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The 'Draft Resolution on the Indochinese Revolution for the Eleventh World Congress'—Where It Goes Wrong

By Fred Feldman

[The following is the edited text of the report given by Fred Feldman to the plenum of the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party (U.S.A.) on January 6, 1977. Since the discussion of this question was only beginning, no vote was taken. Footnotes have been added at the end of the report.]

I hope everyone has had a chance to read the document entitled "Draft Resolution on the Indochinese Revolution for the Eleventh World Congress," submitted by Comrades Aubin, Duret, Roman, and Walter. It is the only item in Vol. XIII, No. 7, November 1976, of the *International Internal Discussion Bulletin*. It was endorsed at the November meeting of the United Secretariat by a majority composed of the supporters of the International Majority Tendency (IMT) who attended that meeting of the secretariat.

The resolution is a further step by leaders of the International Majority Tendency toward placing in question key aspects of the Trotskyist program. It codifies a further adaptation to the political positions of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) on such key questions as "people's war" and coalition government.

The resolution touches on a wide range of topics. On some points, such as the historic import and positive impact of the Vietnamese victory on the world revolution, agreement exists in the world Trotskyist movement. The view taken by the Socialist Workers Party on this was expressed in the headline of the May 9, 1975, *Militant* after the entry of the liberation forces into Saigon: "Vietnam: victory for all oppressed."

This report will focus on three areas where serious disagreement exists. The first and most important disputed area concerns the character of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the ruling parties in Laos and Cambodia. The second disagreement concerns the method of approach to be adopted in determining the class character of the state. The third difference centers on the strategy adopted in building the anti-Vietnam War movement.

The draft resolution holds that the Vietnamese Communist Party broke from Stalinism in a revolutionary direction at least thirty years ago, if indeed it was ever Stalinist at all. Since then, we are told, the VCP has pursued an unaltered course toward socialist revolution in Vietnam. The resolution characterizes the VCP as a "proletarian party oriented toward the seizure of power and the establishment of a workers state" that played a "decisive revolutionary role" [p. 13] in the Vietnamese struggle. In its battle for socialist revolution, the resolution indicates, the VCP adopted the only means that were realistic under the circumstances—the strategy of "people's war."

Thus, the resolution presents the Vietnamese Communist Party as a revolutionary-socialist working-class party. Perhaps the authors would prefer the designation of

"'empirical-revolutionary' workers' party" developed for the Vietnamese Communist Party by Comrade Pierre Rousset in his article, "The Vietnamese Revolution and the Role of the Party," in the April 1974 issue of *International Socialist Review*. [p. 8.] The resolution stresses, however, that the theory of this party has been somewhat deformed owing to its long association with world Stalinism.

The resolution holds that Vietnam and Laos are workers states. The same designation is conferred on the Cambodian regime. The authors hold that these three workers states suffer from bureaucratic deformations but are not ruled by bureaucratic castes.

On the contrary, the resolution gives encouragement to the view that struggles for workers democracy in these countries may well take the form of popular mobilizations led by a section of the leadership of the ruling parties. The building of revolutionary workers parties in these countries as sections of the Fourth International is not proposed by the resolution.

The Chinese Precedent

In taking up the Vietnamese Communist Party's supposed break with Stalinism and the problems of bureaucracy in the Indochinese regimes, the resolution makes frequent reference to the Chinese revolution and the role of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as an example. This is an entirely correct approach, for a sound analysis of the Chinese revolution and the role of Maoism is an invaluable aid to understanding the Vietnamese Communist Party. Unfortunately, however, the authors' flawed understanding of Maoism is transmitted to their evaluation of the VCP.

The differences in the international over Vietnam have their origins in the discussion in the Fourth International of the meaning of Mao's victory. Among others, Ernest Mandel (who often wrote under the name Ernest Germain) sought to explain this by arguing that the CCP had to break from Stalinism in order to take power.¹

This required Comrade Mandel to locate some political break with Stalinism in the history of the CCP. This has not proved to be easy. Those holding this view have generally taken refuge in speculations about the secret diplomatic relations between Stalin and Mao, particularly speculation about Stalin's view of the CCP decision to overturn Chiang Kai-shek. No open political break occurred before Stalin's death, and to the end Mao remained a firm defender of Stalin. However, a break was demanded by Comrade Mandel's theory, and when all else failed, the break was merely posited.

This theory presented further difficulties because the CCP's strategy before the decision to take political power had been that of a class-collaborationist leadership of a

peasant war. After the overthrow of Chiang, Mao attempted to carry out class collaboration under the new conditions established by his military victory. He tried to form a coalition government with real, though gravely weakened, representatives of the Chinese bourgeoisie and to preserve capitalism under the rubric of "new democracy." After the overturn of capitalism in the 1953 period, Mao ruled through a tight bureaucratic dictatorship rooted in a high degree of institutionalized privilege. Mao urged class collaboration on an international scale, and put forward the concept of building socialism in one country through "self-reliance." The creation of a regime like this had been barred in advance by Comrade Mandel's theory, which held that Mao had definitely broken from Stalinism and moved in the direction of revolutionary socialism.

This view led logically to reinterpreting Mao's policies and practice before and after the seizure of power in the light of this supposed turn toward revolutionary socialism.

The theory and practice of "new democracy" was disregarded or reduced to mere errors in formulations. Mao's bureaucratic police-state methods of rule were combed for nuances of difference with the practices of the Soviet bureaucracy so that Mao's regime could be presented as somehow confusedly antibureaucratic.

The SWP weighed the outcome of the revolutionary events for several years before adopting a definitive view. Our opinion was embodied in a resolution adopted in 1955, "The Third Chinese Revolution and Its Aftermath." This resolution appears in the SWP Education for Socialists publication *The Chinese Revolution and Its Development*.

The SWP observed the fact that Mao's relations with Stalin—whatever nationalist strains may have appeared—were not those of a leadership breaking from Stalinism in a revolutionary direction. We recognized that Mao had violated normal Stalinist practices in breaking with Chiang and later overturning capitalism. Stalin had also done this under imperialist pressure by overturning coalition governments and capitalism in Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe, thus violating the Yalta and Potsdam agreements.

However, the record showed that Mao had violated Stalinist concepts in these instances not as part of a new course toward Leninism, but in order to defend the interests of his bureaucratic team and Stalinist party under the conditions of Chiang Kai-shek's recalcitrance, the cold war, deepening peasant unrest in China, and the colonial upsurge as a whole. Following these actions, the CCP consistently acted as a Stalinist party governing in the interests of a bureaucratic caste, subordinating the world revolution to the interests of this caste.

The SWP's conclusion had the advantage of permitting our party to recognize *all* the facts. We could recognize the fact that Mao had sought to carry out class collaboration with Chiang Kai-shek before and after World War II. We could recognize that, when Chiang refused to cooperate, the Chinese Communist Party broke with him and took power.

We did not have to claim that Mao's military victory in and of itself represented the victory of a socialist revolution. We could recognize the existence of the period of "new democracy" during which Mao set up a coalition government and tried to preserve capitalism. We could recognize that the Chinese CP finally abandoned the coalition experiment, and as a workers and peasants

government called for the overturn of capitalism, accomplishing this in a bureaucratic fashion. We could admit the counterrevolutionary character of the bureaucratic rule that Mao imposed, drawing the necessary conclusion that an antibureaucratic revolution led by a mass Trotskyist party was needed. And we could recognize that Mao's party had been and remained an obstacle to the advance of the Chinese and world revolutions.

Extension to the VCP

The draft resolution on Indochina extends Comrade Mandel's approach to that region. It demonstrates that Comrade Mandel's theory has been transformed from a hypothesis aimed at explaining complex facts into a barren schema that ignores vital facts.

Dogmatically insisting that the VCP must have broken from Stalinism in taking power, the resolution attempts to bar consideration of alternative explanations by statements like the following: "It is unthinkable that the revolutionary mobilization of the Vietnamese population could have been maintained for three decades despite the hammer blows of the counterrevolution without the action of a subjective factor, namely the Vietnamese Communist party." [p. 12.]

The SWP has never argued that workers states have been established without leadership—without a "subjective factor," if you prefer. It has argued that in backward countries under the conditions of the post-World War II period, transformations have taken place in a few important instances under Stalinist or other petty-bourgeois leaderships.

The Stalinists who stood at the head of the transformations in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, Albania, and Vietnam did not break from Stalinism, but remained class-collaborationist bureaucrats, counterrevolutionary obstructions to workers democracy and the world revolution.

The Stalinists are not incapable of leading class battles. They are not pacifists. It is by leading struggles that they win the opportunity to betray the masses of workers and peasants through the search for class-collaborationist agreements with the class enemy.

Stalinists are not incapable of picking up the gun and waging a militant, if sometimes ill-organized, struggle against reactionary forces. The Kremlin demonstrated this in meeting the attack of German imperialism in the Second World War. The Greek, French, and Yugoslav parties provided further examples in building resistance movements against the Nazis. In the postwar period, many Asian Communist parties undertook armed struggle against rightist regimes.

In the post-World War II period, the struggle in the colonial and semicolonial world proceeded under quite favorable conditions. These were described in the resolution adopted by the 1963 Reunification Congress, "Dynamics of World Revolution Today."

The resolution states:

"In the colonial and semicolonial countries, on the other hand, the very weakness of capitalism, the whole peculiar socio-economic structure produced by imperialism, the permanent misery of the big majority of the population in the absence of a radical agrarian revolution, the stagnation and even reduction of living standards while indus-

trialization nevertheless proceeds relatively rapidly, create situations in which the failure of one revolutionary wave does not lead automatically to relative or even temporary social or economic stabilization. A seemingly inexhaustible succession of mass struggles continues, such as Bolivia has experienced for ten years. The weakness of the enemy offers the revolution fuller means of recovery from temporary defeats than is the case in imperialist countries.

"To sum up: the victories and defeats since 1917 express the relationship of forces between the old ruling class and the toiling masses on a world scale. The fact that the revolution won first in backward countries and not in the advanced is not proof that the workers in the advanced countries have shown insufficient revolutionary combativity. It is evidence of the fact that the opposition which they have to overcome in these countries is immeasurably stronger than in the colonial and semicolonial world. The weakness of the enemy in the backward countries has opened the possibility of coming to power even with a blunted instrument. The strength of the enemy in the imperialist countries demands a tool of much greater perfection."²

Thus the resolution attributes the post-Second World War victories not to the high quality and "decisive revolutionary role" of the leaderships, but to the "weakness of the enemy in the backward countries." The "weakness of the enemy" does not mean that the colonial and semicolonial bourgeoisies and their imperialist backers are not capable of trying to drown a revolution in blood. It refers to the depth of the social crisis, and the *political* and *economic* weakness and isolation of the counterrevolutionary forces in the colonial revolution.

"Dynamics of World Revolution Today" points out that these conditions do not obviate the need for revolutionary parties in the colonial and semicolonial world. However, they did make it possible in some instances for inadequate and class-collaborationist leaderships to win victories despite strategies that would lead to certain disaster if applied in imperialist countries.

The Vietnamese Communist Party always fought for class-collaborationist objectives with a class-collaborationist strategy. It projected a bourgeois stage of the revolution. In line with this, the VCP sought coalition governments with the capitalists. It promised and sometimes actively helped to preserve capitalism, landlordism, and even a bourgeois government if it received acceptable terms in return.

However, Vietnam was a country afflicted with a permanent social crisis. The peasants faced deepening impoverishment and land hunger. The whole population lived in permanent resentment of foreign domination. A puny national bourgeoisie was unable to make a serious effort to co-opt the nationalist movement after World War II. The imperialists were determined to make Vietnam an example of their capacity to crush the colonial revolution, but the scope of the mass movement again and again blocked attainment of this objective. These conditions made it impossible for the Stalinists to stay at the class-collaborationist level they sought. At several points they were forced to confront the alternative of being swept away or of fighting. Still later, they confronted the danger of losing the workers state in the north from which the leaders derived their privileges.

August 1945—A Revolution Betrayed

The authors of the new resolution assert that the VCP came into conflict with Stalin when Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese independence at a mass rally in Hanoi on August 19, 1945. The authors assert that this act violated the Potsdam agreement signed earlier that month in which Stalin guaranteed that French, British, and Nationalist Chinese occupation of Indochina would be permitted.

As the Potsdam conference was going on, however, a great national and social revolution was sweeping Vietnam.³ Hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants demonstrated, seized land, and occupied factories. People's committees were formed everywhere. This was a proletarian revolution resembling the Russian revolution of 1917 and the Chinese revolution of 1925-27.

The Vietnamese Communist Party did not initiate this upheaval, although it was looked to for leadership by wide sectors of the population. During the war the Vietnamese CP had expressed willingness to accept postwar French rule of what the VCP leaders carefully called "French Indochina." They proposed that the masses welcome and cooperate with imperialist armies in return for a projected independence with French approval in ten years.

In March 1945, however, the Japanese granted formal independence to Vietnam, in an effort to increase the difficulties of Japan's imperialist opponents. When later confronted with a massive popular upheaval for independence in August 1945, the Vietnamese CP could not openly reject independence without running into a head-on confrontation with the masses, and perhaps being outflanked on the left by other forces, including the Trotskyists.

Ho Chi Minh issued the declaration of independence as the head of a capitalist government that included the former Emperor Bao Dai and major bourgeois parties. This government opposed anticapitalist and antilandlord struggles. Although they accepted independence in words—*at first*—the CP and its allies systematically carried out the Potsdam agreements in *deeds*. Therefore the VCP was never criticized by Stalin, who was quite capable of breaking with forces he thought might be moving to the left, and of slandering and murdering them if possible. (The case of Stalin's break with Tito, coming several years after the VCP's alleged break with Stalinism, is of special interest in this regard.)

The resolution states: "In 1936, as in 1945-46, the heart of the national liberation movement in Vietnam was located in the cities. With the arrival of the French-British expeditionary corps, the revolutionary forces were driven to retreat from the cities and engaged in a long war of resistance whose center of gravity was henceforth located in the countryside. . . ." [p. 12.]

This is a broad generalization that disregards facts. French and British troops did not simply "arrive" in Vietnam. Their entry into the country was approved by the VCP, which organized the masses of Saigon to hail their entry into the city. The Vietnamese CP suppressed political groups and people's committees that opposed this policy. It was at this point that the CP began the massacre of the Trotskyists, an event that is not mentioned in the resolution.

Of course, the VCP leaders were not trying to commit

suicide. On the contrary, they hoped that the occupiers would accept Stalinist participation in the government and even move toward permitting independence in the long run. They believed that class collaboration was practical and possible. This hope was vain. The imperialists organized a coup and expelled Ho's government from the southern half of the country. The defeat of the revolution of 1945 had begun.

In March 1946 the Vietnamese Communist Party leaders signed an agreement with the French permitting tens of thousands of French troops to occupy the north and accepting the status of a province in the French Union. The Vietnamese CP joined with French troops in police actions against nationalist forces outraged by this betrayal. Ultimately, of course, the French turned on the Vietnamese CP and drove its forces from the northern cities as well.

The upsurge of 1945-46 was defeated, but it had not been entirely crushed. The peasant movement still stirred. Having thrown away a priceless revolutionary opportunity, the Vietnamese CP now fought back militarily while still putting forward a class-collaborationist program. This coincided with the intensification of the cold war and a left turn signaled by Stalin for Communist parties all over the world. Once again, Stalin indicated no disagreement with the Vietnamese CP's course. The suspicious-minded dictator had no inkling, it seems, that one of his parties was moving toward revolutionary socialism. I should add that the Fourth International and the Vietnamese Trotskyists also missed this transformation. Should not the resolution provide an account of the reasons for this "error"?

The resolution holds that the Vietnamese CP was "driven" to give up the cities—that is, it had no choice. The record shows that the VCP leaders betrayed a proletarian revolution—a very different thing. The authors' desire to defend their estimate of the revolutionary character of the VCP has led them to portray a betrayal as though it were a revolutionary course, a break from Stalinism. A parallel to this evaluation of the August 1945 revolution would be a resolution apologizing for Stalinist policy in the Chinese revolution of 1925-27.

How will the present resolution affect the capacity of Trotskyist cadres to orient sections or evaluate the policies of other currents in revolutionary situations like that which occurred in Vietnam in 1945? The estimation of Stalinist policy in the August 1945 revolution is not a mere historical question. It has important political consequences.

'People's War'

The resolution states that the Vietnamese revolution was a "*national liberation movement compelled to win through a long military struggle centered in the countryside in the absence of a revolutionary upsurge in the major imperialist centers. . .*" [p. 12. Emphasis in original.] If adopted, this resolution will give the endorsement of the Fourth International to the strategy of "people's war" as an appropriate strategy of struggle for the proletarian revolution. The resolution judges that a strategy of peasant war independent of the mobilization of the working class and independent of building a party rooted in the working class was correct and necessary. In turning

to this strategy, the resolution implies, the Vietnamese Communist Party discovered the only road to socialist revolution under the given Vietnamese and world conditions.

The political implications of this resolution cannot be isolated to Vietnam alone. The resolution carries the clear implication that this strategy is necessary for any colonial country "in the absence of a revolutionary upsurge in the major imperialist centers." That would mean, for instance, that the correct strategy for China during the revolution of 1925-27 was "people's war" in contrast to the policies fought for by Trotsky, since this occurred during a period of imperialist stabilization. I have had the impression that many IMT supporters questioned the correctness of Trotsky's views on China *after* the 1925-27 revolution, but it now appears that his policies during this upheaval may be coming into question as well.

The resolution never explains why it is impossible for the colonial proletariat to win the leadership of peasant millions and thus accomplish a socialist revolution unless the proletariat of the imperialist countries is simultaneously engaged in a revolutionary upheaval. It never explains why the movement must center on the peasantry except on those occasions when the imperialist centers are in crisis. Does this not mean that the pattern of the Bolshevik revolution has been invalid in the colonial countries for the greater part of five decades?

It is simply not true that proletarian revolution in the colonial or semicolonial countries is barred unless the imperialist countries are in a revolutionary crisis. It is not true that the working class of a colonial country is incapable of leading a struggle that could prevent or defeat an imperialist intervention.

The revolutions of 1925-27 in China and of 1945-46 in Vietnam were defeated not because of the military strength of the counterrevolutionary forces—foreign or domestic—but because of the class-collaborationist policies of the leaderships. In a working-class upsurge, such policies are particularly fatal because the issue of which class shall rule and which property forms shall prevail is directly posed.

The resolution affirms that peasant struggles, isolated from the working class, are a strategy for the proletarian revolution. The only proviso is that the peasants must be led by a party defined by the authors as revolutionary and working-class.

The resolution ignores the fact that no party, not even the most revolutionary, can transform the nature and objectives of real social classes. The peasantry are not clay that can be molded into any form or wielded as a weapon for any purpose by a leadership. Peasant struggles are *petty-bourgeois* struggles. The peasantry fights for the ownership or cooperative working of small plots of land and for an independent national state. The peasantry is not a social force capable on its own of fighting for or establishing a workers state.

This has been the case in Vietnam. As in China, the peasants fought not for socialism but for land and independence under a reformist capitalist regime of "national democracy" headed by a coalition government. This was true even during the Second Indochina War, when the peasants had before them an example of a workers state in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. When the leadership decided at last to overturn capitalism

in violation of its long-standing program of bourgeois revolution, it had to turn to the working class to carry this out, mobilizing it by bureaucratic means against the capitalists.

As a program of peasant war independent of the proletariat, "people's war" includes as a fundamental principle the search for a governmental alliance with a sector of the national bourgeoisie. This has characterized the application of the "people's war" strategy everywhere in the world. This is not an accident. This policy reflects not only the Stalinist nature of the leadership but the intermediate class position of the peasantry and its susceptibility to class-collaborationist schemes.

The program of "people's war" chooses the capitalists rather than the working class as the preferred urban ally of the peasants. That is the meaning in class terms of the VCP's promises throughout the war to preserve capitalist property relations. The resolution never mentions these promises, but refers instead to the "timorous" social policy of the VCP in the "initial years of the resistance." [p. 4.] I would hardly call the VCP or its leadership "timid" or "timorous." That is the least of their problems. The VCP's social policy was not the result of timidity, but of a class-collaborationist strategy. This strategy is the reason why the VCP played so slight a role in the mass urban movements of the 1960s which overturned Diem and played a key role in dooming the puppet regime.

What is at issue is not whether urban upheaval or peasant war is to be preferred. In a proletarian revolution in colonial countries, both are necessary. The choice is between a proletarian revolutionary strategy in which the mass workers movement under Leninist leadership contends for the leadership of the peasant war, and the petty-bourgeois Stalinist strategy of "people's war," which uses peasant war to exert maximum pressure on the capitalists and imperialism for an alliance on terms acceptable to the Stalinists.

On Coalition Government

Because the authors have reinterpreted the Vietnamese CP's strategy as a revolutionary one, their resolution never once mentions this party's calls for and participation in coalition governments. We are told of the CP's calls for "national concord," but the resolution omits to mention what this means. The call for "national concord" proposed a coalition government for South Vietnam made up of elements of the Thieu regime, bourgeois third force groups, and the National Liberation Front, on the basis of capitalist property relations.

In that context, consider the implications for our program of the resolution's assertion that the policy of "national concord" sanctioned "the party's fierce desire to move to the seizure of power and the socialist reunification of the country." [p. 13.]

The call for a coalition government in South Vietnam is presented as part of a strategy for proletarian revolution that placed no practical obstacles in the road of the Vietnamese revolution, although the resolution grants that it poses problems for the establishment of workers democracy after the revolution.

The VCP strategy of "national concord" destroyed the revolution of 1945 and blocked the working-class struggle in subsequent years. These class-collaborationist practices

led to the cessation of struggle after the Geneva Accords of 1954. It was the masses on their own initiative and not the Vietnamese CP that resumed the struggle for national independence. The policy of "national concord" led the Vietnamese CP to hail the 1973 accords as a victory, in part because they seemed to offer some hope for the establishment of a coalition government. Only after more than a year of effort to attain this goal did the Vietnamese leaders give up all hope in the class-collaborationist provisions of the accords.

The resolution's approach to calls for coalition governments—new in our movement—is extended to the coalition regime that emerged in Laos in September 1973. Although the resolution takes no note of it, this was the third coalition government in Laos composed of Stalinists, bourgeois "neutralists," and rightists. The coalition governments formed in 1957 and 1962 ended in political disaster for the Laotian masses and renewed war.

The draft resolution states: "The Revolutionary People's party of Laos, under the cover of a government of 'national union,' gradually took control of all the armed forces, stimulated urban mobilizations, and accelerated the disintegration of the puppet forces, before proclaiming the abolition of the monarchy and the birth of a new people's republic." [p. 13.]

This ignores the actual stages of the Laotian revolution. The Laotian PRP, a Stalinist formation, did not use the coalition government formed in September 1973 to further revolutionary-socialist objectives. On the contrary, it restricted the mass movement and helped to preserve the decayed capitalist and neocolonialist order.

This situation was changed not by the clever utilization of the coalition government by the Stalinists but by the victories of revolutionary forces in Vietnam and Cambodia. Under the changed relationship of forces produced by these victories, the PRP decided to take advantage of the profound popular discontent with the policies of the coalition government to abolish the old army and concentrate all power in its hands, forcing its former bourgeois allies out of the government. This new government was a workers and peasants government.

Because of its desire to present the PRP's policy as a revolutionary one, the resolution fails to make the basic distinction between the PRP's alliance with the bourgeoisie after September 1973 and its decision to break that alliance after May 1975. The result is to portray the coalition government in Laos as a stepping-stone to the proletarian revolution.

In fact, this coalition government was an obstacle to the Laotian revolution. Its breakup and replacement by a workers and peasants government opens the road to the transformation of property relations needed to establish a workers state. The further evolution of this workers and peasants government will depend on the course followed by the leadership, and on the actions of the masses.

What will the resolution on Indochina mean for Trotskyist cadres who have to evaluate calls for coalition governments in the future? Once again, this is not a historical question. The cadres of our movement read and study resolutions for political lessons and direction in the class struggle.

If calls for class collaboration were harmless in Vietnam and participation in a coalition government provided "cover" for the socialist revolution in Laos, might not such

class-collaborationist practices be justified elsewhere, provided the intentions of those engaging in them are thought to be sincerely socialist, and provided that they are ready to fight arms in hand? Might not calls for coalition governments or even participation in such governments be seen as a clever tactic for putting the capitalists off guard? Won't Trotskyist cadres be tempted to draw the conclusion from this resolution that—at least in some circumstances—the combination of “people's war” with a people's front represents a quicker and more proven road to a workers state than building a party in opposition to such schemes?

The Paris Accords and a False Debate

The resolution includes no evaluation of the Paris accords of 1973, which included the call for “national concord,” or of the Vietnamese Stalinist assertion that the accords were a “victory of epochal significance,”⁴ or of the debate that occurred in the international around the November 1972 resolution of the International Executive Committee majority, which also presented the accords as a victory.⁵

Instead, we are presented with a tendentious version of the debate in our movement.

The resolution states: “On the basis of a different assessment of the role played by the Vietnamese CP . . . some comrades drew a radically different assessment of the likely outcome of the struggle. The analysis of the International Executive Committee of 1972 was fully confirmed by the evolution of events.” [p. 13.]

I suppose the nameless “some comrades” must be a reference to the SWP. If I correctly understand what the authors are driving at, they claim that the SWP, on the basis of its opinion that the Vietnamese CP was Stalinist, drew the conclusion that the revolution was probably doomed; whereas the IMT, on the basis of its assertion that the VCP was essentially revolutionary, correctly considered victory a virtual certainty.

This construction is fictional. The SWP, it is true, did not regard victory as assured. We would not regard victory as certain even if the leadership was Leninist. Such questions are decided in struggle. However, we did not regard victory as foreclosed or even improbable because of the Stalinist character of the leadership. In the July-August 1973 issue of the *International Socialist Review*, George Johnson and Fred Feldman wrote:

“We do not believe that the weaknesses of the leadership doom the Vietnamese revolution to defeat, although they are a serious liability. The Vietnamese revolution is continuing, and the one in neighboring Cambodia has undergone intensification. American imperialism has been relatively weakened, despite the powerful assistance provided it by Moscow and Peking. Events like the Watergate scandal, the meat boycott, and the weakening of the dollar demonstrate that continued war is not without its risks for the U.S. ruling class. The antiwar movement in the U.S. and around the world will have a vital role to play should the imperialists decide to step up their aggression.

“Any new victories won by the Indochinese liberation fighters will be hailed by revolutionary Marxists, as we have hailed earlier victories. Nonetheless, such victories will not change our analysis, as Marxists and revolutionary realists, of the leadership of the VCP and its program.

Because of their program, these leaders have failed to take advantage of conjunctures far more favorable than that now confronting the Indochinese peoples.” [p. 89.]

In fact, we would have been opposed to debating a speculative question such as the “likely outcome of the struggle,” even if we had been aware of big disputes raging over this question.

The real issue in 1972 was not the “likely outcome of the struggle” but the evaluation of the proposed terms that later became the Paris accords of 1973, and the Nixon-Mao-Brezhnev détente of which they were the first fruit. We saw these accords as the product of the pressures the Moscow and Peking Stalinists exerted on the Vietnamese, exemplified by the disgusting exhibitions by Mao and Brezhnev of solidarity with Nixon during his visits to the Soviet Union and China.

While we recognized that the withdrawal of most U.S. forces from Vietnam was a gain for the revolution, we held that the accords included important concessions such as a cease-fire that left the Saigon regime intact, together with the perspective of reconciliation with the Thieu regime. These concessions were imposed on the liberation fighters with the aim of freezing the struggle and buying time for the puppet regime. We pointed to provisions that could be used to justify renewed U.S. intervention.

We held that the objectives of the Vietnamese revolution could not be advanced through the accords, but that the workers and peasants would have to break out of this prison in order to achieve victory. Our duty as revolutionists was not to hail the “likely outcome of the struggle,” but to point out the dangers involved in the accords and to provide Vietnamese revolutionists and their allies in the international antiwar movement with the programmatic guidelines needed to overcome the concessions contained in the accords.⁶

Fortunately, the Vietnamese did break through the restrictions embodied in the accords, and a great victory was won.

The SWP's evaluation of the accords was made independently of an evaluation of the character of the Vietnamese CP. It was also, I might add, made independently of the Vietnamese CP itself. It no more meant that the Vietnamese revolution was doomed than Lenin's evaluation of the concessions included in the Brest-Litovsk treaty as a setback meant that the Russian revolution was doomed.

It is the IMT and not the SWP that holds that the Vietnamese revolution could triumph only if the VCP were revolutionary and that the revolution was necessarily doomed if the VCP were Stalinist. Since the SWP adopted its resolution on the Chinese revolution in 1955, we have recognized the possibility of victory under a nonrevolutionary leadership under conditions such as those faced by the Vietnamese revolution.

The Character of the Regime

The nature of the Vietnamese CP is indicated most graphically by the regime it established after 1954 in the north and which is rapidly being extended southward today. The draft resolution describes this regime with a substantial degree of accuracy. Political decision making and activity are tightly controlled by the heights of the bureaucratic apparatus. A hierarchy of privileges was

established with the taking of power and is defended by the regime. There is no freedom of the press or right to form opposition parties. The ruling party itself is totally undemocratic in its structure. The resolution describes a totalitarian political structure defending bureaucratic privilege, although it does not characterize the regime in this way.

How does the resolution explain the striking similarities between this regime and a Stalinist one? The authors write: ". . . the orientation of the VCP also confirms the thesis that the rediscovery of a properly revolutionary Marxist program cannot occur without a reappraisal of the historical debates of the workers movement, a complete theoretical break with the heritage of Stalinism, and an integration of the experience of the world revolution. These three elements are foreign to the political history of the Vietnamese Communist party." [p. 13. Emphasis in original.]

Thus the resolution presents the Vietnamese CP leaders as well-meaning provincials lacking access to the basic ideas of revolutionary Marxism. Such a view of these leaders is inaccurate, to say the least. The Vietnamese CP is a highly experienced and sophisticated Stalinist party, quite supple in applying Stalinist policies and methods.

Ho Chi Minh was a founder of the French Communist Party. He lived in the Soviet Union during the first years of the Stalin-Trotsky dispute. He was in China as a Comintern official during the 1925-27 revolution. Before and after this, he traveled for the Comintern to many countries.

The Vietnamese Trotskyists

From its formation, the Vietnamese CP adopted the theory of socialism in one country, the two-stage theory of revolution, and opposition to Trotskyism. It remained in the Stalinized Communist International until its dissolution in 1943, and has retained close ties to its constituent parties.

In order to uphold its thesis that the Vietnamese Stalinists are ignorant of the nature of Stalinism and of the issues in the fight against Trotskyism, the resolution has to pass over a rather important opponent of Stalinism in Vietnam: the Trotskyists. These able revolutionists fought the Stalinists' orientation day in and day out for many years with some success. The views of these revolutionary Marxists were not "foreign" to the experience of the VCP. The Stalinists were trained in part by the daily combat against Trotskyism, and ultimately murdered the Trotskyists for their revolutionary-socialist views.

By mentioning the Vietnamese Trotskyists only once in a rather obscure passage near the end of the resolution [p. 17], the resolution can only have the effect of depriving Vietnamese revolutionists of the programmatic and class-struggle continuity that they will sorely need in the coming battles for workers democracy and an internationalist policy.

The resolution admits the inevitability of further bureaucratization in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, since the leadership fosters this by antidemocratic policies. Yet the need for a new party and a political revolution is rejected. Instead we are urged to look toward eventual divisions in the leadership of these parties. The resolution's approach encourages the hope that a wing is likely

to arise in the leadership of these parties that will advance in the direction of workers democracy, despite the forty-six-year record of the Vietnamese CP, in particular, in opposing workers democracy. [p. 16.]

Contrary to what is implied by the resolution, the ability of the VCP to respond to calls for socialist democracy has already been subjected to a test. In 1956 the regime suppressed a movement of intellectuals and dissident CP members calling for democratic rights and cultural freedom. They were forced to recant and some were imprisoned on frame-up charges of being "spies and psychological warfare cadres" of the U.S. imperialists and Diem.⁷ This important clash finds no place in the resolution.

Nor does the resolution take note of the VCP leaders' support for the crushing of the Czechoslovak struggle for socialist democracy, and the VCP leaders' praise of Stalin. Should not such factors be taken into account in weighing the likely response of the VCP to proposals for workers democracy?

Toward an Antibureaucratic Revolution

The authors provide no suggestions as to how revolutionary internationalists in Vietnam can advance the struggle for workers democracy and internationalism in the day-to-day conflicts between the bureaucracy and the population. Should they place confidence in the leadership in Vietnam—or those in Cambodia and Laos—to complete the social revolution, or should they urge the masses to press for deepening the land reform, expropriations, and other measures? Where should they stand when the right to read or speak out becomes an issue? Should they urge confidence in the ability of the VCP to settle these issues satisfactorily? Should they seek to gather oppositional cadres around our program, even if this requires working in the underground or in exile? Should they attempt to construct a Vietnamese section of the Fourth International to participate in the ongoing struggles of the workers and peasants? None of these questions are touched on.

According to the resolution, the existence of a totalitarian political structure institutionalizing bureaucratic privilege can be explained as a result of the interaction of objective conditions like poverty and war with ideological errors of the leadership. Thus, the antidemocratic practices of the VCP are not a result of their Stalinism, as is the case when identical practices are utilized by the Soviet CP, but of their failure to *understand* Stalinism. The resolution implies that if they can be made to understand Stalinism, through a combination of international revolutionary developments and friendly persuasion by advocates of socialist democracy, a wing of the VCP leadership may seek to abolish bureaucratic rule and to lead the masses in instituting socialist democracy.

This approach departs from the materialist interpretation of social and political phenomena. It ascribes undue weight to ideological causes in explaining a political system and a social structure. In reality, the actions of the Vietnamese CP represent *social interests* with a *material stake* in this kind of regime: that is, the bureaucratic caste that monopolizes political power. The bureaucratic oppression of the Vietnamese masses is not the result of a misunderstanding due to the bad company the VCP has been keeping all these years, but of the material interests of the bureaucratic caste.

Ideology reflects social interests. When the Vietnamese Stalinists accepted and fought for the Stalinist program, they became the representatives within Vietnam of the interests of the Soviet bureaucratic caste. Later this program also expressed their own interests as the bureaucratic command structure of a peasant army. After the overturn of capitalism in the north, this program and practice reflected the interests and outlook of the bureaucratic caste of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This is a social force that will not surrender its privileges and power without an antibureaucratic workers revolution led by a new revolutionary party, adhering to the Trotskyist program. The building of such a party in opposition to the VCP was necessary in the past, it is needed today, and it will be needed tomorrow.

Is the VCP Internationalist?

The authors of the resolution go so far as to contend that the Vietnamese Communist Party is internationalist, although its internationalism is not "complete." [p. 13.] Thus they write the following astonishing passage, inspired by the problem of nationalities in Indochina:

"During the 1930s the Indochinese Communist party had tried to respond to this problem by advancing the perspective of the formation of a 'Union of Soviet Republics of Indochina' guaranteeing the right of self-determination to minorities and integrated into a 'Union of World Soviet Republics.' Whatever the actual underestimation of the differences that were to emerge in the course of the Indochinese revolutionary processes, this perspective did seek to respond to a problem that remains one of the key questions today. This perspective has not at all been abandoned." [p. 7.]

Such a stand would bring the Vietnamese Communist Party very close to the internationalist outlook of the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky. If the assertion is true, the Vietnamese CP belongs in the Fourth International regardless of differences over historical questions. If they do not want to join the Fourth International, then we should consider joining them.

It should be noted, however, that such statements were common in the programs of CPs during the Stalinist "third period," when the programmatic statement quoted by the resolution was adopted.

Curiously, the authors of the resolution present no proof of the claim that the VCP holds fast to the perspective of building an Indochinese federation as part of a united socialist world. They seem to consider this to be self-evident.

However, they admit that the VCP is opposed to the building of a revolutionary international, the material expression of such a perspective. [p. 13.] In what way then has their internationalist perspective been expressed?

Was it expressed when the Vietnamese leaders supported Indira Gandhi's coup in India, aiding her efforts to convince the masses that this reactionary move was progressive? Was it expressed when they stabbed the Ceylonese masses in the back by endorsing Bandaranaike's repression of student and peasant rebels in 1971? Was it expressed in the support given to the imperialist MFA government in Portugal? Or was it expressed in the VCP's support for the policy of détente as long as their own national interests are not passed over?

In his article, "The Vietnamese Revolution and the Role of the Party" in the April 1974 *International Socialist Review*, Pierre Rousset wrote that the VCP "offers aid to numerous movements of national liberation so long as they do not interfere with its immediate interests." [p. 18. Emphasis in original.]

Socialism in One Country

This is not an example of a flawed internationalism, as Comrade Rousset seemed to think at the time, but of the Vietnamese Stalinist practice of building "socialism in one country," the subordination of the world revolution to the diplomatic dealings and "immediate interests" of a bureaucratic caste. The theory of socialism in one country holds that socialism can be built in Vietnam over time as long as imperialist intervention can be fended off. It is not an ideological error or even a theory at all, but an apology for the rule of a bureaucratic caste.

This caste seeks to maintain control of the masses at home, in part through police measures, but also by promising to achieve socialist miracles within the boundaries of a national state. Simultaneously, the bureaucracy seeks recognition from the imperialists of its privileges and power as part of the international status quo. This caste, fearful of movements from below and tied by its very social nature to the survival of the national state, is opposed to world revolution and can see no future for itself in a world socialist society without national states and national boundaries.

Socialism in one country is a trap for the Vietnamese revolution. It is opposed to the social interests of the Vietnamese workers, who can overcome want only through the world socialist revolution, particularly its extension to the most advanced countries. The policy and practice of socialism in one country not only cuts off the road forward for Vietnam, but endangers the gains already won by the Vietnamese masses.

Despite its program, the Vietnamese CP led a mass peasant struggle to military victory and later moved to establish a workers state. Nonetheless, it cannot be regarded as a proletarian revolutionary party when its program and practice traps the workers state within national boundaries by subordinating the world revolution to the leadership's "immediate interests." On the contrary, this policy makes the VCP a dangerous obstacle to the Vietnamese revolution.

It is high time to reaffirm with reference to the Vietnamese CP the concept stated by Trotsky in *In Defense of Marxism*:

"The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and the only decisive standpoint, the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, completely retains its reactionary character and remains the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution."⁸

The position adopted by the draft resolution on Indochina is an unwarranted concession to the advocates and practitioners of the Stalinist policy of socialism in one country.

Trotskyism on the Class Character of the State

The transformations now proceeding in Indochina have posed the question of the nature of these states. The Fourth International has noted several steps that have gone into the creation of workers states in the postwar period. These steps can also be traced in the Russian revolution of 1917, although they were given a very different form by the direct leading role of the proletariat and a revolutionary workers party in the process.

In establishing a new state, a government independent of the bourgeoisie must arise out of struggles against the old ruling classes. The army and police of the old order must be broken up. The Fourth International took note of these steps in Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, and Algeria. In the latter four, it designated the new government a "workers and farmers government" to indicate its independence of the capitalists.

A further step is the transformation of the economic foundations of the state by the expropriation of the capitalists and the nationalization of industry. In taking all these steps, mass mobilizations against the old order are needed.

The transformation of property relations was noted by the Fourth International as a point of qualitative change in Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe, China, and Cuba.⁹

In all three countries of Indochina, the first step has been carried out. The bourgeoisie was expelled from governmental power and its repressive apparatus destroyed. In Cambodia and Laos, the governments are workers and peasants governments by the criteria used by the international in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, and Algeria. In neither Laos nor Cambodia is there clear evidence that an economic transformation has occurred. The resolution does not attempt to demonstrate that such a transformation has taken place.

In declaring all three regimes to be workers states, the new resolution follows the example of the 1973 IEC Majority Tendency document on China in rejecting the criteria used by the Fourth International in determining that Yugoslavia, the regimes in occupied Eastern Europe, China, and Cuba were workers states and that Algeria under Ben Bella had a workers and farmers government.

What criteria are to replace those that the Trotskyists have put forward in the past? The resolution puts forward none. Confusion is enhanced by the fact that the resolution defines Cambodia as a workers state, while also stating, "Given the almost complete closure of the country and the anticommunist slander campaign that has consequently been able to be waged, the absence of information prevents an effective balance sheet of the evolution of the regime from being drawn." [p. 7.]

It is a mistake for the authors to propose a sweeping change of this kind without explaining what it proposes by way of replacement for our previous criteria and why previous positions were wrong.

The authors attempt to leap over some of these problems by stating that the Vietnamese revolution was a social revolution. Therefore, they reason, the victory on April 30, 1975, represented the victory of a social revolution. But a social revolution is not merely a mass movement for social objectives, which the Vietnamese revolution certainly is. It is a change in the fundamental property relations of a

society. A transformation of property relations is not an administrative detail that automatically follows a military victory, but requires a conscious political decision by a government and popular mobilizations to assure the establishment of the new economic order.

The victory in Vietnam on April 30, 1975, was political and military in nature. The resolution portrays the Vietnamese CP as proceeding relentlessly with social-revolutionary measures after the April 30 victory. To create this impression, a number of stages are passed over in silence.

In June 1975 the Provisional Revolutionary Government was installed as the ruler of South Vietnam. Reunification was indefinitely postponed. CP leader Le Duan projected the creation of "a fine national democratic regime, a prosperous national democratic economy"¹⁰ in the south. Every reporter sent to Vietnam during the first year after the victory noted the continued predominance of capitalist economic relations in the south.

However, it proved impossible to build a national-democratic economy in the south. The Stalinist two-stage theory was disproved again. In face of massive unemployment and capitalist sabotage, the regime moved toward more rapid political reunification, and took measures against some of the remaining capitalist forces. The perspective of completing the overturn of capitalism in the south was adopted at the July 1976 meeting of the National Assembly, which also codified the political reunification of the country. Since then, adequate information has been hard to come by, but it appears that the transformation is moving forward.

The political and military apparatus in the south is an extension of the apparatus of the workers state in the north. And the evidence available indicates that the social revolution is being carried out on the economic level through the overturn of capitalism in the south.

The Antiwar Movement

An additional topic taken up in the resolution is the international antiwar movement. The resolution manages to do this without mentioning the turn at the Ninth World Congress (Third Since Reunification) or the debates over strategy in the antiwar struggle that took place in our movement following the congress. (Before the congress, there was broad agreement on the appropriate strategy, tactics, and slogans for building the antiwar movement.)

Nonetheless, the resolution provides an implicit evaluation of these differences in its estimate of the antiwar movement in the United States as supposedly contrasted with that in the rest of the world. Through this estimation the resolution reaffirms the turn made by the majority leadership at the Ninth World Congress toward "initiatives in action" geared to the concerns of the "new mass vanguard," a turn away from the method of the Transitional Program.

The resolution states: "As a whole, the antiwar movement in the United States never attained the level of political consciousness of the international solidarity movement, which ranged itself *on the side* of the Indochinese fighters and consciously acted for their victory." [p. 9. Emphasis in original.]

Thus we are presented with a dramatic contrast: On the one hand, a low-level but massive movement in the United

States; and on the other hand, a smaller but much higher-level movement elsewhere.

The resolution's estimate is completely inaccurate. The majority of the organized antiwar movement in the United States—which was larger than any other—was consciously on the side of the Vietnamese people and consciously defeatist. They wanted the Vietnamese people to win. The supporters of the Vietnamese revolution in the United States were by no means limited, as some supporters of the resolution may suspect, to the ultraleft contingents that chanted the name of Ho Chi Minh while charging the speakers' platforms at antiwar demonstrations.

Those ranged on the side of the Vietnamese in the United States included the SWP and YSA, the overwhelming majority of the activists in the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and tens of thousands of others (especially youth) who saw the link between their opposition to the U.S. war and the Vietnamese people's struggle for liberation.

The U.S. antiwar movement was not an outbreak of narrow nationalistic "isolationism," as the bourgeois press is wont to present it. Its actions had a profoundly anti-imperialist dynamic. It mobilized and expressed the progressive mass pacifist sentiment of tens of millions of Americans. It reflected the deepening international consciousness of the American working people and their allies.

The grossly inaccurate estimate of the American antiwar movement in the resolution screens a deep difference of opinion that emerged in the Fourth International in 1969. The question at issue was: Should those forces ranged on the side of the Vietnamese people and consciously acting for their victory adopt as their key political slogan a demand like the immediate withdrawal of troops? Or should they focus instead on some slogan like "Victory to the NLF" or "Solidarity Until Final Victory"? What approach would best accomplish the goals of those who supported the liberation fighters?

We fought for the position that withdrawal was the more politically conscious slogan for U.S. antiwar fighters, and our position carried the day in the American antiwar movement. In other countries, the demand to "End British Complicity" or "End Canadian Complicity" was an additional important slogan for politically conscious advocates of the Vietnamese cause to adopt. This was the way to build the most powerful and massive movement.

The line put forward by the IMT, and reaffirmed implicitly in the new resolution, was not the line of the international before 1969. Until then, the international was united in the belief that a mass antiwar movement should be built everywhere around slogans appropriate to that objective. This strategy was carried out with success in several countries.

For instance, the comrades of the International Marxist Group [IMG—British section of the Fourth International]—at that time having fewer than 100 members—played a decisive role in bringing together a coalition that brought out 100,000 people at the end of 1968 in a massive antiwar demonstration in London.

Although the slogan "Victory to the NLF" was included among the official slogans, in order to draw in broader forces, the main demand of the demonstration was "End British Complicity."

After the Ninth World Congress, this approach was

sharply changed. The turn was explained by Comrade Ernest Germain in his political report to the December 1969 meeting of the International Executive Committee. After hailing the policy adopted by the SWP in the antiwar movement as "absolutely correct," Comrade Germain stated:

"But in the rest of the world . . . the situation is basically different. The antiwar movement in these countries is not a product of the immediate needs and demands of the broad masses, but a result of a process of *political radicalization* of the vanguard. For French revolutionists, Italian revolutionists, German revolutionists, there does not exist any possibility of making an immediate direct contribution to the victory of the South Vietnamese revolution, except by making an immediate victorious socialist revolution in their own country. For them, the key question is therefore the one of inserting themselves into the general trend of political radicalization, and contributing to the maturing and political clarification of that vanguard.

" . . . they have to identify themselves clearly and fully with the South Vietnamese revolution; and they have to try to do this not only in words but also through certain specific forms of struggle that indicate clearly they are revolutionists and not reformists or pacifists. That is why most of the sections of the Fourth International outside of the U.S. have correctly taken the lead in using slogans like 'Victory to the NLF,' 'Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution,' and giving the antiwar movement as militant forms of action as possible."¹¹

Thus instead of seeking slogans that could mobilize the masses in defense of the Vietnamese revolution and in opposition to the imperialist war, the sections were directed to adopt slogans and tactics that would impress the "vanguard" with the fact that Trotskyists "are revolutionists and not reformists or pacifists." The building of a mass movement in defense of the Vietnamese revolution was ruled out since nothing could be done by European revolutionists to aid Vietnam short of making the socialist revolution itself.

This completely erroneous line resulted in a 180-degree turn in the work of the IMG. The IMG now opposed building demonstrations of the kind it had built in 1968, preferring smaller "initiatives in action" that could establish its revolutionary credentials in the eyes of the ultraleft "vanguard." In 1970, the IMG even ended up participating in a phony, sectarian "united front" dominated by the Healyites that built a tiny action that was openly counterposed to the earlier mass actions.

This shift took place in all the European sections for several years as our comrades turned their backs on building the antiwar movement as a mass struggle. Only in 1971 did this course begin to be partially corrected in an empirical way, although the international never again had a line of building a mass antiwar movement.

It proved difficult, let it be noted, for Comrade Mandel to maintain the contradictory position of praising the mass-action orientation of the SWP in the United States while proposing an ultraleft course everywhere else. In December 1972, implied criticisms of the SWP policy were included in one of the basic documents of the International Majority Tendency at that time, Ernest Germain's "In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International."¹² This criticism is essentially repeated in the new resolution's

implication that the organized antiwar movement in the United States was not "on the side of the Indochinese fighters."

The error in the building of the antiwar movement led the comrades who supported the turn at the Ninth World Congress into a deeper error when sections of the international supported the slogan "Sign Now" in demonstrations prior to the signing of the Paris accords. Despite their desire to unconditionally support a revolutionary struggle, these comrades, by supporting the accords, objectively gave their assent to U.S. imperialist demands for a voice in the future of Vietnam. Claiming that the vanguard had risen to a higher level than the slogan of immediate, unconditional withdrawal, these sections actually fell considerably below the level of this slogan at this critical juncture. The key cause of this grave error, touching basic principles, was the orientation toward linking up with the concerns of the "new mass vanguard" rather than the objective needs of the masses.

* * *

The line proposed by the draft resolution on Indochina should be rejected by the Fourth International and the

Socialist Workers Party. It is politically wrong in its analysis of the nature, program, and practice of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and in its failure to pose the need for the construction of revolutionary Marxist parties in Indochina. In defending the "decisive revolutionary role" played by the Vietnamese Communist Party, it rewrites the history of that party and throws into question the revolutionary Marxist position on such issues as the attitude to be taken toward calls for coalition government with the bourgeoisie.

Further, the resolution rejects without explanation the criteria used by the Fourth International in determining that workers states had been established in Yugoslavia, occupied Eastern Europe, China, and Cuba, and that a workers and farmers government existed for a period of time before the fall of Ben Bella in Algeria. In doing so, it moves toward revising the Marxist definition of social revolution as well.

Finally, the resolution affirms the vanguardist line adopted by the supporters of the International Majority Tendency toward the antiwar movement and grossly misjudges the political character of the antiwar movement in the United States.

Our opposition to this resolution is part of the effort to preserve and build a Trotskyist Fourth International.

Notes

1. This position developed in several stages.

In a January 1951 document entitled "What Should Be Modified and What Should Be Maintained in the Theses of the Second World Congress of the Fourth International on the Question of Stalinism? (Ten Theses)," Ernest Germain argued that Mao's seizure of power did not, in and of itself, represent a break with Stalinism. Germain wrote:

"In the two cases where the Communist parties have actually conquered power through the action of the masses (in Yugoslavia and China), this has not immediately culminated in a break with the political and organizational methods of Stalinism nor in a public rupture with the Soviet bureaucracy. Only subsequently, through the necessity for maintaining and extending their mass base in order to conserve and consolidate the conquests of their revolution, were these Communist parties impelled towards a policy more and more independent of the Kremlin."

(See the Education for Socialists publication *International Secretariat Documents*, Volume 1, p. 18.)

At this time Germain saw independence from the Kremlin as beginning to develop only after the overturn of Chiang Kai-shek.

The resolution of the Tenth Plenum of the International Executive Committee entitled "The Third Chinese Revolution" took a similar stance. Adopted in May 1952, it stated:

"The establishment of the People's Republic of China is only the beginning of the Third Chinese Revolution."

The resolution further held:

"The CP entered upon the Third Chinese Revolution as a Stalinist party empirically freeing itself from the direction of the Kremlin. The international and national social forces which act upon it will determine its transformation from a highly opportunist workers' party into a centrist party going forward along the road of the completion of the revolution."

(*Fourth International*, July-August 1952, pp. 113, 117.)

As late as 1952, therefore, the Chinese CP was viewed as a Stalinist party which was entering into a process of being

transformed into a centrist party. It was not yet regarded as having definitively broken with Stalinism.

After the Fourth International split into two public factions in 1953, the International Secretariat faction declared the Chinese CP to be a non-Stalinist current. "The Rise and Decline of Stalinism," a resolution adopted at the "Fourth World Congress" of the IS in June 1954, stated: "... the Yugoslav CP and the Chinese CP have been able to lead a revolution victoriously and independently of the Kremlin and have in these instances ceased to be Stalinist parties in the proper meaning of this term. . . ." (See the Education for Socialists publication *The Development and Disintegration of World Stalinism*, p. 18.)

In 1973 a document on China, entitled "The Differences in Interpretation of the 'Cultural Revolution' at the Last World Congress and Their Theoretical Implications," was submitted to the international discussion in the name of the IEC Majority Tendency. The document took a further step, dating Mao's break with Stalinism to 1946: "If the Chinese CP was therefore a petty-bourgeois workers party, and not a purely 'peasant' party, can one by the same token characterize it as a Stalinist party? Before 1945, without doubt. Certainly not in the period that opened with the rise of the Third Chinese Revolution in 1946." (See IIDB, Vol. X, No. 22, p. 32. Emphasis in original.)

2. See *Dynamics of World Revolution Today* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), pp. 28-29.

3. See "On the Nature of the Vietnamese Communist Party," by George Johnson and Fred Feldman, *International Socialist Review*, July-August 1973; and "Vietnam, Stalinism, and the Postwar Socialist Revolutions," by George Johnson and Fred Feldman, *International Socialist Review*, April 1974.

These articles include considerable information as well as references to source material on the events of 1945.

4. See "Hanoi's Statement to Vietnamese People on Signing of Cease-Fire Agreement," *Intercontinental Press*, April 16, 1973, p. 446.

5. See "Sterne-Walter resolution on Vietnam," IIDB, Vol. X, No. 6, April 1973, p. 21.

6. In an article entitled "The Paris Accords and the Class Struggle in Vietnam," in the February 16, 1973, *Militant*, Barry Sheppard said:

"The actual course of events in South Vietnam will be determined by the living class struggle in Vietnam and on a world scale. The accords must be seen in this context. And, as we shall see, the road to victory for that struggle cannot be the road outlined in the accords.

"The two administrations and two armies that face each other in South Vietnam represent irreconcilable class forces. The Saigon regime is based on the landlords and capitalists and defends their interests. The PRG and NLF are based on the peasants, workers, and other oppressed layers.

"This situation is highly explosive. After so many years of war and revolution, the South Vietnamese people face huge social problems. None of the basic questions, including land reform, national liberation, and reunification, which have been at the root of the war and which so many courageous Vietnamese died fighting for, have been resolved by the accords."

7. See Johnson and Feldman, "On the Nature of the Vietnamese

8. Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 19.

9. The positions held by the Fourth International on these regimes appear in the following resolutions and documents:

"Class Nature of Eastern Europe" and "The Yugoslav Revolution," adopted by the Third World Congress of the Fourth International (in the Education for Socialists publication *Class, Party, and State and the Eastern European Revolution*); "The Third Chinese Revolution," adopted by the May 1952 Plenum of the International Executive Committee (in the July-August 1952 issue of *Fourth International*); "Report and Discussion on the Third Chinese Revolution," at the May 1952 Plenum of the IEC (in the Education for Socialists publication *The Workers and Farmers Government*, by Joseph Hansen); "The Rise and Decline of Stalinism," resolution of the "Fourth World Congress" of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International (in the Education for Socialists publication *The Development and Disintegration of World Stalinism*); "The Third Chinese Revolution and Its Aftermath," resolution adopted by 1955 SWP convention (in the Education for Socialists publication *The*

Chinese Revolution and Its Development); "Draft Theses on the Cuban Revolution," resolution approved by December 1960 Plenum of the SWP National Committee (in the Education for Socialists publication *The Nature of the Cuban Revolution*); "Turning-Point in the Cuban Revolution," editorial in the Summer 1960 issue of *Fourth International*, and "On the Nature of the Cuban Revolution," resolution of the "Sixth World Congress" of the IS of the Fourth International (both are reprinted in IIDB, Vol. XIV, No. 5, May 1977); "On the Character of the Algerian Government," statement of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (in the February 21, 1964, issue of *World Outlook* and IIDB, Vol. XIV, No. 5); and "The Algerian Revolution from 1962 to 1969," resolution of the December 1969 Plenum of the IEC of the Fourth International (in the Education for Socialists publication *The Workers and Farmers Government*, by Joseph Hansen).

10. For this quote and other references to this period, see "New Advances in Vietnam's Course Against Capitalism," by Fred Feldman, *Intercontinental Press*, October 18, 1976, p. 1478.

11. See International Information Bulletin, Reprinted from 1968-71, Algeria, et al., p. 11.

12. See IIDB, Vol. X, No. 4, April 1973. In this document, Germain states:

"In the same sense, we wonder whether e.g. in the mass antiwar movement, which the SWP has helped to organize in such an exemplary way, it wouldn't have been necessary to combine a general united front approach toward mobilizing the maximum number of people for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam, with a more specific propaganda directed to a more limited vanguard, explaining the need to support the Vietnamese revolution till its final victory (i.e. the need to support the process of permanent revolution unfolding in Vietnam). While the largest possible mass demonstrations for the withdrawal of the US troops were undoubtedly the best contributions which American revolutionists could make to the victory of the Vietnamese revolution—and in that sense we entirely approved and approve the SWP's line in the antiwar movement—withdrawal of troops does not equal victory of the Vietnamese revolution, as subsequent events have stressed sufficiently. To continue a more limited solidarity movement with the Vietnamese revolution, once the US troops had been withdrawn, could have been prepared by a more combined approach to agitation and propaganda, which, incidentally, would have helped recruitment among vanguard elements too.

"Whatever may be the opinion one arrives at on the question, the pre-conditions of the 'single-issue-campaigns-orientation' should be correctly understood and not idealised, so as not to make a virtue out of what could be considered, in the last hypothesis a dire necessity." [p. 46.]