



Nahuel Moreno

**The Revolutionary
Dictatorship of
the Proletariat**

Nahuel Moreno

The Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat

1979

(For security reasons, the first edition of this book, was published under the pseudonym "Darioush Karim")

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Foreword to the 2021 edition

In 1977, the majority of the Fourth International – Unified Secretariat (USFI) adopted a draft resolution written by its leader Ernest Mandel, entitled *Socialist Democracy and Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. It was quickly translated into different languages and aimed to be one of the important topics of discussion at the XI World Congress that was scheduled to take place in 1979.

The current headed by Nahuel Moreno had entered the Fourth International – Unified Secretariat in 1964, a year after the reunification between the SWP of the United States and the International Secretariat headed by Ernest Mandel. In 1969, for the Ninth Congress, Moreno's current had joined the SWP and other sections to combat the guerrillaist deviation that Mandelism imposed on the Fourth International.

In March 1973, Morenoism together with the SWP formed the Leninist Trotskyist Tendency (LTT), which later in August was transformed into the Leninist Trotskyist Faction (LTF), to combat the increasingly revisionist and capitulatory positions of Mandelism, which had formed the International Majority Tendency (IMT). From 1975 onwards, an accelerated process of decline and fall into opportunism in the leadership of the SWP began to become evident, which led the LTF to a crisis. Most of its forces, led by Morenoism, which in August 1976 in Bogotá formed the Bolshevik Tendency (BT), withdrew. At the centre of the debate with the SWP were, among others, policies towards revolutionary processes in Portugal and Angola.

In 1977, both the Mandelist IMT and the minimal remnants of the LTF that the SWP grouped dissolved themselves without explanation and unified into what Morenoism defined as “an unprincipled bloc” to remain in the leadership of the Fourth International.

One of the first and main programmatic-political agreements of the former IMT and the SWP was expressed in the approval, in July 1977, of the draft resolution presented by Ernest Mandel that we previously mentioned. The document expressed a totally revisionist conception of Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism on the issue of the dictatorship of the proletariat, workers' democracy and a capitulation to bourgeois democracy. This worsening of the deviations led the Bolshevik Tendency to transform itself into a faction, in July 1978. In its *Platform and Program*, the Bolshevik Faction (BF) took the criticism of Mandel's text on “socialist democracy” as one of the first topics of controversy, calling to reject it as revisionist at the Eleventh World Congress.

While in exile in Bogota, Moreno prepared this lengthy polemical document, which was published in February 1979, entitled *The Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. It was published in Spanish by the Colombian PST, as part of its *International Polemic Collection* that reproduced the debate documents towards the Eleventh Congress and which also published the USFI project *Socialist Democracy and Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Also in 1979, it was published as an internal bulletin in Buenos Aires by the Argentine PST, which acted clandestinely since it was prohibited by the military dictatorship. From London, it was published in English with the support of the Trotskyist

group headed by Alan Thornett, who had been expelled in 1966 from Gerry Healy's party. Thornett participated as a guest in the constitution conference of the BF in Bogota but later he moved away from Morenoism.

The expected polemic over workers' democracy, bourgeois democracy and other issues raised by Mandel and criticized by Moreno (for example, on whether or not there was danger of restoration in the bureaucratic workers' states), which would have been held at the Eleventh World Congress, did not take place. In August 1979 in Nicaragua, the Simon Bolívar Brigade (SBB), promoted by Morenoism from Bogota, was expelled by the bourgeois Sandinista government. Both the SWP leadership and Mandelism supported this expulsion. Faced with this flagrant violation of elementary principles of the working class and the revolutionists, the BF withdrew from the Fourth International (United Secretariat). Those attending the Eleventh World Congress unanimously and explicitly declared their support for the Sandinista government and the expulsion of the SBB.

The work was republished in Buenos Aires, with a foreword by the author, signed "Darioush Karim, Paris, March 1986".

Mercedes Petit¹

July 2021

1 **Mercedes Petit** is a Trotskyist militant, a journalist, and a researcher. In the 1960s, she joined the current headed by Nahuel Moreno (www.nahuelmoreno.org), with whom she collaborated in theoretical elaboration and propaganda tasks. After the 1976 military coup, they shared exile in Colombia. Petit wrote *Elementary Political Concepts* and *Our Experience with Lambertism* in 1986 together with Nahuel Moreno (both available in www.nahuelmoreno.org); *Notes for a History of Trotskyism* (2005) and *Working Women and Marxism* (2009, with Carmen Carrasco). She writes in *El Socialista* (www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar) and in *International Correspondence* (www.uit-ci.org).

Preface to the 1986 edition

For this new edition of my work *The Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, I have thought it appropriate to write a few lines to expand the explanation of the causes that led to the document of the Unified Secretariat – Fourth International (USFI), *Socialist Democracy and Dictatorship of the Proletariat* against which I argue, and to further specify the relationship between freedom and repression under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Turning to the first topic, it is worth remembering that our criticism of Mandelism has not been limited to this debate. We have always held that it is an impressionist current, which yields to the fashions of intellectual or student circles in imperialist Europe. In this book we argue against the modality that Mandelist impressionism adopts at the time that Eurocommunism arises or, more precisely, when “Carrillism” arises, that is, the break with the discipline to Moscow by the Spanish Communist Party led by Santiago Carrillo, in the mid-1970s. As it could not be otherwise, this process also had an impact on our impressionable Mandel, who saw signs of being a progressive phenomenon or of having the possibility of being one.

Eurocommunism: Progressive or reactionary?

On the contrary, in our opinion, Eurocommunism was moving towards reformism. That is why we argued at that time that we had to analyse in-depth the economic and social phenomena behind Eurocommunism.

It is well known that world Stalinism depends on Moscow economically and in every way. But to the extent that the communist parties of the capitalist countries become strong, they enter the mechanisms and apparatuses of bourgeois democracy. They begin to dominate municipalities, achieve parliamentary positions and depend more and more—even economically—on these positions and their relations with the bourgeoisie of their country. Symmetrically, the dependence of each communist party in relation to Moscow decreases. The Eurocommunist parties thus increasingly resemble the Social Democratic parties, which do not depend on any workers’ state and are instead closely linked to the bourgeois democracy of their countries.

This has as a positive that it accelerates the decomposition of Stalinism. But the negative aspect is that no progressive or revolutionary current could (or can) emerge from Eurocommunism, precisely because of this social-democratisation, to that greater and growing dependence of the Eurocommunist parties regarding the bourgeoisie and its apparatuses.

Nor does this mean that we should then support orthodox Muscovite Stalinism against Eurocommunism. They are two negative phenomena as a whole but they have in common the positive aspect of being expressions of the crisis of Stalinism on a global scale.

Mandelist “Eurotrotskyism”

The general capitulation to Eurocommunism, which abandoned the line of the dictatorship of the proletariat — from the formal point of view because orthodox Stalinism had already abandoned it in content — led Mandel to also capitulate to all the bourgeois-democratic prejudices of the social democracy and Eurocommunism. He thus created a Eurotrotskyism which actually argued that there would be no civil wars or major problems in the European revolution, nor in the world revolution in general.

Mandel, in his document *Socialist Democracy and Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, proposed a political line for the moment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the civil war that can only be applied when the proletariat is already defeating imperialism on a global scale. The policy voted by the USFI was for the most unrestricted freedom for all currents and for the most juridical, purest judgment of the counterrevolutionaries who took up arms against the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Mandel tried to show Eurocommunism that Eurotrotskyism, as soon as the proletariat took power, would bring democracy almost to the absolute.

Class struggle and democratic freedoms

Let it be well understood. The proletariat gives many more democratic freedoms when it takes power than the bourgeoisie. But not in an unlimited and absolute way as Mandel said. Our attack was because Mandel in his document — which was later approved by the world congress of the USFI — abstracted the dictatorship of the proletariat from the true revolutionary process that was going to take place in the next five, 10 or 20 years.

We believed and continue to believe that the world revolutionary process and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat will have to face powerful enemies, colossal civil wars. That it is going to unfold in a process of revolutions and wars of unusual violence and not within those pure and juridical norms that Mandel raised and raises.

This is what we are seeing currently in Haiti. According to Mandel, we should tell the masses to stop killing “Tonton Macoutes”. We, on the other hand, encourage the Haitian masses and their immediate revolutionary justice.

Programmatic norms and class struggle

To finish, I would like to point out that there have been two interpretations of my work. One, starting from the general argumentation of the book, concludes that we Trotskyists are in principle, as a program, for repression, the persecution of the bourgeoisie, the bourgeois parties, the counterrevolutionaries, the reactionaries, and everything that is not worker’s. And, on the other hand, based on the final synthesis, when I summarise in a few points, in a few small theses — let’s call them that — our positions, there are comrades who interpret that we only insist on the orientation that under the dictatorship of the proletariat practically absolute freedoms will be given to the workers and we will be very liberal concerning the bureaucratic workers’ parties and with a certain liberality towards the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois parties.

We believe there is a misunderstanding in those who only see dictatorship and also in those who only see liberality in this book.

One aspect, liberality, reflects the programmatic norm: we want to build a society of freedom. The other aspect, repression, reflects the reality of class struggle and civil wars.

The programmatic norms, when applied, suffer deformations, adaptations to the reality of the class struggle, which is always the richest thing. That is why Trotsky insists so much that civil war and revolution are the least juridical actions, the ones that least conform to the norms.

The final points, of synthesis, are for us the programmatic norms. The rest of the book tries to show how, although these programmatic norms must be applied, the absolute law is that of the class struggle. We are in favour of the revolutionary masses doing what they want, taking whatever initiatives they can think of. This is the absolute principle of all our political actions. That the masses mobilise and, in the mobilisation, do what they democratically decide. This is our fundamental rule. It is what today, contrary to the norms and pure legality that Mandel demands, leads us to support the initiative and the revolutionary justice of the Haitian masses.

There is a contradiction in this book, but an inevitable and characteristic contradiction of every Marxist revolutionary, between the norm and the pressing needs of the class struggle in the most critical moments, wars or revolutions. This forces us to attempt to strike a dynamic, hard-to-achieve balance between the reality of the revolutionary struggle and our programmatic norms of striving for the most absolute freedom for all men on earth.

Darioush Karim (Nahuel Moreno)

Paris, March 1986

Preface by Darioush Karim (Nahuel Moreno) in February 1979

This polemic book against the resolution *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* presented by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, was finished in July 1978. The manuscript was shown to an important group of political friends, who returned to me with some modifications and suggestions. None of them brought substantial changes to the original text, except for that made by an Italian friend, on the definition of the revolutionary dictatorship. His view was to add to the six points with which I had defined revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat one which defined its nature. I included this observation, as well as all the others.

When the present work was about to go to the publishers, lacking only the final touches, I left on a trip to certain countries of the Middle East as a tourist-journalist, intending to return within two weeks. While in Iran, I was arrested along with several socialist comrades. This caused me several months of inconvenience because of the time taken to regain my freedom and then reorganise my activity. These were the circumstances that delayed the printing of this book.

I generally write the preface after I have finished the main text. For this reason, because of the loss of time I had looking after my personal affairs and the attempt to write an introduction of interest to young readers of the left — to whom my work is primarily addressed— the work was not finished until December. All these drawbacks, however, gave me time to add the examples of the Shah and the mobilisations in Iran, in those passages which, in the initial text, referred to Somoza, Pinochet, Franco and Salazar.

I am convinced that, during the six months since I virtually finished this book, the accelerated course of the world revolution has confirmed some of the central points in this work. I believe there are two that deserve to be especially featured. One of them is the attack on the ignorance reflected in the resolution on the possibility of wars or invasions between proletarian dictatorships, as well as the lack of a policy towards those inevitable situations. A few months later Vietnam invaded Cambodia.

Another central point of my criticism to the United Secretariat (USFI) is for not recognising the need for violent armed confrontation with the counter-revolution under certain circumstances, and for its proposal that this confrontation should always adhere to written laws. Everything that has happened in Iran supports my criticism. The Iranian masses have had to arm themselves before they could execute the assassins of Savak² and confront troops loyal to the Shah. Fortunately, they did not follow the dictates of the USFI resolution. It did not occur to any Iranian worker, peasant or student to hold a public trial without recourse to “retroactive delinquency” for the murderers and exploiters of the previous regime. They did what all revolutionaries in history have done: they democratically judged and executed the murderers wherever they found them.

2 **SAVAK** (National Organisation for Security and Intelligence) was the secret police, domestic security and intelligence service in Iran during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty. It was established by Mohammad Reza Shah with the help of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). [Editor]

These two examples clearly show that this book deals, at least, with current and fundamental problems to the development of world revolution. The title sums up my position: I have rejected “Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” of the USFI to return to the sources, to revive the old Marxist formula. Put another way, a dictatorship to develop the revolution, rather than immediate “Socialist democracy”.

Darioush Karim [Nahuel Moreno],

February 1979

Introduction

When the major western Communist Parties, such as the French, Spanish and Italian, withdrew from their programs the slogan of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” a debate generalised on the phenomenon that has been termed “Eurocommunism”, that is the abandonment of the Marxist-Leninist concept of the state along with a superficial criticism of the worst features of the ruling Stalinist bureaucracies.

In this as in all previous major controversies, the Marxist teachings which have been corroborated and enriched by over a century of revolutionary experience are at stake. To defend these teachings, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) passed a resolution entitled *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* in which the authors proposed a public debate on the subject. It was the right thing to do because the subject is of great interest to all the European and western left.

And it is no coincidence that the Communist Parties decide to withdraw the slogan of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” at the precise moment that Europe is experiencing an uprise in workers’ struggles which is also spreading to Latin America, the USA and the colonial masses of Asia and Africa.

In reality, the Communist Parties are simply adjusting their theories to their old daily practice: the abandonment of the class struggle and its conclusion, the dictatorship of the proletariat. And they do this precisely at the moment when their respective imperialisms have increased pressure on the Communist and Socialist Parties to accept their austerity plans.

The strongest Communist Parties of Western Europe find themselves under twofold pressure: the imperialist offensive on the standard of living and employment of the working class and the latter’s refusal to bear the brunt of the capitalist crisis.

To confront the resistance of the workers, imperialism —European, Yankee or Japanese— appeals to the bourgeois-democratic prejudices of the workers. Through its enormously powerful mass media, it subjects the masses of these countries to a permanent campaign extolling the virtues of bourgeois democracy and its freedoms while criticising the lack of democracy and freedoms in the workers’ states. Instead of comparing the colossal gains of the working class —expropriation of the bourgeoisie, planning, full employment, etc. — which would tip the scales in favour of the workers’ states, the media *compares formal freedoms* and questions the repressive, totalitarian character of the workers’ states. Day after day, the mass media challenges the left-wing parties and the workers with arguments like: “We give you full freedoms to oppose us. We only use repression if you rise against the national democratic constitution; if, for instance, you resort to wildcat strikes, acts of terrorism, or try to impose your will on the nation and reject the results of the elections or the decisions of the freely elected parliament. Instead, in the workers’ states, there are concentration camps and all citizens who do not conform to the ruling Communist Party’s opinions are sent to prison or

interned in psychiatric clinics. We are democratic: we give you freedom of speech, of the press, and freedom to run in elections; and we will even allow you to take over the government if you win. The choice is between the freedoms of the capitalist countries or the totalitarianism of the proletarian dictatorships. However, *to maintain this system, you must accept the sacrifice of working longer hours and earning lower wages.* The choice is yours: freedom or totalitarianism.”

These statements aim to the bourgeois-democratic prejudices of Western workers. Anyone active among the students or workers of the advanced capitalist countries will be aware of this belief, which fundamentally consists in believing that capitalism, despite its faults, offers freedom of choice: where to live, where to work, what to study, etc. This belief does not take into account the relative nature of these privileges and, what is even more serious; it does not understand that these advantages, scarce as they are, belong exclusively to the rich nations, which exploit the rest of humanity. Over the last decades, the Communist parties have joined the Social Democrats in aiding and abetting these sentiments. Other factors have been the economic boom, which has permitted a higher standard of living for the working class and the modern middle classes; the tragic spectacle of the bureaucratic regimes of Eastern Europe and especially the USSR; the terrible experience of the fascist totalitarian regimes; and lastly, the victorious struggle against the Greek colonels, Salazarism and Francoism, that initiated a period of democratic privileges which the masses are afraid to lose.

Not satisfied with that, each imperialism makes the following demands of their respective workers’ parties, particularly the communists; “are you willing to help us overcome our national economic crisis to safeguard democratic freedoms and the parliamentary system? Will you be serious and trustworthy politicians, ready to convince the working class that it must make a sacrifice to safeguard the economic development of the nation? Are you on the side of the homeland and economic development, or for the defence of the USSR and the sectoral interests of the workers?”

For now, many communist parties are immune to these questions. Because of their weakness and their lack of positions in parliament, trade unions and government of their respective countries, their leaderships remain dependent on aid from Moscow. This means that, for the time being, they maintain their traditional positions.

But, for the stronger parties, such as the Italian Communist Party., this means the following: “What do you want? To lose millions of dollars in trade with the USSR or your municipal incomes? To lose thousands of supporters who will lose their jobs? Do you wish to lose your enormous part in the bureaucratic apparatus of the major cities to return to a dependency on the USSR, like the weaker Communist Parties? What for? Are you really losing any influence in the parliamentary system with these austerity plans? Our system guarantees your jobs and privileges. Is it too much to ask in return that you discuss with us labour contracts and laws to convince workers to earn a little less or work a little more?” For this reason, Communist parties have accepted with open arms collaboration with the austerity plans of the bosses, as already seen in Italy and Spain.

However, the awareness that this policy could produce serious crises —to be overtaken by the mass movement or to lose votes in elections— leads them to compensate by making concessions in other areas. The same concessions as those made by the bosses but with Marxist guise.

The Communist Parties have “democratised” their program and their policies and attempt to direct everything into discussions that alienate their militants and the vanguard from the resistance to the economic plans of the bosses’ governments. For example, relying on the just repudiation of the masses, they attack American imperialism, instead of identifying the imperialist bourgeoisie of their own country as the main enemy. For the same reasons, they question the political monopoly and the one-party system of the sinister Russian bureaucracy by criticising the worst features of the relentless repression exercised by the USSR and the other bureaucratized workers’ states against their oppositionists and other workers’ states. They also defend the martyrs of the Moscow trials, the other victims of Stalinism, and Czechoslovakia.

And when they withdraw the dictatorship of the proletariat from their program, openly defending the parliamentary system and universal suffrage, they do it to foster the false democratic hopes of the working class and gain credibility with the bourgeoisie. They advocate an absolute

multi-party system both before and after the seizure of power based on the workers' hopes that everything will be put in order through peaceful, parliamentary reformism. They have even asserted that, should they reach power and then lose the elections to a reactionary party, they will abide by the result out of respect for the sanctity of universal suffrage. And, as it could not be otherwise, they have begun to raise patriotism towards their imperialism which can be counter-posed to the old blind "Russian patriotism" which characterised the early stages of Stalinism. For the same reasons, they have started to insinuate, albeit more timidly, freedom of dissent within their Communist parties and the workers' organisations they control.

They face the Trotskyists with arguments similar to those imperialists use: "Don't be dogmatic. Forget the class struggle and the proletarian revolution and dictatorship advocated by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and adapt yourselves to the times and the advanced Western societies. Why not commit yourselves, as we have done, to unfettered political freedom if you seize power? Why don't you put aside the mistaken notions of class struggle, workers' revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the pledge to defend democratic freedoms and the parliamentary system? Why not defend universal suffrage, parliamentary democracy and majority rule?"

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International wrote and published its resolution precisely to respond to the Euro-communists and defend the positions of Lenin and Trotsky on these issues. All this would have been extremely praiseworthy and gained our unconditional support had the USFI not committed a veritable theoretical, political and historical crime by ascribing to the dictatorship of the proletariat objectives and a program 90 per cent of which are outlined in the Euro-communist programs and diametrically opposed to those of our teachers.

According to the USFI, the dictatorship of the proletariat will be duty-bound to guarantee the restorationist bourgeoisie and its political parties "unfettered political freedom" from the first day of its inception and forever more so long as these parties do not take up arms and declare civil war. "This is our programmatic and principled position: unfettered political freedom for all those who in practice respect collective property and the workers' state's constitution."³ What does "in practice" mean? "This means that freedom of political organisation should be granted all those, including pro-bourgeois elements, who in actual practice respect the constitution of the workers' state, i.e., are not engaged in violent actions to overthrow workers' power and collective property."⁴

It seems ridiculous that we should have to explain why there can be no "unfettered political freedom" or "universal suffrage" under a class dictatorship and that there should be a debate to establish that dictatorship is counterpoised to "unfettered political freedom" for all inhabitants since dictatorship means some form of oppression, of political compulsion for someone because otherwise, it is not a dictatorship. The debate moves from the absurd to the tragic when we apply this concept to the political arena ("unfettered political freedom for Somoza, Pinochet, and the Shah of Iran until they take up arms against the workers' dictatorship without standing trial for their past crimes").

The USFI tries to justify its position by referring to Lenin and Trotsky. However, it is easy to demonstrate that its new program has nothing to do with what the latter did and said.

For Lenin it was not political freedom but only dictatorial power that was "unfettered" after the October Revolution: "The scientific term 'dictatorship' means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force."⁵ In *The State and Revolution* Lenin quotes Engels: "so long as the proletariat still needs the state, it does not need it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist."⁶ In the *Program of the Russian Communist Party*, written by him and ratified in 1936 by Trotsky, Lenin emphasises the

3 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Vanguard Press, Toronto, 1977, p. 27.

4 Ibid, p. 2.

5 Lenin, V.I.: "A Contribution to the History of the Question of the Dictatorship", 1920, in *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Vol. 31, 1965, p. 353.

6 Lenin, V.I.: "The State and Revolution", 1917, in *Collected Works*, op. cit., vol. 25, p. 445.

“restrictions... of freedom” until socialism is won and the exploitation of man by man disappears: “... withdrawal of political rights and all other restrictions of freedom are merely provisional measures which will cease to be necessary when the objective possibility of the exploitation of man by man ceases to exist...”

In *The Revolution Betrayed*, the same book on which the USFI attempts to base its “programmatic and principled norm”, Trotsky insists that under the dictatorship of the proletariat there must be “strict limitations of freedom”: “To be sure, a revolutionary dictatorship means by its very essence strict limitations of freedom.”⁷ Close to exile, he warned us that “the dictatorship of the proletariat is inconceivable without the use of force even against sections of the proletariat itself.” In 1938, the *Transitional Program* repeats these statements “...the formulas of democracy (freedom of the press, right to unionise, etc.) mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans in the independent movement of the proletariat...”⁸

The traditional programmatic norm of Marxism is therefore sufficiently clear: “unfettered political freedom” will only be given when “the objective possibility of the exploitation of man by man ceases to exist”, that is, when imperialism has been definitely defeated and the classes have disappeared. Until then, there will be “strict limitations of freedom” according to Trotsky, and a “withdrawal of political rights” and “restriction of freedoms” according to Lenin. This “unfettered power” will be necessary for the defence of the national and international socialist revolution. We will not wait for the counter-revolutionaries to declare civil war against the new government to limit their freedom but we will stop them organising and taking up arms. Therefore, we are not committed to giving them “unfettered political freedom”. This does not mean that we shall outlaw counter-revolutionaries altogether; they shall have limited “political freedom” according to the requirements of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

We believe that both the above quotations and our arguments sufficiently prove the USFI has completely revised the revolutionary Marxist position on the dictatorship of the proletariat. With this, we do not mean to say the USFI is mistaken. We are merely proving the significant fact that its present views are opposed to the traditional Marxist position. Thus, one of its most enthusiastic adherents admits with complete honesty: “Specifically, I believe this is a positive and necessary *correction* (emphasis in the original), with which I emphatically agree. This must be clearly stated. It is necessary to establish the material bases and political logic which lead us to adopt the present position. Otherwise, we would be suggesting that the resolution states the traditional position of the Fourth International, the Left Opposition, and the Bolshevik Leninists, which would not be a serious attitude on our part.” And further: “Our program at this stage is not the same or identical to that of the Bolsheviks in 1917 nor that which we have traditionally adhered to.”⁹

The reader will wonder: how this change has come about? Since it cannot be a theoretical “mistake” or “omission”, is it a capitulation? If not, what is it? How do we define what is happening?

What has happened is that a section of the Western and European Trotskyist movement has become a transmission belt for the bourgeois-democratic prejudices of Western workers, combined with the ideological traces of the ultra-left influences from the European student movement they had until recently.

These prejudices are manifested in their program of “unfettered political freedom” and the ultra-left influence is shown in the formal, academic, negation of bourgeois-democratic institutions.

Although this influence is relenting since it being replaced by bourgeois institutions as shown by Mandel’s desire to impose “universal suffrage” upon the dictatorship of the proletariat.

What happens in the ranks of this sector of Trotskyism is a phenomenon symmetrical to that of Eurocommunism. The programs of the current leadership of the Fourth International is the same

7 Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, 1936, Pathfinder Press, 1977, New York, p. 278.

8 Trotsky, Leon: “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International”, 1938, in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, 1973, New York, p. 101.

9 Heredia, A.: “On the USFI Resolution Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”, published in Paris in August, 1977.

as the one of the Western European Communist Parties although the program of the USFI is for the dictatorship of the proletariat while the program of the Eurocommunists is for the capitalist and transitional system. And this is for similar reasons.

The Communist International under Lenin, and later the Trotskyists, have insistently remarked on the existence of bourgeois-democratic prejudices amongst the Western masses. The strength of the Social Democratic and Communist parties is a clear political expression of this fact. These parties embody the ideal synthesis: they are “working-class parties” and give articulate expression to their prejudices. They are not imperialist: they criticise the workers’ states from the “democratic” angle. Nevertheless, the European crisis and rise while initially eroding those prejudices, also strengthen them. How? Very simple. At the beat of the rise, which means in a way more power to them, the workers believe that everything will be solved when their parties take office peacefully, through elections.

This poses a theoretical-political problem. The Fourth International of Europe and the USA lives in a society and with toiling masses that are immersed in bourgeois-democratic prejudice. Inevitably, some leaders and currents of our movement must reflect these prejudices. Who can these people be? Unfortunately, this question answers itself: the USFI majority. Who else could it be? Someone must reflect them. At the end of the 1960s, when the European student movement gave massive support to the Cuban Revolution, made Che Guevara its hero, and guerrilla warfare its method, this socio-political phenomenon also had its transmission belt in our International. It could not be otherwise. It has always been and will continue to be so. A living International which is not a sect will always reflect the socio-political processes in which it is immersed. In no way, however, does this mean that our International should transform itself into their mouthpiece. Together with Trotsky, we believe that to lead the revolution, we must “swim against the current”.

But the current United Secretariat of the Fourth International, all its documents and policies express, within the Trotskyist ranks, a complete surrender to the bourgeois-democratic prejudices of the Western masses. Its resolution on the *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* is the most perfect synthesis that has been elaborated to date of this new revisionist tendency that has begun to take shape. Trotsky, in his time, compared fascism and Stalinism as parallel phenomena caused by the advance of the counter-revolution in the world. Today, we can say that Eurocommunism and the current policy of the USFI are, roughly, symmetrical phenomena caused by the same socio-political- reasons: the rise of the European workers’ movement and the burden of the bourgeois-democratic prejudices of the masses.

They are symmetrical but not identical. Against the Eurocommunists, the comrades of the USFI formally defend the dictatorship of the proletariat and the need for a workers’ revolution against bourgeois-democratic institutions. They emphatically assert they are the guardians of the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky. Thus, they strive to convince the workers and public opinion that the dictatorship of the proletariat as they define it —more legitimate, wise, generous, libertarian as well as the most democratic towards counter-revolutionary parties than any previous class dictatorship — is the dictatorship advocated by our teachers.

However, this is not the case. Thus, we insist on pointing out the USFI’s true coincidence is with Eurocommunism. There must be complete clarity on this point. The USFI majority and the Eurocommunists are in complete agreement over the multiparty system and the granting of absolute freedom to the bourgeois parties in all stages of the class struggle, contrary to the traditional Marxist conceptions.

The present orientation of the USFI majority can therefore be scientifically categorized as Euro-Trotskyist and be defined as feverish bourgeois liberalism; that is, its orientation is profoundly opportunistic, falling at times in the ultra-leftism.

Summing up, the USFI does not respond to the Eurocommunist pressures as a Trotskyist should, but rather accepts the greater part of its premises, stating “We still support the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers’ revolution but let there be no confusion, our dictatorship will give immediate ‘unfettered political freedom’ to all citizens, including the counter-revolutionaries, by

replacing parliament with soviets which will be far more democratic, open to the whole population and not only to the workers.” And Comrade Mandel reinforces this capitulation to Eurocommunism by asserting he is an “intransigent supporter of universal suffrage before, during and after the workers take power” (*El País*, Madrid, 7 August 1978).

The hybrid which results from giving a Eurocommunist content and form to the Marxist concept of proletarian dictatorship forces the USFI into attempting to prove a theoretical absurd: that “dictatorship of the proletariat” means granting “unfettered political freedom” to the counter-revolutionaries.

If the document had not been written yet and someone had considered the possibility that this position of the USFI —Trotskyist dictatorship and Eurocommunist freedom— would crystallise in a resolution, this would surely have been considered impossible. One would think, for example, that it would demand a misrepresentation of history in the style of the historians of the CPSU or something similar. Because this is an impossible task; the USFI cannot circumvent the two contradictions it faces with its new program: on the one hand, the traditional Trotskyist position and, on the other, the reality of the class struggle.

They attempt a solution to the first contradiction with a play on words, placing an equal sign between “dictatorship of the proletariat” and “unfettered political freedom”. In this context, the Eurocommunists have been more consistent than our own comrades by removing the first phrase from their program. The USFI, on the contrary, clings to it to formally remain within Trotskyism while imbuing it with a strictly Eurocommunist content and thus negating it.

To avoid confronting reality, the document establishes a new style in Marxism by floating above it. For example, there is no reference to 60 years of proletarian dictatorships, in a resolution about the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”; it contains a thesis on political parties without mentioning any of the socialist, communist or Trotskyist parties by name. The same regarding political or practical assertions: it never gives current examples of its theoretical assertions. We do not believe the members of the USFI have lost their grasp of reality. On the contrary, we think they have taken flight to a far-removed period to best defend their position. A clear example of the application of the resolution would have been to announce to the Iranian workers: “When we take power, we will do our utmost to stop the trial of the Shah and struggle for his ‘unfettered political freedom’.” Clearly, the USFI would have great difficulty in convincing any Iranian revolutionary that this correct.

This novel style gives this document its unusual style, its strange character. The resolution leaps more than a century, from the time before Lenin took power to the cybernetic telephones of the future, ignoring both the past and the concrete problems of the present and the immediate future. The result of all this is a work of a new literary genre. Critics might well consider it to be a typical expression of late surrealism. Others may consider it the expression of a new current: Marxist science fiction. Indeed, as a work of science fiction, it proceeds most pleasingly in its consideration of real scientific concepts and more or less viable possibilities.

However, from a political standpoint, this play on the imagination is devoid of interest. Any document on the dictatorship of the proletariat must deal with some fundamental questions. Among others: What has been the experience of the successful proletarian dictatorships over the last 60 years? What is our position on the invasion of one dictatorship of the proletariat by another? And many similar problems. However, the most decisive and important of all is: with what party and what program may we achieve within five, 10 or 20 years the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat for which we struggle? This gives rise to another series of questions: Will they be blocked; will they involve civil war? Will the reformist parties nationally and internationally fight them to the death? Will the first, led by Trotskyists, be able to avoid a terrible civil war with the bureaucratised workers’ states, imperialism, the bourgeois parties and opportunist workers’ parties? Will dictatorships in advanced and under-developed countries be identical? (The document seems to suggest they will.) And, how will we impose the dictatorship? Through insurrection and civil war?

The above are some of the problems which will face us, and our International should formulate a program to deal with them. However, the USFI’s majority publishes a resolution that ignores

them. A Marxist document should neither avoid these issues nor confuse the reader with evasive or futuristic formulations. Neither should it make concessions to avoid clashing with widely held prejudices, save prestige or disguise revisionist positions. By doing so, it prevents the formulation of a clear line for political action for the coming years.

The revisionist process under way has inevitable consequences which demand our attention. This turn, resulting from the democratist pressures of the Western masses, begins to be total. It is even more disastrous than the previous turn, which resulted from the guerrillaist pressures. Whereas that turn showed desperation to achieve its objectives, the present turn abandons those objectives altogether. It is impossible to attack one of the pillars of Marxism—in this case, the concept of the revolutionary dictatorship—without the collapse of the entire building.

The paper which supports the resolution of the USFI leaves us with no doubt: “What will be the effect of the new phenomena on the activity of the working class? What is the dialectic of the relation between the masculine and feminine worker, the old and the young, the manual with the intellectual, technical or scientific worker? What will be the effect of these phenomena on the relation of the vanguard of the working class with the masses? And how will this affect the organisations that the masses generate? Is the relationship between class, party and leadership the same today as it was at the time of Lenin and Trotsky? Is it legitimate to conclude that the relation of the vanguard parties of 1917 is the same as that of today? Or the relation of the parties with the state? Will the structure of the party remain the same? Will our concept of democratic centralism be the same as that of yore? *We think not*, we subscribe wholeheartedly to the assertion that ‘A’ is not equal to ‘A’.”¹⁰

This defence and the revisionism of the resolution signify the abandonment of the entire Marxist-Leninist Trotskyist heritage; loose hands for the bourgeoisie, no settling of scores with the fascists and, ultimately and as a consequence, a different conception of the organisation of the revolutionary party and of the stages of the class struggle that, if left uncorrected, will lead the Trotskyist parties to abandon the workers’ revolution and its conclusion, the civil war.

We consider that with our response starts one of the most important debates that have taken place within the ranks of the Fourth International. The purpose of this work is to impress upon the young newcomers to Marxism, that flattery and concession to their prejudices on the part of the young and old leaders formed in the universities are causing havoc to our Marxist heritage. We will attempt to show that the current majority of the USFI is misleading us in the manner of Kautsky, Martov, Urbahns, Souvarine¹¹ and all other opportunists and centrists in the world rather than following the path of Lenin and Trotsky.

10 Heredia, A.: “On the USFI Resolution Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”, op. cit.

11 **Karl Kautsky** (1854-1938), was a Czech-Austrian and one of the main theorists and leaders of the German Social Democracy. He accompanied the revolutionary wing together with Lenin against the reformism of the Second International until a few years before the First World War. He fell into centrist and capitulatory positions and became a critical open enemy of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Lenin wrote in 1918 *The Proletarian Revolution and the renegade Kautsky*, and Trotsky in 1920 *Terrorism and Communism*, against Kautsky’s defense of bourgeois democracy.

Julius Martov (1873-1923) was a Social Democratic politician who became the leader of the Mensheviks in Russia in the early 20th century. He was an old friend and mentor of Trotsky, who described him as the “Hamlet of democratic socialism.”

Hugo Urbahns (1890-1946) was a leader of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and was expelled as an oppositionist in 1927. He was one of the founders of the Leninbund, a left-centrist split of the KPD. For a time, he had ties to Trotsky, who began to disagree with Urbahns about the USSR’s definition of class and other issues. In 1930 Urbanhs expelled Trotsky’s followers. See “An Open Letter to All Members of the Leninbund”, 6 February 1930, *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1930).

Boris Souvarine (1895-1984), was one of the founders of the French Communist Party. He repudiated Stalinism in the 1920s and broke with Leninism in the 1930s. Trotsky had a strong polemic with him, seeing him as the embodiment of the cynicism and defeatism that characterized those who broke with Bolshevism. [Editor]

CHAPTER I

A program of “unfettered political freedom” for the Shah or a program for crushing him without mercy?

Far from mocking the title, we think it sums up the questions an Iranian worker would pose after reading the USFI’s document. On the one hand, he will find no answers to any of his questions and, on the other, he will notice that all he has done is criticised by the USFI. At this point, the worker will have probably lost several friends, co-workers and relatives in the streets of Tehran. He is convinced that the Shah left Iran thanks to the mobilisations. Because of this, all his questions will be related to the violence: how to get arms, how to guarantee a strike-through force, how to confront the police and the army of Bakhtiar,¹² how to convince the soldiers not to fire on the people, etcetera. If he feels sure of something, it is that the *terror* now felt by the SAVAK agents who go around asking for mercy is fine. He has no doubt of the need about executing a few of them and he approves without hesitation of spontaneous lynching. It does not even occur to him that he is fighting for the “unfettered political freedom” of anybody, and he does not care about the image the masses might be presenting to those who are worried about democracy. He only wants to be sure that the Shah will not return, that the Imperial Guard and the SAVAK are dissolved. This worker who has come to know Trotskyism through the USFI’s document will never want to be a Trotskyist because he will just think that if the Shah returns, it will not be possible to apply the “concept of retroactive delinquency” even if the proletariat has the power. On the contrary, what would be expected is that he should be left free to organise a counter-revolutionary party. And anybody who reads well would come to the same conclusions as the Iranian worker would. Let us see why.

1. Total and absolute freedom for counter-revolutionaries and their parties

The USFI continually reiterates its position of “unfettered political freedom” for counter-revolutionaries: “the waging of a relentless struggle against these ideologies in the field of ideology itself, which can, however, attain its full success only under conditions of open debate and open confrontation, i.e., of *freedom for the defenders of reactionary ideologies to defend their ideas, of ideological cultural pluralism*. (...) Once the capitalist class is disarmed and expropriated, once their members can have access to the mass media only in relation to their numbers, there is no reason to fear a constant, free, and frank confrontation between their ideas and ours (...) But only proven acts of that kind should be punishable, not general propaganda explicitly or implicitly favourable to a restoration of capitalism.”¹³ And, as we have already seen, this entails that “freedom of political organisation should be granted all those, including pro-bourgeois elements, who in actual practice

12 **Shapour Bakhtiar** (1914–1991) was an Iranian politician who served as the last Prime Minister of Iran under the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. [Editor]

13 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 26, 27.

respect the constitution of the workers' state; (...) i.e., are not engaged in violent actions to overthrow workers' power and collective property."¹⁴

As is quite dear, the USFI attempts by every means to avoid describing phenomena by its Marxist terms. It talks of "reactionary ideologies", "the bourgeois class", "general propaganda explicitly or implicitly favourable to a restoration of capitalism", "pro-bourgeois elements" without clarifying that all this is nothing less than "the bourgeois counter-revolution", although for the time being it only defends its ideology and makes propaganda while preparing for armed insurrection. Does the USFI perhaps believe that "a bourgeois class" which is naturally favourable to the "restoration of capitalism", formed by "pro-bourgeois elements" with "reactionary ideologies" can properly exist without being counter-revolutionary, without being committed to the return of private property of the means of production by whatever means possible?

This "unfettered political freedom" for counter-revolutionaries will only be restricted when they take up arms or instigate civil war against the dictatorship of the proletariat. They support this with a surprising dictum: "No social class, no state, has ever granted full rights to those actively engaged in violence to overthrow them. The dictatorship of the proletariat cannot act otherwise in that respect."¹⁵ What does this mean? What conclusion can be drawn from these statements? We will answer. The USFI comrades are convinced, or at least attempt to convince us, that the different classes which have taken power in the past have indeed granted "full rights" to those who never "actively engaged in violence to overthrow them." In fact, the opposite is true: "No social class, no state, has ever granted full rights to those dominated classes or to their parties however peaceful they may have been." The USFI should openly say that it favours the next successful dictatorship of the proletariat going against this absolute historical law of class society because it would be the first dictatorship to grant "full rights" to its class enemies.

This program of the USFI for the period following the seizure of power is a continuation of comrade Novack's program for the imperialist countries before the seizure of power. The comrade with his accustomed clarity stated his position some time ago: "This requires the implementation of a revolutionary program, perspective and strategy. The pivot of such a program is (...) to protect democratic rights and extend them."¹⁶

2. Civil war fought in obedience to a strict ultraliberal code

The USFI majority will be equally democratic and liberal after the counter-revolutionaries have taken up arms against the dictatorship of the proletariat. Undoubtedly, for this stage, the document considers that certain restrictions to the "unfettered political freedom" that the counter-revolutionaries should enjoy will become necessary. But these astonishingly liberal restrictions will be carefully imposed judicially:

"It is, therefore, necessary to stress that the use of repressive self-defence by the proletariat and its state against attempts to overthrow workers' power by violence should be strictly circumscribed to proven crimes and acts, strictly separated from the realm of ideological, political, and cultural activities. The Fourth International stands for the defence and extension of the most progressive conquests of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions in the field of penal codes and justice and fights for their incorporation into the socialist constitutions and penal codes. These include such rights, as:

"a) The necessity of written law and the avoidance of retroactive delinquency. The burden of proof to be on the accuser, the assumption of innocence until proof of guilt.

"b) The full right of all individuals to freely determine the nature of their defence; full immunity for legal defenders of any statements or lines of defence used in such trials.

14 Ibid., p. 27.

15 Ibid., p. 27.

16 Novack, George: *Democracy and Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1972, p. 217.

“c) Rejection of any concept of collective responsibility of social groups, families, etc., for individual crimes.

“f) Extension and generalisation of public trial by jury of peers.

“g) Democratic election of all judges, and the right of the mass of the toilers to recall elected judges.”¹⁷

One must not forget that the USFI majority is not referring to the ideal soviet penal code which will exist when the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat begins to disappear but rather at the moment it reaches its peak when the revolutionary dictatorship is engaged in a deadly civil war against the counter-revolution. It is precisely at this crucial time that the majority demands these ultra-liberal judicial norms to be strictly enforced.

How does the revisionist trap of the USFI manifest itself at this point? The document makes a historical analogy both novel and mistaken.

Until now we Marxists have always compared the dictatorship of the proletariat, particularly during times of civil war, with the dictatorships of Cromwell and Robespierre, never with the stages of development of the most progressive bourgeois penal codes, that is, after heads had already rolled. The USFI majority fails to mention that these penal codes were written long after the bourgeoisie had imposed its dictatorship, not during the civil war against absolutism and feudalism.

Trotsky himself stated long ago: “If Lenin can be juxtaposed to anyone then it is not to Napoleon nor even less to Mussolini but to Cromwell and Robespierre. It can be with some justice said that Lenin is the proletarian twentieth-century Cromwell. Such a definition would at the same time be the highest compliment to the petty-bourgeois seventeenth-century Cromwell.”¹⁸

“Cromwell was a great revolutionary of his time, who knew how to uphold the interests of the new, bourgeois social system against the old aristocratic one *without holding back at anything*.”¹⁹

“Any historical analogies demand the greatest caution especially when we are dealing with the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries; yet nonetheless one cannot help being struck by some distinct features that bring the regime and character of Cromwell’s army and the character of the Red Army close together.”²⁰ About the future representative organs of the workers’ revolution in England, he asserted: “It will the more surely achieve this the better it masters the lessons of Cromwell’s era.”²¹

Trotsky, in summarising the role of legal and constitutional rights under revolutionary dictatorships, stated that the English proletariat: “...will be convinced from this very experience of the English revolution how subsidiary, subordinate and qualified a role is played by law in the mechanics of social struggle and especially in a revolutionary era, that is to say when the basic interests of the basic classes in society come to the fore.”²² Trotsky expressly compared the first years of Lenin’s dictatorship with that of Robespierre: “The measures of terror which were applied during the initial, and, so to speak, ‘Jacobin’, period of the revolution were called for by the iron necessity of self-defence.”²³

17 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 28.

18 Trotsky, Leon: “Where is Britain going?” in *Trotsky’s Writings on Britain* Vol. 2, New Park Publications, London, 1974, p. 110.

19 Ibid, p. 109.

20 Ibid, p. 115.

21 Ibid, p. 112.

22 Ibid, p. 117-118.

23 Trotsky, Leon: “Romain Rolland Executes an Assignment”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*, Pathfinder Press, 1970, New York, p. 162.

3. The Red Terror

Practically, it is no longer necessary to demonstrate that these conceptions imply the abandonment of the Red Terror. The USFI document cannot state this openly but, what does this softness, this abandonment of the concept of “retroactive delinquency” mean if not this? The Red Terror takes hostages and punishes “social groups and families”, i.e., the representative of the exploiting classes although they may have not done anything. This includes relatives, as in the case of the Tsar who was brought to justice along with his entire family to preclude the possibility of any sort of monarchic claim. “No one understood so clearly [as Lenin] even before the overturn [of power] that without reprisals against the propertied classes, without measures amounting to the severest form of terror in history, the proletarian power would never be able to survive, hemmed in by enemies on every side, (...) The Red Terror was a necessary weapon of the revolution. Without that, it would have perished. More than once before now, revolutions have perished from soft-heartedness, indecisiveness, and the general good nature of the working people.”²⁴ The USFI attempts to defend the power of the revolutionary proletarian state by its liberal code as opposed to “applying wherever necessary harsh and ruthless methods of dictatorship, without flinching before any decisive measures in trampling upon bourgeois hypocrisy...”²⁵ as Trotsky said.

Once again, we should establish whether the leaders of the first successful revolutionary dictatorship, Lenin and Trotsky, acted in the way we prescribe during the civil war, or whether they acted in the manner laid down in the USFI document. And, incidentally, we shall see if they were wrong after 1921, as postulated by Mandel. We can anticipate that, if the penal and constitutional norms of the USFI were applied, we would conclude that our teachers were incorrigible totalitarians, antidemocratic and repressive bureaucrats who were set on this wrong path long before 1921.

Let us examine the facts. As carefully documented by EH Carr,²⁶ almost immediately after the October insurrection, Trotsky issued a fierce warning: “We hold the Kadets as prisoners and hostages. If our men fall into the hands of the enemy, let him know that for every worker and for every soldier we shall demand five Kadets... They thought that we should be passive, but we showed them that we can be merciless when it is a question of defending the conquests of the revolution.” Soon after he reiterated: “We shall not enter into the kingdom of socialism in white gloves on a polished floor.” Regarding the banning of the Kadet Party, he stated: “At the time of the French Revolution more honest men than the Kadets were guillotined by the Jacobins for opposing the people. We have not executed anyone and do not intend to, but there are moments when the fury of the people is hard to control.” He later wrote along the same lines: “Demands to forgo all repressions at a time of civil war are demands to abandon the civil war. (...) You protest against the mild terror we are directing against our class enemies. But you should know that not later than a month from now the terror will assume very violent forms after the example of the great French revolutionaries. The guillotine will be ready for our enemies and not merely the jail.”²⁷

The dictatorship of Lenin and Trotsky gave the Cheka the power of punishment according to “the circumstances of the case and the dictates of the revolutionary conscience” and it was not based on written law. Let us not forget that years later Trotsky called the Cheka, “the very centre of power, during the most heroic period of the proletarian dictatorship.”²⁸

24 Trotsky, Leon: “Our Differences”, in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)*, Pathfinder Press, 1975, New York, p. 294.

25 Trotsky, Leon: “The Fourth World Congress” in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Monad Press, New York, 1972, Vol. 2, p. 187.

26 **Edward Hallett “Ted” Carr** (1892–1982) was an English historian, diplomat, journalist and international relations theorist. [Editor]

27 Carr, E. H.: *The Bolshevik Revolution (1917-23)*. Norton & Company, New York, 1985, vol. 1, p. 157-158.

28 Trotsky, Leon: “At the Fresh Grave of Kote Tsintsadze”, in *Portraits, Political and Personal*, Pathfinder Press, 1977, New York, p. 94.

Kote Tsintsadze was a Bolshevik revolutionary from Georgia, who early confronted Stalin alongside Lenin and Trotsky and was persecuted. He was sent into exile in Siberia and suffering from tuberculosis did not survive the harsh climate. [Editor]

Let us return to Carr's account. When within a few weeks of the October insurrection forced labour was introduced on a class criterion "bourgeois men and women (were) sent to dig trenches for the defence of the capital against the Germans" with no consideration at all of their specific guilt. They were condemned simply for being members of the bourgeoisie. In 1918, Lenin wrote an article which was not published until later, where he proposed "putting in prison ten rich men, a dozen swindlers and half-a-dozen workers who keep out of their way of work" and "shooting on the spot one out of every ten found guilty of idling." Furthermore: "Until we apply the terror — shooting on the spot — to speculators, we shall achieve nothing."

In the proclamation of the Cheka on 22 February 1918, which declared "the socialist fatherland in danger" all the local Soviets were ordered to "seek out, arrest and shoot immediately [horror! without written law or defence lawyers!] all enemy agents, counter-revolutionary agitators and speculators." As a result of this proclamation, the Cheka carried out executions "in what numbers cannot be determined, without any regular or public judicial process". About this, Sverdlov declared in July 1918 that "tens of death sentences have been carried out by us in all towns: In Petrograd, in Moscow and the provinces."

In August 1918, there was a kulak rising in Penza and Lenin gave orders "to put into effect an unsparing mass terror against kulaks, priests, and white guards and to confine suspects in a camp outside the city", and recommended the taking of hostages who would "answer with their life for prompt and accurate deliveries of grain."

A resolution of the Soviet government based on previous speeches delivered by Lenin and Trotsky was issued on 29 July 1918, stating, "The soviet power must guarantee its rear by putting the bourgeoisie under supervision and carrying out mass terror against it." This means the application of the concept of "retroactive delinquency" and "collective responsibility of social groups". Dzerzhinsky elaborates upon this Leninist and Trotskyist doctrine as follows: "The Cheka is not a court. The Cheka is the defence of the revolution as the Red Army is; and as in the civil war the Red Army cannot stop to ask whether it may harm particular individuals, but must take into account only one thing, the victory of the revolution over the bourgeoisie, so the Cheka must defend the revolution and conquer the enemy even if its sword falls occasionally on the heads of the innocent."

Following the assassination attempt in which Uritsky was killed and Lenin wounded the government proclaimed the following resolution: "All counter-revolutionaries and all who inspired them will be held responsible for every attempt against workers of the Soviet and upholders of the ideals of the socialist revolution. To the white terror of the enemies of the Workers' and Peasants' government, the workers and peasants will reply by a mass red terror against the bourgeoisie and its agents."²⁹

In the second half of 1918, were shot 512 counter-revolutionaries, declared 'hostages', in Petrograd. And there is no doubt that the "concept of retroactive crime" was applied since many of these were "Tsarist ministers and a whole list of high personages". The Cheka, as one of the members explained, "does not judge, it strikes". Carr correctly asserted: "The essence of the terror was its class character. It selected its victims on the ground, not of specific offences, but of their membership of the possessing classes." Carr understood this point very well; unlike the proponents of the USFI thesis who, discarding the class criterion will solely condemn "specific crimes" or "proven actions" during the civil war.

We have dwelt on these quotes to demonstrate that for Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks there was no "written law", nor "avoidance of retroactive delinquency", nor "the use of repressive self-defence (...) circumscribed to proven crimes and acts", nor was the concept of "collective responsibility of social groups, families, etc." rejected as out of hand, and that in no way was the accused considered innocent "until proof of guilt". In other words, the only absolute law was the defence of the revolution against the armed attempts of the counter-revolution.

29 Carr, E. H.: *The Bolshevik Revolution (1917-23)*, op. cit., p. 167.

4. What was the practice of the leaders of the other great revolutions?

Why did Lenin and Trotsky act in this way? Were they the first leaders in history to do so? Evidently not; all great successful revolutions have taken this path.

How were ideas like “civil equality” and the “declaration of human rights”, which so impress the democrats, imposed? For the USFI, the correct answer seems to be: with a humanitarian penal code. But Robespierre, on the contrary, asked: “Is it necessary to make a judgement upon the necessities of public safety in times of crisis, since those measures are imposed by the impotence of the law with the criminal codes in their hands?” And he clarified: “If the popular government in times of peace is characterised by virtue, in times of revolution it is characterised by both virtue and terror: without virtue, terror becomes sinister; without terror virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing more than swift, severe, inflexible justice and therefore develops from virtue.” Regarding the French Revolution, Lenin told the communist Frossard in 1920 “the French need repudiate nothing of the Russian Revolution since the methods and procedures of the French Revolution are reborn within it”. And how did our patriots, those who liberated America from the yoke of the crowns of Spain and England, our own “liberators”, the heroes of “independence” and democracy, act?

Bolivar proclaimed that any Spaniard who did not support the Revolution should be shot.

“All Spaniards who do not conspire against tyranny in favour of our just cause, using the most effective and active resources, will be considered enemies, and will be punished as traitors to the homeland, and therefore, will be promptly executed. On the other hand, a general and absolute pardon is issued to all Spaniards who pass into our army, with or without their weapons; to those who offer aid to the good citizens working hard to shake off the shackles of tyranny. War officers and magistrates that proclaim the government of Venezuela and join our cause will keep their destinies and work positions; in one word, all Spaniards who perform service for the State will be reputed and treated as Americans. (...) Spaniards and Canarians, count on death, even if indifferent if you do not actively work in favour of the independence of America. Americans, count on life, even if guilty.”³⁰ A present-day disciple of Bolivar’s, if he were consistent with this teaching, would issue a decree stating: “Any member of the bourgeoisie who does not join the proletarian army and support it with all his strength will be shot”. And during the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson stated: “During the struggle, which was necessary, many guilty persons, as well as some innocent ones, fell without the chance of going through due process of law. I deplore this more than anyone and I will weep for some of them till my dying day, just as I weep for those who fell in battle. It was necessary to use the peoples’ might, which is almost, not quite, as blind as bombs and bullets.”

Following this correct method of making analogies, Marxists have always recognised five unshakeable historical laws that govern every revolutionary dictatorship:

First: the bourgeoisie, when it made its revolution against feudalism and absolutism, imposed the great revolutionary dictatorships of Cromwell and Robespierre, which gave no freedoms to counter-revolutionary enemies. (let us remember it is no accident that the guillotine is the symbol of the best years of the Great French Revolution of 1789).

Second: As the example of Lenin’s and Trotsky’s revolutionary dictatorship clearly shows, the proletariat acted and will continue to act in the manner of Cromwell and Robespierre, albeit, of course, its class character will be neither bourgeois nor petty-bourgeois, but distinctly proletarian.

Third: We must distinguish between revolution and civil war situations from the period when the dictatorship is in the process of stabilisation. When there is stability there can be democracy, jurisprudence and relatively stable norms. In a revolutionary period, when the establishment and survival of the dictatorship are at stake, as amid a civil war, everything is resolved by the forces in struggle and nothing by established norms. To be precise, these norms are destroyed by the classes and their parties, locked in mortal combat.

30 Bolivar, Simon: “Decreto de guerra a muerte” [Decree on War to the Death], in *Ideas Politicas y Militares* [Political and Military Ideas], Cumbre, 1969, pp. 22 & 23. [Translator’s Note: The term “Americans” here means natives of the American continent.]

Fourth: At critical junctures, the counter-revolution will attempt to apply the most ferocious repression and all revolutionaries worth their salt must resort to revolutionary terror. Each class in the struggle for survival will resort to the most violent and ruthless dictatorial means to ensure its victory or survival. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is the conscious scientific application of these absolute laws of the history of revolutions and class struggle, and the establishment of every revolutionary dictatorship.

Fifth: There is another law that complements the first four: whenever the exploited classes have been “magnanimous”, “humane”, “considerate”, “attached to established rules”, “legalist”, “democratic”, and have not applied the inexorable laws of revolutions and revolutionary dictatorships against the counter-revolutionaries, the latter have always triumphed.

The USFI ignores these laws. This is the first time that someone who calls himself a Trotskyist has attempted to submit the revolution and civil war to a penal code. Trotsky repeatedly asserted the opposite.

5. Will the USFI follow the logic of its position? Will it fight in favour of “unfettered political freedom” for the Shah, Pinochet and Somoza?

Every position has its iron logic, whose practical consequences are not always anticipated by its authors. James Burnham’s³¹ position that the USSR was not a workers’ state was transformed, over the years, into consistent political support for American imperialism. The same fate awaits the authors of *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* unless they return to the defence of the Marxist position. The political consequences are not yet evident but these theoretical premises will inevitably lead to counter-revolutionary political positions.

Let us suppose that tomorrow will see the triumph of the workers’ revolution in Iran, Spain, Portugal, Nicaragua or Chile. The mass movement will want to take justice into their own hands and take their revenge on the Shah, Somoza, Pinochet, or the torturers of Franco and Salazar. What will be the response of the USFI then?

If they are consistent with their resolution there is no doubt: if the Shah, Pinochet or Somoza’s torturers are imprisoned, they will fight in the streets for their freedom to avoid that they be judged. Why? Because they demand that “... the Fourth International stands for... written law and the avoidance of retroactive delinquency” in the judgement of counter-revolutionaries. If workers’ power passes a law, no crime committed before its publication can be accounted as indictable. Since any law which is passed by a workers’ dictatorship will always be after the governments of the Shah, Somoza and Pinochet, there is no way around it, the workers’ dictatorship of the USFI will be handcuffed by the inviolable norms of its resolution and will be unable to bring the bloodiest dictators of this era to justice. The USFI will be forced to fight for their immediate release rather than their trial. The same will hold for members of extreme right-wing terrorist organisations and professional scabs: they will not be judged because the laws of the USFI dictatorship will not be retroactive. This will eliminate the revolutionary and class justice which gives a free hand to the initiative and rage of the masses as expressed in sovereign assemblies for the judgement of fascists, torturers, murderers, scabs and traitors for what they did or do, without taking into account pre-existent or written laws.

In its place, we will get the petty-bourgeois legal regulations of the USFI which seek to impose strict, inviolable norms on the natural hatred of the mobilised masses. The resolution appears to be telling us: “Beware of touching a hair on the head of the Shah’s minions, of the PIDE,³² of Franco or Pinochet unless you can indict them under already existing written laws. Whatever next! How

31 **James Burnham** (1905–1987) was an American philosopher and political theorist. He was a prominent Trotskyist activist in the 1930s. In 1939 he was part of the “anti-defencists” faction that rejected Stalin’s defence of the USSR against a military attack by Nazism and broke with the Fourth International. Burnham left Marxism and joined the American Conservative movement. He was editor of the right-wing *National Review* magazine. [Editor]

32 **PIDE** (International and State Defence Police) was a Portuguese security agency that existed during the dictatorship of Salazar and Caetano. [Editor]

can uneducated workers possibly expect to take justice into their own hands, unacquainted as they are with the history of penal law and unwilling to accept the need for the defence and extension of the most progressive gains of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions in the field of penal codes and justice? This would take us back to the savage and illiterate era of direct democratic justice, by raised hand, of primitive communism.”

This is not an academic discussion. If the USFI remains consistent with its position, this will bring about the breaking of the Fourth International and a physical confrontation in the streets across the barricades between ourselves and the partisans of the USFI. If a workers’ revolution triumphs in Iran or if the Shah falls, the supporters of our document will fight in the streets to bring to justice this sinister monarch and his clique of torturers and collaborators, whether or not there is a law that formally assigns them to such a fate. In other words, Iranian penal law would be superseded by “retroactive delinquency” which would be based on the legitimate hatred of the masses towards the Shah and his lackeys, and on the political needs of the workers. We will rise and fight on the demand for the “trial of the Shah and his murderous minions” while the USFI demonstrates in the streets of Tehran with the Shah, his sister and his torturers under the slogans: “No recourse to retroactive delinquency” and “no judgement of the Shah and his minions unless there is a pre-existing penal law”.

But this is not all. Having fought for the unconditional release of the Shah and his assassins from the prisons of the dictatorship of the proletariat, if it is to be consistent, the United Secretariat will have to fight in the streets for the rights of these “individuals” and their “group” to “unfettered political freedom” and “full freedom of action, propaganda and agitation as well as full access to the mass media (...) in relation to their numbers”. This is the political future of the USFI if it is not stopped in time. We hope that this prospect will prove so repugnant to the followers of the USFI, that they will reverse course and vote with us for the right of the masses to apply democratic justice to counter-revolutionaries, before and after the revolutionary dictatorship, without written law or an established penal code and without the prohibition of the concept of “retroactive delinquency”.

6. An Example that clarifies everything

Any worker who has participated in a more or less militant strike will understand perfectly well these differences regarding the proletarian dictatorship and the civil war and understand how the position of the USFI’s majority is humanitarian, democratist and libertarian. In short, intellectual anarchism of a new type. Imagine, then, that we are on the brink of a strike and the USFI majority issues a resolution to the effect that “once the strike has begun, everybody in the factory (the Chairman and Board of Directors, managers, foremen, and white-collar and blue-collar workers) will have “unfettered political freedom”; and that whoever opposes the strike with armed force will be judged according to an extremely liberal penal code by a workers’ tribunal with a public prosecutor and a defence lawyer.”

Suppose that the next morning the strike is declared and some scabs call for a return to work, but they neither go in nor physically attack the strikers. What then? Do we comply with the USFI’s resolution or do we ferociously fight the scabs, subordinating everything to the central task of winning the strike? Every class conscious and militant worker knows that at this moment it is essential to proceed by whatever means necessary to smash the bosses’ propagandists. Any methods that serve to terrorise possible scabs, weaken the bosses and strengthen the strike are good; methods that do not serve these objectives are bad. Although this may appear crude, we must turn to the comrades of the USFI’s majority and ask them what their program is for such a strike. Is it to give total freedom to all those in the factory, from the bourgeois owner to the scabs? Does it extend to allowing the political party of the owners, if requested by a single worker, to make propaganda in a workers’ mass meeting and defend in a public debate the bosses’ position against the strike? Should we make the union’s mimeograph available to the boss and those workers who are his agents for them to print an anti-strike newsletter? This may sound harebrained but it is the program of

the USFI. The option is clear cut: either we embark on a strike giving freedom of expression to everybody in the factory— the strikers, the bosses and their stool-pigeons in the workforce— or we apply an orthodox Leninist-Trotskyist program, the program we uphold, which means rejection and repression without further ado of all strikebreakers, no freedom of propaganda in support of the bosses. Our goal is to win the strike; everything is subordinated to that. The same applies to the proletarian revolution and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. We do not make it to grant immediate freedom for everybody but for the revolution to continue advancing and for all who oppose it (i.e., the counter-revolutionaries and their agents) to be crushed. We must do the same to all those who make propaganda on behalf of the bosses to break the strike, even though they have not yet started work or physically attacked the strikers. Because a strike will seem like mere child's play compared to the first stages of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is sad to have to spell out such elementary truths to comrades such as those at present in the USFI majority and responsible for this resolution; to comrades who have been able to remain within Trotskyism despite so many years of Stalinist pressure. Just as in the strike, there is no democracy for all but only for those who support the strike while scabs are roughed up, so with the first phases of the workers' revolutionary dictatorship, there will be democracy only for revolutionaries, for those who are committed to fighting to the death against imperialist bourgeois restoration. This freedom is absolutely necessary so that the best way to develop the revolution and definitively smash the counter-revolutionaries can be found.

7. The mobilisation of the workers against capitalist reaction: an unresolvable contradiction for the “dictatorship” of the USFI

One of the founders of Argentine Trotskyism, *Quebracho*,³³ coined a phrase that was to endure. Against the Stalinist popular frontism which refused to organise defence committees to challenge the fascists, *Quebracho* launched the slogan: “You don't discuss fascism. You destroy it!” In this, he did no more than following Trotsky who had insisted on the need of using the physical force of the workers' vanguard supported by the proletariat to attack and, if possible, permanently wipe out every fascist group.

It was never stated that if fascism only used ideological and propagandist methods at any given moment, it would be combated exclusively by these same means. When and how to attack fascism depends on the relationship of forces and solely upon this, as is the case in any other open struggle between classes and between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary parties. Thus, no Trotskyist has ever held any doubt about attacking a fascist meeting, even if it was only called to study Hitler's, *Mein Kampf*. If the armed vanguard, supported by the proletariat, took the initiative against the Nazi study group, all Trotskyists would applaud it since they know that the study of *Mein Kampf* leads directly to the murder of leftist workers, possibly our comrades. These examples show that the propagandist, ideological, political and physical struggle are closely intertwined and that there are no fixed barriers between them, least of all determined by the enemy. We must never wait for them to switch from one form of struggle to another before doing so ourselves. It all depends on what is most expedient. Let's see the example of the study group from another angle. If we possess the necessary forces, our group studying Trotsky's writings on fascism will immediately afterwards go on to physical attacks against the fascist gangs.

We hope that the USFI majority has not changed this classical Marxist position for the moment prior to the taking of power. That is, we believe that they will continue to defend the combination of different forms of struggle when the working class and counter-revolutionary groups clash violently, as in civil war. We hope so because they have changed their conceptions for all other situations.

33 *Quebracho*, alias of **Liborio Justo** (1902-2003), son of President Agustin Justo (who ruled from 1931 to 1938). In 1937 he joined Trotskyism. In July 1942, amid serious accusations and insults and with a public letter, he broke with the Fourth International. The 1943 controversy between Nahuel Moreno against Liborio Justo can be found in *The Party*, available in www.nahuelmoren.org. [Editor]

Let us assume that after the successful insurrection, the working class will want to continue acting in the same manner as before and during the taking of power; i.e., that it will be ready to continue their physical mobilisation against the counter-revolutionaries. The USFI considers that, if this is the case, we should combat the counter-revolution ideologically and through propaganda but never suppressing its “unfettered political freedom” and much less attacking them physically: “This confrontation is the only means through which the working class can educate itself ideologically and successfully free itself from the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideas. [...] The waging of a relentless struggle against these ideologies in the field of ideology and politics itself.”³⁴

According to the USFI, instead of launching more powerful mobilisations and using all its power to attack the counter-revolutionaries, the victorious proletariat should serve notice on all enemy groups which have not taken up arms against the workers’ power. In Iran, for example, it should serve notice on the Shah — if he has still not taken up arms against the workers’ power — informing him that there will be a referendum to find out how many followers he has and then proceed to give them their respective spaces in the mass media. If the dictatorship of the USFI triumphs in Iran, we could turn on the TV or the radio at any time to find Shah and his cronies broadcasting on the national network to the whole country for a full hour. They are followed by Comrade Mandel or some Iranian supporter of his explaining to the workers that they must not attack these people as they did before the taking of power but they should only combat them at an ideological level. The same will happen with Somoza in Nicaragua. Franco and Salazar will not be given airspace. This, however, will not be a result of a USFI decision but because they are dead. However hard we try, we do not understand why all this should be the case.

For the majority of the USFI, once the proletariat is in power it will act towards the bourgeoisie and imperialist counter-revolutionaries, in the same way, that, according to Hollywood, the knights of the Middle Ages treated their peers: they will not physically attack unless they have already been physically attacked, and they will use the weapons of the enemy. This might seem a polemical exaggeration but it strictly corresponds to what is said in the document of the USFI majority. In it, they insist that if the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary and reactionary parties employ ideological weapons, the response should be with the same weapons. To allow this “duel” to take place the bourgeoisie will be handed absolute rights of organisation and propaganda, and only when it takes to the use of firearms will it be answered in the same manner and deprived of its democratic rights. Everything is reduced to the imaginary code of honour of medieval chivalry and not to the iron laws of the class struggle.

The USFI assertions derive directly from the Age of Enlightenment and French rationalism, and, in its overestimation of the influence of ideas in the historical process, contradict everything Marxism has said on the matter. We, for our part, believe that so long as the world economy continues to develop capitalist forms of production resulting in the emergence of sectors of the bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie and privileged workers, there is absolutely no possibility that the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideas will disappear even if we spend a thousand years arguing against them. And, on the contrary, we assert that with a strong revolutionary dictatorship that destroys the economic potential for the emergence of privileged economic sectors and which establishes a socialist world economy, these ideas will not have the possibility of advancing one millimetre. This is not to say that we deny the great importance of ideological struggle but it must be given its proper place: it is very important but not the “only means” nor the most efficacious way to wipe out bourgeois ideology. Its function is that of powerful support for the permanent mobilisation of the workers in the destruction of the capitalist system. In other words, “the only means” by which humanity can overcome bourgeois ideology is to establish a new system of production, as opposed to waging an ideological struggle against bourgeois ideas.

In its eagerness to justify the argument that the counter-revolution can only be fought in its field of activity without the revolutionary party taking any initiative in attacking as it suits it best, the USFI uses another argument that is complementary but of a negative character. This is that every administrative measure against the counter-revolutionary parties, except when they take up arms

³⁴ Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 26.

against the workers' power, will in the long run be detrimental to the revolutionary cause. This is no more than just another fetish but negative: administrative measures or punishments are always bad. We reject this along with all the other judicial, normative and institutional fetishes of the USFI majority. "Repressions can prove fully effective against a class that is disappearing from the scene —this was fully proven by the revolutionary dictatorship of 1917 to 1923."³⁵

The USFI's conception is both defensive and metaphysical. They conceive separate struggles in watertight compartments, totally unrelated to each other unless the enemy has already done it. If this were the case, the possibility of a workers' state beginning a revolutionary war against a bourgeois state is eliminated. This possibility was considered by Lenin and Trotsky at various times and cannot be discounted for the future. But if we are consistent with the reasoning of the USFI, a workers' state ought never to begin a revolutionary war and should restrict itself to answering the propaganda of an enemy bourgeois state simply with its own propaganda. We do not think like this. We do not believe that in the long run, the administrative and physical measures are bad or that penal measures are useless unless applied according to written law and in the presence of defence lawyers. Neither do we accept that the use of violence in an ideological struggle is necessarily negative because ideological struggle must only be countered with its like. Nor do we believe that it would have been a mistake to declare war on Hitler's Germany in 1933. This is a guilt-ridden petty-bourgeois criterion that needs to have the bourgeoisie cast the first stone. We are proud to cast the first stone, it is a duty. The other criterium is to capitulate before the petty-bourgeois public opinion of the Western countries, which bears no resemblance whatsoever to Marxism.

Marxism holds that class struggle is total war in which every administrative, penal, propagandist, ideological, theoretical, economic and especially political and physical methods and weapon are used to defeat the class enemy and that the most efficient means are chosen regardless of whether they are used by the enemy or not. This is not saying that every struggle does not have its specific laws but, rather, that it has them within a unity of the whole. Of all these types of struggles, the most important is that which destroys the counter-revolution politically and physically. Trotsky told us with his characteristic clarity: "... in the struggle against landlords and capitalists revolutionary violence served as the basic method..." This is in clear contrast to the plaintive calls of the USFI to fight them ideologically unless they take up arms. On the same page, Trotsky insists: "Exploiters cannot be drawn to the side of socialism. Their resistance had to be broken, no matter at what cost."³⁶

The USFI resolution provides us with an almost complete blueprint for the period after the taking of power even to the point of telling us how to make a telephone call for further information. The "only" aspect that is not covered is the reaction of the USFI dictatorship when faced with a physical assault (which we advised them to consider before the taking of power) by the working class on the counter-revolutionary propagandists of the bourgeoisie. Will the norms of the USFI prohibit such an attack? Will the USFI encourage it or at least let it take its course? Will the workers be able to take the initiative in assaulting the party militants and newspaper editors of the counter-revolution? Will they be punished under the penal code of the USFI if they do?

We have no doubts in this respect: the imperialist counter-revolution (even under the shameful name of "reaction" bestowed upon it by the USFI majority) must be fought in the manner considered most apt and efficient by the working class without being tied and committed to fixed norms. Hence, across the facade of the triumphal arch of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, we will paraphrase and inscribe in large letters *Quebracho's* famous phrase: "UNDER THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT IMPERIALIST COUNTER-REVOLUTION IS NOT DISCUSSED. IT IS DESTROYED!"

35 Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 288.

36 Trotsky, Leon: "The Degeneration of Theory and theory of Degeneration", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1932-33)*, Pathfinder Press, 1972, New York, p. 217.

CHAPTER II

European messianism: the imperialist counter-revolution evaporates

1. Advantages only for Europe

Like a modern Moses, Mandel believes his “European countries” are the “chosen” for the development of socialism. In place of a Messiah, there will be a series of exceptional conditions which will “save” them from an imperialist counter-revolution and all its consequences.

Messianism, a typical expression of petty-bourgeois impressionism, recognises neither nuances nor contradictions. It always oscillates between absolute optimism, as the inevitability of world war at a fixed term, and total optimism, which takes no account of obstacles and perceives only supreme advantages. Yet, the reality is neither absolutely negative nor absolutely positive. There are always elements that are more or less favourable to our objectives. These are combined in varying degrees which means that at any given moment there are more or less potential for revolution or counter-revolution.

In the case of the USFI, its messianism is made obvious by its omissions and its failure to see the inconveniences of the socialist revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat that their document raises. In the case of Mandel, this is made explicit. In an interview granted to Weber in May 1976, Mandel explained why he considers the peoples of Western Europe will follow a path different from that taken by the rest of humanity in the first part of this century, to reach the revolution.

The first advantage is the remote possibility of imperialist counter-revolutionary intervention. Let's see. “We have not witnessed any ‘descent’ on Portugal by the Spanish regular army — let alone the French, German or American regular armies. Nor do I think that a victorious revolution in Spain, Italy or France will have to face anything of that kind in the first three or six months. The world has changed a great deal since 1917.”³⁷ And further on, he says about the possibilities of an enduring European popular frontist government similar to that which existed in Chile, “... the process lasted three years in Chile, where the working class was infinitely weaker than in Western Europe and were there was a much greater danger of direct intervention by US imperialism.”³⁸

These statements of Mandel's are irresponsible. In Portugal, there was no successful revolution that necessitated a foreign military counter-revolutionary intervention. As later events have shown, the Portuguese revolution was strictly under imperialist control. Only those who believed, along with ultra-leftists of every ilk, in the possibility of a workers' revolution under the government of Vasco Goncalves would today be considering the necessity for military imperialist intervention. How can Mandel be so sure that a successful revolution in Southern Europe would be free from military attack from the bourgeois armies of the subcontinent during its first three to six months? What will happen

37 Mandel, Ernest: “Revolutionary Strategy in Europe”, in Socialist Workers Party *Internal Information Bulletin No. 5*, 1977, p. 13.

38 Ibid, p. 34.

after nine months? Why would it be spared the civil war and armed confrontations of 1917? It is completely irresponsible to dismiss these eventualities out of hand.

Let us look at what lessons can be drawn from actual events in Europe. The only two revolutions of a soviet character that had the potential to succeed — Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968—were invaded immediately by the Russian army, with the full acquiescence of imperialism. There has been no other European experience or potentially victorious soviet-type revolution in the last quarter of a century from which we can learn. Clearly, these events give us no reason whatsoever to believe the European revolution will be any more peaceful than the others, or that it will not be attacked by bureaucratic or imperialist armies.

Europe's second advantage is that its "degree of self-sufficiency is incomparably higher than in a country like Chile."³⁹ This is completely and utterly false since the more advanced a country is, the less autarchic it is. Trotsky constantly emphasised this, saying (already in 1928!), that to believe that an advanced country can build socialism within its own borders is to forget "the law of uneven development (...) precisely at the point where it is most needed and most important." Using the example of the productive forces of Britain, he says that the "...excessive development of her [Britain's] productive forces which require almost the whole world to furnish the necessary raw materials and to dispose of her products."⁴⁰

"If, however, we approach these problems of socialist construction only with this criterion [Mandel's, we might add], abstracting from other conditions, such as the natural resources of the country, the correlation between industry and agriculture within it, its place in the world economic system, then we will fall into new, no less gross errors and contradictions. We have just spoken about Great Britain. Being no doubt a highly developed capitalist country, it has precisely because of that no chance for a successful socialist construction within the limits of its own island. Great Britain, if blockaded, would simply be strangled in the course of a few months."⁴¹

What Trotsky said in 1928 holds even truer today. Like the case of Japan or the United States, the economic autarky of any Western European country is practically non-existent. We need only look at West Germany's US\$ 110 billion in foreign trade or France's US\$ 60 billion-plus, to realise that their economies are far more dependent on the world market and economy than are those of Paraguay, Angola or India. The more under-developed a country, the greater its degree of autarchy. Up to now, only the reformist and nationalist currents of the workers' movement have disputed this.

The third alleged advantage is the social structure of European Countries. Mandel's analysis is fundamentally economicist. Referring to the composition of the European armed forces in relation to those of Chile, he says: "Here too, I think that we will be able to avoid these mistakes and obtain better results. The recent experience of the soldiers' movement—especially in Portugal, but also in France and Italy—shows that we are already in a better starting position than were the Chileans. In highly industrialised countries—where even the composition of the army reflects the social structure of the country—it is extremely unlikely that a gigantic revolutionary upsurge will not find expression in opposition movements within the army. All these are trump cards that were not available in Chile."⁴²

By this, he means that in Western Europe, where there is greater industrial development and the proletariat occupies a more important place in society than in the backward countries, this is an absolute benefit to the working class and weakens the bourgeois armies. This is a simple process deduced from a formal syllogism with no contradictions and is, therefore, false: to greater industrial development, a greater number of workers; to a greater number of workers, a greater proletarian composition in the armies; to greater proletarian composition in the armies, less counter-revolutionary potential in these armies.

With this, Mandel attempts to establish that there are fewer (worker) draftees in Chile than in Europe. He does not mention that 80 per cent of this smaller proportion of the working-class

39 Ibid, p. 34.

40 Trotsky, Leon: *The Third International after Lenin*, 1936, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1970, pp. 58 & 56-57.

41 Ibid., pp. 57-58.

42 Mandel, Ernest: "Revolutionary Strategy in Europe", op. cit., p. 35.

draftees is politically anti-imperialistic and that this was reflected in the colossal crisis of the Chilean armed forces, which Mandel seems to ignore. Nor does he see, on the contrary, that in Europe, there exists a pro-imperialist and reformist labour aristocracy built up as a result of the exploitation of colonies and semi-colonies, which is privileged in relation to the marginalised sections of the working class and, above all, the oppressed nationalities. Whether we like it or not, the working class is sharply divided for socio-economic reasons between those who belong to this privileged sector and those who are most exploited. In addition to this, there exists a powerful pro-imperialist middle class in these advanced countries. For these reasons, we cannot believe that the fact the proletariat constitutes 80 per cent of the population necessarily advantages the revolutionary process. This statistical data does not sufficiently clarify things because the relations are far more complex than Mandel's syllogisms claim. The position those privileged sectors will take depends on the political struggle. For example, the economic crisis could lead important sectors of the either into becoming instruments of imperialist counter-revolution or into the revolutionary camp. Hence, the revolutionaries of the advanced countries have the further task of winning these privileged sectors to the revolution since they will otherwise become the main collaborators of the imperialist or bureaucratic counter-revolution either through their reformist parties or through the fascist gangs.

This messianic conception of comrade Mandel is embodied in the USFI's resolution in the complete ignorance of imperialism and the imperialist counter-revolution. As we shall see, it only mentions imperialism in two historical references. Not a single other mention in the entire document. The same goes for the imperialist counter-revolution.

This characterisation made by the USFI is novel since a few years ago it held exactly the opposite view: that in a few years there would be decisive battles with the imperialist counter-revolution. Let us revisit it: "If a new revolutionary leadership is not built in the time remaining to us [four to five years, starting in 1972], after successive waves of mass struggles (some of which will certainly surpass even May '68 in France), the European proletariat will experience new and terrible defeats of historic scope."⁴³ The same document states that there will pass "a period spread out in most cases over four or five years before the decisive battles are fought."⁴⁴

Those battles did not take place, so we ask the USFI: will you explain what happened? Were they postponed for one or two, or ten years? Has this possibility disappeared for a historical stage? Why? But, comrades, most important of all: Why do you no longer speak about those battles for which urgent preparations had to be made?

Without further explanation, it seems that this danger of immediate and mortal struggle with the imperialist counter-revolution no longer exists, even though we are miles away from having built "a new revolutionary leadership... in the time remaining to us".

It is possible that the USFI believes that it is writing a program to win over those sectors which are full of democratic prejudices. Therefore, it cannot mention imperialist attacks because its super democratic program would come to pieces. However, we will not win them over with a program made up to meet their prejudices but rather through revolutionary action. A victorious revolutionary dictatorship in Europe will have to oppose a counter-revolutionary united front composed of the imperialists, the bureaucrats from the workers' states and especially the USSR, the privileged sectors of the labour movement and the middle classes who follow the reformist, bourgeois-democratic or fascist parties. Our program must prepare the forces we win for the revolution to combat this united front.

43 International Majority Tendency: "Theses on Building of Revolutionary Parties in Capitalist Europe", in *Intercontinental Press*, Vol. 12, No. 46 (23 December 1974), p. 1824.

44 Ibid, p. 1821.

2. From armed struggle at all times and in all places to a semi pacifism

The USFI strategy for power has now taken a consistent turn. Since the danger of imperialist counter-revolution no longer exists and the European masses — the “chosen”— now prefer peaceful methods, these are the ones the USFI takes up. Armed struggle has been completely discarded.

To understand the significance of these changes, we must remember their previous, and very recent, positions. For many years, the USFI majority preached the creed of armed struggle at all times and places. Their documents were haunted by the vision of an organised and bloody European counter-revolution to be staged within the next six years, for which preparations had to be made. In Latin America, as a self-proclaimed vanguard, they ignored the processes where the masses participated in elections. Those who did not support guerrilla warfare were considered reformists, as were those in Europe who did not agree with minority violence. Inspired by this orientation, our British and French comrades began to face, cudgels in hand, fascist grouplets. A well-known French leader even formulated the hypothesis that the French peasantry could lead the struggle against counter-revolution in Castroist-style guerrilla warfare. According to him, of course, it was the only way to confront the counter-revolution. We need not go into the details of this well-worn polemic.

But according to the document, it now appears that armed struggle is rarely present. So, certain questions come up. The first one is: what happened to the imperialist counter-revolution according to the USFI? How and when did this frightening danger disappear?

A document that does not say a word about the inevitable armed struggles which will take place in the next few decades is good for nothing, not even to understand the victorious revolutions, those of the present and the future.

The resolution has not a single line devoted to these inevitable confrontations. There is a chapter on the period after the taking of power which considers armed confrontation and comes to the conclusion that it must be conducted under a humanitarian penal code. The document never defines the period of the civil war although “none of the historic classes can move from subordination to domination overnight, even on the night of the revolution”. There is always an immediately before and an immediately afterwards.

The before entailed 30 years of civil war in Vietnam and 20 in China while in Russia it lasted nine months. The very moment of the seizure of power is a violent decisive confrontation of uncertain outcome which will be resolved one way or another. “Is it really true that such a historic event can hinge upon an interval of 24 hours? Yes, it can. When things have reached the point of armed insurrection, events are to be measured not by the long yardstick of politics, but by the short yardstick of war. To lose several weeks, several days, and sometimes even a single day, is tantamount under certain conditions to the surrender of the revolution, to capitulation.”⁴⁵

Lenin said that there was an essentially military moment, which compels the “art” to “organise a *headquarters* [...] move the reliable regiments to the most important points [...] and move against the officer Kadets and the Savage Division those detachments which rather die than allow the enemy to approach the strategic points of the city [...] call them to fight the last desperate fight, occupy the telegraph and telephone exchange [...]”.⁴⁶ This was Trotsky’s account of Lenin’s requirements of the least bloody revolution in history! Trotsky believed that Europe and America “will encounter [...] a much more serious, obstinate, and prepared resistance from the ruling classes” which “makes it all the more incumbent upon us to view the armed insurrection in particular and civil war in general as an art.”⁴⁷

The period after the taking of power is simply the continuation of civil war. “The seizure of power does not end a civil war; it only changes its character.”⁴⁸ It now becomes the defence of the

45 Trotsky, Leon: *The Lessons of October*, Chapter 7, “The October Insurrection and Soviet ‘Legality’”, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch7.htm.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Trotsky, Leon: “Problems of the Civil War”, in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-1925)*, op. cit., p. 181.

new workers' state against the desperate attempts of the counter-revolutionaries to turn the clock back.

The dynamic and duration of these periods cannot be predetermined, but previous experience shows them to be inevitable and increasingly extended. Without the taking up of arms, without civil war, there will be no successful workers' revolutions and revolutionary dictatorships. At most the USFI majority believes that there may be an armed struggle in only exceptional cases after the consolidation of workers' power. This explains the derisory size of the chapter dedicated to the self-defence of the workers' state.

Mandel elaborated on this in the May 1976 interview with Weber. "For that, there must be a further ideological, moral dimension whereby the masses begin to reject the legitimacy of the institutions of the bourgeois state. And that can only come about through profound experiences of struggle and a very sharp — though not necessarily violent or bloody — clash between these institutions and the immediate revolutionary aspirations of the masses."⁴⁹ This conclusion of Comrade Mandel relating to the future of the European capitalist countries is very cautious but also very significant. Until now, revolutionary confrontations have been "violent and bloody" as in Iran and even more so. However, according to Mandel there exists an alternative path for the "chosen" Europeans: one which is peaceful and democratic since it is possible to avoid "violent clashes".

Positions change but they continue to be fuelled by the same student and professorial impressionism.

Yesterday the chosen were the European youth impacted by Castroism; the method was guerrilla warfare, and the place, Latin America. Today the chosen are the western masses with their bourgeois-democratic prejudices; the method, "unfettered political freedom"; and the place, Europe.

The objective basis for these positions appears to be the state of the class struggle in Europe at this particular time. Most workers still believe everything will be resolved when the workers' parties are elected to the government. However, we cannot draw conclusions month by month, tailing the masses and the collaborationist parties. The history of this century has shown that all the post-war victories were won only after tremendous civil wars with the intervention of imperialism in one form or another; that civil war is of decisive importance in contemporary reality: This was true in Russia, Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba. The violence of these civil wars has generally escalated from that of Russia. The Cuban revolution was less violent because of an imperialist blunder that tolerated it and allowed one of its sectors to give it support. Nevertheless, there was later intervention of imperialism with an invasion and a blockade which still endures. The only exception, that of Eastern Europe is relative since in those countries the revolutions were a more or less direct result of the war between the Red Army and the German imperialist army at a cost of tens of millions of lives.

The USFI resolution effectively disarms the masses by excluding the military dimensions of insurrection from their concept of workers' revolution. Over the next decades, those workers who follow the USFI will have to fight imperialist armies with their ideas.

3. Mandel's unfortunate use of the Chilean example

Mandel has the gall to use the example of Chile in his explanation of why Europe will almost certainly be spared armed confrontation. However, a vestige of reality slips through and Mandel is forced to admit, in one phrase, that things might not be as peaceful: "This [a left government taking office] will inevitably be accompanied by an intensification of the class struggle, a flight of capital, an investment strike by the capitalists, sabotage of production, constant plotting against the government by reactionaries and the extreme right supported the state apparatus right-wing terrorism, and so on. That is what we saw in Portugal last year, in Spain 1936, in Chile after 1970, and

49 Mandel, Ernest: "Revolutionary Strategy in Europe", op. cit., p. 14.

we shall see it tomorrow in Italy, Spain and France.”⁵⁰ We agree with the perspective of this single and isolated phrase of Mandel. The world Trotskyist movement must prepare and develop theses on the proletarian dictatorship around the inevitability of armed counter-revolutionary attacks. We need to add to this that in the event of the proletariat taking power this struggle will worsen and transform into a serious challenge to the survival of the first successful European dictatorship.

It would seem that, on reading this prognosis, one should ask: If the bourgeoisie is ready to respond in that manner to a left-wing bourgeois government like Allende’s, how will it not do to a revolutionary proletarian dictatorship? The answer is self-evident. What is Mandel’s program — and that of the resolution — to face this inevitable confrontation? Regarding the reformist governments, they say we must demand from them for “a thoroughgoing purge and elimination of the whole repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie, the disbanding of repressive bodies and an end to full-time judges. In addition, there are all the economic demands of the masses related to nationalisation under workers’ control, which express the logic of dual power.”⁵¹

Here we have synthesised the revisionist, reformist capitulation of the members of the USFI as formulated by Comrade Mandel, who appears to be their best spokesman. If the perspectives we face are “constant plotting against the governments by reactionaries and the extreme right supported by the state apparatus”, how can the solution be found in demanding of reformist and class collaborationist governments “a thoroughgoing purge and elimination of the whole repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie... and an end to full-time judges”? Not a single word too few or too many: they will trust in such a government and put pressure on it, not as a pedagogic method to expose it before the masses but as their main strategy! Otherwise, why does neither Mandel nor the resolution say a single word on the need for the armed mobilisation of the proletariat? Why do they believe these Social-Democratic or popular-frontist governments will dismantle their repressive apparatus at the asking of the workers’ movement? Hence, why spilling? However, whether they like it or not, armed confrontation will not only be the sole effective means of confronting the reactionary right but also the only possible grounds on which to call for a United Front with Social-Democratic and Stalinist workers, “Let us unite in joint action against the extreme right”.

“The second basic category of demands addressed to the government concern the riposte to be made to the inevitable bourgeois acts of sabotage and economic disruption. Here the guiding policy should be one of tit-for-tat: the occupation and take-over of factories followed by their co-ordination; working out of a workers’ plan of economic reconversion and revival, the extension and generalisation of workers’ control in the direction of self-management; the running of a whole number of areas of social life by those directly concerned (public transport, street markets, crèches, universities, agricultural land, etc.). Numerous layers will move from reformism towards left-centrism and revolutionary Marxism through discussing these questions in the framework of proletarian democracy and through their own practical experience, *protected by the intransigent defense of the freedom of mass action and mobilisation*, even when it ‘embarrasses’ the plans of the government or cuts across those of the reformists. This break from reformism will be assisted by the illustration, consolidation and centralisation of varied experiences of self-organisation; it will not be helped, however, (...) by insults of the ‘social-fascist’ type, or by ignoring the special sensitivity of those who still place their trust in the reformists. The policy of winning the masses by the united front is thus inextricably bound up with the affirmation, extension and generalisation of dual power, up to and including the consolidation of workers’ power by insurrection.”⁵²

The same for the “second basic category”! Both categories have the aim to confront the counter-revolution through economic means, of reorganising the economy in terms of the working class, to slowly and peacefully convince the workers of the wonders of proletarian power. Not a single word is said about armed confrontation with the counter-revolution in the streets. It is quite

50 Ibid, p. 36.

51 Ibid, p. 33.

52 Ibid, p. 36-37.

outlandish for Mandel to have used the examples of “Spain 1936 and Chile”, countries in which armed confrontation against counter-revolutionary coups was the key factor of the defeat.

This was the great Chilean experience. The masses applied Mandel’s policy to the letter; in the “first category” they tired of pleading with Allende to repress the extreme right. They simultaneously developed the second: occupying factories and establishing “*cordones industriales*” (industrial belts, a Soviet-type organ). The results are there for all to see: Pinochet’s coup was successful. The lesson for Chile, Spain, and Bolivia in 1971 is that during the stage of reformist government the main task is arming the proletariat and forming a united front with reformist workers to challenge the counter-revolutionaries with weapons in hand, and not Mandel’s two-category politics: making demands on the government and occupying factories to prove to the opportunist workers that we are more democratic and better administrators of the economy than the bourgeoisie. Instead of this, we must show the reformist workers how to physically confront and defeat the bourgeoisie and the imperialist counter-revolution.

4. Cuba belies the irresponsible optimism of the USFI

The USFI is forced to admit the existence of certain stumbling blocks for the Chosen countries. Not an armed confrontation, of course, but rather counter-revolutionary propaganda. However, there is no real danger. “There is no reason to fear” it because it is already defeated. “Once the capitalist class is disarmed and expropriated, once their members can have access to the mass media only in relation to their numbers” rather than their wealth, “there is no reason to fear a constant, free and frank exchange of ideas.” “A relentless struggle against these ideologies in the field of ideology itself”⁵³ should be enough.

What is a “constant exchange of ideas” between revolution and counter-revolution? A game? If counter-revolutionaries make propaganda, it is because they can and have something to gain through it. There is no historical example that proves otherwise. Counter-revolutionaries will always take advantage of the tremendous difficulties of the workers’ dictatorship and, when achieved, will proceed inevitably towards civil war. The USFI thesis does not contemplate this possibility.

Let us look at Cuba. Here, as we said, the violence prior to the seizure of power was much less than in the rest of the countries that reached the workers’ dictatorship. But in this case, the worst came later.

Cuba is part of the Western world and suffered a permanent economic crisis through the imposition of a colossal economic blockade. This blockade went hand in hand with the exodus of half a million counter-revolutionary “*gusanos*”⁵⁴ to the United States.

According to the USFI resolution, Fidel Castro as soon as he returned from the Sierra Maestra should have made a speech addressed to the 500,00 “*gusanos*” asking them to remain, and guaranteeing their individual freedom. They should have been allowed enormous propaganda by virtue of their great number. The right to organise a political party and headquarters under the control of the militias would have been handed to them. Naturally, torturers would be protected from trial since they could only be indicted based on the forbidden “retroactive delinquency”. Batista, too, would have had to stay. Let us now assume that Fidel had gone further still and not only granted the “unfettered political freedom” of the USFI but also taken Mandel’s advice on universal suffrage and called a general election. Let us further assume that counter-revolutionaries took no advantage of these conditions to overthrow Fidel violently and recover their expropriated wealth. In short, that we count on an honest counter-revolution who behaves peacefully and dedicates himself to developing their electoral campaign at a purely ideological level. Under conditions of the severe economic crisis caused by the Yankee blockade, support from the imperialists, the backwardness of the peasantry,

53 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p.26.

54 **Gusanos** (worms) is the term Fidel Castro used to describe the first 1960’s waves of wealthy white former landowners who fled Cuba after the overthrow of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Since then, it has become a scornful term to designate counter-revolutionaries in exile. [Editor]

the fragmentation of the left and the iron determination of the 500,00 “*gusanos*”, the bourgeoisie might well have gained a majority without bloodshed, as desired by the USFI. What then? The taking of power by another Batista and the return of the expropriated firms to the capitalists?

Eurocommunists have already committed themselves to return power to counter-revolutionaries if these win an election. We want to know what the USFI and Mandel would propose under similar circumstances. We demand that the Unified Secretariat express itself categorically on this issue. If they gain power, will they hold free elections and hand power over to whoever wins, even to the counter-revolution? If not, we want to know what will they do when the reactionaries, logically enough, demand that the power they have won in the polls be handed over to them; will the USFI confront the counter-revolution, arms in hand, to keep the power? What if the working masses take to the streets and smash the ballot boxes? Anything they do that is not to hand over power to the counter-revolution will be transformed into preventive armed repression of the counter-revolution; it will be to leave aside the electoral struggle. The whole document falls apart. But the USFI, irresponsibly, discards this possibility of electoral victory for the imperialist counter-revolution.

The USFI might reply that theirs is a program for a revolutionary dictatorship and that, therefore, the Cuban example is invalid. In this case, the program of the USFI would be infinitely more criminal. If in Cuba there had emerged a revolutionary Marxist dictatorship, based on workers’ councils, the blockade would have been imposed both by the USA and the USSR. In this case, the proletarian dictatorship advised by the USFI would not have lasted even six months. Those half-million “*gusanos*” would have developed a campaign based on a huge economic crisis which would have assured them of success. Why should the Cuban blockade not also be imposed on a socialist revolution in the European countries? We not only believe this will be the most likely trend but we also insist once again: the first revolutionary dictatorships of the proletariat, led or influenced by the Trotskyists, will suffer the most atrocious and tremendous civil wars that have been seen in this century.

5. The imperialist counter-revolution and the danger of capitalist restoration

According to the resolution, the advantages which the European workers have for the seizure of power will continue to hold true for future dictatorships and they already exist for the workers’ states: “Moreover, the main problem today in the Soviet Union, the Eastern European workers’ states, and China is not the danger of immediate capitalist restoration under conditions of war or civil war. The main problem facing the working class in these countries is the dictatorial control over the economic, political, and social life by a privileged bureaucratic caste.”⁵⁵

If the resolution refers to the “main problem today” and only today, then we can agree completely. The priority for the masses of the bureaucratic workers’ states is a political revolution. We will not insist on this which not only we have never abandoned but it is the *raison d’être* of Trotskyism. However, the axis of this quote is not to define the present situation but the timeless danger the capitalist restoration and the entire resolution suffers from such claims to eternal validity. Faced with this problem, the USFI replies that there is something even worse than imperialist counter-revolution: the dictatorial control of the bureaucratic caste. We must ask then what will happen tomorrow, or in 10 or 20 years, will the danger of such a restoration exist? In that paragraph, the issue is not developed any further although it appears again later: “The workers have no need to fear as a mortal danger propaganda that incites them to give the factories and banks back to private owners. There is little chance that a majority of them will be persuaded by propaganda of that type.”⁵⁶ With this, everything seems clear: According to the USFI, contemporary and future workers’ dictatorships will not be challenged by any important enemies —neither by imperialism nor by the restoration of

55 Ibid, p. 28.

56 Ibid, p. 29.

capitalism. The main dangers will come from traces of the ideology and habits of the bourgeois class, which will be rendered helpless “once (it) is disarmed and expropriated”.

As we see, according to the authors of the resolution, the bourgeois counter-revolution has become absolutely idiotic and truly honest: it will proclaim its true objectives, requesting that the workers “give the factories and banks back to private owners”. It would seem that, according to the USFI, the bourgeoisie will abide by the rules of the game and its propaganda will be frank and honest, discarding all subterfuge, thus repaying Comrade Mandel’s courtesy with the same coin. Unfortunately, things have never been nor ever will be this way. The restorationist bourgeoisie will never request the return of the factories to their old owners. As in the Kronstadt uprising, it will pose as the champion of freedom, of soviets independent from the revolutionary ruling party, and the great “defender” of the workers and peasants in the factories and kolkhozes (collective farms). Because this restorationist bourgeoisie will not be the old bourgeoisie but the great majority of technocrats, bureaucrats, and labour and kolkhoz aristocrats. These sectors of the aspiring bourgeoisie will probably propose that factories should cease to belong to the “totalitarian state” and “pass into the hands of the workers” as worker-owned cooperatives. The same will hold for collective farms. The restorationist assault will be directed against state ownership of industry and land, state control of foreign trade, and the five-year plan. They will dig up all kinds of democratic slogans to eat away at these foundations. We have reiterated these platitudes because it is extremely dangerous to underestimate the ingenuity of the bourgeoisie. However, by far the worst of this USFI position is the conviction that the workers’ states will not be challenged by a major enemy: for some unknown reason, they discount both imperialism and capitalist restoration.

Nevertheless, the danger of counter-revolution does not depend on restorationist sympathies but imperialist control of the world market. To think otherwise is to believe in the permanent coexistence of socialism and capitalism. We need to have a terrible fear of the grave danger posed by the tremendous right-wing tendencies that, under these conditions, originate economic development under the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is an inevitable process, of growing contradictions, given the existence of national borders of the bureaucratised workers’ states, the imperialist superiority in the world economy, and, up until now, the relative backwardness of the workers’ states. For these reasons, economic development produces strong capitalistic tendencies, primarily through the distribution of production. The function of the bureaucratic state is to precisely guarantee this bourgeois distribution. In this sphere of distribution, inequalities are inevitable and will be accelerated as production increases. Because production will be insufficient in any case and will generate a vicious struggle over its appropriation. A colossal development of the bourgeois apparatus accompanies the development of productive forces within a workers’ state surrounded by imperialism and contained within its national boundaries. Trotsky always held that economic development accelerates existing contradictions and generates new ones, such as new, dangerously pro-bourgeois, restorationist tendencies. Only the development of the revolution up until the defeat of imperialism can avoid the emergence of these contradictions in the long term. Moreover, these inevitable contradictions will lead to the bureaucratisation of any workers’ state which remains isolated over a long period.

This Trotskyist position could be opposed by the argument that in these 60 years there has been no concrete danger of bourgeois counter-revolution in any of the workers’ states. However, this is not valid. The contradictions exist and are ever more acute. They have not blown up for other reasons. The first is that since 1939 world imperialism has been engaged in internal struggle and has been unable to form a united front against the USSR. The second is that the post-war period was spent recovering from the disasters of war, and the subsequent economic boom made the regaining of the markets of the workers’ states less crucial. The most fundamental reason is that the deformed workers’ states have had an almost autarchic development because of the above reasons and the backwardness they inherited. This gave rise to a rickety commercial relationship between imperialism and the workers’ states. Under these conditions, capitalist restorationist tendencies could not prosper since they can only do so as appendages of world imperialism.

However, over the last 10 years, this process has been reversing and there is an increase in the commercial and financial trade between the workers' states and imperialism. This is exacerbated by the widening split between the Chinese and Russian bureaucracies and also the Eurocommunist phenomenon. The first two compete with each other to make pacts with imperialism and conduct bilateral negotiations with the Yankees, Europe and Japan to the best advantage of these countries. Eurocommunism openly supports the European imperialist bourgeoisies against Moscow's "totalitarianism", concurring with Carter's plan and creating ideological conditions which could later justify an internal or external attack on the workers' states.

Thus, Trotsky's prediction remains valid although at present it is only manifested in the embryonic stage. This process will acquire an ever-accelerating dynamic along with the growth of the commercial and financial influence of imperialism over the workers' states, and thus present a real threat of bourgeois counter-revolution. In other words, while the contradictions within the workers' states grow more acute and imperialism continues to dominate the world economy, it — rather than the old ruling classes — remains the main enemy.

Carter's plan is imperialist politics at the service of restoration. His economic, political and military plan is based on the demagogic campaign for human rights which emerged at the same time as the democratist formulations of the USFI; something which could well give rise to an awful confusion. The democratist propaganda of imperialism is based on the just democratic movement which is growing within the workers' states in response to the reactionary and totalitarian character of their present governments. We believe that imperialism will advance to a critical point at which it will attempt to direct the highly progressive and inevitable political revolution and democratic mobilisation of the workers' states towards a politics of free trade and capitalist restoration. The omission of Carter's plan from the resolution is a very serious mistake, particularly at this time since the two programs, in reality diametrically opposed, appear to have points in common. We must immediately come to the defence of our program and attack and denounce that of imperialism. *No document should fail to do this.*

Trotsky formulated the following law: The danger of restoration will increase as the economy develops, imperialism will attempt to draw the workers' states into its orbit through trade, investment and the black market. Carter's plan is already doing this and will continue to do so until it provokes bitter and maybe armed conflicts within the workers' states.

Trotskyism has the responsibility of clarifying for the masses the vast differences between our democratic plan and that of Carter, of denouncing the new counter-revolutionary strategy of imperialism and warning of the danger of capitalist restoration in the workers' states which is its consequence.

CHAPTER III

Bourgeois democracy or workers' democracy

1. Two concepts of workers' democracy and freedoms

The democratic freedoms, which according to the USFI will be extended *ad infinitum* after the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, are in reality purely formal individualist political freedoms; the freedoms of bourgeois democracy in the era of free trade capitalism. This was a system that necessarily held sway in a supposed society which the bourgeoisie described as composed of individuals, sellers of commodities, who had a set of rights and some obligations, amongst which were respect for the private property of the means of production. From these were derived freedom of expression in the press, freedom of assembly, the right to issue propaganda and organise politically.

Marxism has always criticised this conception of freedom. It has pointed out that it existed only for the bourgeoisie, the only ones who could own presses, paper, buildings to meet, means to advertise, and was thereby able to organise into parties for the political contest. In short, these were the freedoms of the rich in the same way as ancient democracy provided freedom only for the slave owners. Coming down to earth, this is known by every worker who does not have the “freedom” of not working an eight-hour day, who is “allowed” to rest on Sunday but not on the other days of the week, who cannot send his children to university although no law prohibits it. It is also known by any member of the middle class such as the professional who is forced to become “salaried” to eat despite holding a profession that enables him/her to work “freely”. It is known by a student who “chooses” a career and finds all university quotas to be booked up. Finally, it is clearly known by unemployed workers who want to work but cannot find a job.

Hence the Marxist critique of bourgeois ideology in this respect is contained in a single phrase; “the real freedom given to the workers is that of starving to death”.

Marxism does not stop here. It has also provided the only true theoretical explanation on this matter. While bourgeois ideology holds that society is comprised of individuals, for Marxists it is in essence made up of classes.

This is not to ignore the existence of individuals but to locate them in their place in class society. Individuals relate to society through the classes; they are mediated by them. Not all individuals have access to the same possibilities. From the fundamental fact that one is bourgeois and another is a proletarian comes their different potential for freedom and development. Thus, while bourgeois ideologues discuss the degree of liberty for individuals in a given society, Marxists start by questioning the degree of freedom obtained within it by the working class.

When we talk of workers' freedoms, we distinguish two levels: one, that of the entire working class within society; the other, that of the workers as individuals within their class. We should not confuse these two levels since their relation is dialectical and they are often in contradiction. For example, when a trade union purchases or expropriates a press there is an advance in the freedom

of expression for the proletariat. Likewise, when that organisation buys or expropriates buildings in different cities, the right of assembly for the union has spread throughout the country. A further and relatively far more important expansion of democracy is signalled when the unions, following a period of clandestine existence, acquire the status of legal organisations. The freedom of the class within society is increased.

If this same union embodies in its statutes the right of the workers to hold assemblies and freely elect delegates within the factory, or if there are monthly union meetings where each worker can speak freely, then the freedom of the workers is increased in terms of individuals within their class. Here, class interests and the interests of individuals are not in contradiction.

Let us suppose that these unions become bureaucratised and deny their members and the different union sectors the democratic right of defending their ideas or of challenging the union's leadership. In this case, what is achieved in terms of the class is lost in terms of the individual. But this fact, although very serious and which we repudiate, should not lead us to forget that the establishment of legal trade unions was a substantial conquest and therefore to adopt the mistaken position of denying them any importance by seeing them simply in terms of the restriction of workers' freedom of expression.

Furthermore, it may happen that in some instances we support the restriction of individual freedoms. Let us suppose the assembled workers of a factory resolve to go on a strike. If this measure is approved by the majority, no individual worker has the right to go to work or even to make propaganda against the strike. If they attempt this, they are repressed even sometimes with the use of force. For us, this repression is the ultimate expression of workers' democracy: the working class is exercising its rights against the bourgeoisie and the individual members of its class who support the bourgeoisie. If the scabs are suppressed and the strike succeeds then we consider this a victory for workers' democracy since the most important democratic conquests are those which the mass of the working-class tears away from the bourgeoisie.

While classes continue to exist, this Marxist conception of democracy and freedom will apply not only to workers' democracy but to society as a whole. Democracy has always been internal, a way of functioning of a class dictatorship. It was never more than this: dictatorship for some sectors, democracy for the sectors or classes that oppress. Democracy and "unfettered political freedom" have never existed for all individuals in class society as is claimed by bourgeois ideology nor could they exist under future workers' dictatorships as is claimed by the USFI.

Among the freedoms, the true Marxists have always upheld in the first place those rights which relate to economic and labour relations; that is, to the nerves and muscles of the workers. Among those, for example, are the "freedom" to guaranteed work, a wage which enables the subsistence of the worker and their family, shorter working hours to limit the brutalizing effects of the very long working day, and to have time to engage in politics. To the rationalist, ideological and individualistic conceptions of the bourgeoisie, which saw the historical process in terms of individuals, ideas and institutions, Marx claimed the economic factors, the development of the productive forces, the relations of production and the class struggle as the decisive factors in the historical process, against the bourgeois rationalist, ideological and individualist conceptions that made others decisive, such as ideas, individuals and institutions. We have to do the same with democratic freedoms: the most important are those which relate to the working day and the workers' standard of living.

There are two key questions necessary for assessing the level of workers' democracy in any particular country: What democratic gains have the working class made as a class within their country? What individual or sectoral rights, what internal mechanisms, of operation, exist to utilize these gains, to lead the institutions of the class?

It is precisely in the term "internal" that one finds the difference between the bourgeois and working-class conceptions of democratic freedoms. The first raises the banner of individuals and sectoral freedoms which are in no way subordinated to class control since in bourgeois society this control is indirect and automatically applied through respect for the private ownership of the means of production. With rare exceptions, which prove the rule, only the rich have printing presses, paper,

and airspace on radio and TV. The working class does not possess — nor will it be able to possess immediately after the seizure of power — an automatic mechanism of guaranteeing that the freedoms which it concedes will strengthen the dictatorship and weaken the enemy. This mechanism can only be the strictest class discipline in confronting the bourgeoisie, in fighting against it, and the widest democratic freedom can and must exist within this discipline internal to it.

2. The China of Chiang Kai-shek and the China of Mao; the same proletarian democracy?

These two irreconcilable conceptions of democratic freedoms have, quite logically, given rising to two fundamentally opposed interpretations of the great workers' revolutions. Such is the case with China and with Vietnam. For the USFI "it is true that in some semi-colonial countries the weakness of the old ruling class led to a very favourable relationship of social forces in which the overthrow of capitalism was accomplished without the flowering of workers' democracy (China and Vietnam being two outstanding examples)."⁵⁷ As we can see, the yardstick employed here is that of bourgeois-democratic freedoms. With it, in terms of "workers' democracy" it turns out that Mao's regime is the same or even worse than that of Chiang.

What is the difference between this position and that of the liberals or Social Democrats? For the latter, both regimes are the same insofar as neither allowed democratic freedoms. For the majority of the USFI, the "overthrow of capitalism was accomplished without the flowering of workers' democracy".

Although the liberals and Social Democrats speak of democracy in general while the USFI speaks of proletarian democracy, both say the same thing, even if the terms are different. The criterion of the USFI is so formal and bourgeois that it considers that since there was and is no freedom of the press or freedom to organise bourgeois and workers' parties, and no trade union democracy for the Chinese workers as individuals, workers' China the same as the China of Chiang as regards "workers' democracy". The USFI goes no further along this line of reasoning. If they were to develop it, they would have to say that "since there are more individual democratic freedoms in Venezuela, Colombia and Costa Rica than under the China of Chiang or Mao there is also greater workers' democracy in these capitalist countries." In fact, this is what they say in another part of the document when, referring to one-party control, they point out that this "would, in fact, restrict and not extend the democratic rights of the proletariat compared to those enjoyed under bourgeois democracy."⁵⁸

Trotsky, instead, considered that "For the workers, the shorter working day is the keystone to democracy, for that is the only thing that can give them the opportunity to really participate in the social life of the country."⁵⁹

Trotsky's point of view was the needs of the proletariat and the development of its consciousness; the USFI takes the viewpoint of the academic individual freedoms of the western universities from which they expect to be listened to be applauded. On this point, they yield to the worst European libertarian prejudices without even listening to the workers of that continent, who as for China and Vietnam have a much more correct class instinct.

In China, the proletariat is organised in trade unions, and the peasantry in communes, which are legal and encompass tens of millions of workers. This single fact shows an enormous difference compared to the regime of Chiang Kai-shek where the unions and communes were practically non-existent and ferociously persecuted. The same applies to paper, presses, radio, and assembly halls. Previously these were in the hands of the bourgeoisie and imperialism now they are in the hands

57 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 18.

58 Ibid., p. 13.

59 Trotsky, Leon: "On the Declaration of the Indochinese Oppositions", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, p. 32.

of the working class and the peasantry, although controlled by the bureaucracy. Thus, the workers' revolution in China, although led by the bureaucracy, entailed a colossal expansion of "workers' democracy" in relation not only to Chiang's regime but also to the most advanced bourgeois democracies which are based on the totalitarian and barbarous exploitation of the oppressed nationalities and colonial people.

Nevertheless, the greatest expression of workers' and peasants' democracy is that while in the China of Chiang there was endemic hunger under Mao the workers obtained the miracle of three square meals a day. We can understand that western professors or students, who have savoured reading Rabelais, fail to see what this has to do with democracy.

Anyway, the conquest of these freedoms does not make us ignore that the Chinese and Vietnamese masses need other equally essential rights such as internal democracy in the peasant communes, the unions and the factory committees, and the legalisation of revolutionary parties.

The Chinese proletariat also needs to gain the freedom of the press, opinion and assembly. The struggle for these is fundamental to the extension of workers' and peasants' democracy which stills runs the danger of sliding back, of losing its conquests, as a consequence of making itself vulnerable to bourgeois imperialist restoration. We know that to keep advancing and expanding these new freedoms, a new revolution is required; a political revolution against the bureaucratic masters. But none of these truths must lead us to ignore that the great Chinese and Indochinese revolutions achieved an expansion of workers' and peasants' democracy never before seen under the prior bourgeois regimes, whether Chinese or imperialist.

3. A dictatorship without responsibilities and an iron discipline?

For the USFI majority, "political freedoms" ought only to be limited for those who "are not engaged in violent actions to overthrow workers' power".⁶⁰ But what do we do with those who show no respect for, and those who through propaganda urge disrespect for the decisions of revolutionary power? The document of the USFI majority allows the counter-revolution guarantees and the widest freedoms but it neglects to state that the proletarian dictatorship will impose the strictest class discipline, as in every worker's struggle, because in the process of permanent revolution, in the heat of the battle against the bourgeoisie and imperialism, it is essential to maintain an almost military discipline. In order to do this, it will make use of the powers of the state which it has at its disposal. "A worker who has 'participated even once in a strike knows that no struggle is possible without discipline and a firm leadership", especially in "our epoch [which] is permeated with the spirit of centralism",⁶¹ said Trotsky. And we should add that the worker has a far clearer understanding of what constitutes the dictatorship of the proletariat than do the authors of these theses. He knows that to win a strike one must have iron discipline; he understands that it is necessary to use all necessary means in fighting the scabs, among whom he numbers those who only propagandise against the strike. Those who want to work are to be denied entry; those who want to issue propaganda are stopped from distributing it. Under the new dictatorship, this will be the case and with even more reason. The measures adopted by revolutionary proletarian democracy will have to be obeyed. Duties will be imposed on the entire population, especially on the non-proletarian sectors. If a measure is passed calling all workers to go to work for an urgent revolutionary need, is it not legitimate that those who don't go or who propagandise against the measure are punished? Isn't this what Lenin thought when he ordered that one out of every ten vagabonds be shot? For the leader of the only revolutionary dictatorship that has existed, it proved necessary to shoot not only those who took up arms against the dictatorship of the proletariat but also those who failed to work. How are we to impose class discipline if we cannot adopt punitive measures?

60 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit.

61 Trotsky, Leon: "Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939-40)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, p. 214.

For the USFI majority, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat will operate in a manner directly opposite to that in which the workers' movement fights under the capitalist system. The authors of the document seem to ignore that it is not only the Marxist revolutionary party and Trotskyist parties in general that are characterised by democratic centralism, by the widest democracy in prior discussion and the strictest discipline once a resolution has been adopted. All workers' and mass struggles are characterised by this and it will be the case to an even greater degree once the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is established: Discussions will be held to adopt necessary measures, and whoever argues that measures should be disobeyed or not adhered to will be repressed whether or not they take up arms. Penal and administrative measures, including any that may be spontaneously adopted by the militant rank-and-file regardless of prior norms, are not only positive but absolutely essential for the repression of those who engage in a campaign of disobedience or issue propaganda on behalf of the counter-revolution. At no point does the document point out that the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat entails the most ferocious discipline and that "... the elementary guarantee of success is the counter-posing of revolutionary centralism to the centralism of reaction."⁶²

It was the anarchists who advocated within the workers' movement for absolute freedom for all from the start of the proletarian revolution. Instead, "authoritarian" Marxism was always characterised by its insistence on the necessity of the state to impose strict discipline and centralisation throughout the revolutionary process and the building of socialism. Before the Russian Revolution, Lenin insisted that education would automatically produce social discipline but, as he admitted, experience showed that this was impossible in the first stages of the proletarian dictatorship.

When the fate of the revolution is at stake, there is no custom or morality which by itself ensure the defeat of the counter-revolution. The centralisation and discipline needed may be bureaucratic or revolutionary but without them, there is no proletarian dictatorship. Precisely, revolutionary democracy is based on revolutionary discipline; in other words, it is a democracy for those who support the revolution and help to advance it.

4. Trotsky on the English trade unions

Trotsky discussed this point very clearly in a text practically forgotten by the USFI. It deals with an Act of Parliament of 1913 which enabled the English trade unions to impose political levies on their members in support of the Labour Party. The law recognised the right of refusal to pay and prohibited the union leadership from expelling or punishing those who made use of this right. In *Where is Britain Going?* Trotsky quotes an article from *The Times* of 6 March 1925, which claimed that 10 per cent of unionised workers chose not to pay the levy. The union obtained the right to vote in mass meetings on the obligation to pay the political levy and this provoked great debate in Parliament and English political life. The trade unions defended their right to impose an obligatory political levy, the House of Lords voted for their prohibition and the House of Commons mediated, authorising the unions to fix levies but barring them from imposing contributions to the Labour Party upon workers who did not wish to make them.

Trotsky accused harshly the Labour leadership of acquiescing in the Commons' proposal and pointed out how these positions were a surprising example of how to appreciate "that the fundamental tasks of the labour movement cannot be assessed and defined from the formal and, ultimately, purely legalistic, standpoint of democracy",⁶³ whilst at the same time demanding of the Labour Party and the unions that they impose the most dictatorial and coercive sanctions upon the 10 per cent of the British proletariat which refused to fund the Labour Party.

Trotsky put forward this position as the best example of how the dictatorship of the proletariat should act. In his argument he stated:

62 Ibid, p. 215.

63 Trotsky, Leon: "Where is Britain Going?" in *Writings of Leon Trotsky on Britain*, Vol. 2, New Park Publications, London, 1974, p. 99.

“The expense of voting a member into parliament is just as legitimate, necessary and obligatory as that of a secretarial apparatus. A Liberal or Conservative trade union member may say: I punctually pay my usual member’s dues to the trade union but I refuse the extortions for the Labour Party as by my political convictions I vote for the Liberal (or for the Conservative). To this a trade union representative can reply: in the course of the struggle for improving working conditions – and that after all is the aim of our organisation – we require the support of the Labour Party, its press, and its MPs; but the party for which you vote (the Liberals or the Conservatives) in such circumstances always cracks down upon us, tries to compromise us, sows dissension in our midst or directly organises strike-breakers; we have no need of those members who would organise as strike-breakers! Thus, what appears from the standpoint of capitalist democracy to be freedom of the individual is shown from the standpoint of proletarian democracy to be freedom of political strike-breaking.

“The ten per cent rebate which the bourgeoisie have gained is by no means an innocuous item. It means that one out of every ten members of a trade union is a political, in other words, a class, opponent. Of course, some of these may be won over, but the rest can prove an invaluable weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat at a time of serious struggle. A further struggle against the breaches made in the walls of the unions by the 1913 Act is therefore inevitable.

“Speaking generally, we Marxists hold that every honest, uncorrupted worker may be a member of his trade union, irrespective of political, religious or other convictions. We regard the trade unions on the one hand as militant economic organisations, and on the other hand as a school of political education. While we stand for permitting backward and non-class-conscious workers to join trade unions, we do so not from an abstract principle of freedom of opinion or freedom of conscience but from considerations of revolutionary expediency. And these same considerations tell us that in Britain, where 90 per cent of industrially organised workers pay political levies – some consciously, others because they do not wish to violate the spirit of solidarity – and only 10 per cent decide to throw down an open challenge to the Labour Party, a systematic struggle must be carried on against this 10 per cent, to make them feel like renegades, and to secure the *right* of the trade unions to exclude them as strike-breakers. After all, if the citizen, taken in abstract, has the right to vote for any party then workers’ organisations have the right not to allow into their midst citizens whose political behaviour is hostile to the interests of the working class. The struggle of the trade unions to debar unorganised workers from the factory has long been known as a manifestation of “terrorism” by the workers – or in more modern terms, Bolshevism. In Britain, these methods can and must be carried over into the Labour Party which has grown up as a direct extension of the trade unions.”⁶⁴

And describing the differences between the petty-bourgeois sectors of workers in small and backward industries and the truly conscious members of the class which were “in the new, more modern branches of production”, Trotsky stated that in the latter “class solidarity and proletarian discipline reign supreme, and that is what appears as terror to the capitalists and their servants from the Labour renegades.”⁶⁵ And here it scarcely needs clarification: the political levy on behalf of the Labour Party is imposed on all workers.

Trotsky accepted a reactionary’s denunciation of union dictatorship as being the same as that of the Bolsheviks: “The Liberal Cobden stated on one occasion that he would more willingly live under the rule of the Bey of Algiers than under the rule of a trade union. Cobden was here expressing his Liberal’s indignation at the Bolshevik tyranny implanted in the very nature of the trade unions. In speaking for himself Cobden was right.”⁶⁶

In *Where is Britain Going?*, Trotsky also quotes Lafargue extensively, considering him to be one of the Marxist writers, who during Marx’s lifetime, best understood the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat after the Paris Commune. One quote of Lafargue, of which Trotsky approved, on the

64 Ibid, pp. 104–105.

65 Ibid, p. 103.

66 Ibid, p. 102.

policy of the dictatorship of the proletariat towards the reactionary parties, will be sufficient: “When local revolutionary institutions are established the latter will have to organise by means of delegations or otherwise the central power upon which will be placed the obligation to take overall measures in the interests of the revolution and of impeding the formation of a reactionary party.” Trotsky ends his comment by saying that “Lafargue stood for class dictatorship as opposed to democracy.”⁶⁷ And to think that the USFI majority claims to be Trotskyist while asserting that granting the widest freedom for the reactionaries and their parties is a fundamental part of the proletarian dictatorship’s program!

5. A bourgeois-democratic program

Every Marxist who, like the USFI, presents a program of “unfettered political freedom” for all sectors and individuals without strictly subjecting them to the class organs and discipline would be defending bourgeois democracy. At times, it is not a bad thing to defend bourgeois democracy and the expansion of these freedoms, as, for example, when they challenge the capitalist state. This would be the case if the workers were denied the right to unionise. In this case, we would say: Individual workers must have the right to unionise if they wish to! But when unions are strong and legal it seems perfectly acceptable for us that they impose unionisation as a prerequisite of employment upon the bourgeoisie and the workers. It is at this moment that union dictatorship and democracy begin to oppose the bourgeois freedom of “to unionise or not to unionise”. Once strong and legal unions are established, we say: Down with the right of every individual worker to exercise their own will over unionisation! Bourgeois democracy came to an end; union dictatorship and democracy, that is to say, the internal democracy of union dictatorship began! Dictatorship, coercion, and hunger to the nonunionised! Democracy and jobs for the unionised! What has happened? Bourgeois democracy has come to an end. We support everything that strengthens the union both against the bourgeoisie and within the workers’ movement in the country, albeit at the cost of weakening the bourgeois individual freedoms of the workers themselves which allow them to choose whether to join a union or not. The only democracy and freedoms that we accept are those of the unionised.

Under the title of “Workers’ Democracy”, the USFI puts forward a program for the dictatorship of the proletariat composed of bourgeois-democratic individual rights: the freedom and absolute right for all workers and the entire population to organise as individuals into tendencies and parties, and express themselves about the number of individual supporters they have, with the sole condition that they do not “take up arms”.

The authors may object to our critique by saying that they formulate their democratic program within the framework of the dictatorship of the proletariat and within the framework of soviets and therefore they are doing no more than saying the same as us when we speak of democratising a union, or the Russian and Chinese dictatorships of the proletariat. This is not the case: the USFI majority demands the most absolute and total freedom for all individuals, sectors and parties, including the reactionaries. And here lies our accusation that they have a bourgeois-democratic program even though this program is intended for the soviets. It is the same position Urbahns had for Russia in 1929, and Trotsky left no room for doubt: “It is necessary to reject and condemn the program of struggle for ‘the freedom to organise’ and all her ‘freedoms’ in the USSR —because this is the program of bourgeois democracy.”⁶⁸

If a supposed Marxist holds that every worker who is a member of a trade union has the right to organise a tendency to defend the bosses and scabs and that this is “workers’ democracy” and “union dictatorship” because he raises his program within the union, then he is deceiving us. What this supposed Marxist is defending is the bourgeois program for the unions: every worker in the union can and should do what they wish; the union cannot suppress their freedom nor force them

67 Ibid, pp. 87-88.

68 Trotsky, Leon: “Defense of the Soviet Republic and the Opposition”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1929)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1975, p. 303.

to act against their will. A union is only worthy of the name if the broad majority of its membership systematically expels all agents of the bosses, all scabs. A union must defend itself against infiltrated enemies, repressing them and not giving them any rights whatsoever. The dictatorship of the proletariat should not act in any way different to that of a class conscious or revolutionary union. This is not to say that enemy agents should always be expelled from workers' organisations. If those agents have an important following in the rank-and-file we must restrict ourselves to an ideological polemic. However, once we have won over the majority of the workers we will mobilise for the expulsion and suppression of the enemy agents. Revolutionary politics has always been so within mass organisations.

6. Our position: to grant only freedoms that help to support, consolidate, and develop the socialist revolution and the revolutionary dictatorship

We all know that the Stalinists in power in the workers' states hold that opposition parties, and not just the counter-revolutionaries, should be systematically persecuted and forced to act in clandestinity. The USFI, like the Eurocommunists, has properly criticised the political practice of the Stalinists. They oppose it, however, with the program of "unfettered political freedom". It is our position that neither the systematic repression of all opposition by the Stalinist totalitarian bureaucracy nor the democratist "unfettered political freedom" of the USFI majority are correct since "... we do not make a fetish of democratic forms. The protection of the dictatorship overrides all other considerations."⁶⁹ This will be directed by one norm: the defeat of the bourgeois and imperialist counter-revolution and the establishment of workers' power throughout the world. Led by the Marxist party, the proletariat through a revolutionary mobilisation will use whatever means at its disposal to crush the counter-revolution and drive the revolution without committing itself to any prescribed norms. At any given moment, it will have to decide, in the light of the prevailing conditions and necessities, which freedoms it is prepared to concede and which it will withdraw. Put another way, there will be "limited political freedom" following the requirements of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. This means that the dictatorship of the proletariat *can* concede democratic freedoms to the counter-revolutionary or opposition parties and often it will be *in its interests* to do so, in which case it *should do so*. On other occasions, it *may* impose radical repression upon the counter-revolutionaries. This will also be absolutely *essential* and should be actioned brutally relentlessly against them. Only the revolutionary masses headed by the Trotskyist party can determine the course of action to be taken in terms of the situation at the time, and there is no written norm or thesis which can prescribe action a priori. Within this principled position, we must point out that not all freedoms are equal. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, there will be an unequal relationship between them. Scientific and artistic freedom, for example, can only benefit the workers' dictatorship, which in itself will progress in line with the advances made in these fields. Freedom of speech and the press following the numbers of supporters is extremely useful to the proletarian dictatorship, and every authentic revolutionary Marxist government should implement this as rapidly as it can. These freedoms play a role very similar to that played by money and reliable statistics in the economy during the period of transition but in the much broader sphere of society as a whole (economic, social, cultural and, above all, political). The almost absolute freedom of the press and of speech towards which the dictatorship must tend serves to define the strength of the various currents of opinion and to provide the dictatorship with information about the problems it faces. It is, however, conditional upon the industrial working class and the revolutionary masses holding a total monopoly of political power. This means that freedom of the press and, above all, artistic or scientific freedom does not automatically imply freedom of organisation and activity for all the counter-revolutionary parties. This is equally the case with a stable currency in the economy of a workers' state, i.e., the application of the law of value in support of the transitional economy. The authorisation of the completely free operation of this law would entail nothing less than authorising the resurgence of the bourgeoisie. We allow the law of value to operate freely but only *within certain*

69 Trotsky, Leon: "On the Secret Ballot", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1929)*, op. cit., p, 59.

scope to better control its tendencies and keep developing the workers' economy in the socialist direction, at the same time avoiding the revival of the bourgeoisie through an intransigent defence of the economic plan, nationalised industry and the monopoly over external trade. The same applies to other freedoms: they cannot be compulsory or automatic in all areas of social and political life.

It is the bourgeois democrats and the reformists who hold that under the dictatorship of the proletariat all freedoms must be conceded. This is because their program and final goal is not the defence, strengthening and development of the new regime but rather a system of total freedoms for individuals and for different sectors — a direct political expression of the free market, of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois individualism — which in the long term will enable the revival of capitalism and imperialist penetration.

We are not saying here that freedoms should be granted or withdrawn arbitrarily according to the whim of the party leading the dictatorship. On the contrary, the existence or absence of freedoms is determined by rigid, objective and algebraic laws expressed by the relation between the revolution and the counter-revolution. The degree of freedom granted by the revolutionary dictatorship to its enemies will be directly proportional to the strength and progress of the national and international revolution and inversely proportional to the strength and advances of the counter-revolution.

Throughout his life, Trotsky emphasised this relative, "limited" character of freedom under the dictatorship of the proletariat. He formulated it in a way practically identical to the way that we have, except that he expressed it in terms of coercion rather than freedom: "The strength of the compulsion exercised by the masses in a workers' state is directly proportional to the strengths of the exploitive tendencies, or the danger of a restoration of capitalism, and inversely proportional to the strength and the general loyalty to the new regime."⁷⁰

7. Trotsky on freedom of the press

The supporters of the USFI's document consider that Trotsky's well known 1938 article "Freedom of the Press and the Working Class" agrees with their position. It is not by chance that they only quote this work since they cannot find in all of Trotsky's writings any other support for their ideas. However, this article itself precisely confirms all that we have been saying about the inequality and relativity of the freedoms that should be granted by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Stalinists and Lombardo Toledano⁷¹ defended the right of the Mexican bourgeois state to control and expropriate the yellow, pro-imperialist press. In justification of this absurdity, they drew a comparison between the Mexican government and that of the Soviet Union. Trotsky responded to this with two arguments.

First is a statement made in passing, and it is precisely this quote that attracts the attention of the sympathisers of the USFI majority's position: "The real tasks of the workers' state lie not in clamping a police gag on public opinion but rather in freeing it from the yoke of capital. This can be done only by placing the means of production, including the production of public information, in the hands of society as a whole. Once this fundamental socialist step has been taken, all currents of public opinion that have not taken up arms against the dictatorship of the proletariat must be given the opportunity to express themselves freely. It is the duty of the workers' state to make available to them, in proportion to their numbers, all the technical means they may require, such as presses, paper and transport. One of the main causes of the degeneration of the state apparatus is the Stalinist

⁷⁰ Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 107.

⁷¹ **Vicente Lombardo Toledano** (1894–1968) was one of the foremost Mexican union bureaucrats of the 20th century. In 1936 he founded the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the national labour federation. He was closely linked to the Stalinist CP. Since 1937, when President Cardenas gave Trotsky asylum, he promoted from the workers' central the campaigns launched by Stalinism, slandering Trotsky and demanding his expulsion from the country. [Editor]

bureaucracy's monopolisation of the press, which threatens to reduce all the gains of the October Revolution to utter ruin."⁷²

But this quotation must be framed into the line of reasoning of the article in its entirety: under the dictatorship of the proletariat, freedom of the press can be suppressed at specific times but this cannot be a fixed programmatic norm. The Stalinist error lies in the attempt to identify a workers' state with a bourgeois state. "A semi-colonial country, it is also a bourgeois state, and in no way a workers' state. However, even from the standpoint of the interests of the dictatorship of the proletariat, banning bourgeois newspapers or censoring them does not in the least constitute a 'program', or a 'principle', or an ideal setup. Measures of this kind can only be a temporary, unavoidable evil." "Toledano and his fellow doctrinaires are trying essentially to introduce into a bourgeois-democratic system means and methods that might in certain temporary conditions prove unavoidable under a dictatorship of the proletariat."⁷³

Characteristically, Trotsky speaks of "currents of public opinion" rather than political parties. There is a profound reason for this; he does not want to commit himself to grant freedom of the press to such Russian parties like the Kadets or the Mensheviks; otherwise, he would have said so instead of using the expression "currents of public opinion". This ambiguity, like the reference to "freedom of the soviet parties" without mentioning the Kadets or the Mensheviks, is because Trotsky leaves the door open, in one or both cases, for the dictatorship of the proletariat to curtail the freedom of the press or constitution of political parties when it proves necessary to do so.

8. Trotsky closes the debate

Trotsky made the final comment on this subject in the year of his assassination. In an interview with the bourgeois paper *The St Louis Post-Dispatch* he was asked, amongst other things, the following: "Does dictatorship of the proletariat necessarily mean the surrender of the civil rights as embodied in the Bill of Rights of the United States, and of course, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion?"

What would have been the reply of one of the authors of the resolution? Without a second's delay, they would have said: "Our program is crystal clear: From the very moment of the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat there will be unfettered political freedom. We shall grant many more freedoms than does the Bill of Rights."⁷⁴ Some of the leaders of the SWP have already said so on different occasions. Trotsky, who was a revolutionary and not a university professor, responded thus:

"It would be a great mistake to think the socialist revolution in Europe or America will be accomplished after the pattern of backward Russia. The fundamental tendencies will, of course, be similar. But the forms, methods; the 'temperature' of the struggle, all this has, in each case, a national character. By anticipation it is possible to establish the following law: The more countries in which the capitalist system is broken, the weaker will be the resistance offered by the ruling classes in other countries, the less sharp a character the socialist revolution will assume, the less violent forms the proletarian dictatorship will have, the shorter it will be, the sooner the society will be reborn on the basis of a new, more full, more perfect and humane democracy. In any case, no revolution can infringe on the Bill of Rights as much as imperialist war and the fascism which it will engender."⁷⁵

72 Trotsky, Leon: "Freedom of the Press and the Working Class", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1976, p. 418.

73 Ibid, pp. 418 & 417.

74 "We've said that we are going to put the progressive provisions of the Bill of Rights in the constitution of the workers republic and expand it to the fullest. We tell that to the American workers and we mean it. If they think we don't mean it, there will probably never be a victorious proletarian revolution in this country". (Barnes, Jack: "The Portuguese Revolution and Building the Fourth International", Report and summary adopted on 21 August 1975, by the National Convention of the SWP. *International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, vol. XII, No. 6, October 1975, p. 51.

75 Trotsky, Leon: "The World Situation and Perspectives", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939-40)*, op. cit., pp. 153 & 155.

It could not be more clearly put. First, Trotsky refuses to commit himself to an unambiguous position: "...no revolution can infringe on the Bill of Rights as much as imperialist war and the fascism which it will engender". Second, the socialist revolution in the USA will infringe on the Bill of Rights but not "as much as imperialist war". Third, everything depends on the objective conditions of the "resistance offered by the ruling classes". Fourth, the "weaker" the "resistance", "the less violent the forms the proletarian dictatorship will have". Fifth, the socialist revolution and the proletarian dictatorship entail the disappearance of freedoms and democracy. If the resistance of the ruling classes is "weak", "the sooner the society will be reborn on the basis of a new, more full, more perfect and humane democracy." Something that is "reborn" must have previously died!

This is the real Trotsky: he does not get embroiled in a discussion around the Bill of Rights; he addresses himself directly to the tasks of the revolution. This is the Trotsky we wish to rescue from falsifiers.

9. Bourgeois democracy and workers' democracy in the European revolution

The false identification made by the USFI majority of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the fullest possible democracy does not only determine the very particular characteristics of their dictatorship. The main author of the resolution also outlines a conception of the revolutionary process which has nothing to do with Trotskyism but much with the ultra-leftism which is the flipside of his revisionism. To begin with, he envisages that the revolutionary process, at least in Europe, will be a propaganda battle or a "debate" between bourgeois democracy and workers' democracy. The fate of the revolution depends on who wins this.

"Thousands upon thousands of workers must grasp, on the basis of their own experience, that the practice of proletarian democracy cannot be confined within the limits of bourgeois democracy. That brings us back to the question of the duration of dual power, and here the historical record forces us to regard the Russian experience as exceptional. A period of six or seven months is much too short for a proletariat like that of Western Europe to progressively abandon the legitimacy, of bourgeois democracy in favour of the new, higher legitimacy of proletarian democracy. *A longer period of dual power will probably be needed, which may be partial and discontinuous and which may stretch over several years (...)* The relation between proletarian and bourgeois democracy — in other words, the problem of the state (...) It is through this kind of apprenticeship that the workers will continually run up against the restrictive and repressive authority of the bourgeois-democratic state, even if it is 'governed' by workers' parties, and that they will learn the limits of this bourgeois democracy and the need to replace it."⁷⁶

And, to conclude, this is how Mandel views the revolutionary future in Europe: "In a revolutionary situation, the workers must learn that the real debate is not between democracy and dictatorship, but between the limited and repressive character of bourgeois democracy and the extension of democratic freedoms by the initiative and authority of the masses. Once that debate is won, the break of the masses with bourgeois institutions no longer seems as difficult and as unrealisable as it did at first."⁷⁷

We, archeo-Trotskyists, hold that objective reality will wipe out all the bourgeois-democratic hopes of the masses and while objective reality does not achieve this then no mere demonstration will be capable of doing so. As long as European workers do not undergo a brutal economic crisis, unemployment, annual inflation rates of 100-150 per cent, appearance of fascist groups, fascist and Bonapartist coups, no bourgeois-democratic hopes will be dispelled. Nobody and nothing will be able to destroy them. It follows that we do not believe in the long term survival of a state of dual power, nor a debate over several years between bourgeois and proletarian democracy. Quite the contrary. Neither long periods of dual power but short ones because bourgeois society could not survive

⁷⁶ Mandel, Ernest: "Revolutionary Strategy in Europe", op. cit., p. 21-22.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 22.

this way; nor will there be an “extension of democratic freedoms”. We still believe that in every revolutionary situation bourgeois democracy will short circuit. In these situations, the alternative is the direct counter-revolutionary dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the revolutionary dictatorship, not democracy, of the working class. These two dictatorships will engage in an armed confrontation before, during, and immediately after the workers’ revolution.

For this reason, we categorize as schematic the position of the USFI, according to which a revolutionary situation will open the possibility of a struggle between bourgeois and proletarian democracy to see which can be the most convincing and can gain the support of the masses in the “debate” over which of the two “democracies” is most legitimate. We also believe that we are presented here with a purely normative and institutionalist approach. The revolutionary process is perceived as a propaganda dispute between two types of institutions or democratic mechanisms, without any grasp of the link between the two institutions and without any possibility of accounting for their combination in a revolutionary process.

For instance, if the great danger before the seizure of power will really be the imperialist counter-revolution, attacks by armed bands, and the threat of military or semi-fascist putsches, then revolutionaries will not be able to make the axis of their activity the development of a debate over which of the two democracies is best. If the masses influenced by Stalinism and Social Democracy continue to believe in bourgeois democracy, revolutionists will be occupied mainly in defending it although in a dynamic and revolutionary way. They are not two separate institutions from the point of view of the workers’ mobilisation. Very possibly, for an entire period of the revolutionary process, the bourgeois-democratic prejudices of the European masses and the danger of imperialist counter-revolution may turn the defence of bourgeois democracy into great transitional demand.

It may also not be so. It all depends on objective reality. We may very possibly be able to confront imperialist counter-revolution, coups d’état and the fascist gangs in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dominant organisations of the European working class. But we think that, because of our extreme weakness and the strength of the Stalinists and Social Democrats, this will not be the case in the first European revolutions. It would be ridiculous, from our point of view, to continue this debate over workers’ democracy and bourgeois democracy instead of proposing a united front in defence of whatever the masses want to defend— and by this, we mean arming and mobilising the workers. In this case, bourgeois democracy and workers’ democracy can combine perfectly and need not engage in permanent debate. The real debate between reformists and revolutionists will not be about the abstract virtues of either form of democracy but, very possibly, about whether to defend the bourgeois-democratic beliefs of the wide majority of the working class through mobilisation and the arming of the proletariat or to adopt methods of class collaboration. The real debate with the Social Democrats and opportunist bureaucracies will be over methods. This is very important because, if we act this way, we run the danger of transforming the living process of class struggle into an academic discussion over democratic schemas.

10. Imperialist democracy and colonial democracy

For the USFI there is more workers’ democracy in bourgeois democracy than in the existing workers’ states. Hence, they tell us, and we repeat it once again, that control by one party “would, in fact, restrict and not extend the democratic rights of the proletariat compared to those enjoyed under bourgeois democracy.”⁷⁸ But to which bourgeois democracy is the USFI referring? If it is that of the 19th century, the workers had no vote and neither did women nor were the trade unions permitted legal existence. If it is referring to those of this century it has forgotten to say this is an imperialist democracy. This is no accident. Bourgeois ideologues have always talked about democracy, in general, to oppose it to dictatorship in general. They have sustained their arguments with the same approach used by the USFI; by comparing the internal democratic organisation of the imperialist countries with the internal organisation of workers’ states or backward countries. This is what happened in

78 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 13.

the debate between the reformists and revolutionaries about Abd el-Krim.⁷⁹ The first held that the French regime was civilized and democratic and the regime of the Moroccan leader was feudal and barbarian; they compared the internal regime of France with the Arab nationalist regime. So said the ideologues of Yankee imperialism concerning Peron: The United States was democratic, while Peron was a fascist.

This line of reasoning is false and pro-imperialist to the very core. One cannot and should not start from the basis of comparing national regimes, precisely because imperialism is not national but international. The imperialist regime of the USA cannot be defined in terms of its internal characteristics (i.e., those of the USA itself) but in terms of the global regime, of which the USA is merely a privileged part. The regimes of Pinochet, Somoza, and the Shah are part of the American imperialist regime. If we take the American imperialist regime as a whole, with all the Shahs that comprise it, any workers' state, whether it be bureaucratic or totalitarian, evidences a colossal extension and not limitation "of the democratic rights of the proletariat compared to those which it enjoys under bourgeois (imperialist) democracy." The vast majority of the workers and peasants in the imperialist democratic regimes, the hundreds of millions of Iranian, Brazilian, Chilean, and Philippine workers have practically no democratic freedom compared to the Russian or Chinese proletariat.

There is also much to say and debate concerning the democratic freedoms of the metropolitan proletariat itself. One has only to mention the Portuguese and Algerian workers in France, the undocumented Chicanos in the USA, the Turks in Germany, the unemployed, the pensioners or the old without a pension, the low level of unionisation and organisation, the minorities etc.

By refusing to define bourgeois democracy as imperialist, following the lead of the bourgeois ideologues, the USFI does not denounce it as having the same content as the democracy of the slave-owners; in this case, it is democracy for a few countries which exploit many others — the entire colonial and semi-colonial world. This prevents the USFI from presenting an effective revolutionary program in its attempt to combat bourgeois democracy.

We state this openly because the document never speaks of beginning the anti-imperialist struggle by unmasking imperialism in their own country, by revealing the colonial nature of each bourgeois democracy. This battle will not be won by trying to establish who is more democratic, as suggested by the USFI, but by combating imperialism at the point at which it manifests its totalitarian and repressive nature: that is, fighting to defend the semi-colonies and the oppressed nationalities within the imperialist country itself. This is the precisely most effective way of fighting for the eradication of bourgeois-democratic prejudices and to combat the Social Democracy, the Eurocommunists and the reformist bureaucracies.

It is this practical, mobilising approach that we defend against the merely polemical activity of Mandel. One of the most effective ways of unmasking imperialist democracy in the eyes of the masses is to confront it with the most advanced demands of bourgeois democracy itself, demands which imperialism cannot possibly concede. We must systematically defend the right of national self-determination for the nations that imperialism controls and for the oppressed nationalities within their borders, along with all the transitional tactical consequences these demands entail.

Besides, the dictatorship of the proletariat in the backward, colonial or semi-colonial countries may or may not have soviet characteristics but it will be victorious only if it takes up the banners for national liberation and, in the most backward countries, for agrarian revolution. That is if the demands of the entire people are taken into account. It is not a question of the soviet form of the dictatorship but the content of the tasks of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. The

79 **Abd el-Krim** (1882–1963) was a Riffian political and military leader and first President of the Republic of the Rif. He and his brother Muhammad led a large-scale revolt by a coalition of Riffian tribes against French and Spanish colonisation of the Rif (now Morocco). He declared the independence of the Republic of the Rif and became the first president of the Republic. His guerrilla tactics, which included the first-ever use of tunnelling as a technique of modern warfare, directly influenced Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong and Che Guevara. The combined strength of both imperialisms — which used mustard gas against the civilian population included — led to the surrender of Abd el-Krim in 1927. [Editor]

resolution attempts to show that it will take practically the same form and content in most of the advanced and backward countries alike without pointing out the profound differences in content between these two revolutionary dictatorships. The first revolutionary dictatorship to triumph in the advanced countries will have to be based on a permanent anti-imperialist mobilisation, in which its own imperialism is unmasked and the right of self-determination of the countries which it oppresses is fought for. On the other hand, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat in the backward countries must have as axis the struggle against imperialist oppression. We have to spell out this fundamental guiding principle of Trotskyism which is hidden by theses under seven seals.

If this approach is not adopted grave errors such as that committed by the SWP of the USA will recur. The SWP, together with *La Gauche*, the paper of the Belgian section, waged a ferocious and systematic campaign against the government of Salvador Allende because it was the best available variant of imperialism and making it the major target of its attacks, instead of centring its attacks against American imperialism, revealing the contradictions that existed between it and Allende and urging the necessity for us to defend Chile against the aggression and planned coup of the CIA. This shameful history, this blot in the record of our International, must never be repeated. However, both the resolution which we criticise and the declarations of the type made by Comrade Mandel are paving the way for new disasters in the preparation of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Attacks should first be launched in the imperialist heartland itself as the best form of fighting bourgeois-democratic prejudices.

CHAPTER IV

Who takes power and for what purpose?

1. Norms and institutions versus permanent mobilisation

The USFI resolution makes a further most serious revision of theory of Permanent Revolution in its attempt to channel revolutionary mobilisation into institutions and norms. The normative mania of its authors reaches a pitch of legalistic delirium when they demand that, during the civil war, the dictatorship submit to an inviolable, ultra-strict, ultra-liberal penal code with the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionaries.

Regarding the system of government, the USFI follows the same line of reasoning. They hold that since the bourgeoisie rules through an institution — parliament — the proletariat must also rule through an opposing institution— the super-democratic soviet. Thus, it concludes the dictatorship of the proletariat can only exist “within the framework of state institutions of a type different from those of the bourgeois state, state institutions arising out of sovereign and democratically elected and centralised workers’ councils (soviets).”⁸⁰

To make the substitution of one institution by another the axis of our program stems from an erroneous method based on false analogical reasoning. “The Soviet system is not simply a form of government that can be compared abstractly with the parliamentary form.”⁸¹ Soviets cannot be put on the same level as bourgeois parliament. We all agree that they are the most effective tools for building the workers’ revolution and wielding power, just as parliament is a tool for bourgeois rule. However, the soviets alone provide no guarantees. “All these variants must be kept in mind to safeguard us from falling into organisational fetishism, and so as not to transform the soviets from what they should be — a flexible and living form of struggle— into an organisational principle imposed upon the movement from the outside, disrupting its normal development.”⁸² For revolutionaries, the only guarantee that the revolution will continue to advance consists in counterposing to bourgeois institutions — and, to a certain degree, to workers’ institutions— the permanent mobilisation of the working class and the toiling masses. We will support the soviets to the extent that they sustain and broaden this mobilisation; if they hold it back or institutionalise it, we will raise the demand — “down with the soviets”.

The USFI remains trapped by bourgeois institutional thinking. It has been the practice of the bourgeoisie and all other privileged sectors of history, to attempt to “sanctify” norms and institutions after their revolutions to restrain revolutionary mobilisations. This took place after the great English Revolution with the king and parliament, two institutions that became “sacred”. Similarly, the

80 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 5.

81 Trotsky, Leon: “Is Parliamentary Democracy Likely to Replace the Soviets?” in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1929)*, op. cit., p. 54.

82 Trotsky, Leon: *The Lessons of October*, Chapter 2, “The Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry”, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch2.htm.

Chartists were led along by the empty promise of the vote as the solution to all their problems. The Great French Revolution foundered upon its glorification and subordination to the Bonapartist bourgeois empire or the Republic.

By virtue of the differences from prior revolutions which define it (elimination of national frontiers, classes and institutions) the revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat cannot freeze any institution.

The successful bourgeois revolutions did not have as objectives the elimination of classes or sustained revolutionary development. This led them to the establishment of “sacred” institutions as soon as their movement had succeeded. But every revolution led by truly Marxist revolutionaries will have an opposite dynamic to others known so far: it will constantly change, create, destroy, build and combine all sorts of norms and institutions, and wage war on all those which attempt to perpetuate themselves or hold back the mobilisation. In this process each norm or institution will have a relative character: only the revolutionary mobilisation will remain constant and absolute.

According to theory of permanent revolution, any norm or institution that helps the permanent mobilisation is useful and must be reinforced. Conversely, if it hinders mobilisation, it should be destroyed. On the other hand, none of these norms or institutions has an a priori progressive character for every stage of the struggle; it must be constantly reappraised. Today’s revolutionary institution may become reactionary tomorrow. Thus, as the objective of the Trotskyists is an unceasing revolution, we consider that the only thing that does not stop being progressive, that is, that does not change its character, is the mobilisation of the exploited against the exploiters.

There can be no exceptions to this rule. National proletarian dictatorships must be superseded first to achieve regional dictatorships, then continental ones, and finally the international dictatorship. Historically, Trotskyism in power will move towards the elimination of classes, of the revolutionary party and the state. The permanent mobilisation will raze and modify everything. If this is not so, then Marx and Trotsky were utopian socialists and theory of Permanent Revolution a mistake.

Does this imply agreement with the anarchist disregard for norms and institutions in the revolutionary process? Not at all; there is a relation between revolutionary mobilisation and norms and institutions which complies with laws of content and form, established by dialectic logic.

This contradictory relation is present in all human activity. Let us look at language for example. Anarchist linguists maintain that written and spoken languages are supreme and that grammatical rules, academies and dictionaries are insignificant. Formalists believe that language should be entirely subject to the norms of grammar and academic discipline without question. A true Marxist begins by upholding as a fundamental factor of this dynamics the written or spoken language, this “permanent mobilisation of language”, while also recognising the decisive importance of grammar, academies and dictionaries— they organically articulate, conserve and incorporate the advances of a living language. At the same time, Marxists insist on the unique richness of spoken language as a basis for change and institutionalisation.

If we extend this analogy to the sphere of social gains, we say these would vanish without institutions and norms. For example, the conquest of the eight-hour day through mobilisation should be materialised immediately in a law or an agreement with the bosses, lest it be quickly lost. Trade unions are the crystallisation of all such economic mobilisations of the workers. If they did not exist under capitalism, all gains won through strikes, factory occupation, etc., would vanish tomorrow. And if the vanguard does not have a party with a program synthesising the historical experiences of the working class and spelling out the objectives of the revolutionary struggle, the proletariat would have to go over the same ground at each new stage.

Norms and institutions are the conservative faces of mobilisation in two ways. One, highly positive, which means safeguarding gains, storing experiences and projections of new gains. The other is negative because it stifles the spontaneity and mobilisation of the workers, which are the only way to any further gains.

2. The state: the institution of all institutions

Anarchists and others like them who deny the need for workers' institutions also deny the need of conquering the state. They fail to understand this dialectic by which we could say that the bourgeois state rules through institutions and that bourgeois institutions rule through the state. The state is supported by them and uses them, although this does not mean that the working class could seize state power through a *coup d'état* in bourgeois revolutionary fashion since a true revolution would be both an end and a beginning. The control of the state apparatus by the working class would mean the collapse of the bourgeois institutions, already rotten, which sustained it and the emergence of new worker's institutions of control.

Anarchists deny the need for all institutions and organisations with which we will seize power, such as the Red Army, trade unions, soviets and especially the party. For them, the revolution has the sole objective of destroying all norms and institutions to return to society and dissolve within it, so everyone can do what they want. According to this idealist schema, all norms are reactionary.

Let us assume for a moment that things could be like this, i.e., that after we seize power everyone will be free to do as they choose. What will the expropriated industrialists, bankers, landowners, and business people do with this freedom? How will the privileged petty bourgeoisie make use of it when they come to share the needs of the people and participate in productive labour? What will be the reaction of relatives and followers of the torturers of the previous regime who were brought to justice by the masses? There can be no doubt: they will use this great freedom to organise and arm themselves (with the unconditional help of world imperialism) to restore the old regime of privileges. Bourgeois institutions will be re-established. There will be a struggle in which both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries will begin to organise and at least two armies will begin to emerge each with their internal disciplines although they may eschew uniforms. These armies will be institutions, in defiance of norms that prohibit their existence. Why go any further?

Anarchists will always behave as they did in Spain when power was within their grasp. They will say that everyone should do what they want. Their words, if they find resonance in the masses, will allow the counter-revolution to triumph as it did in Spain, but with a death toll many times that of the million dead there. Could there be any other outcome when an imperialist army is confronted by groups of individuals bound only by their own free will?

In conclusion, isolated individuals cannot challenge institutions; for this, they must be organised. Institutions that fix objectives and individual responsibilities must exist even for mobilisation. As victories, large or small, are achieved, they must be institutionalised; the advances must be reflected at the level of the state. Finally, after the seizure of power, workers must count on norms and institutions a thousand times stronger than those prior to the seizure of power because, otherwise, the international counter-revolution will mobilise until it crushes it. The bourgeoisie has a lesson to teach us here.

Trotskyism faces the most critical of contradictions: to wipe out institutions, other institutions must be formed. The contradiction is resolved by its program for the permanent mobilisation which will liquidate its institutions in the second stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The revolutionary party will create, direct and make permanent the mobilisation of the masses towards the destruction of organisations as they outgrow their use, and finish its work by eliminating the state and dissolving itself within society. The party, the "fundamental weapon of the proletarian revolution", will give way to a hitherto unknown permanent mobilisation of the entire population; the party will be replaced by a new, classless society.

It is obviously impossible to draw up an *a priori* list of the kinds of institutions the proletariat will establish under its dictatorship, much less specify their specific tasks. Therefore, while we attack the anarchist conception — which at least mobilises the masses — we launch an even stronger attack against the normative, institutionalist conception of the USFI's resolution, which would impose fixed norms on the revolutionary process. We oppose the pedantry of pretending that

we can develop a program for all times and places, thus displacing theory, essence and method of permanent revolution.

3. The relation between the party and other institutions

The above can be summarised by saying that permanent mobilisation alone is insufficient and, therefore, must be linked to institutions. The question is: which is the decisive institution? The USFI majority holds that, without a doubt, it is the soviets; that these will take power along with mysterious soviet parties, apparently all the parties in the country, including the counter-revolutionary ones.

It is clearly stated in subheading (e) of the first thesis of the resolution that: “The necessary conclusion drawn by revolutionary Marxists as a consequence: that the working class can exercise state power only within the framework of stable institutions of a type different from those of the bourgeois state, state institutions arising out of sovereign and democratically elected and centralised workers’ councils (soviets), with the fundamental characteristics outlined by Lenin in *State and Revolution* — the election of all functionaries... etc.”⁸³ They give details of all the different methods of election, rotation of officials, how they will be paid, etc.

In these indications, which seem to be drawn up by a lawyer, practically all aspects of a state organisation are considered. But nowhere is it said what is the role of the revolutionary Marxist party in the revolution, the seizure of power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Hence, there is no indication of its relationship with other organisations, for example, with the Soviets.

It is no accident that, out of all the Marxist literature, they chose Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* as the basis for their schema, rather than the works he and Trotsky wrote after the revolution where their theories were modified by actual events. The USFI does not take into account at all the richness brought to the Marxist theory of the state and of the revolution by the October Revolution. After the seizure of power, the leaders of the revolution realised the paramount importance of the party as the institution for the development and consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. And that power must rest with the party, based on the soviets. Lenin began to insist that the decisive factor in the dictatorship of the proletariat was state monopoly by the Communist Party. In 1924, Trotsky came out against united fronts with other soviet parties for the taking of power, emphasising and approving the monopolistic character of the Communist Party and its relation to the soviets and the other parties.

Soviets which are not under the leadership of this party are not those of a revolutionary dictatorship but something far more unstable; soviets which could in the long-term point towards counter-revolution.

Let us remember what Trotsky said of the Kerenskist Soviets: “The instability of the conciliationist soviets lay precisely in this democratic amorphousness of a demi-power coalition of workers, peasants, and soldiers. The soviets had to either disappear entirely or take real power into their hands. But they could take power not in the capacity of a democratic coalition of workers and peasants represented by different parties, but only as the dictatorship of the proletariat directed by a single party and drawing after it the peasant masses, beginning with their semi-proletarian sections.”⁸⁴

And in 1930, under the Stalinist dictatorship, he asserted: “What constitutes the basis of the regime in the USSR? Let us recount the essential elements: (a) the Soviet system as the state form; (b) the dictatorship of the proletariat as the class content of this state form; (c) the leading role of the party, in whose hands all the threads of the dictatorship are united; (d) the economic content of the proletarian dictatorship: nationalisation of the land, the banks, the factories, the transport system, etc., and the foreign trade monopoly; (e) the military support of the dictatorship: The Red Army.

83 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p.5.

84 Trotsky, Leon: *The Lessons of October*, Chapter 8, “Again, on the Soviets and the Party”, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch8.htm.

“All these are closely connected with one another and the elimination of one of them may mean the collapse of the entire system. The weakest link in the chain at present is undoubtedly the party, the cornerstone of the entire system.”⁸⁵

Clearly, Lenin and Trotsky considered the Communist Party to be the decisive element of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR. Nowhere are the Soviets singled out as fundamental. It is only emphasised that they are the state form and that, in the combination of institutions and relations of production that characterise the regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the key point is the Communist party.

The two fundamental and permanent elements in any revolutionary process (either under the dictatorship of the proletariat or under the bourgeois rule) are: on the one hand, the working class, its allies and mobilisations and, on the other hand, the Revolutionary Marxist Party. Their permanent existence does not mean their optimum development; there can be massive mobilisations for example, with a party that is not yet capable of leading them. But they remain the only constants. Instead, trade unions, factory committees, workers' commissions, soviets, etc. appear and disappear according to the countries and stages of the class struggle. The key elements, party and mobilisation, mediate through different organisations. Trotsky's famous analogy of gears and sprockets is useful before and after the seizure of power. He held that there is not a direct relationship between the revolutionary party and the masses. They relate through organisations other than the party: broader and or larger intermediary organisations (such as soviets, factory committees and trade unions). And the soviet form, despite its enormous advantages, despite being the broadest, most dynamic organisational form created by the mass movement in struggle, far superior to trade unions and factory committees, is nothing but a privileged gear, but still a gear. “The councils represent an *organisational form* and only a *form...*”, whereas on the other hand the revolutionary party, is the opposite..., “it is not at all a ‘form’.”⁸⁶

In other words, the revolution is made by the revolutionary mobilisations of workers and their mass organisations, but power and leadership are held by the revolutionary party. Once in power, the party will use the organisational forms most suited to each stage of the class struggle without fetishising a single one of these, whether they be Soviets, factory committees, non-party workers committees, Red Armies, or trade unions; just as Lenin and Trotsky did in the first years of the October Revolution, to facilitate and organise the permanent mobilisation of the masses.

4. The role of the party in the revolution and the workers' dictatorship

We maintain that the USFI minimises the importance of the subjective factor. Trotsky has dealt extensively with this subject and has taught us that it is something that distinguishes all opportunist currents. “Opportunism which consciously or unconsciously thrives upon the inspiration of the past epoch always tends to underestimate the role of the subjective factor, that is, the importance of the party and of revolutionary leadership. All this was fully disclosed during the discussions on the lessons of the German October, on the Anglo-Russian Committee, and on the Chinese revolution. In all these cases, as well as in others of lesser importance, the opportunistic tendency evinced itself in the adoption of a course that relied solely upon the ‘masses’ and therefore completely scorned the question of the ‘tops’ of the revolutionary leadership. Such an attitude, which is false in general, operates with positively fatal effect in the imperialist epoch.”⁸⁷

Trotsky also considered this to be an essential feature of anarchism: “The inconsistency and, in the final analysis, the reactionary nature of all species of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists consists

85 Trotsky, Leon: “To the Bulgarian Comrades”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*, op. cit., p. 44.

86 Trotsky, Leon: “The ILP and the Fourth International”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*, op. cit., p. 147.

87 Trotsky, Leon: *The Third International After Lenin*, op. cit., p. 84.

precisely in the fact that they do not understand the decisive significance of the revolutionary party, particularly at the highest stage of the class struggle, in the epoch of the proletarian dictatorship.”⁸⁸

Indeed, on this point, the USFI falls into opportunism, revisionism, anarchism, ultraleftism, and the only thing it doesn't fall into is Trotskyism. Our “religion”, if we have one, must be that of the fundamental role of the party in the transitional stage, before and after the seizure of power. The USFI has now replaced this with the soviets, although “If the party were excluded from the Soviet system, then the whole system would soon collapse.”⁸⁹

Why doesn't the USFI mention, even in passing, that the revolution will be led by the party? A further document must clarify whether they have abandoned their fervent conviction of the validity of this statement of Trotsky's for all times and places: “A steam boiler, even under rude handling, can do useful work for a long time. A manometer, however, is a delicate instrument that is very quickly ruined under impact. With an unserviceable manometer, the best of boilers can be brought to the point of explosion. If the party were only an instrument of orientation, like a manometer or a compass on a ship, even in such a case its derangement would spell great trouble. But, more than that, the party, is the most important part of the governing mechanism, The Soviet boiler hammered out by the October Revolution is capable of doing gigantic work even with poor mechanics. But the very derangement of the manometer signifies the constant danger of explosion of the whole machine.”⁹⁰

There are objective reasons, that is, independent of the will of the Marxists, as to why the working class, as a whole, can neither make the revolution nor exercise power immediately after seizing it. Trotsky is crystal clear on this point: “A revolution is ‘made’ by a *minority*. The success of a revolution is possible, however, only where this minority finds more or less support, or at least friendly neutrality, on the part of the majority. The shift in different stages of the revolution, like the transition from revolution to counter-revolution, is directly determined by changing political relations between the minority and the majority, between the vanguard and the class.”⁹¹

We can complain as much as we want but the reality of the contemporary class struggle makes it so. This is the most important distinction between bourgeois and proletarian dictatorships and revolutions.

When the bourgeoisie took power, they were already culturally and economically dominant. They did not need political parties because their power was based on parliament, universities and their control over the economy. Moreover, they even managed to win over religious and aristocratic sectors as well as using the mobilisation of the plebeian masses to their advantage while absorbing sectors of those into their class. All this helped to consolidate their cultural and economic dominance and transfer these to the level of the state and politics.

For centuries, the evolving strength of the bourgeois class was paralleled by a corresponding weakening of its enemy, feudalism. Thus, this class gained homogeneity, strength and consciousness of its interests. The opposite is true for the working class. The passing of time does not increase its cultural or economic power. The monopolist and imperialist system seeps into the working class through its pores, corrupts it, aristocratises it and incorporates it, together with its traditional leaderships, into the bourgeois institutions. This poison seeps through education, written press, radio and television.

What the bourgeoisie achieved — effective power before government — is inaccessible to the working class. Capitalism attempts to prevent it from becoming increasingly revolutionary and conscious of itself and its place in society. Imperialism has successfully blocked the development of this consciousness.

88 Trotsky, Leon: “Problems of the Development of the USSR”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*, op. cit., pp. 210-211.

89 Trotsky, Leon: “To the Bulgarian Comrades”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*, op. cit., p. 46.

90 Trotsky, Leon: “Problems of the Development of the USSR”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*, op. cit., p. 212.

91 Trotsky, Leon: “Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)*, op. cit., p. 136.

Naturally, this is a highly contradictory process in which capitalism is unable to completely achieve its objectives because of the mobilisations of the working class and the work of the party in developing its revolutionary consciousness. If it were not so, there would be no possibility of workers' revolution. The worldwide contradictions of imperialism and capitalism cause the revolutionary mobilisation of workers against their exploiters at certain times in specific countries.

Anyway, the development of a revolutionary situation in a country is still exceptional. When it takes place, it is as the result of the most relentless objective needs rather than as an evolutionary process of maturation of the consciousness and organisation of the class. Against the Gorterian⁹² vision of reality that depicts the situation "as if the starting moment of the revolution actually depended solely upon the degree of the proletariat's enlightenment and not upon a whole series of other factors —both domestic and international, both economic and political, and, in particular, the effect of privations upon the most disinherited toiling masses",⁹³ we hope the comrades of the USFI majority will excuse us for paraphrasing Trotsky: "For the privations of the masses remain (...) the most important mainspring of the proletarian revolution."⁹⁴ However, despite these crises, the cultural level and particularly the consciousness of the working class is still inferior to that of the bourgeoisie. This is reflected in the existence of multitudinous reformist parties and by the support given by American workers to the Democratic Party. This contradictory process is manifest in the relations between the bourgeois, reformist and revolutionary parties.

This means that the proletariat cannot take power solely through the organisations and institutions that encompass it —which would effectively mean the entire proletariat. The working class is, and will continue to be, divided into antagonistic sectors during the seizure of power and even under the dictatorship of the proletariat. A conscious minority will be engaged in the revolutionary process, others will be neutral, while certain sectors will remain prisoners of the reformist or bourgeois ideology and, therefore, will be in the counter-revolutionary camp.

Only after it takes power, will the working class advance towards the unity, strength and control which the bourgeoisie had before it seized power. As the moment of the revolution, the seizure of power and the dictatorship draws nearer, the proletariat and its parties will be rent by tremendous contradictions and politico-organisational divisions produced by the enormous burden of bourgeois ideology carried by the masses.

Only a party capable of leading the working class will be able to carry it through these grave difficulties. All the difficulties of the working class concerning the bourgeoisie can be overcome by the emergence of a conscious minority, strongly organised in a party that leads the process, fighting those working-class sectors which oppose the revolution, and gain the support or neutrality of the majority. The working class can compensate to a great extent for its disadvantages by developing a conscious, subjective element that is by the building of a strong, solid Marxist revolutionary party by the vanguard. Because: "The party is the supreme political weapon (which) embodies the possibilities of the revolution and its future."⁹⁵

All the successful proletarian dictatorships and revolutions of this century have been party dictatorships and revolutions; they have never emerged from trade unions, soviets, factory or peasant committees. They have never been won by all toilers and workers, but rather by a highly organised minority that has gained the support or the more or less active neutrality of the majority.

Trotsky explained this magnificently:

92 It refers to **Herman Gorter** (1864-1927), Dutch writer and poet who for decades remained on the left wing of the labour movement. During the First World War, Gorter held an internationalist position. In the years after the defeat of the German revolution (1918-1919), Gorter, like the majority of the leaders of the Dutch Communist Party, fell incurably ill of sectarianism. [Editor]

93 Trotsky, Leon: "On the Policy of the KAPD", in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 150.

94 Ibid., p. 150.

95 Trotsky, Leon: "Open Letter to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1975, p. 144.

“Consciousness, premeditation, and planning played a far smaller part in bourgeois revolutions than they are destined to play, and already do play in proletarian revolutions. In the former instance, the motive force of the revolution was also furnished by the masses, but the latter were much less organised and much less conscious than at the present time. The leadership remained in the hands of different sections of the bourgeoisie, and the latter had at its disposal wealth, education, and all the organisational advantages connected with them (the cities, the universities, the press, etc.). The bureaucratic monarchy defended itself in a hand to mouth manner probing in the dark and then acting. The bourgeoisie would bide its time to seize a favourable moment when it could profit from the movement of the lower classes, throw its whole social weight into the scale, and so seize the state power. The proletarian revolution is precisely distinguished by the fact that the proletariat—in the person of its vanguard—acts in it not only as the main offensive force but also as the guiding force. The part played in bourgeois revolutions by the economic power of the bourgeoisie, by its education, by its municipalities and universities, is a part which can be filled in a proletarian revolution only by the party of the proletariat.

“The role of the party has become all the more important in view of the fact that the enemy has also become far more conscious.”⁹⁶

5. A neo-reformist model

Indeed, if anything characterises reformism is having a model of a transitional stage identical to that of the bourgeois revolutions. All reformists believe the working class will move towards the seizure of power in the same way as the bourgeoisie did; i.e., as the logical conclusion of its increasing economic strength.

This explains the reformist mania for cooperatives, for state ownership within the capitalist system, for powerful trade unions full of economic privileges, for universities and workers’ education which would allow the steady evolution of the proletariat towards the seizure of power. This is “pseudo-Marxist objectivism which presupposes some sort of purely objective and automatic preparation of the revolution, and thereby postpones the revolution to an indefinite future. Such automatism is alien to us.”⁹⁷

Comrade Mandel, with his usual talent and intelligence, has built a model similar to that of the reformists, although far more sophisticated, to justify the USFI’s resolution and give it consistency. He has moved his pieces, like a good chess player would, in a well ordered and strategically subtle attack on revolutionary Marxism. Comrade Mandel’s obsession with long, extremely long, periods of dual power, with the constant practice of the control of production, and with the long struggle for the legitimisation of proletarian democracy amongst workers—rather than bourgeois democracy—is the evolutionary and reformist model for our time, when a quarter of humanity already lives under successful proletarian dictatorships and workers’ revolutions. This play in the name of workers’ revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat (whatever next!) is most ingenious: we must give the entire proletariat time to unite, in its soviet organisations, under workers’ control until it becomes stronger than the bourgeoisie. Then, without fissures, with the active and enthusiastic conviction of all workers, it will take power through its organisations which involve universal suffrage, broad soviets free of contradictions or significant internal struggles, the support of all the workers’ parties and—who knows—perhaps all the parties in the country.

Thanks to workers’ control, the proletariat, the entire proletariat, will be far stronger economically than the bourgeoisie before the seizure of power and will be able to control production much better. No popular sectors will follow the capitalists thanks to the victory of the legitimacy of workers’ democracy over bourgeois democracy. The working class, of course, the great majority

96 Trotsky, Leon: *The Lessons of October*, Chapter 8, “Again, on the Soviets and the Party”, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch8.htm.

97 Trotsky, Leon: “Report on the Fourth World Congress”, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 308.

of it, at any rate, will be opposed to the bourgeois organisation and in favour of popular soviets. The governments will be mandated by the universal suffrage which Comrade Mandel supports so “intransigently, before, during and after the taking of power by the workers” —according to the previously mentioned interview in El Pais. Above all, enough time must be allowed for all the toiling masses— not only the workers—to be shown that the organs of popular power, the soviets, are the most democratic form of government.

Things would go very well for Mandel if this were a game of chess. However, what will happen is that the villain of the movie (the counter-revolution) will appear and kick the board sky high.

The class struggle and counter-revolution will never give the working class and the toilers — as they never gave the reformists— time enough to convince themselves of the legitimacy of their democratic power. Neither will they gain control of the economy and unite the whole people, without any divisions, in the organs of workers’ power. Before we arrive at this Garden of Eden the counter-revolutionary minority of that country will engage in mortal combat against the revolutionary minority, trying to neutralise and win the majority by force.

Workers’ revolution and workers’ power will occur only if the revolutionary minority succeeds in the military defeat of the counter-revolution by gaining the support or neutrality of the majority of the workers. In Comrade Mandel’s schema, there is room neither for the Pinochets, Francos, and Mussolini’s nor for the betrayals of Stalin, Ebert, and Allende.

6. Revolutionary dictatorship and permanent mobilisation

If there is one thing missing from theses, it is the main objective of the revolutionary dictatorship — to deepen the permanent revolution and the international socialist revolution. They seem to be satisfied with demanding absolute democracy, even for counter-revolutionaries. The authors of the document may believe that absolute democracy guarantees the international permanent revolution and so there is no need to mention it specifically. The USFI document is characterised by its fetishism of democratic forms and, within democracy, of voting —inclusive of the typically bourgeois methods of universal suffrage and referenda.

Instead of pointing out, according to the strictest recognition of Marxist teachings, that a revolutionary process is never defined by any type of vote but only by the relationship of forces and the struggle between the contenders, the authors revolve around a single axis: the absolute virtues of democracy.

For us, the fundamental objective of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat continues to be the permanent revolution and mobilisation of the workers against national and international exploitation. In any case, this is the only hope for the survival and development of a revolutionary dictatorship; if it remains constrained by its national borders, it will have to face the most acute and irreconcilable contradictions produced by its economic development.

The laws of permanent mobilisation and revolution of the proletariat and its toiling allies remain constant before and, even more so, after the conquest of power; only the forms change. Before the seizure of power, we attempt to drive a permanent mobilisation of the working class and its allies against imperialism, capitalism, and all exploiters to overthrow them and take power. We put forward tasks as well as political and economic demands — along with various organisational proposals — to be taken up by the workers as demands around which there can be constant struggle and mobilisation.

This process of permanent mobilisation does not cease with the seizure of power; it intensifies. It takes on a hitherto unknown dimension with the emergence of a far more powerful organisational form; an organisational and institutional lever of incalculable magnitude — the national state controlled by the proletariat. However, this new form of organisation of the international proletariat, a national workers’ state, is simply a new and far more powerful instrument to be used in the process of international socialist revolution, i.e., in the process of permanent revolution and mobilisation.

The period after the seizure of power gives the revolutionary party, for the first time in history, the possibility of achieving an uninterrupted mobilisation of the workers, impossible under capitalism for obvious reasons. The party must achieve this with the same techniques used when the exploiters ruled the country: advancing the necessary slogans for the mobilisation of all the workers according to the stage of the struggle and the needs of the toiling masses. The question of slogans is very important because there is no such thing as workers' mobilisation in the abstract or through purely organisational forms. Organisational forms must be flexible, always changing according to the demands or struggles around which the exploited will mobilise. Before the victory of the Russian Revolution, mobilisation was around "all power to the soviets" and "peace and land". Later, during the civil war, the great slogan was the defeat of the White Guard and imperialist intervention, while the crucial mass organisation was the Red Army, not the soviets. Later still came the struggle for transportation and against starvation, typhus and lice. After the victory in the civil war came the battle for economic recovery and this new mobilisation gave relevance to the trade unions and the workers without a party, with relatively less emphasis on the soviets as the preeminent organisational form of the Russian workers and mass movements. The point here is that, after the conquest of power, there were different stages with different axes of mobilisation according to the circumstances — just as there are under capitalism. The mechanics for workers' mobilisation, after the seizure of power, through slogans that express the urgent needs of the class struggle at any given time, can never be resolved automatically through the simple mechanism of soviets voting. As always, this will depend on the role and influence of the revolutionary party in continually bringing forward mobilising slogans as it did before the seizure of power.

This is the real driving force, the true content of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Its aim is neither the establishment of absolute democracy nor the creation of soviets. The aim is the continuation and intensification of the mobilisation of the workers, and there is no better way to ensure this than by having democracy for those who mobilise, for those who join the struggle. This needs to be said because the ultimate explanation of the degeneration of the USSR, or the bureaucratic character of all the workers' states is that there has not been a continuous mobilisation of the workers. The Russian proletariat failed because it grew tired, fatigued and ceased to mobilise. In the other bureaucratised workers' states, the mobilisations were controlled by the bureaucratic apparatus. They were sporadic rather than permanent and were constricted by the interests of the bureaucracy after the seizure of power. No organisational form can avoid this paralysis of the mobilisation of the working masses. It can only be overcome through the constant application of mobilising slogans. This means that after the seizure of power, it will be imperative for the revolutionary party to raise its transitional slogans needed to ensure that the workers' struggle will never cease. This is the deep meaning of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

7. The future of soviets and parties

The USFI comrades have no doubts that as soon as the proletariat seizes power three closely linked phenomena will instantly take place: "the dictatorship of the proletariat begins to wither away almost from its inception", the soviets will be transformed into multitudinous popular movements involving the entire population, and lastly, "It can be predicted confidently that under genuine workers' democracy parties will receive a much richer and much broader content and will conduct mass ideological struggles of a much broader scope and with much greater mass participation than anything that has occurred up to now under the most advanced forms of bourgeois democracy."⁹⁸

It appears that the USFI majority envisages a global process that will include the weakening of the proletarian state and the spectacular development of popular soviets and political parties. Strange though it may seem, there are certain parallels between this conception and the Stalinist concept criticised by Trotsky. This is no coincidence. It was Stalin who said that the Soviet system and socialism developed simultaneously and Trotsky who insisted that if the soviet system developed, socialism could not, and vice versa. Trotsky's explanation was simple: if socialism is

98 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 10.

developed, classes begin to disappear; if classes disappear, the state begins to wither away; if the state withers away, the same will happen to the Soviet regime, which is merely a state form. If soviets are developed and strengthened, inevitably some kind of state, different from that of the bourgeoisie but a state, all the same, will also be strengthened.

The same holds for political parties; if their strength increases, it is because the political and economic battles for power and the distribution of the surplus product are also on the rise.

The Third International passed a resolution on the question of political parties and soviets, which runs counter to the present position of the USFI. This resolution explains how, as the state and the classes disappear, so will political parties and workers' organisations disappear: "The need for a political party of the proletariat will only disappear with the complete dissolution of the classes. On the way to the final victory of communism, it is possible that the historical significance of the three fundamental forms of proletarian organisation of the present (party, soviets, production associations) will change, and that the uniform type of the workers' organisation will gradually crystallise out. The Communist Party will not however completely dissolve into the working class (emphasis in original) until communism has ceased to be an object of struggle and the whole of the working class has become communist."⁹⁹

Thus, the "confident" assertion that political "parties will receive a much richer and much broader content" under a dictatorship of the proletariat which "begins to wither away", is absurd from the Marxist point of view. As the state begins to wither away — and, according to the USFI, this process will begin as soon as the proletariat seizes power — political parties will also vanish, because their *raison d'être*, control of the state, will cease to be. The USFI confuses more or less organised cultural ideological currents with political parties. This is why they write that parties "will conduct mass ideological struggles". However, an ideological struggle waged by a party must be subordinated to the political struggle for the power of the state; otherwise, it is a cultural-ideological, not a politico-ideological struggle.

The disappearance of politics, which will be a consequence of the disappearance of exploitation, misery, hunger, war, etc., will enrich the quality of life and debate within society. Socialist citizens will participate, on a hitherto unknown scale, in debates on pedagogic, scientific, sporting, artistic and social issues. These issues are, as the comrades of the USFI say, "ideological" but not political. People will form groups to better defend their ideas and, since they will be far more lucid than the authors of the resolution, they will say: "Thanks to the disappearance of political parties we can meet freely to discuss all this. If we had political parties and a state, we would all be restricted by the monsters of class society: politics and administration through violence by man against man."

A similar situation exists in the relation between direct and indirect democracy. According to the USFI majority comrades, the enormous proliferation of political parties does not go counter to the development of direct democracy. Nothing is further from the truth. The proliferation of political parties is contrary to direct democracy, even though in a revolutionary proletarian dictatorship these opposite, contradictory poles can develop jointly up to a critical point, at which the development of one or the other is put into question. This holds because political parties are the highest expression of indirect democracy. The existence of parties implies that they mediate the initiative of the masses; that their discipline restrains, channels and distorts the immediate, self-determined activity of the workers and the mass movement. Direct democracy implies the immediate implementation of a common decision without delegation of tasks to any organisation and even less to any party. The emergence of the state is the absolute negation of direct democracy since everything must be mediated by the state, and even the ruling class is forced to resort to the state bureaucracy to achieve its ends. The existence of parties is nothing more than a consequence of the existence of the state — and that is why parties must be centralist.

Direct democracy may either gain dominance as the state disappears or may develop simultaneously with the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers' parties

99 Communist International: "Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution", (1920), in *The Second Congress of the Communist International*, New Park Publications, London, 1977, p. 96.

but as an opposite, contradictory pole. Both poles will develop and establish links, but at a certain point, they will inevitably become contradictory. In the transitional period from capitalism to socialism, we will see only the beginning of the development of direct democracy as it combines with the growth of indirect democracy expressed in the Soviet system, the trade unions and the political parties. Direct democracy will gain control as social classes, imperialism, the state, the parties, and the soviets begin to disappear. Socialist producers and consumers may even undergo conflicting, contradictory experiences without the need for any discipline, even from that of a majority vote. Every social group will be free to do as it wishes thanks to the existence of enormous wealth. There is only one absolute law: as direct democracy develops political parties will disappear.

However, the USFI comrades are right on one point: in the first stages of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, there will be a flourishing of soviets and revolutionary democracy. Different mass organisational forms will emerge (including soviet parties representing different sectors of the mobilised working class and masses). This will be the consequence of the revolutionary dictatorship appealing to the permanent mobilisation of the workers to become stronger and be able to confront imperialism on a world scale and its influences on a national scale, generating a struggle that cannot but develop and expand revolutionary democracy to hitherto unknown heights. Hence, we need to strengthen the revolution and to achieve it we need to mobilise the masses to reinforce the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletarian state and, thereby, revolutionary democracy. The USFI comrades fail to understand this dialectic precisely because they do not recognise this particular stage of proletarian dictatorship that we are living in. Because of the existence of imperialism, as soon as the proletariat takes power it will have to strengthen its revolutionary dictatorship by extending and deepening the revolution and, for this, it will have to strengthen its state, that is, its soviets, and revolutionary democracy, likewise all the forms of organisation whose orientation follows the direction of the development of the revolution and the strengthening of the revolutionary dictatorship. In the immediate future, as soon as the revolutionary dictatorships of the proletariat begin to emerge, this perspective will be true. But at the moment, it's just futuristic poetry. These will be future parties that will be united by a common bond, the defence of the socialist revolution, although they express different points of view and interests. Before they disappear, both political parties and the state will flourish more than ever.

However, what concerns us is the relation between soviets and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat with the contemporary political parties — Stalinists, Social Democrats — which are agents of imperialism, with the only consistently revolutionary world party, the Fourth International and its Trotskyist parties.

We have to state clearly that we do not see the possibility of the spectacular transformation of the present opportunist workers' parties into revolutionary parties.

Unfortunately, they will remain opportunist and counter-revolutionary and therefore the mortal enemies of Trotskyist parties, soviets and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

CHAPTER V

Soviet fetishism

1. Soviets: an organisational “principle”?

The persistent overestimation of soviet organisational forms by the USFI, practically discarding the fundamental role of the revolutionary party and the mobilisation of the masses, is a phenomenon foreseen by Marxism. Both the Russian and German revolutions led our teachers to reflect deeply on this deviation, which they called “organisational fetishism” (in specific reference to soviet fetishism) and to warn about the dangers that stem from it.

Trotsky states in *The Lessons of October*; “But the young European parties, who have more or less accepted soviets as a ‘doctrine’ and ‘principle’, always run the danger of treating soviets as a fetish, as some self-sufficing factor in a revolution. Yet, despite the enormous advantages of soviets as the organs of struggle for power, there may well be cases where the insurrection may unfold based on other forms of organisation (factory committees, trade unions, etc.), and soviets may spring up only during the insurrection itself, or even after it has achieved victory, as organs of state power.

“Most highly instructive from this standpoint is the struggle which Lenin launched after the July days against the fetishism of the organisational form of soviets. In proportion as the SRs and Menshevik soviets became in July, organisations openly driving the soldiers into an offensive and crushing the Bolsheviks, to that extent the revolutionary movement of the proletarian masses was obliged and compelled to seek new paths and channels. Lenin indicated the factory committees as the organisations of the struggle for power.”¹⁰⁰

Mandel states that it is possible for the opportunist parties to enter the soviets and in this respect his criticism of the ultra-left, which opposes this position, is correct. We also believe that by the very virtue of being opportunist, these parties will attempt to integrate themselves in soviets once these become mass organisations. Mandel, however, stops in mid-stream. What will the opportunists do in the soviet? Obviously, they will be there to try to make them opportunist and counter-revolutionary. There is no other possibility. Mandel cannot carry on along this tack because to avoid this eventuality, he would have to make his soviets revolutionary, in which case they would no longer comprise the entire population.

Therefore, we reiterate Trotsky’s position that it is “most highly instructive” to “struggle... against the fetishism of the organisational form of *soviets*”, that we must not elevate the soviets to a “principle” and that “a simple recognition of the soviet system clarifies nothing”, since “the soviet form of organisation does not possess miraculous powers”. We are for soviets but only to make them revolutionary soviets. This is what Trotsky and also Lenin were when the latter proposed breaking from the soviets controlled by the Mensheviks and the Social-Revolutionaries. He also proposed

100 Trotsky, Leon: *The Lessons of October*, Chapter 8, “Again, on the Soviets and the Party”, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch8.htm.

to attack them relentlessly to take power because they had begun to act as a transmission belt for Kerensky's counter-revolutionary policies.

We struggle to make mass organisations (whatever they may be) revolutionary. We do not indulge in the ultra-leftist politics of ignoring organisations that don't conform to our ideas, neither do we adopt the opportunist position of always following them whatever their character. We make no fetish out of them but clearly recognise that soviets, like unions, can be led by opportunists today and counter-revolutionaries tomorrow. The predictions made by Trotsky for the future in Austria are valid for other countries: "...the possibility remains not only that the slogan of soviets might not coincide with the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but that the two might even be counterposed, that is, that the soviets might be transformed into a stronghold opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat."¹⁰¹ Trotsky's warning is valid also for the period after the conquest of power.

2. What should the soviets be like?

Comrades of the USFI, would you agree that to answer this question we refer to Trotsky? We assume that you will, and we will therefore quote nothing less than *The Transitional Program* of the Fourth International. "How are the different demands and forms of struggle to be harmonised, even if only within the limits of one city? History has already answered this question: through soviets. These will unite the representatives of all the fighting groups". "...Through these doors pass representatives of all strata, drawn into the general current of the *struggle*." "...the soviets, acting as a pivot around which millions of toilers are united in their struggle against the exploiters..."¹⁰²

We believe there is nothing original in the fact that soviets are organs of struggle and of those who engage in struggle, and that they can only emerge "when the mass movement enters into an openly revolutionary stage."¹⁰³

But who are those involved in the struggle? They are not all of the people. "Because among the whole people, constantly suffering and most cruelly, from the brutalities of the Avramovs, there are some who are physically cowed and terrified; there are some who are morally degraded by the 'resist not evil' theory, for example, or simply degraded not by theory but by prejudice, habit, routine; and there are indifferent people, whom we call philistines, petty-bourgeois people who are more inclined to hold aloof from intense struggle, to pass by or even to hide themselves (for fear of getting mixed up in the fight and getting hurt). That is why the dictatorship is exercised, not by the whole people, but by the revolutionary people..."¹⁰⁴ We should apologise for producing one quote after another but this is because we believe that Lenin and Trotsky have some authority on the subject of soviets.

The question that now arises is: who are the revolutionary people? Basically, the industrial proletariat, the most advanced sections of it. Hence, in the only revolutionary dictatorship that we know of, the proletariat possessed the most numerous delegation and voting was not in secret but by a raised hand. This method, which is typical of workers' mass meetings, is coercive because it is used to avoid the participation of counter-revolutionary workers or toilers. It was used to ensure that soviets comprised those engaged in struggle and not the entire people. The leaders of the October Revolution were stricken with the same obsession as we are: they trusted only in the proletariat. "Revolutionary power lies within the proletariat itself. It is necessary for the proletariat to rise for

101 Trotsky, Leon: "The Austrian Crisis and Communism", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1929)*, op. cit., p. 394.

102 Trotsky, Leon: "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International", in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, op. cit., p. 96.

103 Ibid, p. 96.

104 Lenin, VI.: "A Contribution to the History of the Question of the Dictatorship", in *Collected Works*, op. cit., vol. 31, p. 353-354.

the conquest of power —then and only then does the Soviet organisation reveal its qualities as the irreplaceable instrument in the hands of the proletariat.”¹⁰⁵

If Lenin and Trotsky placed so much importance on maintaining a majority of workers in the soviets, if they believed that these could only emerge in revolutionary conditions and that only those engaged in struggle should be admitted to them, we must conclude — although it will seem incredible to the USFI — that soviets are necessary because there is a struggle. This means that there are two forces, that of the revolution and ... that of the counter-revolution (the latter comprises either direct agents of the bourgeoisie and imperialism or indirect agents such as the bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy).

A comparison can be made here between two confronting armies or two pickets in a strike (that of the scabs and that of the strikers). How is it possible for the enemy to join our side? This is what the USFI wants when it says that everyone can join the soviet. How can we, the strikers, admit scabs to our armed picket, if we have organised precisely to see who will smash whom! Such are the mysteries of revisionism!

Our comrades of the USFI don't need soviets to fight against imperialist counter-revolution simply because it doesn't enter into their calculations. The primary task of their new soviets is “socialist construction”. If we are dealing with the task of construction, it is no bad thing for the counter-revolutionaries to collaborate. But to consider “construction” the fundamental objective and to deny the necessity of developing the class struggle on a national and a world scale, is — it goes without saying — a capitulation to theory of socialism in one country.

After having clarified what soviets are (since they led to the triumph of the only revolutionary dictatorship in history and having had over 60 years to study them), let us now see what the USFI document has to say about them. Simply, it seems they no longer agree with Leninist ideas. Firstly, regarding politics, they should not be organs of struggle or of those engaged in struggle. They should not be revolutionary. The soviets of the future are envisaged as organisations of a hitherto unseen democratic nature with total freedom for tendencies, groups and political parties, including those of the counter-revolutionaries. Will every individual have full freedoms by the fact of being a worker? This is the same as saying that a delegate who is an agent of the bosses has the freedom to make propaganda against a strike, simply because he had been elected by a union meeting.

The second aspect of the Leninist-Trotskyist definition is sociological: for the leaders of the October Revolution, “the revolutionary people” were essentially the industrial proletariat. In the eyes of the USFI, the soviets ought not to be integrated essentially by the industrial proletariat; the entire people should be in them. “Finally, in the building of a classless society, the participation of millions of people not only in a more or less passive way through their votes but also in the actual administration at various levels cannot be reduced to a workerist concept of considering only workers ‘at the point of production’. Lenin said that in a worker's state the vast majority of the population would participate directly in the administration of state functions. This means that the soviets on which the dictatorship of the proletariat will be based are not factory councils, but bodies of self-organisation of the masses in all areas of economic and social life, including factories, commercial units, hospitals, schools, transport and telecommunications centres, and neighbourhoods.”¹⁰⁶

This is a popular and territorial conception. Lenin said that “The soviet Constitution also brings the State apparatus closer to the masses by the fact that it is not the territorial district but the production unit (factory, plant) which becomes the electoral unit and the basic cell of the State.”¹⁰⁷ Trotsky confirms this when he says that “the Soviet system of election (is based on) class and industrial groups...”¹⁰⁸

105 Trotsky, Leon: “Manifesto of the Second World Congress”, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 130.

106 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

107 Trotsky, Leon: *The Trotsky Papers*, letters (1917-1922) edited and annotated by Jan M. Meijer, Mouton & Co., The Hague, 1964, vol. 1, p. 287.

108 Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

This discussion over the soviets and the revolutionary dictatorship is not new to Marxism. The predecessors of the USFI are all those petty-bourgeois currents that have always wanted to seize the monopoly of power from the industrial proletariat to give it to the people. A Trotskyist cannot speak of “people” since people means everyone, as long as they are toilers. Under this heading come the petty-bourgeois and the reformist or counter-revolutionary workers, and the USFI will have them in so that they can participate in the administration of the state!

This is the direct consequence of their organisational fetishism, which attempts to oppose to the bourgeois parliament an abstract and ideal soviet which is... merely a new form of parliament. This has always been the aim of reformism and it has no place at all in a Trotskyist program. “The Soviet system is not an abstract principle opposed by Communists to the principle of parliamentarianism. The Soviet system is a class apparatus which is destined to do away with parliamentarianism and to take its place during the struggle and as a result of the struggle.”¹⁰⁹ If within the bourgeois parliament there exists the same degree of representation for those opposed to the system that the parliament upholds and develops, this is because the bourgeoisie has already ensured with the invaluable support of reformism that this organ operates as a brake upon the popular and workers’ struggle. Whenever there is a danger that it may support the struggle of the exploited, the bosses do not hesitate in suppressing it until they are once again in a position to restore it to its traditional functions. Parliament is in every sense opposite to the soviet, which without struggle loses the reason for its existence.

But the USFI revision of the soviets goes further and has dire consequences. By denying their true nature and attempting to convert them into democratic parliaments the USFI place them in danger of being swept up in the myriad of administrative tasks that will arise. And with that, the USFI encourages the soviets to end up becoming bastions of the bureaucracy, which is the same as saying institutionalised bulwarks against the permanent mobilisation of the masses.

The USFI ends up making a major concession to Kautsky, albeit from an opposite position. Kautsky said that soviets could not be organs of the state if they were organs of struggle (if they are organs of struggle, they must continue to struggle even against the state itself and the governing party; otherwise, they lose their character). The USFI replies: “they are organs of state, not of struggle”. Both sides agree: “state” and “struggle” are opposed.

We say they are the organs of struggle of the workers’ state because we are speaking of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. We hold that one of the fundamental tasks of the revolutionary party is to keep them struggling because the party needs them to link up to, and lead, the permanent revolutionary mobilisation of the masses. Hence, “one cannot conceive of a better form” than the soviet. If it becomes bureaucratised or becomes the enemy of mobilisation, we will look for new organisational forms. At best they will cease to exist when classes disappear and the state with them.

Our International is the only party capable of immediately fulfilling the historical objective of the proletariat. It will continue to be so as long as it stops adopting theoretical positions for the destruction of revolutionary soviets.

3. Trotsky and the future of soviets in the USSR

In his last years, Trotsky continued to confirm this definition of the soviets not only for the period before the taking of power but also for the period after. This is to be found mainly in the *Transitional Program* and the discussion articles around it. His position is made particularly clear when he speaks of what should be the future of the soviets in the USSR to restore the revolutionary dictatorship of the first years and destroy the bureaucratic degeneration.

Just as before the taking of power, the construction of soviets is subject to the existence of a clearly revolutionary situation, “the Soviet regime” will be able to “revive” in the USSR “only” insofar

¹⁰⁹ Trotsky, Leon: “Manifesto of the Second World Congress”, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p.131.

as there exists “the victorious revolutionary uprising of the oppressed masses.”¹¹⁰ And what should these soviets be like? How will they be constructed? “It is necessary to return to the soviets not only their free democratic form but also their class content. As once the bourgeoisie and kulaks were not permitted to enter the soviets, so now *it is necessary to drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the soviets*. In the soviets there is room only for representatives of the workers, rank-and-file collective farmers, peasants and Red Army men,”¹¹¹ which he earlier stated were engaged in “struggle”.

Trotsky felt obliged to have many discussions on this question with the comrades of the movement. He decided to turn one of these into an article elaborating and emphasising his position on the struggle for the expulsion of the bureaucracy and labour aristocracy from the soviets. One comrade objected to this position in much the same terms as those now held by the USFI: “There do not appear to be any valid political reasons to establish an a priori disfranchisement of entire social groupings of present-day Russian society. Disfranchisement should be based on political acts of violence of groups or individuals against the new Soviet power.”¹¹² As we have said, these lines could have been taken from the resolution that we are now criticising: that the most absolute democratic freedoms should only be withdrawn from those who engage in proven acts of violence against Soviet power. Trotsky criticised his correspondent for taking “a formal, juridical, purely constitutional attitude on a question which must be approached from the revolutionary-political point of view. It is not at all a question of whom the new Soviets will deprive of power once they are decisively established; we can calmly leave the elaboration of the new Soviet constitution to the future. The question is *how to get rid of the Soviet bureaucracy* (...) Real soviets of workers and peasants can come forth only in the course of the uprising against the bureaucracy. (...) It is not a question of a constitutional ‘determination’ which is applied on the basis of fixed juridical qualifications, but of the *real self-determination of the struggling camps*. The soviets can arise only in the course of a decisive struggle. They will be created by those layers, of the toilers who are drawn into the movement. The significance of the Soviets consists precisely in the fact that their composition is determined not by formal criteria but by the dynamics of the class struggle.”¹¹³

He could not have been clearer. Firstly, the Soviets will “withdraw the rights” of social sectors of the Russian population, including sectors of the workers’ movement, and it will be their right to do so. Secondly, in the future, sections of the population will be “deprived of their rights”, although “we can calmly leave the elaboration of the new Soviet constitution to the future”. Thirdly, “it is not a question of a constitutional determination” as to who participates in the soviets since not all the workers are included within them, but “those layers of the toilers who are drawn into the movement”. Those sectors and those alone will decide which parties and social sectors to legalise and which to declare illegal. We hold the same position: there is no Marxist principle forcing us to grant absolute legality to all sectors and parties, much less to counter-revolutionaries. Trotsky was for the outlawing of parties that defend the bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy, not for the legalisation of all parties and inhabitants. To oppose this is to fall into fetishism of the organisational form of soviets through a formal and juridical conception. This is to view the soviet not as an organ for struggle and of those who struggle but as an apparatus of state administration for which revolutionary struggle has ceased, and as a cyst in which the bureaucracy — which people often only talk of fighting — can easily develop.

110 Trotsky, Leon: “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International”, in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, op. cit., p. 106.

111 Ibid, p. 105.

112 Trotsky, Leon: “It Is Necessary to Drive the Bureaucracy and the Aristocracy out of the Soviets”, in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, op. cit., p. 148.

113 Ibid., p. 148–149.

4. Soviets and the Paris Commune according to Trotsky

The USFI majority attributes to its soviets and its dictatorship of the proletariat— not to the true ones — the super democratic characteristics of the Paris Commune. However, it is most surprising that the authors, who know Trotsky so well, have not referred to his revision of Lenin’s classical analysis of the Paris Commune if only to criticise it. This omission is all the more ominous because the authors hold that the essential characteristics of the dictatorship of the proletariat are to be found in the codes issued by the Paris Commune; and what Lenin subsequently wrote in this regard in *The State and Revolution*, without mentioning that Trotsky modified that interpretation of the Commune. In this revision, Trotsky stressed that the essential characteristics of the Commune were the features of dictatorship and struggle, and not of popular democracy. Moreover, he identified its most serious defect as the absence of a disciplined revolutionary party to lead the process.

This modification began in the early 1920s with Trotsky’s 1922 resolution on the French Communist Party for the Executive Committee of the Communist International: “The most glorious page in the history of the French proletariat — the Paris Commune — was nothing else but a bloc of all the organisations and shadings within the French working class, united against the bourgeoisie. If, despite the establishment of the united front, the Commune was quickly crushed, then the explanation for this is above all to be found in the fact that the united front did not have at its left flank a genuine revolutionary, disciplined and resolute organisation, capable of quickly gaining leadership in the fire of events.”¹¹⁴

Trotsky did not see the essential element of the Commune in the vote, or power of recall over delegates, or the average wage, but in the unity of action of the workers’ parties that took power. He identifies its essential failure to be the absence of “a genuine revolutionary disciplined and resolute organisation” to take over the leadership. In this same period Trotsky wrote in on behalf of the ECCI a letter to the Seine Federation of the French CP: “The most important reasons for the defeat of the Commune, namely petty-bourgeois, democratic and federalist principles, the absence of a strong hand to guide the revolution, to unify, discipline and centralise it.”¹¹⁵ These quotes might have been of little importance if Trotsky had not reflected over the years upon this problem, and if he had not produced a complete revision of the classical conception of the Commune.

It was in the 1930s, in a debate with the tendency of French Trotskyists who produced *La Commune*, that Trotsky for the first time denied that what was extraordinary in the Commune was the dictatorship of the proletariat and he defined it as a bourgeois institution. Against the accepted view that what was extraordinary in the Commune, what was truly revolutionary was the democratic functioning, the vote, the revocability, the workers’ salary for the civil servants, against everything that had been written and that Kautsky so strongly supported (although Lenin had already pointed out that the universal vote was only for those who remained in Paris, that is, for the workers), Trotsky points out that the dictatorship of the proletariat rested in another organisation, in the National Guard, the organ of struggle. In opposition to ultra-democratic fetishism, he stated that this can never be the fundamental element in the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the true soviets. The workers’ dictatorship was the organisation of those who fought and not that of all the workers in Paris. The Commune, the organisation of all the workers, was, with its super democratic mechanisms, a bourgeois organisation and not the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead, the organisation of those engaged in the struggle was the “soviet” and the dictatorship of the proletariat. We are entirely in agreement with Trotsky’s revisionist and revolutionary conception of the Paris Commune, but we are not out to dupe anybody. We state quite clearly that it is a revision of traditional Leninist analysis.

Although it is rather long, we offer the following quotes by Trotsky which are apparently unknown to the authors of the resolution: “When we say ‘Long Live the Commune!’, we mean the

114 Trotsky, Leon: “Resolution of the Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI”, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 147.

115 Trotsky, Leon: “A Letter of the ECCI to the Seine Federation”, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p.158.

heroic insurrection, not the institution of the commune, that is, the democratic municipality. Even its election was a stupidity (see Marx) and even then, this stupidity was only possible after the conquest of power by the Central Committee of the National Guard, which was the ‘action committee’, or the soviet, of the time.”¹¹⁶

“In the same paragraph, you say, in parenthesis: ‘Paris Commune, soviets...’ In a whole series of letters, I have insisted on the fact that it is impermissible when speaking of the organisational form of the government, to identify the Commune with soviets. The Commune was the democratic municipality. It is, therefore, necessary to choose between the soviets and the Commune.

“The revolutionists of 1871 wanted to combine their ‘soviet’ of yesteryear (the central committee of the National Guard) and the Commune (the democratic municipality).

“They only created more of a mess by this hedge podge. In 1917 in Petrograd, after the conquest of power, we had the soviet and the democratic municipality. Despite the fact that the Bolshevik Party absolutely dominated the Commune, we dissolved it in favour of the soviet. It is La Commune that speaks of government based on local communes. This formulation of a democratic municipal federalism is most agreeable to the Bakuninists or to the Proudhonists. It has nothing in common with the dictatorship of the proletariat and soviets as its instruments.”¹¹⁷

The soviets of the USFI are the petty-bourgeois municipal Communes of the Proudhonists and not the soviets for which true Trotskyists fight.

116 Trotsky, Leon: “Critical Remarks on Revolution”, in *The Crisis of the French Section (1935-36)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1977, p.111.

117 Trotsky, Leon: “The Appeal to Revolutionary Organisations and Groups”, in *The Crisis of the French Section (1935-36)*, op. cit., pp. 129-130.

CHAPTER VI

The role of the revolutionary party and the Fourth International

1. What do political parties represent?

This is the title of one of the most important theses of the USFI resolution. It is so far removed from reality that the Fourth International is not mentioned once, nor is there a single word about Social Democracy and Stalinism. Thesis ignores the relationship between these blood and bone parties, and Trotskyism and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

For a Marxist to write a chapter on political parties without mentioning or defining the existing ones, particularly the workers' parties, is the same as making chicken soup with a pair of old socks.

Thesis begins by explaining that parties “came into being with the emergence of forms of government in which relatively large numbers of people (as opposed to small village community or tribal assemblies) participated in the exercise of political power to some extent (e.g., under the urban democracies of antiquity and of the Middle Ages).”¹¹⁸

In other words, for the USFI majority, the main reason for the emergence of parties was that there was a change from few people to many people. We emphasise people because if we replace this word with individuals, we unmask a clearly bourgeois-democratic conception of society as being composed of persons or individuals, rather than classes. They conclude their definition thus: “As soon as political decisions go beyond a small number of routine questions that can be taken up and solved by a restricted group of people, any form of democracy implies the need for structured and coherent options on a great number of related questions, in other words, a choice between alternative political lines and program. That is what parties represent.”¹¹⁹ This is a demographic definition! Parties come into being when there are lots of people! How intellectual! “Structured and olitical power. In brief: no classes, no state; no state, no politics; no politics, no political parties.

Political parties do not give structured responses to satisfy an intellectual necessity or because “many people” need a coherent set of principles within a structural framework, such as a theory or a scientific school could give them. They do so in response to the specific political, economic or social problems which relate to general politico-economic interests of class sectors. These common interests are precisely what give political parties their coherence and make them a structured whole.

Parties grew out of the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions. Their history is different from that of the political defence of sectoral class interests, i.e., politics. This came first; true political parties emerged many centuries later out of the great English and French Revolutions. A distinction must be made between the political struggle of a few Roman Senators, or a political civil war between religious sects in the Middle Ages, and the struggles between modern political parties. The class

118 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 10.

119 Ibid., p. 10.

struggle had to fully develop and reach its peak with bourgeois society before it could be expressed at a superstructural level in the formation of political parties.

The USFI not only does not apply the Marxist method of defining political parties; it goes so far as to hold that that method is useless in this case.

“If one says that only parties and organisations that have no bourgeois (or petty-bourgeois?) program or ideology, or are not ‘engaged in anti-socialist or anti-Soviet propaganda and/or agitation’ are to be legalised, how is one to determine the dividing line? Will parties with a majority of working-class members but with a bourgeois ideology be forbidden? How can such a position be reconciled with free elections for workers councils? What is the dividing line between ‘bourgeois program’ and ‘reformist ideology’? Must reformist parties be forbidden as well? Will social democracy be suppressed?”¹²⁰ The USFI majority wants to know how we determine “the dividing line”. They cannot conceive of establishing precise distinctions between the parties. It could not be otherwise given their use of demographic and intellectual methods of definition and their renunciation of Marxism. However, Marxism provides us with all the necessary conceptual tools for determining with clarity the dividing line between bourgeois and workers’ parties. With the contributions of Lenin and Trotsky, we can draw the dividing line between two counterposed types of workers’ parties, to which a new decisive parameter will have to be added at the moment of the dictatorship and the revolution: For or against the revolution?

2. Two types of workers’ parties

Lenin and Trotsky have insisted that there are two delimited types of workers’ parties, as dissimilar to each other as chalk and cheese.

Besides, the revolutionary workers’ parties are bureaucratic or reformist workers’ parties which can even become counter-revolutionary at a certain point. These parties represent the politics of the labour aristocracy and bureaucracy, particularly in the metropolitan countries and the workers’ states, where these privileged sectors feed respectively on the crumbs of imperialist exploitation and state administration. Hence, they are the superstructural expression of an enormous sector of the working class and the modern middle class, which we may also cautiously include in the working class. These parties are Social Democracy and Stalinism. They continue being reformist and generally counter-revolutionary agents of imperialism directly or indirectly —even when they take power at the head of a workers’ revolution because their role is to halt its international development. The existence of these parties made the construction of the Third International necessary and later on — on its bureaucratisation — the founding of the Fourth International.

The importance of making this distinction is that it is the only one that gives us a valid explanation for the fact that no revolutionary dictatorship has triumphed after that of Lenin and Trotsky. Since the character of the workers’ state depends on the party that leads the revolution and takes power, the state may be revolutionary or bureaucratic. In other words, we have not seen more revolutionary dictatorships because no revolution has been led by a Trotskyist party.

Instead of following the examples of Lenin and Trotsky and defining the existing workers’ parties, the USFI asserts that: “one cannot deny that different parties, with different orientations and different ways of approaching the class struggle between capital and labour and the relations between immediate demands and historical goals, can arise and have arisen within the working class and do genuinely represent sectors of the working class (be it purely sectoral interests, ideological pressures of alien class forces, etc.).”¹²¹ Put another way, they fail to define or analyse the existing divisions between contemporary workers’ parties and thus refuse to define the Social-Democratic and Stalinist Parties as agents of imperialism in the workers’ movement. This is so precisely because they represent the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy. Their thesis on political parties makes no

120 Ibid., p. 9.

121 Ibid., p. 21.

mention whatsoever of the influence of imperialism and the layers of the labour aristocracy on the definition of political parties.

In their zeal to avoid making this definition, the USFI abuses Trotsky's attack on Stalin's assertion that there is one party for every class, and that that of the working class is Stalinism.

In *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky states: "In reality classes are heterogeneous; they are torn by inner antagonisms, and arrive at the solution of common problems no otherwise than through an inner struggle of tendencies, groups and parties. It is possible, with certain qualifications, to concede that 'a party is part of a class'. But since a class has many 'parts' — some look forward and some back — one and the same class may create several parties. For the same reason, one party may rest upon parts of different classes. An example of only one party corresponding to one class is not to be found in the whole course of political history provided, of course, you do not take the police appearance for the reality.

"In its social structure, the proletariat is the least heterogeneous class of capitalist society. Nevertheless, the presence of such 'little strata' as the workers' aristocracy and the workers' bureaucracy is sufficient to give rise to opportunistic parties, which are convened by the course of things into one of the weapons of bourgeois domination. Whether from the standpoint of Stalinist sociology, the difference between the workers' aristocracy and the proletarian masses is 'fundamental' or only 'something in the nature of' matters not at all. It is from this difference that the necessity arose in its time for breaking with the Social Democracy and creating the Third International."¹²²

The USFI abusive interpretation of this runs as follows: "... the idea of a homogenous working class exclusively represented by a single party is contradicted by all historical experience and by any Marxist, materialist analysis of the concrete growth and development of the contemporary proletariat, both under capitalism and after the overthrow of capitalism. At most, one could defend thesis that the revolutionary vanguard party alone programmatically defends the long-term historical interests of the proletariat."¹²³

What does the US imagine the Stalinist and Social Democratic Parties represent if they are not the "long-term historical interests of the proletariat"? Do they represent privileged sectors that are direct or indirect agents of the bourgeoisie within the workers' movement as Trotsky held? If this is the case, why don't they say so? What does the Fourth International represent? Is it a political party? Does it belong to the very mysterious class of "revolutionary vanguard parties"? Where are these parties active, and what is their ideology? Are they Marxist? Could they even be Trotskyist?

How does the document define our International? This is not made explicit but there seems to be an implicit definition to compensate for this. "At most, one could defend thesis that the revolutionary vanguard party alone programmatically defends the long-term historical interests of the proletariat." This must be their optimum definition of our International since this is what it is "at most". The least we can say is that this definition can be traced, by its form and its contents, to the Bukharinist-Stalinist conception so strongly criticised by Trotsky. For example, concerning the Stalinist program, he said: "The draft confines itself to purely formal definitions of the party (vanguard, theory of Marxism, embodiment of experiences, and so forth) which might not have sounded badly in a program of the left Social Democracy prior to the war. Today it is utterly inadequate."¹²⁴

Our International is precisely (neither "at most" nor at least) the only International in existence and only its parties are the only ones which struggle for the permanent revolution. That is, for a transitional program towards socialist society, for a workers' revolution to impose a revolutionary proletarian dictatorship to carry out the fight for the development of the international revolution. The other existing workers' parties (the Social Democrats and Stalinists), if they take power forced by circumstances, will impose a nationalist, bureaucratic, reformist dictatorship on a world scale since their program is now, and ever shall be for socialism in one country. Our International does not only

122 Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 267.

123 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 20.

124 Trotsky, Leon: *The Third International After Lenin*, op. cit., p. 83.

reflect “at most” “the long-term historical interests of the proletariat” but also the immediate needs, especially of those sectors which are the most militant and the most consistent with the struggle against exploitation, generally the most disinherited and backward as well as the most concentrated and modern sectors of the working class. This is made manifest by the fact that it is the only world party that fights for the international socialist revolution.

This ultra-general but indispensable definition of workers’ parties does not deny the existence of centrist, intermediate formations which fluctuate from one pole to another; from revolutionary to reformist and bureaucratic, and vice versa. This was the case, for example, with the Communist Party of the USSR which went from being revolutionary under Lenin and Trotsky, to being reformist and bureaucratic under Stalin. The same happened with the left-wing of the Russian Social Revolutionary Party. It moved from petty-bourgeois reformism to an alliance with the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution and back again to the counter-revolutionary camp. In Germany, we have also the example of the centrist faction of the Independent Socialist Party which joined the Communist Party. However, these hybrid phenomena can be defined by their dynamic regarding the two main existing types of workers’ parties. Does their centrism lean towards Trotskyism or rather towards opportunism, nationalism, and reformism? Given this diversity of possibilities, it is possible for a party that does not define itself as Trotskyist — owing, perhaps, to the weakness of our International — to take power and establish a revolutionary dictatorship. This will be a vital stage in its transformation from a centrist to a Trotskyist party. It also explains, as we shall see, the possibility of soviet and revolutionary parties which — without being themselves Trotskyist— may join the Trotskyist party in the defence of the revolution and the revolutionary dictatorship.

3. One-party system or the soviet multiparty system. Once again, the role of the revolutionary party

Chapter IV broadly clarified the role of the revolutionary party in the struggle for power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was done to establish the identity of the critical institution in this process: The Soviet or the Party. The point now needs elaborating about another of the key themes of the USFI document: a one-party or multiparty system?

The USFI majority fiercely defends the “soviet multiparty system”. In their eyes, this “soviet multiparty system” does not mean legality for parties authorised by the revolutionary soviet but legality for all the political parties in the country including the counter-revolutionaries. The majority is quite explicit in this respect: “... genuinely representative, democratically elected workers’ councils can exist only if the masses have the right to elect whomever they want without distinction, and without restrictive preconditions as to the ideological or political convictions of the elected delegates”. And further: “... workers’ councils can function democratically only if all the elected delegates”, irrespective of their ideological and political convictions, “enjoy the right to form groups, tendencies, and parties, to have access to the mass media...” In case we still have any doubts we are later told that: “workers’ democracy” is only possible while there exists “the right of the toiling masses to elect whomever they want to the soviets and freedom of political organisation of all those who abide by the soviet constitution (including those who do not ideologically support the soviet system).”¹²⁵

Here, again, we find ourselves trapped by an individualist bourgeois-democratic analysis and program disguised as Marxism. The USFI is for “unfettered political freedom” for all parties. However, instead of saying so openly, they present arguments worthy of Lincoln or Bernstein, they

125 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 8-9.

Mandel reveals what the USFI tries to conceal when he states openly that he is for the freedom of all parties. Consistent to the end, as usual, he doesn’t bother over whether these “unfettered political freedoms” to form automatically legal political parties, will be held by individuals, as individuals, or as soviet delegates. He says: “Trotskyists have consistently demanded the plurality of political parties in the USSR, ever since the founding Congress of the IVth International” (In reply to Shirley Williams, Minister of Education in Callaghan’s cabinet, published in *Inprecor*, 16 February 1977, p. 12). The falsity of this assertion will be demonstrated later on.

hide behind these so-called “elected delegates”. This freedom is not held by soviets, or by a class, but by individuals, the delegates, completely independently of what the class and soviet democratically resolved by a majority. If this were applied in Iran, the Shah’s party would be completely legal since at least one counter-revolutionary would be sure of election to each soviet. In Russia, there were mass trade union organisations that democratically decided to fight alongside the white armies against the Red Army.

A soviet is a mass united front for revolutionary action, and can only include those parties which support this united front. There may well be confused delegates and workers who continue to give ideological support to counter-revolutionary parties but only those parties which support a united revolutionary front can take part in the soviet. It happens the same as in a trade union: there can only be those parties and members that, in fact, agree on the need to defend themselves against capitalist exploitation in the economic field. Generally, and historically, Trotskyists have been in favour of multiparty soviets but provided that it is understood as the right of the Soviet to admit parties according to their convenience.

This is the opposite of what the USFI’s resolution holds. The multiparty soviet is a relative norm, not an absolute one. In certain cases, a multiparty soviet can become a one-party soviet through a dialectical process. At any given time, revolutionary soviets will have the right to determine which parties to recognise, perhaps only one or barely two or three. And to solve it, the soviet must consider the concrete fact of whether the parties are revolutionary or counter-revolutionary. On principle, we are only obliged to give legality to revolutionary, not counter-revolutionary parties.

This is the true Trotskyist conception. During the Russian revolution Lenin stated quite clearly that: “When we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party and, as you have heard, a united socialist front is proposed, we say, ‘Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position!’...”¹²⁶

This is no more than another example that for Trotskyists there can be no fixed norms. We are completely opposed to the Stalinist norm that the only legitimate party, in the dictatorship of the proletariat, is the party in power. We are also opposed to the Euro-Trotskyist position which stands for a multiparty system in all cases, without exception. We hold that this decision is dependent upon the process of the class struggle, and the needs of the revolution, in addition to the type of relations established between the parties in the first years of the revolutionary dictatorship. We cannot pre-determine which norms will regulate the relations between the opportunist, bureaucratic workers’ parties, and the revolutionary workers’ parties of the workers’ movement. These relations will be imposed by force, not by constitutional mechanisms, between the two main sectors of the workers’ movement, and their political superstructures. If there is a permanent mobilisation of workers, then the revolutionary parties will be predominant, and even new ones will arise. If there is passivity and acquiescence, then the bureaucratic sectors, the labour aristocracy will be in control. From this general law will emerge the different possible relations between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers’ parties.

We insist: the one-party/multiparty debate is not the most crucial. No norms can substitute the living process of permanent mobilisation and the role played by the revolutionary party within it. These two factors are absent in the USFI’s theses. To put things in the terms the resolution does is to put the cart before the horse. Whether soviets will be one-party or multiparty systems will depend entirely on the degree of workers’ mobilisation and the existence or non-existence of a revolutionary party capable of giving that mobilisation a permanent character. It cannot be otherwise.

If the situation is not critical and the counter-revolution is relatively weak, if the aristocratic and bureaucratic parties reluctantly accept the proletariat’s revolutionary course, they may be granted full, or at least partial, legality. Else, if the counter-revolution remains strong, they might well be partly or totally banned. Suppose now that an opportunist party takes over workers’ power. In that case, if it feels secure in the saddle and the situation is relatively stable, they may grant some measure

126 Lenin, VI: “Speech at the First All Russian Congress of Workers in Education and Socialist Culture”, in *Collected Works*, op. cit., vol. 29, p. 535.

of legality to the revolutionary party. Although, most likely is that the upsurge of the masses will force the opportunists in power to grant some democratic concessions. We do not discard this possibility for certain definite stages of the revolutionary process, although the bureaucracy's tendency — be it in a union, a workers' party or a workers' state — is towards complete bureaucratic control and, therefore, the one-party system.

Everything will change as the world socialist revolution develops. It is quite possible that the weakening of the opportunist parties will generate great revolutionary parties and factions which will give unconditional support to the revolution, although they represent different political or workers' sectors. Naturally, these parties must be completely legal.

4. A revision of the Trotskyist program for the USSR

In its failure to understand the dialectic of the relations between mass movements, the revolutionary parties and the opportunists within the soviets, the USFI modifies the entire program of the Fourth International for the USSR, and the other deformed workers' states. The Trotskyist program for these states is not that of total and absolute freedom for all parties. The *Transitional Program* categorically states: "Democratisation of the soviets is impossible *without legalisation of soviet parties*. The workers and peasants themselves by their own free vote will indicate what parties they recognise as Soviet parties."¹²⁷

For Trotsky, no party should be legalised automatically because some Soviet delegates decide to build that party, but the workers and peasants will decide, through the democratic and centralist mechanism of the majority vote in the Soviets, which ones are legal, of the Soviets, and which ones are not. Moreover; "As once the bourgeoisie and kulaks were not permitted to enter the soviets, so now *it is necessary to drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the soviets*. In the soviets, there is room only for representatives of the workers, rank-and-file collective farmers, peasants and Red Army men."¹²⁸ It will be those engaged in struggle who will decide for themselves which parties are legal and not a prescribed norm.

We would not be surprised if the authors of theses formally defended their positions by saying that the crux of their program for the revolutionary dictatorship is identical to Trotsky's: "the democratisation of soviets is impossible without absolute freedom for any delegate to organise a political party".

It is here that the USFI sets up its trap. They appear to be saying the same thing as Trotsky, while in reality, they are saying the opposite. What is the trap? It is the bourgeois-democratic individualist content they have given to the phrase "legalisation of soviet parties". They have done this in two ways. One is by substituting individual rights for class rights. For the USFI majority, the legality of any "soviet party" is determined by the individual right of any soviet delegate to build a party or a tendency. For Trotsky, this legality is subject to the decision of the masses in struggle, by a majority vote; in other words, to the right of the class to make a majority decision through its revolutionary soviets.

The other way is related to the dynamic of the revolution rather than to a broadening of bourgeois democracy. Trotsky's position on the USSR and all future workers' revolutions can only be fully understood by bearing in mind that the revolutionary rise will bring about, among other radical changes, also changes to the political parties themselves. When Trotsky speaks of "soviet parties", he is referring to new, hypothetical parties which will emerge in the heat of the struggle, and not all the existing parties as the USFI claims. This is why Trotsky does not mention them by name. He never demands "legality for the Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and Kadets", or "for the right of exiled leaders to return, and take up their party positions". He never demanded freedom of organisation and propaganda for the Kadet party, nor radio time in proportion to their

¹²⁷ Trotsky, Leon: "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International", in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, op. cit., p. 105.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

numbers, nor their right to have delegates in the soviet. Can this be an oversight from a person who was so meticulous in defining his positions, from a polemicist who left no detail untouched? If Trotsky had agreed with the present USFI position, he would have given explicit directions for its implementation. Trotsky said nothing on this precisely because he opposed this position. By “soviet parties” he meant those which are for the revolution against the bureaucracy, and, therefore, he mentions neither the Mensheviks—who would, in time, probably align with the bureaucracy—nor the openly counter-revolutionary Kadets.

For Trotsky, “returning democratic freedom to the soviets” was inseparable from returning their “class content”. For this reason, the fight for soviet democracy does not begin with the legalisation of Mensheviks and Kadets. It begins by expelling from the soviets nothing less than working-class sectors, “the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy” just as “we refused the bourgeoisie and the kulaks” entry to the soviets. Trotsky was thus developing a conditional, hypothetical demand which will come alive in the process of mass struggle, and define which currents or tendencies of old or new parties are revolutionary—as it happened with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. In the USSR, this process was aborted by the retreat of the revolution and the civil war. If this had not been the case, we are convinced there would have been a proliferation of revolutionary and pro-revolutionary parties and tendencies.

This poses another more general problem. We believe that these political revolutions will broadly follow the same formal stages as the Russian Revolution. There may well be two great revolutions or two great successive/almost continuous stages in the political revolution. The first will be a general, popular struggle that will revolve around challenging bureaucratic totalitarianism. Soviets will emerge from this struggle as united fronts of all sectors who wish to destroy the totalitarian bureaucracy. These sectors will very likely include some who have been deluded by the church, and even by imperialist propaganda in favour of democratic freedom. However, all of them will contribute to the general struggle against the bureaucracy. This stage of general popular struggle will be followed by another in which it will be necessary to gain power for the new soviets and fight the danger of capitalist restoration.

Put another way, the fall or the weakening of the Bonapartist bureaucracy of the deformed workers’ states will exacerbate the contradictions between the revolutionary wing of the workers’ and mass movements and the restorationist wing of the bureaucracy, which may even drag some sectors of workers, grouped behind the democratic slogans. There will then be a need for a new October Revolution.

5. The future of the revolutionary party and the struggle against its bureaucratisation

For the USFI comrades who wrote the document in question, the multiparty system is synonymous with democracy, while the one-party system, with bureaucracy. This infantile reasoning is a further expression of the USFI majority’s capitulation to liberal bourgeois thought. In the final analysis, it is a direct result of the institutionalist, idealist manner with which it counterposes its soviets to bourgeois parliament, without in any way taking the class struggle into account. This is a simplistic mechanistic schema: one party equals bureaucratic control, many parties equal absolute democracy. The opposite could be true. At a certain stage of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, there could exist revolutionary control by a single party which would permit a greater development of direct and revolutionary democracy than would be possible in a multiparty regime. The bureaucratic or revolutionary character of a workers’ dictatorship is not determined by the number of parties in the soviet but by whether or not there is a permanent mobilisation of the masses and by the party that leads them. The task of avoiding the bureaucratisation of the revolutionary party is, therefore, of vital importance.

The struggle against the entrenchment of its cadres in official party posts, and later in those of the institutions of the new workers’ state, must be absolutely implacable if we are to carry out

the main party objective of permanent workers' mobilisation. This can be achieved only if the revolutionary party is increasingly proletarian, a true mass party with an industrial working-class majority and leadership.

True, intellectuals, functionaries, and privileged workers have an important part to play in building the party, especially in the early stages. However, if the party is not proletarianised, if the great majority of its members are not active workers, if its leadership is not in the hands of the most capable elements of the class, it will hardly be able to pose successfully as the leader of the revolutionary process which will lead the workers to the conquest of power. It will be even more difficult for the party to lead the dictatorship of the proletariat in a revolutionary way. All those who occupy leadership positions without coming from the working class or without having proven themselves leaders in their struggles, must withdraw from their positions and clear the way for the industrial workers to hold the helm of the party and dominate by their numbers, and orientation. Because they are the most organised, the most concentrated, the richest in the experience of struggle and on whom the greatest weight of the great economic transformations and the ruthless confrontation with the imperialist counter-revolution that will take place in the new state. However, this would not be enough.

After seizing power, the revolutionary party must take upon itself the task of filling the key government posts with scores of its leading cadres — those most trusted and capable — as the Bolsheviks did in the Russian Revolution. There is a grave danger in this; perhaps the gravest after the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat has been established. The size of this challenge for Trotskyist parties in the leadership of future revolutions can be measured against the bureaucratisation of the greatest party in history, that of Lenin and Trotsky. Nevertheless, the danger of the “Stalinisation” of the revolutionary party cannot be forestalled by evading the responsibility of assuming the functions demanded by the new workers' state without betraying the revolution itself, just as Lenin and Trotsky did not evade it, because this would amount to the betrayal of the revolution.

The party will have to lead the process both from within the state apparatus itself, as well as in the production centres through organisations which the working masses have adopted to exercise their power. This will only be successful as long as its cadres keep their roots in the working class. For this reason, they must always combine their government tasks with direct productive labour for which they will draw their pay, making every attempt to avoid remuneration for their state functions. The proportion of labour allocated to institutional or productive work will be determined by concrete circumstances, but this will be historically facilitated by the reduction in the working day which will release time for other activities. It will be this combination of tasks that will keep the party firmly within the working masses, without ever ignoring its real needs, constantly sustained by its experiences, and at the head of its permanent mobilisation.

Thus, the revolutionary party will be preparing its own demise, “concomitant with the disappearance of class antagonisms, politics, bureaucratic forms, and, most important, the lessening of coercive measures in social relations.” Its militants will become progressively integrated into the production process where they will exercise the direct power pertaining to all socialist workers. This is until they are completely immersed in a communist society where they will be distinguished from other men and women only by their freely developed qualities.

6. The role of the Fourth International

The resolution fails to analyse and define the critical role of the Fourth International in the achievement of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, and the development of soviets. It also fails to take into account the relation between opportunist parties and these phenomena. It is not a question of sectarian dismissal of the possibility that at a given time the opportunist parties may turn to the soviets, to divert them away from their dynamic opposition to bourgeois state control. However, the outstanding historical lesson of the last 60 years is that, in general, the opportunist

parties will refuse to develop soviet forms or any other broad forms of the mass movement. Because they have learnt through the experience of the Soviet Russian and German movements of the first post-war period, that these organisational forms facilitate the revolutionary process.

This has enormous implications for the Fourth International. Our world party is alone in its fundamental programmatic objective of developing these organisations to drive the socialist revolution. Clearly, there is no possibility of soviet development and the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus anywhere in the world unless there is a parallel, mutually beneficial development of a mass Trotskyist party: “While the councils can arise only on the condition that there is a revolutionary ferment among the many-millioned masses, the International is always necessary...”¹²⁹

Hence, there must be a link, a very close dialectical relation between the soviets as revolutionary soviets, and the Trotskyist party. Only the development of strong Trotskyist mass parties can guarantee the emergence and the prolific development of soviets essential for the workers’ revolution.

However, there are other two, equally or more important aspects of this fundamental role of the Fourth International. One is the struggle against the fetishisation of soviets by ultraleft currents. The other, decisive factor is the relentless battle against the opportunist parties over the development and leadership of the soviets and all other organisations of the mass movement.

This means that the Fourth International while continuing to fight for the soviets, understands that the historical process, which has strengthened the great mass opportunist parties, hinders the immediate perspectives for the emergence of “typical” great soviet organisations. Even if these perspectives materialise, it is unlikely they will swiftly develop a proletarian revolutionary dynamic. It is more likely, as the USFI correctly indicates, that under the influence of opportunist parties, they will languish and disappear.

As a result, the Fourth International must fight against ultra-leftist currents, and find within the class struggle itself workers’ organisations which are far more embryonic, primary, and traditional than soviets: those which can function as organisms of the revolutionary mobilisation of the proletariat and the toilers in the struggle for power. In this respect, we consider that trade unions, factory committees, pickets and workers’ defence squads have an important part to play, particularly as a united front against the imperialist counter-revolution before the conquest of power. We believe that the Fourth International should search for organisations of this kind, such as the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Workers’ Centre), the People’s Assembly in 1971 or the Peronist unions in 1956–1957, or as the Comisiones Obreras (Workers’ Commissions) could have been in Spain. It would be criminal if the Fourth International, because of the soviet fetishism of the USFI, disregarded the traditions of each country and the disastrous influence of the mass opportunist parties, and attempted to counter-pose unreal soviets to the existing organisations that the reality of the struggle of classes gives us. It is quite possible that in many countries soviet organs will only develop after the seizure of power by the revolutionary party. As we have shown, these soviets will be subject to the ebbs and flows of the revolutionary process after the seizure of power.

All these points lead up to the most important conclusion of this document: the organisational forms adopted by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat are extremely important, but not decisive. The crucial point is that there will be no revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat anywhere in the world unless it is led by a Trotskyist or Trotskyist-like organisation. In other words, over the next decades, revolutionary dictatorships of the proletariat will not be synonymous with soviet organisations but with the revolutionary dictatorship of Trotskyist or Trotskyist-like parties.

129 Trotsky, Leon: “The ILP and the Fourth International”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*, op. cit., p. 147.

CHAPTER VII

Trotsky's supposed self-criticism

1. Mandel Interprets Trotsky

To justify his revisionist positions, Mandel holds that Trotsky's positions in his later years were self-critical.

“For example, Trotsky wrote in 1921 that soviet democracy is not a fetish, and that the party can exercise power not only in the name of the working class, but even in exceptional circumstances *against* the will of the majority of the class. We should be incomparably more cautious before adopting formulations of that kind, because we know from experience that in such a situation it is a bureaucracy rather than a revolutionary minority that will come to exercise power against the majority of workers—a fact that Lenin and Trotsky were themselves to recognise a year later. As far as theory is concerned, the year 1921 was the nadir of the Bolsheviks' history and Lenin and Trotsky made a whole number of errors.

“All you have to do is read Trotsky's later writings to understand that he became aware of these errors. At the end of his life, he said that he did not want to discuss whether the banning of factions in the Party was inevitable, but that what was clear was that it assisted the establishment of the Stalinist régime and the bureaucratic dictatorship in the USSR. What is that if not a *de facto* self-criticism? Moreover, when Trotsky said in the *Transitional Programme* of 1938 that he was in favour of freedom for all soviet parties, he had undoubtedly drawn the conclusion that the lack of such a constitutional right opens the door to the use of the argument ‘You are a potential party’ against any faction, and of ‘You are a potential faction’ against any current or tendency. In that direction, it is not only socialist democracy that is stifled, but also inner-party democracy. In the period 1936–8, Trotsky had become fully aware of the inner logic of such positions and was implicitly undertaking a serious self-criticism. In our own thinking on the question, we should not let ourselves be restricted by an uncritical defence of the decisions taken under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. Moreover, I think that the formula ‘freedom for soviet parties’ contains a far more serious self-criticism on Trotsky's part.”¹³⁰

As we can see, Mandel considers that Trotsky made an almost complete self-criticism at three stages in his life. In 1922, along with Lenin, on the role of the party and the fetishism of soviet democracy; “at the end of his life”, he made a “de facto self-criticism” on the banning of factions within the Bolshevik Party; and in the *Transitional Program* he was “in favour of freedom for all soviet parties”, and this implies “a far more serious self-criticism”.

130 Mandel, Ernest: “Revolutionary Strategy in Europe”, op. cit., p.29.

The last sentence appears neither in the translation published in the Spanish Trotskyist magazine *Comunismo*, nor in the English translation published in the *Internal Information Bulletin* of the Socialist Workers Party. Perhaps the editors of both publications decided to eliminate it out of shame!

Mandel adds a conclusion of his own to the supposed self-criticisms; the 1921-1923 Bolshevik policy of banning “the Menshevik party, the Anarchist organisations” and multiple slates in the soviet elections was a mistake. Discretely and with great finesse, Mandel is telling us that Lenin’s policies on these fundamental problems of the Soviet state, and those of Trotsky after Lenin’s death and up to 1934, were completely mistaken. With the same discretion he is asserting that during those 15 years the Mensheviks and ultra-lefts were right, and Lenin and Trotsky wrong. It is imperative to discover the truth about this complete revision of the history of Trotskyism.

2. Were the Mensheviks right?

It is a shame that Comrade Mandel does not start from 1919 when the left Mensheviks led by Martov presented their program for Soviet Russia. It is the same program that the USFI defends today and which according to Mandel should have been that of the Bolsheviks and which Trotsky was presumably formulating with his self-criticism. In the 1919 All-Russia Congress of Soviets, Martov “attacked the violations against the Soviet Constitution... and followed this by reading a declaration which asked for the restoration of the Constitution... freedom of the press, of association and assembly... immunity of persons... abolition of execution without trial, of administrative arrests and official terror.”

In his violent reply, Lenin accused Martov of holding a bourgeois position and made an unconditional defence of the Red Terror and the Cheka. “... if you remove its envelope of general democratic phrases and parliamentary expressions (...) and get down to the real root of the matter then [Martov’s] entire declaration says ‘Back to bourgeois democracy’ and nothing more.” Lenin added: “We say to ourselves, ‘Yes, the terror and the Cheka are absolutely indispensable’.” And he continued: “You do not abide by the Constitution, but we do when we recognise freedom and equality only for those who help the proletariat defeat the bourgeoisie.”¹³¹

At its core, this debate between Martov and Lenin is methodological: it sprang up in Kautsky’s famous discussion with Lenin and Trotsky. Kautsky was the first to want to impose fixed inviolable norms on the revolutionary process at any price, before the conquest of power: respect for universal suffrage and the Constituent Assembly. In this sense, Martov was a consistent Kautskyist, with the difference that he should impose absolute democratic norms upon the workers’ dictatorship, instead of the bourgeois-democratic norms which his teacher Kautsky wished to impose on the mass movement under capitalism. However, they both use the same normative method. This was also the methodology of the ultra-leftists, including Rosa Luxemburg, who inserted into the *Program of the German Communist Party* a clause against Red Terror. This has been a continuing debate between the revolutionary wing, which constantly defends the objective necessities of the revolution, along with all the methods which answer those needs as long as they remain useful; and the petty-bourgeois normative wing with its legalistic, organisational or political schemas so characteristic of centrists and ultra-leftists. Petty-bourgeois intellectuals attempt to extricate themselves from the realities of the most implacable class struggle by appealing to the middle way, to the imposition of norms with which it can be categorized and regulated. Vain intellectual attempt to categorize what cannot be categorized! Unfortunately, the present members of the United Secretariat, authors of this resolution, will go down in history as representatives of the highest peaks of petty-bourgeois normative thought.

3. The fateful year 1921

Let us look again at this foolhardy statement of Mandel’s and all the ultra-lefts of the world: “As far as theory is concerned, the year 1921 was the nadir of the Bolsheviks’ history and Lenin and Trotsky made a whole number of errors.”¹³² Suffice it to say that in 1921 the Third Congress of the Communist International developed the analysis, program and theory for winning the opportunist masses over to the Communist Party and the proletarian revolution. This same Congress developed the policy of the Workers’ United Front, one of the most important discoveries of revolutionary

131 Lenin, VI: “Seventh All-Russia Congress of Soviets”, in *Collected Works*, op. cit., vol. 30, p. 233 and 241.

132 Mandel, Ernest: “Revolutionary Strategy in Europe”, op. cit.

Marxism. The elaboration of this tactic was possible because there was a unity of understanding about the great difficulties that the existence of mass opportunist parties in capitalist countries and the reflection of the same phenomenon within an isolated USSR posed to the development of the revolution. It is a contradictory unity that in the capitalist countries leads to a persistent call for the united front and in the USSR to the banning and repression of these parties. A formalist might only perceive the contradiction, that is, the opposition between the tactics implemented in the capitalist countries and the USSR, concerning these opportunist parties. This leads to the false conclusion that the contradiction lies in the analysis and theory of these parties, whereas, in fact, contradiction is posed by reality itself.

In the capitalist countries, these mass opportunist parties had become the subjective blocks to the revolution. Only to the extent that the masses make their experience with those opportunist leaderships could the Communist parties grow, set the revolution on its way to victory, and thus end the economic isolation of the USSR. However, the economic offensive that capitalism deploys from 1920 reduced the masses of their own countries to the most brutal levels of misery. The only way in which the opportunist leaderships could maintain their control over the workers and not become isolated from them was by confronting their governments and placing themselves at the head of mobilisations against the capitalist offensive, misery, and crisis. There was then a clear scope to attempt or propose the united front against the capitalists and their governments. This is why the communist tactic of calling on the reformist masses to unite with them in the struggle against a common enemy was not only possible but also the only way of halting the bourgeois offensive and allowing the masses to experience their opportunist leadership. However, this offensive of the capitalists against their own working class, in Russia, was expressed as an imperialist siege and a capitalist offensive which made the misery more acute, it forced the implementation of the NEP and intensified social conflict. The only possible tactic of a united front for communists in the USSR had to be the defence of the dictatorship of the proletariat against the assaults of world and national capitalism. However, the same opportunist and reformist parties which were forced into conflict against bourgeois governments in the capitalist metropolis were, in the USSR, in a united front with the bourgeoisie against the revolutionary dictatorship. In other words, there was no scope for the use of the united front tactic in the USSR because the enemy of opportunist and reformist leaderships was not capitalism or imperialism but the workers' government and its party, i.e., the party of Lenin and Trotsky whom they blamed for the economic and social deprivation suffered by the masses they led.

Whereas in the capitalist countries it was possible to at least call them to fight together, in Russia the reformists were in armed confrontation against the Bolsheviks in Kronstadt: "...the Kronstadt uprising was nothing but an armed reaction of the petty bourgeoisie against the hardships of social revolution and the severity of the proletarian dictatorship."¹³³ The Social Revolutionaries and the Anarchists participated in this uprising (the Mensheviks were too weak to give material support but supported it in their press). Under these conditions, the only possible path was the banning and repression of these opportunists.

The year 1921 was extraordinary as far as Bolshevik theoretical elaboration precisely because, taking into account the different behaviours of these opportunist parties, the unity of analysis that makes them part of the same phenomenon was rescued: the capitalist and imperialist offensive. Moreover, contrary to what any formalist would do — extract a universal tactic, a single policy for all those parties whatever the circumstances — our teachers knew how to understand that the tactic within capitalist countries was different from the tactic which had to be applied in the USSR towards those parties and the capitalist reaction.

133 Trotsky, Leon: "Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)*, op. cit., p. 141.

4. Trotsky's position in the early stages of the struggle against Stalinism

In 1924, Trotsky wrote *The Lessons of October* in which he exhaustively analysed the role of the party in socialist revolution, the taking of power and revolutionary dictatorship: “Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the past decade. It is true that the English trade unions may become a mighty lever of the proletarian revolution; they may for instance, even take the place of workers’ soviets under certain conditions and for a certain period of time. They can fill such a role, however, not apart from a Communist Party, and certainly not *against* the party, but only on the condition that Communist influence becomes the decisive influence in the trade unions. We have paid far too dearly for this conclusion — with regard to the role and importance of a party in a proletarian revolution — to renounce it so lightly or even to minimise its significance.”¹³⁴

These conclusions of Trotsky’s gave rise to such a debate that two months later, in November of that same year, he was forced to publish an extensive essay entitled *Our differences*, which reaffirmed these positions. It cannot be objected to because he was not referring only to the seizure of power: “I am told that the party is needed not only to seize power but to maintain it, to build socialism, to manoeuvre in international affairs. Am I really unaware of that?”¹³⁵

“I doubly emphasised in my preface [to *The Lessons of October*] the fact that the bourgeoisie in seizing power enjoys a whole series of advantages as a class, while the proletariat can only make up for the lack of these advantages by having a revolutionary party.”¹³⁶

Similarly, “...the most favourable revolutionary conditions may not produce victory for the proletariat if it is not led by a genuinely revolutionary party capable of securing victory.”¹³⁷ “... the proletariat cannot take advantage of even the most favourable revolutionary situation *if in the preceding, preparatory period the vanguard of the proletariat has not taken shape in a genuinely revolutionary, i.e., Bolshevik, party*. This is the central lesson of October. All others are subordinate to it.”¹³⁸ Further on, after stressing, again and again, the fundamental role of the Communist Party, he says “This is the central idea of Leninism.”¹³⁹

5. Trotsky continues defending his positions

With the Left Opposition in existence and the reactionary Stalinist offensive well under way, Trotsky continued defending the same position. In the 1928 theses of *The Permanent Revolution* he insisted, already as a matter of principle and as a fundamental thesis: “4. No matter what the first episodic stages of the revolution may be in the individual countries, the realisation of the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletarian vanguard, organised in the Communist Party. This, in turn, means that the victory of the democratic revolution is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat which bases itself upon the alliance with the peasantry and solves first of all the tasks of the democratic revolution.”¹⁴⁰

Soviets are not even mentioned, far less the plurality of parties! Thesis is clear cut: the dictatorship of the proletariat is the dictatorship of the Communist Party, and “only” to the extent that this continues to be the case, can the revolutionary worker-peasant alliance be guaranteed. There

134 Trotsky, Leon: *The Lessons of October*, Chapter 8, “Again, on the Soviets and the Party”, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch8.htm.

135 Trotsky, Leon: “Our Differences”, in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)*, op. cit., p. 272.

136 Ibid, p. 269.

137 Ibid, p. 269.

138 Ibid, p. 273.

139 Ibid, p. 274.

140 Trotsky, Leon: *The Permanent Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1969, p. 277.

can be no exceptions because this must be so whatever the characteristics of particular revolutions in particular countries.

In the same year, after the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, he stated: "...in a country with an overwhelming peasant majority and surrounded by capitalism, the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot allow freedom of parties. In itself, this postulate is absolutely correct."¹⁴¹

He then affirms that this demands a "correct (inner party) regime" and policy. And even though he clearly rejects the Stalinist abuse of the one-party system, he continues to rule out freedom for all parties. Trotsky's writings on this and other theses were circulated by hand in manuscript form due to Stalinist censorship. This was done at the risk of "punish[ment] with deportation to the forgotten corners of Siberia and even, most recently, with strict solitary confinement in the prison of Tobolsk",¹⁴² as he tells us in the Foreword to the 1929 French edition of *The Third International after Lenin*.

In September 1929, five months after his exile, in his debate with the famous German ultra-leftist Urbahns, he still stood by the same arguments. Urbahns held that "it (was) necessary for the Russian working class to reconquer 'all liberties'" in its struggle against the Stalinist regime. Trotsky criticised Urbahns for naming only one of these liberties, that of "organisation", adding "But in that case, it is already Urbahns himself who 'does not go far enough'. To put forward the freedom to organise as an isolated demand is a caricature of politics. Freedom to organise is inconceivable without freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and all the other 'freedoms' to which the decision of the February conference (Reichsausschusses) of the Leninbund refers vaguely and without commentary. And these freedoms are unthinkable outside the regime of democracy, that is, outside of capitalism. One must learn to think one's thoughts out to the end."¹⁴³

Approximately a year later, the problem was debated again. The Indochinese Trotskyist comrades had presented a program which called for the struggle to achieve "...the 'conquest of democratic freedoms by means of the dictatorship of the proletariat'". This is exactly what the USFI majority says today. Trotsky replied vehemently: "This is, to say the least, an imprecise formulation. The concept of democratic freedoms is understood by vulgar democrats to mean freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of assembly, free elections, etc. The dictatorship of the proletariat, instead of these abstract freedoms, places in the hands of the proletariat the material means and instruments for its own emancipation (in particular the printing presses, meeting halls, etc.)."¹⁴⁴ Take note of the dates of these publications: 1929 and 1930.

Trotsky derided the democratic formulation of the Souvarine program for the USSR as that of a charlatan, laughing about it and naming it as democratic Communism. If he were alive today, he would talk of democratic Trotskyism.

6. Trotsky's supposed self-criticism

What remains of Comrade Mandel's commentary? Is it true that Trotsky's program for political revolution in the USSR is self-critical in its demand for "freedom for soviet parties"?

We claim the reverse is true. We believe that this slogan runs counter to everything said by Mandel and the USFI's resolution. There is no such self-criticism here.

Above all, Mandel does not seem to realise that Trotsky raised this demand only when he considered there was a need for a political revolution in the USSR. Never before. This is no coincidence; the demand was part of a new political line: the need for violent political revolution

141 Trotsky, Leon: *The Third International After Lenin*, op. cit., p. 153.

142 Ibid, p. XXXI.

143 Trotsky, Leon: "Defense of the Soviet Republic and the Opposition", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1929)*, op. cit., p. 290 and 292.

144 Trotsky, Leon: "On the Declaration by the Indochinese Oppositionists", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*, op. cit., p. 31.

against the ruling bureaucracy. The new policy required new demands, one of them being “freedom for soviet parties”.

We do not know why Mandel isolates this from the new analysis and the new policy for revolution in the USSR as a degenerated workers’ state and tries to make it valid for all time, for instance, the early period of the Russian Revolution. If this had been Trotsky’s intention, we must again ask why he never demanded legality for the Mensheviks, the return of all exiles, freedom of propaganda and organisation for the Kadet Party, and the allocation of radio time to every party in proportion to their numbers. Why did he never do any of these? Because he forgot? Memory is political, and this principle is truer than ever for a genius of Trotsky’s stature.

Nevertheless, Mandel insists on isolating this demand from its social and political context and transfers it into the past. Not content with isolating it and transferring it to the past, he asserts that Trotsky’s raising of the demand constitutes a self-criticism for not defending it between 1921 and 1923. We must return to the question: If this was a self-criticism for not legalising the Mensheviks, what held him back from demanding freedom for the parties of the past, such as the Kadets or Mensheviks, in 1936 or 1938, when he wrote into the *Transitional Program* the demand for “freedom for soviet parties”? Moreover, why when he raised this demand in the *Transitional Program*, he poses as a condition the expulsion from the soviets of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy? We can give four simple reasons. First, because until he conceived the need for a political revolution, he was always in favour of the one-party system for the USSR. Second, because he was never, not even in 1938, in favour of freedom of the Mensheviks and Kadets; otherwise, he would have said so. Third, because the slogan “freedom for soviet parties” means, as we have already pointed out, freedom for revolutionary parties, for the new parties and tendencies that emerge in the revolutionary struggle against the bureaucracy and aristocracy; it does not mean freedom for counter-revolutionaries. Fourth, this demand was raised in a completely different context, when the USSR had become a degenerated workers’ state and the Communist Party had become the party of the bureaucracy.

Between 1936 and 1938, Trotsky more than once explicitly defended his old position of banning parties in the USSR. In a polemic against the ultra-lefts who criticised him for this ban, he explained: “As far as the *prohibition* of the other Soviet parties is concerned, it did not flow from any ‘theory’ of Bolshevism but was a measure of defence of the dictatorship in a backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies. For the Bolsheviks, it was clear from the beginning that this measure, later completed by the prohibition of factions inside the governing party itself, signalled a tremendous danger. However, the root of the danger lay not in the doctrine or in the tactics but in the material weakness of the dictatorship, in the difficulties of its internal and international situation. If the revolution had triumphed, even if only in Germany, the need to prohibit the other Soviet parties would immediately have fallen away. It is absolutely indisputable that the domination of a single party served as the juridical point of departure for the Stalinist totalitarian system. But the reason for this development lies neither in Bolshevism nor in the prohibition of other parties as a temporary war measure, but in the number of defeats of the proletariat in Europe and Asia.”¹⁴⁵

This could not be clearer. The banning of other parties was a “measure of defence” taken because Russia was a “backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies”. The “root of the danger lay not in the tactic”, the totalitarian Stalinist system did not originate “in the prohibition of other parties”.

7. Trotsky’s theoretical position

Trotsky made his most exhaustive theoretical analysis of this theme precisely in 1937, the year of his self-criticism according to Mandel.

Reaffirming the fundamental role of revolutionary parties in the revolutionary process, the seizure of power, and the dictatorship of the proletariat, he says: “The proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself, the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural

¹⁴⁵ Trotsky, Leon: “Stalinism and Bolshevism”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)*, op. cit., p. 426.

level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organised in a party, is crystallised the aspiration of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the class's confidence in the vanguard, without the class's support of the vanguard, there can be no talk of the conquest of power. In this sense, the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard. The soviets are only the organised form of the tie between the vanguard and the class. A revolutionary content can be given to this form only by the party. This is proved by the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the negative experience of other countries (Germany, Austria, finally Spain). No one has either shown in practice or tried to explain articulately on paper how the proletariat can seize power without the political leadership of a party that knows what it wants. The political subordination of the soviets by this party to its leaders, has, in itself, abolished the Soviet system no more than the domination of the Conservative majority has abolished the British parliamentary system."¹⁴⁶

In other words, the conquest of power by the working class can only be considered possible under the leadership of a revolutionary party. The reformist or revolutionary character of the proletarian dictatorship will depend on the character of the party that heads the process, not on the soviets. This is the lesson, both of the Russian victory as well as of the Austrian, German and Spanish processes.

Two months later, he gave the following interpretation of the revolutionary dictatorship: "The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected revolutionary vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we cannot jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history."

"The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution. This is the teaching of all modern history. Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the "dictatorship" of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."¹⁴⁷

The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party — not the multiparty soviet system, or the soviets — is an objective necessity imposed by social reality: the existence of different sectors of workers and toilers, and the low political and cultural level of the majority of these sectors. This is why the dictatorship of "the entire working population" is impossible.

146 Ibid, p. 426.

147 Trotsky, Leon: "Dictatorship and Revolution", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)*, op. cit., p. 513 and 514.

CHAPTER VIII

What is the dictatorship of the proletariat?

1. A normative and antediluvian definition

According to the authors of the document, there can be absolutely no doubt about the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat: "...the working class by itself can exercise state power directly only within the framework of state institutions of a type different from those of the bourgeois state, state institutions arising out of sovereign and democratically elected and centralised workers councils (soviets), with the fundamental characteristics outlined by Lenin in *The State and Revolution* — the election of all functionaries, judges, commanders of the workers or workers and peasants militias, and all delegates representing the toilers in state institutions; rotation of elected officials; restriction of their income to that of skilled workers; the right to recall them at all times; simultaneous exercise of legislative and executive power by soviet-type institutions; drastic reduction of the number of permanent functionaries and greater and greater transfer of administrative functions to bodies run by the mass of the concerned toilers themselves."¹⁴⁸

And in conclusion; "thus, the dictatorship of the proletariat is nothing other than a workers' democracy."¹⁴⁹

This categorical definition is taken from the writings of Lenin, immediately before and after the triumph of the Russian Revolution in October 1917 and the first resolutions of the Third International. Lenin and Trotsky's first expectations were that the process of international socialist revolution would be balanced, harmonious and growing; that it would go through stages similar to those of the Russian Revolution, and that socialist revolution would triumph within 10 years throughout all Europe. The emergence and development of the new Russian form of state institution — democratically elected soviets — would place the soviets as the axis of the European process. The soviets would enable both the destruction and replacement of the bureaucratic state apparatus (superstructure) of the bourgeois and imperialist dictatorship and the realisation of the socialist revolution within the economic structure. However, events did not take this course. Lenin and Trotsky (especially the latter) changed their definition. Nevertheless, the authors of these theses prefer to leap from *The State and Revolution* (written during August and September 1917) to the cybernetic telephones of the future, never stopping to study the reality of the last 60 years, nor considering the implications that the reality has for the modification of theory and definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

148 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 6.

149 Ibid, p. 5.

2. Are the USSR and China proletarian dictatorships?

The document speaks at various points of bureaucratised workers' states. If we adhere strictly to the clear and categorical definition that we have just quoted, we reach the outlandish conclusion that none of these countries is dictatorships of the proletariat. It doesn't take much to see that the existing forms of government in the USSR, China, Cuba, etc. do not comply with a single requirement that the USFI majority made for the dictatorship of the proletariat. This unexpected conclusion takes on further implications when we recall that, according to the USFI, neither Maoist China nor Vietnam broadened proletarian democracy after the revolution.

This "gap" (the ignoring of the only existing dictatorship of the proletariat) is enough to put all theses outside of reality and Marxism. Any worker or young student who reads them is sure to ask this basic question: does the dictatorship of the proletariat exist in those countries or not? According to this definition, it does not. If the reader has the slightest knowledge of Trotsky's traditional analysis, he/she will face an unsolvable dilemma presented by the document. It claims that today no dictatorship of the proletariat exists, whilst the traditional analysis of Trotsky and Trotskyism (for instance, numerous works of some of the authors of theses), holds that there are numerous dictatorships of the proletariat, although they are bureaucratised, degenerated and deformed.

Which is correct?

Let's suppose that the USFI majority has written a document on contemporary trade unions using the same method. They could have started with a thesis entitled "What are the unions?" They would say: "They are those organisations of workers who defend their wages and standard of living, in which all the delegates and leaders are elected by the rank-and-file, are obliged to rotate posts, are paid the same as a skilled worker, and are subject to immediate recall by the workers who voted them in." They would conclude: "Hence, the unions are nothing other than union democracy." This definition has several advantages. For example, it outlines very clearly what the Trotskyists would like the unions to be, and it would surely please unionised workers. Nevertheless, its disadvantage is of far greater importance: it doesn't apply to 99 per cent of existing trade unions and, therefore, cannot provide anybody with a political perspective for fighting within them. All in all, it is good for nothing.

As Marxists and revolutionary politicians, we have no choice but to say that unions are the organisations for the economic defence of the workers, even though today the vast majority are currently controlled by corrupt and counter-revolutionary bureaucracies against which we fight for union democracy. There are similarities here with the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Although we fight with all our will to revolutionise the existing bureaucratic dictatorships, we cannot substitute our wishes for reality. This means that we must start by defining the existing dictatorships rather than those we would like to see in existence; we can afford even less to repeat mechanically what was said by Lenin and Trotsky before 1917.

3. The only correct definition: state superstructure of a transitional economy or of the workers' states

The nature of the first proletarian dictatorship, the Russian workers' state, was substantially altered by the defeat of the European revolution, the isolation of the Russian Revolution, and the necessity of reconstructing the economy destroyed by civil and imperialist war. The views of Lenin and Trotsky that either the Soviets would advance to conquer the European countries, or the imperialist counter-revolution would defeat them and destroy the first workers' state, were not borne out. The European revolution did not succeed but the isolated workers' states survived and began to establish a bourgeois state without a bourgeoisie. The technocratic bureaucracy in the government established a state apparatus that was very similar to that of the exploiters, although it still rested upon the new economic basis established by the Russian Revolution.

The supposed revolutionary harmony between the structure and the superstructure; between the political revolution of the democratic and revolutionary soviets and the social revolution in the relations of production fell to bits and became an acute and permanent contradiction within the first workers' state. The political revolution of the soviets was discontinued; the revolution in Germany and the rest of Europe did not continue up until the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus and the disappearance of the state. Nor was the social revolution in the sphere of productive relations able to open the way to the socialist reorganisation of the economy. The democratic and revolutionary soviets which controlled the state were replaced by a totalitarian, omnipotent, reformist, nationalist, and privileged bureaucracy. It directed an economy that was in transition not to communism but to socialism as we shall see in detail below. It is here that the analogy between the unions and the social-imperialist workers' parties is pertinent: both are workers' organisations under the leadership of a parasitical and counter-revolutionary bureaucracy.

Trotsky had the opportunity to make explicit modifications to the definitions he and Lenin had held until shortly after the victory of October 1917. Faced with the need to find a theoretical explanation of what had happened, he identified two fundamental and relatively autonomous categories which had failed to combine harmoniously: the political superstructure and the economic structure to which Trotsky attributed decisive importance.

This theoretical explanation was a return to the source of Marxist thought and theory, historical materialism. It defines the political superstructure primarily in terms of the economic structure of society, that is, the social class base of the state ("Politics are the concentration of economics"), even though the superstructure exists in a dialectical relationship to the structure and can possess great autonomy. Thus, Trotsky reversed, or rather, completed the reversal he and Lenin had begun to make during the latter's lifetime, as regards the relationship between superstructure and structure, to define the proletarian dictatorship. Based on concrete experience, he abandoned the primitive superstructural definition of the state based upon revolutionary and democratic soviets. He took up the social, as opposed to the political, realm as the fundamental parameter with which to define the dictatorship as the state superstructure of transitional, non-capitalist relations of production. In other words, the superstructure of the workers' states.

Trotsky said: "The terminological difficulty here arises from the fact that the term dictatorship is used sometimes in a restricted, political sense and, at other times, in a more profound, sociological sense. We speak of the "dictatorship of Mussolini" and, at the same time, declare that fascism is only the instrument of finance capital. Which is correct? Both are correct but on different planes. It is incontestable that the entire executive power is concentrated in Mussolini's hands. But it is no less true that the entire actual content of the state activity is dictated by the interests of finance capital. The *social* domination of a class (its dictatorship) may find extremely diverse *political* forms. This is attested by the entire history of the bourgeoisie, from the Middle Ages to the present day.

"The experience of the Soviet Union is already adequate for the extension of this very same sociological law — *with all the necessary changes* — to the dictatorship of the proletariat as well. In the interim between the conquest of power and the dissolution of the workers' state within the socialist society, the forms and methods of proletarian rule may change sharply, depending upon the course of the class struggle, internally and, externally."¹⁵⁰

4. Two proletarian dictatorships: reformist-bureaucratic and revolutionary

Dialectics are but a relative negation of the laws of formal logic. It uses those laws, gives them movement, overcomes them and reveals their contradictions and limitations. This is what Trotsky did with one of the laws of formal logic, that of definition by common quality and specific difference. Theoretical operation involved in his modification of Lenin's classic thesis was a brilliant dialectical application of this Aristotelian law. Trotsky sought the similarities between Lenin's dictatorship

150 Trotsky, Leon: "The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1934-35)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1974, p. 172.

and that of Stalin, i.e., their common qualities. He found they had only one point in common: both were based upon the economic expropriation of the capitalists, upon a transitional economy. In everything else, they were radically different. In showing this, Trotsky arrived at the only Marxist definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat; state power in those countries where capitalism has been expropriated, that is, the workers' states.

However, Trotsky also showed that this common ground, about the relations of production, did not eliminate the specific differences between the two dictatorships. He continued by demonstrating how the great differences in their operation (ideological, programmatic, in national and international politics) were the superstructural expression of the differences between the distinct sectors of the proletariat which each represented.

Lenin's dictatorship was the expression of the most exploited sectors of the workers, of their international revolutionary vanguard, and the permanent mobilisation of the masses. The dictatorship of Stalin was that of the privileged sectors, of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy, of the passivity of the masses. From this emerges the definition of both states or countries: workers' or revolutionary workers' states under Lenin; degenerated workers' states under Stalin. Workers' state by virtue of its economic structure; degenerated because of its state superstructure.

Trotsky's definition of the USSR, with its qualitative differentiation between the states of Lenin and Stalin, can be transferred symmetrically to the dictatorship of the proletariat as the class content of the workers' state. Hence, under Lenin, there was a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat as in Marx's definition. Under Stalin, there was another type that was degenerate, reformist or, as we prefer to call it, bureaucratic.

If Trotsky had let this new definition rest there, it would not have been dialectical. He devoted his final years to reveal the effects of the Stalinist counter-revolutionary political superstructure upon the economic structure, as well as its increasingly acute contradictions, its probable dynamic and the dangers which it contained. Trotsky was the only one to explain that the Stalinist government systematically weakened the proletarian dictatorship, undermined its economy and the support of the workers' movement.

Trotsky's definitions and the method by which he arrived at them are the *raison d'être* of Trotskyism. Every attempt, such as that of the USFI majority, to define the dictatorship of the proletariat based on the superstructure rather than the structure, has — despite the support of quotes from Lenin and Trotsky in the early years of the revolution — extremely dangerous consequences for revolutionary politics. It will lead to capitulation to ultraleftism or opportunism, to imperialist public opinion, and the Social Democratic Parties.

To deny the importance of specific superstructural differences, however; leads to capitulate to Stalinism. Thus, while the generic structural definition is essential for the unconditional defence of the bureaucratized workers' states, against all imperialist attacks or internal bourgeois counter-revolutionary movements, the specific apprehension of the bourgeois and bureaucratic nature of the superstructure is essential to develop the political revolution.

5. The new bureaucratized workers' states

Almost all of the victorious revolutions of this post-war period (Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe, China, Korea, Vietnam) established workers' states similar to that of the Stalinised USSR, not the Leninist one: reactionary one-party monopoly of power; the decisive influence of the bureaucracy and the technocracy; totalitarianism; complete lack of freedom; relentless repression against oppositionists and the most exploited sectors of the proletariat and the peasantry. Only our world movement has been able to give a satisfactory answer to this novel theoretical problem.

In *The Transitional Program*, Trotsky said about the slogan of "workers' and farmers' government":

“From April to September 1917, the Bolsheviks demanded that the SRs and Mensheviks break with the liberal bourgeoisie and take power into their own hands. Under this provision the Bolshevik Party promised the Mensheviks and the SRs, as the petty-bourgeois representatives of the workers and peasants, its revolutionary aid against the bourgeoisie; categorically refusing, however, either to enter into the government of the Mensheviks and SRs or to carry political responsibility for it. If the Mensheviks and the SRs had actually broken with the Kadets (liberals) and with foreign imperialism, then the ‘workers’ and peasants’ government’ created by them could only have hastened and facilitated the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But it was exactly because of this that the leadership of petty-bourgeois democracy resisted with all possible strength the establishment of its own government. The experience of Russia demonstrated, and the experience of Spain and France once again confirms, that even under very favourable conditions the parties of petty-bourgeois democracy (SRs, Social Democrats, Stalinists, Anarchists) are incapable of creating a government of workers and peasants, that is, a government independent of the bourgeoisie. [...]

“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, but in no case in that ‘democratic’ sense which later the epigones gave it, transforming it from a bridge to socialist revolution into the chief barrier upon its path.

“Of all parties and organisations 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. [...]

“Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers’ organisations possible? Past experience shows, as has already been stated, that this is to say the least highly improbable. However, one cannot categorically deny in advance 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.”¹⁵¹

This type of regime, which according to Trotsky was “highly improbable”, is the only one we have seen in the last 35 years. All victorious workers’ revolutions have come about through a “workers’ and farmers’ government”. To put it another way, petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic Stalinist parties like those of Mao, Tito, Enver Hoxha and Ho Chi-Minh, or democratic nationalist parties — such as that of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara — broke politically with the bourgeoisie and imperialism, took power, and were able to expropriate the exploiters.

Starting in 1949, Pablo, Hansen and Moreno deepened and expanded Trotsky’s “highly improbable” hypothesis of the workers’ and peasants’ government which is transformed into a dictatorship of the proletariat and they combined it with the definition of the Stalinist USSR as a “degenerated workers’ state”. Thus, they begin to give the new category of “degenerated workers’ state”. It is imperishable merit of our International that it has accepted this new category without major shocks.

Once this happened, the country or state became a workers’ state; and its state superstructure, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Fourth International defined the new states or countries as deformed workers’ states since their bureaucratic nature was not the result of the bureaucracy’s political expropriation of the proletariat, as occurred in the degeneration of the October Revolution. It was rather because the bureaucracy and the privileged workers had been dominant from the very revolutionary victory. The analogy was nevertheless clear: a workers’ and peasants’ government which gave origin, without interruption, to a bureaucratized workers’ state like that of the USSR.

151 Trotsky, Leon: “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth international”, in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, op. cit., p. 93-94, 94 and 95.

6. The workers' and farmers' governments

Let us return once again to the workers' and farmers' government. This designation embraces several phenomena and concepts. It is a tactic and slogan aimed to educate the reformist workers because it calls on their parties to break with the bourgeoisie and take power (and when they do not, we can unmask them in the eyes of the masses that follow them). It also defines a type of government: that of the petty-bourgeois parties that break with the bourgeoisie and take power. We call it a workers' and farmers' government and not a proletarian dictatorship because the bourgeoisie continues to dominate society both economically and socially — that is, the productive and property relations continue to be bourgeois. It characterises a stage of the class struggle: a brief and highly contradictory stage that begins when the reformist parties break from the bourgeoisie and take power and ends when the government expropriates the bourgeoisie and becomes a proletarian dictatorship. In this period, we have an anti-capitalist, worker-farmer government on a capitalist economic base. It is exactly the opposite of a deformed workers' state, which has a government apparatus similar to that of the bourgeoisie, but is based on a workers' transitional economy and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.

This short period between the political break with the bourgeoisie by the reformist parties, and its economic expropriation, also took place in the Russian Revolution.

“The reference to the first period of the October Revolution is not any more fortunate. 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. During this first period, soldiers' soviets ruled side by side with workers' soviets and often elbowed them aside. Only toward the autumn of 1918 did the petty-bourgeois soldier — agrarian elemental wave recede a little to its shores, and the workers went forward with the nationalisation of the means of production. Only from this time can one speak of the inception of a real dictatorship of the proletariat.”¹⁵²

What name should be given to this period of the Russian Revolution? Should we call it a formal or governmental proletarian dictatorship to distinguish it from the “real dictatorship” which, according to Trotsky, began after the expropriation of the bourgeoisie? This is a serious theoretical problem. If the bourgeois counter-revolution had triumphed in this period, it would have had to act essentially at the superstructural, political level, not at the level of production and property relations since the factories were still owned by the bourgeoisie.

Seen from this point of view, the following fact leaps to the eye: all workers' states, from Lenin's to Mao's, have passed through a similar stage. All victorious workers' or socialist revolutions have passed through two different stages. The first stage is political, of taking power and breaking with the bourgeoisie and imperialism but the economic and social basis of the bourgeois regime was maintained. In the second, more distant, stage, the bourgeoisie was expropriated and its regime destroyed. Can we define this stage, in general, as a workers' and farmers' government? We think we can; otherwise, we have to find another name since the stage exists and embraces a definite historical phenomenon.

It is equally true that in this stage common to both the governments of Lenin and Mao, we will find the same specific differences we found when we defined the proletarian dictatorship: Lenin's was revolutionary and internationalist; Mao's, reformist and nationalist. How can we achieve a definition as precise as possible? Doing the same as we did with the definition of dictatorship of the proletariat but replacing “dictatorship” with “government”: the former is a revolutionary workers', or workers' and farmers', government; the latter is an opportunist and bureaucratic government.

Against this, it can be claimed that the differences between the Leninist and the Maoist periods corresponded not only to the nature of the party that headed the workers' and peasants' government — Lenin's party was Marxist revolutionary, while Mao's was nationalist and reformist — but also to

152 Trotsky, Leon: “The Class Nature of the Soviet State”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1933-34)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1975, p. 106.

the institutional or organisational form adopted by each; in the former, revolutionary democratic soviets; in the latter, bureaucratic control of the mass movement.

Although this is indeed historically true, it is by no means the only theoretical possibility. The category “workers’ and farmers’ government” was coined as a way to approach the government of the petty-bourgeois parties — the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks — based on the soviets. If the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks had taken power and broken with the bourgeoisie as the Bolsheviks demanded them to, they would have done this to give “all power to the soviets”. Lenin and Trotsky would have called this soviet government a “workers’ and farmers’ government”.

The point is that to define all these categories, we have to refer to the two extreme poles of social reality: the economic structure on the one hand; governments and political parties — the most superstructural of all institutions — on the other.

7. The defence of the existing proletarian dictatorships

It is strange to see how some of the principal leaders of our International have retreated from the position of the inevitability of a world war to one which abandons the defence of the workers’ states. The USFI majority’s theses pose the defence of a workers’ state, of a dictatorship, against an internal counter-revolution without considering the possibility of imperialist war. This is particularly odd since it was Comrades Mandel and Pierre Frank, who, from the year 1951, developed thesis that divided the world Trotskyist movement. This thesis was the inevitability (in six months for Comrade Mandel, in several years for Frank and Pablo) of an imperialistic war against the USSR and the other workers’ states. At that time, they were echoing the view that it was inevitable the cold war would become hot. We have always fought against the view that wars or guerrilla warfare are inevitable in the coming months or years.

Today, however, we are presented with a conception that is completely opposite to this. We are told about the self-defence of the states of the future but there is not a single word about the possibility of war by the imperialist countries against the present degenerated workers’ states, in the coming decades. There is no word at all in the document on the number one obligation of the world proletariat: to show the most consistent class patriotism towards these proletarian dictatorships, educating the world proletariat about what it should defend. Never does the document identify the existing bureaucratised workers’ states as the greatest achievement of the proletariat in this century, nor does it raise the banner for their intransigent defence. Quite the opposite, it encourages all the bourgeois-democratic prejudices of western workers against these proletarian dictatorships. The fact that the politics of the bureaucracies are repugnant to western workers is no justification whatsoever, for ignoring the need for class patriotism. Neither, for that matter, is the argument that those bourgeois-democratic prejudices of the European and American workers have positive aspects which are objectively opposed to bureaucratic totalitarianism. These prejudices allow the masses to be manipulated by the union bureaucracies, and the Social Democratic parties in favour of imperialism, and against the existing dictatorships of the proletariat.

It is a situation very similar to that in which the workers who refuse to join the union, supporting the bourgeois campaign that the unions are at the service of the bureaucrats and not the workers. It is through this argument, based on fact — the enormous privileges of the union bureaucracy — that the workers who oppose the union become the agents of capitalism within the workers’ movement. The traditional Marxist position in the face of those workers has long been: we are the most fervent defenders of mass unionisation; we strive for all workers to join the unions and we denounce the bourgeois campaign to undermine the unions, which is helped by the corruption of their leaders. Based on this passionate defence, we are the most implacable critics of the bureaucracy.

We practice the most consistent class patriotism regarding the unions and all other organisations or conquests of the working class. If the tenet of every bourgeois is, “right or wrong, I am unconditionally with my bourgeois country”, that of every class-conscious worker — not to mention a revolutionary Marxist — is, “right or wrong, I am with my union, my workers’ state”. This

proletarian class patriotism — for the defence to the bitter end of all existing international workers' organisations — is materialised in the intransigent defence of the existing proletarian dictatorships against the imperialist campaign of discredit and disparagement and, when the moment comes, against its military offensive.

If there is one noticeable aspect in the entire USFI resolution, it is precisely the absence of class patriotism, the defence of the existing proletarian dictatorships against the pernicious campaign of Social Democracy and world imperialism. Nowhere does it show that these proletarian dictatorships are a million times superior to the bourgeois democracy existing in the imperialist countries. The entire resolution is intended to show that this is not the case, that there is less democracy in the deformed workers' states than in the capitalist countries. If in Mao's China there is the same degree of "democratic freedoms" as in Chiang Kai-shek's, then there is much less workers' democracy there than in Venezuela or the USA. Although it doesn't say so explicitly, the USFI document prepares the Western workers for the defence of imperialist democracy against the totalitarianism of the bureaucratised workers' states.

This shouldn't be so. One of the most important tasks of Trotskyism is precisely that of educating the world working class to recognise that the existing proletarian dictatorships are much more democratic for the workers than any imperialist democracy could be. Another one is preparing it for the inevitable counter-revolutionary wars of the capitalist and imperialist countries against the workers' states, and for the defence of the latter.

8. What should be our position over possible wars between workers' states?

These theses are so stratospheric, so distanced from the inevitable military struggles of the future, that they don't even deal with one of the most outstanding events of the last decades, regarding the existing proletarian dictatorships: the invasion of one proletarian dictatorship by another, those of Hungary and Czechoslovakia by the USSR. This is a new problem which, to judge by the silence of the resolution, will never happen again.

We believe that, sadly, we have embarked upon a period in which wars between proletarian dictatorships — workers' states — may break out and be repeated over the next decades. This is a clear perspective.

These possible wars between workers' states, or the occupation of one by another, add a new dimension to the emergence of the next revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Up to now, we have witnessed two invasions of workers' states by the USSR. Both were caused by the fear of the Russian bureaucratic caste that these states might become revolutionary because of the beginning of a political revolution and the appearance of councils or soviets in embryonic form. For us, it is permissible to think that these workers' bureaucracies will fall into a state of chronic desperation as soon as revolutionary proletarian dictatorships emerge, heralding their destruction as a privileged caste.

But also, we cannot rule out that, because nationalist economic interests, wars similar to the one that began now between Cambodia and Vietnam break out. Without embarking upon a discussion as to whether or not these are proletarian dictatorships, we must recognise the new possibility of wars between workers' states in which neither side is based on a revolutionary dictatorship. Moreover, the campaign undertaken by China a few years ago against "Russian Social-imperialism" was an ideological preparation for a possible war between these two bureaucratised workers' superstates.

This serious theoretical problem of the possibility of wars between bureaucratic workers' states, or between a bureaucratic workers' state and a revolutionary workers' state, is of capital importance and forces us to begin a discussion to find a Marxist course of action in the face of these possibilities. Without wishing to exhaust the subject, we consider it is much more important than the influence of cybernetic telephones in the future proletarian dictatorship.

One variation of this possibility is the inevitable armed uprising of the national minorities oppressed by these bureaucratic dictatorships, an uprising which we will support unconditionally.

If war breaks out between one of the two giant workers' states and a small one, we believe that the small proletarian nation will be struggling for its right to self-determination and that the war will be provoked by the hegemonic nationalist ambitions of the greater nation. In this case, we must fight against the Pan-Russian or Pan-Chinese chauvinism and for the right of national self-determination of the small workers' state.

On the other hand, let us suppose that a war breaks out between two bureaucratized states of relatively comparable strength. Let's say, for example, Vietnam and Cambodia, assuming that they are workers' states. Our general political position will be for fraternity between all workers' states, for a peaceful and democratic resolution of the dispute. This position must be accompanied by a permanent campaign for the democratic federation of all existing workers' republics. This is a decisive matter which, henceforth, must be the most important demand of our International. It is this campaign, and not the cybernetic telephones, that lays down the most important programmatic necessity of the moment for the world proletariat and the workers' states. It will lead to the overcoming of the present backwardness in the development of the productive forces in the workers' states and strike a most decisive blow at imperialism. It will also help to prevent the imperialist manoeuvres which try to take advantage of the differences between the workers' states and lead to solid unity in the face of the enemy. At the same time, it will avoid the economic exploitation of the less developed workers' states by the most developed ones through the commercial exchange. The slogan of "Federation of the existing workers' states" is far more important now than when Trotsky raised the demand for "Federation of European Socialist Republics". Both are propagandistic but also essential. It also points to political revolution because the present bureaucratic governments will never accept a demand that hits at the source of their privileges: the existing workers' states with their present borders.

This is, however, an essentially propagandist line and we cannot stay there in the concrete event of war or military conflict. We must first study carefully to see whether one state has hegemonic ambitions over the other and then adopt a political defence of the workers' state under attack and a political attack against the state that was the aggressor. When the war takes place between a bureaucratized workers' state and a revolutionary workers' state, Trotskyists support the latter unconditionally regardless of whether or not it the aggressor.

CHAPTER IX

Building socialism in one country or an international socialist revolution?

1. Consistent Stalinism

The essence of the USFI document is simple: before the conquest of power the basic task is to make the revolution; however, once the proletariat controls the government, the essential task becomes the building of socialism. The revolution is over. Two further theses arise from this: first, after the seizure of power the revolutionary and class struggle will diminish; second, as a result of this, “the dictatorship of the proletariat begins to wither away almost from its inception.”

There are dozens of quotations that support this position. For example, the resolution states that any restriction of democracy “can only hinder the emergence of a consensus around the most effective and correct solutions of these burning problems from the point of view of building socialism...”¹⁵³ The “process of building a classless society...”¹⁵⁴ These phrases are used on exactly 15 occasions, and in countless others, the subject is referred to in other words.

In contrast with this plethora of assertions on this theme, we find no less categorical silence on others: there is no mention of the fact that a true socialist revolution can only take place after the seizure of power. Evidently, the USFI believes that with the dictatorship of the proletariat the social revolution finishes entering its stage of gradual disappearance. It is also no coincidence that the resolution never mentions the imperialist counter-revolution. From reading the document, clearly, the perspective is that once the proletariat has taken power in a country, each national bourgeoisie will be isolated, in retreat, disarmed, expropriated and in definitive decline. No new bourgeois tendencies linked to imperialist counter-revolution will emerge. The bourgeoisie will live in “nostalgic remembrance of the bourgeois past”.

The USFI falsifies Stalinism with a critique of some originality which is worth looking at: “e) a further underlying assumption is that of an intensification of the class struggle in the period of building socialism...”¹⁵⁵ What are you doing, comrades? Other than confusing everything and even attributing a revolutionary position to Stalinism? Trotsky always criticised Stalinism precisely because it held that the revolution came to an end, and the class struggle diminished with the seizure of power. He stated that Stalinism had “a far more concrete system of ideas, namely: the revolution is wholly completed; social contradictions will steadily soften; the kulak will gradually grow into socialism; the development as a whole, regardless of events in the external world, will preserve a peaceful and planned character.”¹⁵⁶ Trotsky’s critique could well be applied to the USFI.

153 Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 14.

154 Ibid, p. 14.

155 Ibid, p. 19.

156 Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 296.

In fact, the present USFI position is the same as that of the Stalinists, although they use it as a premise to arrive at different conclusions. They both say that the class struggle will disappear immediately but the Stalinists believe that the state must be strongly reinforced to combat the puny remains of bourgeois ideology. More consequent, the USFI arrive at a rather more pertinent conclusion from this false premise: if there are increasingly fewer contradictions, there can be ever-increasing freedom, and so “the dictatorship of the proletariat begins to wither away almost from its inception”.

2. The masters of Marxism and the transition to communism

It is well known that Marxists, from Marx onwards, have considered that there would be a stage of transition from capitalism to communism, after a socialist revolution in which the proletariat has taken power. This stage is characterised by the gradual disappearance of the state and has been defined as “socialism” by some authors.

They recognised, therefore, two historical stages after capitalism: the transitional stage, or the building of socialism, and communism. Both were outlined very briefly and hypothetically remained unchanged from the birth of Marxism until the first years of the Russian Revolution.

According to Marx, communism meant a society which — from the socio-economic point of view — would take “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!”¹⁵⁷ Politically, it would be characterised by the disappearance of the state. The economic formula established that in communist society none would be forced to give more than they wanted, that individuals could freely develop their potential, and receive everything they needed from society. The disappearance of the state would be the result of the disappearance of classes.

Between capitalism and the future “classless” society, there would be a transitional society “emerging” out of capitalist society itself. It would, therefore, in Marx’s famous phrase, be “still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.”¹⁵⁸ As a result, each person would receive from society “paper vouchers entitling them to withdraw from the social supplies of consumer goods a quantity corresponding to their labour time.”¹⁵⁹ In short, in the socialist stage, to each according to his work, minus a deduction for the common fund. Clearly, this is a continuation of bourgeois distribution of production, since it is done based on work performed rather than the needs of the worker. But there is no exploitation or oppression of any kind in this since the deduction for the “common fund” is for the increase of social production and for what we can call social wages. From the political point of view, this stage could be characterised by the existence of both the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, this would be a new type of state; condemned to destruction since the building of socialism would progressively suppress social classes, and consequently, the dictatorship of the proletariat, a class dictatorship. In this schema, the socialist revolution would end with the seizure of power. This is the present position of the USFI: first the revolution and the seizure of power; immediately afterwards the building of socialism. As we see, they are more Marxist than Marx himself.

However, the conception of Marx and Engels started from the premise that the socialist revolution would succeed in the most advanced capitalist countries, with a great development of the productive forces and where the working class would comprise the majority of the population (England, France, Germany). The class enemy was the national bourgeoisie. Never did Marx believe that the socialist revolution would emerge in backward agricultural countries. Therefore, according to our teachers, the transitional stage would be much more advanced than the capitalist because it would combine, from the beginning, the highest capitalist levels of development of the productive

157 Marx, Karl: “Critique to the Gotha Programme”, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, Volume 24, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2010, p. 87.

158 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

159 Marx, Karl: “Capital Volume II”, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, Volume 36, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2010, p. 356.

forces with a new and superior system of production and ownership. As a result, the task for the ruling proletariat would be the “building of socialism”, which would progressively incorporate all inhabitants into socialist production, without major obstacles.

Lenin and Trotsky before 1917, and all the orthodox Marxists at the start of the October Revolution defended Marx’s classic schema with two modifications. One, that the main enemy was no longer the national bourgeoisie but imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. The other (a brilliant modification!) was the possibility that the European and world revolution would break out at the weakest link in the imperialist chain, in a backward country like Russia. Nevertheless, for Lenin and Trotsky, Marx’s conception was still valid.

They held this position because they believed that the extension of socialist revolution into the other European countries, particularly the most advanced, was imminent. Within a few years, there would be a revolution in Germany, France, and all of Europe. The working class would seize power, socialism construction would begin in Europe and the workers’ dictatorships would begin to weaken. The emergence of the revolution in Russia was only a conjunctural, tactical problem because it would be immediately followed by the most developed industrial countries.

In the period immediately before and after the October Revolution, Lenin believed that “the collapse of European imperialism” could occur “anytime, even today or tomorrow”. The “proletarian state will begin to wither away immediately after its victory”. The suppression of exploiters could be carried out “with a very simple ‘machine’, almost without a ‘machine’, without a special apparatus, by the simple *organisation of the armed people*.” “To *smash* the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one”, was not at that time a “utopia”. It would only be necessary to “overthrow the capitalists”, to “organise the whole economy on the lines of the postal service”¹⁶⁰ and clear the way for the immediate construction of socialism. In conclusion, the state, classes and national boundaries would start to disappear almost from the beginning and there would be an unfettered extension of freedom for all citizens and socialist producers — for almost every inhabitant. In sum, for Lenin, the construction of socialism and the defeat of world imperialism would happen simultaneously, in the same historical period of two or three decades. He believed that within 10, or at most 20 years, we would be building socialism in the transition towards communism.

It should be emphasised here that Lenin and Trotsky had a program for the extension of the revolution into Germany, the most advanced European countries, and the whole world. Their actions had made it feasible to think in terms of world revolution, the building of socialism, and the phasing out of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Their mistake was one of calculation rather than theory: the belief that world revolution would triumph shortly.

3. But events followed a different course

The October Revolution was of momentous significance for humanity but it did not herald the victory of the international European socialist revolution, as Marxists had predicted. Proletarian Russia was isolated, and the socialist revolution continued to triumph in backward countries after the Second World War. Trotsky, 20 years after October, stated: “...the USSR does not correspond to the norms of a workers’ state as set forth in our program (...). Our program has counted upon a progressive development of the workers’ state and by that token upon its gradual withering away. But history... does not always act ‘according to a program’...”¹⁶¹ Furthermore, “That period, which to Lenin and his colleagues looked like a short ‘breathing spell’, has stretched out to a whole historical epoch.”¹⁶²

Hence, instead of a federation of highly industrialised workers’ states which have defeated imperialism, we are confronted with isolated workers’ states facing a far more powerful enemy than national capitalism: imperialism. These countries are far superior to capitalism in their relations

160 Lenin, VI: “The State and Revolution”, *Collected Works*, op. cit., Vol. 25, p. 411, 468, 430, 432.

161 Trotsky, Leon: “Not a Workers’ and Not a Bourgeois State?” in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)*, op. cit., p. 64.

162 Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 59.

of ownership and production (the bourgeoisie have been expropriated) but they are far behind imperialism in their development of the productive forces. This acute contradiction, this combination unexpected by the Marxists, has had far more serious consequences than the mere fact of carrying “birth-marks”.

This underdevelopment of the forces of production, combined with the survival of national boundaries, forced the dictatorship of the proletariat to fortify itself and employ bourgeois institutions and personnel as a defence against imperialism and its national agents. Instead of “withering away almost from its inception”, it had to be reinforced at all costs.

For this reason, the contemporary proletarian dictatorships are entrenched behind their frontiers with armies, police forces and state bureaucracies which are reminiscent of the worst capitalist regimes. Government control — by the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy — has led the dictatorships to degenerate into totalitarian regimes, with a reinforcement of bureaucratic control, oppression of the workers and peasant rank and file, instead of a strengthening of the state by the mobilisation and revolutionary organisation of the workers. At the same time, however, the existence of the phenomenon of the “capitalist state without capitalism” in all of these countries clearly indicates that there must be a strong objective reason for the need to strengthen the dictatorships of these isolated workers’ states. However, this need can be answered in two different ways: one is bureaucratic and the other, revolutionary. The first way is the constant strengthening of the police and the privileged sectors of the working class. The second way is the mobilisation of the most exploited and concentrated sectors of the proletariat. This second way leads to the development of world revolution and the final confrontation with and the defeat of imperialism. Instead, requires the first reinforces the isolation of the workers’ states inside their boundaries and co-existence with imperialism. Co-existence with imperialism is a historic impossibility because it leads to an inevitable confrontation. To put it another way: it is a momentary strengthening that in the end weakens the workers’ state and the proletarian dictatorship.

4. Socialism in one country or permanent revolution?

As we have seen, the USFI thesis and that of Stalinism have certain theoretical premises in common: the building of socialism in one country, the weakening of revolution and the class struggle, and the halt of socialist revolution once the proletariat has taken power. To oppose this conception, Trotsky raised his second formulation of theory of Permanent Revolution. His first formulation, prior to the Russian Revolution, revolved around the combination of democratic and socialist tasks, and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the spearhead of the democratic revolution in the backward countries. The second is to respond to the Stalinist theory of the building of socialism in one country and to the tasks that arise after the seizure of power not just in backward countries but in any country. Its subject is the dynamic of the transformation of a victorious national socialist revolution into an international revolution. With this new theory, Trotsky definitively modified the conceptions held by Marxists until then about the relationship between socialist revolution, the conquest of power, socialist construction, and weakening of the dictatorship. His new theory established a new, nonlinear sequence: the national socialist revolution and the conquest of power lead to the international socialist revolution which has as the main task the defeat of imperialism, rather than building socialism, and this needs the strengthening of the proletarian dictatorship.

Marxism teaches that revolutionary periods begin when the development of technology, that is, of the productive forces, collide with the relations of production and ownership. According to Trotsky, under imperialism, the productive forces also collide with the existence of national states. This is obvious since the productive forces depend on the entire planet for their development. National bourgeois states are, therefore, as great an obstacle as private bourgeois ownership. They constitute a hindrance to the development of the productive forces on the same global, historical scale as at their time feudal property did. The world socialist revolution is a present objective need to adapt all Earth to the development of productive forces because it is the only one that will

destroy not only private property but also national boundaries. Under monopoly imperialism, this development is at the service of the conservation of the national states (the highest expression of bourgeois ownership), which is another way of saying that it is at the service of backwardness. For this reason, it is the decisive counter-revolutionary factor.

The backward capitalist countries were directly exploited by imperialism, through capitalist investment. However, after the victory of the workers' revolution, they remained backward: imperialist productive forces continued to be superior, enabling them to continue indirect exploitation through their control of the world market and economy. This is why Trotsky claimed that the proletariat of the USSR is a ruling class in the USSR but it is also exploited by imperialism. Leaving aside the obvious differences, the Russian Revolution and those that followed it are in a position similar as if the French Revolution had triumphed in Provence and Marseille but not in the rest of France and feudalism had remained dominant in Paris and Lyon, where there was greater development of the productive forces. This would have left the monarchy very strong since Provence alone would not have been able to defeat it. Capitalism always needs, at least, to control the national market to achieve an impetuous development of the productive forces.

The same happens today with the workers' states but on a world scale. They can only be seen as tactical advances of world revolution. Only the existence of serious problems and specific circumstances has made it impossible for imperialism to destroy them. The new bureaucratic workers' governments are isolated; their main concern being the defence of their national boundaries and the development of their backward economies. However, sooner or later, the comparative paucity of their productive forces — in relation to world capitalism — will force them to trade with imperialism, which means they will be exploited indirectly via trade transactions and loans.

Reality has shown that the world revolution has had an "abnormal" development to date, based on great backwardness rather than on advanced capitalist development. At the same time, it has demonstrated on a world scale that the development of the productive forces cannot be contained by national boundaries. This contradiction is manifest in the fact that revolutions have broken out in the weakest sectors of capitalism. As long as imperialism survives, any underdeveloped country which makes the revolution within its national boundaries will continue to be exploited in the same way, because "... the fundamental criterion is the level of the productive forces."¹⁶³

From this analysis, both Lenin and Trotsky concluded that imperialism was not defeated by the conquest of power and that, therefore, the class struggle and the revolution must be accelerated on a scale that could lead to its definitive defeat. "Having overthrown the bourgeoisie and conquered political power, the proletariat" must crush "the increasingly stubborn resistance of the exploiters". "The class of exploiters, the landowners and capitalists, has not disappeared and cannot disappear all at once under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The exploiters have been smashed, but not destroyed. They still have an international base in the form of international capital, of which they are a branch. (...) Because they have been defeated, the energy of their resistance has increased a hundred and a thousand fold, The 'art' of state, military and economic administration gives them a superiority, and a very great superiority so that their importance is incomparably greater than their numerical proportion of the population. The class struggle waged by the overthrown exploiters against the victorious vanguard of the exploited, i.e., the proletariat, has become incomparably more bitter. And it cannot be otherwise in the case of a revolution, unless this concept is replaced (as it is by all the heroes of the Second International) by reformist illusions."¹⁶⁴

Trotsky underlines this in *The Permanent Revolution*: "The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration. In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the successes achieved. If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions. The way out for

163 Ibid, p. 60.

164 Lenin, VI: "Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the proletariat", in *Collected Works*, op. cit., vol. 30, p. 116.

it lies only in the victory of the proletariat of the advanced countries. Viewed from this standpoint, a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain.”¹⁶⁵

This is magnificently summarised in the ninth thesis of *The Permanent Revolution*: “The conquest of power by the proletariat does not complete the revolution, but only opens it. Socialist construction is conceivable only on the foundation of the class struggle, on a national and international scale. This struggle, under the conditions of an overwhelming predominance of capitalist relationships in the world arena, must inevitably lead to explosions, that is, internally to civil wars and externally to revolutionary wars. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such, regardless of whether it is a backward country that is involved, which only yesterday accomplished its democratic revolution or an old capitalist country which already has behind it a long epoch of democracy and parliamentarism.”¹⁶⁶

5. The dictatorship of the proletariat: Does it weaken or gain strength?

With the appearance of the undeniable need to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat during a certain period, one of the basic theoretical principles of Marxism was discarded. When the USFI seems to be at its most orthodox, for example, when it ignores this modification wrought by historical experience, it is furthest from Marxism.

In contrast, Lenin, who had defended the classic schema for years, was the first to correct it as the USSR became isolated. Barely a year after the Bolsheviks had taken power he said: “We cannot all at once make the leap to socialism... I have no illusions about the fact that we have only begun the transitional period to socialism; that we have not yet arrived at socialism”. “The anti-authoritarians ask for the authoritarian political state to be destroyed straight away... Have these people ever seen a revolution? A revolution is undoubtedly the most authoritarian thing one can imagine.”¹⁶⁷ Following Lenin’s teachings, Trotsky described clearly this phenomenon and told us categorically: “But the transition period from capitalism to socialism demands an extreme strengthening of the functions of the state (dictatorship of the proletariat). This historic dialectic of the state has been sufficiently illuminated by theory of Marxism (...) the idea of the inevitable strengthening of state power in the transitional epoch between capitalism and socialism [is an] idea which, following Marx, Lenin advanced for the explanation of the necessity of the proletarian dictatorship...”¹⁶⁸ Clearly, Trotsky’s position on this crucial question is directly opposed to that of the USFI.

Under the rule of Lenin and Trotsky, this implied the restriction of freedom, the monopoly of power by the Communist Party, the establishment of the Red Army, the Cheka, etc. Later, when the revolution continued to succeed in backward countries under opportunist bureaucratic leaderships, this strengthening of the dictatorship led it to degenerate into a totalitarian regime, which claimed Trotskyism as the first victim of its notorious crimes. However, although a bureaucratic leadership has aggravated and degenerated this process, it does not follow that a revolutionary leadership could have avoided it altogether. This will continue to be true for future proletarian states until imperialism is defeated.

There exists a law that can be suspended but not annulled: during the current period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of mortal confrontation with imperialism and with national boundaries still existing, the strengthening of the workers’ dictatorship and the proletarian state. Stalin and Trotsky “coincided” on this point but only Trotsky analysed the existing relationships between imperialism and world capitalism with the national proletarian dictatorships to give a scientific explanation of this necessity. This is not the only difference between them. There is no common ground in their actual programs and perspectives for strengthening the dictatorship.

165 Trotsky, Leon: *The Permanent Revolution*, op. cit., p. 133.

166 Ibid, p. 278-279.

167 Lenin, V.I., quoted by Carr, EH, in *The Bolshevik Revolution (1917-1923)*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 131.

168 Trotsky, Leon: “The Degeneration of Theory and Theory of Degeneration” in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1932-33)*, p. 215 and 220.

The same happens when a guild in a capitalist country wins a great victory through intensive mobilisation. The victory allows the guild to build and strengthen a powerful union. Thus, it faces a choice between three alternative conflicting courses of action. The first is the line of the USFI which calls for the immediate weakening of the union (the dictatorship of the proletariat), regardless of whether the other workers in the country are being terribly exploited by the capitalists and without taking into account the inevitable attacks of the management on the gains won by this guild and union. The second is that of the bureaucracy which puts all its effort into strengthening its own union and nothing else. Its endeavours will be directed towards better clinics, buildings and holiday hotels. This path leads to an authoritarian regime inside the union since by leaving the struggle, the union becomes bureaucratised. This is the Stalinist solution, which, if taken to the level of a country, results in the bureaucratic strengthening of the workers' dictatorship by the imposition of a totalitarian police state which forces workers to "build socialism in one country".

As we have repeatedly shown, this bureaucratic strengthening is detrimental to the immediate interests of the workers and, in the long run, weakens the proletarian dictatorship, accelerating its internal and external contradictions.

Finally, we have the Trotskyist line, which without leaving aside those improvements which the bureaucracy wants for the union, concentrates on developing the class struggle all over the country, attempting to mobilise all unions and all workers. This is the only way to strengthen the union without bureaucratising the leadership and the union itself. This is correlated to Trotsky's program for strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat: developing and intensifying revolutionary mobilisation through international socialist revolution. For Trotsky, this strengthening will result from the constant extension of the mobilisation of workers in the home country and all over the world, and the growth of multitudinous revolutionary organisations of the mass movement which challenge imperialism and the bourgeoisie.

However, this is not just a theoretical question but also the correct solution imposed on us by reality. What happens if the world revolution does not advance, or if it advances objectively through victories which become stunted and frozen behind their national boundaries attempting to "build socialism in one country"? This is the lesson of the last 60 years: imperialism continues to dominate on a world scale, continues to exploit indirectly the proletariat in these workers' states, and the consolidation of the workers' dictatorship confers a bureaucratic, totalitarian character upon it, with its attempt to constrain in a straitjacket terrible contradictions. These contradictions become increasingly acute, undermining and weakening the workers' dictatorship dominated by the bureaucracy.

At another level, it would be the same as, if after the victory of the guild of our example, no others had been taken place, or a few more had triumphed, but each one was dedicated exclusively to strengthening their union regardless of the class struggle in the country. Regardless of the achievements of each one separately, the bourgeoisie would continue to dominate the country as a whole, they would continue to be exploited — perhaps to a lesser extent than the rest — and the bureaucracies would become increasingly solid and strong in their unions, attempting to remain in their positions and permanently negotiating with the bosses. In the same way that the main enemy of the workers — in these unions as in the rest of the country — is the bourgeoisie as a whole, rather than their individual bosses, for the workers of the workers' states and the whole world, the enemy is no longer their national bourgeoisie but imperialism.

6. Trotsky's analysis of the USSR

Trotsky completed his analysis of the USSR taking the existence of imperialism and the development of the productive forces as his point of reference.

"The proletariat of the USSR is the ruling class in a backward country where there is still a lack of the most vital necessities of life. The proletariat of the USSR rules a land consisting of only one-twelfth part of humanity; imperialism rules over the remaining eleven-twelfths. The rule of the

proletariat, already maimed by the backwardness and poverty of the country, is doubly and triply deformed under the pressure of world imperialism. The organ of the rule of the proletariat — the state — becomes an organ for pressure from imperialism (diplomacy, army, foreign trade, ideas, and customs).”¹⁶⁹

Furthermore: “...a rise in the productive forces, that is, real socialist development will begin in our country only after the victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries of Europe...” Trotsky made use of Bukharin’s assertion to synthesise an important aspect of Marxist theory, enriched by the lessons of the Russian Revolution. He added that “the very same statement was used [by the Stalinists] as a basis of all acts of indictment against ‘Trotskyism’, including the indictment at the Seventh Plenum of the ECCI.”¹⁷⁰

This economic inferiority is the fundamental cause for the emergence of the bureaucracy which characterises all the existing workers’ states. “In its first period, the Soviet regime was undoubtedly far more equalitarian and less bureaucratic than now. But that was an equality of general poverty.” “The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there are enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there are little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman, to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of Soviet bureaucracy. It ‘knows’ who is to get something and who has to wait.”¹⁷¹

At first sight, it might seem that the improvement of the material and cultural conditions inside its borders should lead to the gradual disappearance of this bureaucracy. Quite the contrary: “...the growth of the productive forces has been so far accompanied by an extreme development of all forms of inequality, privilege and advantage...” The growth of the productive forces “...is still far from guaranteeing all necessities to everybody”, and creates the best conditions for “giv[ing] significant privileges to a minority, and convert[ing] inequality into a whip for the spurring on of the majority.”¹⁷²

Bureaucracy arises “as the bourgeois organ of a workers’ state”, a product of the needs of our society, besieged by imperialism. However, when it “has far outgrown its socially necessary function, it becomes an independent factor and therewith the source of great danger for the whole social organism”. “The poverty and cultural backwardness of the masses has again become incarnate in the malignant figure of the ruler with a great club in his hand.” Within the narrow boundaries of the national state, the bureaucracy, “from being a servant of society, has again become its lord.”¹⁷³

However, if Stalin with his program of socialism in one country, had not defeated the opposition led by Trotsky with his policy of developing the permanent revolution, the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat would have still been fully justified until the defeat of imperialism, and the extinction of national boundaries allowed the development of the forces of production on a world scale. “The present Soviet society cannot get along without a state, nor even —within limits— without a bureaucracy. But the cause of this is by no means the pitiful remnants of the past, but the mighty forces and tendencies of the present. The justification for the existence of a Soviet state as an apparatus of compulsion lies in the fact that the present transitional structure is still full of social contradictions, which in the sphere of *consumption* — most close and sensitively felt by all — are extremely tense, and forever threaten to break over into the sphere of production. The triumph of socialism cannot be called either final or irrevocable.”¹⁷⁴

169 Trotsky, Leon: “Not a Workers’ and Not a Bourgeois State?”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)*, op. cit. p. 69-70.

170 Trotsky, Leon: *The Third International After Lenin*, op. cit., p. 38.

171 Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 112 and 112.

172 Ibid, p. 112 and 113.

173 Ibid, p. 113.

174 Ibid. p. 111-112.

7. The problem of imperialism

The comrades who wrote these theses completely ignore the realities of the last 60 years. They tell us that Marx and Engels were unable to “analyse the phenomenon of imperialism”, and that Lenin did not see “the delay of the proletarian revolution in the advanced imperialist countries”, and “the bureaucratic degeneration of the first workers’ state”. What they do not tell us is what stops them from making this analysis. Although they affirm that Marxism “is critical thought par excellence”, they continue to cling to the perspectives held by our masters at the turn of the century.

Hence, their document does nothing more than repeat professorially the predictions upheld by Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and the other orthodox Marxists until 1917. Nevertheless, they do so by omitting the fundamental conception underlying those forecasts.

There is a theoretical basis for this political error: the authors give no importance to the existence of imperialism. Herein lies the reason for the 15 specific references to “building socialism” against the two appearances of the word imperialism, the complete absence of references to imperialist counter-revolution; and the passing mention of the danger of military imperialist intervention is calculated to most effectively minimise its importance. This becomes far more serious if we look at why imperialism is mentioned each time. The first is to say that “the phenomenon of imperialism (...) was not analysed by Marx and Engels”. The second holds that Stalinism “systematically misused slanderous accusations of ‘collusion with imperialism.’”

We hold that the emergence of imperialism, with its exploitation of backward countries, is a global phenomenon that has affected the course of the world revolution and given origin to all the “abnormalities” which were not foreseen by Marxism, or by Lenin and Trotsky. It is precisely this new phenomenon which has caused — directly or indirectly— those “abnormalities” the USFI points out: “the delay of the proletarian revolution in the advanced imperialist countries” and “the bureaucratic degeneration of the first workers’ state” as well as many others which are just as significant but which the USFI does not mention. These are: The degeneration of the Second and Third Internationals and the bureaucratic character and isolation of the new workers’ states. However, the two most spectacular results have been the appearance of a labour bureaucracy and aristocracy on one hand, and the victory of workers’ revolutions in the backward countries, on the other.

By way of its exploitation of the backward countries, imperialism — the highest expression of capitalism — has aristocratised important sectors of the working class and maintained a strong middle class in the metropolis. In other words, workers and the working class across the world have been divided into two distinct, and often antagonistic sectors: one privileged; and the other, exploited more heavily. Capitalism, by virtue of its fabulous riches and its economic dominance under imperialism, retires from the historical scenario just as it entered: winning over a sector of its class enemy. Capitalism is repeating its success with the clergy and the feudal lords in its rise to power, with the working class itself. This split in the workers’ ranks is the social cause of all the other phenomena.

The flip side of this split in the working class is what happens in the backward countries. There, imperialist penetration has destroyed the archaic modes of production and generated a development of capitalism which simultaneously hinders and distorts. Over the last 30 to 35 years, this has given rise to almost unbearably sharp objective contradictions for nearly all those workers who fought for, and won — although under bureaucratic leaderships — a socialist revolution in various backward countries. Imperialism is forced to increasingly exploit workers in other parts of the world, to grant privileges to those of the metropolis. However, the revolution it held off at the front door is now squatting in its back yard.

Since these revolutions are only a part of the socialist revolution against imperialism on a world scale, it is also true that they are generated by imperialism itself, producing the destruction of archaic modes of production, accelerating the capitalist productive process in backward countries, while simultaneously holding back the accelerated and constant development of capitalism as a

whole. Imperialism exports not only its capital and its goods to dependent countries but also its capitalist crises which become the chronic crises of backward countries.

This is what produced the great colonial revolutions of this post-war period which became socialist. However, the advantages of backward countries become disadvantages as soon as the proletarian dictatorships take control. The most acute contradiction lies in the national state. The independence and unification of the national state of a backward country is great historical progress, a democratic, anti-imperialist victory. It allows the country swiftly to catch up with the great capitalist countries which achieved the same goal one, two or three centuries ago. However, no sooner has the workers' revolution achieved this aim, than it becomes a hindrance since even with the proletariat in power, the national state is still a bourgeois institution. In the last century, it was progressive, it is progressive at a certain point of the struggle against imperialism; but, in the last analysis, it is retrogressive regarding the need for world development of the productive forces. Thus, this bourgeois-democratic gain becomes a straitjacket imposed on the proletariat of this country by the world capitalist system. The labour aristocracy is the great champion of this straitjacket because it tends to increase its privileges by controlling the national state. Its other great champion is imperialism, which understands that even a backward workers' nation-state allows imperialism to orchestrate and control world politics and economy.

Let us take the example of the degeneration of the USSR where both phenomena are clearly combined. What happened to the Russian Revolution? The principal cause of its degeneration was the retrogression of the world revolution which put the monopoly of power into the hands of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy. Because of this, the gap between the workers' rank and file and its aristocracy, within the USSR's national boundaries, has widened in relation to capitalist countries; because in Russia these privileged sectors service themselves through their control of the state. Hence, Trotsky's position of vindicating power only for the workers' rank and file of the Soviet Union and demanding the expulsion of an important sector of the working class — the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy — from the revolutionary soviets. The brutal and antagonistic distinction between these two sectors of the proletariat justifies a call for a violent, political revolution of the most miserable sector of the working class against the privileged sector of its own class. The USFI does not seem to understand this aspect of the political revolution. It is not a social revolution of one class against another — workers against the bourgeoisie — but of one sector of the working class against another.

The existence of imperialism has changed the whole dynamic of the world revolution; no longer does the defeat of a national bourgeoisie or capitalist regime, however important it is, implies its defeat on a world scale. It continues to survive and dominate and the historical task of inflicting its final defeat is still posed as the only way to uproot the principal source of world-class exploitation.

8. Our analysis: The two stages of the dictatorship of the proletariat

Sixty years after the Russian Revolution, we can see that what was anticipated as a single stage in the dictatorship of the proletariat — building socialism, the disappearance of social classes and the dictatorship itself — has now become two distinct stages or historical task. The first stage, which we have been experiencing for 60 years, where the essential task is political, of a relentless struggle against imperialism and which demands the strengthening of the workers' state, that is, of class dictatorship, which can be either bureaucratic or revolutionary. In the second stage, after the defeat of imperialism, the fundamental task will be economic and cultural, the building of socialism in which — as our masters predicted — the state will become extinct, the dictatorship of the proletariat will weaken and be replaced by the most complete and unimaginable flowering of freedoms.

In this first stage, the workers' states live with an acute contradiction. Imperialism continues to dominate world politics and economics, just as it continues indirect exploitation of the working class in these countries because of the existence of national boundaries and its aforementioned superiority. As a result, the working class suffers direct oppression, which is the price it pays for the defence of the workers' state and the appearance of a bureaucracy which reserves for itself

the surplus product. If the regime is bureaucratic, this oppression can be coercive in the interests of maintaining and increasing the privileges and parasitical lives of functionaries. However, if the regime were democratic and revolutionary, there could also be a voluntary, democratic sacrifice of the surplus product by the proletariat to pay the costs of confronting imperialism, developing the national and international socialist revolution and its functionaries. In this stage, the survival of bourgeois norms of distribution would be linked to oppression based on functional, political reasons, and not on class exploitation.

According to Marx, the socialist stage is characterised by giving to each according to their “work”, minus what goes into the “common fund”. However, what actually happens in this first stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat is that each is given according to the “wage” considered appropriate to the level of oppression or sacrifice of the job. That is to say, it is necessary to wrest from labour a surplus product that does not return to the working class and does not go to the “common fund”; and thereby constitutes oppression or a sacrifice. “By this token, the rule of the proletariat assumes an abridged, curbed, distorted character. One can with full justification say that the proletariat, *ruling* in one backward and isolated country, still remains an oppressed class.”¹⁷⁵ This can only change with the final defeat of imperialism.

From the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, we have lived through a period of war against imperialism waged by the proletariat of the advanced countries, the colonial masses and the workers’ states. The building of a transitional economy, important as it is, is subordinate to this struggle. This is, therefore, the transitional stage to socialism, of transition to “the transition to communism”. The nationalist, reformist, and bureaucratic political course of the workers’ states and the mass parties all over the world have allowed imperialism to turn its defeats into mere setbacks, and even counteract and maintain its global dominance.

On the international level, this situation poses a stage of civil war and dual power between the workers’ states and the world proletarian masses, and imperialism. This civil war and dual power are latent in every country since they only come to light during critical, revolutionary periods but has existed on a world scale since 1917. “A socialist revolution is not only possible but inevitable in every country. What I affirm is that it is impossible to construct a socialistic society in the environment of a capitalistic world.”¹⁷⁶ “World imperialism cannot live side by side with a victorious advancing social revolution.”¹⁷⁷

The second historical stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat, after the defeat of imperialism, will be the beginning of the construction of socialist society, the beginning of the disappearance of the state, of transition to communism. “Socialism means progressive equality as well as the progressive abolition of the state.” This stage will indeed have the features described by Marx and Lenin before the October Revolution. In this period, although each will receive according to their labour; although bourgeois norms of distribution will survive and there will be many remnants of capitalism, the oppression of humanity and its principal source, the exploitation of humanity by imperialism, will have ceased to exist. This will be a period of increasing wealth for society, and the development of the productive forces will at last begin from a level above that of capitalism. This superior development will avoid the existence of sharp contradictions and give it a reformist rather than revolutionary character because the counterposing of different positions will no longer be violent.

The building of socialism or the transition to communism must be based on the permanent mobilisation of the entire population. The disappearance of exploitation, classes, and even the state will coincide with the emergence of socialist producers and consumers located in the same economic framework.

175 Trotsky, Leon: “Not a Workers’ and Not a Bourgeois State?”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)*, op. cit., p, 71.

176 Trotsky, Leon: “On the Eve of World War Two”, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939-40)*, op. cit. p.22.

177 Trotsky, Leon: *The Third International After Lenin*, op. cit., p. 13.

In summary, we can say that the two stages after capitalism (transitional and communist), which have been recognised since Marx, have now become three: 1. the transition from capitalism to socialism; 2. the socialist or of transition to communism stage; and 3. Communism.

9. Three programs for the stage of transition from capitalism to socialism

At the start of the revolution, Lenin believed that the repression of counter-revolutionaries would be in direct proportion to the liberation and democratic self-determination of the toiling population. His program started from this premise. This was a logical conclusion since, in line with Marx's teachings, Lenin believed it would be possible to start building socialism within a few years. However, because of the subsistence of imperialism and the isolation of the USSR, even under Lenin and Trotsky, these aspects had an uneven and contradictory development. Revolutionary, coercive, dictatorial measures for the defence of the workers' dictatorship proved to be far more urgent than the liberation and democratic self-determination of the workers and the population towards the building of socialism. A hiatus, an ever-widening breach was produced between the immediate task of imposing and defending the dictatorship and extending the world revolution against imperialism, and the ultimate aim of building socialism — the extension of direct democracy, democratic freedoms, and the extinction of the state.

From the very start of the revolution, the program for direct democracy and the immediate dissolution of the workers' state became a long-term objective, a task which was undertaken in combination with other more urgent demands of the dictatorship. As long as capitalism is dominant on a world scale, there exists the permanent danger of imperialist counter-revolution. The teachings of the Russian Revolution tell us clearly that the immediate tasks of any dictatorship of the proletariat — whether bureaucratic or revolutionary and democratic — cannot be other than the repression of its enemies as the only defence against the imperialist counter-revolution, and the only means of imposing the dictatorship and developing world socialist revolution. Only the success of these immediate objectives and the historic defeat of capitalism can clear the way for the programmatic tasks of dissolving the state and gaining complete democracy and freedom for all inhabitants. Then we can begin to build socialism.

Over the last 60 years, there have emerged three different orientations and programs for this transitional state from capitalism to socialism.

Stalinism, or national-communism, generalised and gave historical characteristics to immediate needs (the suppression of factions in the Communist Party, the monopoly of power, the one-party system and repression), elevating them to the status of absolute, general rules for the whole stage. In this way, it tries to justify the bureaucratic repression of the mass movement, and the oppression of the working class in the interests of a privileged caste inside the workers' state, which also exists under world imperialism.

This "program" of the workers' states is the bureaucratic justification for the refusal to grant increasing scientific, artistic and cultural freedoms of all kinds — of the press, public opinion — and, lastly, political freedom to control, diminish and bring into decline the oppression suffered by the working class. This is the program of the bureaucracy for permanent peaceful coexistence with imperialism, of protection of national boundaries and stifling the development of the world revolution which, ultimately, goes against the dictatorship of the proletariat itself. In the end, this is a program of acceptance of the status quo of imperialist domination at the world level, and bureaucratic privilege at the national level, of pro-imperialist opportunism versus international socialist revolution.

For their part, the USFI majority, with their typical academic and formal bias, confuse this period of transition to socialism, of mortal combat against imperialism, with the stage of building socialism. What in this period cannot be anything other than an objective, a trend, a medium-term rule, the USFI transforms it into its program without taking into account the concrete and immediate needs of applying repression, coercion and strengthening the dictatorship. This confusion generates

a maximalist program for the construction of socialism, the imminent dissolution of the state, and the granting of the most absolute freedoms for the whole population, including counter-revolutionaries. And, as always happens with all maximum, libertarian, super-democratic programs in times of mortal combat between class enemies, it serves the interests of the exploiters.

As consequent Trotskyists, we hold that the only program which can challenge that of the reformist bureaucrats in this transitional stage from capitalism to socialism is... a transitional program and not the maximalist program of the USFI. In compliance with Trotsky's method, we hold that such a program must incorporate a combination of all possible socialist elements into the immediate task of strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat. A revolutionary Trotskyist dictatorship would always lean towards granting more and more freedoms. Even in times of the greatest need for the use of force and coercive measures it would grant ample freedom to scientists, artists, and revolutionaries.

The Trotskyist program is realistic and seeks to arrive as swiftly as possible to the beginning of the true building of socialism. This is why it has to raise a transitional program that combines, sometimes in a contradictory way, a multiplicity of tasks. As soon as the working class takes power it must combine and harmonise two dissimilar tasks: continuing the revolutionary struggle against world imperialism and starting to develop the elements of a new social and economic system superior to capitalism. In turn, these tasks demand a highly contradictory combination of institutions and tasks, both bourgeois and transitional. In a backward country, outright bourgeois-democratic, as well as socialist measures, must be combined and implemented. In all countries, backward or not, for as long as national boundaries continue to exist and imperialism to dominate, bourgeois economic laws and political institutions must be combined with transitional laws and institutions.

For example, in the economic field, this requires the combination of a bourgeois distribution of consumer goods with the payment of a wage (partly based on workers' oppression), nationalised industry and foreign trade and state planning. This means that the law of value will apply to the fixing of mercantile prices and the maintenance of a stable currency. A surplus product — which does not go to the "common fund" — will be deducted from each worker to stabilise wages in line with planning and non-capitalist relations of production. The socio-political field will surely require the most tremendous skill in the task of strengthening the dictatorship of the industrial proletariat and developing the national and international socialist revolution. This will possibly have to be combined with making concessions to bourgeois technicians and even to imperialism, and above all coming to some agreement with the peasantry and the urban middle class.

At the superstructural level of institutions, it will be necessary to combine characteristically bourgeois apparatus and sectors such as state bureaucracy, the army and the police, as specialised apparatus with the encouragement and participation of the masses and the working class. The latter's participation in the state must be developed in their free time, or by rotating the state administration until the specialised bureaucracy and apparatus are totally eliminated. The development of a popular workers' militia and the arming of workers will similarly develop alongside the regular revolutionary army. In other words, it will be necessary to combine transitional organs of the bourgeois apparatus with specific, dominant organs of the industrial proletariat and its allies (soviets), aiming, as a trend, towards the destruction of the bourgeois bureaucratic organs and the state itself.

A similar problem exists in the relation between direct and indirect democracy. In its first stage, the dictatorship of the proletariat must maintain a highly contradictory combination of these two types of democracy, but under no circumstances can it eliminate indirect democracy. The clearest example of this will be the survival of political parties, the ultimate expression of indirect democracy.

The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat must have a program — as Lenin and Trotsky had — of the strictest revolutionary-democratic workers' controls over both the bourgeois tasks and apparatus and also the repressive measures to "strengthen the functions of the proletarian state". That is, it must combine different methods and tasks in its development. Throughout this entire first stage, the combination of these activities, trends, laws and apparatuses will be determined

by the revolutionary needs, by the degree of backwardness in the development of the productive forces, by the weight of the working class, by the progress in the transitional economy, and mainly by the relations between the imperialist counter-revolution and the world socialist revolution. The transitional program will become far more important in the early years of the dictatorship of the proletariat than it was under capitalist rule. The USFI resolution abandons it in favour of a maximum program.

The definition of the character of a workers' dictatorship — bureaucratic or revolutionary and democratic — as always requires the identification of the dominant element in the dynamic of these combinations. Does it lean towards the extension of freedoms, towards socialism, direct democracy, suppression of the state and victory of the world socialist revolution? Is it moving towards imperialist-capitalist exploitation? Is it seeking an unstable bureaucratic equilibrium between both trends that will inevitably break one way or the other?

CHAPTER X

Trotskyism and vulgar Trotskyism: a summary of our differences

1. Vulgar Trotskyism (some comments on theory and method)

The method of the USFI document is a negation of Marxism. Its reasoning is based on vulgarities strung linearly together by syllogisms and the principle of identity; based on common sense rather than dialectics.

It points out no contradictions concerning dictatorship. None of its characteristics or tendencies is relativised; everything is absolute, identical to itself; there are no exceptions or variables. The same program is formulated for all countries, at all times, with “unfettered political freedom” (and, according to Mandel, “universal suffrage”) right from the beginning, and with the assumption that an extremely liberal, super democratic penal code should be used in all civil wars.

From the time of Heraclitus, if not before, we have known that everything is relative, “limited” and mediated, except for change and contradiction. For the USFI, everything is absolute, except the existence of movement and contradiction. That is why there can be “unfettered political freedom”, conditioned by nothing and nobody. Neither the class struggle nor the imperious necessities of civil war can assail the penal code of the USFI. “Let the dictatorship sink, let the civil war be lost, but save our penal code and our program of ‘unfettered political freedom’!” This is what the resolution seems to scream out.

This predominance of absolutes, this absence of dialectics which end up hiding the contradictions which exist in reality do not help the USFI to avoid the serious — not exactly dialectical — contradictions into which their document has fallen. Rather, it has led the document to fall into them. This is particularly and dangerously clear when the document deals with the problems — certainly worthy of respect — of how to avoid bureaucratic abuses and degeneration; what guarantee is there that a person or tendency is justifiably accused of being bourgeois or counter-revolutionary? Hasn't Stalinism warned of the danger of counter-revolution to justify its repressive dictatorship of the workers' movement and the toilers? How can we combat Stalinist politics? Two important aspects must be mentioned here. The first, the most obvious, is that the sequence which runs through the rest of the resolution is broken precisely at this point and only at this point. The only subject on which the USFI cannot pronounce itself with certainty is how to identify who is revolutionary and who is counter-revolutionary after the proletariat has seized power. “If one says that only parties and organisations that have no bourgeois (and petty-bourgeois?) program or ideology, or are not ‘engaged in anti-socialist or anti-Soviet propaganda and/or agitation’ are to be legalised, how is one to determine the dividing line? (...) What is the dividing line between ‘bourgeois program’ and ‘reformist ideology?’”¹⁷⁸ When it is a case of determining the “dividing line” the USFI is full of doubts, and the document abandons the absolute to submerge itself into a total relativism.

¹⁷⁸ Mandel, Ernest: *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, op. cit., p.9.

The second aspect of this: How does the USFI extricate itself from this situation? Very simple! The USFI finds legal, normative solutions to these problems, returning once more to what is abstract and absolute, and far removed from the class struggle — “unfettered political freedom” for everyone, and the adoption of the most liberal penal code in history in the face of civil war. Clearly, it never occurred to our comrades, for whom everything was in doubt at a certain point, to question whether it will be possible to keep power in the hands of the workers if there is “unfettered political freedom” from the beginning.

These absolute legal guarantees are, and always will be, completely useless. These absolute norms — absolute democracy for capitalist and reactionary parties, and super-democratic penal codes and constitutions to judge counter-revolutionaries who have risen in arms against workers’ power — are tools only for the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolution to use against the bureaucracy. For Trotskyists, the only guarantee lies in the development of class struggle and the permanent mobilisation of the workers. Just like in a trade union the only effective opposition to bureaucratic abuses is workers’ mobilisation. No statute can ever prevent bureaucratic manoeuvres and abuses; they can only be defeated by mobilisation.

There are a whole series of aspects, around this question of theory and method, which the USFI majority seems to ignore. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is not free from a series of dialectical laws such as the relation between the means and the end, the whole and its parts, between liberty and necessity.

The goal of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is not to grant “unfettered political freedom” to counter-revolutionaries, as the USFI resolution seems to suggest in the guise of freedom for everybody, but the smashing of the counter-revolution and the development of socialist revolution on the national and international arena. The granting of freedoms is important, but it is still only a means subordinate to the ultimate goal of establishing the revolution, and destroying the counter-revolution. Therefore, between the revolutionary ends and means, between democracy and freedom, there exists a very contradictory relation that should be recognised and tackled, never avoided. The USFI majority eliminates this contradiction from their program. They do not accept the goals of the revolution necessitate the restriction of democratic freedom.

Similarly with the famous law Marxism inherited from Hegel, “freedom is consciousness of necessity”. As Trotsky explained, this fundamental dialectical law means that absolute freedom does not exist; on the contrary, freedom means the understanding, acceptance, and development of necessities. Anyone who understands the need behind thirst will consciously drink the healthiest liquid and this is the only real human freedom there is. No normal person will take the ridiculous, absolute freedom of drinking any liquid to quench their thirst to prove they are free. That is the freedom of lunatics. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, just like a strike or any workers’ struggle, cannot, or should not ignore the dialectical relation between freedom and necessity. No Marxist worthy of the name would postulate “unfettered political freedom” for everyone, particularly counter-revolutionaries, without taking the other side of the relation into account: the urgent needs of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Freedoms which take these urgent needs of the dictatorship into account (are conscious of them) will indeed be granted. Freedoms that are not linked to revolutionary necessity will be like the freedom of a lunatic who drinks urine or stagnant water to prove he is free.

Finally, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is subject to the Marxist law that the whole governs and conditions its parts — without denying that at certain times a part may revolutionise or exceed the whole. This means that the workers’ revolutionary dictatorship governs and conditions its parts (workers as individuals, class sectors, etc.).

These three dialectical laws which apply to the workers’ dictatorship can be combined to form another, far more general law: the means used and the freedoms of each part (individuals, tendencies and workers’ sectors) are contingent upon the goal of defending and developing the socialist revolution, the imperative need of defeating the bourgeois or imperialist counter-revolution and imposing the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. In conclusion: only those sectors

which accept and recognise the urgent need for the defence of the revolutionary dictatorship and the defeat of the counter-revolution can aspire to general freedom and democracy.

But the USFI prefers not to get involved with the complexities of dialectics, their reasoning is very simple: they take categories —socialism, democracy, the dictatorship of the proletariat— give them all similar attributes and define them on a historical scale. Socialism and democracy, both become “unfettered political freedom” for all inhabitants and a new civilization with a penal code emerges which is far superior to anything we have known in the barbarous class society. Ergo, socialism and absolute democracy have become synonymous to our comrades. Furthermore, since the “dictatorship of the proletariat” is a necessary condition for the emergence of “socialist democracy” — *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* is, after all, the title of the resolution — these become identical. This is what the entire document sets out to prove.

Unfortunately, all Marxist theory this century has been based on theoretical finding that “socialist democracy” is an opposite, contradictory category to “dictatorship of the proletariat”. They are dialectically opposed and historically related. The workers’ dictatorship will engender its opposite, “socialist democracy”, as a seed engenders a plant by negating itself. However, if a category engenders its opposite, this does not make them identical, as the USFI claims.

The mistake of identifying “socialist democracy” with “dictatorship of the proletariat” extends, into a manic use of the principle of identity for everything: thus “soviet democracy” becomes “socialist democracy”, with a few extra trimmings.

In these, as in other concepts, the USFI falls into Stalinism. Stalin said exactly the same things in 1936. In defining the USSR, he said: “That social organisation which we have created may be called a Soviet socialist organisation, still not wholly completed, but at root a socialist organisation of society.”¹⁷⁹ This statement of Stalin — who, like the USFI, considers that “soviet” is a synonym of “socialist”, although the USFI adds the term “democratic” but still identifies both terms — was criticised by Trotsky in terms similar to the ones we have used to criticise the resolution: “The social organisation is called ‘Soviet socialist’, but the Soviets are a form of state, and socialism is a social regime. These designations are not only not identical but, from the point of view of our interest, antagonistic. Insofar as the social organisation has become socialistic, the soviets should drop away like the scaffolding after a building is finished.”¹⁸⁰

The USFI makes all these mistakes because it fails to understand that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a transitional stage. In this stage, the old barbarous method of class society, class and revolutionary oppression combined with the goals of human liberation. In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat is forced to use barbarous, coercive methods, repressing those sectors of society which politically and socially represent the counter-revolution, to open the way for a humane, socialist society without coercion or repression.

The authors of the resolution have understood neither Trotsky nor Marxism in general. Trotsky showed that a future socialist or communist regime with unfettered freedom for everyone is something completely different from a “transitional system”. “The dictatorship reflects the past barbarism and not the future culture. It necessarily lays down severe limitations upon all forms of activity, including spiritual creation. The program of the revolution from the very beginning regarded these limitations as a temporary evil, and assumed the obligation, in proportion as the new regime was consolidated, to remove one after the other all restrictions upon freedom.”

The dictatorship of the proletariat, this barbarous regime, cannot give “unfettered political freedom” from the start as the USFI would like. Quite the contrary, it must impose “severe limitations upon all forms of activity” to gradually remove “all restrictions upon freedom”.¹⁸¹

179 Stalin, Josef quoted by Trotsky, Leon, in *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., p 63.

180 Trotsky, Leon: *The Revolution Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 63-64.

181 Ibid, p. 180.

2. A summary of our differences

It is not strange, therefore, that this methodology so alien to Marxism displayed by the USFI majority in its document should be the basis of a systematic revision of Trotskyism.

To leave no room for doubt about this assertion, and at the same time clarify the position for all militants and sympathisers, it is necessary to finish this work by summarising and enumerating the almost complete disagreements we hold with the comrades of the USFI. As this document has tried to show, the principles on which we disagree are the following.

1. The first and most important difference is over nothing less than the method of the transitional program. The characteristic feature of this method is its systematic combination of different tasks in response to concrete situations which arise in the class struggle both on a national and an international scale. This is why the transitional program never raises an isolated demand, task or method but rather a dynamic, changing combination. It is a system of tasks modified by the concrete situation, the incarnation of the law of uneven and combined development: a dynamic, systematic program that moves at the same pace as reality.

Thus, the transitional program, theory of permanent revolution and the law of uneven and combined development are all attacked from two fronts. The first is that of the opportunist bureaucrats who will only fight on minimal or democratic demands, applying pressure. The second is the ultra-leftist method of making only maximum demands, and abandoning all others to chance: always concentrating on the most extreme methods — general strike, guerrillas, etc.

Just as there have never been two identical situations in history, neither can there be two identical transitional programs for two different stages or countries. The unity of the program is given by the objective of developing a permanent mobilisation of workers; the conquest of power by the proletariat, led by Trotskyist parties through a workers' revolution; and the development of the national and international socialist revolution. Apart from these historic objectives of theory of permanent revolution, programs change from one country to another and from one moment to another in the class struggle. The USFI document, with its fixed and identical program for all countries in the world — “unfettered political freedom” for counter-revolutionary parties —, negates the method of the Transitional Program, just as, the Stalinist one-party conception negates it.

A true Trotskyist will never cling to a single absolute demand because we have the method of the Transitional Program which forces us to modify, systematize, mediate and relativise slogans according to the concrete circumstances at every stage of the class struggle. If we should say — along with the US — that from the very first days of the dictatorship of the proletariat, if there is no civil war, we will give the broadest freedoms to counter-revolutionary parties, then we are replacing the Transitional Program with a maximum program of democratic freedom, without knowing whether it will be relevant to the different stages of the class struggle. Thus, demands become absolute and permanent instead of “episodic and incidental”, tailored to the needs of the class struggle, and the defence of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

2. This attack on the method of the Transitional Program forces the USFI majority — whether or not they admit it — to question theory of permanent revolution. The USFI is not only destroying the method of the Transitional Program when they impose exactly the same program in every country in the world — the multiparty system, absolute freedom for counter-revolutionary parties, and the application of an ultra-liberal, inviolable penal code when counter-revolutionaries instigate civil war— they are also negating the most important concept of theory of permanent revolution, which asserts that the permanent mobilisation of workers should not be subject to, or constrained by any programmatic, constitutional or penal norms, nor any fixed, immovable or absolute institutions. Theory of Marx and Trotsky is the complete opposite of this: the permanent mobilisation of workers does not stop before any norms or institutions; on the contrary, it blows them into smithereens.

3. Two other extremely serious revisions rise out of this substantial modification of theory of permanent revolution.

The first is the abandonment of the international socialist revolution against imperialism, and of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale as the only valid premise on which to build socialism. It will exist on a global scale, or not at all. The resolution focuses on national revolution and the building of socialism in the struggle against national capitalism, imposing and developing proletarian dictatorships which build socialism inside national boundaries. Nothing illustrates better this fall into the Stalinist theory of “socialism in one country” than the absence from the vocabulary of the resolution of such indispensable Trotskyist concepts as “imperialism”, “international socialist revolution”, “imperialist counter-revolution”, “worldwide dictatorship of the proletariat”, “liquidation of all national borders as the indispensable pre-requisite for socialism”.

4. The second revision is the underestimation, the failure to recognise the decisive role of the Fourth International, before and after the conquest of power in the process of carrying out the international socialist revolution against imperialism.

The role of our International and all the Trotskyist or Trotskyist-like parties, which, in a relentless struggle against the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties, may achieve the establishment of revolutionary dictatorships of the proletariat, is indispensable. In the resolution, it is replaced by soviets and mysterious soviet parties which take power and develop the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is a revision of Lenin’s theory — enriched and complemented by Trotsky — which asserts that the only organism which can lead a social revolution in the capitalist countries, and a political revolution in the workers’ states, which will culminate in a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is a Bolshevik party. The Fourth International is, therefore, the only organisation that can lead the international socialist revolution against imperialism.

5: There is no indication that the central axis of Trotskyist politics is the systematic struggle against imperialism, given that socialism can only be built after its defeat. Imperialism does not exist for the resolution: not on a political level, not as counter-revolution, not as democracy, economy, or in any way whatsoever.

6. In its failure to comprehend that after it takes power, the proletariat must take up the struggle against imperialism and that in fact the class struggle intensifies; the USFI falls back on theory of socialism in one country. Because of this, the resolution does not define the two stages of the dictatorship of the proletariat: the first being that of socialist revolution on a world scale, the defeat of imperialism, and reinforcement of workers’ government; the second stage being the building of socialism, and the progressive weakening of the dictatorship once imperialism has been defeated. Neither is there any indication that the first stage of the development of the socialist revolution is combined with the task of building socialism. The USFI reduces everything into the task of building socialism in one country, thus neglecting the international socialist revolution.

7. The USFI ignores the mortal confrontation with imperialism, offering a perspective for peaceful revolutionary development over the next decades. This is completely counterposed to the perspective of a period of “wars, revolutions, crises” predicted by revolutionary Marxism.

8. There is no orientation for Trotskyism to fulfil one of its most important political obligations: to be in the vanguard of the armed struggle which must challenge imperialist counter-revolution, both before and after the seizure of power. Hence the abandonment of the Red Terror.

There is a complete revision of the Leninist-Trotskyist concept of the armed insurrection of the proletariat, which should be prepared and led by a Bolshevik party, as the only way to achieve the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead of armed insurrection, we are presented with an abstract and peaceful socialist revolution, devoid of armed struggle before and during the conquest of power, led by soviets with unspecified leaders which take over the government thanks to the demonstration and exposition of the wonders of the most absolute workers’ democracy.

9. In their eagerness to defend peaceful means, the USFI has produced what is probably the first Marxist document devoted to the dictatorship of the proletariat and civil war, which does not use the dictatorships of Cromwell and Robespierre as analogies. On the contrary, without mentioning them by name, they use the authors of the bourgeois treatises on penal law as examples of the maximum expression of proletarian politics in times of civil war. As a consequence, the USFI would restrict the judgement of those counter-revolutionaries, who take up arms against workers' power and participate in civil war, to an extremely liberal penal code in which the concepts of "retroactive delinquency" and "collective responsibility of social groups, families, etc." are eliminated. This would replace the coercive revolutionary Marxist policy, which judges based on political and social criteria and gives a free rein to the initiative of the masses.

10. The resolution opposes the Leninist-Trotskyist definition of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat as a dictatorship based on force and that confronts the counter-revolution in open war. It replaces this conception with the defence of "unfettered political freedom" for counter-revolutionaries.

11. The Leninist-Trotskyist conception of soviets and dictatorship as organisations for militants and revolutionaries, and the industrial proletariat, is modified to redefine them as organs of the state, open to the whole population including counter-revolutionary sectors.

12. There has been a complete abandonment of the propaganda for the defence of the existing workers' states and dictatorships as being infinitely more progressive than bourgeois democracy. It is also a capitulation to bourgeois-democratic public opinion which affirms that the "proletarian democracy" of Mao's China was the same as that which existed under Chiang Kai-shek. The same goes for Vietnam: workers' democracy under French and Yankee occupation was the same as that which exists at present under a proletarian dictatorship. As if this were not enough, we are told that there are more "democratic freedoms" in imperialist countries than in the deformed and degenerated workers' states.

13. The Trotskyist program for political revolution in the USSR and the bureaucratised workers' states which defends the multiparty system only for soviet parties — that is, parties which a soviet majority has agreed to legalise — has been replaced by a defence of absolute freedom and political legality for all parties, whether or not they are counter-revolutionary.

14. As a further result of ignoring imperialism, the resolution completely omits the Leninist definition of bourgeois democracy as imperialist democracy and takes up the ultra-leftist definition of bourgeois democracy in general. This category confuses or equates the democracy of imperialist countries with that of the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

15. There is an abandonment of the characteristic Trotskyist combination of worker and bourgeois-democratic demands and institutions for mobilisation and proletarian revolution in the struggle against imperialist counter-revolution in the period prior to the seizure of power. Instead of this, there is an ultra-leftist position of exclusive defence of workers' demands and institutions.

16. The traditional Marxist definition of political parties as representing classes or class sectors is replaced by a demographic and rationalist type of definition.

17. The resolution discards the International Communist and Trotskyist theory which asserts that there are essentially two types of workers' parties: on the one hand, the reformist and opportunist parties which represent bureaucratic and privileged sectors of the labour movement, and act directly or indirectly as agents of imperialism and, on the other hand, Trotskyist parties, the only authentically revolutionary internationalist workers' parties. In its place, there is an indistinguishable and motley display of workers' parties. The failure to define with precision the two political poles of the workers' movement makes it impossible to categorize correctly ultra-leftist and centrist organisations; to discover which of them are progressive and orienting towards Trotskyism, which of them are retrogressive and pointing towards the counter-revolutionary camp.

18. The resolution thus disguises the sinister counter-revolutionary role played by the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties, both in the present and in the first stages of the revolutionary

dictatorship of the proletariat. As a consequence, there is no attempt to prepare our parties for the open battle on every terrain which must be waged against the counter-revolutionary bureaucracies. This is absolutely critical since this inevitable struggle will be fought at the heart of the workers' movement, and is the most important event for which we must prepare.

19. The dialectical method goes overboard. Instead of relativising the means and the ends of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, and the development of the international socialist revolution against imperialism, the resolution preaches a gospel of absolute norms and institutions. This shows a complete disdain for the fundamental laws of Marxist dialectics regarding the contradictory relationship between means and ends, necessity and freedom, the whole and its parts, form and content. Instead of this, we are presented with a formal method through which everything results from the development of the most absolute rights and freedoms for everybody, without reference to the means and the end of proletarian dictatorship.

20. The resolution covertly criticises the politics of Lenin and Trotsky when they were in power since they did the opposite of what the resolution prescribes as obligatory for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

21. The resolution rejects Trotsky's politics concerning the USSR up until 1934. The crux of this political position was the unconditional defence of the monopoly of state power by the Communist Party, the one-party system and the banning of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries. The resolution opposes this historic position of Trotsky's and Trotskyism and advocates at all times a multiparty system under the dictatorship of the proletariat, with the one exception of civil war which must be regulated by the application of an ultra-liberal and strict penal code.

3. The seven essential characteristics of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat

The effect of the formal, juridical type of concept which characterises theses is that the content, the function of the dictatorship, is nowhere to be found. What do we want it for? Or, more precisely, why do we need it?

According to the USFI, permanent revolution and mobilisation will cease to be the supreme objectives after the taking of power. Thus, the authors of the resolution draw up a dictatorship of the proletariat without a precise and determinate political objective. For them, the objectives become the automatic implementation of a soviet type of absolute democracy, defensive measures to "prevent the re-establishment of private property", and the systematically reiterated objective of "building socialism". Not once does the USFI mention the continuing struggle for the international socialist revolution against imperialism.

We clearly define the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat as the organisation and control of the state by the working class, to further develop the national and international socialist revolution. This is the reason for what we want and need; to develop the permanent mobilisation of workers until the victory of the socialist revolution on a world scale.

Based on all we have said, we can briefly summarise the seven essential characteristics of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat; these stem from this goal and our critique:

1. The main task of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat under the leadership of a Trotskyist or Trotskyist-like party, in its first stage of confrontation with the imperialist counter-revolution, is to drive the world revolution against imperialism. This main task is combined with the subordinate task of establishing the basis for socialism by economic planning; accelerated development of the productive forces; and consumption by the masses through the soviets; workers' control, and/or any other forms of workers' and mass self-organisation, which can educate the masses about the management of the new society; the permanent mobilisation against imperialism and the influence of the exploiters.

2. The roots of this self-organisation are found in the productive, economic structure; its axis will be the largest and most modern factories and the industrial proletariat, with no popular or territorial features in its basic organisation.

3. The dictatorship is not all the proletariat, nor of all the working masses but rather of the majority of the proletariat and toilers who have mobilised for the revolution and the revolutionary soviets.

4. There will be the most severe class discipline: those who do not fulfil their duties and obligations, even if they are workers, will be forced to carry out the decisions of workers' power.

5. The dictatorship is led by an internationalist, Marxist, revolutionary party that is committed to the objective of the world revolution. This means that it must be a Trotskyist or Trotskyist-like party.

6. The broadest democracy will exist only for the industrial proletariat and revolutionary workers, i.e., those who comply with and fight for the resolutions adopted by the revolutionary working class in power. Only these sectors have the absolute right, as individual workers or toilers to criticise any political resolution in any organ or meeting of the revolutionary workers' movement, without fear of coercion or repression. This individual right of any revolutionary worker or toiler is total and absolute. It will depend on the circumstances of the workers' dictatorship whether this individual right is transformed into the right of tendencies, or into a multiparty revolutionary or soviet system. The general, programmatic principle would tend towards the multiparty soviet system, with the revolutionary soviet deciding by majority vote which parties to recognise.

7. The previous six characteristics do not mean under any circumstances that always and at all times the opponents, bourgeois and workers, of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat will be repressed or coercive measures will be applied to them. The opposite is true: without setting precedents, nor as a "categorical imperative", the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat will be inclined to give the broadest freedoms of press, opinion, assembly, ideology, propaganda and politics allowed for by the conditions of the revolutionary struggle against world imperialism. This tendency must be emphasised for all sectors of the workers' movement and the toilers, even if objectively they are in the service of counter-revolutionary parties.

Bogota, July 1978