

TROTSKYIST BULLETIN No. 4

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Trotskyism vs. Pabloism

# Nicaragua & the Permanent Revolution

**Bolshevik Tendency**

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## INTRODUCTION

The contents of this bulletin document the recent important political struggle in the Toronto branch of Socialist Challenge [SC -- known until May 1988 as the Alliance for Socialist Action (ASA)] over the character and direction of the Nicaraguan revolution. The fight, which began over the rejection of the pro-capitalist Esquipulas II Accords (also known as the "Arias plan"), soon became a debate on the relevance of the program of Permanent Revolution to Nicaragua. As an appendix, we reprint several items relating to the Toronto Anti-Intervention Coalition (TAIC) in which the SC/ASA and Bolshevik Tendency (BT) cooperated for several months last winter.

The political developments in SC demonstrate that reformist "socialist" organizations are often not completely politically homogeneous. The subjective impulses which draw individuals to such organizations often conflict sharply with the real program of the groups they join. Even in a period when large segments of the left are drifting rightward, individuals and groupings can move in the opposite direction. This is what happened in the Toronto SC in the fall of 1987, where a real political discussion, with important implications, developed as a result of several SC/ASA members' unwillingness to swallow the Esquipulas II agreement as a "Victory for Peace."

### SC/ASA's Left Zig

The discussion over Esquipulas II within SC/ASA was initiated by a political fight in TAIC which came to a head at its November 1987 annual conference. The SC/ASA found itself pitted against its erstwhile allies in the coalition over support to the Arias plan. The reformists of the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) and the Communist Party in alliance with a TAIC co-chair (Ann Pohl) and various "solidarity" activists, demanded that TAIC publicly endorse the Arias plan. They pointed, with considerable justification, to the "Political Basis of Unity" of the coalition which called for, "Support for all peace initiatives which enjoy the support of the majority of the people struggling for self-determination within their respective nations."

Although SC/ASA had for years endorsed this wretched pacifist position, most of the members, to their credit, recoiled from embracing its concrete manifestation -- the Arias plan. They knew that the neo-colonial rulers of Central America did not have the best interests of the Nicaraguan masses at heart. Some of them also suspected that by legitimizing the contras and assuring the CIA and the Vatican access to the mass media, while at the same time guaranteeing capitalist property and cutting off aid to the Salvadoran left, the Sandinistas (FSLN) were undermining the Nicaraguan revolution.

At the TAIC conference, SC/ASA tried to bury the issue by arguing that there was no need to take a position on Esquipulas II. But the RWL was not in a mood to compromise and, after accusing SC/ASA of lacking faith in the FSLN, put forward a motion to endorse the Arias plan. When the motion was defeated, the RWL simply walked out, along with the CP, the New Jewish Agenda and miscellaneous others, leaving SC/ASA in control of a "coalition" comprised of little more than its own members and periphery.

The BT intervened at the conference in opposition to the Arias plan and in favor of reconstituting TAIC as a genuine united front on a principled basis. After losing

degrees, opposed to the Arias plan. Over the next several months it became clear that they had either to deepen and generalize their critique or abandon the position.

The final stage in the political fight occurred in May at the fusion convention between SC/ASA and the Quebec-based Gauche Socialiste (GS). By the time of the convention, Henderson was effectively a minority of one -- although a few other members remained sympathetic to aspects of his position. He was allowed to present his argument to the assembled delegates, but it was clear that one of the points of convergence between the two organizations was their uncritical, tailist attitude toward the FSLN. Livio Maitan, the USec's official representative at the convention, intervened on two occasions against positions advanced by Henderson. In the end, Henderson was the only one to vote against the political resolution.

A few weeks later, on 3 June, after concluding that there was little future for Trotskyism within SC/GS, Henderson resigned. He did so publicly at a Toronto SC forum on Nicaragua where he distributed his resignation statement, written in the form of an open letter to SC (also contained in this bulletin). In it, he broadened his criticisms of USec tailism toward the Sandinistas into a more general critique. Comrade Andrew R. of SC replied to Henderson's open letter with a piece which clearly articulates the ideological rationalization for SC/ASA's inveterate tailism. Andrew's response reveals an acute ignorance of the recent political history of the USec, which is perhaps understandable as today's opportunist infatuations usually turn out to be tomorrow's embarrassments. Henderson's rejoinder addresses many of these points and is evidence of his definitive break with USec liquidationism.

After a period of intensive political discussion and study, Henderson has aligned himself with the BT. Before doing so, he undertook a careful evaluation of the substance of the political differences between the BT and the Spartacist tendency, represented in Toronto by the Trotskyist League.

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SC advertises itself as the best builders of the various "mass movements" to which it attaches itself. In order to perform this function, without alienating its host, it must be careful not to advance anything resembling a Marxist position. In the case of TAIC, a "mass movement" initiated and sustained throughout its existence by SC/ASA, this takes the form of wholesale political capitulation to the reformist/pacifist politics of the mainstream "solidarity" milieu (see previous TAIC program in appendix). This adaptationism, so characteristic of the USec, is exactly the **opposite** of what Trotsky described as the method of revolutionists:

"But on whatever arena, and whatever the methods of functioning, they are bound to speak in the name of unqualified principles and clear revolutionary slogans. They do not play hide-and-seek with the working class; they do not conceal their aims; they do not substitute diplomacy and combinations for a principled struggle. **Marxists at all times and under all conditions openly say what is.**"  
-- "An Open Letter for the Fourth International," Spring 1935

In Nicaragua, as in every other potentially revolutionary situation, the USec leaders forswear building independent Trotskyist parties in favor of floating downstream on what they imagine to be the objectively revolutionary "dynamic" of history -- in this instance represented by the radical nationalist Sandinistas. This denial of the

importance of the conscious factor in history -- that of a Trotskyist leadership and program -- is a form of revisionism which, in the Trotskyist movement, is known as "Pabloism," after its originator, Michel Pablo.

The objectivism of the USec represents, in the last analysis, a profound pessimism about the prospects of winning the proletariat to the revolutionary program. The notion that history is animated by a "dynamic" which is inexorably and automatically unfolding in the direction of socialism, derives from the tradition of Menshevism, not Bolshevism. As Trotsky noted in 1935:

"The whole history of the struggle between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks is dotted with this little word 'process.' Lenin always formulated tasks and proposed corresponding methods. The Mensheviks agreed with the same 'aims' by and large, but left their realization to the historic process. There is nothing new under the sun."

-- "To Comrade Sneevliet on the IAG Conference"

Bolshevik Tendency  
August 1988

## THE ARIAS PEACE PLAN SIX MONTHS LATER

by Robert Adam and Neil Henderson

At the time of its signing, the Arias peace plan was hailed by many as a victory for peace in Central America. Now, almost six months later what was apparent to Marxists is clear to all: rather than providing a benefit to Nicaragua, the peace plan is an attempt to prop-up the four U.S.-backed dictatorships in the region while isolating the Nicaraguan revolution.

The motivation behind the Sandinistas signing the accord was a belief that they could outmaneuver the Reagan administration leading to an end of contra funding and an end to the war itself. This aim led many solidarity activists to support the plan under the mistaken belief that the plan could actually bring peace to the region. This balloon was punctured in late December when the contras launched a massive attack against gold production centres in northeast Nicaragua the day before the peace talks were to resume between the Sandinistas and the contras. At the same time, the U.S. Congress agreed, with bipartisan support, to authorize up to \$14.4 million in "non-military" aid to the contras. By this standard alone, the Sandinistas' attempts have failed.

More significant than the failure to bring "peace" to the region are the concessions the Sandinistas made in order to comply with the accord. Under the guise of bringing democratic reforms to Nicaragua, the Sandinistas have allowed the CIA-supported Nicaraguan bourgeoisie to operate a radio station, to organize politically, and to once again publish the political voice of counterrevolution *La Prensa*. Perhaps more dangerous is the requirement that the Sandinistas halt aid to "irregular forces or insurrectionalist movements." In essence the Sandinistas have given up their right and duty to support the FMLN of El Salvador. In short, by complying to the Arias peace plan, the Sandinistas contribute not only to the isolation of their own revolution but also the isolation of revolutionary struggles throughout Central America. If the Sandinistas were to renounce this fake peace plan, they would undoubtedly come under intense international condemnation; however, the dangers posed by continued compliance to the accord far outweigh the risk of offending world bourgeois opinion.

At the heart of the Arias peace plan rests the fear of the Central American bourgeoisie that the contras will be unable to destroy the Nicaraguan revolution. The failure of the contras may lead to direct American military involvement in the region and a destabilization throughout Central America coupled with a revolutionary upsurge by the workers and the peasants. The lessons of Southeast Asia have not been lost on the architects of the Arias plan. The Arias plan was devised to prevent socialist revolution from triumphing in Central America: the belief that the Central American bourgeoisie could design a peace plan of benefit to revolutionary Nicaragua is to accept the same illusions that led Allende to bloody defeat in Chile.

As revolutionary Marxists, we stand unconditionally on the side of the workers and peasants of Central America against imperialism and their own bourgeoisie. In Canada we need to build a mass-action oriented movement against imperialism in Central America and to construct a revolutionary workers party capable of leading a successful socialist revolution in North America. In the case of Nicaragua, it is clear that the revolution cannot stand still, it must advance or fall back. We argue, therefore, for the expropriation of the Nicaraguan capitalists, who still control 60% of the Nicaraguan economy, and for the completion of the revolution. Socialism cannot be built in a single country, thus the fate of Nicaragua lies in a perspective of spreading the revolution throughout Central America and the final victory of the workers and peasants in the region.

## A VICTORY AND A DANGER: Comment on the Central America Peace Plan

by Barry Weisleder

The defeat of President Ronald Reagan's demand for \$36.2 million in aid to the contra mercenaries by the U.S. House of Representatives on February 3 represented a temporary victory for the Nicaraguan Sandinista government and for its efforts to negotiate and implement the Central America peace accord signed in Guatemala last August 8.

Contrary to what was argued in this space in the last issue of *Socialist Challenge*, the accord, otherwise known as Esquipulas II, with neither a blunder nor a sellout by the revolutionary leadership of the Nicaraguan workers' state.

It was a risk -- but a risk that has yielded important dividends, while containing considerable ongoing dangers to Nicaragua and liberation struggles in the region. The important thing to recognize is that the risks are **inherent** in the situation of war and revolution in Central America. The question is how to respond to these risks.

Given Nicaragua's small size, population and abject poverty and underdevelopment, it has no military or economic weapons to use directly against the source of its misery, the United States. Revolutionary Nicaragua has militarily stymied the contras who, after seven years of terrorist attacks, have been unable to establish a territorial base inside the country. But the war continues to devastate the Nicaraguan economy and people, usurping over 50% of the national budget, and undermining the social gains implemented after the 1979 revolution.

To adopt the attitude that the Sandinistas must launch a 'fight to the finish' against their numerous U.S. sponsored enemies in the region, coupled with abstractly correct calls for "spreading the revolution throughout Central America" (why not the whole world, given the impossibility of building socialism on one continent, let alone one impoverished region?) is in fact to advocate doing very little indeed.

Fortunately, the revolutionary socialist Sandinista leadership took up another available weapon in the fight for peace -- diplomacy. The objective was to internationally isolate U.S. foreign policy in the region -- to make Washington pay the maximum political price possible for its aggression, and if possible, to block U.S. government backing for the war.

The signing of Esquipulas II by the presidents of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala came as a major blow to U.S. efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. It recognized the Nicaraguan government (which at one time was excluded from regional peace talks). It required an end to U.S. financing of the contras. It demands an end to contra bases in Honduras and Costa Rica. And it was a 'made in Central America peace plan,' a symbolically important political fact that helps to unite and marshal the anti-imperialist sentiment of the immense majority of Central and South Americans (not to mention world opinion) against the U.S. war makers.

These facts were not lost on Washington, which tried to sabotage Esquipulas II by issuing its own plan on the eve of the conference, including in it the demand that the Sandinistas hand over political power, that new elections be held, and that Nicaragua

give up its right to defend itself with weapons provided by the Soviet Union, that it release Somocista National Guardsmen, and negotiate with the contra leadership.

Although not required to do so by the vaguely worded Esquipulas peace accord, Nicaragua recently decided to accede to the last two demands. Why?

Firstly, the Sandinista leadership is operating from a position of relative internal political strength. As FSLN leader Bayardo Arce explained to a January 22 rally of 70,000 in Managua, concessions can be made "because the revolution is strong, because hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans support it arms in hand."

Secondly, although the contras don't **deserve** amnesty or release, although their leaders don't **deserve** recognition or direct negotiations, because of the weakness of the workers' movement in the United States, the Sandinistas were and still are compelled to take further initiatives to exploit differences within U.S. policy-making circles in order to win a breathing space for their revolutionary process.

Nicaragua's economic problems cannot be solved internally until the war is halted. The biggest problem, which contributes to the 1,400% inflation and stems from the breakdown of Nicaragua's primitive industrial capacity, is the burgeoning 'informal sector' of the economy (the black market). This problem cannot be wished away or overcome by illusions of nationalizing the street vendors, taxi drivers and petty artisans. The drought that destroyed last year's bean crop and the sabotage that wreaks havoc with roads, bridges and electricity are impervious to legislation. This is precisely where the peace accord enters onto the scene as a potential political tool.

Without any illusions in the murderous, U.S.-client regimes surrounding it in Central America, Nicaragua entered into negotiations and a peace accord with the other four states to expose U.S. blame for the war, and to expose the hypocrisy and repressive nature of the other regimes signatory to the accord. The whole world recognizes that only Nicaragua has complied with the terms of the agreement, in fact that Nicaragua has exceeded these requirements in the quest for peace. And this is precisely what has Washington so annoyed.

Without a doubt, Reagan will see to it that the contras get aid through private channels (in the wake of the Iran-contra aid scandal, direct violations of U.S. law by surreptitiously providing government funds presents a problem). A "humanitarian" aid package is being negotiated with Democratic congressional leaders. The contra leaders claim they have sufficient supplies to continue fighting into the spring -- by which time the White House will be launching renewed appeals for military aid.

But none of these factors suggest that things would be any better had the Sandinistas not entered the peace accord process. Quite the contrary; they might now be facing war with fully and continuously armed contras, but also with all of the other regimes in the region. Recent statements by Panama's leader general Noriega, who revealed that the U.S. tried to blackmail him into invading Nicaragua last year, certainly point in this direction.

With a gun to its head, Nicaragua has no intelligent choice but to negotiate the best deal it can, with any power that can influence the course of events. It cannot be criticised for negotiating with enemies on the basis that its enemies will try to extract unreasonable concessions, and fraudulently try to claim the role of

'peacemakers,' interested in promoting human rights and democratization. But working people the world over will be in a position to judge the real motivations and the real results.

But the tasks facing the opponents of the war in Central America here are not exactly the ones facing the embattled peoples of the war-torn region. Our task is to oppose all forms of U.S. intervention, and Canadian government and corporate complicity unconditionally!

Central Americans may be forced to make concessions to imperialism. We don't help them by demanding support for peace accords which incorporate or even imply concessions. That is a flagrant violation of their right to national self-determination. If one sees a neighbor being robbed at gunpoint, one doesn't endorse the thief's demand that the victim should hand over the money. But nor do we, from a safe distance, denounce the victim for failing to fight off the well-armed aggressor with his/her bare hands. All our efforts must clearly be directed at disarming the thief. Hands off the Victim!

Unfortunately, much of the Central America solidarity movement has failed to adopt this elementary democratic position, instead opting to 'promote the peace plan,' which includes promoting the concessions, not to mention the plan's equation of the contra terrorists with the popularly based liberation movements in El Salvador (FDR-FMLN) and Guatemala (URNG).

Though unfortunate, it's perhaps not surprising to see liberals, social democrats, and the Communist Party promoting the accord, seen through rose coloured glasses. It's a bit more disturbing to see groups like the Revolutionary Workers League, whose predecessors took the opposite and principled "U.S. Out Now" position in the movement against the war in Vietnam, now opt for a view that flies in the face of their own political legacy.

This concessionary approach weakens the anti-intervention movement, and thereby the struggle in Central America, in at least three ways. Firstly, it renders the movement relatively passive as many activists are wrongly led to believe that the peace process by **itself** will bring peace with social justice to Central America. Only the Central American social revolution, defended by a massive and active anti-war movement in the imperialist countries, particularly in the U.S. and Canada, can win meaningful peace.

Secondly, it needlessly introduces programmatic and analytical divisions into the anti-intervention movement, reducing its capacity to unite the broadest sectors of the population in protests against the war.

Thirdly, it opens the movement to the illusion that our imperialist government can play any kind of useful role as a mediator or provider of 'peacekeeping troops' to the region. When we place demands on our government, we should demand not that it intervene, but that it call for an end to imperialist intervention, that it cease aid and trade with repressive regimes, and that it increase no-strings-attached aid and trade where it will genuinely benefit the majority of the people -- revolutionary Nicaragua.

Those are the ideas and demands socialists and anti-intervention activists should advance in building the protests planned for April 30 and June 19 World Economic Summit in Toronto.

That's the best contribution we can make to augmenting the gains of the Central American revolution in the face of continued aggression by U.S. imperialism.

## CENTRAL AMERICA TREATY = PEACE?

by Harold Lavender

In February the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly rejected new military aid to the contras. This was a setback of U.S. President Reagan's plan to destroy the Sandinista revolution. Of course the vote was not everything it was cracked up to be: the Democrats plan to support "non-military" aid to the contras and one doesn't have to be much of a cynic to recognize the contras will get funds one way or the other. Nonetheless, the vote was a victory for opponents of U.S. intervention and the Sandinista government which has made securing peace a priority.

Of course the Sandinistas paid a certain price to influence U.S. public opinion and the outcome of the congressional vote. The Sandinistas signed the Central American plan and now they being held to the very letter of the accord while the non-compliance of the right-wing military dictatorships in Central America is conveniently ignored.

The peace plan has led to a political trade-off. The ability of the U.S. to intervene militarily against the Sandinistas has been restrained: at the same time the Sandinistas have agreed to some concessions. The FSLN has modified some of its previous positions, agreeing to lift the state of emergency imposed in 1982, expedite the application of a wide ranging amnesty for its opponents, and hold cease-fire talks with the contras.

It is possible to debate the relative merits of the agreement, two very different interpretations were presented in *Socialist Challenge* (Vol. 2, Nos. 6 and 7).

However, in engaging in such a discussion it is important not to lose sight of our fundamental objectives. Our main objective in solidarity work is surely not to debate the peace plan but to stop U.S. intervention. We unconditionally defend the Nicaraguan government to engage in whatever diplomatic maneuvers may be necessary to defend the revolution from U.S. intervention.

Socialists and anti-intervention activists are in no way obligated to cheerlead for the diplomatic maneuvers of the FSLN. Our focus should be very simple -- stop U.S. intervention period. If the enormous military-diplomatic-economic pressure of the U.S. was removed, there would be no reason, no necessity for the Sandinistas to engage in trade-offs or make concessions to the contras.

We have no reason to hail the anti-communist, anti-Sandinista President Arias of Costa Rica as a noble democratic hero, or praise the great virtues of the Contradora governments.

However, it would be a serious mistake not to recognize there is a real difference between what President Arias is proposing and what Ronald Reagan wants. And it is quite wrong to condemn the Sandinista government for seeking to make use of these divisions.

It's fair enough to say the peace accords were a response to U.S. pressure, that the terms of the agreement are not ideal and that they involve some risks for the Nicaraguan revolution.

Unfortunately, comrades Neil Henderson and Robert Adam (*Socialist Challenge*, Vol. 2, No.7) go much further than this and condemn the peace accord outright and call on the FSLN to break with the accord.

This position implies that the Sandinistas have unlimited freedom to do whatever they want. In their extreme voluntarism, Henderson and Adam miss the central point--the Sandinistas are faced with an extraordinarily difficult situation in which they have very limited options.

Henderson and Adam look at the actions of the FSLN highly suspiciously. Their suspicion is not justified by the facts.

The FSLN led the Nicaraguan revolution -- with great tactical skill one might add. For eight years, the FSLN has courageously resisted U.S.-backed aggression. While moving slowly, the FSLN has sought to enact major reforms in the interests of the workers and peasants.

Yes, the socio-economic revolution is not yet finished and yes, it ultimately needs to be extended throughout Central America and Latin America. But surely this should not blind us to the fact that the FSLN has acted as a revolutionary leadership.

If the FSLN has made some hard choices to implement the peace plan, they have done so with good reason.

The contra war is taking a crippling toll in Nicaragua of human life and has wreaked havoc on the economy. The people of Nicaragua desperately want peace. The FSLN is perfectly correct to respond to this desire and bend over backwards in an attempt to facilitate peace. It is only with peace that the economy can be truly restored. If the economic situation continues to run down, the Sandinistas risk losing popular support because they have been unable to improve the lives of their supporters.

Yes, the FSLN has opened new space for domestic opposition. But is this really such a terrible thing? If the Sandinistas act in the interests of the worker and peasant majority in Nicaragua and earn the support of these sectors, then surely they can withstand the disinformation and counterrevolutionary propaganda of *La Prensa*.

Revolutionary tactics do not consist of mouthing maximalist slogans. In unfavorable circumstances revolutionaries may well be compelled to make concessions.

For example, the Bolsheviks under Lenin signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty with German invaders in World War I. The terms of this treaty were ten times worse than the Central American peace accords, but Lenin was clear there was no other viable choice.

Political tactics need to be determined in relation to the level of mass consciousness and overall relationship of forces in the society and the world.

Henderson and Adam would not advocate boycotting all parliamentary elections in Canada--because parliament is in reality an illegitimate bourgeois institution. Nor would they call on trade unionists to tear up their contracts because agreements with the boss are unacceptable compromises with wage slavery. It is only common sense.

The FSLN has lots of revolutionary common sense -- this we should applaud, not condemn.

## THE ARIAS PEACE PLAN & THE ASA: A VICTORY (FOR BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY) AND A DANGER (TO MARXISM)

"Reactionary epochs like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard, but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through. In these conditions the task of the vanguard is above all not to let itself be carried along by the backward flow: it must swim against the current. If an unfavourable relation of forces prevents it from holding the positions that it has won, it must at least retain its ideological positions, because in them is expressed the dearly bought experience of the past. Fools will consider this policy 'sectarian.' Actually it is the only means of preparing for a new tremendous surge forward with the coming historical tide."

-- Trotsky, "Stalinism and Bolshevism," 1937 <sup>1</sup>

The publication of the April issue of *Socialist Challenge* makes crystal clear to any interested observer that within the ASA [Alliance for Socialist Action] there exists a gulf of major proportions over Nicaragua and the so-called "peace process." Not one, but two articles appear criticizing "The Arias Peace Plan: Six Months Later" by cdes. Robert and Neil. With all due respect to cdes. Harold and Barry, these replies are evidence that in our movement "the general ideological level" has been thrown "back to stages long since passed through." There is a mood within the Toronto branch today of willingness, even on the part of those comrades who did not want to endorse the Arias plan originally, to reinterpret the plan in the light of the popularity of the ceasefire accord. There is no denying that it is popular: it has a wide spectrum of support -- from contra spokesmen Obando y Bravo and Calero to Jack Barnes and even the leadership of our own organization. But a Marxist vanguard does not determine its political line on the basis of immediate popularity.

Both Barry's and Harold's articles strike at the fundamental positions upon which the Trotskyist movement was built. Although many of the points we shall raise apply to both Harold and Barry's articles, it is Barry's that most urgently requires a reply. While parts of Barry's document were already addressed in the document "Nicaragua, the Permanent Revolution and the Road to Workers' Power," we feel that the political questions in dispute are so important that it requires a full reply.

While it is rather disappointing that comrades with over a decade's experience in the movement could churn out such a low-grade critique, what is most shocking is that the critique is based on fundamentally **anti-Trotskyist** premises. For Marxists, history is the history of class struggle. Conversely class struggle is the motor force of history. It is on the working class' capacity to struggle for its class interests that we base our theory and strategy. Barry however starts from a different place. He seems to think that the paramount consideration is that of what he imagines to be practical. In an effort to be practical, he counsels that we rely "on any power that can influence the course of events."

Instead of seeing the Trotskyist movement as one which must bring the experience of the past century and a half of socialist struggles to the battles of today, this view tends to project our role as one of pressuring those groups with "any power." The only result of such a short-sighted orientation will be to guarantee that the Trotskyists never get "any power," for we can only win that on the basis of openly fighting for our distinctive ideas and building a mass base for these ideas.

The Sandinistas, who are not in any sense Trotskyists, but rather left radical petty-bourgeois nationalists, have opted for a policy of conciliation and maneuver with imperialism and its contra mercenaries in the name of "practicality." This is a mistake of major proportions. The attempt to sell the Nicaraguan workers on the idea that their interests and that of the exploiters and their hirelings can be reconciled threatens the very life of the Nicaraguan revolution. But Barry and Harold, again in the name of practicality, would have us follow along behind Ortega in this "historic compromise." To be blunt, the methodology apparent in both Barry's and Harold's articles is not Marxist. It begins from the false premise that the FSLN [Front for National Liberation] is a consistently revolutionary formation, and then reinterprets reality to fit this preconception.

The theme running through Barry's article is deeply pessimistic. He seems to think that the prospect of deepening and broadening the Central American revolution is not so much impractical as inconceivable. This appears in all three of the main arguments which he advances:

- 1) First, Barry suggests that to call for spreading the revolution, however "abstractly correct"(!), is in fact to "advocate doing very little;"
- 2) Secondly, he accepts the FSLN's stagist theory that because the contra war has devastated the economy, it is therefore necessary to end the war **before** the economic problems can be addressed;
- 3) Thirdly, Barry argues that Nicaragua has "no military or economic weapons" to use against imperialism and therefore has no option but to enter into negotiations in the "fight for peace." It is necessary to examine these individually in detail.

### **Spreading the Revolution -- "Doing very little"?**

A newcomer to our movement who read Barry's piece could be forgiven for thinking that Nicaragua was the first time a revolution had encountered any economic or military opposition from imperialism or domestic counterrevolution. There is absolutely no sense in any of his arguments that there is a communist tradition from which we should seek to draw some lessons. **The problems facing Nicaragua are not new.** They are the same problems which confronted the Russian revolution between February and October in 1917, or which the Chinese Communists had to wrestle with in the 1920's. In fact the documents that launched the Trotskyist movement sixty years ago, which advocated the program of permanent revolution, provide the key to the way forward in Nicaragua today.

In 1929 Trotsky wrote that, "The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable."<sup>2</sup> This is doubly true for Nicaragua, a small economically backward country. The option for Nicaragua to survive as an isolated workers state is completely ruled out. The fate of the revolution lies in its expanding beyond the Nicaraguan borders. Instead of working toward this end, the Sandinistas have taken to promoting Nicaraguan "patriotism." This reached the most disgusting depths with the signing of the accords with the contras when Ortega and chief contra Calero joined together to sing the national anthem. Barry and Harold apparently think that this is clever tactical maneuvering which should be applauded, while they sneer at the perspective of completing and spreading the revolution as "doing very little." This kind of attitude is appalling coming from leading comrades of an organization which claims the tradition of Trotskyism!

## Peace, then Social Justice: The Reformist Stages Theory

To claim that the problems of Nicaragua's economy cannot be solved until the war [is over] is to accept "two-stagism." It ignores the fact that the major problem with the economy exists independent of the war: the active sabotage of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. Livio Maitan, in a recent issue of *International Viewpoint*, actually points this out, but refuses to draw the necessary conclusions.

It has been argued that the contras have no popular support within Nicaragua. This is only partly true. It is an elementary observation that the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie are simply economic contras, they have never been, nor can they be, the friend of the Nicaraguan revolution. This is the nub of the permanent revolution: **the bourgeoisie has no progressive role to play anywhere.** This has been concretely demonstrated in Nicaragua. Yet in lauding the accord with the contras as some kind of "victory" -- or at the very least "a potential political tool," cde. Barry follows the FSLN down the path of promising to rebuild a capitalist economy in Nicaragua.

"Expropriate the bourgeoisie." For some comrades this is just a slogan, suitable only for May Day banquet speechifying, but of no particular relevance to the most important revolutionary process taking place in our hemisphere this decade. But these comrades are wrong: expropriating the bourgeoisie is not just a slogan, it is the key to the entire program of Trotskyism. Trotsky argued repeatedly during the disastrous course of the Spanish civil war, as the Stalinists advised reconciliation with the Spanish capitalists, that the only road to victory was through the completion of the social revolution. He denounced those who proposed to put this task off until **after** the defeat of Franco for aborting the Spanish revolution, and argued in his writings that Franco could **only** be defeated through expropriating the large capitalist holdings and destroying the bourgeoisie. What was true in Spain in the 1930's is every bit as true today in Central America: preservation of bourgeois property and the victory of the working people are mutually exclusive.

## Social Revolution: The Economic and Political Weapon of Trotskyism

When considering the question of slogans it is useful to recall which weapons the Bolsheviks used in their struggle against the imperialists. They obviously could not put the kind of economic squeeze on the imperialists that Reagan is currently putting on Panama. It should be understood though, that the act of expropriating capitalist private property in Russia, was an economic weapon used against imperialism domestically which had enormous political (and therefore potentially economic) impact internationally. This weapon remains untested by the Sandinistas.

Did the Bolsheviks mount military expeditions against the imperialist heartlands? No, they were unable to. The Bolsheviks had all they could handle militarily to organize an army of those workers and peasants who were determined to defend their revolution against the invasion of a dozen imperialist armies and the remnants of the old bourgeois army which were funded and equipped by the imperialists. The Nicaraguans have thus far been able to organize an effective military response to the imperialist-funded counterrevolution domestically, but of course they are even less able to imagine undertaking offensive military actions against the imperialists than were the Bolsheviks.

But the similarities in tactics ends there. The Bolsheviks had a limited ability to launch direct offensive military operations against imperialism but they did what they could to attack the capitalist powers with revolutionary propaganda. In the case of Britain, the most aggressive opponent of the regime, this was an effective and successful strategy as Soviet calls on British workers for class solidarity made it much more difficult for the government to attack the revolution.

The FSLN has a different program and so it has acted differently. Rather than attempting to spread their revolution, the Sandinistas have attempted to substitute diplomatic negotiations. Harold's argument that we should applaud the Sandinistas because they are revolutionaries, and if revolutionaries make concessions, well, we should not condemn them, is not worthy of a Marxist.

### **Sandinista Concessions to the Counterrevolution**

What concessions have the Sandinistas made? First, they give the contras two months to rest and recuperate while they are resupplied in Nicaraguan territory. These American mercenaries are now treated as a legitimate "opposition" instead of a gang of cutthroats. The FSLN released a hundred rightist prisoners, even though an earlier experiment in which a thousand were freed last year, resulted, according to Tomas Borge, in most of them joining the contra bands. The terms of the ceasefire require the FSLN to release the rest of the three thousand counterrevolutionaries (including ex-National Guardsmen). The CIA-funded newspaper *La Prensa* has been reopened and a reactionary radio station has also been opened. At the same time, the property of the exploiters is guaranteed while there are disturbing reports of FSLN attempts to suppress workers' strikes. All of this goes under the name of the "democratization" of the revolution. In reality this is the path to the eradication of the remaining gains of the revolution and the return to a status as an imperialist neo-colony.

Daniel Ortega has assured Reagan that democracy "is and always has been the objective of our revolution."<sup>3</sup> But democracy for whom? Democracy is not a class-neutral concept. It has a specific class content depending on which class rules the society in question, or to put it another way, which class owns the means of production. Bourgeois "democracy," and this is what is on the table for negotiation in Managua, is another term for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Lenin explained that, "the capitalists have always used the term 'freedom' to mean freedom for the rich to get richer and for the workers to starve to death."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, "the 'purer' democracy is, the more naked, acute and merciless the class struggle becomes, and the 'purer' the capitalist oppression and bourgeois dictatorship."<sup>5</sup> Having agreed to "democratize" and allow the counterrevolution a free hand, the Sandinistas have confused their supporters about the nature of the "opposition" and left themselves open to charges of "destroying the peace" in the eyes of the war-weary masses if they were to make a turn and crack down on the contras in the future.

Yet the comrades insist that the Arias peace plan (and now its product, the ceasefire) has been a "major blow to U.S. efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government." What gains are there to chalk up against the debits? Nicaragua has "gained" diplomatic recognition. The contras are supposed to be deprived of military supplies, but everyone knows that they will get supplied through "private" channels as long as their imperialist masters think they are useful. Finally, the Arias plan is supposed to have marshalled "anti-imperialist" sentiments in the region against the U.S.

Barry suggests that, "had the Sandinistas not entered the peace accord process," they "might now be facing war with fully and continuously armed contras, but also with all of the other regimes of the region." Any regime in the region which broke with imperialism and its "own" national capitalist class would undoubtedly face the hostility of the neighbouring imperialist client regimes. So what conclusion should be drawn? That revolution is "impractical"? The fact is that **all** of these regimes are extremely vulnerable to social upheaval, and the intervention of any of them against a social revolution outside their own borders, like the intervention of U.S. forces to preserve any of them against indigenous upheavals, would be deeply unpopular. Of course, there are no guarantees of success in advance, but Barry's strategy of not antagonizing the local weak client regimes is a prescription for disaster, as a workers state which remained within Nicaragua's artificial boundaries would be doomed -- particularly given the refusal of the Soviet bureaucracy to support it.

The question that Barry does not address is why did the "murderous U.S. client regimes" propose the Arias plan in the first place? It is precisely because U.S. intransigence in Central America threatens these extremely fragile and hated governments. Theirs is merely a tactical difference with the U.S. in how best to destroy the Nicaraguan revolution.

Why did the Sandinistas agree to such dangerous concessions? Not because they are operating from a "position of relative internal political strength" as Barry imagines. In fact, it is just the opposite. With the collapse of the economy and the rapid decline of living standards, popular support for the FSLN, and unfortunately for the revolution as well, is declining. What else can you expect in a situation where a construction worker "Under the new wage structure imposed in February...is to earn 26 cordobas a day" when "A worker's lunch costs 30 cordobas, a pack of filter cigarettes is 39, and an inexpensive pair of shoes sells for at least 400."<sup>6</sup>

Facts are stubborn things. Slightly over 30% of the votes cast in the 1984 election were for parties to the right of the Sandinistas. In the past two months, rallies of 10,000 against the Sandinistas have been held. While it would be an error to underestimate the Sandinistas' continuing base of support, it is far worse to ignore the fact that there exists a substantial, and growing, potential base for counterrevolution. As the economic situation worsens (due to the imperialist blockade, the contra war and the sabotage of the property owners), the Sandinistas' support ebbs.

At the founding of the Communist International in 1919, Lenin presented a set of theses on "Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat." The alternatives for social development which he outlined are as valid today as they were then: "there can be no alternative but the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the dictatorship of the proletariat. Dreams of some third way are reactionary, petty-bourgeois lamentations."<sup>7</sup>

There are really only two ways out of the present situation in Nicaragua. One is through extending and completing the revolution as we argued for in the article in the January-February *Socialist Challenge*. This means giving up on the nationalist, class-collaborationist "Third Road" that has proven to be a blind alley. It involves breaking the power of the bourgeoisie and initiating a struggle for workers revolution throughout the region, something the Sandinistas are moving further and further away from. They are trying to make a deal with imperialism, this is the meaning of signing

the Arias plan and the subsequent ceasefire with the counterrevolution and the pleas for imperialist "aid" now coming from Managua. This is the tactic of "exploiting differences within U.S. policy-making circles" over how best to strangle the Nicaraguan revolution. The latter strategy means accommodation to the Democratic Party, and if pursued to the end, ultimately the stabilization of Nicaragua as a "radical" neo-colonial state like Algeria or Zimbabwe.

### **Brest-Litovsk: The Opposite of the Arias Plan**

Comrade Harold makes a comparison between the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiated in 1918 between the Bolsheviks, under Lenin and Trotsky, and the Arias plan. He suggests that in both cases we have a situation where revolutionaries are compelled to make concessions. This comparison is ahistorical. Where Lenin referred to the treaty he was forced to agree to as an "incredibly harsh, rapacious and humiliating peace,"<sup>8</sup> the Sandinistas have applauded the Arias plan and the settlement worked out under it as a victory for peace.

More importantly, Brest-Litovsk involved conceding territory in order to **preserve** the dictatorship of the proletariat. At the same time as it was agreed to, the regime was actively suppressing the forces of internal counterrevolution. The Bolsheviks never consented to granting "rights" to the Russian contras and their press. Where the Sandinistas have allowed *La Prensa* to reopen and promise to permit full freedom of organization for reaction, Lenin's party ruthlessly crushed the Russian fifth column and rhetorically asked "whether democracy can be **preserved for the rich, for the exploiters** in the historical period of the overthrow of the exploiters."<sup>9</sup>

Working people here and in Latin America are in a position to judge the accord on its "merits" as Barry says. There is no evidence that anyone outside of Reagan's White House ever took the contra mercenaries as any kind of legitimate "opposition" to the regime. Certainly the workers of Central and Latin America did not. Even the Honduran dictatorship was getting increasingly nervous about continuing to offer their territory as a staging area for the contras. In praising the accord, and even exceeding the requirements of the Arias plan in negotiating the political future of Nicaragua with the contras, the Sandinistas have conferred legitimacy on these murderers. They have also put themselves in the position of being held to blame by the war-weary Nicaraguan masses if in the future they refuse any more of the endless concessions demanded by the imperialists and their agents.

### **Tasks of the North American Anti-Intervention Movement**

If the Sandinistas have made an error in signing the accord, what result has there been for the anti-intervention movement in which the ASA is involved? Comrade Barry argues that it is the task of revolutionaries to promote the "elementary democratic position" of "U.S. Out Now" rather than drumming up support for the Arias peace plan. This flies in the face of most of the arguments which he puts forward in his article. If the Sandinistas are a revolutionary socialist leadership, which has neither made "a blunder nor a sell-out" in signing the accord, then why should not the defenders of the Nicaraguan revolution endorse it?

The *Gauche Socialiste* headline "Victory for Peace" is perfectly consistent. To argue that the peace plan was a wise move, while refusing to promote it, is indeed confusing. As Barry notes, much of the solidarity movement has opted to promote the peace plan.

Unfortunately the "rose coloured glasses" they wear are also worn by the GS and the comrades of the ASA who have claimed that the peace plan is a "victory."

The substitution of a call for the "U.S. Out Now" does not address this problem. By itself this slogan, taken directly from the SWP's work in the [anti-] Vietnam war movement, fails to make clear our side in the conflict. A united front on the basis of "Out Now" would have been one thing, but the job of the Trotskyists within it would be to put forward a clear position of revolutionary defeatism and politically struggle against liberal illusions about imperialism. In the past, the Toronto ASA has made the same mistake in our work in the TAIC when we tended to keep our propaganda within the limits acceptable to the NDP [New Democratic Party], Ann Pohl, etc. This led us to agree in advance to promise "Support for all peace initiatives which enjoy the support of the majority of the people struggling for self-determination within their respective nations." By that logic, which we fortunately overturned by scrapping the old basis of unity at the November [1987] conference, we would be bound to support the Arias plan and the current ceasefire. The TAIC issued some pretty embarrassing propaganda. For example, one leaflet had a headline that said "Social Justice, Not Communism, is the Issue." This is completely wrong. The whole point of the permanent revolution, to which we should be trying to win anti-intervention activists, is that **without communism there will be no social justice in Central America.**

The conclusion of Barry's article attempts to cover for the earlier comments contained in it, with the argument that "the peace process **by itself**" cannot bring peace with social justice. This, Barry says, can only occur on the basis of social revolution. But the central point is that the "peace process" is **opposed** to the social revolution. The Arias peace plan and the current ceasefire accord and negotiations with the contras are deliberately intended to stop the spread of the Central American revolution. The current talk of Canadian imperialist peacekeeping troops to oversee the honouring of the treaty ought to be proof enough of that. And it is not just the liberal solidarity milieu which has called for imperialist troops though, it is the Sandinistas themselves!

### **The Tasks of Trotskyists in the Present Stage of the Nicaraguan Revolution**

In this country our task is to cut hard against these illusions. At the same time, we must not resign ourselves to merely building solidarity demonstrations, although that obviously remains an important task. We must remember Trotsky's remark that, "Only a reformist can picture the pressure of the proletariat upon the bourgeois state as a permanently increasing factor and as a guarantee against intervention."<sup>10</sup> Our job is to build an organization politically capable of leading a revolution, and one of the keys to this job in the present situation is to win the best of the solidarity activists to understand that the only guarantee against intervention and counterrevolution is a policy of consistent class struggle against the capitalists, both here and in Nicaragua, not an accord with them.

Unfortunately the lead article in the current *Socialist Challenge* [April 1988] points in exactly the opposite direction with its "demand" that "The [Canadian] Federal government must be forced, through protest actions like that of March 19th, to openly denounce U.S. intervention, to cut off Canadian aid to and corporate activity in the repressive U.S. client states, and qualitatively increase aid and trade with embattled, democratic Nicaragua." This tells militants who look to our newspaper for a socialist analysis that with enough pressure the Canadian imperialists can be pushed into pursuing a **non-imperialist** foreign policy. This is simply reformism. It is the same

policy advocated by Kautsky and attacked by Lenin in his important work *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Section VII):

"The essence of the matter is that Kautsky detaches the politics of imperialism from its economics, speaks of annexations [here we might substitute 'complicity'] as being a policy 'preferred' by finance capital, and opposes to it another bourgeois policy which, he alleges, is possible on this very same basis of finance capital....The result is a slurring-over and a blunting of the most profound contradictions of the latest stage of capitalism, instead of an exposure of their depth; the result is bourgeois reformism instead of Marxism."<sup>1f</sup>

One last point which can only be touched on, but is posed pretty clearly in this dispute, is the question of the role of Trotskyists within Nicaragua and internationally. Is a Trotskyist party necessary in Nicaragua? Comrade Barry and Harold and others with limitless faith in the Sandinistas would apparently answer no. We say yes it is, that without a party which takes correct positions on the lessons of the communist movement this century, the chances of victory are negligible. The mistakes of the Sandinistas to date are not original, they represent an unconscious rejection of Leninism, i.e., Trotskyism. We therefore reiterate our previous statement that the task of Nicaraguan revolutionaries is to **split** the Sandinistas through a struggle for the program of Permanent Revolution. The best elements in their party, together with the union militants facing such a desperate economic situation today, must be broken from the class-collaborationist "Third Road" and won to the program of revolutionary Marxism. This requires the construction of a Trotskyist party in Nicaragua willing to carry out an unflinching fight against the utopian defeatism of "peaceful coexistence" with the capitalists.

What is most disturbing is that it is necessary to fight for this perspective **within** the Fourth International itself, against the complacent and even willfully blind position of the leadership of the ASA (and apparently of most of the other sections as well) that all is well in Nicaragua and the FSLN is headed toward the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat when it is at this point so obviously headed in exactly the opposite direction.

"The duty of a proletarian revolutionist is not to persist in mistakes, not to place ambition above the interests of the cause but to call a halt in time. It is time...to call a halt! Otherwise the scratch which has already developed into an ulcer can lead to gangrene."

-- Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*

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1. L.D. Trotsky, *Basic Writings of Trotsky*, Irving Howe ed., Random House, 1976, p. 356
  2. L.D. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, 1978, p. 279
  3. Daniel Ortega, quoted in *New York Times*, January 25, 1988, p.8
  4. V.I. Lenin, *Founding the Communist International*, Pathfinder Press, 1987, p. 153
  5. *ibid*
  6. *New York Times*, April 14, 1988, p.8
  7. V.I. Lenin, *op cit*, p. 155
  8. *ibid*, p. 331
  9. *ibid*, p. 330
  10. L.D. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution*, p. 267-268
  11. V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, International, 1980, p. 235-236

## NICARAGUA, THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION AND THE ROAD TO WORKERS' POWER

Excerpts

...

...The theory of permanent revolution holds that there is no independent road of capitalist development available in the age of imperialism. In rejecting the theory of permanent revolution, Barnes rejects this and backtracks to a Menshevik two-stage theory of a progressive capitalist first stage. With regard to Nicaragua we have a clear choice: Jack Barnes or Leon Trotsky. If the program of permanent revolution is not relevant or is impractical for Nicaragua, as Barnes contends, then the struggle Trotsky waged in the 1920's and beyond was a sectarian error. Needless to say, Trotsky's theory retains its full validity, not just in China in 1927 or Spain in 1936 but in Nicaragua where the capitalist property owners have demonstrated beyond dispute that they cannot be won to an alliance with the poor peasants and workers. Rather, they identify their interests as the allies and partners of imperialism.

...

Of course it would be a pure utopian fantasy to believe that tiny Nicaragua could build socialism or long survive as an isolated workers state on its own. Thus the fate of Nicaragua lies in successfully spreading the revolution throughout Central America and beyond. Comrade Barry's assertion that while this perspective is "abstractly correct," it is "to advocate doing very little indeed"<sup>1</sup> reveals a certain "pragmatic" lack of faith in the Trotskyist program. It should be realized that the U.S. bourgeoisie and its regional clients are terrified of a renewed outbreak of revolutionary upheavals in Central America. Mexico is, by all objective standards, on the brink of a potential social explosion. Moreover, Mexico is a country with a multi-millioned proletariat and a significant national extension into the southern U.S. Completing the Nicaraguan revolution by expropriating the capitalists and repudiating the bloodsucking I.M.F. would create an entirely new political configuration in Latin America. To refer to such a perspective as "doing very little" is shocking, especially from a Trotskyist!

The July 1979 insurrection which placed the Sandinistas in power was not simply a popular revolt. What made this different was that the old Somoza state machine was smashed and the question of workers power was potentially posed....

...

Almost nine years into the Sandinista revolution, over 60% of the economy remains in private hands. In 1987, 73.6% of export products and 86.4% of internal products are produced by the private sector.<sup>2</sup> The bourgeoisie, no friends of the Nicaraguan revolution, control "the major lines of agricultural production (which are) decisive for the export trade."<sup>3</sup> While it is an idealist error to expect the complete nationalization of bourgeois property the day after the revolution, it is simply a truism that a workers state can only be established on the basis of expropriated capitalist property. For comrade Raghu who has expressed the opinion that this is not necessary,<sup>4</sup> Lenin is explicit: Russia was a workers state because "proletarian state power is organizing large-scale production on state-owned land and in state-owned enterprises on a national scale."<sup>5</sup> It is, after all, only with the advent of massive nationalizations that

the Fourth International declared Cuba to have become a workers state<sup>6</sup> (i.e., an armed body of men who defend a particular set of nationalized property relations).

From the Sandinistas we see little of this. If anything, the trend has been away. After the 1984 elections, the right to private property in the means of production became enshrined in the constitution. The ABC of Marxism is that the working class and the bourgeoisie have absolutely antithetical interests. Yet Jamie Wheelock, when asked if he thought the bourgeoisie could limit themselves to "exploiting their means of imposition and use the means of production to live, not as instruments of power,"<sup>7</sup> he repeated he thought they could! Today Nicaragua is very much in the same position as Cuba in 1959: an insurrectionary party faced with a choice of defending the interests of the working class or those of the bourgeoisie. In this sense, the Sandinistas are classically bonapartists and without the existence of soviet-type formations and workers democracy, the working class is incapable of ruling directly.

The Sandinistas however have indicated directions they may head in. As Trotsky remarked, "In Civil War, incomparably more than in ordinary war, **politics dominates strategy**."<sup>8</sup> Support for the Arias peace plan which is an "attempt by the bourgeois regimes of Central America to contain and isolate the Nicaraguan revolution"<sup>9</sup> is ultimately based on the reformist belief of the Sandinistas that it is possible for there to be peace in Central America short of victorious socialist revolution. Within the ASA, comrades who have made this point, have been labelled as "sectarians" who are isolated within the Fourth International. Beside the fact [that] this is unprovable, it appears unlikely that out of an organization of thousands of [militants], only three think it was an error to release a thousand contras, or to appoint the head contra as negotiator, etc., etc. Such a position may of course "isolate" the ASA from reformist solidarity activists who want to maintain illusions in the peace plan, but only by arguing for revolutionary Marxism in the crucial issues which are taking place today, can the best of these militants be won away from a limited solidarity perspective. In any case, as revolutionaries our first duty is always to tell the truth to the masses.

[The] position of not criticizing the Sandinistas for the Arias plan makes less and less sense as they increasingly display their illusions in liberal imperialists. At the same time as he was referring to imperialism's attempts to crush the revolution as an "unfortunate policy of pressure," Daniel Ortega was calling on other imperialist powers, including Canada, to monitor the plan.<sup>10</sup> To regard the Sandinistas' illusions as evidence of its revolutionary leadership is to depart from the method of Marxism...

...

What then are our demands? Given that the working class and the bourgeoisie have absolutely opposite interests, in Nicaragua it is necessary to raise the call for expropriation of the factories and large capitalist farms, thereby completing the revolution. To argue that social revolution must first wait until the war is ended is to retreat from Bolshevism to the Menshevik theory of stages. Stalin, it should not be forgotten, never said he was opposed to world revolution, he merely argued 'now was not the time.' Instead, as Trotsky said of the Spanish civil war, the road to the victory for the workers and peasants lies through accelerating the tempo of the social revolution. Attempts to hold the revolution within the boundaries of respect for bourgeois property are the biggest danger. The results of a "stagist" policy [have been] bloody disasters for the working class in China and Chile to name a couple. While it is impossible to guarantee that the Nicaraguan revolution will definitely

succeed by taking up Lenin's program, the program of permanent revolution, we can say that without it, it will not succeed.

Can the Sandinista leadership adopt such a program? In light of the FSLN's appraisal of imperialism, its relationship to the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and its strategy for the revolution, it cannot in any way be considered a revolutionary Marxist organization. Undoubtedly, large sections of the FSLN are subjectively revolutionary, but these elements must be broken from the Sandinistas' class-collaborationist program. This task can only be achieved by the formation of an independent Trotskyist party in Nicaragua standing as a revolutionary pole of attraction and winning the best elements of the FSLN and union militants to the revolutionary program of permanent revolution.

Neil Henderson

March 13, 1988

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1. Barry W., *Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. v #1, p. 8
  2. Livio Maitan, *International Viewpoint*, 22/5/88, p. 5
  3. ibid
  4. Raghu K., "The 'Principled' Coalition Bogey"
  5. V.I. Lenin, "Economics and Politics in th Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", *Marx, Engels, Marxism*, Progress, Moscow, 1968, p. 427
  6. F.I. document, reprinted in *Intercontinental Press*, 19/10/81
  7. Jamie Wheelock, "The Great Challenge", *Nicaragua: The Sandinista Peoples Revolution*, Pathfinder, New York, 1985, p. 135
  8. Leon Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, Pathfinder, New York, 1986, p. 243
  9. ASA, Toronto motion, adopted 31/1/88, 7 - 0 - 1
  10. *New York Times*, 25/1/88

## NATIONAL RECONCILIATION OR CLASS WAR? THE CHOICE FOR NICARAGUA

"The Marxists are the class enemies of the bourgeoisie and of imperialist wars but they are the supporters of national liberationist and revolutionary wars, both offensive and defensive."

-- Trotsky, *Writings, 1934-36*, p. 266

The events in Central America over the past two weeks have demonstrated the aptness of Trotsky's words, written against centrists in the 1930's, for the present period. As Marxists, we unconditionally defend the actions of the Nicaraguan army in their efforts to mop up the U.S.-backed contra mercenaries. The peace agreement, signed March 23, however, points in rather a different direction. Instead of any kind of "Victory for Peace," itself an abstract and class-neutral term, the agreement was a sell-out and a betrayal of the Nicaraguan revolution. While it would be premature to pronounce the Sandinistas as having definitely crossed the rubicon, the path they are now following leads to the consolidation of a bourgeois state.

In reaching an accommodation with the contras, the Sandinistas have gone beyond the designs of the pro-imperialist Esquipulus II accord. Although the ostensible result has been the end of the war, conditional that bourgeois property rights are respected, the real issue has been the reintegration of the contras into Nicaraguan society. Put another way, national reconciliation. It is no coincidence that at the conclusion of the talks, both sides joined in singing the Nicaraguan national anthem! Such practices spit on those who have died fighting the contras. The concessions made by the Sandinistas, rather than taking the revolution forward, act to block it. The release of a further 3,000 contra prisoners and a guarantee of a full democratic rights, access to the media and "non-CIA"(!) humanitarian aid from the U.S., together with the bourgeoisie's control of the economy are the noose around the neck of the revolution. Even the *New York Times*, the respectable voice of the American bourgeoisie, has argued that now the U.S. must apply diplomatic pressure not military.

It is not too late to reverse this trend, but time grows short. The way forward is to break with the bourgeoisie and repudiate this peace treaty. No propaganda victory will save the revolution, only the spreading of the revolution and the disarming of the imperialists by the working class.

Neil H.

March 27, 1988

## OPEN LETTER TO SOCIALIST CHALLENGE/GAUCHE SOCIALISTE

I hereby resign my membership in Socialist Challenge/Gauche Socialiste [SC/GS]. My decision to leave the organization was not taken lightly but on consideration of the political program of SC.

I have been a member of SC, previously known as the Alliance for Socialist Action [ASA], for over fifteen months, serving as an executive member of the Toronto branch for over half of that period. Prior to my membership in SC, I was a founding member of the first Canadian branch of Ted Grant's British-based Militant tendency. I joined the socialist movement as part of Canada's social democracy, the NDP [New Democratic Party], in 1983. The basis of my resignation is not simply a clash of personalities or organizational differences, but rather the logical result of an unsuccessful six month struggle for Trotskyism in SC.

I am issuing this open letter in order to explain the dispute within SC. Rather than allowing this semi-public debate to be consigned to 'historical differences,' I find it necessary to make a formal clarification.

The unraveling of SC's pretensions to Trotskyism began for me over the question of the Nicaraguan revolution and in particular the so-called Arias 'peace' plan. SC's error in Nicaragua began in July 1979. The bourgeois state machine was smashed; the question was posed -- what class relations existed in Nicaragua? By rigidly relying on past theory of the Cuban revolution that a smashed bourgeois state equals a workers state, the radical petty-bourgeois nationalists of the FSLN were transformed into unconscious Marxists or practical revolutionaries. The very notion of unconscious Marxists makes a mockery of Lenin's theory of a vanguard party bringing socialist ideas to the working class. The idea that a healthy workers state could arise by 'accident' is alien to the tradition of Trotskyism. More importantly, it revises the Marxist theory of the state. The state, for Marxists, is simply armed bodies of men committed to the defense of particular property relations. The Sandinistas have played a bonapartist role; that is balancing between classes. A party which subsidizes the bourgeoisie, while claiming to represent the interests of the workers, cannot be considered Marxist.

The signing of the Esquipulas II Accords last summer presented a problem which after some months of discussion, the Toronto SC [ASA], on January 31, agreed was a plan to "contain and isolate the Nicaraguan Revolution and to prop up U.S. supported dictatorships in the region." At the [ASA] February 28 meeting, after it became apparent that this position implied criticism of the Sandinistas, the position was reversed and the peace plan was regarded as a victory **and** a danger! The recent ceasefire has further hardened this view. To view the reintegration of the contras into Nicaraguan society as some kind of victory and as proof of the Sandinistas' revolutionary credentials is almost beyond belief. It is an abandonment of the methods of Marxism in favor of uncritical enthusiasm over the early achievements of the FSLN.

Programmatic liquidationism cannot but help having organizational consequences. It is no coincidence that during its four year tradition, the Toronto Anti-Intervention Coalition (TAIC) which Socialist Challenge helped found, and has more or less run ever since, has on only one occasion seen Marxists speak from the platform in their own name. At other times it has been as a representative of this or that social movement,

thus ensuring the commentary remains acceptable to the Dan Heaps, etc. It is also significant that during the February 2 TAIC demonstration when Robert, an SC member, spoke from the platform presenting some elements of Marxist criticism, Barry, a leading member of Socialist Challenge found it necessary to coax a reformist from the solidarity milieu to publicly rebut him. SC has in TAIC, and in its other work areas, built platforms for liberals (or worse) -- the most charitable description of which would be propaganda blocs. By counterposing the building of a 'mass movement' on the lowest common denominator to fighting for correct ideas and winning the movement to them, Socialist Challenge does a disservice to the tradition it claims to represent. Lest it be forgotten, the Bolsheviks built a mass movement, but one that was committed to disarming and expropriating the Russian bourgeoisie.

The importance of building the mass movement to SC is a reflection of a conception of program. For SC, Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution is not a revolutionary program used by the revolutionary party, rather it is a supra-historical process. Ultimately this is part of the conception of the party. SC is not a Bolshevik organization, at the very best it is a Menshevik formation. Rather than a democratic-centralist organization which strives to be, in Lenin's words, a tribune of the people, SC is a rotten federalist bloc which has capitulated to every conceivable sector. The recent fusion with the Quebec-based Gauche Socialiste, on the basis that the GS National Conference cannot be overruled on Quebec issues, flies in the face of Leninism. Moreover, SC supports an independent women's movement, an independent black movement, etc., etc...To Leninists these should be familiar arguments. It is simply the separatist arguments of the Jewish Bund from 1903 given new clothes (see Lenin's *What Is To Be Done*). It is worth recalling Lenin's comment that communists aim to split mass movements into their ideological components and build mass communist movements.

Were the problems I have outlined merely a national deviation effecting only this organization, the problem might not be so serious. Unfortunately, they originated in the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) to which the SC/GS is affiliated. The USFI may be the largest of all the 'Internationals' which claim to uphold the political legacy of Leon Trotsky and the revolutionary Fourth International he founded in 1938, but it is in no way qualitatively superior. The USFI has repeatedly demonstrated its tendency to come down on the wrong side in the international class struggle.

In Iran, the USFI criminally tailed Khomeini, dubbing him an 'anti-imperialist.' The U.S. SWP's [Socialist Workers Party] headline the week after the fall of the Shah read "Victory in Iran." Victory for whom? USFI leader Ernest Mandel was later to insist it was correct to support "the uprising against the Shah even though it was led by the clergy" (*Revolutionary Marxism Today*). It was a mistake that was to prove fatal for the HKS, the USFI section. It is the ABC of Trotskyism, which the USFI proved unable or unwilling to grasp, that the bourgeoisie, much less feudal reactionaries, have no progressive role to play. It is clear that revolutionaries must defend Iran against imperialist attacks; however, we extend no political confidence in the Islamic republic and call for its overthrow and the establishment of a workers republic.

When the Soviet Army intervened in Afghanistan to defend an Afghani Stalinist regime that was trying to implement some progressive reforms against reactionaries of the same kind that had triumphed in Iran, the USFI opposed it but did not call for Soviet withdrawal. That subsequently changed. Now, on the verge of a Soviet withdrawal,

the USFI has become aware of the imminent bloodbath and has belatedly started to insist that there be a defense of the women and leftists who will be slaughtered in Afghanistan. While extending no confidence in the Soviet bureaucracy, we ought to have called for military victory to the Soviet Army.

Finally in Poland, the USFI hailed the clerical-nationalists of Solidarnosc as leading the political revolution. The USFI has been strangely silent on Solidarnosc's identification with reactionary Polish nationalist Pilsudski rather than Rosa Luxemburg. Never mind the growing strength of the sinister anti-Semitic KPN [Committee for an Independent Poland] or the plan to dismantle the planned economy in favor of 'market socialism.' Under such circumstances Trotskyists would call for a military bloc with the Stalinists to stop Solidarnosc and to defend working-class property forms.

In each of these cases we [see] an abandonment of Trotskyism. While this charge might seem incredible, it is worth recalling that sections have abandoned Trotskyism in name as well as in practice. The American SWP has openly declared Trotskyism to be a sectarian doctrine, likewise its followers in Canada in the Revolutionary Workers League. The Australian SWP took Barnes' theories to their logical conclusion and split in favor of an eclectic third-world Stalinism.

Other sections have been more sophisticated. The French LCR [Revolutionary Communist League] reportedly has a sizeable state-capitalist minority and has expressed a desire to liquidate into the 'Renovateur' milieu led by the ex-Stalinist, now populist, Juquin who led a right-split from the CP. A taste of what is waiting for the LCR is the German United Socialist Party (VSP). The GIM [International Marxist Group] (the German USFI affiliate) merged with the ex/semi-Maoist KPD [Communist Party of Germany] to form a hodgepodge organization with no position on the Russian question and is in a state of organizational paralysis. The American corollary of the VSP is the Solidarity group. Formed by expellees from the SWP and Shachtmanite remnants, Solidarity was formed 'in opposition to the Democratic Party,' but their work exhibits a gravitational attraction to Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition.

Even the supposedly orthodox wing of the USFI, led by Mandel is little better. Rather than the program of Marxism, the appetite is for an objective dynamic. This revisionist current reflects at base a deep pessimism about the prospect of world revolution and is based on a rejection of the necessity of building Marxist-Leninist (i.e., Trotskyist) parties throughout the world in favor of settling for the next best thing -- be it Sandinista guerrillas or Vietnamese Stalinists. While it is possible, and even likely, that the building of a truly democratic-centralist revolutionary International will involve large numbers of USFI cadre, it is clear that as it presently stands, the USFI is a major obstacle to such a development.

In leaving SC I do not leave the Trotskyist movement. I remain convinced that a revolution in this country can only be led by a revolutionary party of the working class of English Canada and Quebec. It must be a multi-racial party built on the traditions of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. It must also be an internationalist party, for unless that revolution is transformed into the North American socialist revolution, it will be doomed to failure. In its desire to simultaneously capitulate to the English-chauvinist NDP and to Quebecois nationalism, to reform Canadian imperialism and many other examples of the abandonment of Marxism, it is clear that SC/GS cannot be that party. Comrades, study the history of the Trotskyist movement. Learn the lessons.

"The basic ideas of Marxism, upon which alone a revolutionary party can be constructed, are continuous in their application and have been for [over] a hundred years. The ideas of Marxism, which create revolutionary parties are stronger than the parties they create, and never fail to survive their downfall. They never fail to find representatives in the old organizations to lead the work of reconstruction."

-- James P Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

For Trotskyism!

Neil Henderson  
June 3 1988

## Addendum

In the course of subsequent discussions with the comrades of the Bolshevik Tendency (BT), as well as a careful study of the documents of both the International Secretarial [IS; predecessor of the United Secretariat (USec)] and the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the first period of the Cuban revolution, it became clear that my previous formulations were at best ambiguous on this question. The sentence in question reads, "By rigidly relying on past theory of the Cuban revolution that a smashed bourgeois state equals a workers state, the radical petty-bourgeois nationalists of the FSLN were transformed into unconscious Marxists or practical revolutionaries."

In fact the overthrow of Batista and the smashing of the Cuban state apparatus did not lead the SWP leadership to immediately conclude that Cuba was a workers state. Initially both the IS and the SWP viewed the Castroite leadership as petty-bourgeois with an ideology that was more bourgeois than socialist. Yet during the summer and fall of 1960, as Castro expropriated the Cuban bourgeoisie, the IS proclaimed: "In Cuba, consequently, a workers' state of a peculiar origin and of a new type has been created."<sup>1</sup> The SWP also hailed the new state. In the "Draft Theses on the Cuban Revolution" the SWP leadership proclaimed that Cuba was "a workers state although one lacking as yet the forms of democratic proletarian rule."<sup>2</sup> Almost thirty years later Cuba is still lacking "as yet" any sign of workers democracy (i.e., soviets). There is very little democracy even for the bureaucracy itself -- the Castroite CP waited almost 15 years to hold its first party congress! In dropping the distinction between a healthy workers state and a deformed one, the IS/SWP (now USec), blurred the bloodline drawn between Trotskyism and Stalinism. At the time, it was only the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP (later to become the Spartacist League) that correctly grasped the nature of the social transformation in Cuba -- that with the massive expropriation of the bourgeoisie in the summer/fall of 1960, Cuba became a deformed workers state.

There is a certain similarity between the USec's initial attitude toward the Cuban revolution and the Nicaraguan. Despite today's proclamation of the revolutionary credentials of the Sandinistas, for the first year the FSLN held power, the USec was "characterising the state as capitalist after July 1979, with a situation of *sui-generis* dual power."<sup>3</sup> But this was subsequently reappraised at the USec's Twelfth World Congress in January 1985 which declared that Nicaragua had been a workers state (although an as yet unconsolidated one) since January 1979. Reportedly a similar process has taken place regarding Cuba, i.e., a back-dating of the establishment of a worker state to the moment the radical petty-bourgeois guerrillas take power.

Obviously this presumes the inevitability of the outcome of the critical juncture of the Cuban revolution -- the expropriation of the capitalists. The fact that the FSLN has for nine years preserved private ownership of the bulk of the economy is so far the key distinction between the two revolutions. What is common to both the USec's Cuban and Nicaraguan positions, is the willingness to liquidate not only programmatically, but also organizationally in favor of the "practical revolutionaries" who hold power. Rather than counterposing a Marxist program to either the Castroites or the Sandinistas, the USec prostrates itself before them. This appetite reflects the profound gulf which separates Pabloism from Marxism.

Neil Henderson  
July 1988

1. "On the Nature of the Cuban Revolution," *Fourth International*, Number 12, Winter 1960-61; reprinted in *International Internal Bulletin*, Volume xiv, Number 5, May 1977, p. 21
2. Joseph Hansen, *Dynamics of the Cuban Revolution*, New York, 1976, p. 75
3. "The Central American Revolution," *International Viewpoint*, Special Issue, "Resolutions of the Twelfth World Congress of the Fourth International," p. 110

## A REPLY TO NEIL H.

by Andrew R.

The recent public defection of Neil H. from our organization must be considered with regret, the loss of even a single comrade, whatever the reason, leaves us weaker in the face of the tasks we have set for ourselves.

On his resignation Neil distributed copies of an Open Letter stating his differences with Socialist Challenge/Gauche Socialiste [SC/GS]. Since the substance of these differences is not superficial, but represents a serious case of disorientation which Neil is suffering with regard to the theory and practice of revolutionary Marxism, it is our immediate responsibility to make clear to him the real significance of his words in concrete political terms.

### What Are the Implications of the Open Letter?

Neil begins with a restatement of his rejection of the revolutionary workers state in Nicaragua. According to Neil's analysis, the FSLN are "radical petty-bourgeois nationalists" whom SC/GS has misrepresented as "unconscious Marxists, or practical revolutionaries."

It is tempting to answer these charges with ridicule, and perhaps to do otherwise would be to undeservedly dignify Neil's argument...A fully "conscious" Marxism has been at the center of the Sandinistas' revolutionary project since the movement's inception in 1967. To view either the victory over Somoza, or the emergence of the Nicaraguan workers state as an "accident" on the basis of the fact that it was not led by Trotskyists, demonstrates an unenviable mastery of sectarian dogmatism, but no basis for serious discussion. If anything is, in Neil's words, "alien to the tradition of Trotskyism," it is the sterile reasoning which Neil employs in statements like this. It is worth noting here, that in the past many of the splinters which have dropped away from the International [United Secretariat] on the way to political oblivion have done so out of exactly this kind of failure; i.e., the failure to recognize the actuality of a proletarian revolution as it is occurring. In the past, such splinters have flown off, in various political directions over the revolutions in Yugoslavia, Korea, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and other struggles. It should not be surprising that the Central American revolution should provide another such test.

In orienting ourselves to the issues of the day, it is often valid to look to the past experiences and leadership of the revolutionary workers movement to the degree that these are applicable to the present. This in no way relieves us of the responsibility of learning to think for ourselves (in spite of the fact that quotations are often used in this way). On the issue of the Esquipulas II peace accords, and the efforts of the Sandinista leadership to negotiate agreements with class opponents both within and outside Nicaragua, Neil should consider Lenin's arguments against the German "Left" communists in 1920:

"It is surprising that, with such views, these Lefts do not emphatically condemn Bolshevism! After all...the entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is **full** of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties!

"To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted and complex than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to renounce in advance any change of tack, or any utilisation of conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one's enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies) -- is that not ridiculous in the extreme?"

"...The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and by the most thorough, [careful] attentive, skillful and **obligatory** use of any, even the smallest rift, between the enemies, any conflict of interest[s] [among] the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries.[..]"

-- V.I. Lenin, *'Left Wing' Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, pp. 29-30  
(emphasis in original)

On the Esquipulas II peace accords, I believe it is possible for real differences to arise among serious activists; as revolutionaries we have an obligation to raise our differences in an appropriate manner, where these arise. Nonetheless, the spurious arguments which Neil raises to prove that the Sandinista government is playing a "bonapartist" role in Nicaragua fall down precisely within the terms of Leninism which Neil claims to be applying. Among Neil's simplistic formulae for denouncing the Nicaraguan revolution not a single one withstands the test of applying Lenin's criteria for making such judgements.

But there are other important reasons for dismissing this allegation. (1) The FSLN has never stood above or outside the internal class struggle in Nicaragua, but have a mobilized, conscious, and **politically experienced** popular base among landless peasants, the urban poor, the workers, and women's organizations. (2) FSLN actions have consistently fostered greater self-activity and self-organization of the Nicaraguan masses in their own interests. (3) The self-activity of the masses of workers is facilitated by genuine political pluralism and wide democratic rights, reinforced by the fact that the broad masses are armed to defend the revolution. The term "bonapartists" might describe the present regimes in Libya, Algeria, or possibly Ethiopia where pseudo-radical phraseology is used to disguise more or less dictatorial rule by a military caste or clique. But these have little in common with the history or the reality of Nicaragua today.

SC/GS does regard the Nicaraguan revolution as a healthy workers state -- without for a moment underestimating the difficulties and threats it faces, both internally and externally. This means in practice that, while the ongoing development of the revolutionary process is an important issue for us, it is clearly secondary in importance to the task of communists in North America: the priority of building the broadest possible movement of forces to fight U.S. intervention and Canadian complicity in Central America. The purpose of such a movement is to exploit whatever divisions we can among our own bourgeoisie to influence the balance of forces in favor of our sisters and brothers in Central America. Whatever the tactical measures chosen by the revolutionary movements in the region, our discussion on these matters must not become an impediment to the fulfillment of the elementary requirements of internationalism in imperialist countries.

But Neil's blindness on this point is merely symptomatic of a deeper problem: the failure to comprehend the dynamic of international class struggle, and the balance of forces on a world scale precisely as they enter into a decisive and open contradiction. For a revolutionist to lose sight of these elements is to liquidate all distinction between tactics, strategy, and principles in the fight against capitalism. Without tactics and strategy there is no fight. History itself becomes opaque, as, one after another, events fail to correspond as expected to the "correct" program, and must be somehow done away with or denied. Whether the proponent of this view is motivated by well meaning voluntarism, deeply rooted radical pessimism, the disease will be marked by abstention from the living day-to-day struggles of our class. And this is just where Neil's argument explicitly leads.

### **Mass Movements**

Historically the working class is nowhere a simple homogeneous mass, but is divided according to gender, ethnicity, race, language, political consciousness, experience, and levels of skill, organization and income. These divisions are not only horizontal but vertical. The oppression of capitalism is felt with differing intensity and in widely different ways, depending on one's location according to these factors. This means that, especially in the absence of a truly representative mass communist organization, specific movements of resistance must coalesce autonomously in order to take up particular fights in different sectors. The reasoning which says that building autonomous mass movements is somehow counterposed to the task of winning these movements to revolutionary ideas is transparently false, and again shows no comprehension that such movements themselves have a role to play in the class struggle. To say that our aim is simply to split such movements in order to build mass communist movements (and abstain from participating in all those which are not communist) leads straight to a political cul-de-sac. The individual who adopts these views has no choice but to stand at the sidelines hurling impotent and sterile denunciations, if not isolating him/herself further by actively disrupting these movements wherever the opportunity arises. In those cases where the movements actually are being misled by reformists and liberals, to abandon them under the pretense of building non-existent "communist mass-movements," is to hand the actual movements over to exactly the kind of bourgeois leaderships he claims to oppose. And this would indeed be the result if all revolutionaries suffered from the same confusion as Neil.

Such a conception fails to grasp the obvious: that communist mass movements will not materialize out of thin air, but will be won to our ideas through our common experiences and leadership in real struggles. And it is in the same harsh light that reformist leaderships will be judged and tossed aside.

The relationship of a communist organization to mass movements must be to take part in the autonomous life of these movements, building them conscientiously in a democratic and exemplary fashion, putting forward proletarian methods of struggle for the achievement of real gains and political education, and being prepared to assume a constructive leadership role when our positions are held by the majority. In this process we seek not only to teach, but to learn, never losing an opportunity to enrich our analysis, tactics, and program with new experiences.

The danger of Neil's confusion over even something as basic as the distinction between tactics and principles becomes crystal clear when we apply it to the real world of

political struggle, not only in the women's movement, and anti-intervention work, but also in carrying out a united-front approach to the NDP [New Democratic Party].

The charges in Neil's letter are strangely vague on this important point. SC is simply accused of "capitulation" to the NDP's reformism. What does he mean by this?

Presumably he does not disagree with our criticism of the party's [NDP's] pro-capitalist program and leadership, or its opposition to Quebec's right to self-determination. His attack must be aimed against our call for an NDP government, even as we fight for Marxist ideas among the party's working-class base. If this is what Neil calls "capitulation," then what does it mean to abandon the struggle altogether, leaving the politically conscious and organized part of the workers movement under the unchallenged influence of the reformists and liberals? Particularly in this period, when the approach of elections make discussion of the NDP and its program more urgent, workers facing intense pressure from the advocates of parliamentary cretinism need to hear more effective socialist interventions in the NDP, not fewer. If Neil's new line on the NDP, like his position on the mass movements, means withdrawing from yet another arena of struggle, it is difficult to take very seriously the accusations of "capitulation" with which he attacks others.

On the question of Quebec, if Neil accuses us of "capitulation to Quebec nationalism" based on the fact that we uphold Quebec's right to self-determination up to, and including the right to independence, and that we defend French language Bill 101, then we emphatically plead "guilty!" But how does this square with our supposed capitulation to English-Canadian chauvinism?

In the pages of the "Open Letter" Neil also pronounced his opposition to the Fourth International [United Secretariat], the world-wide party of socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. His departure from this organization is not only in terms of formal membership, but is also represented by the character of his political attack on its positions. Unfortunately Neil sees fit to distort the historical record when the facts do not conform to the picture he is painting. This is not a promising political development in any militant, but it is completely unacceptable for those claiming to uphold the banner of revolutionary Marxism.

Neil makes the assertion that the Fourth International [USec] "criminally tailed Khomeini." This implies some type of political support or endorsement of the barbarous Iranian government. The charge would be very serious, if it were not an outright fantasy. In fact, the Fourth International has never politically endorsed the Khomeini regime in Iran, but stood by the right of the Iranians to self-determination, their right to overthrow the Shah, or any other government imposed by imperialism. Defending this principle in the face of U.S. military aggression, whether against the current government in Iran, Panama, or Libya has nothing to do with political endorsement. For Neil to state otherwise is a self-serving fabrication.

In 1980 the FI [USec] condemned the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan correctly seeing this as a terrible blow to the development of indigenous revolutionary movements in Central Asia, and called for immediate Soviet withdrawal. With each day of the continuing occupation, with its record of brutal atrocities and cosmetic reforms, (not to mention a long list of anti-popular concessions made to the most conservative landlords and clergy), the forces of reaction and the hands of imperialism were vastly strengthened, while the development of class struggle throughout the entire region was

set back many decades. The Soviet invasion is now bearing its fruit: the likely slaughter of those Afghans, innocents and opportunists alike, who now find their destinies hitched to the back of Brezhnev's disappearing tank columns. The fate of progressive Afghani workers is obviously a matter of little importance to the Soviet bureaucracy. If the invasion had been inspired by any kind of internationalist motives whatsoever, its departure would have left the Afghan workers stronger, with social equality, the capacity for popular self-defense, but most of all, with a revolution of their own to defend. The withdrawal of Soviet forces is now nothing more than another cynical action that uses Afghanistan like a bargaining chip for Soviet deals with imperialism.

In Poland, Neil returns to the method of willful distortion in attacking the FI's [USec's] position. Our organization has never "hailed clerical nationalism" in Poland or anywhere else. But the important point here is that Neil himself completely ignores the militant self-activity of the Polish workers in their struggle to smash the Stalinist bureaucracy. Instead of supporting the struggles of Solidarnosc, Neil calls "for a military block with the Stalinists to stop Solidarnosc and to defend working class property forms." Arguing on this basis, Neil should also include the hierarchy of the Polish Catholic church in his "military bloc," since this institution continues to protect its privileges by helping the regime to demobilize mass actions on the part of the workers organizations. The reactionary illusions of some layers of the Polish workers movement are, incidentally, deliberately fostered and deepened by the very political regime which Neil supports. Revolutionary Marxism, buried beneath over 40 years of Stalinist cant throughout Central and Eastern Europe, will be recovered precisely through the struggles which develop the self-activity of the working classes, and with unwavering international workers solidarity, not under the political tutelage of James Robertson or General Jaruzelski. The illusions of some Solidarnosc leaders in Reagan, or John Paul II are not surprising, but these illusions, and leaders who promote them, will be shed by the test of political experience, as are all illusions -- except perhaps those of the sectarian.

The last question I would like to raise with regard to Neil's open letter is the statement about his own future in the Trotskyist movement. If commitment to Trotskyism is measured by the number of times one invokes the name of Trotsky (11 times in 4 pages) to justify one's every political thought and action, then perhaps Neil is right. But this is a criterion that only an insignificant number of "true believers" would accept -- and for good reason.

So far Neil's political break with us has only taken place in words. True, these words imply that he will concretize these words with action by withdrawing from participation in the social movements, and the NDP, just as he has withdrawn from the Fourth International [USec] and from our organization. If his hesitation to make this break with mass work betrays confusion on this point, Neil should resolve it soon, or be content in the incongruity of being a revolutionary without a party. Ours is the only organization which is committed to the ongoing application and development of revolutionary Marxism in the context of these struggles.

On the other hand, Neil may follow through on his thoughts to join one of the other groups which claim allegiance to the "idea" of the Fourth International, if not its present reality. These include James Robertson's international Spartacist tendency and its split-off, the Bolshevik Tendency. Both of these groups share the same sectarian program, and focus their public activity primarily on attacking each other, and every

other organization of the left. For some people this represents a "purer" kind of revolutionary politics. It's just as well that such people have a place to go that isn't SC/GS. There are also the local franchise operation of Ted Grant's Militant tendency, or the other British-based groups, the International Socialists, and the Workers League. If inward-looking "purity," and the exclusion of a mass orientation are what Neil desires, each of these currents will have something to offer. Most of the above also have the advantages of a high level of Leninist centralization (i.e., no members west of Bathurst Street), and a firm stand against "petty-bourgeois Quebec chauvinism" (no francophone connections in Quebec).

Building a genuine revolutionary organization is not for everyone. It is possibly the most difficult single task which activists can set for themselves at any time. There are also some of us who are convinced that it is the most vitally important one. Perhaps the only thing we can justly claim as a major asset is the immensity of the need which we are attempting to fulfill, or begin to fulfill. There is nothing easy about building social movements, being involved in real struggles which effect peoples' lives and futures. As revolutionaries we are certain that we will make errors, and equally certain of our duty to learn from these mistakes. In this struggle, revolutionary Marxism must be learned, used, understood, and learned again -- as a method and an arsenal, not as an archive of holy texts.

If Neil recovers his commitment to this struggle at some point in the future, we will not hold this lapse against him. But we are now obliged to take our own steps to correct the weaknesses in our internal education program, and in the formation of our cadres. We must ask ourselves what allowed Neil to remain so long in our ranks without developing a basic grasp of our ideas.

REJOINDER TO ANDREW R.

## THE UNITED SECRETARIAT: AN ANTI-TROTSKYIST FRAUD

The "Reply to Neil H." by comrade Andrew R. of Socialist Challenge/Gauche Socialiste (SC/GS) vividly confirms Trotsky's quip that, "Renegades are always distinguished by short memories or assume that other people have short memories."<sup>1</sup> If a revolutionary party is the memory of the working class, SC seems to be suffering from amnesia. In his enthusiasm to defend the political program of his mentors in the United Secretariat (USec), Andrew lapses into sloppy formulations, factual errors and even a few of the "self-serving fabrications," which he incorrectly ascribes to my open letter.

Andrew suggests that in leaving SC, I manifested symptoms of "a serious case of disorientation" which has left me unable to "comprehend the dynamic of international class struggle and the balance of forces on a world scale precisely as they enter into a decisive and open contradiction." This "inability" is presented as an "unenviable mastery of sectarian dogmatism" and "sterile reasoning."

In spite of the author's strident polemical tone, his reply manifests most of the characteristic features of the form of political revisionism known in the Trotskyist movement as "Pabloism." Pabloism is not some sort of political bogeyman as members of the USec pretend -- it is an anti-revolutionary methodology which abandons the task of building revolutionary vanguard parties in favor of adaptation to the present consciousness of the masses. This typically manifests itself in the discovery of a "dynamic" in various non-proletarian forces which qualifies them as vehicles for socialist transformation. While Andrew claims that the mark of a sectarian is a failure to "recognize the actuality of a proletarian revolution as it is occurring," he and his organization possess the dubious talent of recognizing virtually every radical movement as incipiently revolutionary. In hindsight, many manifestations of the supposedly eternally unfolding "objective revolutionary dynamic" (e.g., Ayatollah Khomeini's reactionary theocratic movement in Iran), have become embarrassments to be quietly forgotten, or even criticized in some retrospective "balance sheet."

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 has thus far been the **only** successful proletarian revolution; i.e., the only revolution in which the proletariat played the predominant political/military role in the seizure of power. The other examples cited by Andrew were **not** proletarian revolutions, but rather social revolutions led either by radical petty-bourgeois insurrectionaries (Cuba) or by peasant-based Stalinist guerrilla armies (Yugoslavia, China). These revolutions resulted in the creation of deformed workers states; states in which the working class does not and has never wielded political power, but which are nonetheless based on working-class (collectivized) property.

The USec's liquidationism can be seen in both China and Vietnam. In 1953 the Chinese Trotskyists who opposed the characterization of Mao's party as centrist and resisted instructions to dissolve into it, were denounced by Ernest Germain (aka Mandel) as "hopeless sectarians."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the Bolshevik-Leninist Group of Vietnam (BLVG), a section of the International since 1947, sent an appeal to the USec's Tenth World Congress in 1974 which was never published. This was doubtless because the appeal correctly attacked the USec for "prettying up the VCP [Vietnamese Communist Party] to the point of labelling it a Revolutionary Party,"<sup>3</sup> and covering up the murder of

the Vietnamese Trotskyists in 1945. For Mandel et al, who at that time were enthusing about the VCP, the BLVG members were an embarrassment.

While the impulse to capitulate to the "revolutionary process" is a constant for all wings of the USec, the forces to which they adapt are often sharply counterposed. It is little more than a decade since the Mandelite International Majority Tendency (IMT) and the Hansen-led Leninist-Trotskyist Faction (LTF) exchanged insults from opposite sides of the barricades in Portugal. In August 1975, the LTF was alibiing the burning of Communist Party offices by the CIA-funded Socialist Party at the head of rightist mobs. The Mandel wing, on the other hand, had its co-thinkers join a so-called "revolutionary united front" brokered by the bourgeois Armed Forces Movement, which offered its support to the program of General Goncalves who was then the head of the bourgeois government!

### Why Nicaragua is Not a Workers State

The disgraceful tailism exhibited by the USec so often in the past is evident today in its attitude toward Nicaragua. Andrew chastises me for rejecting the "revolutionary workers state in Nicaragua." In fact, Nicaragua is **not** a workers state, as the USec itself recognized at least until 1980. But popularity is the ultimate criteria for opportunists. By the time of its Twelfth World Congress in 1985, the USec publicly criticized itself for failing to understand "the character and trajectory of the FSLN" and announced that Nicaragua had indeed been a worker state since 1979.<sup>4</sup>

In his defense of the Sandinistas as "revolutionary Marxists" (which leaves aside the USec's previous characterization of the FSLN as popular-frontist), Andrew displays an acute ignorance of fundamental aspects of Leninism, in particular the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The passages which he cites from Lenin's *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* retain all their validity as advice on **tactics**. But Andrew omits the context in which the advice was given: the defense of the dictatorship of the proletariat -- a state which has as its economic basis the expropriation of the capitalists and the nationalization of the means of production. In his "Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," Lenin states quite clearly:

"History teaches us that no oppressed class ever did, or could, achieve power without going through a period of dictatorship, i.e., the conquest of political power and forcible suppression of the resistance always offered by the exploiters...."<sup>5</sup>

But, far from suppressing the exploiters, the FSLN is proclaiming its support for the "democratization" demanded by the contras and their capitalist backers. This, among other things, includes the "right" of *La Prensa*, the CIA-funded organ of counterrevolution, to publish a daily paper in Managua. As against this policy Lenin asserted:

"The first thing to do to win real equality and genuine democracy for the working people, for the workers and peasants, is to deprive capital of the possibility of hiring writers, buying up publishing houses, and bribing newspapers. And to do that the capitalists and exploiters have to be overthrown and their resistance suppressed."<sup>6</sup>

But in Nicaragua, the capitalists and the exploiters have not been overthrown or suppressed. They retain an effective stranglehold over the economy, which they have used to undermine production and thereby destabilize the populist Sandinista regime. Proletarian property forms do not exist in Nicaragua, and it seems increasingly unlikely that the FSLN will ever attempt to try to establish them. Instead of overthrowing the rule of capital, the Sandinistas want to **reconcile** the exploiters and their victims. It is absurd therefore for Andrew to defend the FSLN strategy of conciliation with the Nicaraguan capitalists with quotes from Lenin on using "any conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries." Of course a revolutionary workers leadership must be prepared to make tactical maneuvers, like the Bolsheviks did in 1922 with the Treaty of Rapallo which broke the imperialist quarantine. In some cases, like the Dreyfus affair, or the current dispute over the decriminalization of abortion in Canada, it is vital that revolutionaries intervene in conflicts between different sections of the bourgeoisie, but comrade Andrew will not find Lenin arguing for the "democratic rights" of the bourgeoisie to agitate for counterrevolution, or for their "right" to own and control the means of production -- and **these** are the questions posed in Nicaragua.

Andrew argues that the Sandinistas have "never stood above or outside the internal class struggle" but have added to and developed "greater self-activity and self-organization of the Nicaraguan masses in their own interests." He is silent about the recurrent bans on strikes and the periodic suppression of the newspapers of the ex-Maoist Marxist-Leninist Party of Nicaragua and the Morenoite Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), both of which have advocated more aggressive measures against the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie than the FSLN has undertaken.

Andrew apparently believes that if a regime is popular, like that of the FSLN, it cannot be bonapartist. The Sandinistas came to power in Nicaragua following the July 1979 insurrection which overthrew Somoza and smashed the old bourgeois state. Since that point, the Sandinistas have balanced between preserving the property of the Nicaraguan capitalists and meeting the completely counterposed needs of the Nicaraguan workers and peasants who make up the FSLN's popular base. This is bonapartism.

Marxists regard workers councils or "soviets" as the highest form of workers' democracy. Such councils, according to Marx and Lenin, would be composed of directly elected and recallable delegates and would unite workers and poor peasants, thus constituting an organizational framework for the workers to impose their own class interests. Such councils do not exist in Nicaragua and mass rallies which roar approval for FSLN policies cannot take their place.

This recalls Cuba, where the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), led by Joseph Hansen, hailed the Castro regime as a healthy workers state despite the fact that it was "lacking as yet the forms of democratic proletarian rule."<sup>7</sup> Now, almost three decades later, these "forms" are still "lacking." Contrary to the rose-colored picture Andrew and Socialist Challenge present, the FSLN's class-collaborationist policies have been a disaster and have put the Nicaraguan revolution in mortal danger.

## On Tactics and "Mass Movements"

Andrew correctly points out that communist mass movements "will not materialize out of thin air." He argues that revolutionaries must participate in independent mass movements, build them, and fight for socialist politics in them. This is all unobjectionable -- but it is also at variance to the political practice of SC.

In the first place, the only mass movement worthy of the name in North America today is the trade-union movement in which SC has only very limited activity. And in the union in which Barry W., SC's leader, is active, the Ontario Public Employees Union (OPSEU), he has a shameful record of association with at least one prison guard. In fact, Barry even invited this screw to speak at a Central America solidarity meeting in March 1986 as a trade-union militant, something which should provide a bit of an embarrassment today with SC's recent involvement in "Prison Justice Day." To my knowledge SC/GS as an organization still does not uphold the elementary Marxist proposition that it is necessary to drive screws and cops out of the union movement.

In the women's movement and other areas of intervention, SC's policies are virtually indistinguishable from the liberal reformists of the milieu. Instead of attempting to win the best elements of these movements to a Marxist worldview, SC spends its time acting as the uncritical "best builders" of these reformist coalitions. There is a more or less explicit two-stage theory which operates here. Now, when the movements are small and marginal, it is necessary to build them on a reformist/minimalist political basis. Only **later** (i.e., never) will it be appropriate to argue for Marxism. Thus all the so-called mass movements which SC supports and "builds" remain quite "independent" from revolutionary politics.

The fruits of SC's adaptationist method are best illustrated in the Toronto Anti-Intervention Coalition (TAIC), a "mass movement" given birth to and sustained by SC, in which the USec supporters willingly limit themselves to politics agreeable to their liberal bloc partners (when they can find them). An information leaflet published by TAIC in 1985 claimed that, "Social Justice not Communism is the issue" in Central America. For Marxists, there is no counterposition between communism and social justice -- social justice in Central America will not be achieved without socialist revolution. The struggle for communism, i.e., the perspective of Permanent Revolution is the issue in Latin America for anyone purporting to be a Trotskyist, but apparently not for SC/GS. In the same leaflet, under the heading "Why Should Canadians Care?" we learn, "Canadians have a long-standing tradition of support for democratic principles of 'respect for international law,' 'self-determination' and 'non-intervention'." This statement represents unadulterated social-patriotism. For most of its existence (with the exception of the brief united-front period under the influence of the Bolshevik Tendency), the TAIC has pushed a rotten combination of Canadian nationalism, pacifism and reformism.

SC members who endorse, as a "tactic," the idea of pressuring the Canadian government to end its "complicity" and to "genuinely benefit the majority of the people" in Nicaragua,<sup>8</sup> as proposed by cde. Weisleder can rationalize this to themselves in one of two ways. They can either believe the reformist tripe they put forward (thereby consciously renouncing any claim to be "revolutionaries") or they can think that it is a smart tactic to say things that they know to be false in the interests of "building the mass movement." Trotsky addressed this kind of opportunism when he

wrote, "no 'tactical' considerations can condone fraternization and embraces with political fakers and traitors in the eyes of the workers."<sup>9</sup>

SC claims to fight for socialist politics within the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP), but in reality, the bottom line is always "Vote NDP." When confronted with a mass reformist or Stalinist party, the task of revolutionary Marxists is to attempt to split the working-class base away from its reformist leadership by exposing the class treachery of these leaderships. Critical support, conditional non-support, the united front, and entrism are all tactics which, depending on the circumstances, may be appropriate. SC however has turned "critical" support into its opposite -- a call for an NDP government disguised with a few figleaf criticisms -- thus gutting the tactic of any revolutionary content. Rather than split the NDP, SC only wants to build it. Consider the editorial in the April 1988 issue of *Socialist Challenge*: "An NDP vote is progressive because it represents an elementary act of class independence. A coalition government **could** [emphasis added] rob the NDP vote of this progressive character of a break with the bourgeoisie."<sup>10</sup> For SC, the NDP could be in a coalition with one of the big business parties and **still** be worthy of electoral support! This was the group's policy during the 1987 Ontario elections, when the NDP ran on its record of class-collaboration with the Liberals. Ed Broadbent has announced that he intends to run on the same basis in the upcoming federal elections. Under such circumstances, the contradiction between the party's working-class base and its bourgeois program is effectively suppressed. A vote for the NDP on these terms becomes in effect a vote for coalitionism -- that is, a vote **against** independent working-class politics. Only if the NDP candidates were prepared to state in advance that they would vote no confidence in the Liberals, could any kind of critical support be considered. But last fall as Bob Rae proclaimed his intention to form another coalition with the Liberals if he got a chance, SC held a forum entitled "For an NDP Government: How, Why and Then What?"

Trotsky's attitude to the type of relationship SC has with the NDP is contained in his comment on a centrist group in France in the 1930's:

"Those who say 'we will forego telling the masses the truth about the latest social-patriotic treachery so as not to be expelled from the party led by the social patriots' become the witting accomplices of these traitors. By claiming to speak in the name of Marxism they reveal what contemptible scoundrels they are."<sup>11</sup>

Cde. Andrew thinks he is being very clever to ask how it is possible for SC/GS to capitulate to the English-chauvinist NDP and to Quebec nationalism simultaneously. He might ask himself how SC/GS's predecessor, the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL), managed it? In 1980, while engaged in NDP work qualitatively no different from SC's, the RWL voted political confidence in the petty-bourgeois Parti Quebecois when it decided to retroactively endorse the PQ's bogus referendum on sovereignty association.

SC/GS's position on the national question is completely contrary to Lenin's. Revolutionaries in English Canada must uphold Quebec's right to self-determination, up to and including the right to separate, while recalling Lenin's injunction that, "The national programme of working-class democracy is: absolutely no privileges for any one nation or any one language."<sup>12</sup> Bill 101, which SC/GS vociferously endorses, offers such privileges to the French language in Quebec. Leninists therefore must oppose it.

## Iran: USec Hails Islamic Reaction

In reply to the three disastrous applications of USec policy which are cited in my open letter (Iran, Afghanistan and Poland), Andrew responds with indignant accusations that I am "distorting the historical record" and indulging in "self-serving fabrications." For all his bluster, Andrew is apparently either too lazy to look up what his organization wrote at the time about the events in question, or he is deliberately misrepresenting the USec's positions. It is therefore necessary to set the historical record straight.

Andrew denies the USec "criminally tailed Khomeini," but does not state what position it took at the time. In 1978-79 as the "Islamic Revolution" took place, most of SC/GS's leaders were members of the RWL. Here is how the RWL's newspaper, *Socialist Voice*, defended Khomeini against criticisms that he was a reactionary:

"Khomeini has been portrayed as arch-reactionary[!] But what are his views? He has called for the toppling of the regime by strikes and demonstrations. He has called on the ranks of the army to join the revolt. He has ordered the religious hierarchy to donate 50% of their tithes to the striking workers. He has publicly indicated he places 'no value on agreements that are against the welfare of our nation'."

-- Alan Russett, *Socialist Voice*, January 15, 1979

Even after the fact, the USec continued to claim that Khomeini's victory opened a "process of permanent revolution in Iran."<sup>13</sup> By characterizing the revolutionary position of the Spartacist League -- "Down with the Shah, Down with Mullahs, For Workers Revolution in Iran" -- as pro-imperialist,<sup>14</sup> the USec demonstrated just how far its pursuit of popularity had taken it from Trotskyism.

Despite the occasional reference to the eventual desirability of a workers government in Iran, the real attitude of the USec and its Iranian affiliate, the HKS, was revealed by the decision to participate in the August 1979 elections to the Assembly of Experts. At this point Khomeini's terrorist "Revolutionary Guards" were viciously attacking women's and leftist organizations. In this context, imagine "Trotskyists" debating with mullahs over "correct" interpretations of the Koran! In the end, three of the eighteen HKS candidates boycotted the elections.

Andrew blithely defends this capitulation with the claim that the USec stood by the Iranians' "right to overthrow the Shah, or any other government imposed by imperialism." By this sleight of hand, which implicitly equates opposition to the Shah with support to the mass movement for an "Islamic Republic," Khomeini is transformed from an arch-reactionary to an anti-imperialist. But there is no necessary conflict between imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism. Khomeini's ability to hegemonize the anti-Shah movement was at the expense of the Iranian left, which overwhelmingly capitulated to his popularity and joined in the chanting of "allah akbar!"

The USec press did not advance the perspective of a struggle against the mullahs or even raise the simple question of separation of church and state until after Khomeini had triumphed and the widespread illusions in him had begun to evaporate.<sup>15</sup> For example, in a document entitled "The Unfolding Revolution in Iran," there is a subsection entitled "Tasks of the Iranian Trotskyists," which in the context of a growing theocratic mass movement entirely ignores the whole question of whether or

not the state should be secular! The USec found it impossible to believe that the "dynamic" of Khomeini's mass movement could have a reactionary character. But that was precisely the essence of the movement in Iran. By refusing to warn the working class of, and instead participating in, Khomeini's mass movement, the USec shares responsibility for the bloody victory of his reactionary regime.

### **Afghanistan: USec Capitulates to Anti-Sovietism**

The reactionary character of Islamic fundamentalism is also evident in Afghanistan. In this situation however, the Russian question plays a key role. Andrew claims, "in 1980 the F.I. condemned the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan...and called for immediate Soviet withdrawal." In fact, when the USec met in January 1980, it "criticized the [Soviet] intervention, but rejected the call for withdrawal of the Soviet troops...[and] only a small minority came out for withdrawal."<sup>16</sup> It was not until May 1981 that the USec openly advocated Soviet withdrawal.

The USec does not wish military victory for the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. *International Viewpoint's* latest (July 11) pronouncement on the question demands that the Soviet troops withdraw while simultaneously claiming to **oppose** a victory by the Mujahadeen: "We are firmly for the defeat of the reactionary forces...." and "...we are for the withdrawal of Moscow's troops, even if this leads to a collapse of the Kabul regime." This is justified with the Menshevik argument that the present social conditions in Afghanistan do not permit the introduction of the reforms which the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) proposed, and that it is therefore necessary to await the development of more propitious circumstances, rather than have more advanced social conditions imposed by the Soviets at gunpoint. Thus the USec stakes out its place in the imaginary "Third Camp" of Tony Cliff et al.

Trotsky did not share the USec's attitude toward the Stalinists' intervention among peoples in the backward parts of Central Asia. In *The Revolution Betrayed* he wrote that the bureaucracy "is laying down a bridge for them to the elementary benefits of bourgeois, and in part even pre-bourgeois, culture."<sup>17</sup> This is perfectly consistent with a dialectical understanding of the Stalinist bureaucracy as a fundamentally counterrevolutionary caste sitting atop the gains of the October Revolution, which must occasionally take steps to defend those gains.

Because Afghanistan is such a backward society, in the foreseeable future real social progress would require **some** kind of external intervention. In 1978 only 35,000 of a population of 15 million were employed in manufacturing. For every 20,000 people, there was one doctor. Women were forced to wear the stifling chador and were treated as chattel. Fifty percent of all children died of disease before the age of five and life expectancy for the population as a whole was forty years. The Soviet intervention in 1979 was intended to prop up the radical petty-bourgeois, pro-Soviet PDPA government, in its struggle against a fundamentalist backlash. The PDPA had attempted to cancel agricultural debt for poor peasants while promoting land distribution, improve the status of women, and raise literacy from 10% to 50% in four years.<sup>18</sup> The Soviet intervention posed the **possibility** of significant social progress for this extremely backward country through economic assimilation by the USSR.

The USec's anti-Sovietism is revealed by Andrew's repeated use of the Cold War phraseology "Soviet invasion." Forty years earlier, the "Soviet invasion" of "poor little Finland" sparked an identical response from a petty-bourgeois layer led by

Burnham and Shachtman within Trotsky's Fourth International. As in 1939, the refusal to side with the USSR militarily when it engages in a particular military struggle with a particular capitalist or imperialist antagonist reveals an inclination to reject the defense of the USSR altogether. The strength of overt anti-Sovietism in SC/GS was indicated by the fact that an amendment to the statement of principles at the fusion conference last May characterizing the Soviet Union as **co-culprit** with U.S. imperialism in the arms race, very nearly carried!

### **Solidarnosc and the Politics of Clerical Nationalism**

Andrew accuses me of "willful distortion" on Solidarnosc and states point blank that the USec has never hailed clerical reaction anywhere. But facts are stubborn things. The truth is the USec hailed Solidarnosc even after it had definitively identified itself as a pro-capitalist and overtly clerical-nationalist formation. Instead of judging mass movements like Solidarnosc by their leadership, social composition and program, the USec uses an imaginary revolutionary "dynamic" projected from the illusions of the base as its criteria. It is therefore hardly surprising that the USec has a miserable track record.

Andrew suggests that the "illusions of some Solidarnosc leaders in Reagan or John Paul II are not surprising." Lech Walesa et al have no "illusions" in Reagan or John Paul II -- they have a common program: to free Poland from the tyranny of a planned economy and be rid of the atheistic Stalinist regime imposed by the Soviets after the war. The critical question in Poland, which Andrew completely ignores, is how to dispel the illusions of the Polish working class in the capitalist-restorationist leadership of Solidarnosc. The "left-wing" at the 1981 Solidarnosc congress recently re-established itself as the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). In a statement issued by the PPS, we find the highly significant passage, "we do not hide the fact that today the social teachings of the Catholic Church, and above all the teachings of John Paul II, are closer to us than Marxism."<sup>19</sup> The PPS has a long history in Poland. It is not the party of Leo Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg -- that was the SDKPiL. The PPS was, and still is, an anti-communist Polish nationalist formation. It was the party of Josef Pilsudski, the reactionary ruler of inter-war Poland who is today revered as a national hero by Solidarnosc.

The right wing of Solidarnosc, the Committee for an Independent Poland (KPN), led by Leszek Moczulski, was described by one observer as possessing "reactionary Catholic anti-communist nationalism of an anti-semitic and strongly authoritarian character."<sup>20</sup> The same Solidarnosc congress in 1981 which dropped all favorable references to socialism from its program, also demanded the release of counterrevolutionary KPN prisoners.

The program adopted at the 1981 congress was the result of an extensive and democratic debate. It was also as one commentator dryly observed, "the transitional program for counterrevolution." Had there been a Trotskyist organization in Poland at the time, it would have fought to **split** the working-class base from the pro-capitalist elements which dominated Solidarnosc. The USec knows as well as anyone that there was no such current at the congress. In the absence of a revolutionary organization with the capacity to defeat Walesa et al politically, in the inevitable showdown between Solidarnosc and the regime, Trotskyists must militarily bloc with the Stalinists against the forces of capitalist restoration. Not because the PUWP has any solutions to the crisis of Polish society -- indeed the decades of rule by the Stalinist

bureaucracy is the cause of the problem -- but because in December 1981 they were the **only** obstacle to Solidarnosc's counterrevolution. (We might note that Andrew's "revolutionary Marxist" Sandinistas supported the crackdown against Solidarnosc -- but raised no serious criticisms of the regime. What does he make of that ?)

Andrew argues that the logic of the Trotskyist position means that "the hierarchy of the Catholic Church" should have been invited to participate in any military bloc to stop Solidarnosc! Does Andrew believe that like the Stalinist bureaucracy, the Catholic Church has a dual role, and that it derives privileges from the preservation of proletarian property forms? The Church uneasily co-exists with the Stalinists in Poland (as it does with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua), but it is fundamentally committed to the preservation of the capitalist world order, and is vitally interested in uprooting any and all variants of secular radicalism or atheistic Marxism.

As Trotskyists, we do not in general favor police suppression of ideological dissidents in the deformed workers states -- but the suppression of active counterrevolutionaries is another matter. As defenders of working-class property forms, we pose the question as Trotsky did:

"We must not lose sight for a single moment of the fact that the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR; that the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of the world proletarian revolution."<sup>21</sup>

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Andrew indicates that SC/GS is "now obliged to take steps to correct the weaknesses of [its] internal education program." As the former education director of the Toronto branch, I concur. I'm sure the comrades of SC/GS could learn a great deal by a study of the history of the 1951-1953 split over the question of Pabloite revisionism which destroyed the Fourth International. One important document from 1951, entitled "Where Are We Going?" by Michel Pablo, neatly captures the USec's method with the claim that, "The objective process is in the final analysis the sole determining factor, overriding all obstacles of a subjective order."

Pablo/Mandel's International Secretariat, and from 1963 the United Secretariat, has worshipped at the altar of the "objective process" for more than 35 years. Andrew is perfectly correct that the building of a revolutionary organization is not for everybody -- the leaders of the USec are a case in point. From the armchair guerrillaism of the 1960's, to tailing the European popular fronts in the 1970's, to prostrating themselves before the anti-communists in Solidarnosc, Mandel & Co. have shown that they lack the political backbone to pursue this difficult, but urgently important task. In its endless pursuit of get-rich-quick schemes, the USec has repeatedly demonstrated that, in revolutionary politics, short-cuts make for long delays.

The struggle within the socialist movement between those who understand the critical importance of the subjective factor, and those who trust in the onrushing dynamic, considerably predates the split in the Fourth International. It was also a key factor in the factional division in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. Like the USec, the Mensheviks viewed the victory of socialism as a semi-automatic process and saw their role as mere facilitators of the inevitable historic "process." Lenin and the

Bolsheviks, by contrast, from the beginning understood the centrality of the struggle for program as an essential precondition for workers power. In Trotsky's words:

"Marxists...are not fatalists. They do not unload upon the 'historical process' those very tasks which the historical process has posed before them. The initiative of a conscious minority, the scientific program, the bold and ceaseless agitation in the name of clearly formulated aims, merciless criticism of all ambiguity -- those are some of the most important factors for the victory of the proletariat. Without a fused and steeled revolutionary party a socialist revolution is inconceivable."<sup>22</sup>

Neil Henderson  
8 August 1988

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14. David Frankel, "How U.S. Left Responded to War Drive Against Iran," *IP*, December 17, 1979, p. 1242
15. "The Unfolding Revolution in Iran," subsection "Tasks of the Iranian Trotskyists," *IP*, November 20, 1978, p. 1278
16. *International Viewpoint*, April 6, 1987, p. 22
17. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, New York, 1983, p. 171
18. Fred Halliday, "War and Revolution in Afghanistan," *New Left Review*, No. 119, Jan.-Feb. 1980, p. 23-24
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20. Oliver MacDonald, "The Polish Vortex," *New Left Review*, No. 139, May-June 1983, p. 28-29
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22. Leon Trotsky, "Open Letter for the Fourth International," *Writings 1935-36*, New York, 1977, p. 27

# APPENDICES

**Demonstrate!**

# **OPPOSE U.S. CONTRA AID!**

On February 3 and 4 the U.S. Congress will be voting on another massive infusion of funds to fuel the Contra campaign of terror in Nicaragua. Over 25,000 Nicaraguans have died so far in the war inflicted by Reagan's Contra mercenaries. Take a stand -- OPPOSE U.S. CONTRA AID!

**Tuesday, Feb. 2**

**5:30 - 6:30 pm**

**U.S. Consulate**

University Ave between Queen & Dundas

partial list of endorsements: Alliance for Non-Violent Action; Alliance for Socialist Action; Bolshevik Tendency; Canada Electric Brigade; Canadian Arab Federation; Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador; El Salvador Information Office; Irish Freedom Association; Latin American Women's Collective; Medical Aid to Nicaragua; Philippines Human Rights Congress; Revolutionary Workers League; Student Christian Movement (U of T); U of T Nicaragua Study Group

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**TORONTO ANTI-INTERVENTION COALITION**

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## **SPEECHES AT TAIC RALLY, 2 FEBRUARY 1988**

We reprint below transcripts of three of the speeches made at the February 2 demonstration against contra funding. The speeches are printed in the order they were given.

### **Robert A. (Alliance for Socialist Action)**

I'm speaking on behalf of the Alliance for Socialist Action. You know, we must not be fooled into thinking that the divisions between the Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. Congress over the contra aid issue can in any way lead to an end in contra aid. The Democrats and Republicans, let me tell you, are both committed to containing and destroying the Nicaraguan revolution. They can differ as far as the methods but they seek to do that.

Reagan's request for \$43.3 million [in] aid to the contras with \$3.6 million in military aid might very well not go through in that form. But I think there's a deal that's being cut right now with bipartisan support to send so-called humanitarian aid to the contras. Yeah, humanitarian aid to killers and torturers. One can not think of a more proposterous contradiction.

As long as the Arias plan -- unfortunately, the Arias plan has become more and more a tool being used against Nicaragua. We see that the countries' -- the other countries in Central America -- compliance with the accord, or more correctly, lack of compliance with the accord, is making just an absolute mockery of the accord, while Nicaragua is being forced to make ever greater and greater concessions. I think that the Arias plan was unfortunately a mistake for the Sandinistas, but it's not something that we should really criticize them for 'cause our main task in this country is to put an end to U.S. intervention and to look at the real culprit of the war, and that's Reagan and the U.S. government, and to step up our efforts to stop contra aid and U.S. intervention once and for all.

One of the things that the Nicaraguans have always said to us is that the best thing we can do to help their revolution is to make a revolution in our country and I think the people here should really take that to heart. And you can see what that means in tactical terms is the fight to build a revolutionary workers party to lead a socialist revolution in this country. For Nicaragua, and countries like it, will forever be faced with wars of intervention as long as the capitalist class in countries like Canada and the United States remain in power. We would like to see the day where rather than standing out in the cold protesting against the actions of our governments intervening around the world, that we would instead, the working people, be in charge of our own affairs and actually be able to help countries like Nicaragua. U.S. Hands Off Nicaragua! Victory to the Nicaraguan Revolution! Build the Anti-Intervention Movement! Thank you.

### **Tom R. (Bolshevik Tendency)**

Yeah, the Bolshevik Tendency was one of the groups that was most active in building this demonstration and we're certainly pleased to be here tonight. We think it's extremely important that so many people have come out to show the broad kind of unity there is across the left and solidarity movement in opposition to Reagan's criminal contra-terrorist policies. It's important though to recognize that the contras

have been sustained through their entire existence on the basis of a bipartisan consensus in the United States. That is, both of the major capitalist parties agree on what they see is the necessity to roll back the gains of the Nicaraguan revolution. And at the same time, the contras continue to have a powerful ally in Nicaragua itself, and I'm referring to the capitalist class there, which still controls 60% of the Nicaraguan economy and does not use it to benefit the workers and peasants of that country.

Now, Somoza's Nicaragua, like virtually every third world country, was characterized by a tremendous gap between a very tiny elite which is benefitting from the system of exploitation and the vast masses of the population who are oppressed under that system and subject to desperate poverty. The Nicaraguan revolution represented a tremendous step forward for the oppressed of Nicaragua in their struggle for a decent life, but at every point, the oppressed masses of Nicaragua have encountered opposition from the ruling elite -- from the capitalist minority in that country. The Nicaraguan revolution also had a tremendous impact internationally, throughout Central America and the whole region.

Unfortunately, it's our view that the Arias plan is predominately an attempt to isolate and strangle the Nicaraguan revolution before it can spread. That is, to stabilize the capitalist regimes in Central America where exploitation is still the norm. Unfortunately, we believe the Sandinistas' response to the Arias plan to date has been one of conciliation and concession, for which they have very little to show. They've even gone so far recently as to float the idea of Canadian peacekeepers. Now we all know here that Mulroney is every bit as much the enemy of the Central American workers and peasants as is Reagan. And the idea that the Canadian government will play any role that will represent in any way the interests of the workers and peasants in Central America is completely erroneous and is potentially dangerous for the future of the Nicaraguan revolution. The alternative, we believe, to a policy of conciliation is to break with the attempt to conciliate the interests of the working class and the Nicaraguan capitalists and to complete the revolution in Nicaragua by expropriating the capitalists who live there.

To finally defeat the contras it is necessary to uproot the system of capitalist oppression of which they are the expression and to do that means to complete and extend the Nicaraguan revolution begun with the tremendous overthrow of Somoza in 1979. It is our duty though in Canada, whatever criticisms or differences we may have with the Nicaraguan revolution and its leadership, to fundamentally make clear that we stand in solidarity with them 100% against Reagan, the contras and Mulroney.

....

#### **Naomi W. (Canadian Action for Nicaragua)**

I'm speaking on behalf of Canadian Action for Nicaragua. I want to say a few words about the Arias peace plan. Canadian Action for Nicaragua's point of view is this: the Arias peace plan represents from our point of view, and from the point of view of many solidarity activists in Canada and around the world, a very real attempt on the part of the Central American countries to forge their own destiny. Now granted, the government of El Salvador and the government of Guatemala, the government of Honduras and even the so-called democracy of Costa Rica, do not represent for us the

kinds of governments that we want to see in Central America's future. However, we feel very strongly that one of the most important significances of this plan is that these countries have made an attempt to send the United States a message.

Now, we also realize that in terms of Guatemala and Honduras in particular, these countries are being used as pawns to further the U.S. plans in Central America. But, it's very, very important that we support the plan. First of all, I'll tell you that if you've ever been to Nicaragua, the country is desperate for peace. I don't think that we're in a position up here to tell the Nicaraguan people to keep on fighting. Inflation is 1,400%; the drought, which they just went through over the early part of winter, cost them 75% of their bean crop. That's all the people have to eat down there. They also lost 10% of their rice crop. They also, because of the drought, didn't get as much of the coffee harvest or the cotton harvest in. The people are being strangled. The country is being strangled. I don't think that we're in any position to tell the Nicaraguan government that this is not a good peace plan for them and that they shouldn't have signed it.

I think it's important if we're doing serious solidarity work in Canada and in North America that we listen to what the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan people are telling us: they want us to support the peace plan. Who are we to say no? It makes no sense.

Another point that I want to make about the peace plan is that Reagan has been under pressure. Let's look at the real world that we live in. O.K., we don't like Mr. Reagan or his policies in Central America -- that is an understatement. However, he was going to ask for \$270 million, now he's asking for \$36 million. He may have to wait until March 31 to get that. So there is international pressure. This demonstration here tonight is part of that international pressure. We have to look at reality. The reality is the Nicaraguans, the Sandinistas, are in no position to take an isolated stand in Central America. They're part of that region, one of five countries. They have to live with that reality, and we have to determine the solidarity, the work that we do, in relation to what their real needs are. And at this particular time, their real need is that we support that peace plan as best we can. If we want to support it critically, we can do that.

For example, we can certainly say, as was said earlier here tonight, that Nicaragua has a gun to its head. Well of course Nicaragua has a gun to its head. That's the whole point. Nicaragua has a gun to its head and therefore, if we want to get rid of that gun, we have to have peace in Nicaragua. The way to get peace now is to support the peace plan. That is what we have to do. Thank you very much.

## The "principled" coalition bogey

by Raghu K.

The following is an appraisal of prospects for T.A.I.C. in its current form. In analyzing the Bolshevik Tendency and certain ASA comrades' position concerning the nature of Nicaragua and the Sandinista leadership, I noticed a common thread between it and the positions taken by the T.A.I.C. fraction concerning the structure of the coalition (ie. the accepted BT proposal). Since I reject the former - and since I consider the two inseparable - I now reject the latter. (NB this is not meant to be a comprehensive representation of my position on Nicaragua)

What is this common thread? In very general terms, I believe it is an incorrect conception of the rôle of the revolutionary vanguard (or, in our case, of the aspiring vanguard). In demanding of the Sandinistas actions based on an inadequate appraisal of the reality of the Nicaraguan situation, there lurks a tendency towards a fetishism of so-called principles.

Just as it is nowhere written that expropriation of the bourgeoisie (to any degree) is a necessary element of a "workers state", we can nowhere find etched in stone the right to speak for all participating groups as an untouchable principle in the functioning of a coalition such as T.A.I.C.

Lenin in Left-Wing Communism : an infantile disorder correctly scolds those who by refusing to participate in reactionary trade unions are no more than vainly "wishing them away". The Bolshevik Tendency - and now the ASA - should similarly be scolded for "wishing" a fragmented, tiny anti-intervention coalition into a genuine united front, that is into a grouping of mass working class organizations united around a specific task. Citing Trotsky's On the United Front vis-a-vis T.A.I.C. is thus akin to grafting the actions of the July 26 Movement in Cuba (or the Bolsheviks in Russia for that matter) onto what "must be" - or "should have been" - done by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

To denounce the Sandinistas' actions - or "inaction"- without analyzing the Nicaraguan reality does a great disservice to the vanguard of a revolution that has greatly nourished our movement's Revolutionary Tree. It also flies in the face of the theory of permanent revolution: that is the theory of combined and uneven development. Furthermore, it makes a mockery of the "critical support" we must steadfastly maintain against both opportunistic tailism and finger-wagging sectarianism.

Similarly, to invoke the classic works of our movement out of context does a great disservice to their authors, and is the trademark of sterile sects such as the Bolshevik Tendency, Trotskyist League, and International Socialists...

Sterile sects precisely because in the name of communist "purity" they severely restrict their sphere of operation. In regards to the current structure of T.A.I.C. it is hardly "opportunistic", leave alone "impure", to see severe problems

with the speakers policy. If people are frightened away from a coalition that stages actions in which two or more keynote speakers are from far-left groups, it is not incorrect to advocate the suppression of this policy. At this conjuncture what is not exclusive on paper is unfortunately *de facto* exclusive in practice.

In T.A.I.C what is crucial is a democratic decision-making process, as well as a principled approach of "no position" towards things like the Arias Plan. Even in the latter case, if a certain RWL member hadn't goofed at the conference and the endorsement of the Plan had gone through, I now believe that it would have been incorrect to discontinue our instrumental participation in the coalition.

I have always maintained that the only reason why we participate in T.A.I.C is to build our organization. That is still my position. Since when, however, is having a speaker at a demonstration a guarantee of attracting people to our ideas? Especially when said demonstration is attended by that very narrow section of the public not alienated by the previous speeches of far-left organizations? Selling the paper to, and speaking with, people from a broader section of the public is equally - if not more - effective for the building of the ASA. And attracting the broad public to T.A.I.C. actions is crucial in the defense of the Nicaraguan revolution.

Defense of the Nicaraguan revolution as an end in itself? Yes, insofar as anything has an end in itself (something which I think dialectical materialists reject). But prospects for the building of our organization are directly linked to the survival and extension of the Central American revolution. This is my interpretation of Comrade Barry W.'s Draft Resolution sub-head "Nicaragua remains the key".

A parallel can be found with regards to our position on the NDP. Again, "as an end in itself" we advocate support for the NDP because of its union, working class base, and not because of its pro-capitalist, reformist programme. Nor do we withdraw our support in response to the NDP's rather undemocratic structure. An increase in support for the NDP, and the election of an NDP government, would be a great boost for the working class movement, and thus a boost for the ASA. Within the NDP we fight for democratic structures, put forward socialist solutions, and thereby endeavour to win people to the ASA; all the while seeking to build the NDP's base of support.

In T.A.I.C. the danger of pursuing this "fetishism of so-called principles" is greater, since we are "at the helm" and are the demonstrated defenders of a mass-action orientation. "At the helm of what?" should be the question at the basis of any analysis of T.A.I.C. Let us not allow political "self-righteousness" to increase in inverse proportion to the breadth of the coalition's attraction.

What do I therefore propose for T.A.I.C.? Based on the success of the February 2 action and the turnout at the general meeting of February 10, we should evaluate the "popularity" of

the speakers policy. If it is the case, as I believe it will be, that many of the usual participant groups are alienated by it (a fact we can not "wish away") then we should act accordingly. What is "accordingly"? It doesn't seem unreasonable that we could approach key figures within these groups with a "compromise" concerning the speakers policy, and work from there.

It should be remembered that we have indeed scored a few points in regards to "who are the most committed to building a mass-action anti-intervention coalition in the city". This has, I believe, put the leaders of these groups a bit off balance before their membership: CAN deciding to endorse the action is a good example. Others such as Tools for Peace must be in a similar position, and could with appropriate changes be won back into the coalition.

The Bolshevik Tendency has shown itself to be extremely capable of building a united mass action. Whether it is stuck to the speaker policy remains to be seen, and should not be taken as a given. In any case, a broad anti-intervention movement is much more important to the ASA than maintaining cordial relations with the Bolshevik Tendency. We should never again be taken in by the bogey of "principled" coalition building.

In conclusion, I would like to point rather hesitantly to possible "side-effects" of the whole T.A.I.C affair on the ASA. Esther D.'s resignation can partially be traced back to her feelings on the conference. Our reaction to the story she told regarding the anti-racist movement in which her father participated was very much a product of this "fetishism of so-called principles" I have discussed. She was very concerned that the movement "for and of itself" no longer meant anything to the ASA. I now believe her concerns were well-founded.

The same can in a much more limited fashion be said about comrade Hamid N's request for sympathizer status. He sensed the fraction was drifting in the direction which I have detailed, and this to him was perhaps the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. He acted in a way which he considered appropriate. In both cases, true, it is inexcusable for members of a revolutionary organization to leave instead of fighting to correct perceived flaws. But to denounce their departure in this way with little corresponding self-examination is a dangerous way to function.

We must constantly adapt the tactics of our organization to the realities of a constantly changing world. Likewise for the development of a "correct" political line. This may be time-consuming and difficult, but has thus far proven itself to be infinitely more rewarding for our revolutionary project. Our task is to bridge the gap between the overripe objective conditions of capitalism's death agony and the underdeveloped subjective conditions. And that means facing the latter head-on from "within" and "without". Fruitless demagogy is better left to those who "read their Lenin".

January 29, 1988

## RESIGNATION FROM THE TAIC

At the 1987 conference of the TAIC on November 7 the Bolshevik Tendency put forward the following motion:

"Proposal to reconstitute the TAIC as a united-front committee on the following basis:

- "A) i) Opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America/Caribbean.  
ii) Opposition to Canadian intervention and/or support for U.S. intervention in the region.
- "B) i) Each sponsoring group has the opportunity to speak and otherwise present its views at each event.  
ii) Every participating organization has the right to approve all material produced in the name of the united front committee -- and nothing will be published that is not agreed to by all.
- "C) That this motion supercedes the entirety of the current 'Basis of Unity of the TAIC.'"

This motion was divided -- parts A and C were passed, with the addition of a third point to part A which supported the right to self-determination for the peoples of Central America and the Caribbean. Part B was tabled to the November membership meeting of the TAIC where it was further tabled to the 9 December membership meeting. The Bolshevik Tendency stated at both these meetings that our participation in the TAIC was dependent on its commitment to guarantee the right of each participating organization to present its own independent view at coalition events.

The 9 December TAIC meeting passed the following motions:

"All published materials must be approved by all participating organizations and individuals represented on the steering committee."

"All organizations which actively build a TAIC event be offered the opportunity to speak for equal time, other speakers to be invited by the coalition."

On this basis the BT agreed to join the TAIC and to take a place on the steering committee. On this basis the TAIC organized what proved to be a successful demonstration of some three hundred people against U.S. contra funding on 2 February. The comrades of the BT did half the work for this demonstration -- comrades of the ASA did the other half. At the demonstration both organizations, as well as the Jenny Green Brigade and Canadian Action for Nicaragua, spoke and put forward their own distinctive positions within the framework of their common opposition to Reagan's contra terrorists.

At the 10 February meeting of the TAIC, under an agenda point where the 2 February demonstration was to be discussed, comrade Barry W. of the ASA abruptly proposed to scrap the united-front organizational framework of the coalition which had been agreed to on 9 December. The comrades of the BT protested this undemocratic procedure and proposed that consideration of such a sweeping change should be postponed to a future

meeting of the coalition to permit time for discussion and consideration. This proposal was voted down and a round of discussion ensued.

In the discussion a number of vulgar anti-communist sentiments were expressed by Noni and David, two ASA allies (now TAIC steering committee members). ASA spokesperson Barry W. argued in essence that permitting Marxist groups to speak from the platform at TAIC events would be a mistake as it would alienate liberals -- thereby narrowing the appeal of an anti-intervention movement. If the TAIC survives, we expect that various honored guests will be invited who will use it as a platform to promote things like the "Arias Plan" -- a measure by which the Democratic Party and the Central American bourgeoisies plan to strangle the Nicaraguan revolution and stabilize capitalist rule in the region.

The reversal of the guarantees of the right to independent expression of Marxist politics within the TAIC represents its reversion into a reformist propaganda bloc which will doubtless once again seek to "pressure the Canadian government" and argue that "social justice, not communism is the issue" in Central America. It is therefore impossible for the Bolshevik Tendency to continue to participate in the TAIC.

Bolshevik Tendency

15 February 1988

# TORONTO ANTI-INTERVENTION COALITION

c/o 427 BLOOR ST. WEST, TORONTO, ONTARIO M5S 1X7



## BASIS OF UNITY OF TORONTO ANTI-INTERVENTION COALITION

### Purposes of the Coalition

- 1) To unite all individuals and organizations who oppose military, economic and political intervention in Central America and the Caribbean; who support the rights of the peoples of the regions to determine their own futures, and who wish to affect the policies of the Canadian and U.S. governments to assist the self-determination of the Central American and Caribbean peoples.
- 2) To educate Canadians about the situation in Central America and the Caribbean and about the role of the Canadian and U.S. governments and corporations in these regions.
- 3) To be prepared for an emergency response action to any major escalation of U.S. intervention in these regions, or any significant increase in Canadian government complicity with U.S. militarism and other types of intervention in these regions.
- 4) To sponsor actions and events which educate and mobilize the Canadian population around these issues.
- 5) To promote the development of a broad Canadian anti-intervention movement and to strengthen links with our allies in the U.S. peace and anti-intervention movements.

### Political Basis of Unity

- 1) Self-determination for the people of Central America and the Caribbean: Stop U.S. military and economic intervention.
- 2) To achieve a just peace in Central America and the Caribbean: Support for all peace initiatives which enjoy the support of the majority of the people struggling for self-determination within their respective nations.
- 3) Canada's foreign policy should actively promote:
  - a) the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other nations
  - b) respect for the principle of self-determination of the peoples of Central America and the Caribbean.

When Canada is complicit with U.S. aggression, we concretely oppose the government's action and demand a change;  
When Canada takes its distance from U.S. aggressive policies, we encourage and deepen these differences in order to isolate the U.S.

- 4) End Canadian government complicity. Canada should refuse to participate in any aspect of the Reagan administration's militarization plans, including arms testing and production for the U.S. military. End cruise missile testing in Canada. Canada should say "NO" to Star Wars. Canadian tax money should go to research, planning and conversion for peaceful uses of factories engaged in war production. Money for jobs and human needs, not war.
- 6) End Canadian government aid to the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Oppose the U.S. trade embargo against Nicaragua. Increase Canadian trade and government aid to Nicaragua.
- 7) Recognition of the Democratic Revolutionary Front/  
Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FDR/FMLN) as the official voice of the people of El Salvador. We call on the Canadian government to do likewise. \*

\*(The FDR/FMLN alliance includes political parties, trade unions, women's and students' groups, and many other diverse mass organizations. It represents approximately 80% of the Salvadorean people in their struggle for social justice and peace. TAIC believes it is important to recognize, and encourage the Canadian government to recognize, this powerful alliance. A TAIC educational presented by the Latin American Working Group made informed adoption of this point possible. If you require more information to reach an knowledgeable conclusion on this matter, please contact TAIC.)

#### General Principles

- 1) That the coalition act as facilitator and initiator, (e.g. that the general proposal is shared with certain constituencies - labour, church, solidarity etc. - and they are invited to develop a specific way in which to participate.)
- 2) That education be integrated with action; action with education.
- 3) That the coalition be committed to affirmative action for ethnic minorities and women, both in its structures and in any events it organizes.
- 4) That the everyday life of the coalition be defined by the monthly Coalition meetings. The Conference is the highest decision-making body of the coalition.
- 5) Within the democratic framework of the coalition, groups and individuals are free to present their ideas and analysis.
- 6) All structures and activities of the Toronto Anti-Intervention Coalition should reflect the diversity and composition of the Coalition. The political, religious, cultural, nuclear disarmament, development education, solidarity, labour, women's community and other groups in the Coalition should have an active presence in all TAIC events and their participation should be actively encouraged.)

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## Trotskyist League Forum

**DEFEND, COMPLETE, EXTEND THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION!**

— Arias "peace" hoax threatens Nicaraguan masses

**Speaker: Peter Stevens, Trotskyist League**

**Saturday 9 April 1988, 7:30 p.m.**

**International Student Centre**

**33 St. George St. (n. of College)**

**For more information contact the Trotskyist League, Box 7198, Station A, Toronto, Ont. M5W 1X8, or call (416) 593-4138.**

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The battle over Central America which has raged throughout the '80s has reached a watershed. The Arias "peace" plan, engineered by the U.S. Democratic Party, aims to give a "democratic" face to the imperialists' drive for counterrevolution in the region. To "verify" compliance with this "peace" hoax, Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega has made risky concessions in order to appease Washington. The Sandinista leader agreed to direct negotiations with Reagan's counterrevolutionary mercenaries, a broad amnesty including former members of the dictator Somoza's murderous National Guard, and lifting the state of emergency enacted to clamp down on the "internal contras."

Now more than ever, defense of the Nicaraguan Revolution means **completing** the revolution by destroying the internal "fifth column" that leeches off the desperate masses. Expropriate the bourgeoisie! For agrarian revolution to take back the land from the cattle barons, sugar and cotton plantation owners and coffee capitalists who themselves "expropriated" the impoverished peasantry under the imperialist-protected Somozas and their predecessors. The Nicaraguan Revolution can survive only by igniting social revolution throughout the Central American isthmus, drawing into battle the powerful proletariat of Mexico, and linking up with sharp class struggle in the heart of North American imperialism.

Yet the so-called "left" and "solidarity" milieu in this country has embraced the imperialists' Arias "peace" hoax, and is either whitewashing or enthusing over every concession by the Sandinista leadership to the reactionaries. Canadian Action on Nicaragua, for example, urges not labor action against imperialism but treacherous appeals to the Canadian government to "support the Central American peace process by...insisting that Reagan end contra aid." Behind them march the Toronto Anti-Intervention Coalition (a bloc of the fake-Trotskyist Alliance for Socialist Action and the dubious "Bolshevik Tendency"), who called a protest outside the American consulate last February 2 on the sole slogan "Oppose U.S. contra aid."

Opposition to U.S. contra aid goes for bargain basement prices in this country. Not only the social-democratic NDP but the Liberals, most Tories (and indeed most European capitalists) oppose aid to the loser contras—because they have a **different** counterrevolutionary strategy. They think they can succeed where Reagan's dogs of war have failed, by squeezing Sandinista Nicaragua economically and diplomatically through schemes like the Arias plan. Refusing even to raise the call to "Defend Nicaragua," the ASA/BT's demo call covered for these counterrevolutionary machinations of our "own" capitalist class. At the very moment when Mulroney & Co. offered to send Canadian "peacekeeping" troops to Nicaragua as part of the Arias plan—there to keep the "peace" of the graveyard, as in Lebanon—these two-bit hustlers' leaflet dropped all mention of opposition to Canadian imperialism.

We of the Trotskyist League say "Anti-imperialism abroad means class struggle at home!" Under the impact of the Cold War, the so-called "left" in this country has moved sharply right, covering for imperialist anti-Sovietism from Afghanistan to Poland to Central America. (Naturally, the ASA/BT cabal breathed not a word of Soviet-defensism on their February 2 demo.) In contrast, we have consistently emphasized that Nicaragua is a front line in the anti-Soviet war drive, saying "Defense of Cuba, USSR begins in Central America" and "Nicaragua needs Soviet MIGs!"

What's needed is not empty "solidarity" rhetoric tailored to appeal to the North American imperialists but concrete acts of proletarian internationalism, from hot-cargoing military goods to Central America, to political strikes in the event of direct imperialist intervention. The key to mobilizing such solidarity is a fight against the pro-imperialist labor misleaders and their "left" lackeys who support the sellout NDP tops in Canada and the Democratic Party in the U.S. We need to build revolutionary workers parties committed to the fight for international socialist revolution. **U.S. and Canadian imperialists: Hands off Nicaragua! Smash the contras! Military victory to the FMLN in El Salvador! Set Central America aflame through workers revolution!**

Labor donated 3/88

Bolshevik Tendency  
Toronto

4 February 1988

Trotskyist League  
Toronto

Comrades:

On 2 February the recently reconstituted Toronto Anti-Intervention Coalition (TAIC), sponsored a demonstration to "Oppose U.S. Contra Aid!" which drew almost 300 participants. Unlike other "anti-interventionist" demonstrations held in this city in the past few years, this was organized as a genuine united front with a simple one-slogan summons to the streets. All who opposed U.S. contra aid were welcome to join in, carry their own banners, and chant their own slogans. On Saturday 23 January and again at your public class on 26 January, you were approached by a supporter of the Alliance for Socialist Action and specifically invited to participate in building the demonstration and guaranteed the opportunity to have your own speaker at it. Your refusal to either endorse or participate in the demonstration confirms our characterization of the Trotskyist League as a sterile, introverted, non-revolutionary sect.

It seems you think something is wrong with the slogan "Oppose U.S. Contra Aid." At your public class you attempted to justify your non-involvement by saying that the demonstration was popular-frontist because the Democratic Party opposed contra funding! In fact the Democrats support continued funding to the contras -- they just oppose Reagan's inflexible tactics toward the Sandinistas. As a supplementary proof of the "popular frontist" character of the demonstration Trotskyist League comrades pointed out that the basis of unity included neither a call for military victory to the FMLN in El Salvador nor for the defense of the Soviet Union. Why stop there? The following correct positions were also **not** included in the basis of unity for the demonstration: 1) the right of self-determination for the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka; 2) the necessity for the rebirth of the Fourth International. No doubt you can think of a few more.

Your conception of what a united front should be is radically different than Trotsky's. He ridiculed the idea that a united front should be organized around one's own full program. His polemics against the idiocy of Third Period Stalinism with its proposals for a "united front" with the reformists on the Stalinist program are entirely applicable (with all proportions guarded) to the farcical ultimatism of the TL toward the TAIC:

"If one accepts the theory that every type of the united front, except the Communist, is 'counterrevolutionary,' then obviously the British proletariat must put off its revolutionary struggle until that time when the Communist Party is able to come to the fore. But the Communist Party cannot come to the front of the class except on the basis of its own revolutionary experience. However, its experience cannot take on a revolutionary character in any other way than by drawing mass millions into the struggle. Yet non-Communist masses, the more so if organized, cannot be drawn into the struggle except through the policy of the united front. We fall into a vicious circle, from which there is no way out by means of bureaucratic ultimatism."

--"What Next?", *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p.169

In its own inimitable comic-opera fashion the "Trotskyist" League mimics the bureaucratic ultimatism of the Stalinist Third Period, complete with references to participants in such demonstrations as "squeezed lemons." The stupidity of the TL's position is manifest in the fact that, according to your leading political spokesperson in Toronto, cde. Masters, you "of course" oppose contra aid. There is, consequently, no rational reason for you to abstain from a demonstration organized on such a basis which guarantees full freedom of criticism for all participants.

We remind you of the words of Joseph Seymour: "A united front is essentially a common **action** characteristically around concrete, usually negative, demands on bourgeois authority." Seymour's document, "On the United Front Question," which dates from the period when the Spartacist tendency was still Trotskyist, first appeared in an internal bulletin in 1974. It was written to refute a notion which had "permeated our ranks that while a united front with bourgeois forces was permissible to defend democratic rights, it was impermissible over issues central to the class struggle (e.g. opposition to an imperialist war)." In fact there were no bourgeois participants in the 2 February demonstration -- but your position seems to be that it was "unprincipled" because there hypothetically **could** have been. As a friendly suggestion to those comrades of the TL who can still think, we propose that they read Seymour's article and consider their abstentionism in its light.

Fraternally,

Ken Williams  
for the Bolshevik Tendency

