

New York

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To Political Committee Members and  
National Field Organizers

Attached is a copy of the United Secretariat greetings to the congress of the Proletarian Democracy Tendency of Colombia, April 15-16, 1978, presented by Galois. (For information on the PDT and on the split in the Colombian PST, see IIDE, Vol. XV, No. 2, April, 1978.)

Natalie

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It is with much pleasure that I bring you the warm revolutionary greetings of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

Your congress has been discussing some very important questions -- not only the broad political problems facing the working class in Colombia, but also the problems involved in constructing a Trotskyist party in ~~your~~<sup>this</sup> country.

Often in United Secretariat greetings it is customary to speak about the world political situation, and under ordinary circumstances I would have liked to talk about this, particularly about the great miners strike in the United States, which was a sign of important changes taking place in the class struggle there.

But the broad questions of the international class struggle are not the only political questions that we must understand and ~~orient~~ orient to correctly if we are to move forward. We must also face up to the problems of party building, of Leninist organizational norms. These are not mere organizational questions, but are eminently political questions.

What kind of International do we need?

What kind of national parties do we want to build?

These are the questions I would like to discuss with ~~you~~ you today, in light of the recent experience of the Fourth International.

From the point of view of party building, our international movement went through a very big test in recent years, the test of ~~in~~ a sharp internal struggle that lasted for ~~years~~ nearly a decade.

We faced some very big problems in this internal struggle. International factions existed. There were splits in many countries. Tensions were high. And there was a danger that the factions would tend to become permanent features of the life of our International. If this had happened, it would have been very damaging. It would have led comrades in the respective camps in the direction of looking only to their own faction for political discussion and advice, and towards closing their minds to the views of other comrades. Tensions would have been easily aggravated<sup>e</sup>, and it would have become difficult to prevent further splits in the national sections, and on the international level as well. Once factions take on a permanent character it is very difficult to reverse the divisive process.

So our movement was put to the test in this respect. Could

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we discuss the sharp differences we ~~had~~ had among us, while avoiding permanent factionalism and splits? Could we discuss in a way that would leave the door open for changes in political opinions, for an atmosphere in which new political alignments could occur?

Our movement, in its majority, passed this test. Although we went through some difficult moments, we did avoid a split between the LTF and IMT, the two longest-lasting factions in the International. And with the recent dissolution of the LTF and IMT, we have been experiencing a very positive <sup>c</sup> change for the better in the internal life of our movement.

This is not to say, of course, that factions are an unmitigated ~~evil~~ evil. As a former participant in the Leninist Trotskyist Faction I could hardly hold such a view. I believe that the formation of factions was necessary at one stage in the discussion.

But the fact that sharp political differences existed was not in itself a reason to rush into the formation of tendencies and factions.

Comrades should recall that the international political struggle arose as a result of differences over Latin America at the 1969 World Congress. These differences in political orientation were very sharp. Yet for three years we discussed these differences without resort to formal tendencies or factions. The organized formations in the International were officially established only in 1972-1973, after the central differences still remained despite the fact that the opposing lines had been tested in practice and balance sheets could be drawn on the ~~experience~~ experience in Bolivia and Argentina. The fact that these differences persisted in spite of the test of experience brought things to a new political stage; this was reflected in the fact that we began to see the political divergences harden and spill over ~~into~~ into other questions, such as Europe. This made the formation of tendencies necessary. Shortly thereafter, the ~~sharpening~~ sharpening of organizational tensions made it clear that we were involved not just in a tendency struggle, but an all-out faction fight, in which the danger of split was present.

Today, however, the LTF and IMT have dissolved. <sup>Did</sup> ~~Does~~ this mean that we now have <sup>a</sup> basic political agreement among the comrades formerly in the IMT and LTF? No, not at all. The dissolution of the IMT and LTF did not come about because we had basic political agreement.

In fact, total political homogeneity is not normal in the

International. In a living movement such as ours, the normal thing is to have many differences of opinion, including differences on important questions. But it is also normal to discuss these differences in a free atmosphere -- without prior lineups or preconceptions, and without sharp organizational tensions.

The dissolution of the LTF and IMT was simply an attempt to bring things back to normal.

What were the changes that enabled us to dissolve the factions? There were basically two.

First was a political convergence on Latin America, as a result of the IMT self-criticism on Latin America, which implied a rejection of the line adopted at the 1969 and 1974 world congresses. In other words, the political difference that was at the origin of the long internal struggle was no longer in dispute. To be sure, differences on some points concerning Latin America may still exist. But not on general line.

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The change on Latin America implied the possibility of change on other questions. And, in fact, many such changes could be noted.

Second was a steady decrease in the organizational tensions. This was illustrated most dramatically in the fact that our previously divided forces were able to join together in fusions in countries such as Mexico and Canada. We also found that better organizational relations were developing at the center. After the dissolution of the LTF and IMT, these processes were accelerated. We saw, for example, further fusions like those in Spain and Australia, as well as the combined publication of Intercontinental Press and Inprecor.

All of these reasons made it an imperative necessity to dissolve.

I repeat, and I stress, that the dissolution of the LTF and IMT did not originate out of general political agreement. Political differences remain, and new political differences will surely arise -- though not necessarily along the same lines as before.

All that the dissolution of factions meant was a better chance to discuss political questions in a free and healthy atmosphere.

One of the key things for us was to improve our functioning in the sections and in the normal bodies of the International, the

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United Secretariat, the International Executive Committee, and the respective subcommittees. In the United Secretariat we now go into meetings without prior lineups, without prior caucus discussions. Each of us speaks their mind, and we do not predict in advance what the agreements and disagreements might be.

As this new atmosphere has taken hold, we have noticed further changes on issues where we had previously been divided. At the time of the last world congress, for example, there were important differences on the orientation to follow in the womens' liberation movement. At the most recent United Secretariat meeting, however, we had broad agreement on a document on womens' liberation that will be submitted to the discussion for the upcoming world congress. We hope to discuss the question of Europe again in the same spirit. Similarly concerning a document on the world political situation. As of this time, prior to the new discussions, we do not know if there are still basic line differences on these questions; we do not know if whether counterposed documents will be necessary, or whether any remaining differences can be discussed in the form of amendments.

On many new questions -- such as nuclear power or the environment -- we have no reason to assume in advance that there will be differences. And on other questions where there probably will be differences -- such as Cuba -- we have no reason to assume that the differences will fall along the old IMT-LTF lines.

One important thing to note: Although the original decision to dissolve the factions did not stem from broad political agreement, the freer atmosphere for discussion and collaboration has led either to new political agreements, or to discussions that cut across the old lines. In general, our political discussions in the United Secretariat and in the sections are better than ever before. This is a clear sign of the correctness of the decisions to dissolve the LTF and IMT.

One of the reasons why we were able to pass the test and overcome the long faction fight was that we learned some very important lessons about party building. Many of these lessons were not new to the Trotskyist movement. But some of them were new to the new generation of Trotskyist cadres.

One thing we learned is that it is wrong to identify a tendency or faction with a party. Individuals can join a tendency or faction, but the party as a whole must not. The identification of a party with tendency or faction is wrong for several reasons.

For one thing, it denies the democratic rights of the members to favor a different tendency or faction, or none at all.

For another thing, it is an abuse of the legitimate authority of the party. A party has the right to demand of all party members that they be active, that they contribute financially, and that they be loyal to the party. It has the right to demand that all party members build the party. But it cannot tell the members that in building the party they are ~~not~~ building a tendency or faction that they may not agree with.

In addition, joining a tendency or faction is a disservice to the party, as such. The party must have equal relations with all components of the International, must exchange views and share experiences freely with all. Adherence to a tendency or faction would tend to close the party off from this broader experience that it must have if it is to grow and develop politically.

Another thing we learned along the same lines is that it is wrong to treat the International as a federation of factions or tendencies. In the normal functioning of our movement the leaderships of the sections and sympathizing organizations collaborate with each other as party leaders, with their primary responsibility to their parties as a whole, rather than to any tendency or faction they may support; and they collaborate in the work of the International, as such, through the regular bodies of the International: the United Secretariat, the International Executive Committee, and the various subcommittees of these bodies. The main role of tendencies and factions ~~is~~ lies elsewhere -- in the presentation of political positions in the internal debate.

We also learned some important lessons about conducting a political debate.

We learned the paramount importance of being objective. It is essential to seek clarity in discussion, and to confront the real issues directly. On the other hand, it is wrong to exaggerate differences, to take small points and blow them up out of proportion. This error would obscure the fight for clarity and would increase tensions unnecessarily. While we are all strong partisans of our own views, we must also be objective about the

positions with which we disagree.

It is also wrong to degrade the political debate by raising horror stories or hurling epithets against the supporters of opposing viewpoints. These methods are unworthy of our movement, and, on the whole, we avoided them.

We also did not make the mistake of making precipitous sociological characterizations (such as petty bourgeois) against the other side. This is a question that was discussed in both the LTF and IMT during the high point of the faction fight, and was rejected by both. It is a highly serious charge in our movement to brand someone as alien to the working class (which is what it means to call someone petty bourgeois), and there was not sufficient grounds to justify such charges. Furthermore, hurling such charges around would only embitter the debate and would obscure the fight for political clarity. Instead of discussing the issues, we would have ended up discussing who was really petty ~~bourgeois~~ bourgeois. X Our world movement is very fortunate that the responsible leaders on both sides resisted the attempt to make sociological characterizations of the others.

We also, on the whole, resisted the temptation to "go it alone" -- to consider the differences to be so great and the opposing views to be so wrong that the discussion of the differences was a waste of time or even an obstacle to party building, and that it was better to split and show the value of one's own line in practice without being "enc<sup>u</sup>ambered" by internal debate. This would have been a very short-sighted and politically immature stance to take. Discussion of differences cannot be avoided; politics forces the differences to be debated and resolved through discussion. If a politically unjustified split is carried out, it does not end the discussion; it only means that the discussion is carried out under more unfavorable conditions.

Finally, we learned some very important lessons about leadership, and about how the international leadership should function.

The international leadership of the Fourth International is not only the comrades elected to the United Secretariat or International Executive Committee. It also includes the indigenous leaderships of the national parties. Real international leaders are those who ~~we~~ earn their recognition as international ~~leaders~~ leaders because they have ~~built~~ built parties that participate in

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the class struggle and play a leadership role in the class struggle to the best of their potential. From this point of view it is clear that the leaders of the national parties cannot be selected from the outside.

The collaboration among the international leadership -- both those who are members of the IEC or United Secretariat and those who are not -- is on the basis of equality and fraternity. It would be wrong for the center to intervene with a heavy hand in the life of the sections, and it would be wrong for any national leadership to accept such intervention. The only kind of leaders who will be worthy in the class struggle are those who stand on their own feet, who think for themselves, and who do not take orders from anyone.

These wrong conceptions that I have mentioned<sup>ed)</sup> are not in the Trotskyist tradition~~M~~ and never have been. Fortunately, the majority of the Fourth International has rejected ~~a~~ these erroneous conceptions. The fact that we were able to do so, and to overcome the effects of the long faction fight is a sign of the strength and maturity of the International.

Now, where does the Bolshevik Tendency stand on this? Where does the BT faction stand in relation to the positive new developments in the International?

We think the BT should be a part of this process of increasing collaboration. And the door is open. The BT comrades should be a part of the international leadership team, and should contribute ~~x~~ their ideas and their cadres to the common effort.

The BT has its own political views, of course. But the real political differences -- in my opinion at least -- are not so terribly great. They are ~~not~~ certainly not as great as the differences over Latin America a few years ago; yet for three years these differences were discussed without any organized formations. The differences today ~~are~~ certainly do not justify hardened formations, splits and expulsions. And the interests of the International as a whole call for a reduction of tensions, not a hardening of lines.

This is important for the comrades of the BT as well. It would be self-defeating for the BT comrades to ~~close~~ close themselves off from the new opportunities for collaboration and exchange of ideas in the International. The last thing that the comrades in the BT need is to turn further inward, to discuss all questions in the



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BT first, and then to debate with the rest of us afterwards, coming into such discussions ~~with~~ as a caucus with its views decided and fixed in advance. The BT comrades need to participate freely in the discussions, to consider all views equally, to contribute their ideas to the ~~the~~ discussions of all, and to be prepared to convince or to be convinced in the course of discussion.

So I would urge the leadership of the BT <sup>(faction)</sup> to seriously consider this~~x~~ and change the course they are on in view of the positive situation in the International today.

Unfortunately, the first ~~response~~ response of the BT central leadership has been negative. I refer to the only material we have in writing at this time, the report by Comrade Greco to the Central Committee of the Colombian PST in December, 1977. In his report Comrade Greco argues that the dissolution of the IMT and LTF resulted in the creation of a new bloc -- an unprincipled bloc because we have differences among us. He also argues that the dissolution was caused by the ~~the~~ weakening and crisis of the IMT and LTF, which forced the two sides to combine forces against the BT. Rather than directing the BT on a course ~~t~~ towards decreased tension and collaboration, he says that the BT must be prepared for an even sharper struggle, of long duration, in which there will be other splits like those that have already occurred, or even ~~larger~~ bigger ones. He also raises a series of horror stories, charging that there is a moral crisis in the International.

Comrade Greco's views are completely unfounded. Let us consider his charge that we are ~~a~~ an unprincipled bloc because the former LTFers and former IMTers have differences among us. We do not deny that we have differences among us. But neither do we claim to be a common~~g~~ tendency or faction or grouping of any kind. All we claim is to function through the official bodies of the International; and in these bodies, such as the United Secretariat, it is not unprincipled to have differences. It is normal.

Nor was the dissolution of the LTF and IMT directed against the BT. It was directed in the higher interests of the International as a whole. And this is the level on which the question should be discussed. It is the only level worthy of the Trotskyist movement, and should not be degraded to the level of horror stories and scandal-mongering.

I will speak only briefly about the situation of our movement ~~here~~ in Colombia, because all the comrades here are familiar with the positions of the United Secretariat on the split in the Colombian PST and the problem of unification of the Trotskyist forces ~~in~~ in Colombia.

At its meeting of January 27, 28, 29<sup>(1978)</sup> the United Secretariat condemned the expulsion of the PDT comrades from the PST, condemned the PST leadership's decision to prohibit tendencies in the PST, and urged that a special congress be called.

At its meeting of March 31, April 1, 2, 1978 the United Secretariat pointed out that to be genuine the special congress would have to be prepared ~~and~~ adequately and include the participation of both sides. To organize such a congress, we recommended that a ~~parity~~ parity committee be formed, in which the United Secretariat would be willing to have an observer. In other words, the preparation of a special congress required the mutual agreement of both sides.

Unfortunately this ~~has~~ has not yet been achieved. So far the two sides have not been able to agree, and the two public factions of the PST have held their separate congresses. Furthermore, it seems that on some political questions the ~~two~~ two factions of the PST seem to be moving further apart, while the PDT and the LCR seem to be drawing closer together. This raises a new situation that we will have to consider, as part of aiding our overall objective of unifying all the Trotskyist forces in Colombia.

Our experience with unifications is that to be successful they must be principled. This means more than achieving broad agreement on programmatic questions. It is possible to be in agreement on the Transitional Program and similar documents, but still be unable to work together in a common organization.

A principled unification does not require complete agreement, but it does require a certain amount of convergence ~~on~~ between the respective sides: convergence on the political line to follow ~~in~~ on the most important questions of the class struggle; convergence on the concepts of internal party organization and party norms; common experience in day-to-day activity that shows that it is possible to work together fraternally. unification

These are conditions for a principled ~~/~~ -- that is, for a unification that will really work, that will be stable.

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If these conditions do not exist, there is the danger that the united organization would quickly split, and the situation would be worse than before; it would be more difficult to unite later on.

These are a few lessons we have learned from experience with the problem of unifications. So we will work for a principled unification of the Trotskyist forces in Colombia along those lines.

Finally, I will conclude with just a few ~~more~~ words on your activities.

The activity of the Colombian LCR and PST -- all comrades of the PST, both sides -- in initiating the socialist electoral campaign around the UNIOS formation and the candidacy of Socorro Ramírez was a big step forward for Trotskyism ~~in~~ in Colombia. We think the results of the initial stage of the campaign are positive, despite the harm that resulted from the split in the PST.

We ~~also~~ always favor taking advantage of ~~the~~ elections to present Trotskyist positions on the big questions of the day. And we look forward to a big and successful socialist election campaign in the months to come.

Viva la unificacion de las fuerzas Trotskyistas en Colombia!  
Viva la Cuarta Internacional!

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