not understand another, more resolute policy. . . the fatal malady of centrism is not being capable of drawing courageous tactical and organizational conclusions from its general conceptions. They always seem to be 'premature': "the opinion of the masses must be prepared (by means of equivocation, of duplicity, of diplomacy, etc.)" (Trotsky, The Spanish Revolution, p. 344).

One after another of Europe's centrist groupings agreed that a revolutionary party was "necessary." One after the other agreed that a new International was a life-or-death question for the world proletariat. And one after the other refused to take concrete steps to bring the party and the International into existence. "The 'masses' (again) would not understand."

Against the French centrists, Trotsky wrote:

Observe, objectively the new International is necessary, but subjectively it is impossible. In simpler terms, without the new International the proletariat will be crushed, but the masses do not understand this as yet. And what else is the task of the Marxists if not to raise the subjective factor to the level of the objective and to bring the consciousness of the masses closer to the understanding of the historical necessity -- in simpler terms, to explain to the masses their own interests, which they do not yet understand?" (Writings 1934-35, pp. 262ff.)

Trotsky declared that "the creation of a new revolutionary party is urgently placed on the agenda." The German centrists of the SAP shrank back.

"Anything you want, but not that," cry the quavering spirits. "This is not the right time. We are realists, not builders of parties and internationals. It's only the march of events, the pressure of the masses and their own experience that can bring about a new party!"

What wisdom! What profound thought! But what does this "march of events" mean? Are we excluded from it? And how does the experience of the masses come about? Are we there for nothing? Are we incapable of intervening in the march of events and of fertilizing the experiences of the masses?

"The masses don't want a new party. . ." objects the wise tactician. . . ((But)) precisely because the class as a whole has only vague, incomplete and confused ideas, the selection of the vanguard is a necessity. For a Marxist, the political formula expresses not the consciousness of the masses today, but the dynamic of this consciousness, how it is determined and how it must be determined for the class struggle.

It is precisely from the experience of the masses that we have come to the unshakable conclusion that the two Internationals are bankrupt. Are we prophets who guard their knowledge for some secret use? No, we are revolutionaries obliged to explain to the masses their own experience. This is the beginning of Marxist realism.

The 'march of events' can facilitate or retard the development of the new party. But the most favorable situation will pass without advantage if the vanguard elements do not do their duty towards the masses, even in the most unfavorable situation. (Writings, 33-34, pp. 298f.)

No, the SAP preferred to bank on the "Historical Process," "The Struggle," and "The Actions of the Masses." Trotsky denounced this neo-Hegelianism:

But the historical process "engenders" everything, Bolshevism as well as centrism as well as reformism as well as fascism.

"Mass Actions are also of diverse kinds: there are the pilgrimages to Lourdes, the Nazi plebiscites, the reformist polls, the patriotic demonstrations, the strikes under the leadership of traitors and, finally, the revolutionary battles doomed to defeat because of centrist leadership (Austria, Spain). And in the interim, an entirely different question is posed before us, namely, what content does the small propagandist organization called the SAP prepare to bring into the future "activities" of the masses?"

And finally, to all those who saw the need for a program, a party and an International, but who waited for the 'historical process' to produce them, Trotsky drew the apt parallel to the Russian Revolution:

The fourth International ((according to the SAP leader Walcher)) is to arise in the "process" and Walcher and his conferences appear to have nothing to do with this "process". . . The whole history of the struggle between Bolshheviks and Mensheviks is dotted with this little word "process". Lenin always formulated tasks and proposed corresponding methods. The

Mensheviks agreed with the same "aims" by and large, but left their realization to the historic process. There is nothing new under the sun. (Writings, '34-'35, 188f.)

The Trotskyist movement in the 1930s produced neither national parties nor an International of any size or stability. The workers did not flock to the program or the banner of the Fourth International. Demoralized by a decade of defeats and having already watched two Internationals betray them within their own lifetimes, the workers were skeptical of new contenders. They remained -- albeit cynically -- under the leadership of the mass parties of betrayal. Depression, fascism, World War II, and Stalinism's expansion was the historical consequence.

The failure of the new International to develop in no way discredits the attempt to build it. Just as revolutions do not succeed "inevitably," just as the "historical process" alone produces no parties, just so are the efforts of revolutionaries too frequently crowned with failure. To conclude from this fact alone that the revolutionaries' efforts are themselves mistaken or misguided is to capitulate, once again, to a fatalistic determinism.

Trotsky foresaw the possibility that the masses might fail to develop in time the consciousness needed to grasp and struggle for the program of revolution. But even in the event of such a failure, he added, at least

... the best elements will say, "we were warned by this party; it was a good party." And a great tradition will remain in the working class. This is the worst variant. That is why all the arguments that "we cannot present such a program because the program doesn't correspond with the mentality of the workers" are false. (Writings, '38-'39, 44.)

Trotsky was right. The Fourth International disintegrated. The socialist revolution did not take place. Capitalism and Stalinism still threaten to drag the world down with them into the grave. But today, as a new generation of revolutionaries reaches for theoretical weapons with which to arm themselves for the coming revolutionary confrontations, to which tradition do the best of them turn? Thousands of advanced workers today are rejecting the Stalinist and social-democratic parties. Whose works can serve as a true guide for them?

Those of the centrists? Hardly. Who even remembers them -- the SAP, ILP, PUP, PSOP? The POUM -- the most "successful" and left-wing centrist party of the 1930s -- is permanently draped in the miserable banner of the Bourgeois Popular Front.

No, it is to the Trotskyist tradition and literature that today's revolutionaries must turn. Only Trotsky's writings and those of his comrades provide us today with an understanding of the entire revolutionary experience from 1923 to 1940. During this entire period, no other tendency mustered the courage to "say what is"; no other tendency, consequently, left behind a tradition from which we can learn. And that is precisely why our

attempts today to reconstruct a revolutionary-socialist movement depend so heavily upon the works of Trotsky himself. So thorough indeed is the eclipse of the centrist "realists" of the 1930s that one must go to Trotsky again even to learn of the centrists' very existence and to discover what they said!

The centrists of the 1930s are lost to us. Really, it is a pity. The record of their words and deeds should be available to all revolutionaries today; all too many comrades would find therein their own political ancestry. Those today who explain their own capitulation to spontaneity with references to the "historical process," "experience of the masses," and "learning in struggle" are merely pirating the distilled wisdom of the centrists of forty years ago. "There is nothing new under the sun."

Only the banner of Trotskyism appears to the best workers today as one worth grasping hold of. And that is precisely why even modern-day centrists and even Stalinoids find it necessary to drape themselves in the Trotskyist banner in order to get themselves a hearing.

X

There is no such thing as a "finished program." The program of a revolutionary party emerges from the dialectical interplay of objective conditions and the Marxist education of the party itself. Both factors -- the objective conditions as well as the political maturity of the vanguard -- are dynamic.

Thus the Communist Manifesto, written in 1847 (at a time when its authors erroneously considered that capitalism had already entered the epoch of its decline), includes a program for the socialist revolution -- i.e., a "transitional program." In their joint preface to the 1872 edition of the Manifesto, Marx and Engels noted the changes which had come about since 1847 -- changes which would require substantial modifications in a revolutionary program. First: the objective conditions -- changes would be required to reflect "the gigantic strides of modern industry during the last twenty-five years," and the specific tasks which this growth posed for the proletariat. Second: changes in the political education of the program's authors: the experience of the Paris Commune taught them that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes."

The creative dialectic was continued in the formulation of the Bolshevik Party's program, the elements of a program contained in the theses and resolutions of the Comintern's first four World Congresses, and the continuing refinements worked out by the international Trotskyist movement (e.g., in the "Program for Action for France," the program for the Spanish revolution, the program for Germany and Austria, and the "Transitional Program" of 1938).

Changes in the objective conditions have continued to take place, of course, since 1938. These changes must be reflected in any new program for-

ulated today. The advances registered in the subjective understanding of Marxists must likewise reflect themselves in the program (e.g., the class character of Stalinism and the nature of the socialist revolution in Stalinist countries). Thus the 1938 program forms a link in a chain that is not yet "finished." The dialectic continues, as history continues.

At least, the dialectic should continue. For most groups claiming adherence to the Trotskyist tradition, however, both history and programmatic thought have come to an end.

When the Stalinist bureaucracy set about destroying the party and abandoning the method of Lenin, they tried to hide their work; they took Lenin's corpse and mummified it, turning it into an icon. Most latter-day "Trotskyists" have similarly desiccated the 1938 program and treat it today in the same religious manner.

Some -- like our French comrades in Lutte Ouvriere -- place the 1938 program on a pedestal surrounded by a temple -- in order to leave it reverently behind during their day-to-day work.

Others -- the perfect example is the Spartacist League (and their country cousins, the Leninist Tendency) -- carry the program with them in a mobile arc-of-the-covenant. When they encounter a member of the uninitiated, they fling open the arc's doors wide. Whoever does not instantly make obeisance to every word in the Scripture is given up as forever lost, a hopeless sinner. They carry on the sectarian tradition already analysed by the program's author:

Marxism has built a scientific program upon the laws that govern the movement of capitalist society, and which were discovered by it. This is a colossal conquest. However, it is not enough to create a correct program. It is necessary that the working class accept it. But the sectarian in the nature of things, comes to a stop upon the first half of the task.

The program is used by these people as a shield against involvement in the mass movement. Where Trotsky advised his comrades to use the program flexibly, advancing first one and then another demand in their agitation, the sectarians must introduce all of it all the time and make the full acceptance of it the minimal basis for any joint work. "The sectarian is content with a program, as a recipe of salvation." (Trotsky, Writings, '35-'36, 26, 29.)

Still others pay lip-service to the need for a party, an International, and a transitional program . . . only now is not yet the time. "Meetings and discussions between socialist grouplets in the various countries are essential, theoretical discussion is essential, but above all the creation of real links between workers is essential. Only after this has been done on a considerable scale will the preconditions for the recreation of the International be achieved. In the existing situation the analogy of Marx and the First International is in some ways more relevant than that of Lenin and the

Third." (Duncan Hallas of the British IS in Party and Class, p. 19.) Transitional demands are fine . . . but not now. Now is, instead, the time for "fighting on the margins of the movement for influence and leadership." Now is the time for revolutionaries, for "serious, active, and persistent struggle on those issues that actually concern their fellow workers, maintained consistently over time." Now is the time for "economic issues, sectional issues; issues of conditions, bonuses, gradings, wage rates and, at one remove, union politics." Now is the time for revolutionaries simply "to give a better, more successful, lead on the concrete, day to day, bread and butter issues, than their non-revolutionary fellows." In all these efforts, we keep this in mind: "Slogans are not magic." "There is no magic in slogans. It is not a question of what is said. It is, above all, a question of who says it." And anyway, the question of nationalization of industry is "irrelevant to the major struggle against 'incomes policy.'" (Hallas, International Socialism 56, p. 19.)

The bloc formed in April between the Geierites ("Transformation Caucus") and the Mackenzie-ites ("Labor Action Caucus") stand proudly on the "traditions" of the Workers Party, the Independent Socialist League, the Independent Socialist Clubs, and the IS. Their attempts to identify that tradition with Anti-Stalinism is a smokescreen. The tradition they defend is that Shachtmanite tradition of political adaptationism and liquidationism. The record of the IS's public functioning and the documents which attempt to defend that functioning provide a clinical case of Lenin's definition of Economism -- "a theoretical basis for their slavish cringing before spontaneity."

For the Transformation Caucus, the essential task of socialists is to substitute themselves for reformists. They enter mass movements in order to "build them" on their current political basis and then to suggest only those slogans and tasks for those movements which are more or less assured a warm reception from the start. The TC, in other words, refuses to set itself the task of educating its audiences in what must actually be done. On the contrary, that kind of undertaking guarantees in the eyes of the TC "sectarian isolation." Instead, the TC favors tailing after "spontaneous" movements without fighting for a revolutionary program within it, without counterposing their own demands to the "spontaneous" reformist program on which the movement is currently organized. That is the meaning of Geier's proclamation that "our program and demands normally under these conditions arose from the struggle itself. . . ."

Unable to sharply challenge the reformist illusions of these movements, the TC is also unwilling to challenge their reformist leaderships. Their inclination is to suppress criticisms of reformists and opportunists with whom they are engaged in joint work, thereby transforming themselves into simple errand-boys and cheerleaders for the reformists and opportunists. All this is done in the name of avoiding "sectarianism" -- in more candid moments, in order to "safeguard relations" with the reformist leaders themselves. By muting their politics and volunteering their organizing talents to reformists free of political charge, the TC aims at "getting the masses in motion." The task of raising the political level of the masses

is left to "The Struggle" and "The Historical Process." And this miserable rehash of Economism-Menshevism is passed off unblinking by Geier as "the method of classical revolutionary Marxism."

Lenin characterized the Economists as "Tailists." What term better encapsulates the methods of the TC? Whatever milieu they wander into dictates to the TC the political program they will espouse. The PFP, the capitulations to black nationalism, and now to "revolutionary feminism," exemplify this method. Now that the milieu has switched and they are involved in industrial work, tailism takes the form of the crudest workerism. (Geier proudly refers to himself as a workerist!) The TC members broadcast their capitulation to "shop-floor" consciousness in every bulletin and leaflet they write, in every caucus they organize or participate in, in every internal document which they grind out. For them, the road to transforming the IS into a cadre organization based in the working class is paved over with organizational pettiness and nightmarishly bureaucratic discipline (the Bradley amendments). Proletarian politics play no role in this transformation. All attempts by the Revolutionary Tendency to lay the unified political, programmatic, and strategic basis for this crucial transformation have been regarded by the TC leadership from the start as part of "an unhealthy trend" in which "the orderly development of political debate, positions, and clarification on many questions" is "continuously subordinated to rerunning discussions on transitional program." (Geier and Trautman, IS Bulletin No. 37, p. 18.)

The Mackenzie-ite group -- the "Labor Action Caucus" (LAC) -- was formally constituted only recently. It began its life swearing one oath after another that it would distinguish itself and stand to the left of the Transformation Caucus. The oaths still hang in the air. Its much-vaunted "differences" with Geier are presumably too explosive to be made public; that, in any case, would explain why today no one hears anything about them.

Their own fundamental affinity with the opportunism-tailism of the TC, on the other hand, is brought further into relief each day. Mackenzie's document on the Miners for Democracy may still be the clearest evidence of this affinity to date.

For revolutionary socialists, the problems posed by the situation in the United Mine Workers was as follows: The union was run by a murderous gangster bureaucracy headed by Boyle. The rank-and-file miners were struggling to throw Boyle's machine out. A tepid, reformist leadership grouping led by Arnold Miller had tapped the anti-Boyle sentiment and was riding it into power in the UMW. Miller's role, therefore, was two-sided. On the one hand, he helped fight against the most reactionary currents in the UMW. On the other hand, as a frank reformist with close ties to the rest of the reformist bureaucracy in the labor movement and to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, Miller set his face against the widespread but inchoate strivings of the rank and file to go further than consistent reformist leaders can tolerate. Thus Miller reflected and reinforced the

the politics of dead center against both right and (instinctive, amorphous) left among the mine workers.

These are the political roots of the bureaucracy. Reformists are politically unable to satisfy the needs, hopes, and aspirations of workers; consequently, they are compelled to separate themselves from the control of the ranks by bureaucratic means.

Extension of critical support to types like Miller is not based on ignorance of their conservative, reformist character and role. Critical support is never based on such illusions. It is precisely because the object of critical support is leading the workers we hope to reach and because he is misleading them that we give these leaders critical support. We support the Arnold Millers critically -- "as a rope supports a hanging man" -- to show the ranks all the more easily and clearly that they need to dump the Millers, to demonstrate the poverty of reformism, and to make crystal clear the need for a revolutionary socialist leadership. Critical support has never meant anything else in the Leninist tradition.

How did Mackenzie analyze this situation and pose the tasks for the IS? His document is instructive. He brings the wretched, flat politics of centrism to life before our very eyes, shows us what centrism looks like today.

First, Mackenzie's characterization of the MFD leadership:

Though the MFD "is neither a rank and file organization nor a democratic organization, it is an organized embodiment of real class struggle based on a progressive program and, as such, a step forward in the struggle."

"Miller, Trbovich, and Patrick and their followers represent (imperfectly, no doubt) genuine militant sections of the union. . ." Only the Yablonski-Rauh-ites need be "politically isolated in the MFD."

And best of all: ". . . the MFD program is the opposite of 'misleading' because it points toward a struggle against the mine owners. . . and against the state, regardless of the intentions of Rauh and the Yablonskis."

This rose-colored view suggests that Mackenzie's willingness to extend critical support to Miller is based not on a desire to dissolve the miners' illusions in Miller -- but is based on Mackenzie's own personal illusions about Miller. It is not at all surprising to read, therefore, that Mackenzie sees the IS's tasks in the MFD as follows:

"The bulk of our work, at this time, however, is necessarily concerned with building this movement." With regard to Miller's reformist program, its problem is simply that it is too short: "Thus it may be necessary to make our own amendments to the MFD program." "But we do not pose these as an alternative program."

Today we are the "builders" because the MFD is on balance "an organized embodiment of real class struggle" possessing a program which -- while in need of "amendments" -- "is the opposite of misleading." The opportunist character of the course Mackenzie prescribes is further proven by his discussion of the proper attitude toward a group playing a less glorious role:

"... but if I believed, as Ron does, that the MFD is misleading and its program bureaucratic, I would not be for supporting it critically or otherwise." And:

"Finally, if it is true, as Ron says, that the MFD played a role in keeping the struggle of the miners in 'acceptable' channels, that is, in one way or another holding back the struggle, then we should have opposed MFD."

Thus, tailism is merely the flip side of sectarianism.

Critical support is offered only to those Mackenzie wishes not to criticize. All others are simply "opposed." The Spartacist League (and the Leninist Tendency of the IS) share Mackenzie's method; but where Mackenzie sees only the "progressive" aspects of groups like the MFD and therefore silences himself politically before the MFD's supporters through opportunism, the Spartacists and the LT see only the retrograde role of the MFDs and always counsel no support at all, practically silencing themselves politically by denying themselves access to the MFD's supporters. Opportunists and sectarians are both incapable of fighting in the working class for a revolutionary program.

To justify the opportunist practice which he recommends, Mackenzie (as we noted above) whitewashes the MFD and its reformist, bureaucratic, holding-back-the-struggle role today. But to prove to IS members that he is not really as gullible as he initially portrays himself, Mackenzie is ready with a second portrait of the MFD as well. And here we learn that Mackenzie really does know that Miller & Co. will betray the hopes of the miners who support him:

"Given the social nature of the labor bureaucracy and the political and economic conditions of US capitalism today, we know that the new UMW leadership will not be able to carry through the fight for its own program against the employers. . . . If the miners carry through their fight with the bosses, as they have in the past, Miller, Trbovich, Patrick, etc., will become a roadblock."

The fact is that the MFD leadership plays a "roadblock" role in the miners' struggle as soon as it comes into existence simply by strengthening reformist illusions among the miners and deluding the miners about what is necessary for them to win a decent human life for themselves. But put that aside -- is Mackenzie in favor of at least warning the MFD's supporters of the "roadblock" role which Miller & Co. are bound to play tomorrow? No! Not until they learn that lesson for themselves, not until "it is clear ((not clear to Mackenzie -- he knows it already -- but to the

miners)) that they are playing that role." Thus all Mackenzie's Marxist foresight is to do the miners no good; they will have to learn their own lessons in their own time in the school of hard knocks -- or, as Mackenzie would put it, "in struggle." In the meantime we keep our foresight to ourselves until the day when Miller's true character becomes "clear" to all. Then we presumably wink wisely and smugly that "we knew it all along." Until then, we are presumably "prophets guarding their knowledge for some secret use":

So long as the majority of the working masses have confidence in the Social Democrats, or let us say, the Kuomintang, or the trade union leaders, we cannot pose before them the task of the immediate overthrow of bourgeois power. The masses must be prepared for that. The preparation can prove to be a very long "stage." But only a tailist can believe that, "together with the masses," we must sit, first in the Right and then in the Left Kuomintang, or maintain a bloc with the strike-breaker Purcell "until the masses become disillusioned with their leaders" -- whom we, in the meantime, uphold with our friendship.

(Trotsky, The Permanent Revolution, 11.)

This opportunist method is the lifeblood of Mackenzie's politics. Read further: The IS believes that the Democratic Party is the historic death-trap of working class movements. It is one of the most flexible political organs of the American bourgeoisie. On this point, at least, there is no ambiguity in the IS's theory (at least, none so far). What, then, does Mackenzie have to say about the ties which bind Miller to the Democratic Party, i.e., to the ruling class? We characterize the DP as reactionary -- as "misleaders" at the very least. What should the IS say to the miners about the DP's political allies within the labor movement -- those, like Miller, who are the best able to tie workers to the Democratic Party? Mackenzie is ready with an answer:

"It would, however, be a mistake to characterize rank and file leaders, such as Miller, who get tied up with Democrats as reactionaries or misleaders when there is no counter-movement and no significant consciousness that this ((an alliance with the DP)) is wrong." (Emphasis added.)

There it is in a nutshell -- including all the sophisticated-sounding phrases about the centrality of consciousness. Mackenzie believes that the Democratic Party is the sworn enemy of labor. But he forbids us to attack those labor leaders who deliver the labor movement into the hands of its enemy. We may not refer to such leaders as "misleaders." Why? Because the workers will not agree with us today! Because as yet, unfortunately, there is no "counter-movement" in the proletariat against the Democratic Party; because there is not yet any "significant consciousness" that political ties to the ruling class "is wrong." Mackenzie is constitutionally unable to help bring such "consciousness" and such a "counter-movement" into existence. He tailors his political message for the workers to fit their present backward prejudices instead of attacking those prejudices and counterposing to them the real interests of the class.

Mackenzie will say nothing to the miners that they are not already pre-

pared to believe. He is an opportunist, a tailist, an Economist. And there is no obstacle which bars his "next step" over the class line, right into the Democratic Party. For if we cannot yet attack Miller as a misleader for currying favor with Democratic politicians, how do we explain to those miners who bother to ask why we ourselves do not advocate alliances with Democrats? Dare we at that point let the cat out of the bag -- expose ourselves as sectarians -- and say what we think of the DP and of its political advance-men in the unions?

We need only imagine Mackenzie faced with this dilemma to understand Mackenzie's basic problem: for him, revolutionary socialist politics and a revolutionary socialist program are cumbersome, clumsy baggage which threaten to trip him up every time he gets a chance to do "real work" with "real workers" engaged in "real struggles."

The Revolutionary Tendency, on the other hand, understands that the task of socialists is to raise the consciousness of the workers, to tell them what they do not yet believe, what they do not yet understand, what they must come to accept or suffer one devastating defeat after another. We utilize all the experiences of our common struggle alongside the workers to prove ourselves correct. Miller is betraying the workers today and will continue to do so tomorrow. We say so. Reformist programs guarantee betrayal. We say so. Ties to the Democratic Party are "wrong." We say so. Labor leaders who advocate such ties are "misleaders." We say so. Labor needs an independent party to fight for its class interests as embodied in a transitional program. We say so. Labor needs the only kind of leadership which can consistently fight for all these things -- a revolutionary leadership. We say so.

It is only because Mackenzie's method is different -- because he is an opportunist -- that he can pompously sneer that "the notion 'that a revolutionary leadership is needed as opposed to the present leadership' is a death trap."

An opportunist is incapable of understanding that revolutionaries -- in the nature of things -- must stand for and say many, many things which the working class in its majority will not understand, accept, or act upon today. That is exactly their job. That is what makes the revolutionaries the vanguard. For Mackenzie, everything we say today must be "actionable" today. Thus he tells us, "We can't say to the workers that this is what's really needed when we know damn well that neither us nor anyone else can carry it through. This is utopian and misleading." But the only reason it can't be carried through today is the failure of more workers to understand that it must be carried through. Just exactly whose job is it to change those workers' minds? (And it is at this point in the debate that Mackenzie and his co-thinkers always drag in The Historical Process by the hair.)

Both Geier and Mackenzie -- the Transformation Caucus and the "Labor Action Caucus" (LAC) -- have implicitly abandoned everything essential to Bolshevism. There is no room, in their pragmatic common-sense recipes, for the Leninist conceptions of leadership, party-building, the party itself, program, class consciousness, or their tactical applications (united front, critical support, etc.).

The difference between the two leaders and their groups is this: Geier is a confirmed charlatan, trained in the political shell game. With his right hand he conducts his "practical work" which denies everything in the Marxist tradition. With his left hand he tears snippets of Lenin and Trotsky out of their contexts and pastes them together into a patch-work mantle of "orthodoxy" which he dons for ceremonial occasions. Thus Geier's absolute lack of political honesty allows him to carry out reformist politics in practice while clinging to revolutionary rhetoric in words. The TC rank and file has no interest in theory, in ideas, whatever; they will not question Geier's inconsistencies.

Mackenzie is a different case. He fancies himself a theoretician, a very sophisticated system-builder who fearlessly and explicitly follows all his ideas out to their fullest conclusions. None of Geier's charlatanism for him! If the "orthodoxy" conflicts with his practice, the orthodoxy will just have to go. Look over Mackenzie's "Initial Tendency Statement." Leninism is going, going, gone.

Here we discover:

(a) ". . . The static idea that it is 'program' which defines the vanguard party."

(b) "Indeed the rise of Stalinism and the subsequent complication of what is and what is not a part of the socialist or workers movement has taught us to look beyond program and even class composition to determine the reality of any party or organization. Even Trotsky did not grasp this fully."

(c) ". . . The vanguard of the working class at any given time . . . must be leaders in the class. . ."

Topping it all off:

"'What Is To Be Done?' must be seen in its context -- as a 'bending of the stick' -- and weighed against the later views of Lenin and others and against world experience since the death of Lenin."

Mackenzie would have an interesting time looking through the resolutions of the Comintern on the nature of the party -- and particularly the contributions of Lenin and Trotsky therein -- trying to find something to "weigh against" the essentials of What Is To Be Done? But back to Mackenzie:

"In the backward Tsarist Russia of 1903, it might have been argued that workers were isolated to such an extent that their self-activity could not lead to socialist conclusions. In today's world, with today's level of education among the masses, such a separation of politics and self-activity is unlikely."

Slice through the fatty verbiage and the oh-so-modern-and-so-sophisticated pretensions here and you reach an idea that was not new when the Mensheviks used it against Lenin, when Stalin used it against Trotsky, when the POUM used to to excuse every one of its capitulations to "spontaneity" (i.e.,

*54 lines
said this
first*

*Should mention
sp. places*

of the Spanish bourgeoisie).

"In Russia the workers are isolated, backward, ignorant," said the Mensheviks. "How can you, Lenin, talk about the workers taking power, here of all places?"

"In Russia, the workers are backward, isolated, ignorant. They needed a vanguard party. But not so the workers of cultured Western Europe." So said every anti-Bolshevik current in the early Comintern, from the opportunists (Serrati, Levi) to the ultra-Lefts (Gorter & Co.).

"In Russia the workers couldn't read; they needed Lenin's party. But events are moving so quickly here in the United States that even the farmers are revolutionary! A Farmer-Labor party is all we need here!" So said the American Communist Party in the mid-1920s, mouthing Stalin's line for the rest of the world as well.

"The Spanish workers are different from the Russian workers; we have huge trade unions and literally scores of workers' parties. Lenin's separation of politics and self-activity is highly unlikely here! A Popular Front, a few militia committees, some good advice to the union leaders plus a centrist party will do the trick in Spain." Mackenzie is every bit as modern and innovative as was the POUM. If he survives politically until our revolution, he will play the same kind of role. "Russian exceptionalism" has always been the screen for the grossest opportunism, from the Mensheviks of Russia down to the Mensheviks in the IS leadership.

But all Mackenzie's innovations and erudition only provide his "Tendency Statement" with dressing on the cake. The cake itself is to be found on p. 3:

"Similarly we defend the critical reassessment of the revolutionary party, and its relationship to the working class and its self-activity, developed internationally since the death of Trotsky and summarized largely in the writings of the British I.S. While these ideas are thoroughly grounded in the ideas of Lenin, Trotsky, and others, they represent a synthesis of the full, rounded ideas of these great revolutionaries -- not a scholastic reiteration of this or that text."

Let's recall the substance of this brilliant reassessment to see where Mackenzie's going.

Cliff's contributions include the following "syntheses" of Lenin, Trotsky, and others:

"For Marxists in the advanced industrial countries, Lenin's original position can much less serve as a guide than Rosa Luxemburg's." (Cliff, Rosa Luxemburg, 1st edition. Subsequent editions have simply dropped this passage. The same point of view remains on that page ((54)), however, although it is presented less forthrightly.)

"In Trotsky's words about the danger of 'substitutionalism' inherent in Lenin's conception of party organization, and his plea against uniformity,

one can see his prophetic genius, his capacity to look ahead, to bring into a unified system every facet of life." (Cliff, "Trotsky on Substitutionalism.")

"Trotsky is torn in the contradiction between his consistent, socialist democratic conception of opposition to any form of 'substitutionalism' and his theory of the Permanent Revolution, in which the proletarian minority acts as a proxy for all the toilers, and as the ruler of society." (Ibid.)

"Since the revolutionary party cannot have interests apart from the class, all the party's issues of policy are those of the class, and they should therefore be thrashed out in the open, in its presence. . . . This means that all discussions on basic issues of policy should be discussed in the light of day, in the open press. Let the mass of the workers take part in the discussion, put pressure on the party, its apparatus and leadership." (Ibid.)

Or Hallas, in the passage quoted earlier: first international links between workers, sometime later an International; Marx and the First International more relevant than Lenin and the Third. Like "Russian exceptionalism," the counterposition of Marx as more relevant than Lenin or Trotsky -- in effect the denial of the lessons the revolutionary movement has learned -- is always a danger sign. **WARNING: Cliff Ahead.**

Or Hallas again ("Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party," 21-22):

"Naturally a party cannot be a hold-all in which any and every conceivable standpoint is represented. The limits of membership are determined by a serious commitment to the ultimate objective: the democratic collective control by the working class over industry and society. Within these limits a variety of views on aspects of strategy and tactics is necessary and inevitable in a democratic organization." (Such as how the "ultimate objective" is to be achieved -- reform or revolution? The conception here is in fact the Menshevik or Social-Democratic conception of organization.)

This is the substance of the "critical reassessment" of the theories of Lenin and Trotsky "and others" performed by the British IS. This is the "synthesis of the full, rounded ideas of these great revolutionaries" on which Mackenzie proudly takes his stand. Mackenzie carefully notes that this synthesis had to await "the death of Lenin" and "the death of Trotsky." In this, at least, he is 100 percent correct.

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The hallmark of centrism is the combination of reformist practice and revolutionary phraseology. Geier epitomizes this combination. But Mackenzie's determination to be more theoretically serious than Geier is propelling him out of the ranks of centrism into the camp of out-and-out Revisionism, of pure and simple reformism. This is not a matter of name-calling but of scientific accuracy. Mackenzie may well turn out to be the IS's James Burnham, carrying Finkel (nodding sagely) along with him into oblivion.

XII

The developing crisis demands the building of a clear-eyed, steeled cadre organization firmly based in the working class and armed with a Marxist program. The political preconditions for achieving this goal are many - fundamentally, however, they all reflect the need for precision in the formulation of our ideas, courage and honesty in applying and testing them.

Given the international character of capitalism and the interdependence of capitalism and Stalinism, a revolutionary-socialist cadre organization must be both internationalist in its perspectives and international in its structure and membership.

It is not possible to chart a successful course for a parochial "American" revolution. It is not possible to understand and anticipate the dynamics of US society without reaching an understanding of non-US capitalism and Stalinism as well. Similarly, it is parochial and irresponsible to restrict our political intervention to the United States proper. We must analyze developments worldwide and formulate the tasks of revolutionary-socialists abroad. We must examine the theory and practice of revolutionary groups all over the world, and we must openly and frankly communicate our conclusions to those groups. Only in this way will an international revolutionary socialist organization develop.

To undertake this task requires a break with the IS's past methods of operating internationally. The IS's relations to groups abroad have reflected a parochial spirit - the "fraternal ties" to the British IS and IO, for example, have had the character of "non-aggression pacts," chiefly useful as allowing the IS(US) to bask in the glory of their greater numbers. Such ties, instead, should be utilized to facilitate the exchange of political analyses and mutual appraisals and criticism. Both of these groups, significant indeed though some of their accomplishments are, are making the most dangerous mistakes today. To hold back such criticisms in the interests of "our relations with them" is unprincipled, irresponsible, and dangerous.

Similarly within the IS(US) and with regard to other organizations in this country. Domestically as internationally, all attempts to gloss over important differences and blur the lines of discussion must be repudiated. An organization held together by ambiguity, diplomacy, and horse-trading instead of genuine clarity and agreement will inevitably smash itself upon the reefs of the actual class struggle.

It is inevitable that our attempts to carry forward the process of clarification meet with resistance. Centrists always howl with pain when politics intrude upon their comfortable world. Just as we initiate the first serious principled reexamination of politics, we are charged with being "unprincipled," "maneuverers," "personality cultists," etc. This development too is nothing new.

It is most frequently the case that those comrades who call principled struggles 'intrigues' are precisely the ones who display the ability for real intrigues when someone steps on

their corns. A lack of concern about principled questions and an exaggerated sensitivity in personal questions characterize many of those who landed by accident in the ranks of the Left Opposition. (Trotsky, The Spanish Revolution, 177.)

Internal clarification is for a single purpose: to enable us to intervene externally with more clarity, confidence, and success. Questions are important insofar as they bear upon the practice of the organization. Only a group with a clear program and clear methods can act coherently in its external work. By the same token, only such a group can successfully test its political formulae in practice. A group with no clear ideas, which tacks helplessly with first this and then that episodic breeze, whose members agree on little aside from vague and ambitious generalities, and which in fact intervenes in the class struggle armed with a dozen distinct programs and strategies -- such an organization can never learn from its experience in the class. The experiment is unscientific: the test tube is contaminated.

Most importantly, we must bring this program to the working class and especially to its most oppressed layers. Only armed with such a program can these layers fight their own struggles through to success and draw the rest of the class into battle with them.

The tasks facing revolutionaries are as follows:

First, it is necessary to forge the program upon which we stand -- to continue the task left off in 1938. It is necessary to modify and improve the transitional program in the light of changes in the objective situation and advances in our own understanding of the world.

Second, we must create an organization capable of intervening in the class on the basis of our program. This requires many things: industrialization; the development of clear and concrete strategies for our practical work not only in the trade unions but in all areas in which we intervene; the construction of real national fractions in the trade unions capable not only of intervening systematically in their arenas but also of locking that intervention into the entirety of our approach to the class; the development of a newspaper, an organ which presents our viewpoint to the class in a clear and unambiguous manner; the creation of a theoretical journal which acts as the vehicle for the development of a thoroughgoing and rigorous understanding of the class struggle; the rapid development and systematization of other avenues of propaganda, including both pamphlets and a wide range of other vehicles such as city-wide rank and file newspapers, industry newspapers, shop floor bulletins, etc.; the development of clear strategies and correct tactics for our approach to the oppressed sectors of the class which make possible the winning over of the revolutionary elements of these sectors to our program and organization; the development of a systematic approach to the recruitment of workers; an approach to the education and training of our own membership which will forge a cadre that both understands our program and is capable of intervening effectively in the actual class struggle on the basis of it; and much more.

Historically, the IS has failed to base itself upon an understanding

of the major questions regarding the nature of the modern capitalist epoch, and the need for the construction of a revolutionary party based upon a program which analyzes and answers correctly the problems faced by the international proletariat. Instead of seeking to thoroughly understand the nature of the crisis of modern capitalism, it has satisfied itself with empirical observations to the effect that "the workers are starting to move" because "things are getting worse" although "there's still a lot of fat in the system." Instead of seeking to crystallize its understanding of the capitalist crisis into a program which provides a correct solution to the crisis from the stance of the proletariat, it has satisfied itself with vague generalities about "moving the struggle forward" "transitionally." Instead of orienting its strategy to the critical necessity for the construction of a revolutionary party, it has paid lip service to the "need" for a party while denouncing anyone who had the temerity to actually suggest that we should begin the process of forging such a party now as a hopeless sectarian.

The dialectical interrelationship between revolutionaries, the world, and the program must be resumed. It can only be resumed by a group dedicated to political clarification and principled practice, both internally and externally. There is only one way to make sure that the development of such a group takes place. It will not be guaranteed by History, the Struggle, or any other disembodied, neo-Hegelian, metaphysical agency. In this matter, as in all others, human beings make their own history.

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