

SOCIALIST VOICE



Reconstruct
the Fourth International!

Magazine of the LEAGUE FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program

This formula, 'workers' and farmers' government', first appeared in the agitation of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and was definitely accepted after the October Revolution. In the final instance it represented nothing more than the popular designation for the already established dictatorship of the proletariat. The significance of this designation comes mainly from the fact that it underscored the idea of an *alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry* upon which the Soviet power rests.

When the Comintern of the epigones tried to revive the formula buried by history of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry', it gave to the formula of the 'workers' and peasants' government' a completely different, purely 'democratic', i.e., bourgeois content, *counterposing* it to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Bolshevik-Leninists resolutely rejected the slogan of the 'workers' and peasants' government' in the bourgeois-democratic version. They affirmed then and affirm now that, when the party of the proletariat refuses to step beyond bourgeois-democratic limits, its alliance with the peasantry is simply turned into a support for capital, as was the case with the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries in 1917, with the Chinese Communist Party in 1925-27, and as is now the case with the 'People's Front' in Spain, France and other countries.

Revolutionaries and the Unions
Spartacist Chauvinism

SOCIALIST VOICE



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No. 2 (Winter 1976-77): Capitalism in the Soviet Union (including a polemic against Ernest Mandel); The "New South" and the Old Capitalism, Jamaica Left Faces the Crisis.

No. 3 (Spring 1977): What Are the Communist Parties: Revolutionary Perspectives for Southern Labor; The Spartacist League's Scandalous Chauvinism.

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Editorial

The resurrection of the Fourth International is the crucial task facing the world proletariat. Trotskyism once represented the clarion call to socialism and revolution. It was an uncompromising proletarian alternative to reformism, Stalinism and all other forms of class collaboration. Today, the grim parody of Trotskyism that passes for its continuation is only a different bottle for the same old vinegar. In this issue we are publishing an article, "Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program," designed to restore the original revolutionary content of the Fourth International's program and strip away decades of reformist misinterpretation and malpractice.

As the crisis of capitalism grows deeper, the frightened centrists preach to the advanced workers that their salvation lies in teaching the more backward workers by moderating every revolutionary instinct and blurring revolution into reform. The hallmark of Leninism has always been to win such workers by presenting a sharp revolutionary alternative, a clear way out of a miserable situation in which workers realize that the moderate politics they listened to in the past have all failed. In contrast, the German socialists in the 1930's moved to the right in order to win the most fearful sections of the working and middle classes. As a result, many of these identified the left with their problems and turned to the Nazis who demagogically presented themselves as a radical solution to the crisis of capitalism.

"Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program" is one weapon in the struggle to see that this history does not repeat itself. The article was the product of an intense discussion within the ranks of the League for the Revolutionary Party, which publishes *Socialist Voice*. The discussion was extended over a long time period because we could not suspend our other ongoing activities. As a result, this issue is the first to appear after a year's delay. We apologize to our readers for the long interruption, ultimately due to the small size of our group in relation to the tasks it must perform. We do not apologize for these problems since they are not of our making, nor can we by our actions alone fundamentally change them. The publishing delay is only the tip of the iceberg.

The enormous defeats suffered by the working class, notably the counterrevolutionary triumph of capitalism in the USSR in the late thirties, the smashing of proletarian revolution in the wake of World War II and the destruction of the American left during the McCarthy period have all taken their toll. A major consequence was the decline and fall of the Fourth International, which represented the continuity of Marxism and Leninism on a world scale. The working class has recovered from its defeats, but it has not yet sorted through all the lessons and re-established its international party of revolution. Rebuilding that party is the central task of the LRP. ■

Spartacist Chauvinism

The Spartacist League has put on record one of the most despicable positions any radical group has ever got itself into. Readers of *Socialist Voice* will recall our report of a speech made in January 1977 by James Robertson, the Spartacists' founder and national chairman, in which he delivered some extraordinarily cynical chauvinist insults. The Spartacists originally covered up the scandal, then called our account a fraud — but finally admitted the whole thing and took pride in it. Their latest attitude is even more revealing than Robertson's performance itself.

In his speech, Robertson sneered at various nationalities and the working classes of several countries he had just visited. We pointed out that Robertson's conduct was not only unbelievable but inexcusable for even a pseudo-revolutionary. We avoided treating the issue in the way the Spartacists themselves love to do, as a choice morsel of gossip about an opponent, but we explained Robertson's performance as an aberrant outgrowth of the Spartacists' middle-class politics. We further demonstrated that the Spartacist League arose out of a specific tendency in the petty bourgeoisie with an affinity to the world view of the labor aristocracy and a contempt for national liberation struggles in particular.

For a year and a half, the Spartacist League made no reply to our article — quite understandably wishing that the memory of their leader's public performance would just go away — except to suggest in an answer to a letter that our account was a total fabrication: "If you believe what you read about the Spartacist League in *Socialist Voice*, you will love the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*." Last fall, however, the SL decided to stop stonewalling and jumped headlong into the fray. An article in *Workers Vanguard* of October 20, 1978 reprinted some of Robertson's comments as quoted by *Socialist Voice* and thereby acknowledged that they were substantially accurate. Here is the original passage from *Socialist Voice* No. 5. The excerpts omitted by *Workers Vanguard* are italicized for reference later in this article.

Robertson delivered a series of chauvinist epithets that insulted the revolutionary capacities of the working classes everywhere and denigrated almost every non-white, non-American and non-English speaking people *that got in his way. His theme was to blame the working masses for the weak state of the revolutionary movement.*

Robertson warmed up with the sneering comment that the Vietnamese victory over imperialism was a "big deal" and was "not really as important as the defeat of the workers in Indonesia" because "not many people live in Indochina." After this cavalier dismissal of 56 million Indochinese people and a struggle which has had enormous consequences for imperialism, he really got going.

"The Greek population exists by selling its children or selling Swiss watches to one another."

Albania, the only "workers state" Robertson saw fit to mention, was a nation of "goat-fuckers."

"Northern Europe is dripping with fat," so the workers of this region can be "bought off with slight adjustments."

Similarly, the foreign workers in these countries can also be bought off and when deported would "only end up supporting popular fronts."

Canada was not worth considering (although the Spartacist tendency has a group in that country) because it is only the "fringe on the surrey extending fifty miles north of the U.S. border." Non-English speaking North America (Mexico and Quebec, *with the most advanced class struggles on the continent*) was specifically ignored in this talk, *which was supposed to deal with the world revolutionary setting.*

As for the U.S., *the one country where Robertson believes that Trotskyism has an "unbroken tradition,"* it too "is a jaded country" which, like Northern Europe, "drips with fat if you exclude the Negro (sic) from the statistics." But Robertson saved his vilest spleen for the American Blacks: "The black population burned down the ghettos and it's now waiting for the Jews to come back and open up the drug stores." High prices charged by storekeepers in the ghetto were attributed to the fact that "black kids rip them off." *And that was his entire analysis on this subject, from beginning to end.*

To which *Workers Vanguard* added: "Whew! No one is safe, it seems, from the SL's acid comments."

Despite the SL's evident pride in such "one-liners, personal observations and evocative images that make a good speech," and despite the editors' inability to charge *Socialist Voice* with misquoting Robertson, the *Workers Vanguard* piece is chock full of epithets like "slander," "distorted account," and "Big Lie" — directed not only at *Socialist Voice* and the LRP but also at several other political tendencies critical of the SL. All the critics are lumped together as one "Anti-Spartacist League" amalgam led, according to the sleuths of *Workers Vanguard*, by the Socialist Workers Party. But the amalgam cannot conceal what the SL was trying to obscure: our charges were accurate. So much for the *Protocols of Zion*.

"Truth" and Diplomacy

We prefer not to speculate at length as to why the Spartacists eventually decided to publicly defend Robertson's garbage. The story of the speech had not died down since the publication of our original article, for a tape of Robertson's talk was published afterwards by the Communist Cadre group (see *Socialist Voice* No. 7). In addition, our article was reprinted almost completely (and without informing us) by the Workers Socialist League, a rival of the Spartacists in Britain. For this reason, and because Robertson's elitist form of racism is linked to the Spartacist League's politics, the SL has been forced to try to put the best possible face on the matter. In doing so, they have created a few new red herrings to draw attention away from the real political questions. We turn our attention to these first before addressing the main issues.

1. The Spartacist League alleges that its opponents (the amalgam) "maintain diplomatic silence" on their differences with each other and write "indistinguishable" articles against the SL. This is a stupid lie. As if *Socialist Voice* has ever neglected to point out our differences with other groups! In particular, in our article on the Communist Cadre pamphlet,

we gave equal time to attacking that organization for taking to their logical conclusion the Pablove theories it shares with the SL — while carefully pointing out the differences between the two groups.

Moreover, aside from this pamphlet and our own articles — what other writings have there been about the speech that the Spartacists find indistinguishable? None. The bulk of the organized left (including the SL and the SWP) ignored the published accounts, even after the pamphlet was produced in January 1977. Any group that doubted our reporters' account could have demanded a copy of the Spartacist tape recording of the speech — but none did. The speech, a blatant example of American Chauvinism, was a stain on the entire left in this country — yet the radical groups, mired in cynicism, were willing to giggle about it in private but let it go unchallenged in public. That's where "diplomatic silences" were, on the part of both the SL and its opponents.

2. The Spartacists charge that their opponents attack only the titillating material that the SL produces and ignore the central political questions. Again, the shoe is on the other foot. Before, during and after the article we have polemicalized against the politics of the SL — as we do with other left tendencies frequently. In *Socialist Force* No. 4 we published a point-by-point refutation of the Spartacist pamphlet slapping in show "Why the USSR is Not Capitalist."

Yet what has the Spartacist League chosen to respond to? Our political and theoretical polemics? The Russian question, which both we and they agree is the central issue of the day? The many practical issues in the class struggle that divide us? No — with the report of Robertson's speech — and then only to the question of the chauvinist remarks themselves, not our interpretation of them. Indeed, *Workers Vanguard's* citation of our account edited out our political comments in the same sentences and paragraphs it quoted (as any reader can now check by referring back to the quoted passage at the beginning of this article) in order to leave the impression that our outrage was based on moralism and not the interest of the class struggle. Needless to say, the far lengthier political treatment of the SL that appeared in the rest of the article was studiously ignored. More "diplomatic silence." More political cowardice, to be precise.

3. Robertson claimed that Marx himself set the precedent of using strong language against the national pretensions of practically everybody — the SL cites Poles, Chinese and Germans. To this two answers must be made. Strong language in itself can be perfectly correct. We use it frequently and are suspicious of those who insist on only polite terms, for we are dealing with questions of human survival and not abstractions. We hate the ruling class and those who aid them; and we show it — used against the exploiters and oppressors of humanity, strong language can have its due effect. But using it to disparage the peoples of less advanced countries in an historical epoch in which imperialism and national genocide are not unheard of is quite another thing. Especially coming from the leader of a U.S.-based political tendency. In our original article we quoted Lenin on the significance of such insensitivity on the part of "great nation" chauvinists:

"Nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice; 'offended' nationals are not sensitive to anything so much as to the feeling of equality and the violence of this

equality, if only through negligence or jest — to the violation of that equality by their proletarian comrades." ("On the Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomization'" December 31, 1922)

And we recall also Lenin's conclusion:

"Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question, he is still essentially petty bourgeois in his point of view and is, therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view."

Secondly, Marx (as the Spartacists point out) did not shrink from denouncing the "national narrowmindedness" of his own people, the Germans. But what did Robertson have to say about his country? The U.S., he claimed, is the only country with a "continuous Leninist Trotskyist tradition embodied in organization and a cadre" since the thirties. This boon he ascribed to "the protection of a very powerful, imperialistically-based bourgeois democracy" which allowed the American Trotskyists to be the only ones who "received all the blows, had to make all the political responses, had to deal with all the questions throughout the whole period." He overlooked the fact that American Trotskyists, precisely because of the hegemonic imperialism of the U.S., have not had to face national oppression or defeat in war. Robertson's speech is itself an indication of one of the consequences. Trotsky warned the American party in the 1940's about the narrow prejudices it was developing as a result of its difficulty in overcoming its labor aristocratic and middle-class base. Imperialism, the source of the privileges, has taken its toll in the American working class in terms of pervasive chauvinism. That is the "Leninist Trotskyist tradition" that Robertson is heir to, not the real one.

4. *Workers Vanguard* berates *Socialist Force* for not mentioning that Robertson's observations about Albanian "goat fuckers" was a gibe against the Maosists, some of whom now look to Albania for revolutionary leadership or, as a full-on Spartacist article has it, as the "vanguard of human progress." This is a lame excuse. Indeed, such Maosists are foolish to consider so backward a country as their "socialist" model — but no more foolish than the Spartacist and other Pablove ilk who judge Albania to be a workers' state because of its nationalized property and ruling Communist Party. A real workers' state, no matter how degenerated, is indeed a vanguard of human progress, that is why revolutionaries would give their lives in its defense. The SL insults Marxism and the working class by posing a "workers' state" that is not more progressive than capitalism. And as for our supposed distortion, the fact remains that Robertson's gibe insulted the Albanian people, not the Maosists.

Robertson's belief that the "goat fuckers" attribution is due to Marx is so far unproved. "We have had our comrades checking," he reports. Good, one can hardly think of a more appropriate assignment for Spartacist researchers; it is reminiscent of ten-year olds reading great literature for dirty words. But *Workers Vanguard* was too impatient to wait for their results. Its second article quoted at length from a book by Havelock Ellis stating that "bestiality... flourishes among primitive peoples and among peasants" (Ellis appears to have overlooked "workers' states"). Why this reference? *Something* had to be found to bolster a cheap and cowardly slander. So here we have the reasoning of Spartacist-thought — primitive

peoples, says one authority, have sex with animals. Albania is a primitive country. Albania has lots of goats, therefore Albania is a nation of "goat-fuckers." And if Marx didn't say so, he should have. Next question.

Black and White Rights

Workers Vanguard charges that "our opponents are so used to mendaciousness that they assume everyone else lies too" and that the Spartacists' critics are guilty of "stupidly imputing to *WP* the euphemistic style characteristic of the left press." That is, *Workers Vanguard* insists on being taken literally, not figuratively, and demands the same criterion for Robertson's speech. For example, Robertson's reference (quoting from the Communist Cadre pamphlet) to "a black population which said 'Why wait?' and proceeded to burn down their own ghettos and they're still waiting for some Jews to come back and open their drugstores" is palmed off by the SL as "frank" talk and literal fact. "It's not pretty — it's just true." All you have to do is "take a drive through the areas of Detroit that were burned out in 1967" — look, no drugstores. And a photo is attached that testifies to the absence of buildings.



Spartacists' contemptuous dismissal of the black upsurge of the 1960's is palmed off as "frank" talk.

Nice try, comrades Spartacists, but it doesn't work. Was Robertson speaking literally when he called the Albanians "goat-fuckers"? It almost appears that he was trying to establish a statistical fact: "...under the conditions of the four-and-a-half-year plan, the production of goats is still the principal activity in Albania." *Workers Vanguard* quotes him as saying, tongue presumably in cheek. But we have been told to put all euphemism aside and face the facts. As the SL is aware, goat production is indeed maintained by the fucking of goats — but only when performed by other goats. Robertson was hardly speaking literally. He was just having his dirty little joke.

Similarly Robertson was not speaking literally in his reference to blacks burning down their own ghettos. But since *Workers Vanguard* claims to see only the literal truth, we will translate into plain English. What he meant was "Look at these idiots who didn't have the sense not to destroy their own homes. And they have to have the Jews reopen the stores

because they aren't capable of doing it themselves." No, this is not euphemism but pure racism.

In an adjoining article, *Workers Vanguard* chose to defend the intervention of "an SL spokesman" at a forum held by the Revolutionary Socialist League in March of 1978 who labeled Jamaica "the lumpen capital of the world." How does the SL defend this "one liner"? "It is an empirical fact that the lumpenproletarian population of Jamaica is huge." The evidence given is the high rate of unemployment (over 20 percent) and the prevalence of non-industrial workers. Fishermen, potters, marijuana traders, washer women and bar girls are listed. But the unemployed are not necessarily lumpen, nor are the occupations listed, except for drug dealing. The Spartacists' "empirical" proof falls to the ground.

Even if the facts proved what the SL claims, they say nothing about the highly interpretive term "lumpen capital" nor about the rest of the world, whose lumpen population Jamaica's presumably dwarfs. The whole argument proves quite a different point: the SL's familiar contempt for the most oppressed layers of the proletariat as well as blacks.

Robertson printed a letter in the December 15, 1978 *Workers Vanguard* to make the same sort of trivial, 'factual' point. He criticizes the "otherwise accurate" Spartacist article for reprinting without comment a misquotation by *Socialist Voice* of what he said about the Greeks. His word was that they "export," not sell, their children. His purpose, he now claims, was "a protest against the civil war's devastation (of the country)" and against the fact that "economic necessity compels the young people to emigrate." Again Robertson was supposedly speaking literally and wants the record set straight. Out account, he complains transformed his print into "gibberish."

Let us quote (from the pamphlet again — we have no other source since the Spartacists still are keeping their tapes to themselves) what Robertson had to say about the Greeks:

"And then there's the Mediterranean basin — Greece, Iberia, Italy, and, in some ways, Yugoslavia — where capitalism is quite weak ... where the main export during the period of the economic boom has been its own sons into the industrial apparatus of North and West Europe. (...) One can describe the region as generally tumultuous in the revolutionary sense ... I don't say a true revolutionary situation, certainly not in general ..."

"Greece is going through one of its usually rare periods since the Metaxas dictatorship of 1935, in which it is possible for the masses to come out into the streets and argue, 'Which of the two Communist or three Maoist parties do you support?' And they do it in the hundreds every night. You know, it's an interregnum between dictatorships in a country that again chronically consists of exporting its children and selling expensive wristwatches to each other. And I'm not sneering, because after you've been to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem it is goddamn good to get to Athens, I'll tell you that! It's a giant step up!"

We grant Robertson his "exporting" license — but that is all we grant. Not sneering? Why, who could possibly have thought so? Of course he is sneering — only he assures us he is sneering even more at the Jews in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

than at the Athenians. His real political point is that the working classes of countries like Greece are hopeless: they are capable of revolutionary tumult but have no capacity for serious revolutionary politics. As we reported from his speech (and *Workers Vanguard* echoed), he thinks foreign workers from Southern Europe have no goal but the popular front. More exactly, to quote the pamphlet again since our account missed the exact flavor: "In the present situation of economic difficulty in West Europe they have a very easy out: they simply deport their *gastarbeiters*, their guest workers, back to their native villages where they go and scream for the popular front." If that is not sneering, what is it? "Frank" talk? An "evocative image"? Yes — evocative only of Robertson's contempt for people less privileged than himself.

We note that Robertson did not try to correct his gibe about the Greeks' selling watches to one another. Is this too meant to be taken literally — as actual concrete fact? Does Robertson the "Marxist" really wish to defend the ridiculous notion that value is created by the multiple circulation of commodities? The author of this gem of economic wisdom complains that we made gibberish out of his comment! In fact it was political gibberish either way. And either way it was a chauvinist put-down, not a protest against the living conditions of the masses or against war devastation, as Robertson now claims (nothing of the kind was in the original speech). If Robertson wishes to retract his sneering he is more than welcome to do so. But he cannot get away with inventing a "protest" he never made and chatting us with suppressing it.

For Robertson was not trying to sympathize with the Greek people. His comment was meant to smear them as petty bourgeois, backward and shiftless. The mass of overburdened, poverty-stricken workers and peasants is identified with the black market street hustlers, just as the SL turned the Jamaican working class lower layer into lumpen with a flick of a pen. Robertson is blaming the masses for what he sees as the inevitable result of dictatorship in Greece, to him they are incapable of revolutionary consciousness. The whole outburst reflects the "sophisticated" sneering attitude towards the world inherent in Spartacist politics. They present not the truth but a distorted version which appears as the truth to the aristocratic layers of the U.S. working class. The real purpose of Robertson's letter was to cover up the content of his racist speech behind the charge that it was misrepresented by *Socialist Voice*.

This brings us to the central point — the politics of the Spartacist League. The Spartacist line today is to denounce the ghetto uprisings as "aimless outbursts of frustrated violence" caused by "lumpen rage," as the first *Workers Vanguard* article puts it. Interestingly enough, this was not always the SL position. At the time of the uprisings in the 1960s, the Spartacists considered themselves part of and in full solidarity with the black movement against cop brutality and ghetto conditions. Robertson himself attempted to play a role in defense of the Harlem riots of 1964. In November 1965, *Spartacist* magazine wrote at length about "the participation of Spartacist alone among organized political movements, in the cause of the Negro people during the riots...." a far cry from their current denunciations. Today the Spartacists sneer at the support by the LRP and others for black self-defense in the riots: "If their only real result is to worsen the quality of life in the ghettos, Sy Landy couldn't care less." (Sy Landy, whose picture accompanied the *Workers Vanguard* diatribe, is national secretary of the LRP and an editor of *Socialist Voice*.)

In the course of a decade Robertson and the Spartacists have learned not only that "oppression oppresses" — as they put it in their reply to the LRP — but also that self-defense by the oppressed will get nowhere and that oppressors, too, have democratic rights that must be safeguarded! Because we have not taken the same path down the road of apologies for racism, they cite it as "liberal moralism" and at the same time accuse us of not "caring." They are wrong on both counts. We are materialists not moralists, and therefore vitally concerned about the material conditions of life of the masses. The black uprisings did not simply tear down drugstores, they were the chief material force behind the concessions that the masses were able to wring from their exploiters during the sixties. The masses, far more than all the civil rights and nationalist leaders, frightened the bourgeoisie into concessions (see "The Black Struggle: Which Road Today?" in *Socialist Voice* No. 7). The Spartacists once understood something of the black struggle, but today they rewrite history to disparage genuine mass movements.

The political point that the two Spartacist articles defend most vociferously is the "right to exist" of the South African whites. The question first came up in the discussion period following Robertson's forum, when an LRP speaker from the floor (not identified as such in the Communist Cadre pamphlet) asked: "It seems to me that one of the hallmarks of your tendency is its antagonism to nationalism as an ideology, and indeed to many nationalist movements. And yet, what stands out in sharp contrast with that general position is your support for Israeli self-determination, or as you call it, 'the Hebrew speaking nation.' I'd like to ask you to try to reconcile those two positions. And to add on to that the question: do you support the right of self-determination of the Boers in South Africa?"

Workers Vanguard's first article raises the same question: "Alleging that we 'equate the rights of oppressor and oppressed' *Socialist Voice* inquires: 'If the South African whites demand "self-determination" on the verge of a black victory in that country, whose side will the South African Spartacists be on?' But *Workers Vanguard* doesn't answer. It refers only to Robertson's forum and quotes him to the effect that the South African whites have no right to exploit and oppress the blacks but do have the right to live: "You think they have no right to live? Well, then, go try to kill them!"

That is an answer to a different question which nobody has asked. Not one of the Spartacist opponents lumped into the "Anti-Spartacist League" has advocated what *Workers Vanguard* labeled the "progressive" extermination of oppressor peoples. The question is the extermination not of people but of oppression, and the inquiry about the right of self-determination is entirely germane to this. The SL equivocates over this right for South Africa's blacks: we asked for information about their attitude towards South Africa's whites. To defend their right to self-determination (which in the abstract, any people can claim) is to defend their right to national independence — a condition that exists today in the form of the apartheid state. Defending this right means opposing the struggle against apartheid.

At the forum, Robertson's immediate answer to our comrade's question was "Yes, of course we do!" He then, as *Workers Vanguard* quoted him, went on to argue for their right to exist. The second *Workers Vanguard* article returned to the point: "It is infuriating to have to protest that the SL, while it supports the national emancipation of oppressed peoples, supports *nobody's* nationalism, and does not call for

self-determination for the white oppressor caste of South Africa. If the editors are infuriated they have only Robertson to blame, along with other SLers who defended the same line at the time. Perhaps Robertson misunderstood the question raised from the floor in January 1977; if that is the case, the SL has had ample opportunity to correct the record. In any event, *Workers Vanguard's* infuriation is simply a cover for the Spartacists' retreat.

Moreover, the Spartacist League *should* favor the self-determination of the South African whites, based upon their vaunted indiscriminate and equal support for the right of self-determination for all nations, oppressed and oppressor alike. If it has indeed adopted a position against the South African whites' self-determination, that is the only people in the world the SL denies the right to. Nor is it any wonder that Robertson "confused" the question of the right of self-determination with the right to exist. The Spartacists' image of a black victory in South Africa is that of a bloodbath against innocent white victims — "reversing the terms of oppression," as they call it. Given their warped view of the world turned upside down, they may identify white existence with white self-determination. Robertson's emphatic assertion of the South African whites' right to self-determination, whether the official SL line or not (we apologize to the editors of *Workers Vanguard* for our obvious stupidity in taking their national leader at his word), was only a logical deduction from the SL's chauvinist politics.

Workers Vanguard devoted the bulk of its first article to berating the New Left for its uncritical third-world nationalism. It cannot level the same charge at the LRP without openly lying, so instead it smears us with a wide brush all the garbage about the "Anti-Spartacist League" with "indistinguishable" articles. There is, however, a link to New Leftism that can be drawn out — in a Marxist manner, not by the Spartacists' gossiping derision. The rise of petty bourgeois movements (including those adulating nationalism) was a result of the smashing of the proletarian revolution at the end of the Second World War by Stalinism. The middle-class radicals of the sixties inherited the idea of the "end of ideology" (read: the end of class struggle and Marxism) from the McCarthyized intellectuals and academics who survived the fifties, but combined it with a recognition of the necessity of mass struggle forced on them by the black revolts and international upheavals. The New Left therefore searched for non-proletarian vanguards to bring down the "establishment." Its most cynical strands had contempt not only for the workers but also for their own past: radicals who spent two weeks "doing ghetto work" returned to campus sneering at their fellow students as "white liberals." The Spartacists of today are part of this same tendency, rejecting their own past and even present instincts and replacing them with a hard veneer of scorn.

The SL frequently boasts of the number of members it has recruited from Maoism and the SWP's youth group. Of all the tendencies that grew out of the New Left, none more stridently patronized the "third world" than did the Maoists (unless it was the SWP). The collapse of the New Left, including its belief that the "third world" would bring down capitalism, led to tremendous cynicism. Patronizing turned to its dialectical opposite, chauvinism — which was of course inherent in the patronizer's consciousness from the beginning. Today we see those who speak "frankly" and without "euphemism" sneering at their previous incarnation.

It is obvious that the SL adopts positions which are designed to outrage middle class opinion. What is becoming increasingly clear is that it consciously and deliberately goes out of its way to do so, to the extent of drawing conclusions whose political correctness is dubious even from the Spartacists' warped point of view. This may well be the reason for its "angular" position on Iran, giving no support to the anti-Shah movement because it was led by reactionary mullahs. Another example is its enthusiasm for white South African self-determination, which it has now been compelled to deny. Yet another is its original non-support for the struggle of the bourgeois nationalist MPLA in Angola against South African imperialism, the traces of which it would also like to conceal (see *Socialist Voice* No. 1). There are many more examples.

The method behind this practice is to force Spartacist members to burn their bridges to the middle-class intelligentsia they were recruited from. A membership recruited out of defeats, and not reoriented but made even more cynical by the leadership, reinforces the contempt their own leaders have for them. The method of cutting ties by taking out outrageous positions is evidence of this. Robertson made no bones about it during his talk:

"When you sit in your administrative offices it's too easy to believe that your whole membership is just a big bag of shit that the central leadership is just dragging behind it, and that if the central leadership makes a serious political mistake, there are within your organization no restorative forces."

The Spartacist manipulation of the ranks is done in a typically New Left fashion, parallel to that of those SDS strike leaders at Columbia University in 1968 who wished to provoke deliberate confrontations with the cops in order to radicalize liberal students. During the 1978 coal miners' strike, the Spartacist League *applauded* layoffs of other workers so that they would learn the harsh lesson of class solidarity! (See *Socialist Action*, April 1978.) In a public forum in March 1979 in New York, the SL's theoretician Joseph Seymour asserted that it was good for U.S. soldiers to have been killed in the Vietnam war since they were fighting on the side of imperialism: more American deaths would have been better. This is the attitude of the New Left Weathermen, not of Leninists whose enemies are the imperialists and not their conscripts.

Underneath this policy common to the SL and the New Left is the conception that the working class has to be tricked into revolutionary consciousness by a clever leadership wielding good (or jolting) ideas. The Marxist understanding has always been that material reality, the workings of the laws of motion of capitalism, will prove to the workers the necessity of communism through the intervention of the most advanced, revolutionary layer of the class. Idealists like the SL downplay the capacity of human beings to understand the nature of capitalist misery and to overcome it. In manufacturing positions to jar its "revolutionary cadre" into line, the SL reveals its lack of confidence in Marxism and its consequent need to produce a false reality not based on the genuine struggles of the proletariat. Robertson's speech and the SL's defense of it constitute a conscious shock treatment designed to prove to the Spartacist membership that loyalty to the international working class is incompatible with being part of the "vanguard."

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Rail Strike: Revolutionaries and the Unions

We publish here an account and interpretation of the 1978 Norfolk & Western Railway strike, together with our reply to the political questions raised. The account is by Stephen Swan, who has worked in the railroad industry and is a supporter of the international line of G. Munis and the Fomento Obrero Revolucionario, as expressed in the publications *Alarma* and *Alarime* (Paris). Comrade Swan is also the writer of the letter on the Spartacist League published in *Socialist Voice* No. 4. Inquiries should be addressed to Stephen Swan, at No News, P.O. Box 26481, San Francisco, CA 94126, U.S.A.

82 DAYS — FOR NOTHING?

1978 saw two major conflicts between U.S. workers and employers: the spring coal strike and the September national railroad workers walkout. Both strikes focused on issues of worker solidarity rather than wages. Most important, of course, was the coal strike, in which employers and mine union officials attempted to institute a contractual ban on wildcat strikes. The miners themselves totally rejected the strike-banning contract, and the ensuing confrontation stimulated a massive rebirth of pro-worker sentiment throughout the country. When the miners finally went back to work, it was with the right to strike intact.

The September railroad strike had origins in the July 10 walkout of 4500 clerks on the Norfolk & Western Railway (N&W) but eventually included over 330,000 workers. The N&W strike was "settled" in the first week of 1979 without fanfare from either side; the national press took no notice, perhaps because the strike spread everywhere in the country except New England and New York, and its impact outside the railroad industry was therefore diminished. Still, the N&W strike was a historic step, and because issues and the role of the union leaders were not so well defined as in the coal strike, the rail conflict is worth a summary review with some perspectives.

Railroad clerks, the initiators of the N&W strike, number about 110,000 in the U.S., including office and station clerical workers, janitors, telegraphers, dispatchers, station and dock laborers, baggage handlers and sleeping car porters. The clerks historically were the lowest paid and least militant railroad workers and among the last workers in basic industry to attain "labor-aristocrat" wages. In 1971, in response to a Teamster Union threat to organize the highly-dissatisfied clerks, the government approved Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks (BRAC) carried out a peaceful and successful campaign for wage parity of the clerks with the other, more militant and better paid railroad crafts. The 1971 contract called for a 43.6 percent rise in wages over 3½ years. Today's average rail clerk's wage is \$13-14,000, excluding "benefits" and before taxes. Today's clerks, whose expectations have continued to rise throughout the decade, are the new center of anti-boss power in the railroad industry.

The Norfolk & Western Railway, target of the strike, is one of the country's three most profitable railroads, the others being the Chessie System and Union Pacific. N&W's profits in

1st half 1978 were \$55.9 million, as compared to \$68.6 million in 1st half 1977. N&W's mainline trackage extends from the Carolinas to Iowa and from Canada to Kansas City. N&W President J. P. Fishwick is the country's highest paid railroad official, at \$413,000.

The source of N&W's bounty is coal; in 1977, N&W was the country's second largest coal hauler after the Chessie System, accounting for 62.5 million tons of coal originated on the company's lines (compare 77.6 million for the Chessie System). N&W is centered in the Appalachian and heavy industry districts that were most affected by the Spring coal strike; N&W is directed from Virginia, and N&W workers commonly refer to their bosses' "plantation mentality." Naturally, N&W President Fishwick was Carter's finance chairman in Virginia, during the 1976 election.

But the specific grievances of N&W workers are not uniquely Appalachian or Southern, nor are they limited to railroad workers. The grievances of all railroad workers are: automation, hazardous conditions, and tyranny. The replacement of workers through computerization is proceeding apace on major roads in both halves of the country. Explosions of negligently maintained tank cars regularly claim a minute or so on TV news. As for tyranny: forced overtime and even 7-day weeks are institutionalized in many yards and divisions, and the 7-day week is often the dark secret behind the "traditional and strike won" high pay of conductors, engineers, and brakemen; these same operating crafts are, on many railroads, so victimized by the company's abuse of "rule books" as a basis for draconic discipline that the majority of train crew members buy "job insurance," sold as insurance by the unions through the Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund (BRCF). On one western division of a transcontinental railroad company, the Brotherhood's job insurance funds are running a deficit of several tens of thousands of dollars over the fees paid, thanks to the iron-butt attitude of a certain superintendent. And since tyranny and feudalism go together, it's worth noting that the majority of railroad workers, i.e. all except the clerks, are denied sick pay.

The N&W strike began on July 10. The "trigger" was the N&W management's adamant refusal to negotiate the acceleration of computerization and job elimination, in which N&W is the national pacesetter. N&W management's attitude was perceived by workers as deliberately provocative of a strike. (To a great extent the progress of events indicated the veracity of that assumption.) The picket lines set up by the 4500 clerks were immediately honored by the railroad's 15,000 plus other workers. The enthusiastic response of the non-clerical workers reflected not only hatred of the N&W's management, but also the resentment of switchmen and other operating workers whose "representatives" were just at that moment openly preparing to force a new contract on their members, a contract calling for wage cuts, in line with the classic corporate anti-inflation strategy. N&W's operations were brought to a complete halt. A company force consisting of management people and their relatives attempted to keep a fraction of normal traffic moving.

The official leadership of the strike consisted of the top brass of the BRAC, headed by International President F. J. Kroff, and including such an interesting individual as J. F. Otero, International Vice President, the subject of much attention in Philip Agee's famous *CIA Diary*. The fact that J. F. Otero was long the head of CIA labor operations in Latin America has been commented on with great disquiet by members of BRAC at union meetings. Otero's fellow International Vice Presidents and their flunkies have, naturally, always replied in "Brother" Otero's best interests. When a member of the Brotherhood's "ground team" in the N&W strike was, several years ago, confronted on the floor of a meeting with the *CIA Diary* citations, the anointed defender of railroad clerks on the field of battle replied "Jack Otero is one of my closest friends and is a deeply patriotic American." With gentlemen like Jack Otero prominently on hand, the first weeks of the N&W strike were predictably quiet. N&W's management claimed that its scabs were keeping business open.

But by the beginning of August the N&W company was on the verge of embargoing its precious coal traffic. On the night of August 2-3 the game changed. N&W railway police, armed but out of uniform, assaulted picketers in Bellevue, Ohio. This was the worst of many such incidents; rail workers in the rest of the country would soon hear from the most authoritative sources that in Virginia "both sides" of the picket line were armed. On August 3, N&W management, in spite of its "valiant" railway cops, filed their official embargo on all coal and coke shipments, "account work stoppage."

In the second week of August the game changed again. Rail clerks in the rest of the country learned that the N&W was deliberately refusing to negotiate with the strikers, because of the company's involvement in a mutual aid pact with 73 other railroad companies. N&W management was receiving over \$800,000 per day in strike insurance payments, allowing it to cover its losses for the duration. Mutual aid pacts are nothing new to the transportation industry (the most famous being the airlines'), and particularly to N&W. In 1971 N&W reported receiving \$737,000 per day in mutual aid funds during the summer operating crafts' strike. The rail clerks' response to news of the latest such adventure was more dramatic than the news itself: a majority favored an immediate national strike against the mutual aid pact. That week on the West Coast the Committee to Aid Railway Strikers (CARS) was formed. On August 14 BRAC head Kroff finally informed the union's members of the details of the mutual aid pact and the fact that the company was now attempting to expand its scab-run traffic, and also reminded the union's members of the union's considerable financial requirements. At least the N&W strike was no longer obscure.

On August 24 N&W filed suit in federal court, charging the strikers with interference in its business. That day's *Wall Street Journal* reported the layoff of 12-14,000 coal miners in Virginia, 11,000 in West Virginia, and hundreds more in Ohio and eastern Kentucky, thanks to the unavailability of rail service. On August 27, U.S. District Court Judge Aubrey F. Robinson granted a petition by the railroad companies involved in the mutual aid pact and issued a restraining order barring sympathy strikes against the mutual aid roads. Over the weekend of August 30-September 1, the mutual aid roads suddenly began advertising their strike-breaking. N&W locomotives appeared for servicing in rail terminals as far away as California, and were used as much as possible in main line and switching work.

In some Western terminals, threats by clerks to strike at the first appearance of the scab locos kept N&W's units out of sight. On September 4 (Labor Day) the Committee to Aid Railway Strikers held a public benefit in San Francisco to raise funds for strikers assaulted by railway cops at Bellevue. The benefit was well attended, a pamphlet on the strike, titled *NW: New Wave of Strikes*, was widely distributed by CARS supporters. On September 5, workers struck the Chicago North Western Railway for ten hours; CNW was one of many Chicago roads keeping up an interchange with the struck N&W, and the CNW strike was specifically in sympathy with the N&W strikers. That same day N&W's coal embargo number 6-78 was amended, with coal to be shipped "to the extent permitted by the number of qualified train crews." Another advertisement of strikebreaking — and rumor was that N&W intended to permanently replace the strikers, under new work rules. On September 7 N&W strikers picketed Conrail facilities in the Great Lakes area, on the issue of interchange with the struck road. 3000 Conrail clerks struck. The next day a Conrail management obtained court order sent the clerks back to work.

Strike Goes Nationwide

Judge Robinson, who earlier had sustained the mutual aid roads' request for injunctive relief against sympathy strikes, seems to have reconsidered in these few days. On September 13 Robinson denied the mutual aid roads' petition for a permanent restraining order, in Robinson's words, the companies had "legally subjected themselves to secondary strike action." That day the clerks' official leaders throughout the country began to be heard. On the Southern Pacific, in San Francisco, BRAC issued strike instructions. On September 15 Conrail and the operating craft unions reached an agreement for reductions of train crews that promised loss of some 4500 Conrail jobs. A penny-pinching wages agreement was thrown in, calling for a "sacrifice" of back pay — around \$500 — for the workers. On September 18 arguments on the legality of a secondary strike were submitted to the Supreme Court. And on September 20 the dam broke: 2200 clerks shut down the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, another coal-hauling giant, run from the South and extending from Florida to Chicago. Pickets also appeared at the Delaware & Hudson and Western Maryland roads, two minor line-haul routes, and at the Peoria & Pekin Union and Toledo, Peoria & Western short lines. Everywhere, the issue was solidarity with the N&W strikers!

On September 26 the strike went well and truly national. Chief Justice Warren Burger stated the Supreme Court's refusal to block picketing of railroads involved in the N&W mutual aid pact. The strike hit the Santa Fe, Southern, Burlington Northern, Seaboard Coast, Union Pacific, Chessie, and Chicago North Western, shutting them all down. In Chicago, 50,000 commuters found out about the N&W strike and had to get home on their own. Amtrak passenger service ended throughout the midwest. On September 27 330,000 railroad workers were on strike. It was the 80th day of the N&W strike.

The next day Southern Pacific was struck, but SP commuter service was kept open for the day as a courtesy to the Bay Area's 4500 or so non-BART rail commuters. Also in the Bay Area, the fairly small Western Pacific Railroad was struck. That night, pickets at the Santa Fe yards from the Bay Area to Chicago burned copies of an anti-strike injunction issued on

September 26, by U.S. District Court judge Alfred V. Kirkland. This excellent fuel for so many bonfires was provided by the Santa Fe railway police. Next morning, September 29, two-thirds of the country's rail system was out,



Union pickets during 1978 railroad strike. Over 300,000 were out at height of the walkout.

and the press featured an order from President Carter sending the clerks back to work and Judge Robinson's refusal to give the order legal force. But that afternoon, a deal was worked out: Robinson suddenly issued the anti-strike order, and International President F. J. Kroll of the BRAC concurred!

With this action, the strike was simply suppressed, at its moment of greatest power. Faced with a bewildered mass of strikers, Kroll "explained" that in return for a promise to end the strike, he had secured an agreement by the railroad companies not to punish the strikers. To the papers, Kroll was happy, calling this blatant act of betrayal "a tremendous victory!" A victory over the strikers, perhaps! To shore up his image, Kroll arranged for union officials in various parts of the country to paint exaggerated pictures of measures prepared by the railroads against the strikers, as if the strikers weren't ready to face whatever the companies threw at them. There is evidence that the companies would have tried to lay off as many strikers as possible at the conclusion of picketing, but such actions are part and parcel of almost every strike, which is why most strikes end with amnesty agreements; but amnesty was no justification for ending the N&W strike! The federal government now served notice that it would decide on the merits of the strikers' complaints against the N&W. So the strikers obeyed Kroll! On September 30 certain foremen returned to work. Most workers didn't return until the end of the weekend, on October 2. But they returned, nonetheless.

In the following weeks the *Wall Street Journal* reported some effects of the strike. Many auto assembly plants around the country had closed or shortened shifts on September 29. GM Southgate furloughed 4000 that day, and 2750 parts workers were laid off at other GM plants. Soft coal production fell from 14.2 million tons the week before the strike to 8.2 million tons during the strike. On the other hand, D. B. Jenks, chief executive officer of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, claimed that the strike cost MoPac only one day's loadings. On October 9 Judge Robinson signed a permanent injunction against the N&W strike, and all sides sat back to wait for the government's report.

In the second week of October the Director of Unemployment and Sickness Insurance of the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB), E. E. Koch, announced by circular letter that unemployment claims for the dates of the clerks' national action, beginning September 26, would not be honored. Although the Railroad Retirement Board, the federal agency covering railroad workers, had defined the action as a "legal" strike, the board's position was that unemployment due to strikes was not a payable basis for a claim until the worker had lost eight days. Naturally, strikers on the N&W were exempt from this ruling and collected unemployment payments from the beginning of their 82 days on the picket line. But railroaders noted that this stand of the RRB on unemployment pay for time lost because of strikes was apparently an innovation: in 1976, for example, workers on one transcontinental railroad were paid by the RRB for one day's work lost on account of a wildcat strike by the Teamsters. Many similar cases can be cited.

On October 10, Mr. Kroll of the BRAC addressed a letter to the members of "his" union, quoting a federal injunction and an agreement to break the strike worked out between BRAC and the railroad companies. Kroll's letter contained no explanations of why the strike had been so suddenly ended. Kroll provided no evidence of the "tremendous victory" he had hailed in the nation's press while sending the clerks back to work. And indeed, no evidence was forthcoming.

On October 23 the *Wall Street Journal* noted a \$300,000 loss in 3rd-quarter 1978, as compared with a \$18.7 million profit in 3rd-quarter 1977, for Occidental Petroleum (the leading U.S. commercial partner of Libya and the USSR), thanks to the N&W strike. The next day the *Journal* reported the net income of the N&W company itself down 40 percent for 3rd-quarter 1978.

Meanwhile, the federal government carried out its process of intervention in the strike. Until September 26, of course, the national authorities had left the N&W conflict unnoticed. The spread of the strike, backed up with Burger's Supreme Court decision favoring the strikers, had caught the Carter administration by surprise, and when Carter and his advisers finally found a way of dealing with the strike and its "devastating effect on the economy" (according to national media), it was by recourse to the provisions of the Railway Labor Act.

The Railway Labor Act is a bizarre body of rules and amendments that separates railroad workers from all other workers by funneling their equivalent of Social Security through the Retirement Board, by authorizing "adjustment boards" composed equally by representatives of the railroad companies and of the Brotherhoods, and by effectively banning strikes. The Act has a "corporatist" (i.e. semi-fascist) character. It is, in fact, almost entirely the product of the first year of the F. D. Roosevelt administration, when Roosevelt and his friends had not yet made their distinct turn towards liberal imperialism and were still experimenting with schemes borrowed from Mussolini and Hitler. On the second day of the national solidarity action, when Carter first began citing the Act as his basis for ordering the clerks to go back to work, railroad workers in many places realized that the Act had never been tested in court and might, in fact, be overturned by Burger.

But the Railway Labor Act was not and will not be tested in court. Even though corporate and federal pressure has recently turned against the Act, as a modernizing step, the Act is necessary to corporations and government in order to suppress strikes. And, too, the union officials will never attack

the Act for the simple reason that a section of the Act protects their income: the Act specifically states that paid representatives of workers on the "adjustment boards" will be chosen not by the workers themselves, through elections, but by the federal government, through certification of "legitimate" representatives. Criteria for such certification are not stated by the Act. But the coziness of the relations between the government and the "regular labor organizations", as the leaders of the Brotherhoods love to call themselves in their press, may be indicated by the single, simple fact that unemployment payments for suspension and dismissal on disciplinary grounds, while theoretically a right enjoyed by each and every railroad worker, are dependent on whether or not the union acts as representative in the disciplinary matter.

Of course, there is another reason why Kroll and BRAC did not challenge the Railway Labor Act during the national strike. Kroll and the BRAC leaders did not want to win the strike. They wanted only to give the 110,000 railroad clerks in the U.S. a chance to let off a little steam, to better whip them into line. Some might quarrel with this analysis, and some might object to splitting hairs over the legality of the Railway Labor Act. But it is unfortunately the truth that the large number of people all over the country who were watching the rail strike unfold did not expect the railroad workers to honor Carter's order to return, since the coal miners, earlier in the year, had successfully defied a similar legal maneuver based on the Taft-Hartley Act. And if the railroad workers, like the coal miners, had refused to return and had defied Carter to the end, it is highly probable that many, many people around the country would have supported the railroad workers. A sad confirmation of this is that for the first three weeks of October it was quite common for railroad workers who had joined the walkout to be asked by their friends in other trades if they were still out on strike.

Another indication of Kroll & Co.'s real attitude toward the strike may be the exclusion of Conrail's many thousands of clerks from the strike after its Supreme Court-sanctioned expansion on September 26, even though Conrail had struck to support N&W strikers on September 7. Thanks to Conrail's absence from the national action the effect of the movement in the New York-New England area was almost totally nullified, and that meant almost no real national media coverage.

Under the provisions of the Railway Labor Act, the government's determination on the N&W strike was due within 60 days. The railroad workers had no way of knowing what actions the federal bureaucrats were likely to take, and of course no further counsel could be expected from the union officials. The workers stayed in limbo. On October 26 Carter's economic mouthpieces announced that railroad clerks would be exempted from the proposed voluntary 7 percent ceiling on wage increases, because the operating crafts had settled a little higher, and to impose a limit on the clerks would constitute intra-industry discrimination. On October 30 the *Wall Street Journal* reported an 80 percent decline in earnings by the Seaboard Coast Line, owner of the Louisville & Nashville and another massive coal hauler, for 3rd-quarter 1978 on account of the N&W strike. That week's statistics, however, disclosed \$228.7 million in profits for all railroad companies in 3rd-quarter 1978.

In the first week of December certain car and locomotive maintenance unions settled their national negotiations with the railroads. The clerks were now the only major group of railroad workers without a national contract. On December 11 it was reported that the Federal Railroad Administration had issued the following fines for violations of safety standards:

against Conrail, \$1.2 million, against Chessie System \$1 million, against Illinois Central Gulf, \$748,000, and against Norfolk & Western \$671,000. The list went on. On December 15, two weeks beyond 60 days, the U.S. government announced its recommendation in the N&W strike.

The report of the "president's emergency board" was taken under advisement by Kroll and the other leaders of BRAC, who communicated nothing about its contents to the N&W strikers and other railroad workers. A piece in the *Wall Street Journal* of December 18 dealt with the report in the sketchiest terms, noting little more than the board's proposal on the issue of job elimination, which was that protection should be extended only to workers with a minimum of three years' seniority, and then only if workers occupied permanent bulletined positions. Workers on extra boards, regardless of seniority, were to be excluded from protection.

This three-year protection rule, which some union bureaucrats were quick to acclaim, may be only a part of a joint corporate and federal strategy to reduce railroad workers' rights. During contract negotiations in all crafts this past year, company representatives called (apparently unsuccessfully) for a dramatic change in hiring practices: a change in the period of probation, during which the new worker can be dismissed without cause, from the first 60 days of employment to the first three years.

The board's report stated that if the union (not the N&W clerks) rejected the proposed settlement, the strike could legally resume on January 14. On January 5, 1979, the Brotherhood of Railway & Airline Clerks and the management of the Norfolk & Western Railway announced that there would be no resumption of the strike. The government's proposals had been accepted. The agreement would be ratified on January 8.

Government Settlement Ratified

Over the weekend of January 6-7, BRAC local officials on the N&W system faced a hostile and anxious membership. The new agreement, heralded by Kroll, had not been communicated from BRAC's Washington headquarters to the strikers. N&W workers considered the government's proposals, or what little they had found out about them from the media, worthy only of complete rejection. While the government supposedly secured the job of every clerk with over three years' seniority, the exemption of extra board workers provided the N&W management with the neatest but most obvious loophole imaginable. Normal practice on the railroads over many decades has been to lay workers off on the basis of seniority, starting from the bottom of the seniority list. The first workers laid off, those with the least seniority, are almost always those who work the extra board, for the simple reason that extra board jobs are the least attractive. So first the low seniority extra board workers are laid off, leaving the extra board open. Then the positions of the higher-seniority workers are abolished one by one, with the arrangement formerly having been that high seniority workers whose jobs are abolished could then go on the extra board, with a protected seniority date keeping them out of the unemployment office. But under the Carter board's proposals, the company can abolish the positions of high seniority workers, pushing them down on to the extra board, and then simply get rid of them as extra board workers. The N&W workers, interviewed by a supporter of the Committee to Aid Railway Strikers, knew that acceptance of this hole in the N&W agreement was the reason why Kroll and his gang were hiding the text from the mem-

bers. "We were out for 82 days — for nothing!" That was the opinion of an N&W worker in West Virginia, on the evening of January 7. "If Kroll asks us to go back out again, we won't go," the worker continued.

On January 8 the new N&W agreement was duly confirmed. Two days later the New York *Journal of Commerce* reported that Kroll was "very pleased." N&W President John P. Fishwick likewise expressed his satisfaction. Against Kroll and Fishwick there is still the verdict of the N&W clerks themselves: "82 days — for nothing!"

THESES ON THE NORFOLK & WESTERN STRIKE

1. The N&W strike was the first nationwide sympathy strike, and the first major non-contractual, non-wages strike in long memory. The N&W strike was a victory in that the railroad companies' mutual aid pact was exposed and defeated. With the N&W strike the "secondary" strike or boycott has been "taken back" as a weapon by U.S. workers, after decades of legal banning. Until now employers took for granted that secondary strikes were out of the question, thanks to "injunctive relief." This is why an unnamed railroad official, quoted in the San Francisco *Daily Commercial News* of September 27, contended that the national action was nothing other than "(an) illegal wildcat." A 330,000-plus "illegal wildcat!" A national sympathy strike in a major industry is a giant step forward for the new workers' movement, and has important precedents in railroad worker history: for example, the Pullman Strike of 1894, which *failed*.

And, of course, the strike was a positive experience in its demonstration of the railroad workers' ability to shut the country down.

2. The negative aspect of the N&W strike may be summed up by the phrase: "F. J. Kroll and the Brotherhood of Railway & Airline Clerks." The strike was broken by the union.

From our point of view, the treason of the unions is not a matter of good vs. bad officials. What must be called into question is the function of the unions themselves, as institutions. Kroll and his bureaucrats are not inherently evil men; as the Sparracists and other union electoralists imply. Krollism is simply an expression of the historic role of unions, which is to serve as a buffer between the employers and the workers, especially when the workers rebel. Most industrial workers know that, and that's why "members" boycott union meetings on the railroad, in longshore, and in every other industry from coast to coast. As well they should!

Unions only defend union officials and their cliques among that stratum of high seniority workers who are beneficiaries of a century of whites-only hiring in the rail industry and elsewhere. Furthermore, the older, racist and sexist workers and their representative union officials are nearly always bitterly hostile to younger workers (whose work is more demanding and very often more dangerous). Union officials gladly serve as company police against younger workers.

Furthermore, union officials act as bankers, through their control of credit unions and pension funds. Their role as bankers and investors depends not on their success as money managers (unlike normal bankers and investors), but on their continued control of union posts. Thus union officials represent a stratum of businessmen whose base in capital is inseparable from their functions as "representatives," "delegates," etc. Truly the seedbed of state capitalism!

This issue of rail union involvement in banking is nothing

new. Much anti-Brotherhood sentiment among railroad workers in the 1930's rested on the banking issue. But today we know of a railroad credit union that is the landmark case in credit union fraud in one Western state, where credit unions are under investigation for corruption.

Something related to this, on the question of the base in capital of the union bureaucrats, comes to us from the maritime industry. When the seagoing unions negotiated new contracts with the Pacific Coast shipping companies recently, the unions obtained a rise in "benefits" without a rise in cash wages. In effect, the maritime union officials provided for themselves, but not for the members! Only the pension funds — the union officials' capital — are filled up by a rise in benefits. That is how the employers pay the union officials off!

In the case of the railroad unions, their anti-worker role is even more obnoxious for being supported by the quasifascist Railway Labor Act, and by such not-to-be-neglected items as BRAC's involvement, through Job Corps, in the state training of workers — docile workers.

3. Trying to take over the unions against the efforts of the union officials, the employers, and their passive supporters, is an *action against the workers*. Local unions, even when "taken over" by rebel groups, *always* experience the rapid degeneration of the rebels and the even more-rapid demoralization of those who follow them. This is an iron law. The role of middleman between the boss and the worker takes over and corrupts even the most sincere, most radical unionists. Too many such cases can be cited.

Rebels can succeed in changing the direction of the railroad workers' movement away from defeats administered by union officials. Railroad workers who are opposed to the traitors should organize *assemblies* where each individual will have a single vote and where there are no permanent officials. Active rebels should collaborate with each other in *committees*. Not assemblies for the bureaucrats to explain the bad news to the ranks, and not committees of new bureaucrats! Their time is done! New weapons are necessary!

January 12, 1979

Appendix: THE SITUATION OF RAILROAD WORKERS

The Committee to Aid Railway Strikers (CARS) was organized in August 1978 by a group of Bay Area industrial workers, in collaboration with *The Dill* and other San Francisco new wave bands.

Because CARS functioned loosely, membership in it was funds for railroad workers on strike against the Norfolk & Western Railway. The N&W strike culminated in a 4-day national walkout in September.

Because CARS functioned loosely, membership in it was held by supporters of officials of the union involved in the N&W strike, the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks (BRAC). Others of us had the position that unions cannot be reformed, but must be surpassed, and that unions and union officials cannot escape acting in defense of the employers.

Those of us who hold the latter position have approved a decision to disband the Committee to Aid Railway Strikers, since we have come to the conclusion that no kind of alliance with union officials can be defended.

We have come to see that strikes run by union officials — like the N&W strike — are nothing but squabbles over who will ride herd on us. The unions are nothing but another set of bosses.

Railroad clerks are currently involved in a "ratification vote" on the contract proposed by the BRAC. Many, many clerks have declared their intention to vote NO. BRAC has responded with open promises of vote-rigging. *We supported a NO vote on the BRAC contract, but far better would be to boycott BRAC and its phony balloting.*

The only way forward is to organize committees and assemblies against the union bosses.

We, who, among many others, hold this position, are now discussing the formation of a new, strong, and active group of industrial workers. Our program will be a simple one: *Class War!*

January 26, 1979

LRP REPLY

Stephen Swan has written a valuable account of a major strike which received comparatively little attention in the bourgeois and radical press. Involving over 300,000 workers in varying degrees, the 1978 railroad strike demonstrated, even though it was betrayed, the enormous potential power of the working class. The strike seriously affected the financial position of the already shaky railroad bosses and had its impact as well on the crucial coal and steel industries. There is no question that the workers' trampling down of the barriers against secondary strikes and the enormous evidence of labor solidarity shook up the capitalists and their state. Further, the actions of F. J. Kroll and the BRAC leadership in hastily scuttling the strike are living proof that the mass eruption of the workers frightened these miserable agents of capital inside the working class.

Last but not least was the impact of the strike upon the railroad workers themselves. Comrade Swan quotes an N&W worker who said "We were out for 82 days - for nothing!" and concludes that this was "the verdict of the N&W clerks themselves." We do not question the accuracy of the quote nor that such a sentiment is very pervasive in the light of Kroll's betrayal. But Swan's own account also indicates that the workers themselves recognized how frantic the government, capitalists and union bureaucrats became in the face of the workers' mass power once they solidarized across union lines. This knowledge workers retain - along with the feeling many have that it was all for naught. The workers' gained new understanding but still have a very mixed consciousness.

Comrade Swan realizes this at least to an extent, for he presents some of the objective gains of the strike in his article: as well, by his actions in the strike and in writing his account, he is trying to draw the lessons of the strike for railroad and other workers from a revolutionary viewpoint. Deepening and advancing the revolutionary consciousness of our fellow workers is exactly the point of *Socialist Voice* and its companion publication *Socialist Action*, which is why we are printing the article. In this spirit, however, we are compelled to say that Swan's report points one way while his conclusions point another. While he seeks to overcome the pro-capitalist illusions of the mass of railroad workers and show them the revolutionary road, he actually falls victim to the same illusions. In our opinion his political views helped disorient himself and other revolutionary-minded workers in a disastrous direction.

The heart of Swan's analysis of what went wrong was the betrayal of the strike by Kroll and the union. For Swan this was not simply the act of a rotten bureaucrat but a treason inherent in unions, which must of necessity function as

bourgeois institutions. The union officials are businessmen who operate among the workers, and the unions are not workers' institutions, however inadequate, but tools of the capitalists. Therefore rebels in the unions are wrong to take them over when the task is to destroy them. Workers should build "assemblies" and "rebels" should unite together in "committees" to operate separately from, and in opposition to, the unions. Swan believes that this is the strategy that should have been followed during the struggle.

We do not quarrel with Swan's assessment of the activities of Kroll & Co. in the strike. The union bureaucrats are brokers for the buying and selling of labor power, and therefore the very existence of the bureaucratic layer in its normal role depends upon the healthy existence of capitalism.

The bureaucrats cannot represent the workers' true interests in revolution and the destruction of capitalism, and consequently they must try to inhibit the struggle at every turn. Nevertheless, in order to stay in business the bureaucrats must reflect *some* of the needs of the workers whose labor power they are dealing in. The degree to which this is necessary varies historically with the level of worker combativity and consciousness.

The workers today have, correctly, a deep distrust of the bureaucrats but they have put forward no alternative leadership. This is also a function of historic and social position. Workers in general know the bureaucrats accept capitalism and strive to keep the profit system going so that they can throw a few sops to the workers (or hope that fewer gains are taken away) in order to maintain their brokerage. They know this and also *accept* it. Most workers do not see the absolute necessity of overthrowing capitalism as communists do, and therefore they accept having to maintain the profitability of capitalism in order to keep their jobs and hold on to their wages. Of course they are divided in their own minds over this because their real material interests force them to struggle against the capitalists' profits, in a way that the bureaucracy is not forced by its *own* material interests.

The view that Comrade Swan puts forward is dangerously one-sided, not because it doesn't give enough blame to the bureaucrats, but because it underestimates the working class. In the N&W situation BRAC was forced to strike. Yes, it betrayed the strike and Kroll was intent on this from the start, but Kroll had to accept a strike because he had to try to keep control of the workers. Likewise, the other brotherhoods grudgingly went along with the solidarity actions of their members. The trade unions were historical gains created by the working class and still reflect the class struggle within capitalism although in a very circumscribed way.

Comrade Swan's ultra-left assessment of the unions led to a dangerous error. In the January 26 leaflet reprinted as the appendix to his article, Swan and his friends announced that it had been a mistake ever to have collaborated with union officials in defense of the strike. They further stated that they were wrong to have advocated a "No" vote against Kroll's sell-out contract: "Far better would be to boycott BRAC and its phony balloting." This position is untenable for working class revolutionaries such as Swan; it is fitting only for middle class commentators who can afford not to trouble themselves with material questions. The Kroll contract was going to hurt the workers if it passed, whether they voted or abstained, hated the union or loved it. Not to vote against such an instrument materially harmed the workers, and no ostrich-like stance could absolve the abstainers from the consequences. Ab-

attention meant turning the union's lack of democracy into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The bureaucratically controlled contract vote was only the faintest shadow of the workers' democracy that Swan is devoted to; even so, voting and campaigning against the contract was one avenue that the class struggle was forced to take. Abandonment of the union in this context literally became abandonment of the struggle for the needs of the workers against the interests of the bosses and bureaucrats.

Swan's action and his account of the utter lack of democracy in BRAC shows that much of his case rests upon the inability of the workers to control their unions. In his description of how assemblies would work he emphasizes their democratic features. We also advocate "assemblies" of this kind, which are similar to "factory committees," an historic Bolshevik demand and a leading slogan in the Trotskyist Transitional Program. While we consider that the unions are still vehicles for the defensive struggles of the workers, we are by no means trade union fetishists and we recognize their severe limitations. Assemblies of railroad workers during the strike could have drawn new layers of workers into the struggle in addition to those active in the union. Moreover, should the strike have kicked off a renewed miners' struggle and spread throughout the working class, such institutions would have had an embryonic dual power significance.

Workers' assemblies during the strike would have had to try to seize effective control over the strike and therefore could not have ignored waging a struggle within the unions. The bureaucracy, because of its ties to the working class as well as its institutional position within capitalism, cannot be sidestepped. The masses of workers, not yet imbued with a revolutionary consciousness — even if they had formed assemblies, which can be vehicles toward that consciousness — would have had to go through the union struggle. If by some miracle the assemblies could have displaced the unions without an internal combat, they would have had to act like unions, in effect to *be* unions, as long as workers retained the need for contracts and compromises under capitalism. They might be better and more democratic but would still be unions under a different name.

Swan's argument is essentially a democratic one: if assembly leaders are not paid and if there is a genuine one-man-one-vote policy, that is the key to transforming the working class. This, we are afraid, is only a more radical version of the petty-bourgeois program of groups like the Socialist Workers Party whose central solution to the capitulations of the bureaucracy is to call for the democratization of the unions. Democracy is essential but it is not in itself the key. "Democracy for what?" is the question. Since it is the capitalist state which is increasingly absorbing the unions and is the tool for the crumbling of union democracy and the capitulations of the bureaucrats, the central strategy must be a revolutionary political attack against that state. Democratic institutions of the working class — assemblies, unions or brotherhoods — will be built only through such a struggle.

Furthermore, democratic unions, even factory committees and Soviets, do not represent the revolutionary alternative by themselves. This is a matter of the revolutionary consciousness of the advanced workers, organized into a fighting instrument in the revolutionary party. Only such a party by providing leadership can give the mass institutions their potential revolutionary significance or even the ability to maintain "rank and file" democracy, which cannot survive under capitalism.

In Swan's situation within BRAC we would have made ourselves known as the advocates of a revolutionary party leadership in opposition to Kroll. In all likelihood only a small number of advanced workers would be attracted to that answer, but it would have been a beginning of the real solution. We would have tried to lead a fight inside the union (out of which assemblies might have grown) but focused on specific demands like strike committees. Without some program of this kind the assemblies will appear as talk shops, not groups designed for action. We would call for strike committees not only within BRAC but cutting across union lines. We would argue for wage, security and job condition proposals designed to bring all the rail unions out not just in solidarity with one group of strikers but for their common interest as well. We would try to force all the unions into a joint official strike, and would also call for breaking down the craft barriers and forming one unified railroad union.

Revolutionary Party Vital

In place of a revolutionary party Comrade Swan advocates committees of "active rebels" which will presumably play a role in struggling for the mass assemblies and in giving them leadership. Swan's term "rebels" lumps together both conscious revolutionaries (without specifically mentioning them) and anti-bureaucratic militants who do not necessarily have an anti-capitalist program. This notion of a vanguard workers' organization is strikingly similar to that of some of the "union electoralists" Swan is opposed to. Every "rank and file" caucus has its quota of "revolutionaries" who either conceal this fact or reveal it within the group to cover themselves from future exposure, but in any case do not fight for a revolutionary program in the union; centrist organizations like the International Socialists and the Maoist outfits specialize in this.

Typically the revolutionaries and militants in such caucuses gather together behind a limited reformist program and tell the ranks that this is what they need to better their conditions. If the rebel group wins power on this program, it generally happens that the leaders capitulate and become just another set of bureaucrats. Swan says so even more strongly in his theses: "Local unions, even when 'taken over' by rebel groups, always experience the rapid degeneration of the rebels and the even more rapid demoralization of those who follow them. This is an iron law."

He is off the mark. There is no iron law of organizational degeneration: it occurs under capitalism because there is a real law that a reformist minimum (that is, pro-capitalist) program will produce reformist actions. This occurs because a non-revolutionary leadership, however militant, must allow the capitalist profit system to function. This is true not only for unions but for workers' assemblies and even Soviets; the Menshevik-led Soviets during the Russian revolution were used for counterrevolutionary actions. No higher organizational form can overcome capitalist degeneration unless it struggles to overcome capitalism. The revolutionary content, not the organizational form, is what makes the difference. The higher form is necessary but not sufficient.

Like Swan, many workers identified the unions with the bureaucrats and chose to ignore union meetings and elections, expecting nevertheless that the bureaucrats would win something for them. The same material conditions, coupled with the international defeat of the working class through the capitulation of its misleaders at the end of World War II, are responsible. But the situation is changing as

workers become aware that the prosperity period is over and will not return. Many are being compelled to turn back to the unions, the only defensive organizations they now have. It is crucial for revolutionaries to be there to fight for their program. This does not exclude revolutionaries and "rebels" working together in united fronts for joint actions, but it does exclude hiding the revolutionary program behind the facade of a "rank and file" caucus or a committee of "rebels."

Swans fatalistic view that the union bureaucracies cannot be defeated and his hesitation to form a clearly revolutionary nucleus are linked to another position that he shares with his mentor, Comrade Munis. Munis was a leading Trotskyist who strongly fought against the Fourth International's capitulations to bourgeois nationalism during the Second World War, and broke with it when he recognized that the counterrevolution had triumphed in the USSR with the restoration of capitalism in the late thirties. Seeing the workers' state, a world-historical achievement of the working class, seized and turned against the workers led many to conclude that all the workers' gains, including the bureaucratized trade unions, must suffer the same fate. Trotsky warned the state capitalist theorists of his generation against precisely such pessimism.

Indeed, those who regarded the USSR as a new class society stronger than decaying capitalism or as a new, strengthened form of capitalism were led to believe that the workers faced overwhelming odds. No better were the post-war Fabianist theorists, who imagined that Stalinism could substitute itself for the working class in making the socialist revolution and had created new "deformed workers states" (We have analyzed these theories in *Socialist Voice* No. 1, see also the article on the Transitional Program in this issue.) All three theories accepted the idea that Russia, China and Eastern Europe were societies lacking a Marxist law of motion leading to decay and the necessity of proletarian revolution. Pessimism

over the revolutionary capacities of the workers and a turn to the union or state bureaucracies was an almost inevitable result. The working class defeat and the period of prosperity were the major factors beneath these cynical views.

Munis and his followers took an ultra-left course instead. They rejected the bureaucracies but also threw out the bureaucratized working class institutions as hopelessly compromised. Munis writes in his 1974 book on the USSR *Party-State, Stalinism, Revolution* (in French) p. 44: "In sum, the two principal sources of the counterrevolution were nationalized property and the dictatorship of the party: these are always its firmest foundation."

Our own analysis of the capitalist counterrevolution in the USSR comes to quite opposite conclusions. First of all, nationalized property was a conquest only the proletariat could have achieved: it is a necessary although by no means sufficient condition for the conscious organization of the economy by the workers' state (see *Socialist Voice* No. 6). Wrested from the workers' hands and put to bourgeois uses it tends to devolve in the direction of traditional individuated capitalist property. Secondly, increasingly arbitrary rule by the Bolsheviks over the USSR was a bad necessity forced upon the isolated workers' state by the destruction of all other class institutions in the counterrevolutionary civil wars of 1918-1921. For the Bolsheviks to have abandoned nationalized property and the party monopoly of power at that time would have meant a rapid, and probably successful, bourgeois counterrevolution. A far better course was the struggle by the Trotskyist Left Opposition against the revolution's degeneration and for its internationalization, even though this struggle was defeated by Stalinism. Comrade Munis has conceded not only the defeat of the Russian workers' revolution but the inevitability of that defeat. It is no wonder that he and his followers concede the unions, nationalized property and apparently even the revolutionary party to the bourgeoisie. ■

Spartacist Chauvinism

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This indeed is the Spartacists' self-conception. They regard themselves as a party based on "declassed intellectuals" who bring socialism to the working class through a "leap from outside bourgeois society altogether" (*Marxist Bulletin* No. 9, Part III, see also our article on the SL, "The 'Marxism' of the Petty Bourgeoisie," in *Socialist Voice* No. 4). Two non-members express the position most succinctly and without guile in a passage quoted approvingly in *Spartacist Britain*, July 1979: "In fact the revolutionary vanguard should be declassed, otherwise they either have petty-bourgeois interests or the proletariat's illusions and chauvinism." Just which section of the proletariat could the comrades have in mind? Many workers have illusions, but it is the aristocracy of labor that holds the palm for chauvinism. The SL defines the proletariat as the aristocracy and concentrates its political work in that sector, it escapes neither petty-bourgeois interests nor aristocratic chauvinism.

The petty-bourgeois outsider position is the key to the Spartacist League. Its idealism is the outlook of middle class intellectuals who regard the clash of material interests to be degrading. For the SL the workers' interests are base; only the "declassed intellectuals" are without the "appetites" that

corrupt the mundane classes of society. The Spartacists' ubiquitous term "appetites" expresses the disdain of those who are not presently driven by the stark material necessities of the masses. Yet "appetite" is the foundation of communism, the material aspiration to better conditions in terms both of bread and of cultural, emotional and intellectual needs. This is clearly not to be grasped by those who sit "outside bourgeois society altogether," atop Mount Olympus drinking nectar from a skyhose.

The SL's viewpoint is precisely that of the professional middle classes who are not directly tied to the means of production, and who therefore see neither the workers' interests nor the bourgeoisie's systemic necessity to accumulate capital that underlies its undoubtedly nasty greed. Their capacity to condemn the appetites of all classes makes them useful servants of the bourgeoisie who need to have the masses' needs controlled. There is room here for the Spartacists, with their special faculty for stating the hard "truth" about the oppressed peoples that more reticent leftists cannot bring themselves to do. Robertson is training a cadre indeed, but not for the proletarian revolution. Eventually the bourgeoisie will put such purposeful corruption to use. ■

Myth and Reality of th

1979 is the hundredth anniversary of Leon Trotsky's birth, and 1978 was the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International and its adoption of the Transitional Program. This Program, widely considered to be the definitive document of Trotskyism, has been put to a severe test during these anniversary years: revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situations have broken out in Peru, Iran and now Nicaragua, and some of the nominally Trotskyist organizations on the scene have been able to apply their versions of the Transitional Program to ongoing revolutions.

It is our contention that the Program has been treacherously misused. Designed for the "systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution," it has been put to purely reformist purposes by centrists masquerading as Trotskyists. The main organization responsible is the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), whose two wings are led by Ernest Mandel and the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Groups under the USec's guidance have helped waste tremendous opportunities for the proletariat and have dragged the Transitional Program through the mud of "democratic" parliamentarism and pacifism.

The foremost task of revolutionaries in a revolutionary situation is to win the working class for the conquest of state power, the proletarian revolution. This does not mean simply propagandizing for the dictatorship of the proletariat (or workers' state) — although this certainly must be done; it means the use of all political tactics and slogans to prove to the mass of the working class that this goal is the only way forward. It means explaining at every opportunity that working class power can be won through revolutionary means only, the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus, not through the accumulation of democratic and partial reforms.

Parliamentarism in Iran and Peru

The chief tool for the United Secretariat's betrayal is the "workers and farmers' government" (or simply "workers' government"), the central slogan in the Transitional Program that deals with the question of state power. This slogan was devised by the early Communist International as a revolutionary tactic for breaking the working class from its reformist leaders by demonstrating their ties to bourgeois state power. It was adopted in the 1930's by the Fourth International to win the workers away from the Popular Front coalitions with the bourgeoisie organized by the Social Democratic and Stalinized Communist Parties. But it had also been used in a purely "democratic" and reformist way by Stalin's Comintern in the late 1920's.

By itself, the slogan of the "workers' government" is most likely to be understood as a change in government to the benefit of working class parties, the examples of the British Labour Party in power or the Unidad Popular of Salvador Allende in Chile are the most prominent. No government of a capitalist state, even if composed entirely of working class

parties, represents a revolutionary workers' state. These regimes are not at all what the tactic in the Transitional Program means. Using the slogan by itself is therefore insufficient; it has to be given the specific revolutionary content. In the hands of the USec, however, the slogan is given a specific content that is entirely parliamentary.

In Peru, a mass upsurge including widespread general strikes forced the ruling military junta to call for elections to a Constituent Assembly in the summer of 1978. Most of the "Trotskyist" parties combined in an electoral bloc known as FOCEP, which included the "workers' and peasants' government" in its program and continually fostered the illusion that such a government could be achieved through the bourgeois-dominated Assembly. Hugo Blanco of the USec was FOCEP's main spokesman and the most prominent working class representative because of his reputation as a fighting leader of peasant uprisings in the 1960's. Blanco issued a draft constitution calling for a government based upon elected committees of workers and peasants. He stressed the democratic organizational forms in his draft, called for a democratic convention of workers' and peasants' organizations to amend



A meeting of the new Russian soviet in March, 1917, the workers, soldiers and peasants and formed the basis

ent" vs. Workers' State

The Transitional Program

and finally adopt the constitution — and added as the final step that "the draft should then be presented by the workers' candidates elected to the Constituent Assembly" (*Intercontinental Press*, June 19, 1978). The masses were not told that a workers' government means a revolutionary confrontation with the armed state power of the bourgeoisie. And this document was not an isolated exception. Throughout his several speeches as an Assembly delegate widely reprinted by the USec press, Blanco created the impression that "governments elected by the people" are the road forward to "workers' and peasants' power."

In Iran, after the overthrow of the Shah in January, the HKS (Socialist Workers Party) was set up jointly by the two wings of the USec and the Organizing Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International. HKS leaders had previously explained their goal of a workers' and peasants' government as follows:

"The republic for which we struggle is not the replacement of the Shah by a president, nor even the replacement of all the reactionary elements by progressive functionaries and Moslems as

Khomeini demands, but the complete democratization from top to bottom of the state apparatus, based on elections and the possibility of recall at any time at the demand of the base." (*Inprecor*, French edition, January 18, 1979)

The state apparatus whose "complete democratization" is called for is the bourgeois state apparatus of the Shah and later the Ayatollah Khomeini. Despite the "workers' and peasants' government" label given to it, this call for a republic was in harmony, not opposition, to the bourgeois and predictably repressive Islamic Republic of Khomeini and his religious followers. The USec contributed to the illusion that Khomeini's republic could be democratized and that a constituent assembly could be set up without a struggle by the working class to destroy the Khomeini regime. In its proposed "Bill of Rights for the Workers and Toilers of Iran" (*Intercontinental Press*, February 5, 1979), the HKS called for such a constituent assembly to "consider establishing" the structural bases of a workers' and peasants' government.

The USec did go so far as to bring up socialism. An official statement, "The Third Iranian Revolution has Begun" (*Intercontinental Press*, May 7, 1979), described the tasks of the proposed workers' and peasants' government.

"Such a government would cement the bond between the workers and the poor peasants, mobilize the masses to expropriate the major branches of banking and industry, break the power of the imperialists and their native capitalist junior partners, institute a planned economy, and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, opening the way to socialism."

It was not mentioned in this comprehensive document that the task of "establishing" the dictatorship of the proletariat would be a violent one, requiring an armed clash with the armed forces of Khomeini and the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the HKS's Bill of Rights states that "the army must be democratized" — not defeated, a treacherous illusion to propagate among the unarmed masses.

The Incomplete Program

In these two outstanding revolutionary opportunities, Peru and Iran, the United Secretariat is using the goal of socialism when it gets mentioned at all — as a cover to support the chimerical democratization of the Bonapartist bourgeois regimes. It bemoans each inevitable betrayal of democracy by these regimes after having deceived the masses that democratization was possible. It sees a fraudulent bourgeois democracy evolving peacefully into the real workers' democracy of the masses. It avoids raising to the masses the necessity of smashing the bourgeois state and erecting a workers' state. This strategy not only betrays socialism but cannot even achieve real democratic gains. The USec uses the workers' and



This profoundly democratic institution was launched by of the revolutionary workers' state.

peasants' government as its chief tool in this deception by promising workers power but giving the demand a passive-electoralist, non-revolutionary meaning. The consequence in both Iran and Peru if the workers and peasants are not prepared for the revolutionary struggle, will be not just missed opportunities for socialism but a turn to savage reaction as in Chile.

How is it possible for the Transitional Program to be used this way? It is not the misinterpretation of words in the Transitional Program that has thrown the pseudo-Trotskyists off the revolutionary path. On the contrary, the degeneration of the Fourth International into centrism occurred over a quarter of a century ago under the impact of the massive defeat of the international working class during and after the Second World War (see our analysis in *Socialist Voice* No. 2); the fraudulent use of the Transitional Program is but one result of that decay. Today the revolutionary upsurge of the masses and therefore the struggle for a genuinely revolutionary program and leadership are at center stage. In various articles we have analyzed other aspects of the theories and practices of the pseudo-Trotskyists. Our specific purpose in this article is to rescue the Transitional Program from the myths created by its centrist interpreters, take apart the theoretical encumbrances that have been constructed around the workers' government slogan in particular, and resurrect the Program as the centerpiece of revolutionary policy that it was intended to be.

The Transitional Program (its exact title is "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International") was written by Trotsky as a draft program for the founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938. It acquired the name "Transitional Program" because the bulk of the document is devoted to a program, or system, of transitional demands "stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat." The quotation is taken from the book *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (TPSR) published by the SWP's Pathfinder Press (third edition p. 114), which contains the Program itself in addition to many of Trotsky's writings and recorded discussions on its significance. It is the only edition now widely available in the United States.

The SWP's title of this book expresses the myth of the Transitional Program — for although the purpose of the Transitional Program is to bring about the socialist revolution, it is not the "program for socialist revolution." The correct placement of the Transitional Program in the revolutionary armory should be evident from several specific statements by Trotsky. In the Program itself, he wrote

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands." (TPSR p. 114)

Of course the bridge to the socialist program of the revolution is not the same thing as that program. A few paragraphs further on, Trotsky made the same point in different words:

"The old 'minimal' program is superseded by the transitional program, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution." (TPSR p. 115)

Clearly Trotsky meant the transitional program to be a substitute for the "minimal" program and not for the

"maximal" program of socialist revolution. In fact the Program does not contain the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The entire Program leads in this direction, but that is precisely the point: it leads this way but falls short. Trotsky was perfectly aware of the omission. As he stated in one of the discussions on the Draft Program with his followers (June 7, 1938, *TPSR*, p. 173)

"The draft program is not a complete program....Also the end of the program is not complete, because we don't speak here about the social revolution, about the seizure of power by insurrection, the transformation of capitalist society into the dictatorship, the dictatorship into socialist society. This brings the reader only to the doorstep. It is a program for action from today until the beginning of the socialist revolution."

Why was the Transitional Program devised to lead only to the "doorstep" of the socialist revolution? That is in essence the subject of this entire article. But we can certainly say that Trotsky was not interested in any far left form of reformism, he did not intend to lead the working class to the revolution only to have the door slammed in its face. Nevertheless, the incomplete character of the program (in the sense Trotsky mentioned) has enabled centrists to use it as a weapon against the revolution.

The workers' government slogan is central to the misuse of the Program because it has been used in fact as a substitute for the missing slogan of the workers' state. It is no coincidence that the organizations which make this substitution are the same ones that thirty years ago, devised the theory that petty-bourgeois forces in Eastern Europe and China could substitute for the proletariat in making the socialist revolution. That, as we will show, is one of the keys to the misrepresentation today. At that time the expansion of Stalinism after World War II threw the Fourth International's theory into disarray, today, the false theory has been crystallized into a program for disguising Stalinist type reformism as Trotskyism. The substitution of workers' government for workers' state is nothing but the substitution of reform for revolution.

The Workers' Government Tactic

The correct use of the workers' government slogan is a complicated political question, made even more so by the fact that the major documents in which it is expounded are either contradictory and confusing in themselves (the resolutions of the Communist International in the early 1920's) or are only sketches of the entire body of theory (the Transitional Program). To recover the meaning of the slogan requires a review of its history in the light of the fundamental Marxist distinction between state and government.

In doing this we wish to establish two central conclusions among others. 1) The workers' government slogan is a tactical one which used correctly can lead to the revolution and the workers' state. It is to be raised at certain conjunctures in the class struggle and withdrawn at others; if it is used as an omnipresent strategy it becomes a substitute for the workers' state and serves only reformist purposes. 2) The slogan is agitational rather than propagandistic, in the sense that it codifies the idea of state power in a form accessible to large numbers of workers and does not in itself embody the full revolutionary implication that only the most advanced layer of workers will be prepared to accept. (Of course, it can be discussed in propagandistic writings as it is being discussed in

this article, but as a slogan it has only agitational significance.) Both of these conclusions indicate the limited and conjunctural character of the slogan. It has nothing in common with the universal substitute for the workers' state that has been made of it.

The scientific codification of transitional demands began at the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921. The revolutionary upsurge that swept through Europe, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and fueled by the hardships of wartime, had subsided. It left in its wake in many countries Communist Parties which generally had the allegiance only of minority sections of the working class. Often the reformist Social Democrats and centrists had an equal or larger influence in the proletariat. The problem facing the Communists was a tactical one. Because of the example of the Bolshevik Revolution, it was clearly understood that the Communist Parties stood for the strategy of overthrowing the bourgeoisie by revolutionary means. Yet the Social Democratic strength made it apparent that not all workers believed that course to be necessary to win their demands. The Comintern congress turned the tactic of the united front in order to prove to the reformist-led workers in joint struggle that the revolutionary strategy was in fact necessary.

The chief point at issue was the link between day-to-day struggles and the victory of socialism. The Social Democrats asserted that the gradual accretion of reforms, coupled with the growing electoral strength of their parties, would lead inevitably to socialism. The sifful prosperity in Europe at the turn of the century, derived from imperialism, had fostered the illusion that reform was a permanent capitalist institution and, moreover, that capitalism would be transformed into socialism through the democratic pressure of the masses without a revolution.

The illusion soon burst, and in the epoch of capitalist decay the minimum program of possible reforms proved to be no answer to the reality of life under capitalism. The minimum program held workers back from fighting for their daily needs, because capitalism in its crisis could not afford to grant even these. The Comintern found an alternative to the minimum program in the struggle for transitional demands:

"In place of the minimum program of the reformists and centrists, the Communist International mounts a struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands which taken together undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat and form the stages in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, and each of which expresses a need of the broad masses, even if they are not consciously in favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Such demands would be the basis for a united front approach to the Social Democratic workers. All the transitional demands were designed to break the workers from their reformist leadership and consciousness, not to linger over the difference between reformist and revolutionary outlooks. Every hesitation and refusal on the part of the reformist leaders to carry out such specific needs of the working class would undermine the Social Democracy's hegemony over its followers; on the other hand, every concrete step jointly fought for by Communist and Social Democratic workers, despite the hesitations of the reformists to demand what the capitalists claim they cannot afford to grant, would be a victory for the working class. In every case, it would be the

Communists who would hold the interests of the working class above any consideration of capitalist profitability and the Social Democrats who would refuse to go beyond limits determined by the bourgeoisie.

But there was one case in which it was the Communists, not the Social Democrats, who might appear to be the obstacle to a united front effort on behalf of the workers' joint interests. The Communists refused on principle to join the bourgeois governments of the various capitalist states, while the Social Democrats did not hesitate to do so, arguing that their participation in government enabled them to aid the working class. The Social Democratic supporters did not consider the bourgeois governments to be organs of the capitalist class alone; they voted for the reformists precisely to win a "share" of the governmental power. The Communists understood that working class representatives in bourgeois governments serve to deceive the masses rather than carry out their interests; yet this understanding had to be proved in practice to the Social Democratic workers who considered such participation a victory. The united front had to be extended to governmental power.

The Bolshevik Precedent

The Communists were able to turn to a precedent from the Bolshevik Revolution. During the period of the Provisional Governments which were coalitions between the openly bourgeois parties and the Mensheviks (reformist Social Democrats) and the Social Revolutionaries (supported by the majority of the peasantry), the Bolsheviks were faced with a similar tactical problem. Here the climate was revolutionary in that the Czarist regime had been overthrown and the workers and peasants were actively fighting to continue the revolution. Yet the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries dominated the soviets, the councils set up by the workers and peasants, and the Bolsheviks held only a small minority of seats. The Bolsheviks raised the slogans "Down with the Capitalist Ministers" and "All Power to the Soviets," in order to present the idea of an independent government of the workers' parties, based on organs of the masses, that would carry out necessary measures such as ending the imperialist war, distributing the land to the peasants, organizing food distribution in the cities.

If the Mensheviks and S.R.'s had broken with their bourgeois partners and carried out the Bolshevik demands, there would have been a "workers' and peasants' government" under the bourgeois state. The Bolsheviks would not have participated in such a government since the state apparatus would still have been that of the bourgeoisie but would have used the fact that the government would be based upon the soviets to fight for power within these bodies. They hoped to win a majority in the soviets by exposing the reformists' refusal to carry out their own promises even when not restrained by the bourgeois coalition. The "workers' and peasants' government" of the Mensheviks and S.R.'s would have existed for only a historical moment; its existence would have aided the Bolsheviks in bringing the class conflict to a head. Here is how Lenin explained the Bolshevik proposal:

"The compromise would amount to the following: the Bolsheviks, without making any claim to participate in the government (which is impossible for the internationalists unless a dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasants has been realized), would refrain from

demanding the immediate transfer of power to the proletariat and the poor peasants and from employing revolutionary methods to fight for this demand. A condition that is self-evident and not new to the S.R.'s and Mensheviks would be complete freedom of propaganda and the convocation of the Constituent Assembly without further delays ...

"The Mensheviks and S.R.'s being the government bloc, would then agree ... to form a government wholly and exclusively responsible to the Soviets, the latter taking over all power locally as well. ... I think the Bolsheviks would advance no other conditions, trusting that the revolution would proceed peacefully and party strife in the Soviets would be *peacefully overcome* thanks to really complete freedom of propaganda and to the immediate establishment of a new democracy in the composition of the Soviets (new elections) and in their functioning. ...

"The Bolsheviks would gain the opportunity of quite freely advocating their views and of trying to win influence in the Soviets under a really complete democracy. In words, 'everybody' now concedes the Bolsheviks this freedom. In reality, this freedom is *impossible* under a bourgeois government or a government in which the bourgeois participates, or under any government, in fact, other than the Soviets. Under a Soviet government such freedom would be *possible* (we do not say it would be a certainty, but still it would be possible). For the sake of such a possibility at such a difficult time, it would be worth compromising with the present majority in the Soviets. *We have nothing to fear from real democracy, for reality is on our side, and even the course of development of trends within the S.R. and Menshevik parties, which are hostile to us, proves us right.*

"The Mensheviks and S.R.'s would gain in that they would at once obtain every opportunity to carry out *their* bloc's program with the support of the obviously overwhelming majority of the people and in that they would secure for themselves the 'peaceful' use of the majority in the Soviets." ("On Compromises," in *Collected Works*, Volume 25, pp. 307-8)

One further point about Lenin's tactic must be stressed. The Bolsheviks withdrew the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" after the "July Days" of 1917 when the bourgeois government with the support of the Mensheviks and S.R.'s curtailed the soviets' powers and outlawed the Bolshevik Party. Lenin then argued that the soviets as working class institutions had been hopelessly compromised so that even a "soviet government" of Mensheviks and S.R.'s would plainly be a tool of the bourgeoisie. Later, after the Czarist general Kornilov had been defeated in his attack on Petrograd in an attempt to overthrow the Provisional Government, the slogans were taken up again by the Bolsheviks on the condition that their freedom of action be restored. The above quotation from Lenin comes from this period of the revolution. The fact that the slogans for the "workers' and peasants' government" were raised at times and withdrawn at others indicates their tactical nature. Lenin made this explicit in the same article quoted above:

"Our Party, like any other political party, is striving after political domination *for itself*. Our

aim is the dictatorship of the revolutionary proletariat.... We may offer a compromise to these parties only by way of exception, and only by virtue of the particular situation, which will obviously last only a very short time."

Lenin's proposal for a Menshevik-S.R. government comes in an essay entitled "On Compromises," and our excerpt describes the compromise that Lenin proposed. The obvious must be pointed out. Lenin's proposal was not part of the Bolshevik's fundamental program but a tactical compromise. It was made openly before the masses and not covertly, but it was a *deal* nevertheless. As well Lenin emphasizes, as will all future genuine united front proposals, that the Bolsheviks retain the right to criticize and propagandize during the compromise. They needed this freedom to prove to the workers the necessity of the workers' state, even while they engaged in a compromise over a "workers' government."

The Bolshevik's proposed compromise was not accepted. The Bolsheviks won a majority of the soviets nevertheless and were able to use this power as a base for the October Revolution that overthrew the bourgeois state. The united front tactic was successful even though not accepted, in that the Mensheviks' refusal to throw the bourgeois ministers out of the Provisional Government was an important element in undermining their influence among the masses.

The Bolsheviks offered another compromise to the centrists *after* the workers' revolution — a share in the government of the new workers' state. This offer was accepted for a time by the left wing of the Social Revolutionary party, reflecting the Bolsheviks' adoption of the S.R. programs for the division of the land among the peasantry. This was in effect an actual workers' and peasants' government, a bloc of a working class party (the Bolsheviks) and a peasant party (the S.R.'s) in power. The government was a united front whose key task was to defend the workers' state against bourgeois restoration; the question of "which state?" was still alive. The bloc with the Left S.R.'s was also meant to expose the vacillators and win the revolutionaries among them over to the Bolsheviks, which to a large extent it did.

The post-revolutionary workers' and peasants' government, although it happened to last only a brief time, was not the necessarily temporary event that a pre-revolutionary Menshevik-S.R. regime would have been. The difference was the class nature of the underlying state apparatus: the Menshevik government, a "workers' government" of a bourgeois state would have been inherently contradictory and would of course have brought the question of which class is to rule to the fore. Thus although the two forms of workers' and peasants' governments had common aspects, the united front in particular, they were two fundamentally different things.

The Fourth Comintern Congress

It was with the precedents of the Bolshevik Revolution in mind that the Fourth Congress of the Communist International turned to the slogan of the workers' government. The Comintern statement, was addressed to those countries where the bourgeois regime was unstable and the working class parties had substantial strength. It was designed to break the Social Democratic workers from their class collaborationist leaders by exposing the refusal of the reformists to break their ties with the bourgeoisie.

"... To the coalition, open or masked, between the bourgeoisie and the Social Democrats, the Communists counterpose the united front of all

workers and the political and economic coalition of all the workers parties against bourgeois power, in order to overthrow the latter once and for all. In the common struggle of all the workers against the bourgeoisie, the entire state apparatus must fall into the hands of the workers' government, and in this way the position of the working class will be reinforced.

"The most elementary program of a workers' government must consist of arming the proletariat, disarming the counterrevolutionary bourgeois organizations, installing control over production, placing the chief burden of taxation on the rich and breaking the resistance of the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie.

"A government of this kind is possible only if it arises out of the struggle of the masses themselves, if it is based on workers' organizations suited for combat and created by the widest layers of the oppressed working masses. A workers' government resulting from a parliamentary combination may also provide an opportunity to strengthen the revolutionary workers movement. But it is self-evident that the emergence of a genuine workers' government, and the continuation of such a government carrying out a revolutionary policy, must lead to the fiercest struggle and eventually to a civil war with the bourgeoisie. The mere attempt by the proletariat to form a workers' government will meet from the start the most violent resistance from the bourgeoisie. The slogan of the workers' government is therefore capable of focussing and unleashing revolutionary struggles."

The document thus clearly describes the nature of a workers' government under a bourgeois state as a destabilizing force that necessarily brings the question of the class nature of the state to the foreground of struggle and in fact precipitates the civil war with the bourgeoisie, under conditions of mass working class mobilization.

But the document also exhibits certain measures of confusion. It goes on to list five possible types of "workers' governments" that Communists have to anticipate:

(1) A liberal workers' government. There is already such a government in Australia; there may also be one before too long in England.

(2) A Social Democratic workers' government (Germany).

(3) A workers' and peasants' government. Such a possibility exists in the Balkans, in Czechoslovakia, etc.

(4) A workers' government in which Communists participate.

(5) A genuine proletarian workers' government, which in its purest form can only be embodied by a Communist Party."

The first two types are dismissed in the document as false workers' governments that "camouflage a coalition between the bourgeoisie and the counterrevolutionary leaders of the workers." However, it is inconceivable that such liberal or Social Democratic governments could ever carry out, or even adopt the "most elementary program of a workers' government" ("arming the proletariat," etc.) that the document provided. The Fourth Congress dismissed these two types from further consideration, noting only that Communists must not participate in them and that they "can objectively contribute to precipitating the process of decomposition of the bourgeois

regime." This is true of the Menshevik-S.R. government of 1917 which the Bolsheviks had tactically proposed, but it was not true of the Social Democratic and liberal governments of the twenties that the Comintern cited as examples. In fact, Labour Party or Social Democratic regimes placed in office in non-revolutionary situations are generally no more destabilizing of bourgeois rule than any other bourgeois government.

So certainly some clarification had to be made, but the above list instead embodies a number of confusions. First, a Social Democratic or liberal government would not at all counterpose the united front of all workers parties against the "coalition, open or masked, between the bourgeoisie and the Social Democrats." It would in fact be just such a masked coalition, aimed against the dictatorship of the proletariat. The slogan of the workers' government does not in itself make this obviously fundamental distinction, and should therefore not be used in a situation where a counterrevolutionary government of workers' parties is likely.

Secondly, the distinction among all five forms is made to depend on which parties participate in the government. That is one element but not the definitive one. For example the fifth, "genuine," category is designed to stand for the dictatorship of the proletariat because it is "embodied by a Communist Party." In Russia by 1922 the proletarian dictatorship was indeed embodied in the Communist Party alone. But the first post-revolutionary government had included non-Communists. The defining point of the proletarian dictatorship is not which parties make up the government but which class rules the state. The workers' destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus and the establishment of their own creates the workers' state. Communists will certainly be the leading force in the government of such a state, but for periods of time their party may share the power. (We now also know that petty-bourgeois forces may capture the governmental power in a degenerating workers' state, as in the Stalinist-ruled USSR in the 1920's and 1930's, so that a workers' state may have a non-Communist and non-workers' government.

The third and fourth types on the list best fit the Comintern's conception of how the workers' government slogan should be used. But there is a third confusion. The document at the very beginning states that "the workers' government ... should be used everywhere as a *general propaganda slogan*" as well as a "slogan of present-day political activity." However, the slogan is directed to agitational uses throughout the document and must not be confused with a general propaganda slogan on the question of power which can only be the dictatorship of the proletariat. The document at the end makes this very point:

"Communists are ready to make common cause with those workers, Social Democrats, Christians, non-party, syndicalists, etc., who have not yet recognized the need for the proletarian dictatorship. The Communists are also prepared, under certain circumstances and with certain guarantees, to support a non-Communist workers' government. But the Communists must at all costs explain to the working class that its liberation can only be assured by the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Since the pre-dictatorship types of workers' government are not inevitable stages towards the proletarian dictatorship, using the "workers' government" slogan as a general

propaganda slogan will lead to immense confusion. It would make the call for a workers' government into a permanent united front strategy with reformists (who, like the Mensheviks during the July days, are capable of playing open counter-revolutionary roles), not the tactical approach used for specific purposes under the conditions already described ("if it arises out of the struggle of the masses themselves," etc.). Trotsky explained the principle behind the united front tactic in a different connection:

"The tactic of the united front still retains all its power as the most important method in the struggle for the masses. A basic principle of this tactic is: 'With the masses — always; with the vacillating leaders — sometimes, but only so long as they stand at the head of the masses.' It is necessary to make use of vacillating leaders while the masses are pushing them ahead, without for a moment abandoning criticism of these leaders. And it is necessary to break with them at the right time when they turn from vacillation to hostile action and betrayal. It is necessary to use the occasion of the break to expose the traitorous leaders and to contrast their position to that of the masses. It is precisely in this that the revolutionary essence of the united front policy consists." (*Leon Trotsky on Britain*, p. 235)

We have already noted that the Fourth Congress resolution gives too much weight to the question of which parties participate in the workers' government as the distinction among the various types. The pre-dictatorship types of workers' government are meant to bring to a head the question of doing away with the bourgeois state. Of course, if Communists participate in such a government it will carry out a more resolute revolutionary program. But the Comintern of 1922 was taking a step beyond the Bolsheviks in 1917. Lenin had then stated that participation in a workers' government within the still-bourgeois state was "impossible for internationalists."

What made Bolshevik participation unprincipled in 1917 and possible in 1922? In 1917 the Bolsheviks were still a minority in the Soviets. Had they joined in a Menshevik-S.R. regime in a secondary role, they would have had to take responsibility for the betrayals of the majority. In the countries in which the question was posed in 1922, on the other hand, the Communist Parties were strong enough in the parliaments so that no purely working class government would have been possible without them. The party wants to win over the new layers of the working class whose consciousness is changing in struggle. In the Russian situation the offer of support was enough to place the onus on the Mensheviks for not breaking with the bourgeoisie. But in the early 1920's, if momentum for a workers' government were to develop and the Communists refused, they and not the Social Democrats would be seen as the obstructors of working class power.

Was such a government ever really conceivable? Trotsky described a particular conjuncture where it was, in the article "The Workers Government in France" written shortly after the Comintern discussion. (In this article, the "Dissidents" are the Social Democrats.)

"Is a workers' government realizable in France in another form than that of the Communist dictatorship, and, if so, in what form?"

"In certain political conjunctures it is perfectly realizable, and it even constitutes an inevitable stage in the development of the revolution.

"Indeed, if we suppose that a powerful workers

movement, arising in the country out of a violent political crisis, leads to elections which give the majority to the Dissidents and the Communists, including intermediate and sympathizing groups, and that the mood of the working masses does not permit the Dissidents to make a bloc with the bourgeoisie against us, then it will be possible under these conditions to form a coalition workers' government which would constitute a necessary transition toward the revolutionary proletarian dictatorship.

"It is very possible, it is even probable, that such a movement, developing under the slogan of the workers' government, will not have time to express itself in a parliamentary majority, whether there is no time for new elections or because the bourgeois government will try to ward off the danger by resorting to the methods of Mussolini. During the resistance to the fascist attack the reformist working class party could be drawn by the Communist Party down the road of forming a workers' government by extra-parliamentary means. Under this hypothesis, the revolutionary situation would be even clearer than the first." (*Le Mouvement Communiste en France*, pp. 215-216)

We can clarify the possible workers' governments as they existed for the early Comintern by enumerating them, from left to right, as they stood in relation to the question of state power. We include any government made up exclusively of parties based on the proletariat (and in some cases on the peasantry as well).

1. A government of the workers' state following the proletarian revolution
2. A "transitional" workers' government in a revolutionary situation within the still-bourgeois state. (This is the possibility Trotsky was discussing in the French situation above.)
3. A "destabilizing" workers' government made up of petty bourgeois-led parties based among the workers and peasants (such as the Menshevik S.R. regime described by Lenin in 1917).
4. A "stable" government made up of Labor or Social Democratic parties in a non-revolutionary situation (best exemplified by British Labour Party governments today)

The workers' government slogan should only be used as a challenge to the mass non-revolutionary parties to form workers' governments of the "destabilizing" or "transitional" types. To call for a workers' government when the outcome would be the "stable" type that rules comfortably for the bourgeoisie and serves as a brake upon the workers would be brazen deception of the masses. It is also ruled out in unstable situations when the capitulationist parties are openly attacking the working class. And to call for a workers' government when the question of the workers' state is on the order of the day — that is, in a revolutionary situation where there is no need to challenge or expose mass working class parties under petty-bourgeois leaders — would simply suppress the mobilization for the socialist revolution.

The workers' government slogan has an algebraic character which Trotsky explained in the article just quoted:

"The workers' government is an algebraic formula, that is, a formula whose terms do not correspond to fixed numerical values. Hence its advantages and also its drawbacks.

"Its advantages consist in that it reaches out to workers who have not yet reached the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat or the understanding of the need for a leading party.

"Its disadvantages, deriving from its algebraic character, consist in that a purely parliamentary meaning can be given to it ..."

Stalinists Drop United Front

Its algebraic nature does not mean that revolutionaries fight alongside more backward workers for a "workers' government" without indicating the different possible meanings, assuming that whatever the masses think the result will inevitably be the proletarian dictatorship. Without mass awareness of just what the workers' government means under a bourgeois state the fight for the workers' state will inevitably be lost. In any struggle for a workers' government in either the "transitional" or "destabilizing" form, the revolutionaries must constantly explain that the successful formation of such a government will bring about conditions of civil war for state power; the backward workers who desire a workers' government under parliament may not believe this until it is proved in practice, but if they are forewarned and are able to make the necessary preparations the workers will be able to continue the struggle through the socialist revolution. This again points to the absolute necessity of freedom of criticism. Political compromises like the workers' government are dangerous: they require constant attention to warning the workers and winning them from the reformists.

As a matter of history, the workers' government tactic was dropped by the Communist Parties after 1923, in the sense of a systematic agitational campaign along the lines advocated by the Fourth Congress. This was a consequence of the degeneration of the Russian revolution and with it, of the Communist International. The united front campaigns outlined by the Third and Fourth Congresses were abandoned, to be replaced by left and right zigzags between sectarian campaigns equating the Social Democrats with fascists and the Popular Front efforts that promoted alliances with large sections of the bourgeoisie, supposedly against fascism. Under these altered circumstances the revolutionary communists, organized as the Left Opposition to the Comintern until 1933 and afterwards as the Fourth Internationalists, had to use the transitional slogans under quite different circumstances.

The Left Opposition

Under the leadership of Stalin and Bukharin in the mid-1920's, the Comintern made a shift to the right that gave the workers' and peasants' government slogan a totally different impact. The first example was the Chinese revolution of the 1920's, where the slogan "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" was used. This old Bolshevik slogan had once signified that the major tasks facing the Russian revolution were first of all bourgeois-democratic — the abolition of Czarism, forming a republic, distributing the land among the peasants, etc. — and that only the proletariat and peasantry would carry them out. When the Czar was overthrown in February 1917, Lenin declared that the slogan had now been bypassed by history: the bourgeois coalition Provisional Government which rested on the worker and peasant Soviets were as close to the "democratic dictatorship"

as any regime could ever come. The strategic task now was to achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat, smashing the bourgeois state and replacing it by the workers' state with the support of the peasantry. The bourgeois-democratic tasks would be accomplished by the proletarian revolution.

In China, under the guise of Lenin's outlived slogan, the Comintern was really reverting to the Menshevik line of 1917. It claimed that conditions were not ripe for a proletarian revolution. The 1928 program of the Comintern reads:

"The transition to the proletarian dictatorship is possible here only after a series of preparatory stages, only as a result of a whole period of the growing over of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into the socialist revolution." (Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, pp. 195-6)

The Comintern perspective was for a bourgeois stage under the leadership of the Kuomintang, the bourgeois nationalist party that, according to Stalin, embodied the interests of workers and peasants as well as the "anti-imperialist" bourgeoisie. The Comintern championed a capitalist state that would ultimately evolve into a workers' state without a proletarian revolution. This "workers' and peasants' government" had nothing in common with the conception advanced by the Fourth Congress. Although the original tactic was open to the danger of reformist deformations, the new formula meant that the Comintern itself was creating pacifist illusions and thereby preparing the Chinese proletariat for severe defeats. And that was exactly what happened, when the bourgeois "anti-imperialist" Chiang Kai-Shek took advantage of Stalin's capitulatory line to massacre the unprepared Chinese workers.

The sharpest answer to the Comintern strategy was given by Trotsky in his 1931 pamphlet *The Spanish Revolution in Danger*; the Comintern had begun to apply the same disastrous "growing over" formula in Spain after the monarchy had fallen and been replaced by a bourgeois republic.

"... these people dream of a process of evolutionary transformation from a bourgeois into a socialist revolution, through a series of organic stages, disguised under different pseudonyms: Kuomintang, 'democratic dictatorship,' 'workers' and peasants' revolution,' 'people's revolution' — and what is more, the decisive moment in this process when one class wrests the power from another is unnoticeably dissolved. ...

"It is not the bourgeois power that grows over into a workers' and peasants' and then into a proletarian power; no, the power of one class does not 'grow over' from the power of another class, but is torn from it with rifle in hand. But after the working class has seized power, the democratic tasks of the proletarian regime inevitably grow over into socialist tasks. An evolutionary, organic transition from democracy to socialism is conceivable only under the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is Lenin's central idea." (*The Spanish Revolution*, pp. 121, 123)

At the same time that the Stalinized Comintern was developing its evolutionary version of the workers' and peasants government it was also refusing to address the

political questions directly facing the Spanish workers. It ignored the 1931 elections to the Cortes (parliament) in which the radical bourgeois and working class parties dominated the vote and the Socialist Party received the single largest bloc of delegates. Trotsky advocated a revival of the workers' and peasants' government tactic along lines parallel to the Bolsheviks of 1917. He called on the CP to demand that the Socialist Party take governmental power itself and break its coalition with the bourgeois cabinet of Alcalá Zamora and his minister of the interior, Maura. He proposed the slogan "Down with Zamora-Maura," the Spanish equivalent of the Bolsheviks' "Down with the Capitalist Ministers." The situations were different in that the soviets, the organs of dual power, were already established in Russia in 1917 while there were no such bodies in Spain in 1931. Trotsky nevertheless advised taking advantage of the large vote given to the Socialists:

"Let us consider for a moment the way in which the Spanish workers en masse should view the present situation. Their leaders, the Socialists, have power. This increases the demands and tenacity of the workers. Every striker will not only have no fear of the government but will also expect help from it. The Communists must direct the thoughts of the workers precisely along these lines: 'Demand everything of the government since your leaders are in it.' In reply to the workers' delegations, the Socialists will say that they do not have a majority yet. The answer is clear: with truly democratic suffrage and an end to the coalition with the bourgeoisie, a majority is guaranteed. ...

"All the considerations mentioned above would remain a dead letter if we were to limit ourselves only to democratic slogans in the parliamentary sense. There can be no question of this. Communists participate in all strikes, in all protests and demonstrations, arousing more and more numerous strata of the population. Communists are with the masses and at the head of the masses in every battle. On the basis of these battles the Communists put forward the slogan of soviets and at the first opportunity build soviets as the organizations of the united front. At the present stage the soviets can be nothing else. But if they emerge as the combat organizations of the proletarian united front, then under the leadership of the Comintern they will inevitably become, at a certain stage, organs of insurrection and then organs of power." (*The Spanish Revolution*, pp. 149-50)

Trotsky had no illusions that the Spanish Socialists would actually form a government in order to bring about the proletarian dictatorship. He was raising a tactical approach to the workers that would bring about a destabilizing situation for bourgeois rule, whether or not the proposal for a workers' government of the Social-Democratic kind was ever put into operation.

Trotsky also proposed a version of the workers' government slogan during the early 1930's in Germany. The Left Opposition's campaign for a working class united front to halt Nazism is well known. It included a comprehensive program of mass action: defense of strikes, unions and party organizations, attacks on the fascist barracks, etc. It is less well known that Trotsky also used the workers' government tactic to champion the united front of the working class parties, the Social Democrats and Communists, in this struggle.

"The Communist Party must say to the working class: Schleicher is not to be overthrown by any parliamentary game. If the Social Democracy wants to set to work to overthrow the Bonapartist government with other means, the Communist Party is ready to aid the Social Democracy with all its strength. At the same time, the Communists obligate themselves in advance to use no violent methods against a Social Democratic government insofar as the latter bases itself upon the majority of the working class and insofar as it guarantees the Communist Party the freedom of agitation and organization. Such a way of putting the question will be comprehensible to every Social Democratic and non-party worker." ("The Only Road," in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p. 322)

The German Communist Party, however, not only failed to fight for the working class united front against fascism, but it put up no political resistance when the Nazis marched to power in 1933. Moreover, the collapse of the CP in Germany inspired no reconsideration of tactics on the part of the Comintern as a whole. For these reasons, Trotsky and the Left Opposition estimated that the Third International was no longer a potentially revolutionary force in the workers' movement and that new parties and a new International had to be built. This major change in the Trotskyists' worldwide strategy for revolution also engendered tactical shifts.

The French Situation in 1934

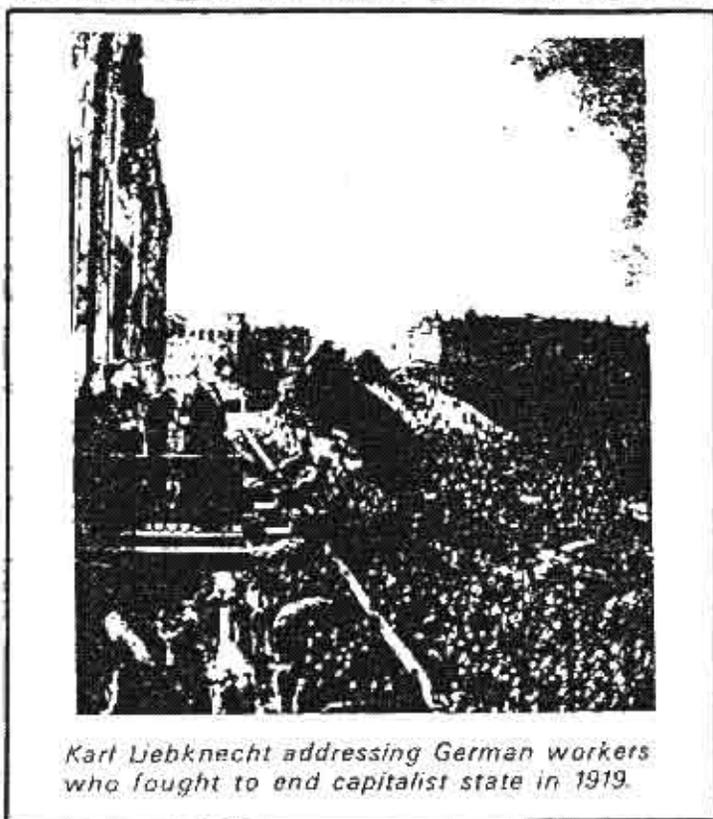
The massive defeat suffered by the working class in Germany brought France to the forefront as the key European political situation in the mid-thirties. The German events touched off responses in France from both right and left. On February 6, 1934, the monarchist and pro-fascist right wing mounted a large armed demonstration in Paris which forced the government to resign, and the Bonapartist Gaston Doumergue became Premier. On February 12, the working class responded with a general strike and massive demonstrations against the danger of fascism and war, in effect bringing about a pre-revolutionary situation through the spontaneous united front of Socialist and Communist workers. This was a great breakthrough but insufficient: an organized united front had to be formed through workers' committees at the base and agreement among the working class parties and trade union federations.

For the Trotskyists the tactical problem was particularly acute. There was the only organized tendency that stood for a united front of working class organizations, yet they constituted a tiny handful and no longer held the perspective of addressing the Communist Party as their own. The united front made no sense at all unless it was formed by the two major working class parties, yet neither of them was yet responding to the pressure of the masses in that direction. Trotsky's article "France is Now the Key to the Situation," written in March (*Writings 1933-34*, p. 244) summarized the program of the International Communist League in a list of slogans mainly directed toward the tasks of the workers' united front:

"Hands off proletarian organizations and the proletarian press!
For the democratic rights and the social gains of the proletariat!
For the basic right — the piece of bread!

Against reaction! Against Bonapartist police rule! Against fascism!
 For the proletarian militia!
 For the arming of the workers!
 For the disarming of reaction!
 Against the war! For the fraternization of the peoples!
 For the overthrow of capitalism!
 For the dictatorship of the proletariat!
 For the socialist society!"

It is obvious from the above list of demands that the workers' government slogan is deliberately omitted. The reasons for the omission are not explained, but they can be surmised from our general understanding of the tactic. Slogans for the revolution, the workers' state and socialism are included, not as immediate demands but nevertheless present as longer-term goals of the struggle. From the inception of the formal united front tactic at the third Comintern Congress, it had been understood that raising the slogan of the proletarian dictatorship was not enough when the masses were not ready for it and their attention was drawn to more immediate defensive struggles. The workers' government slogan was



Karl Liebknecht addressing German workers who fought to end capitalist state in 1919.

devised for just such situations, but how was it to be applied in France at that moment? Toward which party? The Socialists were still acting as the working class arm of the bourgeoisie; the Communists were maintaining their isolation from the living mass struggles by following the bureaucratic policy of refusing to join united fronts except through ultimatums to the workers from above. The CP was not taking the leadership of those united front organs developing at the base and was expelling members of the party who attempted to; thus the workers' government tactic could not be formulated through the CP. Nor would it work through the Socialists; the parliamentary paralysis that the SP contributed to had produced a semi-Bonapartist regime, making the idea of a working class electoral majority meaningless. No useful form of the workers'

government slogan was available.

In June Trotsky helped draft the International Communist League's "Program of Action for France" (*Writings 1934-35*, pp. 21-32), a document which in many respects serves as a model for the Transitional Program of 1938 and elaborates many of the same transitional demands. Yet it too nowhere uses the workers' government slogan but instead relies on the workers' state to pose the question of power. Thus in summarizing the demands for nationalization of industry "by the workers" and for the monopolization of foreign trade, the Action Program states, "only the state, ruled by the workers, would really control all foreign commerce for the benefit of the collectivity." Under the heading of the workers' and peasants' alliance it explains that "the proletarian state must rest on the exploited peasants as well as on the workers of town and country." And in the section entitled "Down with the Bourgeois 'Authoritative State'! For Workers' and Peasants' Power!" the Action Program reads:

"The task is to replace the *capitalist state*, which functions for the profit of the big exploiters, by the workers' and peasants' *proletarian state*. The task is to establish in this country the rule of the working people. To all we declare that it is not a matter of secondary 'modification,' but rather that the domination of the small minority of the bourgeois class must be replaced by the leadership and power of the immense majority of the laboring people."

The Trotskyists' slogans changed when the situation took a new turn. At the end of May, the Socialist Party convention voted against further governmental blocs with the bourgeois Radicals and invited previously ousted left-wingers to rejoin. In July, the Communist and Socialist leaders held talks over the possibility of a united front, and a pact against fascism was signed on July 27. The French Trotskyist group took advantage of the SP's shift to the left and joined it as a distinct Bolshevik-Leninist tendency in order to win the developing left wing to revolutionary politics. Their programmatic slogans shifted as well. By the time Trotsky issued his article "Whither France?" in October, the Communists were moving further to the right. CP leader Marcel Cachin had already made overtures to the Radical Party to abandon the workers' alliance and "extend" it to an alliance including sections of the bourgeoisie, the Popular Front. Trotsky sought to counterpose the workers' united front and therefore posed the struggle for power in terms of the workers' government tactic via the leaders of the two working class parties: "The aim of the united front can only be a government of the united front, i.e., a Socialist-Communist government, a Blum-Cachin ministry" (*Leon Trotsky on France*, p. 59). Yet he did not therefore neglect to raise the goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the alternative to Doumergue:

"The struggle for power means the utilization of all the possibilities provided by the semi-parliamentary Bonapartist regime to overthrow this regime by a revolutionary push, to replace the bourgeois state by a workers' state."

And the slogan was specifically linked to the previous Action Program of transitional demands:

"The struggle for power must begin with the fundamental idea that if opposition to further aggravation of the situation of the masses under capitalism is still possible, no real improvement of their situation is conceivable without a

revolutionary invasion of the right of capitalist property. The political campaign of the united front must base itself upon a well-elaborated *transitional program*, i.e., on a system of measures that, with a workers' and peasants' government, can assure the transition from capitalism to socialism." (*Ibid.*, p. 60)

The Trotskyists made a tactical shift within a few months, but during a period in which the upheaval of the masses had forced the working class parties through large swings and evasive twists by their leaders. The workers' and peasants' government slogan was introduced when the workers had forced their leaders into joint action, a turn which the pro-bourgeois leaderships naturally tried to transform into a renewed coalition with the supposedly anti-fascist wing of the bourgeoisie. The tactics worked out in this period deserve a careful examination by Trotskyists today, when the workers' and farmers' government slogan has become a substitute for propaganda for the workers' state and has been petrified into a permanent strategic line.

The 1938 Transitional Program

By the time the Transitional Program was produced, the revolutionary opportunities of the early and mid-thirties had passed. Hitler was in power, the Spanish Republic defended by the workers was losing the civil war and the French Popular Front had deflected the mass explosion that culminated in the 1936 general strike into safer electoral channels. The forces of the Fourth International were pitifully small and isolated from Socialist and Communist Parties. Moreover, the Second World War was imminent and would inevitably inflict even greater misery. The task of showing the workers the way forward was made immense by the vastly unfavorable balance of forces between the revolutionaries on the one hand and the reformists and Stalinists on the other, who were responsible for an extensive mood of demoralization brought about by the successive defeats.

Winning the workers from their leaderships required challenging the dominant parties to carry out their own programs, promises with which they had deceived the mass of workers into following them. The masses still regarded these organizations as usable for defensive purposes, even when they understood that they were hardly revolutionary. (The Trotskyists, it should be noted, no longer considered the Stalinists to be centrists at this point: the Transitional Program refers to the "definite passing over of the Comintern to the side of the bourgeois order, its cynically counter-revolutionary role throughout the world" *TPSR*, p. 113.) Since the bourgeoisie had proved time and again that it was ready to mobilize its full force against the workers, only the revolutionary program constituted a real defense of the working class. Because of their ties to capitalism, the CP's and SP's were incapable of leading this defense; it was this fact that had to be proved to the workers in practice.

Trotsky defined the Transitional Program as a *tactical*, not a *strategic* program:

"The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow. Its political aim is the conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie. However, the achievement of this *strategic* task is unthinkable without the most considered attention to all, even small and partial, questions of *tactics*....The

present epoch is distinguished not because it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution. ...

"Insofar as the old partial, 'minimal' demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism — and this occurs at each step — the Fourth International advances a system of *transitional demands*, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very foundations of the bourgeois regime." (*TPSR*, pp. 114-5, emphasis added)

The transitional demands are what enable daily work to be linked so closely to the revolutionary tasks. Unlike the democratic and partial demands (some of which are also included in Trotsky's draft program) the transitional demands challenge the structure of capitalist relations, the right of the bourgeoisie to exploit the workers and to rule the state. Although it is certainly true that bourgeois society in particular periods may be unable to grant partial demands, that is not what makes a demand transitional. The transitional demands are "directed against the very foundations of the bourgeois regime" (*TPSR*, p. 115) because they reflect the program of the workers' state.

The workers' state is the transitional phase between capitalism and socialism in which the proletariat holds state power in order to eliminate over time all bourgeois social relations. The program under which this is carried out can properly be called the socialist program. The Transitional Program reflects the socialist program but does so through the tarnished mirror of capitalism. The way a transitional demand appears to reformist workers living under capitalist conditions is quite different from its socialist model. For example, the "sliding scale of working hours" can take the form of "30 for 40" (thirty hours' work for forty hours' pay) and may be limited to one factory or one industry; even a victory along these lines is of a different order from the socialist program which aims at dividing the necessary labor among the available workers and thus expanding the leisure time of all workers for the purpose of ruling society.

Thus the Transitional Program is algebraic. The demands make the program of the workers' state visible through the capitalist mirror and therefore real to workers who do not accept the workers' state. Such workers, still following reformist leaders, will give the demands a sectoral meaning. The struggle itself will demonstrate the inadequacy of sectorally limited demands and prove that what the revolutionaries are saying is correct. Used in this way, the demands bridge the gap between workers' present consciousness and the objective necessity of class unity for reaching socialism, and thereby become transitional.

The Workers' Government Slogan

The slogans of the transitional program are aimed at the mass parties and unions of the working class. These organizations under reformist leadership cannot be expected to adopt revolutionary demands for overthrowing capitalism. But they can be asked to carry out their own promises and professed programs and to fight for them to the limits of capitalism, since reformism teaches that far-reaching reforms can still be won under this system. This is what Trotsky meant

when, in the discussions with comrades about the draft Transitional Program, he said:

"Yes, we propagandize this program in the trade unions, propose it as the basic program for the labor party. For us, it is a transitional program; but for them it is the program." (TSPR, p. 87)

Revolutionaries can approach other workers for a united front struggle through the mass organizations for transitional demands, explaining that the lessons of the struggle will prove whether the demands can be achieved within the present society. They will also prove in practice the limitations of the reformist leaderships. The most far-reaching demand of this kind is the workers' government, the ultimate possible program of a reformist working class party. After all, the purpose of a political party is to take over the government, and the natural goal for a working class party is a workers' government. As Trotsky put it:

"Of all the parties and organizations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' and farmers' government. On this road we promise them full support against capitalist reaction. At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should, in our opinion, form the program of the workers' and farmers' government." (TSPR, p. 134-5)

The "workers' and farmers' government slogan is transitional with a significant distinction. It reflects not just an aspect of the workers' state but the state power itself. If such a government ever comes about it would amount to such a severe challenge to the bourgeoisie — ousting this class from the government of its own state — that it can occur only under revolutionary conditions and then can only have a fleeting existence. Either it leads to the proletarian revolution or it is defeated and bourgeois order is bloodily restored. A workers' government can only be directly transitional to the workers' state, and the proletariat has to be well prepared for this transition.

Stalinist Workers' Governments?

Trotsky's analysis in the Transitional Program emphasized the immediately transitional character of the slogan. He cited the Bolshevik example, stating that "in the final instance it represented nothing more than the already established dictatorship of the proletariat" (TSPR, p. 133). He attacked the Menshevik and Stalinist construction of the "democratic dictatorship," which used the workers' alliance with the peasantry as a means of collaboration with the bourgeoisie. He contrasted this to the Bolshevik challenge to the Mensheviks and S.R.'s, the method he advocated for the Fourth International: "The slogan 'workers' and farmers' government' is thus acceptable to us only in the sense that it had in 1917 with the Bolsheviks, i.e., as an anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist slogan..."

Trotsky did not compare his use of the slogan with the Fourth Comintern Congress, undoubtedly because the situations and necessary tactics were quite different. The revolutionaries in 1938 had no mass weight or political influence to use against the reformists but only the appeal of their politics. United front tactics therefore could not be used directly, because the united front means the alliance of the entire working class or at least of its largest sections. The

Transitional Program does not use the united front slogan, so prominent in Trotsky's writings when he was addressing the entire Comintern in the 1920's and early 1930's. The indirect form of the united front which the Fourth International employed was the tactic of critical support, as in the paragraph quoted above.

Thus there was no question in 1938 of whether the revolutionaries might participate in workers' governments; their small size ruled it out. The "workers' and farmers' government" slogan was now solely a challenge directed at the capitulationist mass parties of the working class. The Social Democrats and Stalinists now had an extensive and explicit history of betrayals, and Trotsky therefore estimated that it was "to say the least, highly improbable" that they would break their alliance with the bourgeoisie. He added:

"However, one cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.), the petty-bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists, may go further than they themselves wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie. In any case, one thing is not to be doubted: even if this highly improbable variant somewhere, at some time, becomes a reality and the workers' and farmers' government in the above-mentioned sense is established in fact, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat."

This passage has been often cited by the pseudo-Trotskyists as a justification for the notion that Stalinists could lead the way to socialist revolutions and workers' states. Such an interpretation is blatantly false, since "the short episode" Trotsky mentions between the workers' and farmers' government and the workers' state is in fact the proletarian revolution against the petty-bourgeois parties along the lines of the Bolshevik challenge to the Mensheviks (see *Socialist Voice* No. 3, p. 30).

Trotsky's analysis in this passage nevertheless proved to be partly wrong. Trotsky considered the Stalinists to be essentially reformist and therefore expected that they would break their open coalition with the bourgeoisie only under revolutionary mass pressure. In fact the CP's had become the parties of state capitalism and therefore could afford to break with the old bourgeoisie only after the workers' upsurge had been suppressed. (See our article on the nature of the Communist Parties in *Socialist Voice* No. 3.) The Stalinists did set up their own governments in several countries after World War II, but shadows of the old bourgeoisie were kept in office for a period to make clear that the states did not belong to the workers. The regimes set up were neither revolutionary workers' governments as described by the Fourth Comintern Congress nor soviet based Menshevik governments as proposed by the Bolsheviks; they were state capitalist regimes.

What conclusions can be drawn about Trotsky's use of the workers' government slogan? Trotsky's error was to identify the Stalinists' possible break with the bourgeoisie as a workers' government, not in linking a real workers' government so closely to the workers' state. All the transitional demands aim at the conclusion that the workers must establish their own power, but the workers' government slogan points to that conclusion directly. When Trotsky wrote that the workers' and peasants' government "in the final instance" meant nothing

but the dictatorship of the proletariat already established (*TSPSR*, p. 133) he meant two things: one that the term had become, after the 1917 revolution, a popular designation for the workers' state that clearly indicated the workers' alliance with the peasantry; and two, that the tactical use of the slogan in the pre-revolutionary period had reached the successful final result of guiding the masses of workers to the proletarian revolution. Any conclusion that the slogan means "only" the dictatorship of the proletariat is completely foreign to the method of the Transitional Program and its pre-history. The slogan is designed to be an important tactical step enabling revolutionaries to carry a pre-revolutionary situation successfully through the "doorstep" of the revolution.

Other conclusions drawn in this article will be summarized at this point.

1. The workers' government slogan is designed for tactical use against mass reformist, centrist or Stalinist parties of the working class. It challenges them to follow the logic of their proclaimed programs and run the government in the interest of the workers without ties to the bourgeoisie. The slogan "workers' government" was never used in this bald form by Lenin or Trotsky. They always specified just which parties should form what government. If no mass reformist parties exist, or if they are playing an openly counterrevolutionary role in the conjuncture, the workers' government slogan as a united front tactic is dangerously inappropriate. If the slogan is raised permanently it becomes a strategic policy, not a tactical one. The revolutionary party which proposed a permanent united front with reformists is ultimately taking responsibility for all the reformists' deeds, both when they are pushed to the left by the masses and when they turn to the right against them.

2. The slogan is agitational and not propagandistic, since it is used to win over the layers of workers who do not yet accept the proletarian dictatorship as their goal. Our propagandistic slogan for workers' power is the workers' state (which in a revolutionary situation may itself be used agitationaly). To use the workers' government slogan as propaganda, that is, as a scientifically exact description of the revolutionary goal for the most advanced layer of workers, is to state in effect that the final goal lies within the framework of the bourgeois state. This usage is the hallmark of the variety of centrism that descends from Trotskyism. This centrism refuses to call for the dictatorship of the proletariat explicitly, even propagandistically, but relies instead on the objective and blind "revolutionary process" to push the workers over the doorstep of the revolution.

3. The slogan is algebraic but is not a trick to blur the difference between a workers' government and a workers' state. This slogan in fact comes into play when the blurring has already been done by the reformists, that is, when there are large numbers of workers demanding that their leaders take the power but who still believe in purely democratic (parliamentary) solutions. The algebra then arises over the goal of the workers' government: the reformists will try to keep it within bourgeois bounds, which will lead to counter-revolution given the volatile situation; the revolutionaries must fight at every stage in the struggle to make certain that the workers understand the need to press beyond to workers' revolution. The workers' government slogan above all else must point to a break from bourgeois terrain.

4. Finally, why did Trotsky write the Transitional Program with the deliberate intention of leaving out the slogans of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat? Obviously

not in order to abandon these slogans but because the Transitional Program had to guide the workers to the point where socialism and the dictatorship would appear as necessary goals. It was an unquestionable fact that the Fourth International (named the World Party of the Socialist Revolution) was completely identified with the program of the socialist revolution and the workers' state. With this in mind Trotsky could point to the need to complete the program of the Fourth International after having brought it to the "doorstep" of the revolution with the transitional demands. The Transitional Program was designed to supersede the old minimum program and bring the daily demands of the workers into line with the revolutionary conditions of the epoch of capitalism's decay so that the maximum goals become the necessary consequence. The greatest mistakes have come from those who imagine that the Transitional Program supersedes the workers' state and the socialist revolution as well.

This is precisely the situation with the pseudo-Trotskyist parties in Peru and Iran. They call for workers' governments as a disguise, in their own minds, for workers' states, but they leave out the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois state machine that comes between the two. They call for workers' and peasants' governments not as a challenge against any mass working class parties (in Peru, Hugo Blanco's FOCEP itself won the largest working class support in the Assembly elections) but they are raising it as their own program. The effect is not to win the reformist workers from petty-bourgeois leaders as the Fourth Congress and the Transitional Program intended, but to keep the workers mired in petty-bourgeois conceptions. In effect, they are using the workers' government slogan in none of the possible ways that the Comintern put forward but in "that democratic" sense which the epigones later gave it, transforming it from a bridge to socialist revolution into the chief barrier upon its path" (*TSPSR*, p. 134). Of all the lessons which "Trotskyists" might have drawn from the immensely rich tactical heritage of Bolshevism and Trotskyism, these people have firmly grasped the method of Menshevik Stalinism.

The Pablo-Hansen Theory

The treacherous misuse of the workers' government slogan today, so contrary to the tactic developed by the Fourth Comintern Congress and the Fourth International, is wholly consistent with a theory of "workers and farmers' governments" concocted by the Pabloite leaders of the Fourth International in the late forties and early fifties. This theory saw workers' and farmers' governments set up by the Stalinists evolving naturally into workers' states.

Michel Pablo, the head of the International at the time, was chiefly responsible for the idea that the states of Eastern Europe conquered by Stalinism were workers' states, he called them deformed, not degenerated, because they had never been genuine workers' states. The theory was afterwards extended to China, Korea, Vietnam and Cuba. It has been debated whether to extend it to Ben Bella's Algeria, Nasser's Egypt and now Kampuchea, Angola, Mozambique and other regimes.

The Pabloite notion of deformed workers' states clashes immediately with Marxism: a workers' state means a state created by a workers' revolution that places the working class in power, but the new Stalinist states were created through revolutions led by petty bourgeois forces (Stalinist parties or peasant armies). The workers generally had to be crushed by

the Stalinists or the old bourgeoisie before the Stalinists would undertake to seize power. In no case was such a "workers state" the creation of the working class. In all cases the revolutionary Marxist or Trotskyist parties that existed were destroyed and their members killed, exiled or jailed.

The Pabloites were willing to swallow these problems because of the Stalinists' nationalization of industry, for them the key criterion in their attempt to sustain the analysis of Russia as a workers state. But there were additional problems. The Stalinists did not satisfy the economy immediately: they maintained some degree of privately-owned property and even coalition governments with the bourgeoisie for several years. Hence the question: just when did the countries become workers' states? When the Stalinists initially took power, or when the nationalizations were consolidated?

The first choice led to the difficulty that the seizure of power could be reversed without a counterrevolution and still without any surviving nationalizations. For example, Russian troops left their sector of Austria after a treaty was signed with the Western powers; had Austria already been labeled a deformed workers state, no trace of "proletarian" power would have remained evident. Moreover, even the strongly entrenched Stalinist rulers vociferously argued against any notion that they had made socialist revolutions. Mao Tse-tung in China, for example, insisted that only a "new democracy" had been created, a progressive form of bourgeois society that would ultimately turn itself into socialism.

The second choice posed difficulties as well. If the Stalinist states became proletarian only after a period of years, they did so without any revolution. Eastern Europe, for example, was taken over with the defeat of Nazism in 1944-45; after that, there were no violent revolutions that could signal the appearance of a new class society. China likewise had its revolution when the imperialist puppets of Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang were ousted in 1949; in the titles, when the Pabloites decided it was a workers' state, where was the revolution that transformed bourgeois into proletarian rule?

To bridge these difficulties a retroactive theory was contrived under the inspiration of Ernest Mandel and the SWP's Joseph Hansen. They suggested that the initial Stalinist takeovers created "workers' and farmers' governments" according to the descriptions of the Fourth Congress and the Transitional Program; then, after a while, these governments transformed the states they ruled into workers' states. The kernel of truth in this reasoning is that the Fourth Congress did conceive of a "transitional" form of workers' government, under the still-bourgeois state, that would bring about the socialist revolution. Also, Trotsky did allow for "the petty bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists" to go "further than they themselves wish along the road to break with the bourgeoisie"; indeed, such workers' and farmers' governments "would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat."

But the precedents led to precisely opposite conclusions from the Pabloites'. The workers' and farmers' governments of both Trotsky and the Fourth Congress would engender civil war and revolution almost immediately. They would not bring about a peaceful evolution into the workers' state. Moreover, a victorious outcome would not signify the defeat of the proletariat! The Fourth Congress had expected the revolutionaries to join in its "transitional" workers' governments, not be hurled into jail. And as mentioned earlier, the Transitional Program meant that the Stalinist governments would be driven from power by the proletarian revolution:

they were not portrayed as its revolutionary agents

The ancestry of the Pablo-Hansen theory does not lie in Bolshevism or Trotskyism but rather in Stalinism and Maoism. When the Stalinists took over in Eastern Europe they labeled their states "people's democracies." At first, the conception was that these were a progressive form of bourgeois state because they had Communist Parties at their heads. Later, when it became clear that the Stalinists would have to embark upon the state capitalist road to maintain their power, the theory shifted and the people's democracies became "democracies of a new type." The Soviet theoretician Varga wrote, "The social structure of these states differs from all those hitherto known to us; it is something totally new in the history of mankind. It is neither a bourgeois dictatorship nor a proletarian dictatorship." (Quoted in A. Ross Johnson, *The Transformation of Communist Ideology*, p. 13.)

Mao's theory was similar, with the exception that he had worked most of it out in advance of the Chinese Revolution and did not have to develop it step-by-step when conditions changed. The Chinese Communist Party called for a "new democracy" through the overthrow of Chiang Kai-Shek and imperialist control, a democratic, anti-imperialist bourgeois regime headed by the CP. "We Communists do not conceal our political views," Mao wrote, mocking Marx and Engels. "On joining the Party, every Communist has two clearly defined objectives at heart: the new-democratic revolution now and socialism and communism in the future..." (*On Coalition Government*, written in 1945). The socialist stage meant for Mao the nationalization (by the new democratic state) of the means of production when the rulers deemed it suitable, no further revolution was necessary.

SWP vs. Mandel

Mao derived his theory from the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" that Stalin had foisted upon the Comintern in the mid 1920's. Just when Mao was explaining that the 1949 revolution in China had set up a "new democracy" and certainly not socialism or a workers' state, Mandel similarly convinced the Pabloites that China was a "workers' and peasants' government" with the same potential of reaching socialism. By the mid-1950's, Mao was saying that China had become a form of proletarian dictatorship, and Mandel, Hansen & Co. followed suit. The Pabloite terminology was different from Mao's but the underlying reformist content was exactly the same.

The distortion of Marxism embodied in the Hansen theory is overwhelming, and it is not mitigated by occasional bouts of comparative honesty such as Hansen's admission that "the Bolsheviks excluded the possibility of such formations actually establishing a workers state." (*The Workers and Farmers Government*, SWP Education for Socialists pamphlet, p. 17.) What is the explanation for this remarkable failure of theoretical insight on the part of the Bolsheviks? Hansen simply appeals to "the facts": the Bolsheviks were wrong because "The experience in China showed that in at least one case history had decreed otherwise." (*Ibid.*, p. 27) The existence of such "deformed workers' states" is not a fact but simply a wrong interpretation of facts, decreed not by "history" but by Mandel, Hansen and others who conceive that the working class is an optional, even an exceptional, component of the proletarian revolution.

History has, however, decreed that outrageous distortions of itself do not go unavenged. In the early months of 1979 wars broke out among the Stalinist states of Southeast Asia:

Vietnam invaded and took over most of Kampuchea, and China subsequently invaded Vietnam. Theoreticians who call these countries socialist or workers' states were thrown into a turmoil. Of course, Russia had been known to embark on an invasion or two, but not the "revolutionary" variety of Stalinists who had fought liberation wars against imperialism recently. The United Secretariat in particular flew into a rhetorical tizzy over the class nature of Kampuchea. The SWP, which had never before been able to figure out what sort of state Pol Pot's Kampuchea actually was, now suddenly discovered that it was capitalist in order to justify Vietnam's takeover. The USec majority led by Mandel objected and called for Vietnam's withdrawal from its "fraternal" deformed workers' state.

The ensuing debate has forced both sides to try to plant firm poles in the swamp of Pabliste theory. Mandel, ignoring the workers' and farmers' government explanation that he helped develop, insists that Kampuchea had to be a workers' state because its bourgeois rulers were ousted in 1975, just like he now says - China had to be a workers' state as soon as the Stalinists ousted the Kuomintang in 1949. For if the state remained bourgeois only to have capitalism overthrown later, how could a bourgeois state be used to abolish capitalism?" (*Intercontinental Press*, April 9, 1979). An excellent question and a fundamental one for Marxists. It has taken the leading theoretician of the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" only thirty years to see the contradiction that he himself created.

For its part, the SWP relies on ridiculing the notion that any regime as brutal and backward as Pol Pot's could possibly be considered proletarian by anyone. This is true enough, but the SWP still believes that the other Stalinist states are workers' states. To explain the difference, it is forced to retrospectively manufacture working class "mobilizations" in all of the Stalinist takeovers (except for Pol Pot's) to replace the missing working class revolutionists. Despite these gyrations, they do score a point against Mandel over Kampuchea.

"When Rosa Luxemburg proclaimed that the choice before humanity was socialism or barbarism, it never occurred to her that any Marxist might mistake one for the other." (*Intercontinental Press*, July 16, 1979)

This "mistake" has been the trademark of the entire Pabliste movement for a quarter of a century. The SWP has hit the nail squarely on its own head.

While Mandel has apparently forsaken the Pabliste theory of workers' and farmers' governments, the SWP has taken it to further theoretical conquests. It now asserts that the Bolsheviks did not really set up a workers' state in 1917; it was only a workers' and peasants' government, since property had not yet been nationalized. Only when the nationalizations occurred in 1918 was it really a workers' state. As justification for this it cites Trotsky:

"Not only up to the Brest-Litovsk peace but even up to autumn of 1918, the social content of the revolution was restricted to a petty-bourgeois agrarian overturn and workers' control over production. This means that the revolution in its actions had not yet passed the boundaries of bourgeois society...Only toward the autumn of 1918...the workers went forward with the nationalization of the means of production. Only from this time can one speak of the inception of a

real dictatorship of the proletariat." ("The Class Nature of the Soviet State" in *Writings* 193) 14, p. 106)

Trotsky's meaning was that the proletarian revolution had immediate bourgeois tasks to carry out, most importantly the distribution of the land among the peasantry. The workers did not seize industry until after many months. When Trotsky reasoned that the dictatorship was not "real" until the workers had begun the specifically proletarian (not just bourgeois-democratic) tasks, he certainly was not implying that the Bolshevik state was still capitalist. He only said that the workers' revolution "in its actions" had for a time confined itself to the left over and pressing bourgeois tasks. But a capitalist state is the necessary implication of the SWP's new conception, for it does believe that Mao's China rested on a bourgeois state after 1949 and likewise with Eastern Europe until 1948. The SWP has hacked itself into a position where Bolshevik Russia ruled by the workers with arms in hand was capitalist, but Stalinist Eastern Europe which had crushed the workers was proletarian. They have forgotten that a workers' state means precisely a workers' state and nothing else. Confusing socialism for barbarism is an inevitable consequence.

Joseph Hansen is now dead, but one comment of his in 1969 on the state of Pabliste analysis to which he contributed so much deserves to be remembered. I think it is just to say that we have not yet achieved a fully satisfactory unified theory. (*The Workers and Farmers Government*, p. 23)

Pabliste in Practice

The real meaning of the Pablo-Hansen notion of workers' and farmers' governments evolving into workers' states lies in the actions it inspires. The United Secretariat has taken its scenario not as an exceptional line of development but as the norm. In Peru and Iran, the USec sections apparently believe that the road to socialism must pass through the stage of the workers' and farmers' government. Since the Pablo-Hansen theory envisages the transition to the workers' states and socialism without any further revolution, there is no need to include revolutionary demands in the Pabliste program. The workers' and farmers' government will be achieved as a "transitional" government under the existing bourgeois state, all that is required is the election of a "democratic" Constituent Assembly to set the workers' and farmers' government process into motion. This government will then make the transition to the workers' state without excessive violence and without having to rouse the masses, as the Pablo-Hansen theory supposedly demonstrates. By breaking the transition to socialism down into two stages, both evolutionary, the Pablistes (like the Stalinists) eliminate the need for the actual socialist revolution.

The crowning test of the Pablo-Hansen theory came with the victory in July of the Nicaraguan revolution against the murderous Somoza regime. This victory was the climax of mass struggles under the military leadership of the Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN), a petty-bourgeois nationalist guerrilla force inspired by the success of the Cuban revolution. The majority wing of the Sandinistas follows a two-stage reformist program derived from Stalinism and has international connections with liberal bourgeois Latin American governments; the two smaller wings are reported to be further left but share the stage theory of revolution. No wing is based on a working-class party. Articles in the USec's *Intercontinental Press* and *Inprecor* in June 1978 argued con-

vincingly that the FSLN is not a working class organization.

After Somoza's ouster, a Government of National Reconstruction was set up by the Sandinistas under U.S. pressure with an openly bourgeois majority, and it has promised to respect most private property and all capitalist relations. The regime is by no means stable since the Nicaraguan masses have immense hopes in their revolution and have already begun to form bodies of workers and peasants that threaten to compete for power. A leading obstacle is the masses' illusions in the ability of the Sandinistas to deliver on their promises. The FSLN policy of compromising with capitalism (and therefore with imperialism) will lead quickly to a conflict with the aspirations of the masses.

The U.Sec's position towards the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan revolution has necessarily been different from its line in Peru and Khomeini's Iran: the strictly parliamentary road obviously makes little sense in the midst of a violent civil war. But the U.Sec has not stood for a proletarian revolution. While supporting the military effort of the FSLN during the insurrection, the U.Sec raised democratic and transitional demands and criticized the Sandinistas' policy of promising the bourgeoisie a coalition government. Its culminating slogan, predictably, was the workers' and peasants' government. But in the context of urging the Sandinistas to break with the bourgeoisie, this slogan means a government of the Sandinistas alone, a petty bourgeois government. While the U.Sec has been careful not to give a clear class characterization of the Sandinistas as petty-bourgeois, it should have no conflict in doing so: its Pabloite theory asserts that petty bourgeois forces can make the socialist revolution.

During the anti-Somoza struggle in 1978, the U.Sec had a section in Nicaragua which reportedly urged steps like the formation of strike committees to take political leadership of the fight out of the hands of the liberal bourgeoisie (*Impressor*, French edition, October 5, 1978). It also called for a Constituent Assembly for similar purposes. But now that the Sandinistas are in power, the U.Sec changed its attitude. The Nicaraguan section has not been publicized since last fall, a sharp contrast to the publicity it gives its Peruvian and Iranian sections. There are no longer open calls for the Sandinistas to break with their bourgeois partners and there are none at all for a Constituent Assembly or the formation of an independent working class party. All trust is given to the Sandinistas alone because of "the revolutionary capacities of this leadership." The masses are not even warned to resist the government's call to hand over their arms and submit to the government's military command. Instead they are asked to mobilize in defense of the ruling Sandinistas who will propel the revolution forward. The SWP, the most sycophantic wing of the U.Sec, warns the masses not to challenge the Sandinistas' power:

"The choice in Nicaragua is either to move forward to the victory of a socialist revolution, as in Cuba — or to suffer a bloody defeat, as in Chile. Either the Sandinistas will consolidate the power of the workers and peasants and deepen the revolution into a socialist transformation, or they will be beaten back by imperialism... *There is no third road.*" (*Militant*, August 24, 1979; emphasis added)

Either Cuba or Chile — there is no other road. Working class revolution is prohibited! But even if we were to accept the U.Sec's endorsement of Cuba, it must be pointed out that the Cuban road is a very unlikely alternative for Nicaragua. In

Cuba as in Eastern Europe, it was first necessary for the Stalinists to nullify the power of the working class; this was done by taking over and disciplining all working class institutions. In Nicaragua there is no strong Stalinist party rooted in the working class, and the Sandinistas alone do not have the cynically hardened working class cadre to accomplish this task. (Not did the original Fidelistas, they had to ally and then merge with the Cuban CP in order to carry through the state capitalization of Cuba.)

In addition, the Russian sponsors of Cuban state capitalism are loath to take on another dependency or to challenge United States hegemony in this hemisphere. The Eastern bloc, even more crisis-ridden than the West, is too dependent on the higher productivity of the U.S. and its allies to take the risk (see *Socialist Voice* No. 7 for our analysis of this relationship). Not surprisingly, Fidel Castro has openly told the Nicaraguans not to hope for a Cuban solution.

"Democratic" Betrayal of Democracy

The only kind of transformation that can be envisaged is a revolutionary one leading to a genuine workers' state. But to the SWP, the good will of the Sandinistas has greater weight than material and historical considerations, so it chooses the Cuban road. It supports an admittedly bourgeois state against the possibility of a working class revolution. There is no word for such a line but counterrevolutionary.

To prove its loyalty, the SWP has contemptibly betrayed its own U.Sec comrades who fought on the side of the FSLN in the Simon Bolivar Brigade. This grouping was expelled from Nicaragua in August by the coalition government, charged with being "outsiders" trying to "capitalize on problems" by agitating in Managua for working class demands. The SWP implicitly supported the expulsion (*Militant* editorial, August 31, 1979). This incident was the first test of the Sandinistas' democracy and internationalism — which they and their admirers in the SWP have abysmally failed.

The SWP thus applauds the police of a bourgeois state disciplining its own comrades. It has come full circle. The U.Sec justifies its workers' and peasants' government strategy as a defense of democracy which will grow over into socialism. But in reality the workers' state is the only defense of democracy from the bourgeois democrats who are far more bourgeois than democratic. Support for the "democratic" workers' and peasants' government as opposed to a revolutionary break by the workers from the bourgeois state betrays democracy as well as socialism.

In making use of the Pablo-Hansen theory in Nicaragua the SWP actually has to take it farther than Hansen did. Cuba was Hansen's shining example, and he developed his "workers' and farmers' government" notions when the Fidelistas ousted their bourgeois coalition partners from the regime. But in Nicaragua the bourgeoisie is still in the government. So the Pabloite theory has to be extended to one more transitional stage. Where Marx and Lenin had envisaged the workers' state as the only transition between capitalism and communism, Pablo and Hansen added the workers' and farmers' government as the transition to the workers' state. In Nicaragua, the revolution has already occurred to the SWP's satisfaction (the radical petty bourgeoisie is in power) and there is no workers' and farmers' government yet — so we are presented with a new transitional regime. The SWP does not as yet have a formal label for it, but it uses classless terms like "revolutionary

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power) to describe it. The theory provides a many-layered cover for radical forms of bourgeois rule so that the workers and peasants will not find the road to their own state power. The SWP's contribution today makes this position explicit, but it has been the underlying method of Pabloism from the start.

The Program for Counterrevolution

For genuine Trotskyists, the Transitional Program is designed to raise the consciousness of the masses in order to confront the bourgeoisie. For Stalinists, revolutionary consciousness is a danger to their own power and must be undetermined, the programs of "democratic dictatorship of proletariat and peasantry," "new democracy" and "people's democracy" have precisely that effect. The Pabloite program likewise casts workers' consciousness aside: no revolutionary proletariat is required for the "road to socialism" following the path of the "workers' and farmers' government." In the past, Pabloites have argued that the "objective" processes of the revolution are what impels petty bourgeois forces to undertake the socialist transformation. Nicaragua indicates, however, that it is the consciousness of the radical petty bourgeoisie that is really decisive for them and determines their cheerleading role.

It may appear strange that the SWP actually talks about socialism in the case of Nicaragua, because in Peru and Iran it has generally concentrated upon purely democratic demands. The difference is that Nicaragua is more advanced, it already has a "revolutionary power" which the SWP believes can evolve into a workers' and farmers' government. The SWP is addressing its socialist ideas not to the masses but to the Sandinistas — the people who can really do the job. For the SWP the road to socialism lies through the petty bourgeois radicals at the head of the state. It is safe to talk of socialism because the masses can be assured that no revolutionary activity on their part is required. In other countries where there are no appropriate petty-bourgeois heroes yet, the workers might actually think that calls for revolution are addressed to themselves.

The USer's call for a petty-bourgeois route to socialism and its enthusiasm for the Cuban solution show that its socialism amounts in reality to state capitalism. For this goal no transitional program is needed but instead a program that stretches capitalism to its limits without going beyond them. Trotsky's Transitional Program has been adapted for this purpose by using a selection of its slogans without the proletarian revolutionary content that must accompany them. The workers' and farmers' government slogan serves admirably, as long as it is taken either in a democratic-parliamentary sense or else as a goal to be handed down from above by radicals running the state apparatus. In either sense, such a "workers' government," combined with a program of selective nationalizations, represents the ultimate aspiration of reformism: state capitalism. But a state capitalist transformation means a political revolution to supplant the old

bourgeoisie and — as the Stalinists well know — a decisive defeat of the working class. The Transitional Program, evanescent, mythologized and transformed into a program for state capitalism, thus becomes a program for counterrevolution.

In condemning the substitution of the workers' government slogan for the workers' state, we are therefore making a substantive distinction, not simply a terminological one. If there were parties in Nicaragua, Peru and Iran today calling for "workers' governments" but presenting the content of smashing the entire bourgeois state apparatus, that would not be a political capitulation. But it would still be a dangerous error. The workers' government slogan is a challenge to the mass reformist parties to carry out their promises and, separated from the workers' state, it also represents their ultimate program. Using "workers' government" to mean workers' state implies that reformism can achieve the destruction of capitalism — a deadly mistake, literally.

This substitution is by no means confined to the United Secretariat. The workers' government as the foremost revolutionary goal is the hallmark of all the centrist deformations of Trotskyism. And it is usually not prescribed with the actual content of a workers' state. If other organizations have not yet made the same outright betrayals as the USer in practice, and even if they faithfully and consistently advocate working class revolutions, the workers' government substitution is a deadly weight around their necks. The SWP has clearly chosen the side of the bourgeoisie in Nicaragua. Others who share the same theoretical conceptions and "transitional" slogans are obliged to prove that they will not be forced to the same conclusions.

Over the last three decades, the capitulations by the epigones of Trotsky have not been limited to revolutionary situations but have occurred in everyday practice as well. Every slogan from the Transitional Program has been stripped of its revolutionary content and used in collaborationist ways. Bolshevik intransigence has been turned into groveling obeisance.

We have pointed out that the Transitional Program was designed to be a bridge between the immediate struggles of the working class and its revolutionary destiny. The Pabloites have transformed it into a smudge between reformist and revolutionary ideas by preaching that the consistent struggle for reforms and democracy grows over into revolution. Inevitably, the epigones are driven to the conclusion that the counterposition of proletarian leadership to petty-bourgeois leadership, at the heart of the Transitional Program, must be abandoned. The renegade Kautsky becomes a stage in the development of the Bolshevik Lenin. The petty bourgeois radicals become the proletarian revolutionaries.

This Marxism of the marsh is no accidental lever. It reflects not a trend in logic or theory so much as the underlying fact that the Pabloites are a middle class formation within the workers' movement. Once the Fourth International presented itself as the vanguard of the world working class, now its degenerated offspring represent only its negation. Linked by a thousand threads to the other strands of petty-bourgeois democrats, they prefer every extreme "solution" to the death agony of capitalism but one — its termination by the proletarian revolution. ■