

Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today

*The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony
in the Liberation Movement
in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries
in the present Period*



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

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This book is dedicated to all those who devote their lives to the working class' liberation struggle and to the building of the revolutionary world party without which this liberation struggle can not win.

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Introduction

The following document is intended to provide an explanatory background to the *Theses on the United Front Tactic* which the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) recently adopted at an international leadership meeting.¹ We therefore suggest that when readers study these *Theses* they do so in conjunction with the present document.

The purpose of this document is both to summarize the main ideas of the Marxist united front tactic while explaining the development and modification of this tactic which we have elaborated in the *Theses*.

As we have stated in the preface to the earlier document, the theses we present there are based on similar ones put forth by the RCIT's predecessor organization – the *League for a Revolutionary Communist International* – which we adopted in January 1994. However, the class struggle and the political formations of the working class and the oppressed have seen important changes and developments in the last two decades. Furthermore, our experience has also shown that the theses adopted then, irrespective of their general correctness and principled character contained some weaknesses which needed to be corrected in order to apply the united front tactic in an authentically communistic way.

Consequently, the RCIT has substantially reworked the old theses so that the *Theses* and the present explanatory document can be characterized as new.

In the following chapters we will first briefly summarize the main characteristics of the united front tactic and elaborate the approach of the Marxist classics on this issue.² We will then outline important social developments in the working class and the popular masses as well as in their political formations in the past decades. We will then proceed to discuss how the united front tactic should be applied in light of a number of new developments (the rise of petty-bourgeois populist parties, the decline of the classic reformist parties, the role of national minorities and migrants in imperialist countries, etc.)

Finally, we note that when speaking about the revolutionary party, what is written applies equally to smaller pre-party formations, i.e., the state in which revolutionaries currently find themselves.

We wish to express our special thanks to comrade Gerard Stephens who performed the English-language editing for this book.

1 RCIT-Theses on United Front Tactic. *Theses on the Principles of the United Front Tactic and their Application under the Current Conditions of the Class Struggle*, Document of the International Executive Committee of the RCIT, 9 April 2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-united-front-tactic/>

2 A brief note on quotations from the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky: We have used the versions of their printed works which are in our possession. However, a number of their writings (in the case of Lenin, more or less all of them) can also be found on the website of the Marxist Internet Archive: www.marxists.org

I. Summary of the Nature of the United Front Tactic

The goal of the united front tactic is to assist communists in deepening their relations and influence among the working class and the oppressed. The Communist International summarized this goal at its Third World Congress in 1921 in the slogan "*Towards the Masses.*" In order to achieve this, communists must be able to work together as closely as possible with workers who, for now at least, do not share their opinions. This is in order to establish the greatest possible unity with all workers and oppressed in our common struggle against the ruling class and imperialism.

At the same time, communists must use this joint experience of fighting side by side with non-revolutionary workers and oppressed in order to raise political consciousness of the latter since – as the father of Russian Marxism, Georgi Plekhanov, so poignantly formulated – "*the sole purpose and the direct and sacred duty of the Socialists is the promotion of the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat.*" Using the own experiences of the workers and oppressed, communists must help them to better understand the failure and betrayal of their traditional leaders, and convince them of the superiority of the revolutionary party.

The principles of the united front tactic can be summarized in the military metaphor "*march separately, strike together.*" This means that revolutionaries join forces with other non-revolutionary organizations in order to organize practical, common actions for specific goals against a specific enemy. However, while doing so, communists retain their full political and organizational independence. In other words, the revolutionary organization disseminates its own propaganda and agitation, which may differ significantly from the respective points of views of the various forces with whom they are allied in the united front. Such propaganda and agitation may, under dire situations, even include important warnings about, or criticism or denunciations of these same allies, for example when the latter are about to betray the struggle for the jointly agreed-upon goals. In short, communists should use the united front tactic to achieve unity of action against a common enemy with other forces, while always maintaining their own political and organizational independence. For this reason, communists should not undertake the production of joint *propaganda* with non-revolutionary forces with whom they are allied in a united front. The only common publications which communists can contribute to must specifically be associated with the united front activities (e.g., strike committee bulletins, preparing leaflets to announce demonstrations, etc.), and these should only focus on agitating for the united front demands and objectives.

At the same time, unlimited freedom of propaganda for revolutionaries (as well as for all forces participating in the united front) must be agreed upon in

advance. As implied in what we wrote above, this freedom must include the right to criticize, if necessary, reformist and populist leaders participating in the common action.

The united front should be based on concrete and precise demands. Revolutionaries oppose self-indulgent political declarations or joint propaganda for long-term goals. The latter only serve to obscure the real purpose of the united front and can readily create the mistaken impression that revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries are in agreement about a common, long-range political agenda.

In general, as the first priority communists direct the united front tactic to mass organizations which have a base inside the working class; but they also approach groups with roots among other oppressed layers and classes (e.g., the peasantry, the urban poor, oppressed nations, migrants). Usually these are reformist (social democratic or Stalinist) or petty-bourgeois-populist forces (e.g., Castro-Chavista organizations in Latin America, various Islamist-populist organizations in the Middle East and Asia, petty-bourgeois nationalists of oppressed nations, etc.) which are at times objectively clashing with or confronting reactionary forces (e.g., ruling class, imperialist powers, racist or fascist forces). Naturally, the role of petty-bourgeois populist forces in the class struggle among oppressed classes and layers is much more important in the semi-colonial world than in the imperialist countries. (More on this issue below.)

Under exceptional circumstances the united front tactic can also be directed towards bourgeois forces in the semi-colonial world – e.g., when the latter is fighting against an imperialist invasion in a semi-colonial country.

In this context it is important to emphasize that the difference between a legitimate united front and an illegitimate popular front is not in itself the open participation of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces, but rather the political subordination by the proletariat to the platform of the bourgeoisie. In other words, an illegitimate popular front is a bloc between bourgeois forces and workers organizations in which the latter accept programs that restrict the workers within the limits set by private property and which protect the bourgeois state.

History has demonstrated numerous times that such a popular front is a death trap for the working class and the oppressed. It results in the official reformist or populist leaderships' defense of the capitalist social system and thereby only strengthens the bourgeoisie, not the working class. The political subordination of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie weakens the former and allows the ruling class or even fascist forces to crush the resistance of the working class and the oppressed. Spain in 1936, Chile in 1973, and Greece in 2015 are just a few examples of the devastating consequences of the popular front strategy for the proletariat.

The united front tactic should be applied in numerous fields and to all issues related to the class struggle. It should direct the work of revolutionaries with and inside trade unions, other mass organizations of the working class and the

oppressed, as well as towards parties (including “entry work” within such parties). It is a crucial tactic in the daily struggle for economic demands, for democratic demands, against imperialist or national oppressions, etc. These various issues give rise to the different forms of the united front (workers’ united fronts, democratic or anti-imperialist united fronts). However, all these forms are basically subject to the same principles of the general united front tactic.

The united front tactic can, under specific circumstances, also be extended to the electoral field. Communists should utilize election periods – which usually are periods of heightened political interest among the popular masses – in order to address those class-conscious workers and oppressed who still have illusions in reformist workers’ parties or populist parties. In contrast to the claims of sectarians, these sectors of the working class are usually much larger than the numbers of the workers and oppressed who have already overcome such illusions and have moved on to a higher, more left-wing class consciousness. When revolutionaries are too weak to put forth candidates of their own, they should deploy the Leninist tactic of critical electoral support for reformist workers’ parties (usually these are social democratic or Stalinist parties). Revolutionaries can even legitimately apply critical electoral support to petty-bourgeois populist parties with a strong base among militant workers and oppressed when social democratic or Stalinist parties do not exist at all, they merely constitute a numerically insignificant phenomena, or where they have already been thoroughly bourgeoisified.

Naturally, there are important exceptions or limitations to the application of critical electoral support. As we stated in the Theses: *“In situations, when a bourgeois workers party (usually as a governmental party) acts as whip or executioner of serious attacks on the working class – austerity programs, imperialist wars, racist hatred, attack on democratic rights, etc. – it is necessary that revolutionaries do not call for electoral support for such a party in order to help the vanguard workers to break with it.”*

The united front tactic was also extended by Lenin and Trotsky to the adoption of slogans about the government to be called for. Where large sectors of class-conscious workers and militant oppressed layers still have illusions in the *“parties of petty bourgeois democracy”* (Trotsky) – i.e., social democrats, Stalinists, petty-bourgeois populists – communists should call on them to break with the bourgeoisie and respectively struggle for *“a workers’ and peasants’ government”* (in a semi-colonial country) or a workers’ government (in most imperialist countries). Furthermore, the adopted slogans should demand that such governments take decisive actions to expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie, to nationalize the key sectors of the economy under workers’ control, to expropriate the big landowners and give the land to the poor peasants, etc. Such a government is an authentic workers’ government allied with poor peasants and the urban poor if it is based on workers’ and popular councils and militias and if it implements a program that opens the road to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Otherwise, it is merely a reformist, and in the final

analysis, bourgeois “workers’ and peasants” government which will invariably constitute an objective obstacle for the working class struggle, and which will ultimately defend the capitalist system.

Finally, under certain circumstances revolutionaries will also have to apply the united front tactic to the field of party building. Naturally, the central goal of communists is the construction of a *World Party of Socialist Revolution* with national sections in each country. However, in light of the numerical weakness of revolutionaries, and given the fact that in many countries even bourgeois workers’ parties do not exist (and in those countries where they do exist they are often thoroughly bourgeoisified), revolutionaries have to apply the united front tactic in the way that they call upon the trade unions and other mass organizations of the working class to build a *New Workers Party (or Labor Party)*. Such parties would, in the beginning, involve not only revolutionary workers and oppressed but also many non-revolutionaries. In fact, revolutionaries would most likely constitute only a small minority of the party when first founded. However, they would openly argue for their program, i.e., a revolutionary and not a reformist program. But they would not necessarily leave such a new workers’ party if they fail to win a majority of the members for their point of view, but would continue to fight for a revolutionary program from within.

II. The United Front Tactic in the History of the Revolutionary Workers Movement

These principles of the united front tactic have been born out and tested in the class struggle and have been part of the arsenal of Marxism from the very start, when Marx and Engels first developed them shortly before the 1848 revolution. On the basis of their experience and that subsequently gained by the Bolsheviks, the Communist International codified these lessons in the early 1920s. After its degeneration by the Stalinist bureaucracy, Trotsky and the forces of the future Fourth International further developed this tactic based on the rich lessons of intense class struggles during the 1920s and 1930s.

Marx and Engels on the United Front

Friedrich Engels, first in his *Principles of Communism* and later together with Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, laid down the fundamental ideas of the united front tactic. In these documents they explained the necessity of undertaking joint actions with reformist workers' organizations, with radical petty-bourgeois groups and, in situations in which the bourgeoisie has still not become the ruling class, even with the latter.

"The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement. In France, the Communists ally with the Social-Democrats against the conservative and radical bourgeoisie, reserving, however, the right to take up a critical position in regard to phases and illusions traditionally handed down from the great Revolution. In Switzerland, they support the Radicals, without losing sight of the fact that this party consists of antagonistic elements, partly of Democratic Socialists, in the French sense, partly of radical bourgeois. In Poland, they support the party that insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation, that party which fomented the insurrection of Cracow in 1846. In Germany, they fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie. But they never cease, for a single instant, to instill into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in order that the German workers may straightway use, as so many weapons against the bourgeoisie, the social and political conditions that the bourgeoisie must necessarily introduce along with its supremacy, and in order that, after the fall of the reactionary classes in Germany, the fight against the bourgeoisie itself may immediately begin. (...) In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. In all these movements, they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time. Finally, they labour everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries. The Communists

*disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions."*³

These tactical guidelines were also put into action by Marx and Engels and their supporters. In Cologne and other German cities, the members of the *Communist League* led by Marx and Engels collaborated with radical democrats while advancing the communist program.⁴

Elaborating the lessons of the revolutionary struggles and their defeats in the 1848-49 revolution in Europe, Marx and Engels warned communists to take care not to blur their slogans with those of the petty-bourgeois democrats, since the betrayal of the later was inevitable. In their famous "*Address of the Central Authority to the League*" of March 1850, the founders of the communist movement emphasized the necessity of organizational and political independence, while at the same time being prepared for joint action with such petty-bourgeois forces.

"Consequently, while the democratic party, the party of the petty bourgeoisie, organised itself more and more in Germany, the workers' party lost its only firm foothold, remained organised at the most in separate localities for local purposes and in the general movement thus came completely under the domination and leadership of the petty-bourgeois democrats. An end must be put to this state of affairs, the independence of the workers must be restored. (...) The relation of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty-bourgeois democrats is this: it marches together with them against the faction which it aims at overthrowing, it opposes them in everything by which they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests. (...) The petty-bourgeois democratic party in Germany is very powerful; it comprises not only the great majority of the burgher inhabitants of the towns, the small people in industry and trade and the master craftsmen; it numbers among its followers also the peasants and the rural proletariat, insofar as the latter has not yet found a support in the independent urban proletariat. The relation of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty-bourgeois democrats is this: it marches together with them against the faction which it aims at overthrowing, it opposes them in

3 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in: MECW Vol. 6, pp. 518-519; see also Friedrich Engels: *Principles of Communism*, in: MECW Vol. 6, pp. 356-357. As a side note we want to point out that the English translation of this quotation is misleading regarding one issue. At the end of the first paragraph is stated that communists fight "*against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie.*" However, in the German original Marx and Engels do not use the phrase "*petty bourgeoisie*" (*Kleinbürgertum*) but rather use the words "*Kleinbürgerei*" which means petty bourgeois ideologies and attitudes. Obviously, the wrong translation changes the significance. While Marx and Engels proclaimed the struggle against the monarchy, the feudal class and petty bourgeois ideologies, the English translation gives the wrong impression that they also intended to fight against the petty-bourgeoisie as a class.

4 See on this, among many other sources, Friedrich Engels: *On the History of the Communist League* (1885), in MECW Vol. 26, p. 325; David Riazanov: *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. An Introduction to Their Lives and Work* (1922), chapter 5; see also the excellent study by August H. Nimtz: *Marx and Engels: Their contribution to the democratic breakthrough*, Albany, New York 2000, (chapter 3 and 4); Otto Rühle: *Karl Marx. Leben und Werk*, Avalun-Verlag, Hellerau 1928, pp. 182-188; August Nimtz: *Marx and Engels – The Unsung Heroes of the Democratic Breakthrough*, in: *Science & Society*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 203-231

*everything by which they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests. (...) At the present moment, when the democratic petty bourgeois are everywhere oppressed, they preach in general unity and reconciliation to the proletariat, they offer it their hand and strive for the establishment of a large opposition party which will embrace all shades of opinion in the democratic party, that is, they strive to entangle the workers in a party organisation in which general social-democratic phrases predominate, and serve to conceal their special interests, and in which the definite demands of the proletariat must not be brought forward for the sake of beloved peace. Such a union would turn out solely to their advantage and altogether to the disadvantage of the proletariat. The proletariat would lose its whole independent, laboriously achieved position and once more be reduced to an appendage of official bourgeois democracy. This union must, therefore, be most decisively rejected. Instead of once again stooping to serve as the applauding chorus of the bourgeois democrats, the workers, and above all the League, must exert themselves to establish an independent secret and public organisation of the workers' party alongside the official democrats and make each community the central point and nucleus of workers' associations in which the attitude and interests of the proletariat will be discussed independently of bourgeois influences. (...) In the case of a struggle against a common adversary no special union is required. As soon as such an adversary has to be fought directly, the interests of both parties, for the moment, coincide, and, as previously so also in the future, this alliance, calculated to last only for the moment, will come about of itself."*⁵

Marx and Engels would later apply the united front tactic to many other situations, including when they founded the First International in 1864. David Riazanov, a Russian Marxist and the best expert of Marx and Engels during his time before his arrest and execution by Stalin in 1938, describes in his book on the history of the political life of Marx and Engels how they had to carefully fight against the politics of the French Proudhonists, the English trade unionists, the anarchist supporters of Bakunin and others. At the same time they tried to avoid premature splits and win over the rank and file supporters of their opponents.

⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Address of the Central Authority to the League, March 1850, in: MECW Vol. 10, p. 277 respectively pp. 279-280 and pp. 281-282

Application of the United Front Tactic by Lenin and the Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks later applied the same tactic in the struggle against Tsarism. They concluded numerous practical agreements (concerning demonstrations, strikes, armed resistance, practical issues of underground work, etc.) with other organizations of the workers, peasants – like the Mensheviks, the Jewish Bund, the *Socialist-Revolutionaries* [S.R.], the Trudoviki, the S.R. Maximalists, various nationalists, etc. – and students and even bourgeois liberals in the struggle against the Tsarist autocracy. This tactic included not only practical collaboration but also, at times, even the creation of a formal joint party with the Mensheviks. Under the pressure of the workers' vanguard, the Bolsheviks were even prepared to formally unite with the Mensheviks between 1905 and 1912, even though they continued to wage a difficult factional struggle against them, and in reality most of the time acted as an independent force. The Bolsheviks also repeatedly concluded practical agreements with petty-bourgeois democratic peasant forces (the Trudoviki and the S.R.) and, at the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1905, Lenin even tried to collaborate with the Russian Orthodox priest Georgy Gapon. The Bolsheviks also conducted tactical agreements with the Trudoviki and the S.R.'s in the Duma elections of 1907 and 1912.⁶

During the revolutionary process between February and October 1917, the Bolsheviks applied the united front tactic and demanded from the largest reformist parties representing the workers and peasants at the time – the Mensheviks and the S.R.'s – to break with the bourgeoisie and take power into their own hands. After the Bolsheviks successfully took power in October, they formed a coalition with the left-wing of the S.R.'s. During all these periods in which they applied the united front tactic, despite these combined practical activities, the Bolsheviks retained their independent propaganda and sharply criticized the other organizations participating in the front.

In his book *'Left-Wing' Communism – An Infantile Disorder* written in 1920, Lenin explained that the Russian revolutionaries had to apply the united front tactic many times and under various conditions:

“After all, the German Lefts cannot but know that the entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is full of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties!

⁶ On this, see the relevant resolutions of the party conference from July 1907 and January 1912 respectively in: Robert H. McNeal and Richard Gregor: *Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Vol.2, The Early Soviet Period: 1917-1929*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1974, pp.116-117 and 150-153. See also, e.g., the two excellent volumes by the Marxist historian August Nimtz: *Lenin's Electoral Strategy from Marx and Engels through the Revolution of 1905. The Ballot, the Streets – or Both* as well as *Lenin's Electoral Strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917*. Both have been published by Palgrave Macmillan US in 2014. See also Aleksei E. Badayev: *The Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma*, Co-operative Pub. Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R, Moscow

(...) Prior to the downfall of tsarism, the Russian revolutionary Social-Democrats made repeated use of the services of the bourgeois liberals, i.e., they concluded numerous practical compromises with the latter. In 1901-02, even prior to the appearance of Bolshevism, the old editorial board of *Iskra* (consisting of Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Martov, Potresov and myself) concluded (not for long, it is true) a formal political alliance with Struve, the political leader of bourgeois liberalism, while at the same time being able to wage an unremitting and most merciless ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and against the slightest manifestations of its influence in the working-class movement. The Bolsheviks have always adhered to this policy. Since 1905 they have systematically advocated an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, against the liberal bourgeoisie and tsarism, never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or during second ballots) and never ceasing their relentless ideological and political struggle against the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the bourgeois-revolutionary peasant party, exposing them as petty-bourgeois democrats who have falsely described themselves as socialists. During the Duma elections of 1907, the Bolsheviks entered briefly into a formal political bloc with the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Between 1903 and 1912, there were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the Mensheviks in a single Social-Democratic Party, but we never stopped our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and vehicles of bourgeois influence on the proletariat. During the war, we concluded certain compromises with the Kautskyites, with the Left Mensheviks (Martov), and with a section of the Socialist-Revolutionaries (Chernov and Natanson); we were together with them at Zimmerwald and Kienthal, and issued joint manifestos. However, we never ceased and never relaxed our ideological and political struggle against the Kautskyites, Martov and Chernov (when Natanson died in 1919, a "Revolutionary-Communist" Narodnik, he was very close to and almost in agreement with us). At the very moment of the October Revolution, we entered into an informal but very important (and very successful) political bloc with the petty-bourgeois peasantry by adopting the Socialist-Revolutionary agrarian programme in its entirety, without a single alteration—i.e., we effected an undeniable compromise in order to prove to the peasants that we wanted, not to "steam-roller" them but to reach agreement with them. At the same time we proposed (and soon after effected) a formal political bloc, including participation in the government, with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who dissolved this bloc after the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and then, in July 1918, went to the length of armed rebellion, and subsequently of an armed struggle, against us." ⁷

As is well known, the Bolsheviks were strengthened by these various applications of the united front tactic. However, these temporary alliances and maneuvers did not at all diminish their ideological and political struggle. Only the

7 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism - An Infantile Disorder, in: Lenin Collected Works (LCW), Vol. 31, pp. 70-72. The Fourth Edition of the *Lenin Collected Works* was published by Progress Publishers, Moscow (1977-1980).

combination of these two elements – organizational and political independence on the one hand, together with joint actions on the other – allowed the Bolsheviks to grow and strengthen themselves as a party.

Codification of the United Front Tactic by the Communist International

The Communist International (Comintern), founded at the initiative of the Bolsheviks in March 1919, attempted to generalize the lessons of the past, that of the Russian revolutionaries having naturally played a particularly significant role. This was not an easy task, and Lenin and Trotsky faced enormous obstacles in their attempts to win the Comintern to their points of view. On the one hand, they had to contend with remnants of the opportunistic past of social democracy, while on the other they were faced with various shades of ultra-left adventurism based on the inexperience of many earlier communist parties.

However, eventually Lenin and Trotsky succeeded to win the Comintern over to the principles of the united front tactic, and the Third (1921) and Fourth congresses (1922) codified them. The following extensive passage summarizes the lessons which were agreed upon by the Comintern in its Fourth Congress:

“There is consequently an obvious need for the united front tactic. The slogan of the Third Congress, “To the masses”, is now more relevant than ever. The struggle to establish a proletarian united front in a whole series of countries is only just beginning. (...) The Communist International requires that all Communist Parties and groups adhere strictly to the united front tactic, because in the present period it is the only way of guiding Communists in the right direction, towards winning the majority of workers. At present the reformists need a split, while the Communists are interested in uniting all the forces of the working class against capital. Using the united front tactic means that the Communist vanguard is at the forefront of the day to day struggle of the broad masses for their most vital interests. For the sake of this struggle Communists are even prepared to negotiate with the scab leaders of the social democrats and the Amsterdam International. Any attempt by the Second International to interpret the united front as an organisational fusion of all the ‘workers’ parties’ must of course be categorically repudiated. (...)

The existence of independent Communist Parties and their complete freedom of action in relation to the bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary social democracy is the most important historical achievement of the proletariat, and one which the Communists will in no circumstances renounce. Only the Communist Parties stand for the overall interests of the whole proletariat. In the same way the united front tactic has nothing to do with the so-called ‘electoral combinations’ of leaders in pursuit of one or another parliamentary aim. The united front tactic is simply an initiative whereby the Communists propose to join with all workers belonging to other parties and groups and all unaligned workers in a common struggle to defend the immediate, basic interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie. Every action, for even the most trivial everyday

demand, can lead to revolutionary awareness and revolutionary education; it is the experience of struggle that will convince workers of the inevitability of revolution and the historic importance of Communism. It is particularly important when using the united front tactic to achieve not just agitational but also organisational results. Every opportunity must be used to establish organisational footholds among the working masses themselves (factory committees, supervisory commissions made up of workers from all the different parties and unaligned workers, action committees, etc.). The main aim of the united front tactic is to unify the working masses through agitation and organisation. The real success of the united front tactic depends on a movement "from below", from the rank-and-file of the working masses. Nevertheless, there are circumstances in which Communists must not refuse to have talks with the leaders of the hostile workers' parties, providing the masses are always kept fully informed of the course of these talks. During negotiations with these leaders the independence of the Communist Party and its agitation must not be circumscribed." ⁸

The Comintern required its sections to follow the same principles in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, while adapting there to a different set of concrete circumstances. The same resolution stated:

"In the colonial and semi-colonial countries the Comintern has a dual task: (1) to create a core of communist parties which represent the interests of the proletariat as a whole, and (2) to support to the utmost the national revolutionary movement which is directed against imperialism, to become the vanguard of this movement, and to emphasize and expand the social movement within the national movement." ⁹

The Comintern went into more detail on the anti-imperialist united front in a special resolution which was discussed and adopted at the same congress. This resolution explained the importance for revolutionaries to join the struggle for democratic tasks, for national independence, against imperialist domination, etc.

"The chief task which is common to all national revolutionary movements is to bring about national unity and achieve political independence. The real and logically consistent solution of this question depends on the extent to which such a national movement is able to break with the reactionary feudal elements and to win over the broad working masses to its cause, and in its programme to give expression to the social demands of these masses. Taking full cognizance of the fact that those who represent the national will to state independence may, because of the variety of historical circumstances, be themselves of the most varied kind, the Communist International supports every national revolutionary movement against imperialism. At the same time it does not forget that only a consistent revolutionary policy, designed to draw the broadest masses into active struggle, and a complete break with all adherents of reconciliation with imperialism for the sake of their own class domination, can lead the oppressed masses to

8 Communist International: Theses on Comintern Tactics, adopted on 5th December 1922 at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International; in: *The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Selected and Edited by Jane Degras, Volume 1 1919-1922*, pp. 424-425

9 Communist International: Theses on Comintern Tactics (1922), p. 424

victory.”¹⁰

At the same time the resolution emphasized the necessity for communists to keep their organizational and programmatic independence given the vacillating character of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders of the anti-imperialist struggles.

*“The expediency of this slogan follows from the prospect of a prolonged and protracted struggle with world imperialism which demands the mobilization of all revolutionary elements. This mobilization is the more necessary as the indigenous ruling classes are inclined to effect compromises with foreign capital directed against the vital interests of the masses of the people. And just as in the West the slogan of the proletarian united front has helped and is still helping to expose social-democratic betrayal of proletarian interests, so the slogan of the anti-imperialist united front will help to expose the vacillation of various bourgeois-nationalist groups. This slogan will also promote the development of the revolutionary will and the clarification of the class consciousness of the working masses and put them in the front ranks of those who are fighting not only against imperialism, but also against the survivals of feudalism.”*¹¹

The communists put these principles into practice in numerous ways. One of the first applications was an initiative of German metalworkers in the Stuttgart local of the trade union federation ADGB in December 1920. Here the Communist Party (KPD) had important influence and they got the local to adopt a resolution calling on the leadership of their union, and of all unions, to launch a joint struggle for immediate demands to improve workers' conditions. (Reduction of food prices; increase of unemployment benefits; reduction of taxes paid by workers and an increase in taxes on great private fortunes; establishment of workers' control of supply and distribution of raw materials and foodstuffs; disarmament of reactionary gangs and arming of the workers.)

While the trade union leadership first ignored this campaign, it soon received support from many other union locals. As a result the KPD leadership, mainly Paul Levi and Karl Radek, drafted an *Open Letter* which was based was an extended version of the Stuttgart initiative. This letter was directed both at the reformist workers parties (SPD, USPD; and also the small ultra-left KAPD) as well as to all trade unions. While the labor bureaucracy did not agree to joint actions with the communists, this campaign increased the influence of the communists in the working class and in particularly in the trade unions.¹²

10 Communist International: Theses on the Eastern Question, 5 December 1922, Fourth Congress of the Communist International, in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922, pp. 385-386. Concerning the Marxist understanding of the anti-imperialist united front tactic we refer readers to chapter 12 and 13 of our book Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism. Vienna 2013, published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (The book can be downloaded for free at www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net.)

11 Communist International: Theses on the Eastern Question, p. 390

12 On this see Dirk Hemje-Oltmanns: Arbeiterbewegung und Einheitsfront. Zur Diskussion der Einheitsfronttaktik in der KPD 1920/21, Verlag für das Studium der Arbeiterbewegung GmbH,

The Comintern extended the united front tactic also to the field of governmental slogans and developed respective slogans for a “workers’ government” a “workers’ and peasants’ government.” The Comintern stated: “The parties of the Second International are trying to ‘save’ the situation in these countries by advocating and forming a coalition government of bourgeois and social-democratic parties. (...) To this open or concealed bourgeois-socialdemocratic coalition the communists oppose the united front of all workers and a coalition of all workers’ parties in the economic and the political field for the fight against the bourgeois power and its eventual overthrow. In the united struggle of all workers against the bourgeoisie the entire State apparatus must be taken over by the workers’ government, and thus the working class’s positions of power strengthened.”¹³

Lenin similarly explained the need for communists to deploy the united front tactic in election campaigns. Taking the example of Britain, where the Communist Party was small and the reformist Labour Party dominated the workers’ movement, Lenin advocated that the communists give critical electoral support to the reformists.

“The Communist Party should propose the following “compromise” election agreement to the Hendersons and Snowdens: let us jointly fight against the alliance between Lloyd George and the Conservatives; let us share parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of workers’ votes polled for the Labour Party and for the Communist Party (not in elections, but in a special ballot), and let us retain complete freedom of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Of course, without this latter condition, we cannot agree to a bloc, for that would be treachery; the British Communists must demand and get complete freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (for fifteen years – 1903-17) the Russian Bolsheviks demanded and got it in respect of the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, i.e., the Mensheviks. If the Hendersons and the Snowdens accept a bloc on these terms, we shall be the gainers, because the number of parliamentary seats is of no importance to us; we are not out for seats. We shall yield on this point (...). We shall be the gainers, because we shall carry our agitation among the masses at a time when Lloyd George himself has “incensed” them, and we shall not only be helping the Labour Party to establish its government sooner, but shall also be helping the masses sooner to understand the communist propaganda that we shall carry on against the Hendersons, without any reticence or omission.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with us on these terms, we shall gain still more, for we shall at once have shown the masses (...) that the Hendersons prefer their close relations with the capitalists to the unity of all the workers. (...). We shall gain immediately, because we shall have demonstrated to the masses that the Hendersons and the Snowdens are afraid to beat Lloyd George, afraid to assume power

Westberlin 1973; Arnold Reisberg: An den Quellen der Einheitsfrontpolitik, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1971, Vol. 1 and 2, John Riddell: The Comintern in 1922. The Periphery Pushes Back, in: Historical Materialism 22.3-4 (2014), pp. 52-103; Larry Peterson: German Communism, Workers’ Protest, and Labor Unions. The Politics of the United Front in Rhineland - Westphalia 1920-1924, Springer Science+Business Media, B.V. 1993

13 Communist International: Theses on Comintern Tactics (1922), pp. 425-426

alone, and are striving to secure the secret support of Lloyd George, who is openly extending a hand to the Conservatives, against the Labour Party. It should be noted that in Russia, after the revolution of February 27, 1917 (old style), the Bolsheviks' propaganda against the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries (i.e., the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens) derived benefit precisely from a circumstance of this kind. We said to the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries: assume full power without the bourgeoisie, because you have a majority in the Soviets (at the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets, in June 1917, the Bolsheviks had only 13 per cent of the votes). But the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens were afraid to assume power without the bourgeoisie, and when the bourgeoisie held up the elections to the Constituent Assembly, knowing full well that the elections would give a majority to the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks (who formed a close political bloc and in fact represented only petty-bourgeois democracy), the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks were unable energetically and consistently to oppose these delays. If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with the Communists, the latter will immediately gain by winning the sympathy of the masses and discrediting the Hendersons and Snowdens; if, as a result, we do lose a few parliamentary seats, it is a matter of no significance to us. We would put up our candidates in a very few but absolutely safe constituencies, namely, constituencies where our candidatures would not give any seats to the Liberals at the expense of the Labour candidates. We would take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets agitating for communism, and, in all constituencies where we have no candidates, we would urge the electors to vote for the Labour candidate and against the bourgeois candidate. (...)

At present, British Communists very often find it hard even to approach the masses, and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a Communist and call upon them to vote for Henderson and against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing. And I shall be able to explain in a popular manner, not only why the Soviets are better than a parliament and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (...), but also that, with my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man — that the impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany."¹⁴

Later, at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, Lenin also advocated the entry of the British Communist Party into the Labour Party in order to better influence the rank and file workers.

As Lenin explained, all these tactics had nothing in common with softness on reformism, but were an application of the urgent desire of communists to build closer ties with the still non-revolutionary masses as well as the urgent need to discredit the reformist leaders before their own supporters; this by demonstrating to them in practice that these leaders are unwilling and incapable of consistently fighting for the interests of the working class.

14 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism - An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, pp. 86-88

Similarly, the communists applied the anti-imperialist united front tactic in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. In China, they supported the struggle of Sun Yat-sen against the reactionary war lords who acted as agents of foreign imperialist powers. In autumn 1922 the communists, at the suggestion of Henk Sneevliet (a Dutchman who later joined the Fourth International for some time), even entered the Sun Yat-sen's party – the *Kuomintang*. This tactic offered the communists, who initially were only a small group of intellectual without roots among the working class, the possibility of overcoming their isolation and becoming a mass party. Unfortunately the Stalinists later transformed this successful tactic into an opportunistic capitulation to the Chiang Kai-shek, the new leader of the *Kuomintang* after Sun Yat-sen's death – instead of auspiciously splitting with this petty-bourgeois populist party when it became an obstacle for the class struggle. This resulted in the infamous massacre of tens of thousands communists in 1927 at the hands of Chiang Kai-shek's army.

Even earlier, Sneevliet has played a crucial role in building a revolutionary organization in Indonesia (a Dutch colony at that time) – the *Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging* (ISDV). This organization engaged in anti-imperialist activities and would later join an Islamist mass organization which was active against the colonial administration – the *Sarekat Islam* (Islamic Union). When the conservative leadership of the Islamist organization finally expelled the revolutionaries in 1921, the communists had already won over many workers and peasants. They would go on to found the first Asian section of the Comintern – *Perserikatan Komunis di Hindia* (PKH; Communist Union of the Indies).¹⁵

Likewise the Soviet Union supported the struggle of Turkey led by the bourgeois nationalist Kemal Pasha against British imperialism and its Greek allies.

Trotsky and the Fourth International on the United Front Tactic

Leon Trotsky, continuing the struggle for the revolutionary banner of the working class struggle after the Stalinist bureaucracy had taken power in 1924, upheld the Marxist method of the united front tactic as it had been developed by Lenin and the Comintern. In fact, he was – besides Lenin – the main advocate of the united front tactic when it was adopted by the Comintern at its Third Congress.

Against the Stalinists opportunist maneuvers with the British trade union bureaucracy in the mid-1920s Trotsky defended the fundamental principles of the united front tactic: *“The tactic of the united front still retains all its power as the most important method in the struggle for the masses. A basic principle of this tactic is: “With the masses – always; with the vacillating leaders – sometimes, but only so long as they stand at the head of the masses.” It is necessary to make use of vacillating leaders while the masses are pushing them ahead, without for a moment abandoning criticism*

¹⁵ For sources on these interesting developments in Indonesia and China see below in chapter V where we discuss this experience again.

*of these leaders. And it is necessary to break with them at the right time when they turn from vacillation to hostile action and betrayal. It is necessary to use the occasion of the break to expose the traitorous leaders and to contrast their position to that of the masses. It is precisely in this that the revolutionary essence of the united front policy consists. Without this, the struggle for the masses always threatens to turn into an opportunist kowtowing ..."*¹⁶

Later the Stalinists distorted the united front tactic and replaced it with their theory of "social fascism" according to which social democracy was only the "twin" of Hitler's fascism. Consequently, the Stalinists rejected any united front with the social democrats, a stance which helped the reformist leaders to justify their betrayal and which allowed them to support several right-wing Bonapartist governments along with taking no action against the rise of the NSDAP before 1933.

Trotsky similarly defended the application of the united front tactic in anti-imperialist and democratic struggles. For example he called for critical but unconditional support of Chiang Kai-shek's struggle against the Japanese invaders in the late 1920s and 1930s (despite the fact that the latter murdered tens of thousands of communists in 1927!): *"Quite so: as against imperialism it is obligatory to help even the hangmen of Chiang Kai-shek."*¹⁷

Trotsky strongly rejected the criticism of those Ultra-leftists who refused to join an anti-imperialist struggle under a bourgeois leadership on the grounds that this would constitute a form of popular-frontism. He called revolutionaries in 1937 to participate and support the military struggle against Japan under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek as long as they are not strong enough to replace him. He compared the necessary tactic for revolutionaries with those during a workers' strike under the leadership of treacherous reformist bureaucrats. It would be the duty of every class-conscious worker to join such a strike without giving any political support to the bureaucrats. Trotsky's attitude becomes clear from a document he wrote on the Chinese war against Japan in 1937 from which we shall quote extensively:

"But Chiang Kai-shek? We need have no illusions about Chiang Kai-shek, his party, or the whole ruling class of China, just as Marx and Engels had no illusions about the ruling classes of Ireland and Poland. Chiang Kai-shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants. But today he is forced, despite himself, to struggle against Japan for the remainder of the independence of China. Tomorrow he may again betray. It is possible. It is probable. It is even inevitable. But today he is struggling. Only cowards, scoundrels, or complete imbeciles can refuse to participate in that struggle.

Let us use the example of a strike to clarify the question. We do not support all strikes. If, for example, a strike is called for the exclusion of Negro, Chinese, or Japanese workers

16 Leon Trotsky: Resolution on the General Strike in Britain submitted to the Centrals Committee and Centrals Control Commission joint plenum, July 1926; in: Trotsky's Writings on Britain, Vol. 2, New Park Publications, London 1974, p. 191

17 Leon Trotsky: The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition (1929); in: Writings 1929, p. 262

from a factory, we are opposed to that strike. But if a strike aims at bettering — insofar as it can — the conditions of the workers, we are the first to participate in it, whatever the leadership. In the vast majority of strikes, the leaders are reformists, traitors by profession, agents of capital. They oppose every strike. But from time to time the pressure of the masses or of the objective situation forces them into the path of struggle.

Let us imagine, for an instant, a worker saying to himself: "I do not want to participate in the strike because the leaders are agents of capital." This doctrine of this ultraleft imbecile would serve to brand him by his real name: a strikebreaker. The case of the Sino-Japanese War, is from this point of view, entirely analogous. If Japan is an imperialist country and if China is the victim of imperialism, we favor China. Japanese patriotism is the hideous mask of worldwide robbery. Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive. To place the two on the same plane and to speak of "social patriotism" can be done only by those who have read nothing of Lenin, who have understood nothing of the attitude of the Bolsheviks during the imperialist war, and who can but compromise and prostitute the teachings of Marxism. (...) But Japan and China are not on the same historical plane. The victory of Japan will signify the enslavement of China, the end of her economic and social development, and the terrible strengthening of Japanese imperialism. The victory of China will signify, on the contrary, the social revolution in Japan and the free development, that is to say unhindered by external oppression, of the class struggle in China.

But can Chiang Kai-shek assure the victory? I do not believe so. It is he, however, who began the war and who today directs it. To be able to replace him it is necessary to gain decisive influence among the proletariat and in the army, and to do this it is necessary not to remain suspended in the air but to place oneself in the midst of the struggle. We must win influence and prestige in the military struggle against the foreign invasion and in the political struggle against the weaknesses, the deficiencies, and the internal betrayal. At a certain point, which we cannot fix in advance, this political opposition can and must be transformed into armed conflict, since the civil war, like war generally, is nothing more than the continuation of the political struggle. It is necessary, however, to know when and how to transform political opposition into armed insurrection.

During the Chinese revolution of 1925-27 we attacked the policies of the Comintern. Why? It is necessary to understand well the reasons. The Eiffelites claim that we have changed our attitude on the Chinese question. That is because the poor fellows have understood nothing of our attitude in 1925-27. We never denied that it was the duty of the Communist Party to participate in the war of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie of the South against the generals of the North, agents of foreign imperialism. We never denied the necessity of a military bloc between the CP and the Kuomintang. On the contrary, we were the first to propose it. We demanded, however, that the CP maintain its entire political and organizational independence, that is, that during the civil war against the internal agents of imperialism, as in the national war against foreign imperialism, the working class, while remaining in the front lines of the military struggle, prepare the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie. We hold the same policies in the present war. We have not changed our attitude one iota. The Oehlerites and the Eiffelites, on

the other hand, have not understood a single bit of our policies, neither those of 1925-27, nor those of today.

In my declaration to the bourgeois press at the beginning of the recent conflict between Tokyo and Nanking, I stressed above all the necessity of the active participation of revolutionary workers in the war against the imperialist oppressors. Why did I do it? Because first of all it is correct from the Marxist point of view; because, secondly, it was necessary from the point of view of the welfare of our friends in China. Tomorrow the GPU, which is in alliance with the Kuomintang (as with Negrin in Spain), will represent our Chinese friends as being "defeatists" and agents of Japan. The best of them, with Chen Tu-hsiu at the head, can be nationally and internationally compromised and killed. It was necessary to stress, energetically, that the Fourth International was on the side of China as against Japan. And I added at the same time: without abandoning either their program or their independence.

The Eiffelite imbeciles try to jest about this "reservation." "The Trotskyists," they say, "want to serve Chiang Kai-shek in action and the proletariat in words." To participate actively and consciously in the war does not mean "to serve Chiang Kai-shek" but to serve the independence of a colonial country in spite of Chiang Kai-shek. And the words directed against the Kuomintang are the means of educating the masses for the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek. In participating in the military struggle under the orders of Chiang Kai-shek, since unfortunately it is he who has the command in the war for independence—to prepare politically the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek . . . that is the only revolutionary policy. The Eiffelites counterpose the policy of "class struggle" to this "nationalist and social patriotic" policy. Lenin fought this abstract and sterile opposition all his life. To him, the interests of the world proletariat dictated the duty of aiding oppressed peoples in their national and patriotic struggle against imperialism. Those who have not yet understood that, almost a quarter of a century after the World War and twenty years after the October revolution, must be pitilessly rejected as the worst enemies on the inside by the revolutionary vanguard. This is exactly the case with Eiffel and his kind!"¹⁸

In the *Transitional Program*, the founding document of the Fourth International written in 1938, Trotsky once again attempted to generalize the experience of the Bolsheviks and show how important it is for communists to put forth demands at reformist and petty bourgeois mass parties of the workers and the oppressed in order to reach out to their rank and file.

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

18 Leo Trotzki: Über den chinesisch-japanischen Krieg (1937), in: Schriften 2.2, pp. 865-867; in English: Leon Trotsky: On the Sino-Japanese War (1937), <http://marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/10/sino.htm> (Emphasis in Original)

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

From April to September 1917, the Bolsheviks demanded that the S.R.s 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 S.R.s, as the petty bourgeois representatives of the worker and peasants, its revolutionary aid against the bourgeoisie categorically refusing, however, either to enter into the government of the Mensheviks and S.R.s or to carry political responsibility for it. If the Mensheviks and S.R.s had actually broke with the Cadets (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 favorable conditions the parties of petty bourgeois democracy (S.R.s, Social Democrats, Stalinists, Anarchists) are incapable of creating a government of workers and peasants, that is, a government independent of the bourgeoisie.

Nevertheless, the demand of the Bolsheviks, addressed to the Mensheviks and the S.R.s: "Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power into your own hands!" had for the masses tremendous educational significance. The obstinate unwillingness of the Mensheviks and S.R.s to take power, so dramatically exposed during the July Days, definitely doomed them before mass opinion and prepared the victory of the Bolsheviks.

The central task of the Fourth International consists in freeing the proletariat from the old leadership, whose conservatism is in complete contradiction to the catastrophic eruptions of disintegrating capitalism and represents the chief obstacle to historical progress. The chief accusation which the Fourth International advances against the traditional organizations of the proletariat is the fact that they do not wish to tear themselves away from the political semi-corpse of the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership: "Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!" is an extremely important weapon for exposing the treacherous character of the parties and organizations of the Second, Third and Amsterdam Internationals. 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 organizations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' and farmers' government. On this road we promise them full support against capitalist reaction. At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should in our opinion form the program of the "workers' and farmers' government."

Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers' organizations 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 the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.), the petty bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists, may go further than they 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.

However, there is no need to indulge in guesswork. The agitation around the slogan of a workers'-farmers' government preserves under all conditions a tremendous educational value. And not accidentally. This generalized slogan proceeds entirely along the line of the political development of our epoch (the bankruptcy and decomposition of the old bourgeois parties, the downfall of democracy, the growth of fascism, the accelerated drive of the workers toward more active and aggressive politics). Each of the transitional demands should, therefore, lead to one and the same political conclusion: the workers need to break with all traditional parties of the bourgeoisie in order, jointly with the farmers, to establish their own power."¹⁹

Thus we see the significance which Trotsky gave to the issue of the united front tactic as a tool to strengthen and unite the class struggle of the workers and oppressed, as well as to increase the influence of the revolutionary party among the working class and popular masses, and to undermine the hegemony of the "*parties of petty-bourgeois democracy.*" In addition, Trotsky considered the united front tactic as a crucial tool for revolutionaries not only in relation to bourgeois (Menshevik-type) workers' parties, but also towards petty-bourgeois populist (S.R.-type) forces which have a mass following among the non-proletarian oppressed classes and layers.

¹⁹ Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International: The Mobilization of the Masses around Transitional Demands to Prepare the Conquest of Power (The Transitional Program)*; in: *Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years (1933-40)*, New York 1973, pp. 201-203

III. The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony under Present Day Conditions: Social and Economic Changes

In the previous two chapters we have outlined the principles of the united front tactic and have shown how the Marxist classics developed their understanding of it. Before we discuss some specific questions of the application of the united front tactic today, we need to take into account important changes which have taken place since the times of Lenin and Trotsky. We shall start with a summary of the economic and social developments.

In our book *The Great Robbery of the South* we have analyzed important changes in the composition of the world proletariat.²⁰ Let us summarize here the most important conclusions combined with actual data.

The Shift to the South of Today's World Proletariat

The RCIT has always stressed that the focus of global capitalist production, and therefore of the international proletariat, has shifted during the past half century from the old imperialist metropolises (i.e., North America, Western Europe and Japan) to the South (i.e., the semi-colonial world plus new imperialist powers, in particular China). The basis for this shift has been a process of massive industrialization in the countries of the global South. This was caused on the one hand by the general economic upswing during the long boom of the 1950s and 1960s (accompanied by a rise in productivity in agriculture, accelerated urbanization, etc.) and by the massive shift of capital export of the imperialist monopolies to the South, in their desire to increase their profits by intensifying super-exploitation.²¹ For part of this time, the industrialization of the Stalinist degenerated workers' states in Eastern Europe, East Asia and Cuba also contributed to this development.

The massive growth of the global labor force during the past decades took place mainly in the semi-colonial world. In 2014, 51.5% of the global labor force was engaged in wage labor out of total of three billion working people²² (See Figure 1). As shown in this graph, since 1991 the share of wage laborers has increased on all continents.²³

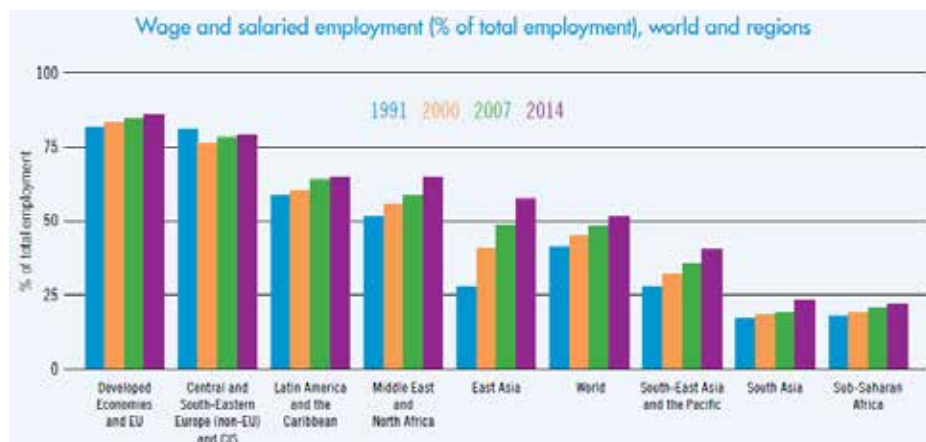
²⁰ See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, e.g. pp. 69-80, pp. 179-188, pp. 228-240

²¹ See on this: *The Great Robbery of the South*, e.g. pp. 57-62

²² The category "labor force" includes all persons involved in economic activity, i.e., workers, peasants, self-employed, salaried middle class employees and capitalists.

²³ We briefly remark here that the bourgeois category "wage earners" includes not only workers but also the salaried middle class. However, the bourgeoisie statistics of the ILO and similar institutions naturally don't differentiate between these two sectors. Nevertheless, these figures are

Figure 1: Wage and Salaried Employment (% of total employment), World and Regions, 1991-2014 ²⁴



Such proletarianization has also taken place among women. Today 46% of all working women are wage laborers. ²⁵

Table 1 expresses the growth of the working class in the world's regions by percentages since just before the turn of the millenium.

Table 1: Wage Laborers as a Share of Total Employment, 1999 and 2013 ²⁶

<i>Region</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2013</i>
Africa	24.6%	26.2%
Asia	30.7%	40.2%
Latin America and the Caribbean	59.0%	62.8%
Middle East	71.9%	80.3%
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	74.9%	78.3%
Developed economies	84.1%	86.4%

nevertheless a useful approximation for the growth of the global proletariat.

²⁴ International Labour Office: World Employment and Social Outlook 2015. The changing nature of jobs, p. 29

²⁵ International Labour Office: World Social Security Report 2010/11. Providing coverage in times of crisis and beyond (2010), p. 28

²⁶ International Labour Office: Global Wage Report 2014/15. Wages and income inequality, p. 14 and Supporting Data

The process of industrialization has necessarily led to a massive shift in weight of the proletariat from the imperialist metropolises towards the poorer countries and in particular to Asia (where 60% of the global industrial workforce lives today). A hundred years ago – at the time of Lenin and Trotsky – the proletariat in the colonial and semi-colonial world was still quite small. Capitalist industrialization outside of Europe, North America and Japan had taken place only to a relatively small degree.

Since then the growth of the working class in the South has accelerated. As a result, the huge majority of the world working class today lives outside the old imperialist metropolises. This is clearly demonstrated by the following tables and figures. Table 2 shows the increase of the wage laborers living in the so-called “developing countries” from 65.9% (1995) to 72.4% (2008/09). If one excludes the semi-colonial EU states the figure for 2008/09 is even higher (75%). In other words, three quarters of today’s wage laborers live and work in the semi-colonial and emerging imperialist countries.

This shift is also visible if we examine the core sector of the working class – the industrial workers. In Table 3 we see that in 2013, 85.3% – or more than 617 million – of all industrial employees (the overwhelming majority of them workers) lived outside the old imperialist metropolises, where “only” 14.7% – or 106.8 million – of all those employed in industry were living. At the same time, nearly two third (62.5%) of all industrial workers were living in Asia (except Russia and the ex-USSR republics).

Table 2: Distribution of Wage Laborers in Different Regions, 1995 and 2008/09 ²⁷

	Wage earners (in percent)	
	1995	2008/09
World	100%	100%
Countries with low and middle income	65.9%	72.4%
Countries with high income	34.1%	27.6%
Countries with high income (without semi-colonial EU-States)	-	25%
Countries with low and middle income (including semi-colonial EU-States)	-	75%

²⁷ World Bank: World Development Report 1995, p. 9, International Labour Office: Global Employment Trends 2011, p. 68; Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission: Labour market and wage developments in 2009; in: EUROPEAN ECONOMY Nr. 5/2010, pp. 188-190 and our own calculations. The category “Developed economies” excludes Eastern and South-Eastern European states and Malta and Cyprus.

Table 3: Distribution of Labor Force in Industry in different Regions, 2013²⁸

	Labor force in Industry (in Millions)	Distribution of industrial Labor force
World	724.4	100%
Developed economies	106.8	14.7%
Eastern Europe & ex-USSR	44.8	6.2%
East Asia	250.1	34.5%
South-East Asia	59.0	8.1%
South Asia	144.3	19.9%
Latin America	58.3	8.0%
Middle East	18.7	2.6%
North Africa	13.0	1.8%
Sub-Saharan Africa	29.3	4.0%

Figures 2 and 3 confirm this tremendous shift by showing the increase in the proportion of manufacturing workers living in the South from about 50% (1980) to about 73% (2008). Bear in mind that in 1950 only 34% of industrial workers around the world were living in the South.²⁹ Note, however, that the numbers for employment in manufacturing and industrial employment in the statistics provided here are not synonymous, since manufacturing includes all industrial labor force but, in contrast to industrial employment, excludes those employed in the mining and the building sectors.

28 Sources: International Labour Office: Global Employment Trends 2014. Risk of a jobless recovery?, p. 97 and our own calculations

29 John Smith: Offshoring, Outsourcing & the 'Global Labour Arbitrage' (2008), Paper to IIPPE 2008 – Procida, Italy 9-11 September 2008, p. 5

Figure 2: Developing Countries' Share in World Manufacturing Employment, 1980–2008 ³⁰

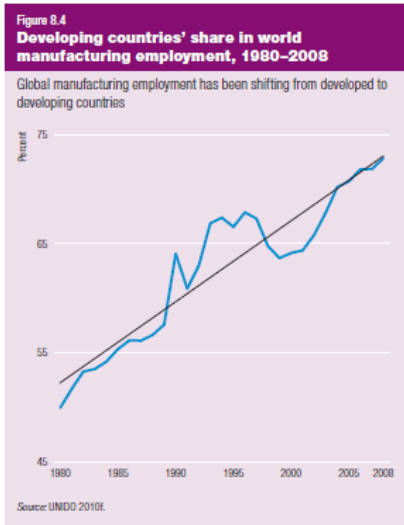
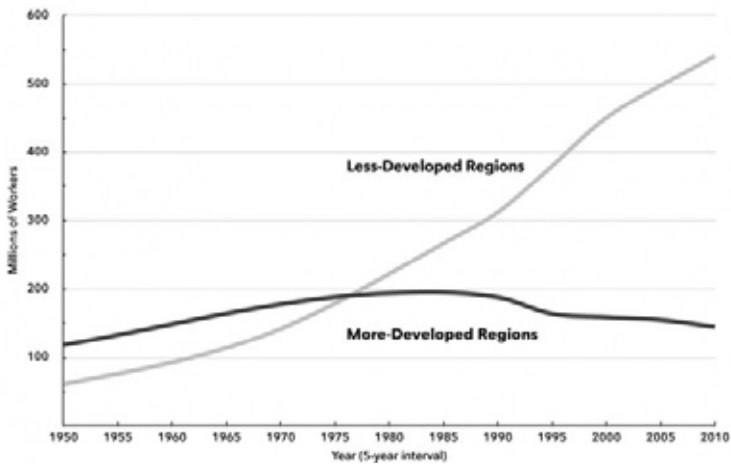


Figure 3: Global Industrial Labor Force in Developed and Developing Countries, 1950–2010 ³¹



³⁰ UNIDO: Industrial Development Report 2011, p. 150

³¹ John Smith: Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century, Monthly Review 2015 Volume 67, Issue 03 (July-August), <http://monthlyreview.org/2015/07/01/imperialism-in-the-twenty-first-century/>.

The RCIT has repeatedly pointed out that, in fact, the actual shift of the proletariat towards the semi-colonial and emerging imperialist countries is even bigger than official statistics indicate. Why? Because, as noted above, the bourgeois category “wage earners” includes not only workers. Generally speaking, one can say that in the rich imperialist countries, a considerable minority of wage earners are not part of the working class, but are part of the salaried middle class (supervisory personnel, police, lower-grade manager etc.).³² In an extensive analysis of the class’s structure, we have estimated that, in the imperialist countries, the number of wage earners – making up to 90% of the total working population – can be divided into two, with approximately 2/3 working class while 1/3 are middle layer.³³ In the poorer countries, the salaried middle classes are much smaller.

Furthermore, we also need to take into account the labor aristocracy, the uppermost part of the working class (e.g., certain sectors of the highly-paid skilled workers, etc.). It is the sector of the proletariat which is literally bribed by the bourgeoisie with various privileges. In the imperialist countries, this layer constitutes a much larger proportion of the working class than it does among the semi-colonial proletariat. The financial sources to pay off the labor aristocracy in the imperialist countries, and thereby undermine its working class solidarity, are derived precisely from the extra profits which the monopoly capitalists so readily obtain by super-exploiting the semi-colonial countries as well as migrants in the imperialist metropolises. Without any smoke or mirrors, monopoly capital uses part of these extra profits to gain the support of sectors of the working class in the imperialist countries, for it is at home that the capitalists need stability first and foremost. Thus, the “bought off” labor aristocracy can be a much smaller sector of the proletariat in the semi-colonial world.

Together with this, the labor aristocracy – along with its twin, the labor bureaucracy – plays a dominating role inside the trade unions and the reformist parties in the imperialist countries.

At the same time, as we have elaborated elsewhere,³⁴ the lower strata of the

32 In contrast to the revisionist theories of the CWI, IMT as well as the Morenoites (LIT-CI and UIT-CI), Marxists do not regard members of the repressive state apparatus as parts of the working class. Trotsky was very clear on this issue: „*The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker. Of late years these policemen have had to do much more fighting with revolutionary workers than with Nazi students. Such training does not fail to leave its effects. And above all: every policeman knows that though governments may change, the police remain.*“ (Leo Trotzki: Was nun? Schicksalsfragen des deutschen Proletariats (1932) in: Schriften über Deutschland, Band 1, p. 186; in English: Leon Trotsky: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat (January 1932), <http://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next01.htm#s1>)

33 Markus Lehner: Arbeiterklasse und Revolution. Thesen zum marxistischen Klassenbegriff, in: Revolutionärer Marxismus Nr. 28 (1999)

34 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, e.g. pp. 179-188, pp. 228-240, pp. 385-386; Michael Pröbsting: Migration and Super-exploitation: Marxist Theory and the Role of Migration in the present Period, in: Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory, Vol. 43, Issue

working class – and in particular migrants – have significantly gained in their relative numbers inside the imperialist countries. In the USA, for example, the share of migrants among the overall population rose from 5.2% (1960) to 12.3% (2000) to more than 14% (2010). In Western Europe, the migrants' share of the population grew from about 4.6% (1960) to nearly 10% (2010).³⁵ According to latest data from the United Nations, 172.6 million migrants are officially living in the old imperialist countries ("high-income countries"), representing 13% of the total population.³⁶ As we have repeatedly pointed out, such official statistics invariably underestimate the number of migrants, as they do not include migrants with no legal status as well as migrants of the second or third generation.

The comparable proportion of foreign migrants in "middle-income" and "low-income countries," i.e., the semi-colonial countries and the emerging imperialist China, is only 1%.³⁷

In particular, migrants constitute a crucial sector of the proletariat in the urban centers of the imperialist metropolises. For example, in the early 2000s half of all resident workers in New York were black, Latino, or belonged to other national minorities. In inner and outer London, respectively 29% and 22% of residents were classified as ethnic minorities in 2000.³⁸ In our study on racism and migrants, we showed that in Vienna (the capital of Austria) migrants represent 44% of the population. Two thirds of them come from the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, or the Eastern European EU States.³⁹

It is also important to realize that low and medium-skilled laborers constitute the vast majority of wage earning workers and oppressed, while highly-skilled

3-4, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03017605.2015.1099846>; Michael Pröbsting: *Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration* (2010); in: *Revolutionärer Kommunismus*, Nr. 7, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-7>. A summary of this study in English-language: Michael Pröbsting: *Marxism, Migration and revolutionary Integration*, in: *Revolutionary Communism*, No. 1 (English-language Journal of the RCIT), <http://www.thecommunists.net/oppressed/revolutionary-integration/>

35 See Rainer Münz/Heinz Fassmann: *Migrants in Europe and their Economic Position: Evidence from the European Labour Force Survey and from Other Sources* (2004), pp. 5-6 and Carlos Vargas-Silva: *Global International Migrant Stock: The UK in International Comparison* (2011), www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk, p. 5

36 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2016). *International Migration Report 2015: Highlights*, p. 28

37 In Russia, according to the same UN study 8% of the total population are migrants. We have examined the situation of migration in Russia and the reasons for this high proportion in our publication by Michael Pröbsting, *Russia as a Great Imperialist Power: The Formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics*, 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>

38 See Peter Dicken: *Global Shift. Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy* (Sixth Edition), The Guilford Press, New York 2011, p. 496

39 Michael Pröbsting: *Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration* (2010); in: *Der Weg des Revolutionären Kommunismus*, Nr. 7, S. 31-33, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-7>; in English: Michael Pröbsting: *Marxism, Migration and revolutionary Integration*, in: *Revolutionary Communism*, No. 1 (English-language Journal of the RCIT), p. 42 <http://www.thecommunists.net/oppressed/revolutionary-integration/>

employees constitute only a minority (even in the old imperialist countries). While the figures displayed in Tables 4 and 5, below, are not exclusively for the working class, and while the level of skill is not directly parallel to being positioned in the lower or middle strata vs. the upper and aristocratic strata of the working class, these figures still provide a useful approximation of the relative proportions composing the proletariat – both globally and by specific region.

Table 4: Numbers and Share of Employment by Broad Occupation (Skill), World and Regions, 2013 (in thousands) ⁴⁰

<i>World region</i>	<i>Low-Skilled</i>	<i>Medium-Skilled</i>	<i>High-Skilled</i>
World	502,153 100%	2,077,789 100%	566,584 100%
Developed Economies	46,668 9.3%	241,654 11.6%	186,693 32.4%
Developing Economies	455,485 91.7%	1,836,135 88.4%	379,891 67.6%

Table 5: Share of Employment by Broad Occupation (Skill), World and Regions, 2013 ⁴¹

<i>World region</i>	<i>Low-Skilled</i>	<i>Medium-Skilled</i>	<i>High-Skilled</i>
World total	16.0%	66.0%	18.0%
Developed Economies	9.8%	50.9%	39.3%
Central & South Eastern Europe	14.1%	52.4%	33.5%
East Asia	8.2%	79.7%	12.1%
South East Asia and the Pacific	22.0%	65.6%	12.4%
South Asia	27.7%	58.5%	13.8%
Latin America and the Caribbean	19.0%	61.3%	19.8%
Middle East and North Africa	12.0%	65.7%	22.4%
Sub Saharan Africa	16.2%	79.2%	4.6%

⁴⁰ International Labour Office: World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2015, pp. 72-89, Supporting Data and our calculations

⁴¹ International Labour Office: World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2015, pp. 72-89, Supporting Data

These actual data from the UN's *International Labour Office* demonstrate that low- and medium-skilled workers represent 82% of the global labor force, 61.7% in the old imperialist countries and 85.8% in the semi-colonial world and the emerging imperialists, namely China and Russia. Their share is even bigger than the figures shown in these tables suggest because – as we have said before – a minority of the wage earners are not part of the working class at all, but rather belong to the middle class. Naturally, the share of high-skilled laborers is much greater among the middle layers than among the working class. In short, these data support our theses concerning the composition of the working class as we outlined it in the RCIT's *Manifesto* as well as we have described in greater detail in our book, *The Great Robbery*.

In addition, the proletariat in the poorer countries is larger in size than the numbers in these official statistics would appear to indicate. A considerable proportion of the workers in these countries are formally counted not as wage laborers, but as formally self-employed, due to the large informal sector. However, in fact, they are part of the working class.⁴²

In general, the growing working class and other oppressed layers are very heterogeneous in terms of their employment status. The recently published ILO data for the employment status of the working population as a whole (i.e. including workers, peasants, self-employed, unpaid family workers, employers [albeit the later are insignificant in terms of numbers]) are extremely interesting. According to them, only around 26.4% of laborers are employed on a permanent contract, with around 13% on a temporary or fixed-term contracts and the significant majority (60.7%) work without any contract. Naturally, here too, there are huge differences between the situation for laborers in the old imperialist countries and those in the South. In the old imperialist countries (“high-income economies”), more than three-quarters of laborers are on a permanent contract (of which less than two-thirds are full-time), a further 9.3% are hired by temporary contracts, and only 14% work without a contract. Among advanced semi-colonies and emerging imperialist countries (“middle-income countries”), nearly 72% of all laborers are employed without a contract, while only 13.7% work under a permanent contract. Across the less developed semi-colonial countries, only 5.7% of laborers are employed with a permanent contract, while nearly 87% of laborers having no contract at all; the majority of these are working either as own-account workers or contributing family workers.⁴³

If we calculate the existing ILO data for the wage laborers, we reach the conclusion that only 51.2% of all wage laborers have a permanent contract while the rest are only employed under temporary contracts or with no contract at all (see Table 6). Here again, there are extreme differences between the old impe-

42 See on this e.g. Jauch, Herbert: Globalisation and Labour, Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI), Prepared for the Regional Labour Symposium, Windhoek, 6.12.2005, p. 8

43 International Labour Office: World Employment and Social Outlook 2015. The changing nature of jobs, p. 30

rialist countries on one hand and the semi-colonial countries and the emerging imperialist powers on the other. In the former, those designated by the ILO as “high-income economies,” the share of wage laborers with a permanent contract is 88.1%. However, this share is much lower in the countries of the global South (30.7% resp. 32.4%).

Wage laborers with a permanent contract should again be divided, comparing those employed full-time and those who work only part-time. Unfortunately, for this issue the ILO provides data only for the imperialist countries where only 73.7% of all full-time workers have a permanent contract (but among women the share is even lower at 64.5%).

Furthermore, one has to take into account the rising number of unemployed workers. The latest ILO report gives the official figure of 201.3 million workers without a job in 2014. Or in other words, 5.9% globally.⁴⁴

Let us now summarize our brief overview of the world proletariat today. We have shown that the international working class has shifted its focus to the South where about three-quarters of the wage laborers are located. Given the higher share of salaried middle class in the old imperialist countries (compared to the South), the proportion of the proletariat in semi-colonial and the emerging imperialist countries throughout the world could be as high as 80%. This being the case, we can conclude that today the heart of the world proletariat is in the South and in particular in Asia.

That does not mean that the proletariat in the old imperialist metropolises (i.e., the relatively rich countries of Western Europe, North America and Japan) has become irrelevant. Nothing could be further from the truth. The proletariat of Western Europe, North America and Japan continues to play a central role in the international class struggle.

Table 6: Distribution of Contract Type of Wage Laborers (%)⁴⁵

	<i>Permanent</i>	<i>Temporary</i>	<i>No Contract</i>
All Countries	51.2%	25.0%	23.8%
High-Income Countries	88.1%	10.7%	1.3%
Middle-Income Countries	30.7%	32.3%	37.0%
Low-Income Countries	32.4%	42.6%	24.8%

⁴⁴ International Labour Office: World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2016, p 72

⁴⁵ International Labour Office: World Employment and Social Outlook 2015. The changing nature of jobs, p. 31 (our own calculation)

But it is vital for revolutionary communists to recognize the increased importance of the semi-colonial countries in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa, as well as of the emerging imperialists, China (and Russia). In other words, the process of the World Revolution is not one in which the front is located in and the entire issue will be decided upon in the old imperialist countries. Rather the proletariat in the semi-colonial world and the emerging imperialist China will play a decisive role. The Arab Revolution reinforced this thesis of the increasing importance of the semi-colonial proletariat.

We have summarized the ramifications of these important changes in the composition of the world working class in our program "*The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*." International workers' organizations must pay particular attention to the South. The huge weight of the Southern proletariat must be reflected not only in their massive participation in international workers' organizations, but also in the leaderships of these forces. And questions of particular importance for the Southern working class – their super-exploitation, their national liberation struggles against imperialism, etc. – must play a central role in the organizations' propagandistic and practical work.⁴⁶

The Misery of the Poor Peasantry and the Urban Poor

Irrespective of the growth of the global proletariat, Marxists must not ignore the fact nearly half of the global working population – and a clear majority in the semi-colonial world – still belong to the poor peasantry or the urban petty bourgeoisie. The figures in Table 6 give an indication about the general social composition of the working population. However, here too we repeat that, for reasons outlined above, the ILO category *Wage Laborers* is not synonymous with the Marxist concept of the working class. This reservation is also applicable for the ILO's *Own Account Laborers* category which is also not equivalent to the Marxist category of the non-exploiting peasantry and urban petty-bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the figures given below are useful approximations.

If we leave aside the very small number of capitalists (employers), which are most numerous in the imperialist countries, we see that peasants and self-employed (and their contributing family members) represent 55.4% of the working population in the countries of the South. However, even here there are important distinctions to be made. For example, while in the emerging imperialist China the share of wage laborers is 56% of the working population and the self-employed and their contributing family members "only" 42.4%,⁴⁷ the self-employed and their contributing family members constitute 80.8% (!) of all working people in the less developed semi-colonial countries. (See Table 7)

⁴⁶ See on this Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT): *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*, published in 2012, pp. 28-30; online on the RCIT website at www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto

⁴⁷ International Labour Office: *World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2015*, Supporting Data

Capitalism means misery not just for the working class but also for the rural population and the urban poor. In order to understand this, we now provide some data about inequality and poverty among the world's peasantry. According to data summarized by the ETC Group (AGETC), of the 450 million farms in today's world, 382 million (85%) are worked by small peasants and have a size of 2 hectares or less. Nearly all of these (close to 380 million) are situated in the global South. Again, the overwhelming majority of them (370 million) are worked by indigenous peasants. In total, peasants work approximately half of the world's cropland. It is estimated that, of the 1.56 billion arable hectares under permanent cultivation globally, 764 million hectares are worked by peasants; no less than 225 million hectares are cultivated by big farmers; and mid-size farmers would consequently hold approximately 571 million hectares.

An estimated 640 million peasant farmers and an additional 190 million pastoralists raise livestock for their own consumption and local markets. Furthermore, there are about 30–35 million full-time fishermen, but probably more than 100 million peasants are involved to some extent or another in fishing and the processing and distribution of the yield of this activity as food.

Table 7: Shares of Status in Total Employment, World and Regions, 2013 (%) ⁴⁸

	<i>Wage Laborers</i>	<i>Employers</i>	<i>Own Account Laborers</i>	<i>Contributing Family Laborers</i>
Advanced Economies	86.3%	3.6%	9.0%	1.0%
Developing Countries	42.6%	2.0%	40.5%	14.9%
Least Developed Countries	18.0%	1.2%	53.2%	27.6%
Lower Middle Income Countries	31.7%	2.1%	50.5%	15.7%
Emerging Economies	58.2%	2.2%	29.0%	10.6%

48 International Labour Office: World of Work Report 2014. Developing with jobs, p. 40

There are also an estimated 800 million peasants who are involved in urban farming. Of these, 200 million produce food primarily for urban markets, and this activity provides full-time employment for about 150 million family members. On average, the world's cities produce about one-third of their own food consumption. Finally, there are at least 410 million people who live in – or adjacent to – forests and derive much of their food and livelihood from them.⁴⁹

Brazil provides an important example of the unequal distribution of land globally and the dire situation of poor and landless peasants in the age of decaying capitalism. About 26,000 Brazilian landowners possess 50% of all agricultural lands, large parts of which are either being poorly utilized for agriculture or are not being cultivated at all. At the same time, in Brazil there are 12 million landless peasants.

The urban poor are another, increasingly important layer of world's population. They have no fixed class position, but rather include various and transitional elements. Most slum dwellers have no permanent job, but are unemployed, informally employed, or self-employed. Thus, they mostly belong to the lower strata of the working class, and either constitute semi-proletarian elements who are often involved in urban agriculture, are among the poor petty-bourgeoisie, or belong to the lumpenproletariat. Their extremely precarious position in the workplace increases the relative importance of their particular living and housing conditions. For these reasons we can speak of the urban poor as a specific layer.

It is estimated that about a third of the global urban population (32.7%) live in slums in the big cities, especially in the semi-colonial world. The proportion of people living in slum conditions in urban areas is particularly high in sub-Saharan Africa (61.7%). However, slum dwellers also constitute an important share of the urban population in Southern Asia (35%), in Southeastern Asia (31.0%), in Eastern Asia (28.2%), in Western Asia (24.6%), in Latin America and the Caribbean (23.5%), and in North Africa (13%).⁵⁰

In short, we see that the poor peasantry and the urban poor constitute huge and important classes and layers. They too suffer daily, throughout their precarious lives, from the devastating consequences of capitalism in decay. It is a crucial task of the working class, and this means the vanguard of this class – the revolutionary party – to be in the front line to win these oppressed layers over as allies for the struggle against capitalist rule.

49 ETC Group: Questions for the Food and Climate Crises, Communiqué Issue #102 (November 2009), p. 26

50 See United Nations: Planning and Design for Sustainable Urban Mobility: Global Report on Human Settlements 2013, p. 215; United Nations: The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, p. 46; Om Prakash Mathur: Urban Poverty in Asia. Study Prepared for the Asian Development Bank, National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi 2013, p. 17

IV. The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony under Present Day Conditions: Political Changes

After having outlined some crucial social and economic developments that have transpired in recent decades, we shall now move on to examine the field of politics. We will outline in summary the most important changes that have taken place among the parties which claim to represent the interests of the workers and oppressed.

The Crisis of Bourgeois Workers' Parties

One of the most important developments in the past two or three decades has been the extraordinary bourgeoisification of the traditional reformist parties of the social democratic and Stalinist hue. At the same time, we have witnessed a surge of new left-wing reformist or petty-bourgeois populist forces. These changes constitute the crucial backdrop for the development and the application of the Marxist tactic of the united front during the present period.

Let us examine these developments and changes in more detail. The most important factor in the world situation – and this is even truer today than at the time of Trotsky in the 1930s – is the complete lack of a strong revolutionary world party. Trotsky's words – „*Without the slightest exaggeration it may be said: the whole world situation is determined by the crisis of the proletarian leadership*“⁵¹ – are even more relevant today, more than half a century after the political and organizational collapse of the Fourth International, when the numbers of authentic revolutionary forces are so abysmally small compared with the historic task ahead of us.⁵² This absence of a world party for socialist revolution is the main reason why so many class struggle eruptions leading to pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations are ultimately defeated. And it is precisely for the same reason that the right-wing shift of traditional reformism resulted in the surge of new left-wing reformist and populist political formations.

The historic crisis of social democracy and Stalinism expresses itself in a dra-

51 Leon Trotsky: Luxemburg and the Fourth International (1935), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky 1935-36, p. 31 (Emphasis in the original)

52 For a full analysis of the degeneration of the Fourth International and its fragments, see our book Workers' Power (Britain) and Irish Workers' Group: The Death Agony of the Fourth International, London 1983. See also Michael Pröbsting's article "Healy's Pupils Fail to Break with their Master: The revolutionary tradition of the Fourth International and the centrist tradition of its Epigones Gerry Healy and the 'International Committee' – A Reply from the RCIT to *Socialist Fight*, October 2013, in *Revolutionary Communism* No. 16, November 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/healy-and-fourth-international/>

matic political shift to the right, a bourgeoisification of its composition and leadership, and its precipitous decline in membership and electoral strength. Let us examine some examples.

The German SPD led Germany – in a governmental coalition with the Green Party – to the country’s first war abroad when NATO attacked Serbia in 1999. They did the same in Afghanistan in 2001 and during the imperialist occupation afterwards. The SPD imposed the draconian Hartz IV reforms which led to substantial cuts in unemployment benefits and social subsidies. Since then this party has been the junior partner in pro-austerity coalitions with the CDU, the conservative party of Angela Merkel, in the years 2005-09 and once again since 2013.

It is hardly surprising that this neoliberalization of the SPD had dramatic effects on its support and membership. Its electoral support has declined from 40.9% (1998) to 23.0% (2009) and 25.7% (2013). The number its members has more than halved between 1990 and 2014 (the latest available data). While the party had 943,402 members in 1990, this figure has dropped to 459,902 by the end of 2012.⁵³ 50% of these members are aged 60 years and above and only 16% are below the age of 40! The social composition of the party is particularly revealing: pensioners constitute the largest group (34%), followed by “Beamte” (a German word for privileged employees in the public sector, 23%), white-collar employees (15%), blue-collar workers (8%) and unemployed (5%). The remaining 15% are housewives, students, self-employed, etc.⁵⁴

True, none of this means that the SPD has ceased to be a bourgeois workers’ party, given its close connections with the trade union federation and other workers’ organizations. Furthermore, many pensioner members were previously workers. But it is clear that the party has substantially weakened its links with the working class and barely represents the working class in its composition, but rather the oldest and most-privileged (Beamte!) sectors of the working class as well as a sector of the lower middle class.

The situation is similar to that of the Spanish PSOE. The party has moved dramatically to the right and has for decades adhered to the neoliberal agenda. Its electoral support has halved since the beginning of the new historic period which began with the start of the Great Recession – dropping from 43.9% (2008) to 22.0% (2015) of the votes cast. The party’s constituency is dominated by “inactive” people (i.e., pensioners) who constitute 41.4% of its entire membership⁵⁵ (see Figure 4).

However, despite this decline and the progressive aging of its membership,

53 Oskar Niedermayer: *Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2015, Arbeitshefte aus dem Otto-Stammer-Zentrum*, Nr. 20, Freie Universität Berlin, 2015

54 Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: *Soziale Zusammensetzung der SPD-Mitgliedschaft*, 28.8.2013, <http://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/parteien-in-deutschland/42102/zusammensetzung-der-spd>

55 Jorge Galindo: *The core of Spanish parties*, 1.11.2015, <http://politikon.es/2015/11/01/the-core-of-spanish-parties/>

a majority of them are from the working class. Also, the PSOE still maintains close relations with the UGT, one of the two major trade union federations in Spain. However, this close relationship helped bring the UGT leadership (together with the Stalinist-led CCOO union), to sign a “social pact” with the then PSOE-led government. This pact is more appropriately termed an “anti-social pact,” and included increasing the official retirement age from 65 to 67.

The French Socialist Party, too, is deeply in crisis, having been transformed into a neoliberal party long ago. This crisis has accelerated since President Hollande’s ascension to power in 2012. Under his leadership, the PSF has waged unprecedented attacks on democratic rights (an indefinite “state of emergency,” since November 2015; anti-democratic amendments to the constitution; thousands of raids against Muslim migrants, etc.). Furthermore, Hollande’s government has engaged in a series of imperialist wars in Mali, the Central African Republic, Iraq and Syria.

Unsurprisingly, these developments go hand in hand with the decline of the party. While it officially had a membership of 203,000 in 2009, this figure declined to about 120,000 in 2015. Since Hollande took power, 40,000 of the PSF’s members have left the party.⁵⁶

Figure 4: Distribution of Supporters of Political Parties in Spain, 2015⁵⁷

Parties of retirees, parties of workers
Distribution of party supporters depending on labour market position (July 2015)

	PSOE	PP	IU	Podemos	C's	Avg
Inactive	41.4%	46.4%	21.7%	16.8%	16.0%	31.3%
Student	3.8%	1.8%	6.5%	5.9%	7.4%	4.1%
Unemployed	21.2%	10.9%	21.7%	24.1%	18.6%	19.1%
Fixed-term	6.3%	5.5%	12.0%	10.6%	7.4%	8.3%
Open-ended	20.0%	17.3%	30.4%	31.9%	33.0%	24.5%
Self-employed	3.8%	8.5%	5.4%	6.7%	6.1%	6.6%
Manager, employer	3.8%	8.8%	2.2%	3.1%	11.3%	5.4%

⁵⁶ Laurent Bouvet: Who Loves the PS? The Electoral Paradox of the French Socialist Party, in: In: Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft Online: International Politics and Society, No. 4/2010, p. 115; Frédéric Sawicki: French Socialist Party, in: Academic Foresights, No. 14: July-December 2015, http://academic-foresights.com/French_Socialist_Party.html

⁵⁷ Jorge Galindo: The core of Spanish parties, 1.11.2015, <http://politikon.es/2015/11/01/the-core-of-spanish-parties/>

No less important is the traditionally petty-bourgeois social composition of the PSF – a characteristic which doubtless has exacerbated in the last few years. According to the French political scientists Laurent Bouvet, only 16% of PSF members are workers and low-ranking wage earners as opposed to 35% who belong to higher management and the professions. The party's membership is also strongly dominated by the relatively privileged public sector employees (58% of all members). Like all other social democratic parties, PSF members has a high average age (67% being above 50 years old). Furthermore, Bouvet reports: *"It [the PSF's electorate, Ed.] comprises mainly voters from the middle and upper strata and few from the working classes (especially from the social and occupational groups »employees« and »workers,« who represent more than 50 percent of the active population in France). Furthermore, the proportion of voters from the public sector is particularly significant in relation to their weight in the active population."*⁵⁸

Furthermore, nearly one quarter of all party members are elected representatives in municipal, regional, or national parliaments, governmental authorities, etc.⁵⁹

The British Labour Party underwent a very similar development until the summer of last year (2015). When the Blair government took power in 1997, it abolished the party's close links with the trade unions (albeit these links still do exist) and deleted the party program's famous Clause 4 which declared the goal of nationalizing key sectors of British industry. Blair's government implemented a neoliberal agenda and was a driving force in the imperialist war offensive in the Middle East. In fact, the "social democrat" Blair was the closest collaborator of US-President Bush and his militaristic, neo-conservative administration. Likewise the Labour Party has proven to be a loyal supporter of Israel and the latter's colonial wars against the Palestinian people. Recently, despite the new left-reformist leadership of Corbyn, the party has started to expel Anti-Zionist members.⁶⁰

Like in other countries, the Labour Party's membership figures declined from about 400,000 individual members in 1997 to about 200,000 in 2015. However, with the successful campaign of the left-reformist Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn in summer 2015, this decline has been turned around. Despite open hostility by the pro-Blairite party establishment, Corbyn's campaign was based on an anti-austerity and anti-militaristic platform which created huge enthusiasm among young people. In the space of a few months, the Labour Party's "membership

58 Laurent Bouvet: Who Loves the PS? The Electoral Paradox of the French Socialist Party; See also: Marc Lazar: In welchem Zustand befindet sich die Parti Socialiste? Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, March 2015; Ernst Hillebrand: Die Sozialistische Partei Frankreichs nach dem Parteitag von Reims, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, March 2009, p. 7 and 11

59 See Ernst Hillebrand: Die Sozialistische Partei Frankreichs nach dem Parteitag von Reims, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, March 2009, p. 6

60 See e.g. RED LIBERATION (Socialists Active in the Labour Party): UK: Defend Nazeem Shah and Ken Livingstone against the Pro-Zionist Labour Leadership! 30 April 2016; Britain: Defeat Zionism in the Labour Party, 30 March 2016, <https://redliberation.wordpress.com/>

*jumped from 201,293 on 6 May 2015, the day before the general election, to 388,407 on 10 January 2016.”*⁶¹

This development is an important indicator that bourgeois workers' parties, even after a long period of decline, can revive and be rejuvenated if newly-radicalized youth and workers see no alternative to them to politically express their desire for change. Labour's membership comeback also demonstrates how wrong numerous centrists (like, for example, the CWI) were when they declared in the early 1990s that the Labour Party (and social democratic parties in general) are no longer bourgeois workers' parties. We authentic Marxists have always rejected this assumption while, at the same time, having also consistently denounced the opportunistic adaption to Labourism and never-ending entryism as practiced by the CWI's former comrades, the IMT of Ted Grant and Alan Woods.

While we are not aware of a concrete study of the party's social composition, an internal report which was recently published contains some interesting conclusions. The British newspaper *The Guardian* reported about the findings of this report: *“The report portrays a party in transition, attracting a higher proportion of new members from wealthy inner-city areas. While there has been a dramatic rise in members across the entire party, Labour's traditional supporters from poorer parts of society are now a smaller proportion of the total membership. (...) But the report's summary warns: ‘Groups which are over-represented as Labour party members tend to be long-term homeowners from urban areas (particularly inner city area) who have high levels of disposable income.’ ‘Those who are under-represented tend to be either young singles/families who rent properties on a short-term basis and require financial assistance or those who live in rural communities.’ (...) It points out that ‘high-status city dwellers living in central locations and pursuing careers with high rewards are highly over-represented.’ ‘As a group they make up 4% of the general population in contrast to 11.2% of party membership,’ it says.”*⁶²

Similar developments can be observed in the Austrian social democratic party and even more in the Irish Labour Party. The latter suffered an historic defeat in the 2016 elections after having participated in an aggressive pro-austerity government since 2011. It lost two third of its voters (dropping from 19.5% to 6.6% of the votes cast) and most of its parliamentary seats (from 37 to 7).

Finally, one should not forget the sad fate of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party in Italy. Both the PSI as well as the PCI simply dissolved themselves and fused with openly bourgeois parties.

61 Ewen MacAskill: Revealed: how Jeremy Corbyn has reshaped the Labour party. Leader's hopes of remoulding the party boosted as Guardian survey shows surge in members, huge support and shift to the left, *The Guardian*, 13 January 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/13/revealed-how-jeremy-corbyn-has-reshaped-the-labour-party>

62 Rajeev Syal: Disproportionate number of Labour's new members are wealthy city dwellers. Figures that will be seized upon by Corbyn's critics show poorer supporters are now smaller proportion of membership, 21 January 2016. http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/20/labours-new-members-mostly-wealthy-city-dwellers-leaked-report?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

The Stalinist and ex-Stalinist parties have faced a somewhat different fate, but they too are in crisis. With important exceptions, they have not participated in government coalitions and thus have avoided the same sharp decline in membership that the neoliberalized social democratic parties have experienced, because they could still present themselves as anti-austerity opposition parties which enabled them, to a certain degree, to attract workers and youth who were disgusted by social democracy. This, for example, was evinced with electoral rise of the Italian *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* which split from the PCI when the latter dissolved. A similar manifestation occurred in Germany with the founding of LINKE after the ex-Stalinist PDS in Eastern Germany fused with the West German WASG, which had previously split off from the SPD. And in France, the *Front de Gauche* (FdG) – a fusion of the ex-Stalinist PCF and the *Parti de Gauche*, the latter having split from the PSF – experienced some electoral successes, as did the Spanish *Izquierda Unida* (which was initiated by the Stalinist PCE).

However, the respective successes of these ex-Stalinist parties – most of which are united in the *Party of the European Left* (PEL) – was not sustainable. In France, the PCF participated in the neoliberal PSF-led government of Lionel Jospin in 1997-2002 which implemented many privatization programs and took part in the NATO wars against Serbia and Afghanistan. The PCF was severely punished for this betrayal during the 2002 presidential election when its general secretary, Robert Hue, received only 3.37% of the vote, less than the centrist-Trotskyist candidates Arlette Laguiller (5.72%) and Olivier Besancenot (4.25%). Later, after the creation of the FdG, the PDF revived. But in the last several years, the FdG has been plagued by internal tensions and PdG leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon – the FdG's candidate in the 2012 presidential elections who received 11.1% of the vote – is currently preparing a separate project.

In Germany, LINKE has continually been moving to the right. In the first decade of the new millennium, this party participated in a regional coalition government in Berlin with the SPD and was responsible for implementing various privatization programs. Some of its leaders openly supported Israel's wars against Gaza in 2008/09 and subsequently. The party officially forbids its members to support solidarity activities with the Palestinian people in Gaza (like participating in the Freedom Flotilla) or supporting the boycott campaign against the apartheid State of Israel.⁶³ Locally, Sahra Wagenknecht, the chairwomen of the LINKE parliamentary group, recently stated that refugees in Germany are only "guests" and if they do not behave like "guests" and respect the German law, they should be expelled from the country!⁶⁴ LINKE's obvious pandering to the ruling class in order to be accepted as a coalition partner is

63 See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, pp. 338-349

64 See e.g., Kevin Hagen: *Wagenknecht und das Asylrecht: Die Gast-Rechte*, SPIEGEL ONLINE, 12.1.2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/sahra-wagenknecht-zum-asylrecht-die-gast-rechte-a-1071614.html>

both embarrassing and disgraceful.

In passing, we note that the same pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist policy has been practiced for years by the LINKE's sister party in Austria – the *Communist Party of Austria* (KPÖ). As we have reported elsewhere, leading officials of the PEL and the KPÖ (as well as their Zionist pro-war allies) have for more than a decade repeatedly made public accusations against the RCIT – including in the bourgeois press – claiming that we espouse “*Anti-Semitism,*” “*revolutionary insanity,*” etc.⁶⁵

Despite all their opportunism, or rather because of it, LINKE continues to lose members – dropping from 78,046 (2009) to 60,547 (2014).⁶⁶ In contrast to right-wing parties, it has proven itself completely incapable of profiting from the decline of social democracy and increasing unrest among the working class and youth.

The same is true for the Spanish IU. After some electoral successes, it suffered several defeats and has been overshadowed by the rise of the left-wing populist *Podemos* party. During the most recent, December 2015 elections, IU received only 3.7% of the vote. In addition to its working class base, IU somehow remarkably still counts among its supporters a significant sector of very professional, well-paid middle class individuals – the *gauche divine*, as the Spanish sociologist Jorge Galindo calls them.⁶⁷

In Italy, Fausto Bertinotti's PRC collapsed after it twice entered neoliberal governments and supported austerity attacks as well as the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan. Since its collapse, the PRC has been unable to garner sufficient votes to pass the electoral threshold and thus currently has no seats in parliament.

Other Stalinist parties who remained outside of the PEL also face stagnation. Despite years of general strikes and political upheavals in Greece, the KKE has been unable to make any electoral advances, and draws an unimpressive 4-6% of the vote. Similarly, in Portugal the PCP, which runs together with the Green Party, has steadily maintained only 7-8.8% of the vote in all elections since 1991. None of these traditional reformist parties has proven itself capable of gaining in strength despite repeated waves of radicalization among the youth and workers, who instead have more readily been able to identify with newer formations (like SYRIZA or the Portuguese *Bloco de Esquerda*).

65 See on this e.g. Die KPÖ und Obamas Krieg im Nahen Osten. Antwort auf eine neuerliche KPÖ-Polemik gegen die RKO BEFREIUNG, 25.10.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/home/deutsch/kpo-naher-osten/>; Gaza-Krieg: Israel-freundliche KPÖ verleumdet erneut die RKO-BEFREIUNG, 25.7.2014, <http://www.rkob.net/international/nordafrika-und-der-arabische-raum/israelfreund-kpoe/>; see also The Great Robbery of the South, pp. 339-343. In all these articles you will find references and links to various articles by our pro-Zionist opponents as well as RCIT's replies to them.

66 Oskar Niedermayer: Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2015, Arbeitshefte aus dem Otto-Stammer-Zentrum, Nr. 20, Freie Universität Berlin, 2015

67 Jorge Galindo: The core of Spanish parties, 1.11.2015, <http://politikon.es/2015/11/01/the-core-of-spanish-parties/>

The decline of the traditional reformist parties has gone hand in hand with a substantial weakening of the trade unions. While an extensive study of the trade union movement is beyond the scope of this present document, we must nevertheless point to the fact that in the old imperialist countries (North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australia), on the average trade unions have lost about half of their members since the 1980s. Trade union density in the OECD countries has decreased from 34% (1978) to 17.0% (2010). In France, the decline has been even more severe during the same period, membership having shrunk from 20.5% to 7.7%. In Germany, membership approximately halved from 35.5% to 18.1%, in Britain the drop was similar, from 48.8% to 25.8%, and in Italy, while the negative trend has been less precipitous, the reduction in trade union membership has gone from 50.4% to 37.3% (see Table 8).

A similar example is the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) in Brazil. The PT emerged in the 1980s as a militant left-reformist workers' party closely related with the radical trade union movement. However, it subsequently formed a popular-front coalition with bourgeois forces (like the PMDB) and has been in power since 2002. (This, of course, is liable to change in the upcoming weeks and months with the coup d'état engineered by right-wing forces – at this stage manifesting itself in the senate trial of the impeached president Dilma Rousseff). As a result of its bourgeoisification, PT increasingly acquiesced to neoliberal demands by pursuing austerity programs. The party is intimately

Table 8: Trade Union Density (%) in Selected OECD Countries, 1978-2013 ⁶⁸

	1978	2013
Australia	49.7%	17.0%
France	20.5%	7.7%
Germany	35.5%	18.1%
Italy	50.4%	37.3%
Japan	32.6%	17.8%
Britain	48.8%	25.8%
USA	34,0%	10.8%
OECD	34,0%	18.1%

⁶⁸ See OECD: Trade union density (%) in OECD countries, 1960-2010; OECD: Trade union density 1999-2014, http://stats.oecd.org/viewhtml.aspx?datasetcode=UN_DEN&lang=en

connected with various prominent capitalist tycoons, and thus has unsurprisingly been involved in various corruption scandals.⁶⁹

In India too, we have a good example of the bourgeoisification and decline of a reformist parties in the evolution of the Indian CPI(M). This party ruled West-Bengal, the fourth most populous states in the country, for 34 consecutive years (1977-2011). During this period, the party not only suppressed peasant rebellions but increasingly collaborated with imperialist monopolies. It dispossessed peasants whose land was handed over to multi-national corporations, while unleashing the police and its own party thugs against those who fought back. Unsurprisingly, on the backdrop of massive protests, the CPI(M) lost power in the elections of 2011.⁷⁰

The Marxist Classics on the Labor Bureaucracy

All these developments are hardly surprising, because both the reformist parties as well as the trade unions are dominated by the conservative labor bureaucracy and their social base – the labor aristocracy, i.e., the upper strata of the working class which is extremely privileged and bribed by the bourgeoisie. Marxism characterizes the labor bureaucracy in their twin versions – in the reformist party as well as in the trade union – as agents of the ruling class inside the workers’ movement. The labor bureaucracy is inextricably linked with

69 For the RCIT’s analysis of the class struggle in Brazil see CCR: Brazil: The Only Way Forward: Defeat the Coup with Mass, Independent Class Mobilizations of the Working Class and Oppressed! 22.4.2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/statement-on-coup/>; CCR: Brazil: The Arrest of Lula da Silva – Yet Another Step in the Creeping Coup, 9.3.2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/arrest-lula/>; CCR: Brazil: No to Impeachment! No to the Call for New Elections! 6.12.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-impeachment/>; CCR and FT-VP: Brazil: Resist A Fascist Coup By All Possible Means! March 27, 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-statement-coup-demo/>; CCR: Brazil: The World Cup and the Mass Protests of the Social Movements, 17.6.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-world-cup/>; CCR: Brazil: From the June protests on the streets towards the path of electoral illusions? 11.1.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-report/>; The Fight for the Right to Public Transportation - Free and With Quality - Under Control of Workers in Brazil, 14.6.2013, *El Mundo Socialista*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-fight-for-public-transportation/>; RCIT and Blog *El Mundo Socialista*: Brazil: Solidarity with the Popular Uprising! 19.6.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-solidarity-with-popular-uprising/>; Brazil: Before the General Strike on 11th July, 2.7.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-general-strike-on-11-7/>; Brazil: Trade Union Bureaucracy limits Workers’ Resistance to symbolic Actions. A report on the National Day of Struggle on 30 August, 2.9.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brasil-national-day-of-struggle-on-30-8/>; Brazil: Indefinite Nationwide Strike of Bank Workers!, 20.9.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-bank-workers-strike/>

70 See on this e.g. Michelle Williams: *The Roots of Participatory Democracy – Democratic Communists in South Africa and Kerala, India*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008; Ross Mallick: *Development policy of a Communist government: West Bengal since 1977*, Cambridge University Press 1993

the capitalist state and the bourgeoisie via countless bonds (positions in parliaments, social security institutions, other state institutions, corporations, etc.) These privileges are based on the super-exploitation of oppressed peoples by the imperialist monopolies and constitute the objective economic sources from which the labor bureaucracy and labor aristocracy are bribed, and in this way tie them to the rule of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Of course, since the working class forms the social base of the labor bureaucracy, the latter can come under pressure from below in periods of heightened class struggle. In such periods it can even be positioned at the top of a strike movement – or better, be dragged there – and half-heartedly implement reforms as a governmental party. However, it will always act with the purpose of undermining all forms of independent proletarian activity and liquidate any radical movement which could endanger the capitalist system.

The following quotes from Lenin and Trotsky demonstrate that this was the view of the Marxist classics. Hence, the leader of the Bolsheviks stated in 1916: „... objectively the opportunists are a section of the petty bourgeoisie and of a certain strata of the working class who have been bribed out of imperialist superprofits and converted to watchdogs of capitalism and corruptors of the labour movement.“⁷¹

In a preface for his book on imperialism, written in 1920, Lenin explained the economic basis of reformism and the role of its leaders:

“Obviously, out of such enormous superprofits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their “own” country) it is possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the “advanced” countries are doing: they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert. This stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, or the labour aristocracy, who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and in our days, the principal social (not military) prop of the bourgeoisie. For they are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real vehicles of reformism and chauvinism. In the civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie they inevitably, and in no small numbers, take the side of the bourgeoisie, the “Versaillese” against the “Communards”. Unless the economic roots of this phenomenon are understood and its political and social significance is appreciated, not a step can be taken toward the solution of the practical problem of the communist movement and of the impending social revolution.”⁷²

And in another document Lenin stated: „*Opportunism, or reformism, inevitably had to grow into a phenomenon of world-wide importance, socialist-imperialism, or social-chauvinism, because imperialism brought to the fore a handful of very rich, ad-*

71 V.I.Lenin: Imperialism and the Split in Socialism (1916), in: LCW Vol. 23, p.110 (emphasis in the original)

72 V.I.Lenin: Preface to Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916 respectively 1920), in: LCW Vol. 22, pp.193-194 (emphasis in the original)

vanced nations, engaged in plundering the whole world, and thereby enabled the bourgeoisie of those countries, out of their monopolist superprofits (imperialism is monopoly capitalism), to bribe the upper strata of the working class."⁷³

After Lenin's death, Trotsky and his co-fighters continued the struggle for revolutionary Marxism. Based on the experience of reformism, and in particular its English version, Trotsky wrote:

„The question of the source of this bureaucratic danger is no less important. (...) In the capitalist states, the most monstrous forms of bureaucratism are to be observed precisely in the trade unions. It is enough to look at America, England and Germany. Amsterdam is the most powerful international organisation of the trade union bureaucracy. It is thanks to it that the whole structure of capitalism now stands upright above all in Europe and especially in England. If there were not a bureaucracy of the trade unions, then the police, the army, the courts, the lords, the monarchy would appear before the proletarian masses as nothing but pitiful and ridiculous playthings. The bureaucracy of the trade unions is the backbone of British imperialism. It is by means of this bureaucracy that the bourgeoisie exists, not only in the metropolis, but in India, in Egypt, and in the other colonies. One would have to be completely blind to say to the English workers: “Be on guard against the conquest of power and always remember that your trade unions are the antidote to the dangers of the state.” The Marxist will say to the English workers: “The trade union bureaucracy is the chief Instrument, for your oppression by the bourgeois state. Power must be wrested from the hands of the bourgeoisie, and for that its principal agent, the trade union bureaucracy, must be overthrown.” Parenthetically, it is especially for this reason that the bloc of Stalin with the strikebreakers was so criminal.

From the example of England, one sees very clearly how absurd it is to counterpose, as if it were a question of two different principles, the trade union organisation and the state organisation. In England, more than anywhere else, the state rests upon the back of the working class which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population of the country. The mechanism is such that the bureaucracy is based directly on the workers, and the state indirectly, through the intermediary of the trade union bureaucracy.

Up to now, we have not mentioned the Labour Party, which in England, the classic country of trade unions, is only a political transposition of the same trade union bureaucracy. The same leaders guide the trade unions, betray the general strike, lead the electoral campaign and later on sit in the ministries. The Labour Party and the trade unions – these are not two principles, they are only a technical division of labour. Together they are the fundamental support of the domination of the English bourgeoisie. The latter cannot be overthrown without overthrowing the Labourite bureaucracy. And that cannot be attained by counterposing the trade union as such to the state as such, but only by the active opposition of the Communist Party to the Labourite bureaucracy in all fields of social life: in the trade unions, in strikes, in the electoral campaign, in

73 V. I. Lenin: The Tasks of the Third International (Ramsay Macdonald On The Third International) (1919), in: LCW Vol. 29, p. 502 (emphasis in the original)

*parliament, and in power.”*⁷⁴

These conclusions have not lost their relevance. Quite the contrary, given the crisis of revolutionary leadership and the massive expansion of resources to bribe the labor bureaucracy and aristocracy through the intensification of the imperialist super-exploitation of oppressed peoples, these features have even substantially increased. We drew attention to this development already in the RCIT Program where we stated: *“In this deep crisis of leadership - combined with the possibilities of the imperialist bourgeoisie for the systematic bribery of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy - the ultimate cause can be found in the extraordinary bourgeoisification of the labour movement and the De-revolutionisation of Marxism, as is has been distorted by left reformism, centrism and the left-wing academics in recent decades.”*⁷⁵

Furthermore, as we have repeatedly emphasized, the deepening of the capitalist crisis in the age of globalization and in particular in the present historic period of capitalist decay which commenced in 2008, have only accelerated this development. The capitalist crisis forces all governments to intensify the attacks on the working class and oppressed people and to accelerate the rivalry against other capitalist states. The ruling classes are forced to implement bigger and bigger austerity packages, to attack more and more democratic rights at home, to wage more and more colonial wars in the South, and to whip up chauvinism against imperialist rivals. As we stated above, the entire raison d'être of the labor bureaucracy is to be admitted by the bourgeoisie into the government and other areas of the state apparatus. For this reason, the reformists are forced (not too much against their will) to adapt to the policy of the ruling class which again is adapted to the objective needs of imperialist capitalism. Therefore it is unavoidable that social democracy and Stalinism become more and more bourgeois and reactionary.

Of course, this is not a unilateral process. Since reformism is a contradictory phenomenon – with the labor bureaucracy constituting a petty-bourgeois stratum serving the bourgeoisie but based on the upper strata of the working class – the class contradictions in the society leave their mark on reformism too. Hence under specific circumstances, reformism can again temporarily swing to the left, albeit mainly in words but hardly in deeds (as we currently observe in Corbyn's Labour Party).

However, in such a period the possibilities substantially increase that the accelerated contradictions between the classes and the radicalization of the working class and the youth lead to either splits in the reformist parties and / or the emergence of new reformist or petty-bourgeois left-wing populist formations. This is exactly what we have seen in the recent years.

⁷⁴ Leon Trotsky: *The Errors in Principle of Syndicalism* (1929); in: *Trade Unions in the Epoch of imperialist Decay*, Pathfinder, New York 1990, pp. 122-123. (Emphasis in the original)

⁷⁵ RCIT: *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*, 2012, p. 24, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/>

The Rise of New Reformist Parties and Petty-Bourgeois Populism

Latin America clearly was the most important region in which petty-bourgeois populist formations dramatically grew during recent years. This rise took place after two decades of unchecked neoliberal offensives by the imperialist monopolies and their local bourgeois governments, with devastating consequences for the workers, peasants and urban poor.⁷⁶

As a result this has led to a substantial weakening of the trade unions, with the important exception of Brazil, in the 1980s and 1990s as we see in Table 9.

However, with the turn of the millennium, Latin America experienced a sharp upswing in class struggle. At the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002, the popular masses in Argentina rose up in a spontaneous rebellion against the neoliberal government of Fernando de la Rúa. These “*revolutionary days*” or “*Argentinazo*” resulted in the overthrow of four presidents in only one week! Furthermore popular assemblies were created in Buenos Aires and other cities, and a number of factories abandoned by capitalists were occupied and run by workers.⁷⁷

Table 9: Trade Union Density in Latin America⁷⁸

<i>Country</i>	<i>1982</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
Argentina	42	22	-20	-47
Bolivia	25	9	-16	-65
Peru	21	6	-15	-73
Venezuela	26	14	-12	-47
Uruguay	21	12	-9	-43
Colombia	9	6	-3	-36
Mexico	25	22	-3	-11
Honduras	8	6	-2	-30
Ecuador	11	9	-2	-21
Costa Rica	13	12	-1	-9
Chile	12	13	1	8
El Salvador	4	5	1	28
Dominican Republic	12	14	2	19
Brazil	15	24	9	57

⁷⁶ See on this e.g. Demmers, J., A. E. Fernandez Jilberto, and B. Hogenboom: *Miraculous Metamorphoses. The Neoliberalization of Latin American Populism*, Zed Books, London 2001

⁷⁷ See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Argentinien: Krise, Revolution, Repression* (German-language collection of articles which the author of these lines wrote during his stay in Argentina during the first half of 2002).

⁷⁸ Kirk A. Hawkins: *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2010, p. 101

Likewise, the workers and poor in Bolivia heroically rebelled against reactionary liberal governments resulting in a series of strikes and uprisings in 2003-05.⁷⁹

Venezuela already witnessed the heroic popular uprising against the IMF-dictated austerity program in February and March 1989 which resulted in a brutal crackdown by the government in which about 2,000 people killed (“*Caracazo*”).

Given the lack of revolutionary leadership these mass protests resulted in the strengthening of existing left-reformist or populist formations.

In 1998, Hugo Chavez won the presidential election after he transformed his underground organization MBR-200 into an open political party (*Movimiento V [Quinta] República, MVR*). Chavez successfully built the MVR as a mass party rooted among the urban poor. For this he utilized the so-called *Circulos Bolivarianos* which spontaneously emerged in 2000 and which were a kind of community groups which addressed issues such as health and education. Each circle had 7-11 members. After some time the party officially had 200,000 circles (as the branches were called) and 2.2 million members (in a country of 30 million people!). These figures may have been inflated, but beyond doubt the MVR had built a significant social base among the popular masses. However, the populist leadership under Chavez never actually wanted that these *Circulos* become real organs of power (like the soviets in Russia 1917), but rather that they should remain pressure-groups to increase the influence of the party among the masses and fight back against the counter-revolutionary mobilizations of the right-wing opposition. They proved particularly valuable during the mass demonstrations against the failed reactionary coup d’état in April 2002.⁸⁰

In Bolivia, Evo Morales built a party which was later named *Movimiento al Socialismo—Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos* (Movement for Socialism—Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples, MAS-IPSP). This was a radical petty-bourgeois populist party based strongly on the coca growing peasants and the indigenous people. Among its founding member organizations were the largest peasant federation – the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CSUTCB) – as well as another peasant union (the *Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia*). The party also created close links with the *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia*, a mass movement representing the indigenous peoples. (The indigenous peoples together constitute 59% of the Bolivian population and, historically, have been severely discriminated against by the white minority.)

Later the MAS-IPSP also succeeded in getting the support of important workers’ and popular organizations like the *Regional Workers Centre* (COR) from El

79 See on this e.g. James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer: *Social Movements and State Power – Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador*, Pluto Press, London 2005

80 See Dawn Gable: *Civil Society, Social Movements, and Participation in Venezuela’s Fifth Republic*, February 9th 2004, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/350>

Alto, the rural teachers federation and *Fencomin* which represents the mining cooperatives (founded by former miners who played a crucial role in all revolutionary events in Bolivia since the 1940s, but which were crushed after an heroic uprising in 1985).

In Brazil, as already stated above, the PT could tremendously strengthen itself. From 1988 onwards it won a number of local and regional elections. In 2002 its leader, Lula da Silva, won the presidential elections and formed a popular-front government.

Similar developments took place in other Latin American countries. In Argentina, a progressive, bourgeois-populist force which emerged out of the Peronist movement coalesced around the Néstor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. First Néstor and later Cristina Fernández de Kirchner headed the country as president from 2003 until 2015. Kirchnerism succeeded in incorporating numerous popular organizations which had emerged during the *Argentinazo* in 2001/02.

Likewise, in Ecuador we saw the *Alianza Patria Altiva y Soberana* (PAIS, Proud and Sovereign Fatherland) led by Rafael Correa who became president of the country in 2007. This alliance combines a nationalist program with socialist rhetoric and social reforms. PAIS has an official membership of 1.5 million people (in a country of 16 million people!)

In their first phase, most of these political movements can be characterized as progressive petty-bourgeois populist forces. (Exceptions are Kirchnerism in Argentina, given the decades-long bourgeois-populist character of the Peronist movement which spawned it, and the Brazilian PT which was founded as a workers' party.) These progressive populist forces formations were not workers' organizations, since their main base was not in mass working class organizations (like the trade unions, etc., or key parties like the Stalinists); neither were they bourgeois parties, as they emerged out of radical mass mobilizations and struggles against the bourgeoisie. Rather they were dominated by petty-bourgeois forces (poor peasants, the lower urban middle class, etc.) which were dramatically affected by the devastating consequences of capitalist globalization. Furthermore, in many cases they succeeded in gaining the support of important sectors of the working class including trade unions. For all these reasons we characterize these parties, in their first phase, as progressive petty-bourgeois populist forces which had strong roots among the popular masses.

However, as Marxists know, in the long run petty-bourgeois parties cannot play an independent role. They have to follow either the working class – represented by a revolutionary mass party – or the bourgeoisie. The temporary coalition government of the Bolsheviks with the Left S.R. from October 1917 until the summer of 1918 is an example of the first case. However, if there is no Bolshevik-like party, sooner or later the petty-bourgeois parties align themselves with sectors of the bourgeoisie and imperialism.

Trotsky summarized this historic lesson in his book on the permanent revolu-

tion:

*"[N]o matter how great the revolutionary role of the peasantry may be, it nevertheless cannot be an independent role and even less a leading one. The peasant follows either the worker or the bourgeois. (...) A democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, as a regime that is distinguished from the dictatorship of the proletariat by its class content, might be realized only in a case where an independent revolutionary party could be constituted, expressing the interests of the peasants and in general of petty bourgeois democracy – a party capable of conquering power with this or that degree of aid from the proletariat, and of determining its revolutionary programme. As all modern history attests – especially the Russian experience of the last twenty-five years – an insurmountable obstacle on the road to the creation of a peasants' party is the petty-bourgeoisie's lack of economic and political independence and its deep internal differentiation. By reason of this the upper sections of the petty-bourgeoisie (of the peasantry) go along with the big bourgeoisie in all decisive cases, especially in war and in revolution; the lower sections go along with the proletariat; the intermediate section being thus compelled to choose between the two extreme poles. Between Kerenskyism and the Bolshevik power, between the Kuomintang and the dictatorship of the proletariat, there is not and cannot be any intermediate stage, that is, no democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants."*⁸¹

Indeed, in Russia we could see that first the Mensheviks and the right wing of the S.R. aligned themselves with the White counterrevolutions after the October uprising. Later, they were joined by the left S.R. after the latter broke with the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1918.

This experience has been repeated numerous times. For example, with the end of the 1911-1917 civil war which broke out following the Mexican Revolution, the new regime kept the capitalist relations of production and consolidated the power of the bourgeoisie (albeit with some reforms and a different political regime).⁸²

A similar development took place in Bolivia after the revolution of 1952 brought the MNR to power with the help of the working class – in particular the miners. While many mines were nationalized and some land reforms took place, the bourgeoisie could again consolidate its power under the regime of the MNR which ruled until 1964.⁸³

It is crucial to understand that, once they take power, petty-bourgeois populist parties are invariably forced to transform their character since they must

81 Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, pp. 277-278

82 On the history of the Mexican Revolution e.g. John Reed: *Insurgent Mexico* (1914), International Publishers, New York, 1994; Adolfo Gilly: *The Mexican Revolution*, Verso Editions, London 1983; Hans Werner Tobler: *Die mexikanische Revolution*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 1984

83 See on this our study of the Bolivian Revolution in 1952 and the Trotskyist tradition: José Villa: *A Revolution Betrayed*, in: *Revolutionary History* Vol. 4, No. 3; See also: James Dunkerley: *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952-82*, Verso Editions, London 1984; Guillermo Lora: *A History of the Bolivian Labour Movement, 1848-1871*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977

find a stable social base from which they can consolidate their power. In other words, they have to align themselves with one of the main social classes in society, i.e. the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Under the conditions of capitalism, taking power usually mean that a radical petty-bourgeois populist party has to create close bonds with sectors of the bourgeoisie. Since the party does not aim to abolish capitalism, the bourgeoisie invariably retain their economic and social power as the ruling class. Furthermore, the capitalist state apparatus – i.e., the bureaucracy of the army, police, legal authority, public administration, etc. – is kept in place, which also plays an important factor in integrating and bourgeoisifying a populist party which recently took power. In short, all petty-bourgeois populist parties which take over the government in a capitalist system eventually build links with sectors of the bourgeoisie and one imperialist power or another. In this way they become popular-front bourgeois parties.

Of course, we cannot exclude here the possibility for exceptions. One important such exception was Castro's *Movimiento 26 de Julio* which took power in Cuba in January 1959 and which was later forced – under the pressure both of US imperialism and the revolutionary upheaval of the workers and peasants – to go much farther than it initially planned. As we have elaborated elsewhere,⁸⁴ as a result of these developments, the Castroites established a bureaucratic anti-capitalist workers' government in the summer of 1960, which in turn led to the creation of a degenerated workers' state in Cuba. But here again, while the Castroites expropriated the bourgeoisie in the economic field, the also expropriated the working class in the political field.

Such an exception was already foreseen by Trotsky himself as he wrote in the *Transitional Program*:

*"Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers' organizations 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 the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.), the petty bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists, may go further than they 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."*⁸⁵

However, as we have already said, usually the petty-bourgeois populist party in power eventually becomes a bourgeois populist party, as it fuses with the bourgeois state apparatus and with a sector of the capitalist class. In cases

⁸⁴ See on this Michael Pröbsting: *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism*, RCIT 2013, chapter I and II

⁸⁵ Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International: The Mobilization of the Masses around Transitional Demands to Prepare the Conquest of Power (The Transitional Program)*; in: *Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years (1933-40)*, New York 1973, p. 203

where it undertakes substantial nationalizations, it may also create a new sector of the capitalist class – a class of state-capitalist managers and associated businessmen. This has been the case in countries like Mexico, Iran or, more recently, Venezuela.

Through such a process, such a party becomes a popular front because it combines sectors of both the capitalist class as well as of the popular masses. Likewise, in power such a populist party will establish relations with one imperialist power or another. For example, the Mexican predecessor organizations of the PRI under Plutarco Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas tried to get the support of US imperialism against the British. So did the Peruvian APRA. Another example is the attempt of Indian nationalists under Subhas Chandra Bose who, while not in power, aligned with the German and Japanese imperialists in order to liberate India from the British.

A similar process took place in Latin America during the past decade. The petty-bourgeois populists – also dubbed “*Castro-Chavistas*” – defended capitalist property relations after coming to power. While they introduced several political, economic and social reforms under the massive pressure of the popular masses (including nationalization or reform of some key enterprises like the oil industry), they didn’t touch the economic base of the capitalist class as such – their private property in the industrial, service and financial sectors. Nor did the Castro-Chavistas fundamentally change the apparatus of the state. Of course they replaced a number of key figures, but the bureaucratic caste as a whole with its tens of thousands of state officials, remained in place.

This meant that the old ruling class, while allowing the new populist forces to take over the government, could essentially keep its wealth and its economic base. Consequently, when the populists in power lose much of their popular support, the old ruling class is still in possession of all the resources they need to easily remove them from power.

Furthermore, the Castro-Chavistas channeled the revolutionary energy of the popular masses towards *passive* support in elections or – in emergency situations – used them for temporary and controlled mass mobilizations against the counter-revolutionary forces (as, for example, happened in Venezuela in April 2002 when there was an attempted coup against the regime of Chavez).

In fact, Chavez, Morales, Correa, etc. have altered the concrete configuration of the capitalist system by expanding the state-capitalist sector (similar to a number of Western European capitalist countries after World War II). In this way they formed close relations with the *Boliburguesía*, as the Bolivarian capitalists are called in Venezuela.⁸⁶

The stint of the Castro-Chavistas in power also enabled them to expand social

⁸⁶ On this see e.g., RCIT: Presidential elections in Venezuela: There is no alternative for the workers on the ballot paper! Neither Hugo Chavez nor Orlando Chirino should be supported by the workers! For a new workers party on a revolutionary program! 3.10.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/elections-in-venezuela/>

benefits for the popular masses (like the *Misiones Bolivarianas* in Venezuela or the *Bolsa Familia* in Brazil). This was, however, only possible because of exceptional and temporary circumstances. During the first decade of the new millennium, various Latin American countries reaped tremendous economic gains from the global rise of prices of raw materials – in particular oil and gas, but also soya in the case of Argentina and lithium in the case of Bolivia.

In addition, the rise of China as a new great power rivaling US imperialism – which traditionally dominated Latin America – granted the Castro-Chavista governments some room to maneuver and withstand the pressure of US imperialism and the IMF. As a result, China has become one of the largest trading partners of and investors in Latin America.⁸⁷

However, the decline of the world economy has led to a fall in export commodity prices – in particular for oil and soya (see Figure 5) – with disastrous effects on the liquidity of the *Castro-Chavista* governments and their ability to fund the social benefits they previously instituted.

It is precisely on this backdrop that we have witnessed the exacerbating crisis and decline of the various populist or popular front governments in Latin America since 2015. These circumstances have already resulted in the Macri victory in Argentina, the impeachment process against Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, and the MUD victory at the last elections in Venezuela.⁸⁸

In Cuba, the Stalinist Castro leadership has opening led the country towards capitalism, with massive layoffs of workers in state industries and the opening

87 See e.g. Miguel Perez Ludeña: Adapting to the Latin American experience; in: EAST ASIA FORUM QUARTERLY, Vol.4 No.2 April–June 2012, p. 13

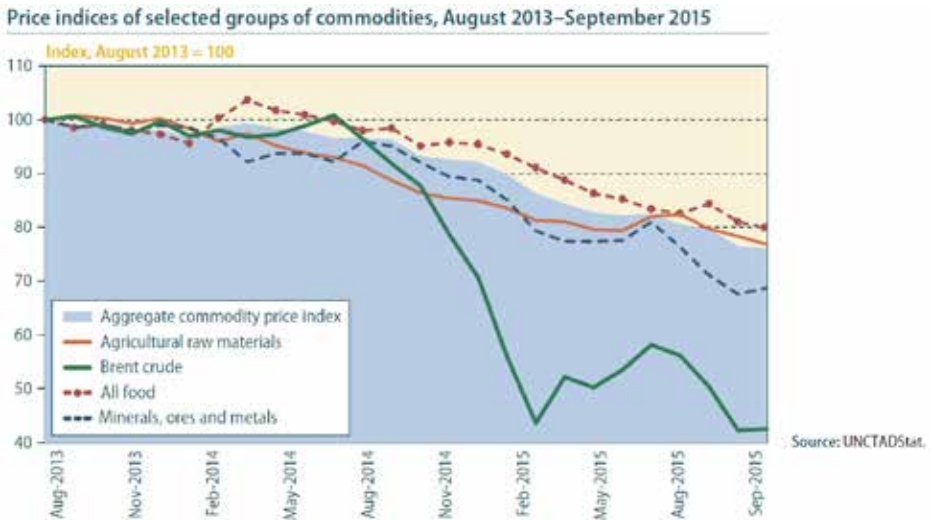
88 For the RCIT's assessment of the situation in Venezuela and the policy of the Chavista see e.g. Venezuela: Only the Working Class under the Leadership of a Leninist Combat Party can achieve a Revolutionary Socialist Solution of the Crisis! Joint Statement of CSR-ETO (Venezuela) and the RCIT, 16.3.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/venezuela-joint-statement/>; RCIT: Venezuela: For Independent Working Class Mobilizations against the Semi-Fascist Provocateurs! No political support for the Maduro government! For a new workers' party based on a revolutionary program! 20.2.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/venezuela-semi-fascist-provocateurs/>; RCIT: Action Program for Venezuela, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/action-program-for-venezuela/>; Michael Pröbsting: On the outcome of the presidential elections in Venezuela, 8.10.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/on-electoral-results-in-venezuela/>; RCIT: Presidential elections in Venezuela: There is no alternative for the workers on the ballot paper! Neither Hugo Chavez nor Orlando Chirino should be supported by the workers! For a new workers party on a revolutionary program! 3.10.2012, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/elections-in-venezuela. For the RCIT's analysis of the class struggle in Argentina see: Michael Pröbsting: Argentina: How to Fight, and how not to Fight, against the Macri Government (Reply to the TPR), 19.02.2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/tpr-christina-slogan/>; RCIT: Argentina: Prepare for Workers' and Popular Mass Resistance against the New Macri Administration! For a United Front of all Workers and Popular Organizations against the New Austerity Offensive and the Macri Administration! For a Break with the Policy of Class Collaboration of Kirchnerism! For an Independent Mass Workers' Party! 19.12.2015, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 45 (January 2016), <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/argentina-macri/>; for RCIT documents on the present impeachment crisis in Brazil see footnote 70.

of its economy to Chinese, US and other foreign corporations.⁸⁹

This is hardly a surprising development, as the Castro-Chavistas never even attempted to expropriate the capitalist class. As a result, they were invariably unable to overcome the fundamental causes of poverty and unemployment. They were able to temporarily mitigate the consequences of the fundamental economic contradictions in their countries by taking advantage of the raw material price boom. But when this boom ended, the social reforms had to stop and the Castro-Chavistas, having already demoralized their supporters during many years of bureaucratically-imposed political passivity, have now themselves started to implement austerity policies.

Historically, the ideological origins of Bolivarian populism can be traced back to the Russian S.R. party which similarly sought to define a theoretical hodge-podge composed of the working class, the peasantry and the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia as a single unity they called the “revolutionary people.” The S.R., and Bolivarian populism in its wake, rejected the strict division of these social forces into distinct classes, with the working class being the only consistently revolutionary force and the other social layers constituting its allies.⁹⁰

Figure 5: Price Indices of Selected Groups of Commodities, August 2013–September 2015⁹¹



89 See on this Michael Pröbsting: *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism*, RCIT 2013, in particular chapter III

90 On this see, e.g., Theodor Dan: *Der Ursprung des Bolschewismus. Zur Geschichte d. demokratischen und sozialistischen Idee in Russland nach der Bauernbefreiung*, Verlag: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., Hannover, 1968, pp. 255-257

91 United Nations: *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2016*, New York, 2016, p. 15

However, despite the current crisis of the Castro-Chavista regimes, it is important to indicate that these petty-bourgeois populist parties both still exist and continue to exert massive influence on the workers and oppressed. Secondly, as long as there is no mass-based revolutionary party as an alternative, a revival of these petty-bourgeois populist parties can by no means be precluded, let alone the emergence of some new influential petty-bourgeois populist parties.

As we have stated in our *Theses on the United Front Tactic* and in various other documents, the emergence of petty-bourgeois populist forces is by no means limited to Latin American. We need only cite Julius Malema's *EFF* in South Africa; various Islamist-type petty-bourgeois populist forces like Hamas, Dr. al-Qadri's *Pakistan Awami Tehreek* (PAT, Pakistan People's Movement), and the Houthis in Yemen; and various democratic nationalist or Islamist rebel organizations in Syria, Libya, and Egypt.

Similarly, various petty-bourgeois populist forces of the nationalist-type have played leading roles in the national liberation struggle of oppressed peoples in the semi-colonial world as well as in some imperialist countries. Until its defeat and demise in 2009, the LTTE ("*Tamil Tigers*") in Sri Lanka was a prominent example of this, as were various petty-bourgeois nationalist forces in Kashmir and Balochistan (Pakistan). The *Sinn Fein/IRA* in Northern Ireland, before its 1998 capitulation, is another example. *Herri Batasuna* in the Basque Country and *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* in Catalonia are also important progressive petty-bourgeois nationalist forces active within the Spanish state.

Recently *Sinn Fein*, which has for a long time been an opposition party in the Republic of Ireland, has significantly increased its influence by playing a leading role in the *Right2Water* campaign, which has become the largest social movement in Ireland for decades in its struggle against the imposing of water fees by the government as part of its austerity program to make ordinary citizen pay for the crisis of the banks. In the latest election (2016), *Sinn Fein* received 13.8% of the votes cast becoming the third-biggest party in Ireland's parliament.

Yet another example of a specific type of petty-bourgeois populist party in an imperialist country is the *Respect Party* in Britain. Its most prominent leader is George Galloway, a long time MP from the left wing of the Labour Party. Galloway has been playing a prominent role in the movement against the imperialist wars in the Middle East and in solidarity with the Palestinian people. (However, he has also taken reactionary positions as, for example, his support for the Assad dictatorship against the Syrian Revolution and his collaboration with the right-wing racist UKIP party in the campaign for Britain to leave the EU). After Galloway's 2003 expulsion from the Blairite Labour Party for his opposition to the imperialist war in Iraq, he founded *Respect* together with the centrist SWP and with the support of a number of Muslim migrant organizations. This amalgamation was the result of the anti-war movement in which Muslim migrant organizations played a major role. While *Respect* never succeeded in

building a stable organized mass constituency, it has nevertheless been able to achieve some electoral successes, most prominently Galloway's two elections to parliament (first in Bethnal Green and Bow 2005–10 and later in Bradford West 2012–15). These two successes were almost entirely based on the support of Muslim migrant communities who had previously supported the Labour Party, but who had broken with it given Labour's submissive support for British participation in the imperialist wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, and the rise of Islamophobic racism in Britain itself. There is no question that these Muslim migrant communities were politically dominated by a small, petty-bourgeois layer of small businessmen, doctors, religious leaders, etc. However, this does not change the fact that *Respect* has for some time become a political expression of the anti-imperialist and anti-racist protest of migrants.

There are also numerous petty-bourgeois populist organizations of migrants in other imperialist countries, as well as among the oppressed black and Latino minorities in the USA.

Of particular importance for revolutionaries are those developments in the working class which led to the formation of new workers' parties. Naturally, revolutionaries advocate such a process, because it helps the workers' vanguard to become politically independent both of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties on the one side or of rotten bureaucraticised bourgeois workers' parties on the other. The most spectacular examples of new parties emerging from the workers' movement in recent years have been the foundation of the *Democratic Labor Party* in South Korea, the *Partido de los Trabajadores* in Bolivia, SYRIZA in Greece and the *Bloco de Esquerda* (B.E.) in Portugal.

In Korea, the *Democratic Labor Party* is strongly tied to the KCTU, South Korea's militant trade union federation. Founded in 2000, the DLP won 10 seats in the 2004 parliamentary election. However, the party later split and ultimately merged with other petty-bourgeois populist forces to constitute the *Unified Progressive Party*. The latter became the third largest party in parliament but was recently outlawed by the South Korean state because of its anti-imperialist position against US aggression towards North Korea.

The Bolivian *Partido de los Trabajadores* was created in 2013 with the support of the COB union federation, in particular that of the national miners union FSTMB. This development was a result of the disillusionment of many workers with Morales' MAS government.

Another example, which has still not matured into a party, is the so-called *United Front* in South Africa. This is a political alliance which was initiated by the metal workers union NUMSA, the largest union in the COSATU federation until its split with the latter's leadership. Unfortunately, the COSATU leadership is determined to follow the trodden path of the reformist *Freedom Charter*, the old ANC program from 1955, and could not bring itself to form a political party which would stand for election against the main government party, the ANC.

SYRIZA in Greece has been a somewhat different phenomenon since its emergence in 2004 as a coalition of *Synaspismós* (a “Eurocommunist” split from the Stalinist KKE) and several smaller left-reformist and centrist organizations. While for a number of years it remained a party with meager support, it experienced an electoral breakthrough in 2012, becoming the second largest party in parliament after garnering more than 16% of the vote. In the next elections (January 2015), SYRIZA was victorious winning 36.3% of the vote. It gained such mass support because of its anti-austerity program and its denunciation of the corrupt “old political class.” However, once in power it completely betrayed the interests of the workers and poor. It organized a popular referendum on the Memorandum of the EU Troika in July 2015 which ended with a resounding victory for “OXI” – “No” to the EU austerity programs. However, only weeks later the SYRIZA government signed the EU memorandum!⁹²

The Portuguese *Bloco de Esquerda*, founded in 1999, is also a coalition of several centrist organizations of Trotskyist and Maoist origin. Like SYRIZA, it has gained popularity as a representative of the struggle against austerity. It soon entered parliament and in the most recent elections (October 2015) received 10.2% of the vote.

92 We have dealt with the rise and the betrayal of SYRIZA in a number of documents and resolutions. See RCIT: Upcoming Elections in Greece: Down with the Pro-Memorandum Parties! Critical Support for LAE (Popular Unity)! 13.9.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/critical-vote-for-lae/>; RCIT: Greece: SYRIZA Splits after Tsipras-Government Capitulates to the EU. For a new Workers' Party with a Revolutionary Program instead of nationalist narrow-minded Left Reformism, 25.8.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/syriza-splits/>; RCIT: SYRIZA betrays Greece's Workers and Poor – “OXI” was not meant as a “YES” to another austerity program! For the organization of mass resistance against the betrayal of the Tsipras government! Left wing in SYRIZA: Fight against the party leaders who are lackeys of the EU-Bosses! 11.7.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/syriza-betrayal/>; RCIT: 61.3% Vote OXI in the Greek Referendum: A Victory for the Entire European Working Class! A battle has been won, but the war against the EU and IMF continues! Nationalize the banks and media under workers' control! 6.7.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-after-referendum/>; RCIT: Referendum in Greece on 5 July: Vote OXI! against the EU-Troika! No to any Austerity Program! Break with the EU and IMF! Nationalize the Banks and Media under Workers' Control! 30.6.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-referendum-oxi/>; RCIT: Greece: No to the Surrender of the SYRIZA Leadership! 26.2.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/syriza-surrenders/>; RCIT: Greek Elections: SYRIZA Wins ... and Forms an Alliance with Reactionary Racists! 27.1.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-syriza-anel/>; RCIT: Elections in Greece: Vote SYRIZA but Don't Trust the Tsipras Leadership! Organize the Struggle in Workplaces, Schools, and on the Streets! Fight for a Workers' Government! 22.1.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-election-statement/>; Michael Pröbsting: After the elections on 17th June: A new phase of the Greek Revolution is beginning! 19.6.2012, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-after-17-6-elections/; Michael Pröbsting: Greece: For a Workers' Government! Critical electoral support for SYRIZA and KKE! Workers: Organize and prepare yourselves for the struggle for power! 6.6.2012, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-for-a-workers-government/; Michael Pröbsting: After SYRIZA's victory in the Greek elections: The question of a Workers Government and the revolutionary way forward, May 2012, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/after-the-greek-elections/; Michael Pröbsting: Perspectives on the Greek Revolution, 10.11.2011, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-revolution-or-tragedy

While both SYRIZA and B.E. were formed by organizations of the workers' movement, initially neither had any significant organized mass base in the working class (B.E. still doesn't have one). However, since their political reputation had remained unimpaired by participation in previous governments and the corrupt political establishment, they were able to become an expression of the political radicalization of sectors of the working class and the youth.

A somewhat different phenomenon is the *Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores* (FIT) in Argentina which is not a party but only an electoral alliance of three centrist Trotskyist organizations (PO, PTS and IS). However, its candidates gained 812,530 votes or 3.23% of the ballots cast in the presidential elections of November 2015.

Finally, there is *Podemos* in Spain which was founded in 2014 after years of mass protests and social polarization in the country. In 2011, Spain experienced a mass democratic movement ("*Indignados*") and in the following years witnessed a number of protests against the harsh austerity programs of the conservative PP government and rising unemployment (half of Spain's youth are without jobs). *Podemos* organized a mass demonstration in January 2015 in which more than 100,000 participated. Despite its brief existence, it has already become the second largest political party in Spain in terms of membership with nearly 400,000 members. It focuses its protests against the government's austerity program, the monarchy, and the corrupt political system, and defends the right of national self-determination for the Basque region, Catalonia, etc.

Podemos is a progressive, petty-bourgeois populist party with a leadership strongly orientated towards the program and organization of the Chavista model.⁹³ Its social base is dominated by the youth of the impoverished lower middle strata.⁹⁴ However, there are also a number of workers among its supporters, as attested to by a number of *circulos* (local party branches) in working class districts in large cities. As can be seen in Figure 4 (above), 35% of *Podemos* supporters are either unemployed or have only a fixed-term contract.

Furthermore, *Podemos* has close relations with various grassroots organizations of workers and the lower middle class like committees of nurses, of victims of evictions from their apartments or houses because of the debt crisis.⁹⁵

93 See e.g. Pablo Iglesias: Understanding Podemos, in: New Left Review No. 93 (May June 2015), pp. 7-22

94 On the decline of the middle layers in Spain see e.g. José Félix Tezanos: Trends Of The Middle Classes' Decline In The Context Of Economic Crisis And Political Uncertainty: The Case Of Spain

95 See e.g. César Rendueles and Jorge Sola: Podemos and the Challenges of Political Change in Spain, in: Near Futures Online Issue No. 1 (March 2016) "Europe at Crossroads"; Jordi Mir Garcia: A Democratic Revolution Underway in Barcelona: Barcelona en Comú, in: Near Futures Online Issue No. 1; Pau Mari-Klose and Albert Julià: The 'enraged' Spanish Socialist voter: young and highly educated, 07 November 2014, http://www.policy-network.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=4769&title=The+E2%80%98enraged%E2%80%99+Spanish+Socialist+voter%3a+young+and+highly+educated; Toni Rodon and María José Hierro: Podemos and Ciudadanos Shake up the Spanish Party System: The 2015 Local and Regional Elections, in: South European Society and Politics (2016); David Rey and Arturo Rodríguez: Municipal and regional elections in Spain: the right wing bites the

In summary, *Podemos* is yet another important example illustrating how, despite the lack of authentic revolutionary leadership, in the context of the historic crisis of capitalism, the coupling of traditional reformist parties and the radicalization of sectors of the working class and youth can, in the short run at least, successfully find expression in a non-revolutionary organizations.

As we have seen in the examples given above, circumstances can lead to one of three possible scenarios:

i) They can provoke the creation of new reformist workers' parties or tremendously strengthen ones that were previously small (e.g., the PT in Bolivia, DLP in South Korea, SYRIZA in Greece, B.E. in Portugal).

ii) They can result in the formation of new (or very much strengthened) petty-bourgeois populist parties, not only in semi-colonial countries, but even in the imperialist countries (e.g., Castro-Chavismo in Latin America, PAT in Pakistan, Sinn Fein in Ireland, CUP, HB and *Podemos* in the Spanish State, Respect in Britain).

iii) They can also lead to the transformation of an old reformist party, through the mass influx of new and radical supporters, thereby transforming it into a left-reformist party (e.g., the Labour Party in Britain under Corbyn).

However, given the greatly volatile, revolutionary nature of the present historic period, it is hardly surprising that all these new reformist and populist formations are very instable. They can grow rapidly but, given their petty-bourgeois adaption to capitalism and their lack of a clear program and perspective, they fail to build a stable working class cadre. This, in short, explains the extremely instable nature of these parties.

dust! 1 June 2015 <http://www.marxist.com/municipal-and-regional-elections-in-spain-the-right-is-crippled-landslide-for-podemos.htm>; Laureano Jimenez: *Podemos: What is it and where is it going?* 11 February 2015 <http://www.marxist.com/podemos-what-ist-it-and-where-is-it-going.htm>; Luke Stobart: *Understanding Podemos*, November 2014 to January 2015 (Part 1 to 3), <http://left-flank.org/2014/11/05/explaining-podemos-1-15-m-counter-politics/>, <http://left-flank.org/2014/11/14/understanding-podemos-23-radical-populism/>, <http://left-flank.org/2015/01/02/understanding-podemos-33-commonsense-policies/>; David Mathieson: *Si, we can! How the left-wing Podemos party is rattling the Spanish establishment*, 5 February 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/02/si-we-can-how-left-wing-podemos-party-rattling-spanish-establishment>; François Sabado : *The experience of Podemos in the Spanish State, its originality, its challenges*, 22 June 2015, <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4092>; Tom Lewis: *Podemos and the Left in Spain*, in: *International Socialist Review Issue #98*, <http://isreview.org/issue/98/podemos-and-left-spain>; Omar Hassan: *Podemos and left populism*, *Marxist Left Review No.11 Summer 2016*, <http://marxistleftreview.org/index.php/no-11-summer-2016/130-podemos-and-left-populism>

The Marxist Classics on the Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement

The united front tactic constitutes a crucial element in the revolutionary struggle for *proletarian hegemony* in several ways. First, by definition, the struggle for proletarian hegemony implies breaking the current petty-bourgeois or bourgeois hegemony of the liberation movement. In other words, the revolutionary party must strive to replace the current leadership position of the Castro-Chavista, Islamist-populist, left reformist, and other non-revolutionary forces. These leaderships – through their conciliations to the ruling class, their pacification of the revolutionary energy of the masses, through absorbing (or isolating) the best elements into the bourgeois state apparatus once they take power, etc. – obstruct the maturing and further development of the proletarian liberation movement. In this way they don't serve the interests of the working class but rather those of the ruling class. Hence, only their replacement with a revolutionary leadership can ensure that the working class and the oppressed can successfully overthrow capitalism. This is the first and foremost task of the struggle for proletarian hegemony.

Secondly, and related to the first, revolutionaries must strive to overcome the petty-bourgeois dominance in the parties and organizations which stand at the head of the working class and oppressed. These parties are often dominated by a petty-bourgeois bureaucracy which obstructs the activity of the rank and file workers. Furthermore, there is often a disproportionately high influence of the petty-bourgeoisie (academics, lawyers, small businessmen, affluent community leaders, etc.) in the upper echelons of such parties.

Many times Lenin emphasized that it is crucial for revolutionaries to be aware of the internal social stratification of both the working class as well as of the poor petty-bourgeoisie. This, he argued, makes the united front tactic even more urgent.

„Capitalism would not be capitalism if the proletariat pur sang were not surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types intermediate between the proletarian and the semi-proletarian (who earns his livelihood in part by the sale of his labour-power), between the semi-proletarian and the small peasant (and petty artisan, handicraft worker and small master in general), between the small peasant and the middle peasant, and so on, and if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata, if it were not divided according to territorial origin, trade, sometimes according to religion, and so on. From all this follows the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the Communist Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, its class-conscious section, to resort to changes of tack, to conciliation and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small masters. It is entirely a matter of knowing how to apply these tactics in order to raise – not lower – the general level of proletarian class-consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to

fight and win."⁹⁶

Finally, the popular front is the highest (or, more properly put, lowest), form of political subordination of the working class to the bourgeoisie. As we have mentioned above, this is a political alliance of parties of the proletariat and the peasantry with openly bourgeois forces. Such popular fronts constitute the biggest danger for the working class, since they inherently involve the workers' political and organizational subordination to the bourgeoisie, lulling the former into a rosy program of pacifist and reformist illusions. Such subordination only weakens the working class and makes it incapable of struggling against future severe attacks by the ruling class. Hence Trotsky characterized the issue of the popular front as the "*main question of proletarian class strategy for this epoch.*" Faced with the experience of the popular front in France and Spain in 1936, Trotsky wrote in a document adopted by a conference of the *Movement for the Fourth International* at that time:

*"The July days [in Spain, Ed.] deepen and supplement the lessons of the June days in France with exceptional force. For the second time in five years the coalition of the labor parties with the Radical bourgeoisie has brought the revolution to the edge of the abyss. Incapable of solving a single one of the tasks posed by the revolution—since all these tasks boil down to one, namely, the crushing of the bourgeoisie—the People's Front renders the existence of the bourgeois regime impossible and thereby provokes the fascist coup d'état. By lulling the workers and peasants with parliamentary illusions, by paralyzing their will to struggle, the People's Front creates favorable conditions for the victory of fascism. The policy of coalition with the bourgeoisie must be paid for by the proletariat with years of new torments and sacrifice, if not by decades of fascist terror."*⁹⁷

Hence, the central task of united front tactic is to help the proletariat to overcome all these forms of subordination and to establish its hegemony within the liberation movement, i.e., to free itself from any bourgeois influence and to lead its allies – the poor peasantry, the urban poor, the impoverished lower middle strata, etc. – into the revolutionary liberation struggle against the capitalist sys-

96 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism - An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, p. 74

97 Leon Trotsky: *The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (1936), in: *Trotsky Writings 1935-36*, pp. 339-340. In another document Trotsky stated: "*The question of questions at present is the People's Front. The left centrists seek to present this question as a tactical or even as a technical maneuver, so as to be able to peddle their wares in the shadow of the People's Front. In reality, the People's Front is the main question of proletarian class strategy for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism. For it is often forgotten that the greatest historical example of the People's Front is the February 1917 revolution. From February to October, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who represent a very good parallel to the 'Communists' and Social Democrats, were in the closest alliance and in a permanent coalition with the bourgeois party of the Cadets, together with whom they formed a series of coalition governments. Under the sign of this People's Front stood the whole mass of the people, including the workers', peasants', and soldiers' councils. To be sure, the Bolsheviks participated in the councils. But they did not make the slightest concession to the People's Front. Their demand was to break this People's Front, to destroy the alliance with the Cadets, and to create a genuine workers' and peasants' government.*" (Leon Trotsky: *The Dutch Section and the International* (1936), in: *Trotsky Writings 1935-36*, p. 370)

tem.

Lenin emphasized this issue many times.

*“What must the policy of the Social-Democrats be? Either abstain, and, as socialists, stand aside from the liberals, who betray liberty and exploit the people, or give the lead to the democratic petty bourgeoisie that is capable of struggle, both against the Black Hundreds and against the liberals. (...) The latter policy is obligatory when the conditions of a bourgeois-democratic revolution obtain, when, in addition to the working class, there are certain bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strata capable of struggle for the democracy that is essential to the proletariat. In present-day Russia the second policy is obligatory. Without ever forgetting their socialist agitation and propaganda, and the organisation of the proletarians into a class, Social-Democrats must, jointly with the democratic petty bourgeoisie, crush both the Black Hundreds and the liberals, as the situation may demand.”*⁹⁸

Explaining a key difference between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, he wrote in another article: *“The struggle between Bolshevism and Menshevism is inseparably bound up with that history, being a struggle over the question whether to support the liberals or to overthrow the hegemony of the liberals over the peasantry.”*⁹⁹

In another article, he explained: *“The hegemony of liberalism in the Russian movement for emancipation inevitably implies the weakness of this movement and the impregnability of the dominance of the die-hard landlords. Only the brushing aside of the liberals by the proletariat and the hegemony of the latter have afforded victories for the revolution and can give more of them in the future.”*¹⁰⁰

In the years following Lenin’s death, the Stalinists accused Trotsky of “neglecting” the necessity of the working class to seek an alliance with the poor peasantry. This was utter nonsense and only served the Stalinists to cover their own strategy of subordinating the interests of the working class to the political leaders of the petty bourgeoisie and the labor bureaucracy (e.g., the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee in 1925-27, Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang, etc.).

Against these accusations, Trotsky replied that the alliance of the working class with the poor peasantry is crucial element of the Bolshevik strategy. However, such an alliance can be established on firm and stable ground *only* if it is *not* achieved by subordinating the proletariat to the leadership of the petty bourgeoisie (whose desire is rather to become part of the bourgeoisie), but rather in an alliance under the leadership of the working class. In fact, this is an indispensable part of his theory of permanent revolution.

In his book on permanent revolution, Trotsky explained:

„Then wherein lies the distinction between the advanced and the backward countries? The distinction is great, but it still remains within the limits of the domination of capitalist relationships. The forms and methods of the rule of the bourgeoisie differ greatly

98 V. I. Lenin: *The First Important Step* (1907), in: LCW 12, pp. 162-163

99 V.I. Lenin: *The Historical Meaning of the Inner-Party Struggle in Russia* (1910), in: LCW 16, p. 378

100 V.I. Lenin: *The Demonstration on the Death of Muromtsev* (1910), in: LCW 16, p. 317

*in different countries. At one pole, the domination bears a stark and absolute character: The United States. At the other pole finance capital adapts itself to the outlived institutions of Asiatic mediaevalism by subjecting them to itself and imposing its own methods upon them: India. But the bourgeoisie rules in both places. From this it follows that the dictatorship of the proletariat also will have a highly varied character in terms of the social basis, the political forms, the immediate tasks and the tempo of work in the various capitalist countries. But to lead the masses of the people to victory over the bloc of the imperialists, the feudalists and the national bourgeoisie – this can be done only under the revolutionary hegemony of the proletariat, which transforms itself after the seizure of power into the dictatorship of the proletariat.”*¹⁰¹

In summary, the struggle for proletarian hegemony and the united front tactic are inseparably linked one with the other. Without the united front tactic, the struggle for proletarian hegemony takes place in a vacuum, because it is only in direct practical collaboration and political confrontation with the reformist and populist forces that revolutionaries can remove them from their positions of leadership. Without the struggle for proletarian hegemony the united front tactic degenerates into opportunistic maneuvering with the petty-bourgeois leaders and hence does not advance the revolutionary class struggle but rather helps the ruling class.

101 Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution, Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 253

V. The United Front Tactic and Petty-Bourgeois Nationalist and Populist Parties in the Semi-Colonial World

After providing an overview of the most important social and political developments of the working class and oppressed, as well as their organizations, we shall now move on to a discussion of several issues related to this revolutionary tactic.

We have shown that petty-bourgeois populist parties have become important forces in recent years, and it is therefore crucial for revolutionaries to apply the united front tactic towards such forces. Clearly this includes the call for joint actions against neoliberal governments, imperialist aggression, etc.

What should be the attitude of revolutionaries towards petty-bourgeois populist parties? And how should they apply the united front tactic to such parties during elections as well as when formulating slogans calling for the desired type of governmental control?

“Workers’ Party” or a “Workers’ and Peasants’ Party”?

While revolutionaries support progressive mass struggles led by petty-bourgeois populist parties against the ruling class and imperialism, they strive towards the creation of a workers’ party, not a cross-class party. We have repeatedly stressed the crucial importance of the alliance of the working class and the other oppressed classes and layers. However, this is an *alliance of different* classes and it would be a grave mistake to confuse the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie. Furthermore, this alliance can only lead to the liberation of the working class *and* the petty-bourgeoisie, if the former leads the latter and not the other way round. If the working class is the leading force, this alliance can open the road to socialism. If the petty-bourgeoisie dominates the working class, it will result in a defeat for both classes.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a powerful confirmation for this. Between February and October of that year the Soviets and, shortly after, the Provisional Government were dominated by the petty-bourgeois Social-Revolutionary Party as well the Mensheviks, which by that time had already been transformed into a bourgeois workers’ party. The Provisional Government not only failed to expropriate the capitalists, remove Russia from the war, and liquidate poverty, but also proved incapable of appropriating the lands of the big landowners and distributing them to the peasants, i.e., to satisfy the needs of the rural petty-bourgeoisie. This only could be achieved when the working class – led by the

Bolshevik Party – took power in October 1917 and founded the dictatorship of the proletariat in alliance with the poor peasantry. They did so, in the first period up until the summer of 1918, in coalition with the left wing of the S.R. party.

The last decade in Latin America has illustrated yet again that, when petty-bourgeois populist parties take power without an alliance with a Bolshevik-type of party, particularly because such a force does not currently exist, the populist parties inevitably act as defenders of capitalism and ultimately become transformed into bourgeois parties related to a sector of the capitalist class. These recent illustrations are nothing new, but merely repeat what has already been demonstrated in Bolivia after Torres' MNR came to power in 1952, or by the numerous petty-bourgeois nationalist movements in Africa and Asia when they took power after the colonial powers were forced to withdraw and accept the formal independence of their former colonies in the 1950s and 1960s.

It is a crucial axiom for Marxists that a revolutionary party must have a clear class character. It must be a party rooted in and based on the working class. This is necessitated by the central position of the proletariat in the process of production, i.e., as the only class which creates capitalist value. Thus, it is the only class which produces surplus value (i.e., the basis for capitalist profits) and hence is *the* creator of the wealth for the ruling class. The working class does not own the means of production as private property, and therefore must sell its labor to the owners of the means of production. Furthermore, by nature it is a collective class, as the very process of production involves the uniting together of the workers while production and reproduction are based on a division of their collective labor. This reality and these dynamics differentiate the proletariat from all other oppressed classes and layers, like the peasants or the urban petty-bourgeoisie, who are characterized by their desire to individually own a piece of land (even if only a small one) or a shop, or the salaried middle layers.

This class contradictions between the proletariat and the capitalists constitute the basis for the economic and political organization of the former against the latter. Marx elaborated this in his polemic against the French utopian socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon:

“The first attempts of workers to associate among themselves always take place in the form of combinations. Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance — combination. Thus combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among the workers, so that they can carry on general competition with the capitalist. If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages. This is so true that English economists are amazed to see the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages in favour of associations, which, in the eyes of these economists, are established solely in favour of wages. In this struggle — a veritable civil war — all the

*elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character. Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have pointed out only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.”*¹⁰²

He and Engels further developed this thought in the *Communist Manifesto*:

*“But with the development of industry, the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The increasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon, the workers begin to form combinations (Trades’ Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there, the contest breaks out into riots. Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle.”*¹⁰³

Does this mean that only workers can be members of a workers’ party? Of course, not! Members of all classes are welcome in a revolutionary party; however under one pre-condition: they must identify themselves fully with the political position of the working class.

In our book on the revolutionary party, we have outlined how the Bolshevik Party in Russia – the most successful revolutionary party in the history of the workers’ movement – had been a party based on a primarily proletarian membership nearly from the beginning. Naturally, the party also had peasants and militants from the middle class in their ranks, but the workers were predominant.¹⁰⁴

102 Karl Marx: *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Answer to the *Philosophy of Poverty* by M. Proudhon (1847), in: MECW Vol. 6, pp. 210-211

103 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in: MECW Vol. 6, p. 493

104 See also Michael Pröbsting: *Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice*.

Hence, when in the 1920s Stalin introduced the idea that communists should build not workers' parties but workers *and peasants* parties, this was a major revision of the orthodox Marxist position. Lenin and Trotsky had defended the necessity to build proletarian parties. Indeed, this was a major difference between the Russian Marxists and the petty-bourgeois populists of the S.R., as Lenin elaborated numerous times.

*„The petty bourgeois, the peasant included, is naturally closer to the liberal than to the proletariat; he is closer as a proprietor, as a petty producer. It would, therefore, be politically ridiculous and, from the standpoint of socialism, downright reactionary, to unite the petty bourgeoisie and the proletarians in one party (as the Socialist-Revolutionaries would like to do).“*¹⁰⁵

*“The alliance of the proletariat and the peasantry’, let us note in passing, should not in any circumstances be understood as meaning the fusion of various classes, or of the parties of the proletariat and the peasantry. Not only fusion, but any prolonged agreement would be destructive for the socialist party of the working class, and would enfeeble the revolutionary-democratic struggle. That the peasantry inevitably wavers between the liberal bourgeoisie and the proletariat follows from its position as a class;“*¹⁰⁶

And in a polemic against the S.R., Lenin elaborated in 1909:

*“ [T]he Social-Democrats maintained that the proletariat and the peasantry were distinct classes in capitalist (or semi-feudal, semi-capitalist) society; that the peasantry is a class of petty proprietors that can “strike together” against the landlords and the autocracy, “on the same side of the barricades” with the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution, and that in this revolution it can, in certain cases, march in “alliance” with the proletariat, while remaining quite a separate class of capitalist society. The Socialist-Revolutionaries denied this. The main idea in their programme was not that an “alliance of the forces” of the proletariat and the peasantry was necessary, but that there was no class gulf between them, that no class distinction should be drawn between them, and that the Social-Democratic idea concerning the petty-bourgeois character of the peasantry, as distinct from the proletariat, is utterly false. (...) [T]here was a Socialist-Revolutionary programme, and the whole difference between it and the programme of the Social-Democrats was that the fundamental, theoretical section of the former was based on the denial of the petty-bourgeois character of the peasantry, the denial of any class distinction between the peasantry and the proletariat. There was a revolution, my dear sirs, and the chief lesson it taught was that in their open mass actions the peasantry displayed a class nature of their own, distinct from that of the proletariat, and proved themselves to be petty-bourgeois.“*¹⁰⁷

This principle of the Marxist party theory has been confirmed numerous

Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism, RCIT Books, Vienna 2014, pp. 81-84 and pp. 25-27, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/rcit-party-building/rcit-party-building-i/>

105 V.I. Lenin: The Bolsheviks and the Petty Bourgeoisie, in: LCW 12, p. 181

106 V.I. Lenin: The Assessment of the Russian Revolution (1908), in: LCW 15, p. 57

107 V.I. Lenin: How The Socialist-Revolutionaries Sum Up the Revolution and how the Revolution has Summed Them Up (1909), in: LCW 15, pp. 331-332

times in history. The S.R. – first the right-wing and later the left-wing as well – went over to the camp of capitalist counter-revolution during the Russian civil war 1918-1921. Later the Chinese Kuomintang turned against the workers and peasants and slaughtered tens of thousands of communists. Trotsky summarized the lessons of this experience as follows:

*“Had the vanguard of the Russian proletariat failed to oppose itself to the peasantry, had it failed to wage a ruthless struggle against the all-devouring petty-bourgeois amorphousness of the latter, it would inevitably have dissolved itself among the petty-bourgeois elements through the medium of the Social Revolutionary Party or some other “two-class party” which, in turn, would inevitably have subjected the vanguard to bourgeois leadership. In order to arrive at a revolutionary alliance with the peasantry—this does not come gratuitously—it is first of all necessary to separate the proletarian vanguard, and thereby the working class as a whole, from the petty bourgeois masses. This can be achieved only by training the proletarian party in the spirit of unshakable class irreconcilability.”*¹⁰⁸

He also drew attention to the fact that, before Stalin, it was precisely the social democratic opportunists who advocated the idea of “workers and peasants parties”:

*“It is fatal that in this question, fundamental for the entire East, modern revisionism only repeats the errors of old social democratic opportunism of pre-revolutionary days. Most of the leaders of European social democracy considered the struggle of our party against S.R.’s to be mistaken and insistently advocated the fusion of the two parties, holding that for the Russian “East” a two-class workers’ and peasants’ party was exactly in order. Had we heeded their counsel, we should never have achieved either the alliance of the workers and the peasants or the dictatorship of the proletariat. The “two-class” workers’ and peasants’ party of the S.R.’s became, and could not help becoming in our country, the agency of the imperialist bourgeoisie, i.e., it tried unsuccessfully to fulfill the same historic role which was successfully played in China by the Kuomintang in a different and “peculiar” Chinese way, thanks to the revisionists of Bolshevism. Without a relentless condemnation of the very idea of workers’ and peasants’ parties for the East, there is not and there cannot be a program of the Comintern.”*¹⁰⁹

In summary, Marxists categorically oppose the populist conception of workers’ and peasant parties. The revolutionary party must have a proletarian character or none at all. In fact, the existence of a separate proletarian party is the precondition for the construction of an alliance of the working class with the peasantry and other oppressed non-proletarian layers, since such an alliance can only be successfully built if it is led by the working class, i.e. its party. Workers’ and peasants’, i.e. petty-bourgeois populist, parties on the other hand are an obstacle for the liberation struggle of the working class and the oppressed.

108 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin. The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 222

109 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin*, p. 223

Entry Tactics in Petty-Bourgeois Populist Parties

What does this mean under conditions in which no workers' party exists, or only a very small or very bureaucratically degenerated one does, while at the same time there are petty-bourgeois populist parties with a mass following among the working class? Of course, as we have already stated, Marxists have to call for the founding of a workers' party (more on this below). However, as we have outlined in our *Theses on the United Front*, it would be completely sectarian for Marxists to limit themselves to purely denouncing such populist parties. They should also develop tactics towards such parties. Obviously this means to apply the united front tactic in various forms. This will include – given the numerical weakness of revolutionaries today – joining practical activities of the class struggle led by such parties and working side by side with their members.

Under specific circumstances this could also mean that revolutionaries should enter such parties in order to work more closely side-by-side with militant members of these parties and to win them over to a revolutionary perspective. Of course, revolutionaries must take care – as this is always the case when applying the entry tactic – that they avoid opportunistic adaption to the dominating petty-bourgeois leadership of the party. Rather, they must constitute a revolutionary wing with a clear platform. They must disseminate their independent propaganda and agitation and try to organize militant workers and youth against the petty-bourgeois leadership. Likewise such entryism can only be a temporary tactic, as Trotsky stated:

*“Entry into a reformist centrist party in itself does not include a long term perspective. It is only a stage which, under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode. . . . To recognise in time the bureaucracy’s decisive attack against the left wing and defend ourselves from it, not by making concessions, adapting or playing hide and seek, but by a revolutionary offensive.”*¹¹⁰

The goal must be to use this tactic in order to help the formation of an authentic workers' party without a petty-bourgeois leadership.

While various centrists oppose such a tactic in principle, Marxists refuse such dogmatism. As is well known, Marx and Engels deployed such a tactic during the 1848-49 revolution in Germany when they entered petty-bourgeois democratic forces.¹¹¹

Revolutionaries have also made important use of such entry tactics during the 20th century. The pioneer of this tactic was the Dutch Henk Sneevliet. Sneevliet was a Marxist in the left wing of social democracy in the Netherlands as well as an important trade union leader. In 1913 he went to Indonesia, a Dutch colony at the time, where he became a leader of the militant railway union (VSTP) that

110 Leon Trotsky: *Lessons of the SFIO Entry (1935)*, in: *The Crisis of the French Section*, New York 1977, pp. 125-126

111 See on this the books referred to above of David Riazanov: *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, August H. Nimtz: *Marx and Engels* and Otto Rühle: *Karl Marx*.

had a number of Indonesian workers in its ranks. One year later he founded the *Indian Social Democratic Association* (ISDV). The ISDV – after the reformist wing split away – first cooperated with the Indonesian-nationalist group *Insulinde* and later with the *Sarekat Islam*. The latter was a petty-bourgeois nationalist and Islamist mass movement with a mass following among the lower urban strata and the peasantry and a petty-bourgeois semi-intellectual leadership. In 1914 it had a membership of more than 366,000 Indonesians.¹¹²

Sneevliet understood well the importance of Sarekat Islam and the ISDV began entry work inside this mass movement. He succeeded in transforming the ISDV into an organization of a few hundred cadres with a majority of Indonesian members. By the time they also gained substantial influence inside Sarekat Islam and formed a left-wing. The ISDV transformed itself into the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) in 1920. With the growing influence of the communists, the petty-bourgeois religious leaders of Sarekat Islam eventually initiated a split. As a result of its successful entry tactic, the PKI became the first communist mass party in Asia.¹¹³

Sneevliet himself was expelled from Indonesia by the Dutch colonial administration in 1918 because of his revolutionary activities. He went on to play an important role in the work of the Communist International in Asia. He had a number of discussions with Lenin before and during the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 and was elected to the important position as the secretary of the congress' *Commission on the National and Colonial Question* with Lenin as its chairman. He was one of the key architects (together with Lenin) of the communist program of the anti-imperialist united front tactic. Later, in 1933, Sneevliet and his *Revolutionary Socialist Party* in the Netherlands joined the Trotskyist movement and stayed there until 1938.¹¹⁴

Later the communists in China – following the advice of Sneevliet who acted as a Comintern emissary – deployed a similar tactic. The communists were very

112 On *Sarekat Islam* see e.g. Michael Francis Laffan: *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia. The umma below the winds*, RoutledgeCurzon, London 2003; Tinur Jaylani: *The Sarekat Islam Movement: Its Contribution to Indonesian Nationalism*, Montreal 1959; Peter Lowensteyn: *Indonesia between 1908 and 1928: The Sarekat Islam*, <http://www.lowensteyn.com/indonesia/sarekat.html>

113 See on this e.g.; Jean Duval: *The First Period of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI): 1914-1926 - An outline*, <http://www.marxist.com/indonesian-communist-party-pki2000.htm>; A. Yu. Drugov: *Relations between the Comintern and the Communist Party of Indonesia*, in: *The Comintern and the East*, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1981, pp. 383-409; Herman A.O. de Tollenaere: *The Politics of Divine Wisdom. Theosophy and labour, national, and women's movements in Indonesia and South Asia 1875-1947*, Leiden 1996 (Part IV: The Labour Movement)

114 On this see e.g., Dov Bing: *Lenin and Sneevliet: The Origins of the Theory of Colonial Revolution in the Dutch East Indies*, in: *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 11, No. 1 (June 2009), pp. 153-177; Tony Saich and Fritjof Tichelman: *Henk Sneevliet: A Dutch revolutionary on the world stage*, *Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1985), pp. 170-193; Tony Saich: *The Chinese Communist Party during the Era of the Comintern (1919-1943)*, Article prepared for Juergen Rojahn, "Comintern and National Communist Parties Project," International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

small at that time and had to find links and roots to the working class and the rural poor. They correctly entered the Kuomintang party in 1922 and worked as a revolutionary faction. However, given the Stalinist turn in the Comintern they were instructed to turn a revolutionary tactic into an opportunist, liquidationist strategy which ended in disaster. As a result the communists did not leave the Kuomintang in 1925 when the workers' strikes and the agrarian revolutionary movement were intensifying and failed to fight openly for the creation of soviets. They rather subordinated themselves to the right wing of the Kuomintang led by Chiang Kai-shek until the latter was strong enough to defeat the revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants in 1927.¹¹⁵

Trotsky and the Left Opposition fought against this Menshevik capitulation of the Stalinist bureaucracy. They declared that the party should have left the Kuomintang in time and openly fought for a revolutionary strategy.¹¹⁶

Trotsky was not always certain that the communists' entry into the Kuomintang in 1922 was wrong in principle or not and, hence, we have contradictory statements by him on this issue. However, there are a number of statements which indicate that he did not consider it an illegitimate tactic in itself. As he wrote in September 1926:

*"The participation of the CCP in the Guomindang was perfectly correct in the period when the CCP was a propaganda society which was only preparing itself for future independent political activity, but which, at the same time, sought to take part in the ongoing national liberation struggle." And he goes on to say that the 'immediate political task' of the CCP 'must now be to fight for direct independent leadership of the awakened working class': 'The CCP must ensure its own complete organizational independence and clarity of political programme and tactics in the struggle for influence over the awakened proletarian masses.'*¹¹⁷

He repeated this assessment in 1928.¹¹⁸ Later in the 1930s, when the Bol-

115 See e.g. The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution, Revolutionary History Vol. 2, No. 4 (1990); Gregor Benton: China's Urban Revolutionaries. Explorations in the History of Chinese Trotskyism, 1921-1952, New Jersey 1996; Wang Fanxi: Erinnerungen eines chinesischen Revolutionärs 1919-1949, Frankfurt a.M. 1983; see also: Damien Durand: The Birth of the Chinese Left Opposition, in: Cahiers Leon Trotsky, No. 15 (1983) [translated by John Archer into English]; C. Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-ying How: Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927 (Studies of the East Asian Institute), Harvard University Press, Harvard 1989; Helene Carrere D'Encausse and Stuart R. Schram: Marxism and Asia: an Introduction with Readings, Allen Lane, London 1969; Rudolf Schlesinger: Die Kolonialfrage in der Kommunistischen Internationale, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt a.M. 1970

116 On this see e.g., Leon Trotsky: Leon Trotsky: The Third International After Lenin (Chapter 3: Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution). Another important work of the Trotskyists at that time is Victor Serge: The Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution, in: Victor Serge, The Century of the Unexpected: Essays on Revolution and Counter-Revolution, Revolutionary History Vol. 5 No. 3, Socialist Platform Ltd, London 1994, pp. 54-141 (in German language: Victor Serge: Die Klassenkämpfe in der chinesischen Revolution von 1927, Verlag Neue Kritik, 1975)

117 Leon Trotsky: The Communist Party of China and the Guomindang, in: Leon Trotsky on China, New York, 1976, pp. 114

118 Leon Trotsky: The Opposition's Errors – Real and Alleged (1928); in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1928-29), p. 90

shevik-Leninists had acquired more experience with entrism, Trotsky again stressed that there was nothing wrong in principle with temporarily entering a petty-bourgeois populist party.

„The temporary entry into the SFIO, or even the Kuomintang, is not an evil in itself; however, it is necessary to know not only when to enter, but also how to leave.“¹¹⁹

“The entering in itself in 1922 was not a crime, possibly not even a mistake, especially in the south, under the assumption that the Kuomintang at this time had a number of workers, and the young Communist party was weak and composed almost entirely of intellectuals (this is true for 1922?). In this case, the entry would have been an episodic step to independency, analogous to a certain degree to your entering the Socialist Party. The question is what was their purpose in entering, and what was their subsequent policy?”¹²⁰

Such an entry tactic can also be legitimate today under the condition that the vanguard sectors of the working class and the oppressed respectively organize to orient themselves towards entry in such petty-bourgeois populist parties. As historic examples for such movements, we could refer to the FLN in Algeria or the Black Panthers in the USA.

Marxists and Petty-Bourgeois Populist Parties: Electoral Tactics and Governmental Slogans

Is it legitimate to call for critical support for petty-bourgeois populist parties in elections? And when should Marxists call for such parties to take power? In our opinion, Marxists should also apply the united front tactic in election campaigns as well as in their sloganeering about the government which such parties can form or conditionally participate in.¹²¹ The most important condition is that such petty-bourgeois populist parties are rooted among the workers and the oppressed, and that they are associated with mass struggles against imperialism and the local ruling class. Furthermore, and this is decisive, is whether, at the same time, there is a workers' party around which the workers' vanguard has rallied. In such a case, revolutionaries should direct their electoral tactics towards such a party rather than towards any petty-bourgeois populist party.

119 Leon Trotsky: Against False Passport in Politics (1935); in: The Crisis in the French Section (1935-36), New York 1977, p. 116

120 Leon Trotsky. Letter to Harold Isaacs (1.11.1937), in: Leon Trotsky on China, New York, 1976, p. 114; Schriften Vol. 2.2, p. 889

121 A certain tradition has developed to call all united fronts that include petty-bourgeois or bourgeois organizations (i.e., organizations which are not workers' united fronts) “*Anti-Imperialist United Front*”. This tradition has its origin in the Comintern's use of this terminology in their *Theses on the Eastern Question* in 1922. The background for this was simply that most countries, which at that time were at the focus of the Comintern's strategy, were in direct confrontation with imperialist powers. However, today there are also a number of cases of democratic struggles directed against a local dictatorship, against a racist law, or against a colonial war in imperialist countries, etc. In such cases it seems more appropriate to use the category “*Democratic United Front*” instead of “*Anti-Imperialist United Front*”.

However, there are numerous cases in which no such workers' party exists, but a radical populist formation rallying the vanguard of the workers and oppressed does. Examples of this are the MAS in the period after 2003 or Chavez' MBR-200 movement in the late 1990s. Other examples might include Julius Malema's EFF in South Africa, the Palestinian *Balad* party, as well as the *Joint List* in Israel, or militant parties of the Tamils in Sri Lanka like the TNA.

In such situations Marxists should join workers and poor peasants who vote these parties. They should say to them: *"You believe that your party can bring an improvement to your living conditions. As you might know we don't share your hopes. We believe that this party will, once in power, not go the full way and ensure a lasting victory for the workers and oppressed. It will rather strike a compromise with the capitalists and the imperialists. However, since you don't believe us we say: go on, elect your parties to office, force them to attempt such measures if you can, but you must make preparations and mobilize your mass organizations and your parties for the inevitable bourgeois declaration of civil war if your leaders will take any serious measures which threaten private property. We will critically support your parties' electoral victory and defend them against bourgeois attack."*

Based on the same method, Marxists should also carefully and precisely word their slogans regarding the type of government which such petty-bourgeois parties can conditionally form or participate in. For example, when the petty-bourgeois Sandinista FSLN party overthrew the Nicaraguan dictatorship of Somoza in 1979, instead of taking power by itself, it formed a coalition with bourgeois-liberal forces like businessman Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (the widow of the newspaper *La Prensa's* director, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro). Under such conditions revolutionaries, would have called upon the Sandinistas to dissolve any coalition with bourgeois parties and take power exclusively into their own hands. Naturally, it is crucial that revolutionaries also warn workers about any illusions in petty-bourgeois parties like the Sandinistas. However, in addition to such warning, revolutionaries should make demands on such a government, calling on it to implement radical social reforms, to expropriate the big landowners and the bourgeoisie, to renounce paying the country's debts to the imperialist monopolies and Great Powers, etc.¹²²

Such an approach is based on the method first elaborated by Marx and Engels and later systematized by Lenin and Trotsky.

When elections for the first Duma took place in Russia following the 1905

122 In elaborating such an approach here, we have improved upon the position which was elaborated by our predecessor organization – the *League for a Revolutionary Communist International* – in the United Front Theses adopted in 1994 (published in Trotskyist Bulletin No. 5, July 1994). Those theses had a "Eurocentric" tendency, in that they did not sufficiently take into account the conditions of the class struggle in semi-colonial countries. For this reason they did not also include a discussion of the application of the united front tactic by revolutionaries to petty-bourgeois populist parties in the semi-colonial world in the context of elections. A similar tendency towards inconsistency can be observed in an, otherwise excellent, article by Stuart King: *Nicaragua under the Sandinistas*, in: *Permanent Revolution* No. 7, Spring 1988, pp. 43-73. King's article wrongly rejects a slogan calling for a Sandinista-only government.

Revolution, the Bolsheviks – along with most of the vanguard of the working class – called for boycott them. However, when the revolutionary tsunami had receded in 1906, Lenin advocated that the party no longer boycott Duma elections. He insisted on this policy even though it was obvious that the Tsarist regime granted very few rights to this institution, and rigged and manipulated the elections. According to the historian Abraham Ascher, as a result of all the regime's repression and manipulation, many workers and peasants didn't bother to vote at all. In fact, only about 19% of the eligible voters (in 67 cities of European Russia) participated in the elections to the Third Duma in the autumn of 1907. In the previous elections (of 1906), voting participation had been 55%.

123

Lenin and the Bolsheviks emphasized the need for social democrats – as Marxists called themselves at the time – to run as an independent party with their own list of candidates for the elections. This was particularly urgent in elections of the *worker curia* of the Duma. At that time, the social democrats had already become a mass party of the working class and were the hegemonic force in Russia's large factories.¹²⁴ Lenin also emphasized the need to fight against the Cadet party – the party of bourgeois liberalism which then played an important role as the official voice of the opposition against the Tsarist regime. Lenin urged social democrats – despite Menshevik opposition to his call – to fight against the liberal bourgeoisie so that the working class can become the hegemonic force of the popular masses and lead them to revolution.¹²⁵ Consequently, Lenin argued that the Duma elections be used to create an alliance between the working class with the poor peasantry.¹²⁶ For this reason he emphatically rejected any electoral alliance or bloc with the Cadets (which is what the Mensheviks advocated) but favored for a bloc with the parties represent-

123 See e.g. Abraham Ascher: *The Revolution of 1905. Authority Restored*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1992, p. 364

124 At the time of the Fifth Congress in 1907, the Social Democratic Workers Party of Russia claimed a membership of 150,000.

125 The Mensheviks – advocating their alliance, or better subordination to the liberal bourgeoisie – justified their stance by referring to the tactic of Marx and Engels during the revolution of 1848. Lenin replied to this:

„Plekhanov quoted passages from the works of Marx, on the need to support the bourgeoisie. It is a pity that he did not quote from the Neue Rheinische Zeitung. A pity that he forgot how Marx “supported” the liberals during the period when the bourgeois revolution in Germany was at its height. Nor is it necessary to go so far to prove something that is indisputable. The old Iskra, too, frequently spoke of the necessity for the Social-Democratic Labour Party to support the liberals – even the Marshals of the Nobility. In the period preceding the bourgeois revolution, when Social-Democracy still had to rouse the people to political life, this was quite legitimate. Today, when various classes have already appeared on the scene, when, on the one hand, a peasant revolutionary movement has revealed itself, and there have been liberal betrayals on the other – today there can be no question of our supporting the liberals.“ (V. I. Lenin: *Concluding Remarks on the Report on the Attitude towards Bourgeois Parties* (1907), in: LCW 12, pp. 471-472)

126 An excellent exposition of the development of Lenin's thinking in 1906 and 1907 – after the peak of the first Russian Revolution – can be found in chapter 4 of August Nimtz: *Lenin's Electoral Strategy from Marx and Engels through the Revolution of 1905. The Ballot, the Streets.*

ing the poor peasantry (the *Trudoviks* and the S.R.).¹²⁷ Thus, we see that Lenin sharply distinguished between bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, and that he exclusively reserved the systematic application of the united front tactic to the latter.

Lenin explained these ideas in 1906, during the party's discussions about the tactics to be used in the elections for the Second Duma.

*„To sum up. We must take into account the experience of the Cadet Duma and spread its lessons among the masses. We must prove to them that the Duma is “useless”, that a constituent assembly is essential, that the Cadets are wavering; we must demand that the Trudoviks throw off the yoke of the Cadets, and we must support the former against the latter. We must recognise at once the need for an electoral agreement between the Social-Democrats and the Trudoviks in the event of new elections taking place.“*¹²⁸

*„The facts relating to the parties compel the following conclusion: no agreements whatsoever at the lower stage, when agitation is carried on among the masses; at the higher stages all efforts must be directed towards defeating the Cadets during the distribution of seats by means of a partial agreement between the Social-Democrats and Trudoviks, and towards defeating the Popular Socialists by means of a partial agreement between the Social-Democrats and the Socialist-Revolutionaries.“*¹²⁹

*„In the cities, where the working-class population is mostly concentrated, we must never, except in case of extreme necessity, refrain from putting up absolutely independent Social-Democratic candidates. And there is no such urgent necessity. A few Cadets or Trudoviks more or less (especially of the Popular-Socialist type!) are of no serious political importance, for the Duma itself can, at best, play only a subsidiary, secondary role. It is the peasantry, the gubernia assemblies of electors, that are of decisive political importance in determining the results of the Duma elections, and not the cities. In the gubernia assemblies of electors, however, we shall achieve our general political alliance with the Trudoviks against the Cadets far better and more certainly, without in the least infringing our strict principles, than at the lower stage of the elections in the countryside.“*¹³⁰

These ideas became the official position of the Bolsheviks as well as of other left-wing forces inside the Social Democratic Workers Party of Russia, and were summarized in an official resolution for a party conference:

„The principal objects of the Social-Democratic election and Duma campaigns are: firstly, to explain to the people the uselessness of the Duma as a means of satisfying

¹²⁷ In exceptional circumstances, in 1907 Lenin allowed the formation of a bloc with the Cadets to defeat the Black Hundreds, as the fascists of the time were called. However, it would be absolutely incorrect to conclude from this exception that Lenin's tactic would allow for the inclusion of bourgeois candidates today. In the early 20th century, the liberal bourgeoisie – which was represented by the Cadets – was not the ruling class. The ruling class was rather composed as a coalition of the autocracy, the (semi-feudal) big landowners and the Octobrist (pro-monarchy) big bourgeoisie. Naturally, this is a very different situation from today's, as the bourgeoisie has become the ruling class in all countries.

¹²⁸ V. I. Lenin: *The Boycott* (1906), in: LCW 11, p. 148

¹²⁹ V. I. Lenin: *Social-Democrats and Electoral Agreements* (1906), in: LCW 11, p. 283

¹³⁰ V. I. Lenin: *Social-Democrats and Electoral Agreements* (1906), in: LCW 11, pp. 286-287

the demands of the proletariat and the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie, especially the peasantry. Secondly, to explain to the people the impossibility of achieving political liberty by parliamentary methods as long as the real power remains in the hands of the tsar's government, and to explain the necessity of an armed uprising, of a provisional revolutionary government and of a constituent assembly elected by universal, direct and equal suffrage by secret ballot. Thirdly, to criticise the First Duma and reveal the bankruptcy of Russian liberalism, and especially to show how dangerous and fatal it would be for the cause of the revolution if the liberal-monarchist Cadet Party were to play the predominant and leading role in the liberation movement. As the class party of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party must remain absolutely independent throughout the election and Duma campaigns, and here, too, must under no circumstances merge its slogans or tactics with those of any other opposition or revolutionary party. Therefore, at the first stage of the election campaign, i.e., before the masses, it must as a general rule come out absolutely independently and put forward only its own Party candidates. Exceptions to this rule are permissible only in cases of extreme necessity and only in relation to parties that fully accept the main slogans of our immediate political struggle, i.e., those which recognise the necessity of an armed uprising and are fighting for a democratic republic. Such agreements, however, may only extend to the nomination of a joint list of candidates, without in any way restricting the independence of the political agitation carried on by the Social-Democrats. In the workers' curia the Social-Democratic Party must come out absolutely independently and refrain from entering into agreements with any other party. At the higher stages of the election, i.e., at the assemblies of electors in the towns and of delegates and electors in the countryside, partial agreements may be entered into exclusively for the purpose of distributing seats proportionately to the number of votes cast for the parties entering the agreement. In this connection, the Social-Democratic Party distinguishes the following main types of bourgeois parties according to the consistency and determination of their democratic views: (a) the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Polish Socialist Party and similar republican parties, (b) the Popular Socialists and the Trudoviks of a similar type; (c) the Cadets. " 131

131 V. I. Lenin: A Dissenting Opinion recorded at the All-Russian Conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party by the Social-Democratic Delegates from Poland, the Lettish Territory, St. Petersburg, Moscow, the Central Industrial Region and the Volga Area (1906), in: LCW 11, pp. 300-301. In another article Lenin quotes from a resolution of the Bolsheviks: "In view of the fact: (...) that large sections of the poorer working people in the city who do not yet adhere to the proletarian standpoint, and whose vote can influence the result of the elections in the city curia, are vacillating between the desire to vote to the Left of the Cadets, i.e., to free themselves from the leadership of the treacherous liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie, and the desire to secure at least a few Trudovik deputies in the Duma by entering into a bloc with the Cadets; (5) that the wavering Trudovik parties reveal a desire to sanction a bloc with the Cadets on condition of obtaining one, or at any rate not more than two out of the six seats in the metropolis, on the grounds that the Social-Democrats refuse under any circumstances to enter into an agreement with the non-Social-Democratic sections of the urban poor against the liberal bourgeoisie—the Conference resolves: (1) immediately to inform the St. Petersburg Committee of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and the Committee of the Trudovik Group that the St. Petersburg Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. is prepared to enter into an agreement with them on condition that they enter into no agreements whatsoever with the Cadets; (2) the terms of the agreement to be complete independence of the contracting parties as regards slogans, programmes

Lenin also defended such an approach in the 1912 elections for the Fourth Duma, by which time the Bolsheviks had become the hegemonic force among the proletariat in the major industrial regions and consequently won the seats for deputies in the worker curiae of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Yekaterinoslav, Kharkov, Kostroma, and Vladimir Gubernia. Lenin explained the electoral tactic of the Bolshevik Party in 1912:

„There remains the second urban curia. Here there are quite a few workers and voters close to the workers: shop assistants, worker tenants, pensioners, etc. (...) The liberals are thus more than three times as strong as the Rights, whose strength is practically equal to that of the democrats. As a rule, therefore, there can obviously be no question here of any danger of a Black-Hundred victory. It is further obvious that the main task of working class democrats in this curia is to fight the liberals. At the present juncture particularly, when, as even the liberals, Octobrists and Purishkeviches admit, there is undoubtedly a general swing to the left in the country, this fight must be put in the forefront. Obviously, in the first stage of the elections the working-class candidates must wage an absolutely independent struggle, putting forward a hundred per cent working-class election lists. In the second stage, at the second ballot, it will in the majority of cases be a question of a fight of democrats against liberals. (...) Inasmuch as the second urban curia is the one in which there will be the greatest number of cases of a second bal-

and tactics generally. The six seats in the Duma to be distributed as follows: two seats for the workers' curia, two for the Social-Democrats, one for the Socialist-Revolutionaries and one for the Trudoviks." He adds his summary in his own words: "Three main points stand out in examining this resolution: firstly, categorical renunciation of all agreements with the Cadets; secondly, inflexible determination of the Social-Democrats to put forward its independent lists under all circumstances; and, thirdly, sanction of agreements with the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Trudoviks." (V. I. Lenin: The Workers' Party Election Campaign in St. Petersburg (1906), in: LCW 11, p. 427)

In another article, written for *Neue Zeit* (the theoretical journal of German social democracy), Lenin summarized the methodological differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks as follows: *„The basic differences amongst Russian Social-Democrats are closely connected with this last problem. One wing (the Minority, or "Mensheviks") regard the Cadets and liberals as being the progressive urban bourgeoisie as compared with the backward rural petty bourgeoisie (Trudoviks). It follows from this that the bourgeoisie is recognised as the motive force of the revolution, and a policy of support for the Cadets is proclaimed. The other wing (the Majority, or "Bolsheviks") regards the liberals as representatives of big industry, who are striving to put an end to the revolution as quickly as possible for fear of the proletariat, and are entering into a compromise with the reactionaries. This wing regards the Trudoviks as revolutionary petty-bourgeois democrats, and is of the opinion that they are inclined to adopt a radical position on a land question of such importance to the peasantry, the question of the confiscation of the landed estates. This accounts for the tactics of the Bolsheviks. They reject support for the treacherous liberal bourgeoisie, i.e., the Cadets, and do their utmost to get the democratic petty bourgeoisie away from the influence of the liberals; they want to draw the peasant and the urban petty bourgeois away from the liberals and muster them behind the proletariat, behind the vanguard, for the revolutionary struggle. In its social-economic content, the Russian revolution is a bourgeois revolution; its motive force, however, is not the liberal bourgeoisie but the proletariat and the democratic peasantry. The victory of the revolution can only be achieved by a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. (...)By "Left bloc" we mean the election bloc of the Social-Democrats and the petty-bourgeois democratic parties (primarily the Trudoviks, using that name in its widest sense and recognising the Socialist-Revolutionaries as the Left wing of the group). This was a bloc directed against both the Rights and the liberals."* (V. I. Lenin: The Elections to the Duma and the Tactics of the Russian Social-Democrats (1907), in: LCW 12, pp. 203-204)

lot, the principal line to be pursued by the workers at the second ballot is precisely this: with the democrats against the Rights and against the liberals.(...) In cases of a second ballot, primarily in the second urban curia, common cause is to be made more often with all democrats against the liberals and against the Rights; and only subsequently it may be necessary at the second ballot to join the general opposition bloc against the reactionaries. "¹³²

Quoting from his book *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, we have demonstrated that Lenin absolutely defended this approach to electoral tactics until his death. So did Trotsky who, as we have shown with the lengthy quotation from his *Transitional Program* (cited above), generalized from the experience of the Bolsheviks in their united front tactic towards the Mensheviks and the S.R., even after these latter two factions had already been transformed into social-imperialist parties, the relevant part of which we repeat here for the reader's convenience:

"[T]he demand of the Bolsheviks, addressed to the Mensheviks and the S.R.s: "Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power into your own hands!" had for the masses tremendous educational significance. The obstinate unwillingness of the Mensheviks and S.R.s to take power, so dramatically exposed during the July Days, definitely doomed them before mass opinion and prepared the victory of the Bolsheviks. The central task of the Fourth International consists in freeing the proletariat from the old leadership, whose conservatism is in complete contradiction to the catastrophic eruptions of disintegrating capitalism and represents the chief obstacle to historical progress. The chief accusation which the Fourth International advances against the traditional organizations of the proletariat is the fact that they do not wish to tear themselves away from the political semi-corpse of the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership: "Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!" is an extremely important weapon for exposing the treacherous character of the parties and organizations of the Second, Third and Amsterdam Internationals. 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."¹³³

After the founding of the Communist International, revolutionaries sought to generalize from the experience of the Bolsheviks. Of course, in most colonial and semi-colonial countries of the time there were no elections. However, from the case of Mexico we find an example of how the Comintern – in its healthy period before the Stalinists took power – was nevertheless able to apply the united front tactic to the field of elections in a semi-colonial country.

132 V. I. Lenin: *The Second Ballot in Russia and the Tasks of the Working Class* (1912), in: LCW 17, pp. 566-568

133 Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International: The Mobilization of the Masses around Transitional Demands to Prepare the Conquest of Power* (The Transitional Program); in: *Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years (1933-40)*, New York 1973, p. 202

In August 1923, the *Executive Committee of the Communist International* (ECCI) sent a long letter to the Mexican party which was published in English by the US section as a pamphlet. In this letter the ECCI elaborates the method of the united front tactic and how it should be applied to the concrete conditions of the Mexican class struggle of the time. It calls upon the mass organizations of both workers and peasants (including their respective parties and leaderships) to undertake joint actions to defend the interests of the popular masses:

*“The tactic of the united front is the revolutionary fight of the’ Communist Party to win the wide organized and unorganized working and peasant masses for a common struggle for common demands”. The Communist Party therefore openly turns towards the leaders of the reformist, syndicalist, and so-called independent trade union organizations and requests their participation in a joint Committee of Action. The same thing applies to the laborites and the Agrarian Party. The object of the Committee of Action is organized centralization of the fight for definite demands. The Committee of Action does not bind any of the participating parties or trade unions to its political agitation and propoganda or to its activity in general Above all, the right of criticism of every Party will be fully preserved.”*¹³⁴

Furthermore, the ECCI analyzed the conflict between the bourgeois government of De La Huerta and the petty-bourgeois democratic opposition led by Calles. It warns that if Calles comes to power he too will betray the workers and peasants. But the ECCI also urged that, in light of the mass support for Calles and the popular illusions in his petty-bourgeois movement, communists should call for critical electoral support for him, combined with critical warnings and a program of demands directed towards him. Such a tactic could assist breaking workers and peasants away from his petty-bourgeois leadership and help the small Communist Party – at that time it had about 1,500 members – win more influence among the masses.¹³⁵

“The first task of the Party must be to state clearly and plainly what the station is and how it will develop. Secondly it must be clearly realized that it is not a matter of indifference for the revolutionary labor movement whether Calles or De La Huerta betray the working classes, even though both will end in the same results The whole situation is not a comedy, as it might appear, but a real tight. It is an attempt on the part of petty-bourgeois democracy to keep its head above water, and it can do that only by possessing political power. The interests of the working class are also involved in this struggle, for the only allies on which the petty-bourgeoisie can rely, are the working class and the peasantry. Calles must therefore make concessions to these classes. It is already apparent that the overwhelming majority of the workers and peasants will support the candidature of Calles. If the whole working class participates in this struggle, the Communist Party must not stand aside and look on; it must fight with the others,

134 Strategy of the Communists. A Letter from the Communist International to the Mexican Communist Party (21 August 1923), published by the Workers Party of America, Chicago 1923, pp. 12

135 On the early history of the Communist Party in Mexico see e.g. Boris Goldenberg: *Kommunismus in Lateinamerika*, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Berlin 1971, pp. 168-185

for Calles today means protection for the masses from reaction and clerical domination. But it is the duty of the communists to combat the illusions of the masses as to the ability of the Calles Government actually to give this protection. Throughout the period of Obregon's regime, Calles silently participated in the attacks of the Government on the working class. Calles will behave on a national scale just as Felipe Carrillo behaved on a local scale in Yucatan. He will suppress the trade unions opposed to him and persecute the communists; he will not hesitate to shoot them down if necessary. In spite of this, the Communist Party must participate in the elections on behalf of Calles. Certainly not as enthusiastic followers of the coming government. This tactic is merely a necessary halting place on the road to the Workers and Peasants' Government, on the road to the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The result developing from the Calles Government will open the eyes of the Mexican proletariat to the impotency of reformism, to the powerlessness and corruptibility of opportunistic and petty-bourgeois anarchist phraseology. The Mexican workers and peasants will recognize that there exist but two kinds of politics; the one that leads to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and the one that leads to the domination of the proletariat, and which is represented by the slogan: All power to the workers and peasants. Many honest workers will say to the communists: If you are already prophesying the treachery of Calles, then your participation in the fight is nothing but a manoeuvre to compromise Calles. But such a statement of the question is incorrect and undialectical. That Calles will compromise himself does not depend on us, but on his opportunistic policy of compromise with the bourgeoisie. But we, on the contrary, point to the only path by which bankruptcy can be avoided, that is, the path to the realization of the proletarian revolution. But will Calles follow this path? We have sufficient reasons not only to doubt this but to answer in the negative. Calles, Morones, Felipe Carrillo, Soto y Gema, etc. are the Kerenskis, the Eberts, the Noskes, and the Scheidemanns of Mexico. They will wed themselves to Gompers and his whole treacherous clique. But in our propaganda we must as far as possible force the socialists and agrarians to the left. We must demand a declaration today from Calles on the disarming of the peasants which Obregon instigated; we must demand protection for striking workers; punishment for the officials guilty of the murder of workers in Vera Cruz and San-Angel; a ruthless struggle against the fascists; the regulation of Articles 27 and 123; measures against the housing crisis; the division of large estates without recompense to the landlords, etc." ¹³⁶

Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International did not deal in detail with the application of the electoral tactic in semi-colonial countries. However, Trotsky did repeat the methodological approach of the Comintern when he emphasized in the *Transitional Program* the need to apply the united front tactic to the "parties of petty bourgeois democracy," by which he meant both bourgeois workers' parties (Stalinists, Social Democrats, etc.) as well as petty-bourgeois populist parties of the S.R. type in Russia (see the lengthy quote from the *Transitional Program* at the end of Chapter II, here). This is the most effective way to rally the workers

136 Strategy of the Communists. A Letter from the Communist International to the Mexican Communist Party, pp. 10-11

and oppressed who still retain illusions in non-revolutionary parties around “*anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist slogans.*”

So in summary we note that both Lenin and Trotsky emphasized that the main task of revolutionaries is to build a revolutionary workers’ party. They also emphasized that revolutionaries have to try to win over the poor peasants for an alliance led by the revolutionary proletariat. To do so, revolutionaries must apply the united front tactic, including in the realm of elections. It can be applied both to bourgeois workers’ parties as well as to petty-bourgeois populist parties (especially in situations where no significant workers party, not even a bourgeois one, exists). Such electoral support must include placing demands on such parties, so that while fighting side-by-side with the reformist rank and file workers and oppressed, we warn them lest they have any illusions in the efficacy and consistency of their leaderships, all with the hope that they will ultimately join us as true revolutionaries.

We in the RCIT believe that such a method is extremely relevant today, in the wake of the significant and dramatic rise of petty-bourgeois populist movements and parties the semi-colonial world (but not there alone!). Of course, a precise electoral tactic can only be formulated after a concrete study is made of the specific national conditions. For this reason, here, in this document, we can only outline some methodological arguments regarding which political formations are potentially qualified for electoral support by revolutionaries.

We believe that the early phases of the Bolivarian movements in Latin America are good examples of such formations. By “early phases” we mean the period when they constituted petty-bourgeois populist parties which were opposed to the neoliberal governments and rallied the aspirations of millions of workers, poor peasants and urban poor. Specifically, we’re talking about Chavez’ MBR-200 movement in the late 1990s and Evo Morales’ MAS in the first half of the 2000s, when these parties acted as a catalyst for the rising class struggle of the workers and oppressed; it was then vital to politicize and radicalize the popular masses who were directing their hopes to the Castro-Chavista leaderships. However, as we will outline below, once such parties had come to power and were transformed into openly bourgeois, popular front parties, it would have been out of question for revolutionaries to vote them.

Another example in which such electoral tactics can still be discussed by South African revolutionaries is that of Julius Malema’s *Economic Freedom Fighters* (EFF) in South Africa. This party originated in 2012/13 resulting from a split from the ANC – the historical petty-bourgeois nationalist party of the black people in South Africa which led the liberation struggle against the Apartheid regime from the 1940s on. However, the ANC was transformed into a bourgeois popular front party when it became the largest party forming the government in 1994 and subsequently ruled the country in the interests of the big corporations. Julius Malema and the EFF defended the Marikana mine workers in 2012, and presented themselves, hypocritically, as a “revolutionary opposition

against the ANC government.” While the EFF’s declared membership of more than half a million is certainly exaggerated, there is no doubt that this party has succeeded in rallying the aspirations of the workers and poor.

Sinn Fein in the Republic of Ireland is yet another example of a petty-bourgeois populist party which has recently become the vehicle for mass protests of the working class, particularly in the context of the *Right2Water* campaign. In the 2016 elections, socialists could have correctly called for critical electoral support for the candidates of centrist lists – *Anti-Austerity Alliance* (mainly SP supporters in Ireland) and *People before Profit* (mainly SWP supporters in Ireland) – in those districts where they had some mass support. In other districts, it would have been legitimate for socialists to call for support for Sinn Fein on the basis of the critical electoral support tactic outlined above.

The Transformation of a Petty-Bourgeois Populist Party into a Bourgeois Party and Electoral Tactics

We consider it as crucial to differentiate between petty-bourgeois populist parties and openly bourgeois, popular front parties. True, there is no Great Wall of China dividing the two: Every petty-bourgeois populist party is a potential popular front party (which is why it is easy to mix these categories). The petty-bourgeois composition – at least at the leadership level – predestines such parties to transform their character and to become open bourgeois parties.

Such a transformation can take place under various conditions. One such condition occurs when such parties enter the government of a capitalist state. In such a situation, the party eventually comes into close contact with the bourgeoisie ruling class and integrates into the bourgeois state apparatus. Usually this leads, after some time, to its fusion with a sector of the bourgeoisie. In Venezuela, this sector is called *Bolivarian bourgeoisie* or *Boliburguesía*.

Naturally, such a fusion with a sector of the bourgeoisie and the state apparatus can take place even before a party becomes part of the government or entirely takes power. It is also possible for such a popular front party to split (e.g., after being expelled from government) and one faction – maybe even the majority of the party – transforms itself once again back into a petty-bourgeois populist party. Examples for such splits and transformations are the Montoneros in Argentina, who were expelled from the Peronist party in 1974, and the South African EFF mentioned above.

Clearly, when such a party becomes an openly-bourgeois, popular front party, it is entirely impermissible for revolutionaries to give it any critical electoral support or to involve its members in the wording of slogans.

On the other hand, fighting against this “crossing the lines into the bourgeois camp” does not release revolutionaries from their obligation to defend such a

popular front government against a counterrevolutionary coup d'état.¹³⁷ Lenin

137 The RCIT has dealt with this issue in a number of documents. See e.g., RCIT: It is Time to Break with a Wrong Method! Open Letter to the Members of the Liaison Committee of Communists, July 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/open-letter-to-lcc/>;

On the coup in Brazil see footnote 70.

On the coup in Egypt see: RCIT: Egypt: Military Dictatorship Sentences Former President Morsi to Death! Down with the Butcher General al-Sisi! For a Revolutionary Constitutional Assembly!

17.5.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-morsi-death-sentence/>; RKOB: Egypt: Down with the Military Dictatorship of al-Sisi! Report (with Photos and Videos) from a Rally in Solidarity with the Resistance in Egypt on 01.03.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/report-egypt-demo-1-3-2015/>;

RCIT: General Sisi – The Butcher of the Egyptian People – Sentences another 683 People to Death, 1.5.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-mass-death-sentences/>;

RCIT: Egypt: Mobilize International Solidarity against General Sisi's Machinery of Repression! 28.3.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/stop-repression-in-egypt/>;

RCIT: Egypt: Down with General Sisi's pro-Army Constitution! Boycott the Referendum!, 12.1.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/boycott-egypt-referendum/>;

RCIT: Tasks of the Revolution in Egypt, July 2, 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/tasks-of-egypt-revolution/>;

RCIT: Egypt: Down with the Military Coup d'État! Prepare Mass Resistance! July 8, 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-down-with-military-coup-d-etat/>;

Yossi Schwartz: Egypt: The U.S. Support for the Military Coup and the Left's ignorance Notes on the role of US imperialism in the military's coup d'état and the failure of the Egypt left, July 11, 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-us-support-for-military-coup/>;

Michael Pröbsting: The Military's Coup d'État in Egypt: Assessment and Tactics. A reply to the criticism of the WIVP and the LCC on the meaning of the Military's Coup d'État and the slogan of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, 17.7.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-meaning-of-coup-d-etat/>;

Yossi Schwartz: Egypt: Mobilize Resistance against the reactionary military regime! Down with the army's puppet-government! No political support for Morsi and the Muslim brotherhood! For independent working class mobilization with a revolutionary perspective! 27.7.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-no-to-military-regime/>;

Michael Pröbsting: The Coup d'État in Egypt and the Bankruptcy of the Left's "Army Socialism". A Balance Sheet of the coup and another Reply to our Critics (LCC, WIVP, SF/LCFI), 8.8.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-and-left-army-socialism/>;

RCIT: Egypt: International Solidarity against the Army Crackdown! August 14, 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-international-solidarity/>;

Yossi Schwartz: Israel and the Coup in Egypt. Israel's primary concerns regarding Egypt are the possible fall of the military regime or a descent into civil war, Aug 21, 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/israel-and-egypt-coup/>

On the coup in Thailand see:

RCIT: Thailand: Smash the Developing Military Coup! No Trust in the pro-Thaksin Pheu Thai Party Leadership! Mobilize the Working Class and Poor Peasants to Defeat the "Yellow Shirts", Army Command, and Monarchy! 21.5.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup/>;

Michael Pröbsting: Thailand: How Should Socialists Fight Against the Military Coup? A Critique of the Statement "Oppose the coup regime!" by several Asian Left Organizations, 27.5.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup-critique/>;

Michael Pröbsting: Thailand: Shall Socialists Defend the Government Against the Military Coup? Reply to a Neo-Bordigist Polemic of the "Liaison Committee of Communists", 24.5.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup-reply/>;

Thailand: Defeat the looming reactionary Coup D'état! Mobilize the Working Class and Poor Peasants as an independent force against the "Yellow Shirts", Army Command and Monarchy! 4.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-looming-coup-d-%C3%A9tat/>;

Michael Pröbsting: Thailand: CWI's

explained this in August 1917 when the Bolsheviks were faced with the need to defend the popular front Kerensky government against a right-wing coup d'état by the forces of General Kornilov.

"Like every sharp turn, it calls for a revision and change of tactics. And as with every revision, we must be extra-cautious not to become unprincipled. It is my conviction that those who become unprincipled are people who (like Volodarsky) slide into defencism or (like other Bolsheviks) into a bloc with the S.R.s, into supporting the Provisional Government. Their attitude is absolutely wrong and unprincipled. (...)

Even now we must not support Kerensky's government. This is unprincipled. We may be asked: aren't we going to fight against Kornilov? Of course we must! But this is not the same thing; there is a dividing Line here, which is being stepped over by some Bolsheviks who fall into compromise and allow themselves to be carried away by the course of events. We shall fight, we are fighting against Kornilov, just as Kerensky's troops do, but we do not support Kerensky. On the contrary, we expose his weakness. There is the difference. It is rather a subtle difference, but it is highly essential and must not be forgotten.

What, then, constitutes our change of tactics after the Kornilov revolt? We are changing the form of our struggle against Kerensky. Without in the least relaxing our hostility towards him, without taking back a single word said against him, without renouncing the task of overthrowing him, we say that we must take into account the present situation. We shall not overthrow Kerensky right now. We shall approach the task of fighting against him in a different way, namely, we shall point out to the people (who are fighting against Kornilov) Kerensky's weakness and vacillation. That has been done in the past as well. Now, however, it has become the all-important thing and this constitutes the change.

The change, further, is that the all-important thing now has become the intensification of our campaign for some kind of "partial demands" to be presented to Kerensky: arrest Milyukov, arm the Petrograd workers, summon the Kronstadt, Vyborg and Helsingfors troops to Petrograd, dissolve the Duma, arrest Rodzyanko, legalise the transfer of the landed estates to the peasants, introduce workers' control over grain and factories, etc., etc. We must present these demands not only to Kerensky, and not so much to Kerensky, as to the workers, soldiers and peasants who have been carried away by the course of the struggle against Kornilov. We must keep up their enthusiasm, encourage them to deal with the generals and officers who have declared for Kornilov, urge them to demand the immediate transfer of land to the peasants, suggest to them that it is necessary to arrest Rodzyanko and Milyukov, dissolve the Duma, close down Rech and other bourgeois papers, and institute investigations against them. The "Left" S.R.s must be especially urged on in this direction."¹³⁸

Similarly, in the context of the Spanish Civil War, Trotsky explained the im-

Disgraceful Support for the Bosses' "Yellow Shirts", RCIT, 15.1.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/cwi-on-thailand/>

138 V. I. Lenin: To the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. (1917), in: LCW Vol. 25, pp. 289-290 (Emphasis in Original)

portance of defending a bourgeois democracy with a popular-front government from reactionary assaults while, at the same time, giving this government no political support:

*“Before 1934 we explained to the Stalinists tirelessly that even in the imperialist epoch democracy continued to be preferable to fascism; that is, in all cases where hostile clashes take place between them, the revolutionary proletariat is obliged to support democracy against fascism. However, we always added: We can and must defend bourgeois democracy not by bourgeois democratic means but by the methods of class struggle, which in turn pave the way for the replacement of bourgeois democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means in particular that in the process of defending bourgeois democracy, even with arms in hand, the party of the proletariat takes no responsibility for bourgeois democracy, does not enter its government, but maintains full freedom of criticism and of action in relation to all parties of the Popular Front, thus preparing the overthrow of bourgeois democracy at the next stage.”*¹³⁹

At the same time, Trotsky considered it unprincipled for revolutionaries to vote for a popular front or to call for a popular front party to take power.¹⁴⁰ This also holds true in situations when such a popular front party or candidate runs against a fascist list or candidate in elections. For example, in March 1937 there was a by-election for a parliamentary seat from Brussels in which a fascist leader was opposed by Premier Paul van Zeeland of the Catholic Party. The Belgian Labor Party and the Communist Party helped van Zeeland by not running their own candidates. The majority of the Belgian section of the “Movement for the Fourth International” – as the Trotskyists called themselves at that time – decided also not to run a candidate and hence also indirectly supported van Zeeland.

Trotsky and the International Secretariat of the Fourth International sharply condemned this position: *“The attitude of the Belgian leadership during the by-election is a severe blow to the prestige of the Fourth International and especially to its Belgian section. On this question we are fully in agreement with the IS and the Paris Lutte ouvrierie.”*¹⁴¹

*“Several days ago I received the statement of Comrade V. concerning the municipal elections. V.’s arguments against participation seemed to me false from beginning to end. You know that I considered and still consider our party’s support to Van Zeeland to be an extremely serious and dangerous error.”*¹⁴²

139 Leon Trotsky: Is Victory Possible in Spain? (1937), in: Leon Trotsky: The Spanish Revolution (1931-39), Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 257 (Our emphasis)

140 On this, also see our reply to the comrades of the TPR in Argentina who called for Christina Kirchner to take power: Michael Pröbsting: Argentina: How to Fight, and how not to Fight, against the Macri Government (Reply to the TPR). Remarks on the TPR’s pro-Kirchnerist Slogan “Bring Christina Back NOW!”, 19.02.2016, <http://www.thecomunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/tpr-christina-slogan/>

141 Leon Trotsky: Opinions and Information (1937), Writings of Leon Trotsky Supplement 1934-40, p.736

142 Leon Trotsky: To the Congress of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Belgium (1938), Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-38, p.368

Trotsky opposed electoral support for a popular front party not only in imperialist countries, but in semi-colonial countries as well. When the Mexican trade union bureaucracy called to support the “progressive “ bourgeois candidate Ávila Camacho in the presidential elections of 1940, Trotsky rejected this. He explained that support for a bourgeois candidate was illegitimate: *“At the present time there is no workers party, no trade union that is in the process of developing independent class politics and that is able to launch an independent candidate. Under these conditions, our only possible course of action is to limit ourselves to Marxist propaganda and to the preparation of a future independent party of the Mexican proletariat.”*¹⁴³

When Diego de Rivera, a famous Mexican painter who had for some time been a supporter of the Fourth International, left the movement and advocated the formation of a new party in order to support a bourgeois candidate at the elections, Trotsky replied:

*“The idea that one can create a party “ad hoc” for a concrete conjuncture is absolutely incredible and opportunistic in its essence. A workers’ party with a so-called minimum program is eo ipso a bourgeois party. It is a party which makes the workers support bourgeois politics or bourgeois politicians. A revolutionary Marxist workers’ party could discuss the question of whether or not it was advisable in this concrete situation to support one of the bourgeois candidates’ We are of the opinion that under the given conditions it would be false.”*¹⁴⁴

In summary, while we consider critical electoral support for petty-bourgeois populist parties as legitimate under specific circumstances, communists can never call for voting for or the taking of power by parties or candidates of the bourgeoisie – neither in imperialist nor in semi-colonial countries. Revolutionary Marxists advocate a workers’ and peasant government and not a government of the workers, peasants and sectors of the bourgeoisie. The latter would be a popular front government. Electoral support for such a party would not represent a step towards class independence but rather a step backwards to the subordination of the workers and oppressed to the bourgeoisie.

143 Leon Trotsky: *Clave and the Election Campaign* (1939), *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39*, p.176
 144 Leon Trotsky: *Statement of the Pan-American Committee*, April 5, 1939, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39*, p. 296

VI. Traditional Reformist Parties, New Workers Party and Electoral Tactics

In this chapter we will deal with the tactics of fighting for a new workers' party – both in countries where no labor party exists at all as well as in countries in which one or more reformist workers' parties already do exist. We will discuss the conditions under which revolutionaries can advance such slogans. Furthermore, we discuss the electoral tactics towards the traditional reformist parties – i.e., social democrat and Stalinist – under the present conditions.

Fighting for the New Workers' Party (or "Labor Party") in the Present Period

Concerning the *New Workers' Party* tactic we wrote in our theses:

"In countries, where no bourgeois workers' party (not even a reformist one) exists or where the existing bourgeois workers' parties are already so degenerated that they repel the workers' vanguard, revolutionaries call upon the workers' vanguard and mass organizations to found a new workers' party (or "Labor Party"). Here, too, interim stages are conceivable. Revolutionaries might support alliances towards such a goal or the foundation of new organizations of oppressed layers (e.g., migrant organizations) which could also stand at elections."

We have explained that the call for a *Labor Party* is a special application of the united front tactic used by small communist forces in countries where a mass bourgeois workers' party does not exist. In such countries revolutionaries call on larger working class formations (e.g., trade unions) to enter the political field by forming independent workers' parties. Such a party must be entirely independent of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parties. In the USA, for example, we call on the trade unions to break with the Democratic Party and to found a Labor Party. The same tactic is applicable in Argentina towards the Peronist-dominated unions, or to the CTA in South Africa, where COSATU is bound to the popular front ANC government. It is also applicable in Egypt, where the independent trade unions are subordinated to bourgeois politicians. Basically, this tactic is applicable for the majority of the countries in the world.

Such a labor party must not refrain from running in elections against bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parties. Revolutionaries should fight against the "natural" tendency of opportunist labor leaders to hesitate and avoid confronting such parties on the electoral field.

In periods of intensified working class struggle, this tactic can be successful as, to a certain extent, we have seen in recent years in South Africa. Here NUMSA, the largest single trade union, split with COSATU after the latter continued to

support the government despite the Marikana massacre and the government's austerity policy. Subsequently NUMSA leaders founded the "United Front," which while a political movement is still not a party running in elections.

Another example of such a labor party is the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil which was founded and led by Lula in the late 1970s in the period of the military dictatorship. However, it later degenerated into a reformist party.

The call for a *New Workers' Party* (or "*Labor Party*") is always an appropriate tactic in such countries where no workers' party exists. Naturally, there will be more opportunities to apply it as agitation during periods of intensified working class struggle. In other words, it will be a particular relevant tactic in the coming period, given the acceleration of the political, economic and social contradictions in the historic period which began in 2008.

Revolutionaries fight against the danger of a reformist degeneration of such a new workers' party. They do so by advocating a revolutionary program, i.e., a full transitional program as the program of this party. They will build a revolutionary tendency within such a party which will fight for the leadership of the party by exposing the betrayal of the reformists and the centrists in actual struggles. This can be done by putting forward a number of appropriate minimum and transitional demands which unify and mobilize the workers and the oppressed against the capitalist class enemy. On such a basis, revolutionaries should use the tactic of the united front with other forces against the common enemy according to the principle "*march separately, strike together.*"

However, revolutionaries must not be ultimatimists. In other words, they don't enter such a labor party, present their program and if rejected immediately leave the party. Such a sectarian tactic would only be in the service of reformist forces trying to control such a party. Communists must attempt to win over rank and file workers and youth and left-wing forces within the party by proposing concrete campaigns which help to advance the class struggle and the political development of the party in a militant, socialist direction.

Of course, sooner or later the party will stand at a crossroads: either it will develop into a revolutionary direction and become a truly socialist party or it will degenerate bureaucratically and be transformed into a reformist force. When revolutionaries prove too weak to halt the reformist degeneration of such a party, they will be obliged to split.

While the labor party tactic was originally developed for countries in which there no reformist workers' party, today it can also be applied in countries where such a party exists. Why? The answer lies in the massive degeneration of the traditional reformist parties in recent years. As we outlined above, the period of neoliberal globalization has accelerated the degeneration of the social democratic and Stalinist parties. It has pushed them to the right; it has intensified the links between the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie; it has increased the influence of the middle class and weakened the links with the working class.

Similarly, there has been a substantial bourgeoisification of the ex-Stalinist

parties too. On the one hand this process has not developed as rapidly as in their social democratic twins. The reason for this is simply that they have, to a far lesser degree, been integrated in the executive of the capitalist state, i.e., they have been less often part of governments. On the other hand, a number of these parties also had fewer roots in the working class. In any case, in recent years we were witness to the increasing influence of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals in these parties (e.g., the *Transform* network of the *Party of the European Left*)

This does not mean, in most cases, that these parties have ceased to be bourgeois workers' parties. However, while it is true that most of them are dominated by a bureaucracy with close links to businessmen and managers, they nevertheless still retain important links to the working class, mostly via their close relationships with trade unions. Marxists must undertake a concrete examination of each such traditional reformist party and, in each case, judge whether or not they have crossed the Rubicon and thereby have ceased to be bourgeois workers' parties, and have thus been transformed into openly-bourgeois parties or, more precisely, popular front parties.

For example, in Europe the slogan calling for a new workers' party is particularly relevant for Italy. The transformation of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) into the *Partito Democratico* is an example of such a development. In this case, the PCI transformed itself in the early 1990s first into the *Democratici di Sinistra* (Democrats of the Left) and later the *Partito Democratico*, via its fusion with other, openly-bourgeois parties. This is a classic case of regression from being a bourgeois workers' party into a popular frontist or openly bourgeois party. While initially a left-reformist party existed in the form of the *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* led by Fausto Bertinotti (its split when the PCI transformed it into a popular front party), this party entirely discredited by its participation in neoliberal governments, and consequently failed to get a single seat in parliament in the last elections.

However, opposite trends cannot be excluded – at least temporarily. Under certain circumstances such parties can even experience an initial rejuvenation (see, for example, the British Labour Party under Corbyn).¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the “neoliberalization” of social democracy incites the breaking away from it of significant sectors of the workers' vanguard and the proletarian masses. However, at the same time, the consciousness of these proletarian sectors is not sufficiently advanced to join a revolutionary organization. In such cases, revolutionaries must apply the *New Workers' Party* tactic, directing a call to found a new workers' party to those sectors of the vanguard and the working class who are ready

145 Albeit, one has to note, this shift to the left is of a very nature, as one can observe in the current wave of expulsions of Antizionists and critics of Israel including the former mayor of London, , as well as the MP . See on this e.g. UK: Defend Nazeem Shah and Ken Livingstone against the Pro-Zionist Labour Leadership! Statement of RED LIBERATION (Socialists Active in the Labour Party), 30 April 2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/defend-shah-livingstone/>; Britain: Defeat Zionism in the Labour Party, Statement by RED LIBERATION, 30 March 2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/zionism-labour-party/>

to break with traditional reformist parties, but still do not have a revolutionary class consciousness. The principles of this tactic are the same as with the Labor Party tactic.

Such a tactic should not be confused with the opportunistic tactic of adopted by various left-reformists and centrists who advocate the formation of a pluralistic reformist party. Of course it is likely that, in the first phase, there will be reformist, centrist as well as revolutionary tendencies within such a new party. Bolshevik-Communists are not sectarian and don't fear the application of the united front tactic under such circumstances.

But centrists consider such a party as a solution, a permanent model of a "*pluralist left party*." They believe that this type of party can exist for an extended period of time. As a result, they don't advocate a revolutionary program of struggle but "realistically" propose a left-reformist program. Rather than fight against the emerging reformist bureaucrats, they cooperate or "peacefully co-exist" with them.

In contrast to such an opportunistic approach, as Bolshevik-Communists, we would work inside such a party while openly advocating our independent program. While cooperating with other forces within the party, we would uncompromisingly fight against reformist and centrist tendencies. We would try to patiently convince the majority of the party to adopt a revolutionary perspective. If this fails and the party degenerates into an ossified reformist formation, revolutionaries would draw the conclusions and split from such the party, taking with us all amenable militant workers and oppressed, and found an authentic revolutionary party.

The present period characterized by the decay of traditional reformist parties is fertile ground for Marxists to advocate the slogan for new workers' parties, taking advantage of the growing desire of significant sectors of the proletariat for a new alternative to these neoliberalized parties. Agitating for such a new alternative by no means involves ignoring those sectors of the vanguard and the working class who are still attached to the traditional reformist parties. But there can be no doubt that, in the current period of upheaval, revolutionaries have to outline a perspective that points forward in the forming of a new workers' party and a new workers' international.

The significant rise and growth in recent years of new political formations which base themselves on reformist or populist critiques of neoliberal capitalism and advocate the rights of workers specifically and popular democratic rights in general is ample justification for the RCIT's tactic calling for the formation of new workers' parties. Examples of this trend is the tremendous growth of SYRIZA in Greece, the electoral successes of centrist forces as well as Sinn Fein at the elections in Ireland, and the spectacular growth of *Podemos* founded only two years ago. While, in the formal sense, SYRIZA and Sinn Fein are not new parties, in recent years they have only constituted small forces but have now begun to grow because of the decay of the traditional reformist parties.

Of course, as we have indicated above, no one should have any illusions about these new reformist or populist parties. Ultimately they will betray the working class and the oppressed either when they have the opportunity to enter a government or when they play the leading role in a mass struggle. It is for this reason that revolutionaries must warn the masses in advance about the true nature of the leaderships of these parties. But at the same time, Marxists must not ignore the politicization and radicalization of sectors of the working class and the youth which currently find their expressions in support for these new parties. Any sectarian abstentionism against this process would only guarantee the isolation of revolutionaries. This is why critical electoral support for such parties, in addition to entryism under certain circumstances, can be a legitimate instrument for Marxists in the current period.

Engels, Lenin and Trotsky on the Labor Party Tactic

The Labor Party tactic was first developed by Marx and Engels. As is well known, in the late 19th century there were countries in which the growth of the trade union movement did not go hand in hand with the formation of independent workers' party.¹⁴⁶ The most prominent cases were Britain and the USA. In Britain the trade unions entered into a political alliance with the openly-bourgeois Liberal Party. Only after decades did they break with the Liberals and turn to independent political representation. First, they founded the reformist *Labour Representation Committee* in 1900 and then, in 1906, they established the *Labour Party*.

Marx and Engels argued that it is essential for the working class to overcome its political subordination to the parties of the bourgeoisie and to constitute their own parties. Doing so would constitute an important step in their development of a political class consciousness. Hence, Marx and Engels supported every practical step towards the formation of an independent workers' party, even when this process was fraught with reformist illusions in the minds of many participants.

In 1886 this is what Engels wrote in a letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge:

"The worst aspect of the Knights Of Labor is their political neutrality whose only result is the sharp practice of the Powderlys, etc. But this last has had its sting drawn by the response of the masses in the November elections, more especially in New York. In a country that has newly entered the movement, the first really crucial step is the formation by the workers of an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is distinguishable as a labour party. And this step has been taken far sooner than we might have expected, and that's the main thing. That the first programme of this party should still be muddle-headed and extremely inadequate, that it should have picked Henry George for its figurehead, are unavoidable if merely transitory evils. The masses

146 One of the best overviews of the history of the workers movement is provided by Julius Braunthal: *Geschichte der Internationale*, 3 Volumes, J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., Hannover 1961–1971

*must have the time and the opportunity to evolve; and they will not get that opportunity until they have a movement of their own — no matter what its form, providing it is their own movement — in which they are impelled onwards by their own mistakes and learn by bitter experience.”*¹⁴⁷

Later Lenin and the Communist International generalized this tactic. Lenin himself wrote in 1907:

*“Engels stressed the importance of an independent workers’ party, even with a poor programme, because he was speaking of countries where there had formerly been not even a hint of the workers’ political independence and where, in politics, the workers mostly dragged along behind the bourgeoisie, and still do.”*¹⁴⁸

Later, after the foundation of the Communist International, Lenin wanted to further generalize this tactic. At the Second World Congress in 1920 he met with the US representative, Louis C. Fraina, and asked him his opinion about the applicability of the labor tactic in the USA. However, Fraina rejected the idea and Lenin did not push this matter.¹⁴⁹ However, Lenin saw to it that the Comintern would continue to discuss this issue. He raised it again in discussions around the Third Congress in 1921 and, by 1922, the Comintern and the American Party — now renamed the Workers’ Party after the name “Communist Party” had been declared illegal in America — adopted the labor party as the specific form of the united front in the USA.¹⁵⁰

This correct approach was explained the same year in a pamphlet — “*For a Labor Party*” — published by the Workers’ Party and written by the Comintern representative in the US, John Pepper. It outlined the Comintern position on this issue. It called for the AFL — the US trade union federation — to build such a Labor Party:

“The December Conference owes it to the American Labor movement to create a big independent political party of the workers, the Labor Party. If this Labor Party is to grow, it must be built on the trade unions. If the new Labor Party is not to sink into a swamp without any principles, it must admit the left wing of the working class, the Communistic Workers Party and the Proletarian Party. The Labor Party must adopt a class-conscious program. A program not considering the interests of the capitalists, but only the interests of the workers. A program clearly seeing the goal: the abolition of wage slavery the establishment of a workers’ republic and a collectivist system of production. Sooner or later, a Labor Party will inevitably adopt such a program. It should

147 Friedrich Engels: Letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, 29 November 1886, in: MECW Vol. 47, p. 532

148 V.I. Lenin: Preface to the Russian Translation of Letters by Johannes Becker, Joseph Dietzgen, Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, and Others to Friedrich Sorge and Others (1907), in: LCW Vol. 12, p. 365

149 See Theodore Draper: *The Roots of American Communism* (1957), Elephant Paperbacks, Chicago 1989, p. 253

150 See Theodore Draper: *The Roots of American Communism*, p. 280; see also Theodore Draper: *American Communism and Soviet Russia. The Formative Period*, The Viking Press, New York 1960, p. 36

*do so at the moment of its birth.”*¹⁵¹

However, against the backdrop of the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern, Pepper and the Workers' Party's leadership would soon replace the principled application of the labor party tactic with an opportunist tactic of building a cross-class *Farmer and Labor Party*. This experiment ended in a complete failure.¹⁵²

Later, Trotsky would develop the labor party tactic into its most refined revolutionary form. In a discussion with leaders of the SWP – the US-American Trotskyist party – Trotsky explained what he considered the correct approach on the labor party question.

“Question: How do you reconcile this with the original statement that we cannot advocate the organization of a reformist labor party? I would like to get clear in my mind what concretely does our comrade do when his trade union is affiliated to the LNPL and he is sent as a delegate to the labor party. There the question comes up of what to do in the elections and it is proposed: “Let us support LaGuardia.” (This was a Republican congressman and later mayor of New York City in 1917-45, Ed.) Concretely, how does the matter present itself to our comrades?

Trotsky: Here we are in a trade union meeting to discuss the affiliation to the LNPL. I will say in the trade union: First, the unification of the unions on a political plan is a progressive step. There is a danger that it will fall into the hands of our enemies. I therefore propose two measures: 1) That we have only workers and farmers as our representatives; that we do not depend on so-called parliamentary friends; 2) That our representatives follow out our program, this program. We then map out concrete plans concerning unemployment, military budget, etc. Then I say, if you propose me as a candidate, you know my program. If you send me as your representative, I will fight for this program in the LNPL, in the labor party. When the LNPL makes a decision to vote for LaGuardia, I either resign with protest, or protest and remain: “I can't vote for La Guardia. I have my mandate.” We get large new possibilities for propaganda ...

The dissolution of our organization is absolutely excluded. We make absolutely clear that we have our organization, our press, etc., etc. It is a question of the relationship of forces. Comrade Dunne says we cannot yet advocate in the unions support for the SWP. Why? Because we are too weak. And we can't say to the workers: Wait till we become more authoritative, more powerful. We must intervene in the movement as it is ...

Question: If there were no movement for a labor party and we would be opposed to the creation of one, how does that affect the program itself – it would still be our transition program. I don't understand when you say we can't advocate a reformist party but we

151 Workers Party of America: For a Labor Party: Recent Revolutionary Changes in American Politics: A Statement of the Workers Party, Oct. 15, 1922, New York, 1922, p. 47

152 On this, see Leon Trotsky: The First Five Years of the Communist International, Vol. I (1924), Author's 1924 Introduction, New Park Publications, London 1973, pp. 12-14; see also Leon Trotsky: The Third International After Lenin (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, pp.120-123; some historical background is provided in the introduction of James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism. Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920-1928, Prometheus Research Library, New York City 1992, pp. 21-25

do advocate and become champions of labor-party movements for the purpose of imposing the workers' will politically.

Trotsky: It would be absurd to say that we advocate a reformist party. We can say to the leaders of the LNPL: "You're making of this movement a purely opportunistic appendage to the Democrats." It's a question of a pedagogical approach. How can we say that we advocate the creation of a reformist party? We say, you cannot impose your will through a reformist party but only through a revolutionary party. The Stalinists and liberals wish to make of this movement a reformist party but we have our program, we make of this a revolutionary...

Question: How can you explain a revolutionary labor party? We say: The SWP is the only revolutionary party, has the only revolutionary program. How then can you explain to the workers that also the labor party is a revolutionary party?

Trotsky: I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible. At every meeting I will say: I am a representative of the SWP. I consider it the only revolutionary party. But I am not a sectarian. You are trying now to create a big workers' party. I will help you but I propose that you consider a program for this party. I make such and such propositions. I begin with this. Under these conditions it would be a big step forward. Why not say openly what is? Without any camouflage, without any diplomacy."¹⁵³

The Traditional Reformist Parties and Electoral Tactics Today

As we have outlined in our *United Front Theses*, the RCIT has always supported the tactic of critical electoral support for reformist parties as developed by Lenin and Trotsky. We have repeatedly explained that, where communist forces are very small, they should advocate the tactic of critical support for parties of the working class and the oppressed in their relations with the non-communist masses.

Our method of critical support implies raising a program of immediate and certain transitional demands which address the most burning needs of the masses. The purpose is to mobilize workers in the struggle and force a reformist party to take this or that act in the interests of workers. Such demands must always be combined with slogans for organizing the workers and oppressed, and which focus on establishing action committees composed of ordinary workers in workplaces and neighborhoods, and which are not controlled by the bureaucracy. This is crucial because, first, mass mobilizations are the only way to force the reformist bureaucracy to implement even limited progressive actions. And second, such organizing slogans can lay the groundwork for the workers to struggle for these demands independently if their bureaucratic leaderships refuse to carry them out.

In our predecessor organization, we explained the tactic of critical support in

¹⁵³ Leon Trotsky on Labor Party: Stenographic Report of Discussion held in 1938 with Leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, Published by the Workers League, Bulletin Publications 1968, p. 14.

our *Theses on Reformism*:

*“Both of these elements of critical support—demands on reformists, and organising independent struggle in pursuit of these demands—are crucial because a government of a bourgeois workers’ party (i.e. a bourgeois workers’ government) will inevitably be the tool of capital against the working class. Organising for struggle is vital to prevent defeat and demoralisation amongst the masses when this becomes clear in practice. At the same time, the communists put forward their own programme, counterposing it to the reformist programme, even where they do not stand communist candidates. To win workers to a revolutionary alternative it is necessary to spell out, even for the duration of the united front (in this case, basically the election campaign) what the alternative is. The tactic of critical electoral support flows solely from the existence of the organic relationship between the bourgeois workers’ party and the working class. It is not in any way predicated upon the programme or promises of the reformists. Communist agitation and propaganda for electoral support must not be open to interpretation as support for the reformists as a “lesser evil” than the open bourgeois parties. The purpose of bringing the reformists to power is precisely to put them to the test, to prove that they are indeed as willing as the open bourgeois parties to defend the class rule and state power of the bourgeoisie and to attack the working class to serve that end.”*¹⁵⁴

Unfortunately, a number of centrists and ultra-leftists believe that critical support for reformist parties, which have repeatedly betrayed the working class, would be a contradiction of Marxist principles. This is absolutely incorrect. In fact, Lenin explained a very long time ago that the issue is not whether we, the communists, understand the treacherous nature of the reformists, but if the mass of the working class understands this. In his famous book *‘Left-Wing’ Communism – An Infantile Disorder* written in 1920, Lenin advised the British communists to lend critical electoral support to the reformist Labour Party:

*“If we are the party of the revolutionary class, and not merely a revolutionary group, and if we want the masses to follow us and unless we achieve that we stand the risk of remaining mere windbags) we must, first, help Henderson or Snowden to beat Lloyd George and Churchill (or rather compel the former to beat the latter because the former are afraid of their victory!); second, we must help the majority of the working class to be convinced by their own experience that we are right; i.e. that the Hendersons and Snowdens are absolutely good for nothing, that they are petit-bourgeois and treacherous by nature, and that their bankruptcy is inevitable; third, we must bring closer the moment when on the basis of the disappointment of most of the workers in the Hendersons, it will be possible, with serious chance of success, to overthrow the government of the Hendersons at once.”*¹⁵⁵

At the time, the communists in Britain were a very small force numbering only a few hundred and were not yet united into a single party.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless,

154 *Workers Power: Theses on Reformism – The Bourgeois Workers Party* (1983), in: *Permanent Revolution* No. 1, pp. 88-89

155 V.I. Lenin: *‘Left-Wing’ Communism – An Infantile Disorder*, in: *LCW* Vol. 31, pp. 85-86

156 See on this e.g. Michael Woodhouse and Brian Pearce: *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain*, New Park Publications, London 1975

or precisely for this reason, Lenin called his comrades to approach the mass of the working class with a tactic that addressed their current, non-communist, reformist consciousness:

*"We would take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets agitating for communism, and in all constituencies where we have no candidates, we would urge the electors to vote for the Labour candidate and against the bourgeois candidate. Comrades Sylvia Pankhurst and Gallagher are mistaken in thinking that this is a betrayal of communism, or a renunciation of the struggle against the social traitors. On the contrary, the cause of communist revolution would undoubtedly gain thereby. At present, British Communists very often find it hard even to approach the masses, and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a communist and call upon them to vote for Henderson and against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing. And I shall be able to explain in a popular manner not only why the Soviets are better than a parliament and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (disguised with the signboard of "bourgeois democracy") but also that, with my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man- that the impending establishment of a government of Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany."*¹⁵⁷

Later Trotsky would continue to advocate such a method in relation to reformist mass parties. He emphasized that communists give critical support to reformists not because they have a better program or policy than openly-bourgeois parties, or because they are the "lesser evil." He argued that communists should apply the united front tactic on the electoral field only because of the organic relationship between the reformists and the working class. For the same reason, he would criticize the centrist ILP in Britain when the latter called for critical support only for those candidates of the Labour Party who opposed imperialist sanctions against Italy after its 1935 invasion of Abyssinia.

"No. Economic sanctions, if real, lead to military sanctions, to war. The ILP itself has been saying this. It should have given critical support to all Labour Party candidates, that is, where the ILP itself was not contesting. In the New Leader I read that your London division agreed to support only anti-sanctionist Labour Party candidates. This too is incorrect. The Labour Party should have been critically supported not because it was for or against sanctions but because it represented the working class masses. The basic error which was made by some ILPers who withdrew critical support was to assume that the war danger necessitated a change in our assessment of reformism. But as Clausewitz said, and Lenin often repeated, war is the continuation of politics by other means. If this is true, it applies not only to capitalist parties but to Social Democratic parties. The war crisis does not alter the fact that the Labour Party is a workers' party, which the governmental party is not. Nor does it alter the fact that the Labour Party leadership cannot fulfill its promises, that it will betray the confidence which the masses place in it. In peacetime the workers will, if they trust in Social Democracy, die of hunger; in

157 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism – An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, p. 88

war, for the same reason, they will die from bullets. Revolutionists never give critical support to reformism on the assumption that reformism, in power, could satisfy the fundamental needs of the workers. It is possible, of course, that a Labour government could introduce a few mild temporary reforms. It is also possible that the League [of Nations] could postpone a military conflict about secondary issues—just as a cartel can eliminate secondary economic crises only to reproduce them on a larger scale. So the League can eliminate small episodic conflicts only to generalize them into world war. Thus, both economic and military crises will only return with an added explosive force so long as capitalism remains. And we know that Social Democracy cannot abolish capitalism. No, in war as in peace, the ILP must say to the workers: ‘The Labour Party will deceive you and betray you, but you do not believe us. Very well, we will go through your experiences with you, but in no case do we identify ourselves with the Labour Party program.’ Morrison, Clynes, etc., represent certain prejudices of the workers. When the ILP seeks to boycott Clynes it helps not only Baldwin but Clynes himself. If successful in its tactic, the ILP prevents the election of Clynes, of the Labour government, and so prevents their exposure before the masses. The workers will say: “If only we had had Clynes and Morrison in power, things would have been better.””¹⁵⁸

Trotsky repeated Lenin’s advise not to confuse the political conclusions of revolutionaries with those of the mass of the working class.

“It is argued that the Labour Party already stands exposed by its past deeds in power and its present reactionary platform. For example, by its decision at Brighton. For us – yes! But not for the masses, the eight millions who voted Labour.”¹⁵⁹

Precisely because revolutionaries advocate electoral support for reformist parties *not* for their program but for their relationship with the working class, we usually do not give electoral support to small reformist or centrist lists. Their non-revolutionary program gives us no reason to support them, and because they lack a mass base in the working class, such a tactic would not help revolutionaries to come closer to non-revolutionary workers and the oppressed. Consequently, any support for such candidates would only be misinterpreted as support for their politics, something which communists can never give.

We have always insisted that it is foolish to believe that workers’ illusions in reformist parties can readily be overcome. This is particularly true in light of the absence of a large revolutionary party. The longevity of these illusions in reformist parties is related to the historic roots of the social democratic and Stalinist parties among the working class. Therefore, these illusions don’t automatically disappear when such parties enter a government.

However, while this has been the case for a number of decades after the World War II, important changes have taken place in the past 10–15 years. As we noted above, most reformist parties have not ceased to be bourgeois workers’ parties, but there have been significant breaks of sectors of the working class with these parties. These ruptures either led to the formation of new parties or to fusions

158 Leon Trotsky: Once again the ILP (November 1935), in: Trotsky Writings 1935-36, pp. 198-199

159 Leon Trotsky: Once again the ILP (November 1935), in: Trotsky Writings 1935-36, p. 199

with other, smaller reformist parties. In other cases, this development only results in a higher rate of abstention from elections.

As we have said above, raising the slogan for a new workers' party does not necessarily mean that revolutionaries should drop the tactic of critical electoral support for the traditional reformist parties. It is the role of revolutionaries to alert workers to the need for building a new party. However, as long as this process has not taken shape, it may still be useful to relate in our electoral tactics to workers who – despite being fed up – still vote for the traditional reformist party as “the lesser evil.”

We therefore stated in our *Theses* that in general, “critical support for non-revolutionary workers parties is a legitimate tactic for helping class-conscious workers to overcome their illusions in reformist leaderships.”

At the same time, we must take into account that the decay of the reformist parties and their increasing discrediting in light of the pro-austerity, pro-war, and racist policy with which they are complicit because of their participation in the government, provokes more and more such ruptures with sectors of its working class base. For this reason, revolutionaries have to carefully study under what conditions the progressive sectors of the working class view the reformist party as a tool to resist the offensive of the bourgeoisie and when this is no longer the case, and these workers would rather turn away from the reformist party.

The latter situation is particularly likely when a bourgeois workers' party is part of the government and serves as a whip or executioner in the implementation of severe attacks on the working class – austerity programs, imperialist wars, racist hatred, attacks on democratic rights, etc. Such a situation arose, for example, in France when Hollande imposed the state of emergency regime in 2015 or in Austria in 2016 when the government – led by the social democratic party – imposed harsh laws against refugees. Similar situations existed in Britain in the first decade of the new millennium when the Blair-led Labour Party became the strongest supporter of Bush's imperialist war offensives in the Middle East.

In such circumstances it would be wrong for revolutionaries to call for the electoral support of these reformist parties. Here the aim is rather to relate to the vanguard workers who have already broken with them. In such cases Marxists should either call for critical support for another party which better reflects the desire of the progressive workers and oppressed to fight back or, if such a party does not run in the upcoming elections, call for a blank vote.

Let us illustrate our approach with the following example. The Austrian section of the RCIT called for a critical vote for the social democratic party (SPÖ) in Vienna's regional elections in October 2015. As we have explained – in addition to the SPÖ's traditional relations with the organized working class – our position was based on a certain rallying in the weeks before the elections of important sectors of the vanguard and the working class as a whole around this

party. The reasons for this shift towards the SPÖ were, on the one hand, the fear of a victory of the right-wing racist FPÖ party and, on the other, the positioning of the SPÖ as a “Refugees are welcome” party in distinct contrast to the anti-migrant position of the right-wing racists. Our assessment was vindicated in the polls by SPÖ’s receiving more than 39% of the vote.

However, in the April 2016 Austrian presidential elections, we no longer called for critical support for the SPÖ candidate. This is because, in the period following the October 2015 elections, the SPÖ had diametrically shifted its policy and – as the leading party in the governmental coalition – implemented a harsh anti-refugee policy. Consequently, the vanguard and a huge proportion of former SPÖ voters turned away from the party and, as a result, the SPÖ candidate won only 11% of the vote – a historic low for this party.¹⁶⁰

We note, in passing, that the Austrian section of the RCIT has had some successful experiences applying the united front tactic towards social democratic activists. For example, in the autumn of 2014, our section recruited the majority of social democratic youth organization activists from the largest and most proletarian branch in Vienna.¹⁶¹

In other words, revolutionaries have to relate their electoral tactics to an attentive study of the political development of the vanguard sectors of the working class and their readiness to break with the traditional reformist parties. This is particularly relevant in a situation of accelerated class contradictions when the chances for a rupture of sectors of the working class with the traditional reformist parties are higher.

On the other hand, revolutionaries must also carefully analyze the dynamic relationship of the working class and reformist parties, because under specific circumstances the progressive sectors of the working class might rally once again under the banner of social democracy or Stalinism in an attempt to form a defense line against a right-wing, neoliberal onslaught.

160 On this see the following statements of the Austria Section of the RCIT: Österreich: In der Stichwahl: Jetzt Massenproteste organisieren und erneut ungültig wählen, 29.4.2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/home/deutsch/bp-stichwahl-2016-austria/>; Österreich: Wahlaufuf zu den Bundespräsidentchaftswahlen 2016: Ungültig wählen, Widerstand organisieren! 21.4.2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/home/deutsch/bp-wahl-2016-austria/>; Wien Wahlen 2015: Sieg und Niederlage im selben Zuge, 13.10.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/home/deutsch/wahlanalyse-2015/>

161 See on this Austria: Founding Conference of a new Workers Organization, 11.11.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/austria-roter-widerstand/>

VII. Revolutionary Tactics and Petty-Bourgeois Populist Parties in Imperialist Countries

In this chapter we will discuss how to assess a somewhat new phenomenon which has appeared in recent years– the emergence of petty-bourgeois populist parties in imperialist countries. By this we don't mean parties like Respect which are to an important degree the (petty-bourgeois) political expression of the resistance of migrants and national and ethnic minorities. Rather we mean parties like *Podemos* in Spain which we have already briefly characterized in Chapter IV.

Should Marxists call for Critical Electoral Support for *Podemos* in Spain?

In our *Theses on the United Front Tactic* we stated that critical electoral support “could also be applicable to new petty-bourgeois populist parties in imperialist countries.” At this point we discussed, and confirmed, the applicability of such a tactic concerning parties like Respect (see more on this below in Chapter VIII). However, here we will discuss whether such a tactic would also be legitimate for new petty-bourgeois populist parties like *Podemos* in Spain.

As we have described above, *Podemos* is a new party which emerged out of the powerful *Indignados* movement which played a powerful role in 2011. It has strong support among the lower middle class which faces unemployment and social decline. It also has substantial support among sectors of the working class. This is not only reflected in the social composition of their supporters but also in their political agenda. *Podemos* gives high priority to social issues like the minimum wage, housing rent, and personal debt.

We maintain that it would be principled for Marxists to call for critical electoral support for *Podemos* in the present situation. *Podemos* reflects both the progressive protest of sectors of the lower middle class which are moving towards unity with the working class, as well as the protest of workers dissatisfied with the highly-bureaucratized and treacherous official leaderships (PSOE, the leaderships of the UGT and the CCOO). This characteristic of *Podemos* has been underlined by the rapid growth of its membership in the shortest possible time – up to nearly 400,000 members since the party's founding in 2014 – their mass demonstration of more than 100,000 people in January 2015, as well as the growth of branches in working class districts. Furthermore, the party receives significant electoral support in working class areas.

It is true that there exist at the same time two bourgeois workers' parties – the social democratic PSOE and the ex-Stalinist IU. However, the PSOE is widely

(and correctly) seen as a party of the ruling class. As a result, the most dynamic sectors of the working class have moved away from the PSOE. To call for critical electoral support for such a party when, at the same time, there are other parties which reflect the dynamism of the militant proletariat, would be cowardly, right-wing opportunism.

In contrast to PSOE, the IU has not been historically aligned with governing the capitalist system, as it was never part of a national coalition government. Through its connections with the CCOO it retains some organic links with the organized working class, even though these links have become weaker in recent years (along with the concomitant weakening of the trade unions themselves). IU relates more to militant sectors of the working class than PSOE does. This is why critical electoral support for IU has been a legitimate tactic in past years.

However, the IU failed to attract the growing number of militant workers and people from the lower middle class, resulting in a substantial electoral losses for the party. During the last elections (December 2015) IU received only 3.7% of the vote. However this can potentially change in the future.

Naturally, there should be no doubt that the case of *Podemos* is an exception. In general, Marxists direct their electoral tactics in imperialist countries either to workers' parties or to petty-bourgeois parties representing oppressed layers (national minorities, migrants). However, in Spain we witness the combination of a number of factors which create a situation in which critical electoral support for *Podemos* is legitimate. These factors include: the emergence of the powerful *Indignados* movement in 2011; the failure of IU to attract the radicalized sectors of the workers and the lower middle class; and, in parallel, the successful constitution of *Podemos* as a party reflecting the desire of these layers for radical change.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that parties like *Podemos* are an unstable, transitional phenomenon. Its petty-bourgeois character and the lack of institutionalized links with established mass organizations make it unlikely that the character of *Podemos* will remain as it presently is for any significant time. Rather, it is far more likely that the party will either shift to the right, and thereby lose many of its active members, or will undergo a split with one wing moving further to the left. A split is by no means out of question given divisions which already exist between the current majority around Pablo Iglesias and a number of minorities, the two principal ones being that presently led by the Mandelite „*Anticapitalistas*“ Teresa Rodríguez and Miguel Urbán, and the other currently formed around the post-Marxist and anti-globalization intellectual Íñigo Errejón.¹⁶²

162 See on this e.g. François Sabado: *Podemos – eine neue Bewegung*, Referat auf einer Veranstaltung der „Société Louise Michel“ (Mai 2015 in Paris)

The Trotskyists and the *Farmer-Labor Party* (FLP) in the USA in the 1930s

We are fully aware that our tactics towards *Podemos* represent an innovation of the Marxists' tactic in imperialist countries. However, we think that our tactic is not without historical precedents.

As we have already outlined above, Lenin and the Bolsheviks considered it legitimate to lend electoral support to the S.R. party, which was based on the poor peasantry but which also had support among sectors of the working class.¹⁶³ As the Bolsheviks have stated many times, Russia at that time was an, albeit backward, imperialist country.¹⁶⁴ However, one can argue that this is not a useful example, since Russia before 1917 still had not completed its bourgeois-democratic revolution, and contained semi-feudal economic structures as well as an absolutist state apparatus.

However, we also refer readers to another example: the *Farmer-Labor Party* (FLP) in the USA. The FLP existed as a mass party in some states (e.g., Minnesota). It was composed of a number of farmers' organizations – like the *Non-Partisan League*, an organization of poor farmers – as well as local trade unions. In Minnesota, the FLP repeatedly won – from 1918 until 1942 – elections for a number of US congressmen as well as senators. Furthermore, candidates of the FLP were elected as the governor of Minnesota between 1931 and 1939 (Floyd B. Olson, Hjalmar Petersen and Elmer A. Benson).

In short, the FLP was not a workers' party but rather a "*farmers and workers party*," i.e., a cross-class party or, in other words, a petty-bourgeois populist party.

However, under concrete circumstances, this populist party represented an important break of workers and small farmers with the two dominant capitalist parties – the Democrats and the Republicans. Under these conditions the US-Trotskyists developed specific tactics in the 1930s towards the FLP. These

163 According to a valuable study about the social composition of the S.R., almost 50% of the party's activists were workers or artisans. (Maureen Perriea: The social composition and structure of the socialist-revolutionary party before 1917, in: *Soviet Studies* Vol. 24, Issue 2, 1972, p. 241)

164 We have previously discussed the nature of Russian imperialism in several documents. See e.g., several works by Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia's Imperialist Character, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>; Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Summary of the RCIT's Analysis, 28 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-china-and-russia/>; More on Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Reply to Chris Slee (Socialist Alliance, Australia) and Walter Daum (LRP, USA), 11 April 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-slee-on-russia-china/>

tactics included a call for critical electoral support for this party as well as entering the FLP and forming a revolutionary faction from within.¹⁶⁵ Farrell Dobbs writes in a book about the Teamsters struggle:

*“Confronted with these unique circumstances, the Communist League of America (as the Trotskyist organization was named at that time, Ed.) shaped a special policy for political work in Minnesota, deciding that FLP candidates for public office could be accorded critical support. That meant they could be backed in election campaigns, as against their capitalist opponents; but such support at the polls would be accompanied by criticism of the FLP’s reformist program and of the politics followed by its elected representatives.”*¹⁶⁶

Yet another manifestation of such an approach was Trotsky’s advocacy of a workers’ and peasant government in the USA which he concretized as a transitional slogan in order to build a bridge to reformist and populist workers and peasants: *“For a government of Lewis, Green and LaFollete”*. The first two were the central trade unions leaders and the latter was a populist who had a strong following among many small farmers.

*“In our mind it leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat. We say to the workers and farmers: You want Lewis as president—well that depends upon his program. Lewis plus Green plus La Follette as representative of the farmers? That, too, depends upon the program. We try to concretize, to make more precise the program, then the workers’ and farmers’ government signifies a government of the proletariat which leads the farmers.”*¹⁶⁷

In summary, under specific circumstances, revolutionaries have to apply the united front tactic – including electoral support and entryism – to petty-bourgeois populist parties even in imperialist countries like the US-Trotskyists did in the 1930s.

165 An extensive elaboration of the FLP in Minnesota, the trade unions as well as the work of the Trotskyists can be found in Farrell Dobbs’ four volumes: *Teamster Rebellion*, *Teamster Power*, *Teamster Politics*, and *Teamster Bureaucracy* (all published at Pathfinder Press between 1972 and 1977). See also Kristoffer Smemo: *The Politics of Labor Militancy in Minneapolis, 1934-1938*; University of Massachusetts 2014.

166 Farrell Dobbs: *Teamsters Politics*, Monad Press, New York 1975, p. 64, see also pp. 110-111

167 Leon Trotsky on Labor Party: Stenographic Report of Discussion held in 1938 with Leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, Published by the Workers League, Bulletin Publications 1968, p. 14, see also www.marxists.org. Trotsky repeated this idea in another discussion with US-American comrades on 29 July 1938. (See Leo Trotzki: *“Für eine Arbeiter- und Bauernregierung”*, in: Leo Trotzki: *Der Todeskampf des Kapitalismus und die Aufgaben der Vierten Internationale*, Arbeiterpresse Verlag, Essen 1997, p. 197 [We have not been able to allocate this document in English language.]

Discussing a Comparison: The Green Parties in the 1980s and 1990s

One could draw some parallels with the Green parties which emerged in German, Austria and other countries during the 1980s and onward. Of course, there are indeed some parallels. The Greens emerged in the early 1980s out of the environmental as well as peace movement. We have – in our predecessor organization – always characterized the Greens in their initial period as petty-bourgeois parties. While they were largely progressive petty-bourgeois organizations – initially they were strongly dominated by ex-Maoists and other leftists in Germany and Austria – they never had any connection with the workers’ movement. Furthermore they had no orientation whatsoever to the burning economic problems of the working class: wages, housing, social benefits; none of these subjects ever played any role in the politics of the Green parties.

As we have stated in past analyses, the Greens – after their initial “radical” period – were transformed from progressive petty-bourgeois parties into openly-bourgeois liberal parties. Since then, they had been part of numerous regional and national coalition governments in many countries.

The question which is of interest for us at this point is the following: would it have been legitimate for Marxists to consider electoral critical support for the Greens in their initial period in the 1980s when they constituted progressive petty-bourgeois parties?

Our answer is a clear and unambiguous NO. By definition there are many different variations of petty-bourgeois parties. In addition to right-wing chauvinist parties there are also various forms of petty-bourgeois protest parties like the so-called “*Pirates*.” In Italy we have the *Five Star Movement* led by the popular comedian Beppe Grillo – a populist party combining attacks on the corrupt parliamentary system with racist anti-migrant positions and an alliance in the European Parliament with the British right-wing racist UKIP party. Critical electoral support for any of these parties would be completely unprincipled for Marxists as they all do not represent a *progressive political mobilization of the petty-bourgeoisie and the middle-class towards the working class*.

This was also true of the Green parties in the 1980s, as was reflected in their political agenda (ignoring burning social and economic issues of the working class) as well as their electoral support base. While they succeeded in gaining some support at the universities and in middle-class districts, they always achieved far below the average voting results in working class districts.

There is also an objective social-economic base for this different development (compared with *Podemos*). When the Greens emerged and grew as a progressive petty bourgeois party, the middle class in its huge majority faced a prosperous future. Today, given the historic crisis of capitalism which began in 2008, this has dramatically changed. Today, significant sectors of the middle class face unemployment and severe social decline. It is therefore not surprising that

Podemos attract sectors of the lower middle class as well as workers by putting issues like the minimum wage, housing rents and personal debt in the focus of its political agenda.

To summarize: in general the RCIT rejects electoral support for petty-bourgeois parties in imperialist countries. The case of *Podemos* is an exception due to the specific conditions of the new historical period and the political constellation in Spain (*Indignados* movement, failure of IU to attract the radicalized sectors of the workers and the lower middle class, etc.).

VIII. The United Front Tactic and the Liberation Struggle of National Minorities and Migrants in the Imperialist Countries

We have outlined in our theses that it is often the case that petty-bourgeois nationalist forces play an influential role among national or ethnical minorities and migrants in imperialist countries. To give a few examples: the *Black Panthers* in the USA in the late 1960s and early 1970s; the numerous forces engaged in the #BlackLiveMatters movement today; Puerto Rican nationalists in the USA; *Sinn Fein* and the *IRA* in Northern Ireland during their struggle against the British occupation until 1998; *Herri Batasuna* in Basque Country; and *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* (CUP) in Catalonia in the Spanish State.

Increasing Mobilization of National / Ethnical Minorities and Migrants on Democratic Issues

It has been our traditional position to lend critical support to petty-bourgeois nationalist forces that stand in confrontation with the imperialist state. This is why our predecessor organization in Britain, *Workers' Power*, traditionally called for the support of *Sinn Fein* and the *IRA* which stood at the head of the Irish national liberation struggle against the British occupation. This application of the united front tactic also included critical support for *Sinn Fein* in elections.¹⁶⁸ Naturally, this tactic ended when the leadership of *Sinn Fein/IRA* around Gerry Adams capitulated to British imperialism by signing the *Good Friday Agreement* in 1998.

Given the importance of liberation struggles of oppressed nations – i.e., national and ethnical minorities (including migrants) – in imperialist countries, it is clear that such an approach has to be generalized. The increasing share of migrants among the working class in the imperialist countries, the acceleration of racism, the expansion of the police state and bonapartist forms of government, the subsequent attacks on democratic rights – all these ensure that the struggle against national oppression (as well as for democratic rights in general) are rapidly becoming one of the key issues of the political class struggle in the early 21st century. As we pointed out in our booklet on the relevance of the theory of permanent revolution in imperialist countries, today we are witnessing a groundswell of the democratic question.

“Thus while during the 19th century democracy was still suppressed or threatened by the pre-capitalist nobility, the absolutist bureaucracy and the opportunist bourgeoisie, today it is threatened by imperialist monopoly capital and its lackeys in the semi-colonial countries. Yes, today there are no semi-feudal modes of production within the impe-

168 On this see e.g., *Workers' Power: The British Left and the Irish War*, London 1983; Matt Docherty: Irish republicanism at an impasse, in: *Trotskyist International* No. 11 (1993)

rialist countries, but this does not at all imply that capitalism has become "pure." What we are facing instead is decaying, rotten imperialist capitalism. Such a system creates new contradictions and exacerbates long-existing ones. As the reactionary offensive of the imperialist bourgeoisie accelerates, it makes immediate and democratic demands an increasingly more important part of the program for permanent revolution within the imperialist countries." ¹⁶⁹

Trotsky's statement about the thoroughly reactionary role of imperialism is highly relevant: *"While destroying democracy in the old mother countries of capital, imperialism at the same time hinders the rise of democracy in the backward countries."* ¹⁷⁰

As already mentioned, petty-bourgeois nationalists of oppressed nations have played an important role in the Spanish state in recent years. Another important development has been the political movement of migrant workers (mostly Latinos) in the USA fighting for the rights of illegal migrants. This movement resulted in mass protests between March and May 2006 with a general strike on May Day of that year as a high point. ¹⁷¹

One of the most important political movements in Europe during the past 15 years has been the anti-war movement which became a huge mass phenomenon with the Iraq war in 2003. At that time millions of migrants – particularly those of Muslim background – participated in mass demonstrations. Later mass protests with a high proportion of Muslim migrants continued to take place. They focused mostly on solidarity with Palestine during the Gaza wars in 2008/09, 2010 (the Israeli attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla), 2012 and 2014. Add to this the numerous actions of migrant organizations in solidarity with the Arab Revolution (in particular for Syria and Egypt). Furthermore migrants as well as national and ethnic minorities have played an important role in mobilizations against police brutality and racism during the past 15 year.

All these mobilizations demonstrated the relevance of migrant organizations for democratic and anti-imperialist struggles in Europe and North America.

169 Michael Pröbsting: *The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today. The Marxist Theory of Permanent Revolution and its Relevance for the Imperialist Metropolises*, August 2015, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 39, p. 12, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/democracy-vs-imperialism/>

170 Leon Trotsky: *Marxism In Our Time* (1939), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1939/04/marxism.htm>

171 See on this e.g. Kent Paterson: *May Day Ten Years Later: Reflections on the Legacies of Immigrant Spring*, 1 May 2016, <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/18667>; Pamela Constable: *Latinos Unite to Turn Fear Into Activism – Pr. William Policy on Illegal Immigrants Prompts Call for Boycott, Other Actions*, *Washington Post*, July 28, 2007

The Experience of the Austrian Section of the RCIT

Hence it has been obligatory for Marxists to apply the united front tactic to these organizations. The Austrian section of the RCIT has done this for many years. We have always actively participated in activities against the imperialist wars as well as in solidarity with Palestine and the Arab Revolution. In contrast to all centrists, we refuse an arrogant social-imperialist approach towards the migrants and their organizations viewed as “backward” by the centrists – and thereby forget how backward in the political sense of the word the left is with its nearly totally white, middle-class composition, and its accommodation to social-imperialist petty-bourgeois prejudices!¹⁷² We call this phenomenon the “aristocratism” of the reformist and centrist left. It is worth noting that not only the Austrian left, but also the Turkish and Kurdish migrant left, always ignored these mobilizations against imperialist wars and solidarity with Palestine and the Arab Revolution.¹⁷³

Furthermore the combination of our anti-Zionist positions, our solidarity with the Arab Revolution, and our practical orientation to the lower strata of the working class (including the migrants) has provoked sharp hostility from most sectors of the reformist and centrist left against our organization, as well as from the bourgeois state. This has led on, one hand, to attempts by the state to prosecute leaders of the Austrian section – i.e., the attempts to put on trial Johannes Wiener (in 2012/13) and Michael Pröbsting (2016) – as well as attempted physical attacks on us at demonstrations by Zionist members of the social democratic and Stalinist youth organizations, as well as from the autonomous milieu.¹⁷⁴

Another result is a slanderous academic thesis published by the university of Vienna and written by a former member of the Communist Party’s student

172 We note in passing that Lenin faced similar attacks from the Mensheviks. The latter denounced the Bolsheviks for orientating to the “backward” poor peasantry – as the proletariats’ primary ally – instead of looking for an alliance primarily with the liberal urban bourgeoisie which was supposedly much more “educated” and “progressive” in their views. What neither the old nor the new Mensheviks understand is the Marxist principle that the most important issue in judging the character of a given social layer or class is not their cultural views or ideological prejudices but their objective class position in the capitalist society. It is the latter which is decisive if a layer enters into confrontation with the ruling class. And it is this issue which is relevant for Marxists and not the ideological phrases which people use to delude both themselves and others.

173 While the PKK plays a dominant role amongst the Kurdish masses, the Turkish left has only weak roots among the Turkish migrants.

174 See on this e.g. Report (with Pictures and Videos) on the multinational, internationalist demonstration in Vienna marking May Day 2016 organized by the Revolutionary Communist Organization LIBERATION, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/report-may-day-2016-in-austria/>; RCIT: Stop Judicial Prosecution for Solidarity with Palestine! A Call to the Austrian State to Drop Its Charges against Michael Pröbsting! April 2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/solidarity-proebsting/>; RCIT: Victory! The Charge against RKOB Spokesperson and Palestine Solidarity Activist Johannes Wiener has been dropped! 10.1.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/solidarity-with-wiener-won/>

organization with the title: *“Israel kills Children! Antizionism and Antisemitism in socialist and anti-imperialist Groups in Austria using the example of the RKOB and the (Neue) Linkswende”*.¹⁷⁵

Naturally we have experienced a number of hurdles in our work. As communists we initially faced mistrust by the migrant masses and hostility from its leaders. However, we regularly participated as an active force in their mobilizations and managed to overcome the mistrust of many migrants. We had to engage in various bold tactics and confrontations with leaders of migrant organizations who didn't want to let us speak from the platform at their demonstrations and rallies. However, gradually we have succeeded in gaining a reputation among several migrant communities which has led to our having been invited many times to their events and have even been asked to address them. At the same time, we did not attempt to conceal in our propaganda our political criticism of various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces which have a strong influence among these same migrant communities.

An example of the improvement in our reputation among a number of migrant communities took place as follows: On 2 February 2015, a mass demonstration against a small rally of right-wing racists took place in Vienna which was initiated by a broad alliance of nearly all centrists and left-reformists. The leading forces among them – social democratic youth and university student organizations, as well as Stalinists – were united in excluding the Austrian section of the RCIT from the speakers' platform of any such demonstration. Unfortunately for them, they had to reserve for the powerful Muslim migrant organizations the right to nominate two speakers. To the astonishment and dismay of the centrists and left-reformists, the Muslims nominated a young Egyptian brother and Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the RCIT! The Muslim organizations were, of course, aware that comrade Pröbsting is a communist and an atheist, but through our solidarity work on anti-racist and anti-imperialist issues during the past 15 years, we have gained a reputation as serious activists.¹⁷⁶

When several migrant organizations formed a list for the municipal elections in Vienna in the summer of 2015, some migrant organizations invited us to participate in the list. In the end, the project failed because some bourgeois migrant leaders managed to dominate this list and directed the project away from a militant democratic orientation into a liberal-opportunist one. As a result, we

175 Tina Sanders: *Kindermörder Israel!* Antizionismus und Antisemitismus in sozialistischen und antiimperialistischen Gruppen in Österreich anhand der Beispiele RKOB und (Neue) Linkswende“; see also the interview with the author: *Die Linkswende in antisemitische Stereotype – Ein Gespräch mit Tina Sanders*, 25. März 2016, <http://www.semiosis.at/2016/03/25/die-linkswende-in-antisemitische-stereotype/>

176 See on this Austria: *Mass Demonstration Stops Right-Wing Racist March against Muslim Migrants*, Report (with Photos and Videos) by the Austrian Section of the RCIT, 4.2.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/austria-mass-demo-against-islamophobia/>

didn't participate in this project.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, this development also reflected the reputation which we have gained over the years.

We think that, in principle, revolutionaries should encourage and support the formation of new political forces which reflect the struggle of migrants against racism and for their rights. Furthermore, revolutionaries should contribute to such a process a revolutionary perspective, focusing on the most burning issues of the struggle of the oppressed. They should also try to widen the list to integrate progressive sectors of the workers' movement who are prepared to accept migrants as equal partners.

All these experiences demonstrate that it is truly possible for communists to engage in systematic united front work with migrant organizations. Furthermore, our orientation to these sectors of the working class has also helped us to recruit a substantial share of migrants to our organizations.

Such an orientation is crucial for us as Bolshevik-Communists since we consider it of utmost important to build an organization which is not solely fighting *for* the working class interests but which is also fighting together *with* the workers and *through* the workers. Naturally, when we speak about the workers, we don't mean the upper, privileged strata – the labor aristocracy – but rather the class' huge majority, i.e., the “*mass proletarian elements*” as the Comintern called it.

In other words, an authentic revolutionary organization must orientate itself to the lower and middle strata of the working class among which the migrants constitute a crucial sector in imperialist countries. We have explained many times the need for such an orientation and its grounding in the writings of the Marxist classics.¹⁷⁸ Here we will limit ourselves to only one quote from Leon Trotsky:

“The characteristic thing about the American workers' parties, trade-union organizations, and so on, was their aristocratic character. It is the basis of opportunism. The skilled workers who feel set in the capitalist society help the bourgeois class to hold the Negroes and the unskilled workers down to a very low scale. Our party is not safe from degeneration if it remains a place for intellectuals, semi-intellectuals, skilled workers and Jewish workers who build a very close milieu which is almost isolated from the genuine masses. Under these conditions our party cannot develop – it will degenerate. We must have this great danger before our eyes. Many times I have proposed that every member of the party, especially the intellectuals and semi-intellectuals, who, during a period of say six months, cannot each win a worker-member for the party, should be demoted to the position of sympathizer. We can say the same in the Negro question. The old organizations, beginning with the AFL, are the organizations of the workers' aristocracy. Our party is a part of the same milieu, not of the basic exploited masses of

177 See Austrian Section of the RCIT to Run in Vienna's Municipal Elections, 5 September 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/rcit-vienna-elections/>

178 See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice. Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism, RCIT, Vienna 2014, pp. 44-49, pp. 94-99 and pp. 103-110.

*whom the Negroes are the most exploited. The fact that our party until now has not turned to the Negro question is a very disquieting symptom. If the workers' aristocracy is the basis of opportunism, one of the sources of adaptation to capitalist society, then the most oppressed and discriminated are the most dynamic milieu of the working class. We must say to the conscious elements of the Negroes that they are convoked by the historic development to become a vanguard of the working class. What serves as the brake on the higher strata? It is the privileges, the comforts that hinder them from becoming revolutionists. It does not exist for the Negroes. What can transform a certain stratum, make it more capable of courage and sacrifice? It is concentrated in the Negroes. If it happens that we in the SWP are not able to find the road to this stratum, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie."*¹⁷⁹

Britain: Respect as a Petty-Bourgeois Populist Party based mostly on National / Ethnic Minorities and Migrants

A more elaborated example of these potential developments is the *Respect* party in Britain led by George Galloway. As already mentioned, this petty-bourgeois populist party succeeded – in some places electoral districts – to gain substantial support among migrant communities and national and ethnic minorities. Unfortunately, our predecessor organization in Britain, *Workers' Power*, ignored the significance of *Respect* as a radical political expression of the democratic and anti-imperialist struggle of some of the most oppressed sectors of the working class. As a result, it refused to give critical electoral support to this party and passed up considering any entry work within *Respect*. This was clearly a mistake. In our opinion, it is legitimate to give critical electoral support to *Respect* candidates in districts where they have roots among the masses. As a consequence, the RCIT in Britain called for a critical electoral support for *Respect* leader George Galloway as a candidate from Bradford West in the 2015 parliamentary elections.

It is pointless to discuss in retrospect whether an entry tactic into *Respect* would have been correct in the first years after its foundation in 2004. Such a decision would necessarily have to depend on many concrete conditions. But it certainly would *not* have been unprincipled for revolutionaries to do so, as it could have helped them to build stronger links with the migrants and national and ethnic minorities.

¹⁷⁹ Leon Trotsky: Plans for the Negro Organisation (1939); in: Leo Trotsky: On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, pp. 61-62

A Useful Analogy: Trotsky on Organizations of the Black Minority in the USA

Our elaborations of a revolutionary strategy towards migrant organizations and the application of the united front tactic are founded on the Trotsky's approach to the liberation struggle of the black minority in the USA. In their most developed form, Trotsky's ideas have been expressed in his discussions with the black revolutionary C.L.R. James which were held in the summer of 1939.

In these discussions, C.L.R. James and Trotsky elaborated some ideas about how the US-American section of the Fourth International could take initiatives to launch a mass organization for the black people. They took into account the political "backwardness" of the masses of the black people as a result of their historic oppression. Trotsky remarked:

*„Your project would create something like a pre-political school. What determines the necessity? Two fundamental facts: that the large masses of the Negroes are backward and oppressed and this oppression is so strong that they must feel it every moment; that they feel it as Negroes. We must find the possibility of giving this feeling a political organizational expression. You may say that in Germany or in England we do not organize such semi-political, semi-trade-union, or semi-cultural organizations; we reply that we must adapt ourselves to the genuine Negro masses in the United States.“*¹⁸⁰

He also considered it as possible to support a candidate of a black non-revolutionary organization for elections even if such a candidate is a member of a bourgeois party (like the US's Democratic Party).

*“It is a question of another organization for which we are not responsible, just as they are not responsible for us. If this organization puts up a certain candidate, and we find as a party that we must put up our own candidate in opposition, we have the full right to do so. If we are weak and cannot get the organization to choose a revolutionist, and they choose a Negro Democrat, we might even withdraw our candidate with a concrete declaration that we abstain from fighting, not the Democrat, but the Negro. We consider that the Negro's candidacy as opposed to the white's candidacy, even if both are of the same party, is an important factor in the struggle of the Negroes for their equality; and in this case we can critically support them. I believe that it can be done in certain instances.“*¹⁸¹

We think that Trotsky's considerations are highly relevant for the Marxist strategy today towards migrant organizations in imperialist countries. Such organizations have to be approached on the basis of a united front in order to engage them in joint struggles – in particular against racism and state oppression as well as for solidarity activities (e.g., with the Arab Revolution and the Palestine liberation struggle). Such a strategy is crucial for revolutionaries in

180 Leon Trotsky: A Negro Organization (1939); in: Leo Trotsky: On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, p. 53

181 Leon Trotsky: Plans for the Negro Organisation (1939); in: Leo Trotsky: On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, p. 68

order to draw closer to the lowest and most oppressed strata of the working class in the imperialist metropolises.

Excuse: Lenin on the Role of the Party as the Vanguard of All Oppressed Classes

There is a widespread misunderstanding amongst many Marxists that revolutionaries should only be interested in the struggle of workers, but not of other oppressed classes. Such an idea is in complete contradiction with the teachings of the Marxist classics.

The entire conception of Marxism is based on the understanding that capitalism is not simply an economic system with politics, society, ideology, etc. as its appendages. Rather, these different aspects interact and influence each other reciprocally, while naturally — as already stressed by Friedrich Engels — the decisive aspect is ultimately the economy.

*“We see economic conditions as that which, in the final analysis, determines historical development. (...) Here, however, there are two points which should not be overlooked: a) Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But each of these also reacts upon the others and upon the economic basis. This is not to say that the economic situation is the cause and that it alone is active while everything else is mere passive effect, but rather that there is reciprocal action based, in the final analysis, on economic necessity which invariably prevails.”*¹⁸²

Consequently, Marxists understand that the class struggle has to be waged not only on the economic level but also on all other levels – political, ideological, cultural, etc. Engels pointed this out in his 1874 preface to his book *The Peasant War in Germany*:

*„It must be said to the credit of the German workers that they have exploited the advantages of their situation with rare understanding. For the first time since a workers' movement has existed, the struggle is being waged pursuant to its three sides — the theoretical, the political and the economic-practical (resistance to the capitalists) — in harmony and in its interconnections, and in a systematic way. It is precisely in this, as it were concentric, attack that the strength and invincibility of the German movement lies.”*¹⁸³

Such an approach is only guaranteed if revolutionaries take into account *all* contradictions of the capitalist class society and integrate them into a comprehensive revolutionary strategy. This was also the thinking behind Trotsky's *Transitional Program*, as the German Bolshevik-Leninists pointed out in one of the preparatory documents for the founding congress of the Fourth International-

182 Friedrich Engels: Letter to W. Borgius, 25 January 1894, in: MECW Vol. 50, p. 265 (Emphasis in original)

183 Friedrich Engels: Supplement to the Preface of 1870 for *The Peasant War in Germany* (1874), in: MECW Vol. 23, p. 631

al held in 1938.¹⁸⁴

Lenin emphasized that revolutionaries must not ignore the oppression of other classes by the ruling class, but rather must also fight against this and connect it with the proletarian liberation struggle. He harshly condemned those reductionist economists who characterize all non-proletarian classes as “reactionary.”

*„The proletariat must strive to form independent political workers’ parties, the main aim of which must be the capture of political power by the proletariat for the purpose of organising socialist society. The proletariat must not regard the other classes and parties as “one reactionary mass”; on the contrary, it must take part in all political and social life, support the progressive classes and parties against the reactionary classes and parties, support every revolutionary movement against the existing system, champion the interests of every oppressed nationality or race, of every persecuted religion, of the disfranchised sex, etc.”*¹⁸⁵

From this follows the obligation for Bolsheviks to conduct systematic propaganda and agitation not only among the proletariat but also among the other oppressed classes and layers.

*„It cannot be too strongly maintained that this is still not Social-Democracy, that the Social-Democrat’s ideal should not be the trade-union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.”*¹⁸⁶

Lenin gave a few concrete examples for such struggles of non-proletarian op-

184 We refer readers to the excellent document “*Thesen zum Aufbau der IV. Internationale*”. This document, written by one of the leader of the Fourth International, Walter Held, was discussed and adopted at an émigré conference of the „*International Communists of Germany*“ (IKD) on 23 August 1937 and published by its monthly paper „*Unser Wort*“ (No. 1 (85), January 1938). Trotsky referred to this text as a preparatory document for the conference (see Leon Trotsky: Discussions with Trotsky: I – International Conference, March 20, 1938, in: Trotsky Writings 1937-38, S.283). Despite its wealth of ideas, this document never received wide distribution in the German language. (It was published in the miscellany edited by Günther Hillmann: *Selbstkritik des Kommunismus*, Rowohlt Verlag, Hamburg 1967, pp. 143-154.) We republished the document some years ago in our theoretical journal. (Unter der Fahne der Revolution No. 4, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/farev-4/>) To our knowledge the document was never translated into English language.

185 V. I. Lenin: A Protest by Russian Social-Democrats (1899), in: LCW 4, p. 177

186 V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 423. Lenin also states in the same book: “*The principal thing, of course, is propaganda and agitation among all strata of the people. (...) We must also find ways and means of calling meetings of representatives of all social classes that desire to listen to a democrat; for he is no Social-Democrat who forgets in practice that “the Communists support every revolutionary movement”, that we are obliged for that reason to expound and emphasise general democratic tasks before the whole people, without for a moment concealing our socialist convictions. He is no Social-Democrat who forgets in practice his obligation to be ahead of all in raising, accentuating, and solving every general democratic question.*” (V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 425)

pressed layers:

*“The point we were discussing was the possible and necessary participation of various social strata in the overthrow of the autocracy; and not only are we able, but it is our bounden duty, to guide these “activities of the various opposition strata”, if we desire to be the “vanguard”. Not only will our students and liberals, etc., themselves take care of “the struggle that brings them face to face with our political régime”; the police and the officials of the autocratic government will see to this first and foremost. But if “we” desire to be front-rank democrats, we must make it our concern to direct the thoughts of those who are dissatisfied only with conditions at the university, or in the Zemstvo, etc., to the idea that the entire political system is worthless. We must take upon ourselves the task of organising an all-round political struggle under the leadership of our Party in such a manner as to make it possible for all oppositional strata to render their fullest support to the struggle and to our Party. We must train our Social-Democratic practical workers to become political leaders, able to guide all the manifestations of this all-round struggle, able at the right time to “dictate a positive programme of action” for the aroused students, the discontented Zemstvo people, the incensed religious sects, the offended elementary schoolteachers, etc., etc.”*¹⁸⁷

Naturally, today revolutionaries will not deal with “Zemstvo people” but instead with oppressed nationalities, women’s struggle, etc. However, other examples of Lenin are still relevant, like protests of petty-bourgeois university students, oppressed religious minorities like the Muslim migrants in Europe, etc.

Lenin denounced those economistic critics who reject the support for protests of non-proletarian oppressed layers because it supposedly would water down the revolutionary class struggle:

“But if we have to undertake the organisation of a really nation-wide exposure of the government, in what way will then the class character of our movement be expressed? (...) The reply is manifold: we Social-Democrats will organise these nationwide exposures; all questions raised by the agitation will be explained in a consistently Social-Democratic spirit, without any concessions to deliberate or undeliberate distortions of Marxism; the all-round political agitation will be conducted by a party which unites into one inseparable whole the assault on the government in the name of the entire people, the revolutionary training of the proletariat, and the safeguarding of its political independence, the guidance of the economic struggle of the working class, and the utilisation of all its spontaneous conflicts with its exploiters which rouse and bring into

187 V. I. Lenin: *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 428. A few pages later, Lenin adds: *“We would be “politicians” and Social-Democrats in name only (as all too often happens in reality), if we failed to realise that our task is to utilise every manifestation of discontent, and to gather and turn to the best account every protest, however small. This is quite apart from the fact that the millions of the labouring peasantry, handicraftsmen, petty artisans, etc., would always listen eagerly to the speech of any Social-Democrat who is at all qualified. Indeed, is there a single social class in which there are no individuals, groups, or circles that are discontented with the lack of rights and with tyranny and, therefore, accessible to the propaganda of Social-Democrats as the spokesmen of the most pressing general democratic needs?”* (V. I. Lenin: *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 430)

*our camp increasing numbers of the proletariat.”*¹⁸⁸

Some people object that this approach of Lenin was only valid for backward capitalist countries which have not experienced a bourgeois-democratic revolution. This, too, is utter nonsense. Lenin was quiet clear that Marxists must not ignore oppression outside the economic field or that of non-proletarian layers in imperialist countries.

As we have already pointed out in our booklet on the democratic question in the imperialist countries, how the imperialist bourgeoisie is accelerating chauvinism, militarism and bonapartism in the current period, and thereby giving peculiar importance to the struggle for democratic rights.

Lenin himself already pointed this out: „*The political superstructure of this new economy, of monopoly capitalism (imperialism is monopoly capitalism), is the change from democracy to political reaction. Democracy corresponds to free competition. Political reaction corresponds to monopoly. “Finance capital strives for domination, not freedom,” Rudolf Hilferding rightly remarks in his Finance Capital. It is fundamentally wrong, un-Marxist and unscientific, to single out “foreign policy” from policy in general, let alone counterpose foreign policy to home policy. Both in foreign and home policy imperialism strives towards violations of democracy, towards reaction. In this sense imperialism is indisputably the “negation” of democracy in general, of all democracy, and not just of one of its demands, national self-determination.*“¹⁸⁹

For example in his draft resolution on the agrarian question for the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, Lenin emphasized that revolutionaries have to support the struggle of the small peasants not only in the colonial and semi-colonial countries but also in the imperialist countries.

“The working and exploited people of the countryside, whom the urban proletariat must lead into the struggle or, at all events, win over, are represented in all capitalist countries by the following classes: first, the agricultural proletariat, (...), second, the semi-proletarians or peasants who till tiny plots of land, i.e., those who obtain their livelihood partly as wage-labourers at agricultural and industrial capitalist enterprises and partly by working their own or rented plots of land, which provide their families only with part of their means of subsistence. (...), third, the small peasantry, i.e., the small-scale tillers who, either as owners or as tenants, hold small plots of land which enable them to satisfy the needs of their families and their farms, and do not hire outside labour. (...) Taken together, the three groups enumerated above constitute the majority of the rural population in all capitalist countries. That is why the success of the proletarian revolution is fully assured, not only in the cities but in the countryside as well. (...) [T]hat although the three enumerated categories of the rural population – who are incredibly downtrodden, disunited, crushed, and doomed to semi-barbarous conditions of existence in all countries, even the most advanced – are economically, socially, and culturally interested in the victory of socialism, they are capable of giving resolute sup-

188 V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 432

189 V.I. Lenin: A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism (1916); in: LCW 23, p. 43 (Emphasis in the Original)

port to the revolutionary proletariat only after the latter has won political power, only after it has resolutely dealt with the big landowners and capitalists, and only after these downtrodden people see in practice that they have an organised leader and champion, strong and firm enough to assist and lead them and to show them the right path.”¹⁹⁰

Lenin’s approach was adopted in the Comintern’s resolutions on the agrarian question in both the Second and Fourth Congress.¹⁹¹ This represented an important break with the tradition of the II. International, until its collapse in 1914, since it largely ignored the poor peasantry in Western Europe and hence failed to win them as allies for the proletariat.¹⁹²

Trotsky continued this approach, as can be seen, to give only one example, in the *Program of Action for France*, written in 1934:

*“The proletarian state must rest on the exploited peasants as well as on the workers of town and country. Our program answers the needs of the great rural masses as well as those of the working class.”*¹⁹³

Of course, the peasantry has been massively reduced both numerically as well as in its relative social weight in the old imperialist countries. Today, the peasantry doesn’t play a central role in the class struggle in these regions.¹⁹⁴ Instead, today, the lower strata of the salaried middle layers play an important role in the old imperialist countries. Add to this the important struggles of the special oppressed layers – women, migrants, youth, national minorities, etc. – of whom many are part of the working class. What we have tried to demonstrate with these references to the writing of Lenin and Trotsky is that Marxists do not limit themselves in promoting the struggle only of the workers, but also support the protests of non-proletarian classes against the bourgeoisie in order to win them over as allies for the proletariat. This is not only true for semi-colonial countries, but also for imperialist states. Naturally, today these allies may differ from those in the times of Lenin and Trotsky. But the fundamental issues have not changed.

The approach of Marxists on this issue differs fundamentally from that of

190 V. I. Lenin: Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question. For the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920), in: LCW Vol. 31, pp. 152-156. See on this also the preparatory work for Lenin’s Theses by the Polish communist Julian Marchlewski which Lenin praised in his Theses: Julian Marchlewski: Die Agrarfrage und die Welt Revolution, in: Die Kommunistische Internationale, No. 12 (1920), pp. 89-97

191 See Theses on the Agrarian Question adopted by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); Communist International: The Agrarian Action Programme adopted by the Fourth Comintern Congress: Directives on the Application of the Agrarian Theses passed by the Second Congress (1922), both documents are reproduced in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents, Vol. I 1919-1922, pp. 155-161 respectively pp. 394-398

192 A useful overview on the development of Lenin’s thinking on the Agrarian question can be found in: Esther Kingston-Mann: Lenin and the problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution, Oxford University Press, 1983

193 Leon Trotsky: A Program of Action for France (1934), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1974, p. 25

194 This does of course not mean that these layers have become completely irrelevant. See for example the periodic protests of French peasants.

various left-reformists in the following way: the left social democrats, the *Party of the European Left*, etc. look for to form alliance with the middle layer in which the proletariat subordinates itself to the petty-bourgeois program of the intellectual representatives of the middle layers. As a result, the left-reformists end up in constructing a popular front in which the working class becomes a subordinate – via the leadership of the middle class intellectuals – to the bourgeoisie.

By contrast, Bolshevik-Communists also look to form an alliance with the middle layer, but one in which the proletariat plays the hegemonic role. They desire to win over the lower strata of the middle layers by advancing the proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie as well as by fighting against the petty-bourgeois ideas of the intellectual representatives of the middle layers.

Appendix: RCIT-Theses on the United Front Tactic

Theses on the Principles of the United Front Tactic and Its Application to the Current Conditions of Class Struggle

Document of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, 9 April 2016

Preface

In what follows we detail the fundamentals and principles of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) on the issue of the united front tactic. These theses generalize based on our experience since then as well as on the further development of our political positions. In a forthcoming booklet to be published soon, we will elaborate our perspective on this subject in greater detail.

The theses given here are structured on those of our predecessor organization (League for a Revolutionary Communist International) which we adopted in January 1994. However, we have substantially revised them so that the current text represents a new document. Note that, when referring below to the revolutionary party, our intent is equally applicable to smaller pre-party formations.

I. The Nature and Principles of the United Front Tactic

1. The basic principles of the united front are simple. Their goal is to enable communists to extend their influence in the working class and among the oppressed – or to express it in the words of the Communist International “*towards the Masses.*” The basic principles of the united front apply to all agreements for delimited, practical, common actions which the revolutionary party proposes to, or undertakes with, other organizations based on the proletariat, on other exploited classes, or on groups of socially or nationally oppressed. These principles can be summed up in the military metaphor “*march separately, strike together.*” This means political and organizational independence of the revolutionary proletarian forces combined with unity of action against a common enemy. The aim of the united front tactic is (a) to establish the maximum unity of workers and oppressed in the struggle against the ruling class and imperialism and (b) to break the domination of non-revolutionary leaderships and win the workers and oppressed over to the struggle led by the revolutionary party.

2. These are the principles which govern the relations between the revolutionary vanguard and other organizations of the exploited and the oppressed in the struggle against capitalism, imperialism and all forms of reaction. They have various spheres of application. Primarily, they aim at joint actions with mass organizations of the working class and, secondly, with mass organizations of other oppressed and exploited classes and layers (e.g., poor peasants, urban poor). Under exceptional circumstances, the united front can include sectors of the bourgeoisie where it possesses mass influence and through objective circumstances is forced to fight against imperialist aggression, national oppression, etc.

3. The united front, bloc, or alliance, can potentially pass through the following phases: an appeal to form it, negotiations between organizations, the striking of an agreement, its active implementation, and eventually its breakup or dissolution. However, only in a minority of cases will it pass through all of these stages.

4. As an alliance which must be actively initiated, the united front should be distinguished from all episodic, co-incidental actions where no agreement on a common immediate goal or coordinated tactics is involved. Such coincidental actions, for example a fascist trade union supporting a justified workers' strike, imply no advocacy of a bloc whatsoever. Similarly, the united front must be distinguished from mere participation in a mass demonstration whose political basis and leadership the revolutionary organization opposes, and for which it takes no responsibility. Here, the revolutionary party is *not* in a bloc with the leadership, gives no support to their slogans, criticizes them openly, and makes propaganda and agitation for its own slogans. In short, a united front must be formally struck between those organizations for the revolutionary proletariat to form temporary agreements for common actions.

5. Yet another distinction must be made between joint *political* actions and an exclusively military bloc, i.e., an agreement simply to coordinate fighting forces against a common enemy. Such agreements can be struck with bourgeois forces in a situation of war, without in any sense constituting a united front. However, in other circumstances, a military bloc – the formation of an anti-fascist workers militia or alliances during a civil war – may have a clearly-defined united front character. Mere military means are not the decisive issue, since war is the continuation of politics by other means. The question is what is the bloc for and with whom is it struck? More problematically, in some languages and national traditions, a distinction has been made between the *united front* proper, which is conceived of as a longer-term formal agreement involving a campaign, and *common or united actions* which are limited to a single event. Whatever the virtues of these terms one thing is clear: the basic principles of the united front apply to each and every one of them.

6. Thus, the united front is at its heart about establishing as close a relationship as possible between the revolutionary party and primarily the

working class masses, and secondly with other oppressed layers. While such relationships between the party and the masses must be permanent, they must also constantly be changing since the class struggle itself is both permanent and changing in form. The united front is thus a *ubiquitous* tactic; a tactic that is repeatedly being deployed in one arena or another. However, no one form of the united front is a permanently-deployed part of the revolutionary party's strategy. The united front itself is not a strategy, but a tactic. Indeed, it involves a range of tactics set within the overall strategy of the proletariat. In pursuing any one form of the united front, revolutionaries must always keep before their eyes the overall goal: the seizure of state power by workers' and peasants' councils and militias and the establishment of a world communist society by means of proletarian revolution. To realize this in practice an independent revolutionary Bolshevik-Communist party is an indispensable necessity. Only such a party can embody full class independence from the bourgeoisie and lead the proletariat in the struggle to establish its own dictatorship.

7. But to reach this stage we have to transform revolutionary nuclei into mass parties which have won the confidence of the broadest layers of the exploited masses. However, today, the great majority of the workers in the world support non-revolutionary and even counter-revolutionary organizations. Revolutionaries must expose the nature of these organizations and deprive them of their leadership, or rather misleaderships, over the proletariat and oppressed. On its own, propagandistic exposure of their errors and crimes is insufficient to achieve this. It is necessary to demonstrate in practice that the reformist, petty-bourgeois-populist, or centrist cannot adequately defend or fight for working class and oppressed interests. The revolutionary party has to deploy a range of tactics which prove to the masses in the course of the class struggle that only *it* is the consistent working class party. The party, in turn, must learn how to lead actual mass struggles, to demonstrate its capacity as an alternative leadership. In this process it must demonstrate both its independent initiative and its ability to co-ordinate its forces loyally with other mass organizations of the working class and oppressed. The mass of the working class and the oppressed, not yet won over to the revolutionary leadership, must come to trust the communists in daily battles and compare them favorable with their treacherous reformist and petty-bourgeois-populist leaders. In fact, it is in the very defining of the arena in which such comparisons will be made that the united front tactic plays such a vital role in the building of the revolutionary party.

8. By extension, the enduring gain of a correct united front policy is the exposure of the limitations of reformism, petty-bourgeois populism, Islamism, anarchism, syndicalism, centrism, and various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies and programs within the working class, and the eventual replacement of all vacillating and inconsistent leaderships with a revolutionary communist one. Therefore, at every stage, the united front policy should be used to strengthen the revolutionary organization by increasing recruitment

and deepening its roots within mass organizations.

9. However, the united front is not exclusively and solely a means to build the revolutionary party. Rather, it is a tactic in the ongoing class struggle which seeks to establish the broadest possible fighting unity for the exploited and oppressed masses regardless of their present political differentiation. The purpose of this unity is to repulse the attacks of the bosses and bourgeois governments and to secure better economic, social and political conditions for the working class and its allies in a way that brings nearer the goal of overthrowing capitalism. In this sense, the united front arises in the first place from the needs of the class struggle. For this very reason, revolutionaries do not simply respond to calls for common action against the class enemy but are the first to initiate the call whenever the class struggle demands united action.

10. As a consequence, on the one hand, united front tactics presuppose the maintenance of an independently organized revolutionary organization based on a transitional programme for the seizure of state power and the overthrow of capitalism. This party must participate as an independent detachment and not dissolve itself in the united front. On the other hand, the necessity of the united front presupposes the existence of broad non-revolutionary masses under the sway of other political forces.

11. The united front cannot be regarded as an uninterrupted series of actions with the same partner up to and including the seizure of power. Its repeated use constitutes only a series of tactics within the framework of the overall strategy of the proletarian vanguard party. This strategy by necessity includes the independent actions of the party. In widely different forms, the united front is constantly being struck and broken. It must never be turned into a systematic subordination of the proletarian vanguard to any limited platform of demands which are acceptable to various non-revolutionary leaders of mass organizations. This would be to relegate the revolutionary programme itself to passive propaganda and restrict agitation solely to immediate or, at best, transitional demands.

Ultra-Left and Opportunist Dangers

12. The united front is a *differentiated unity*. It is common action for clearly limited and prescribed goals; it also entails sharpest criticism of the united front partners. Without the former, capitalist attacks cannot be repelled or new gains won; without the latter gains cannot be consolidated nor the revolution advanced. All mistakes in the application of the united front begin when this differentiated unity is replaced by a *formal identity* between the tasks of the revolutionary organization and the limited and immediate tasks of the class.

13. Ultra-leftism invariably begins when the revolutionary program is advanced in contradiction to the demands essential to the immediate tasks facing the mass of the working class. For the ultra-leftist, the united front is

intentionally proposed as an ultimatum, deliberately courting its rejection by reformist and centrist leaders in the vain belief that this exposes them. However, such “exposure” is, in reality, purely rhetorical in nature. Reformist leaders are not exposed because they fail to carry out revolutionary tactics or strategy but precisely because they fail to fight for the immediate interests of the masses. The sectarians, who limit themselves exclusively to denunciations, avoid being measured on the practical terrain of the class struggle, fearing that they will succumb to opportunist temptations.

14. The opportunist starts not from the platform of struggle, or even a single demand dictated by the objective needs of the class struggle, but rather by what the present consciousness of the masses is deemed to be or, worse, what their leaders can be expected to accept. In comparison, the scope of the proposals put forward by revolutionaries for a united front, while likely to be less than the “full program” is also likely to be considerably greater than the timid proposals of the reformist leaders, and even ahead of the social-general consciousness of the masses. At the same time, the slogans proposed for the united front must relate to the current consciousness of the advanced workers, both to win them over to the joint struggle as well as to exert pressure of the reformist leaders. The aim of the united front must be to link the present consciousness of the masses (and especially its advanced sections) to the urgent tasks of the day, as specifically dictated by the nature of the enemies’ attacks. The slogans of the united front must enable the revolutionary vanguard to lead the masses into the struggle.

15. Because the united front is not a strategy, there is no such thing as a “united front program” that extends from today’s struggle to the seizure of power. The revolutionary organization advances those parts of its program that appear necessary to unite broader forces in a practical fight. Having determined the nature of the attack and the balance of class forces, the revolutionary organization raises concrete demands that, taken together, can create the basis for a united fight against this present attack, in order to repel it, or by extension secure new advances.

16. The character of the demands to be fought for in the united front does not fall into any schematic categorization. The demands must be specific, precise and avoid all extraneous and artificial demands or ideological dressing that does not pertain to the achievement of the common goal. Any concrete united front proposal may consist of only a single demand; but can also be composed of a single type of demands; e.g., immediate economic demands, democratic demands, or transitional demands. Finally, the proposal for a united front can be put forward or forged as a platform of several demands tied together in a series of actions designed to meet a particular crisis. Thus it follows that a united front can involve a single action – e.g., a strike or an armed action – or it can incorporate a longer campaign of various actions. The only valid criticism of a united front proposal would be that it entirely excludes an

essential demand for action; action to which the masses can be won over and which exposes their leaders if the proposal is refused. Therefore, the absence of numerous revolutionary demands from a united front platform cannot be taken as a valid criticism; indeed, the presence of such demands in a non-revolutionary situation is a sure sign of passive propagandism, scholasticism and sectarianism. However, this is not the case when there is a mass upswing in the class struggle signaling the development of a revolutionary situation. In such a situation it becomes indispensable to fight for such multiple revolutionary demands as the best expression of the united front.

17. The demands must be associated with clear and precise methods of struggle (e.g., demonstrations, strikes, defense squads, armed militias) and forms of organization (e.g., strike committees, mobilization committee, soviets). The united front can thus vary in form and duration depending on the nature of the attack it seeks to repel. Committees which exist to co-ordinate a series of diverse or repeated actions aimed at achieving the objective are united front organizations; in this sense the united front is more than the action itself (e.g., a demonstration); rather it embraces the organizational preparation in advance of the action as well as its post festum evaluation.

The United Front Tactic, the Working Class, and Other Oppressed Layers and Classes

18. With which types of forces is it permissible to form a united front, or a bloc based on united front principles? There is no one answer to this question. Rather it depends on the situation, the character of the country (imperialist, semi-colonial or degenerated workers state), the objectives of the struggle, the class forces involved, and the degree of class differentiation. As a general guideline, revolutionaries initiate proposals for a united front tactic towards forces which have a mass base inside the working class and other oppressed layers and classes (usually these are reformist or petty-bourgeois-populist organizations). In exceptional circumstances, these can also be bourgeois and sometimes even centrist organizations which are objectively in a confrontation with reactionary forces (e.g., ruling class, imperialist powers, racist or fascist forces).

19. By contrast, the *popular front* is a bloc between bourgeois forces and workers' organizations in which the latter accept programs that restrict the workers within the limits set by private property and which protect the bourgeois state. Thus, what distinguishes a popular front from a united front is not the participation of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces in itself, but rather the political subordination of the proletariat to the platform of the bourgeoisie in a popular front.

20. A popular front can also be very dangerous when it involves very weak bourgeois forces (the "shadow of the bourgeoisie"). Workers' parties

which have undertaken such ostensible united fronts with weak bourgeois forces “in defense of democracy,” for example, can find themselves defending the bourgeoisie and capitalism against the proletariat (as happened in Spain in 1936, Chile in 1973, and Greece in 2015). Whichever way it’s reached, wittingly or unwittingly, the popular front is, as Trotsky said, a noose around the neck of the proletariat.

21. No popular front has ever opened the road to socialism. On the contrary, they have repeatedly opened the road to anti-working class counter-revolution. Genuine Trotskyists always fight against popular fronts. They are in favor of *working class unity* and for the independence from and not unity with the bourgeoisie. We place demands on all the workers’ parties and unions, whose leaders have taken them down the road of the popular front and, consequently, class collaboration and insist that they break with the capitalist parties, defend workers’ rights, and take up the fight for workers’ power. Such demands to break with the bourgeoisie are similarly directed to petty-bourgeois populist forces which have a mass base among the workers and oppressed, as the Bolsheviks did it towards the Social-Revolutionaries in Russia until 1917 (e.g., Castro-Chavista organizations in Latin America, certain Islamist-populist organizations in the Middle East).

22. Naturally there are certain differences in the application of the united front tactic in imperialist as opposed to semi-colonial countries, as well as between different countries within each such category. In Western Europe, Canada, and Australia bourgeois workers’ parties play an important role within the working class. However, at the same time they are undergoing massive bourgeoisification. In other imperialist countries, either no bourgeois workers’ parties exist (the US, China, Russia) or only very weak ones do (Japan). In the countries of the South (where nowadays $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world proletariat live) there are no or only weak bourgeois workers’ parties (important exceptions are India and South Africa). At the same time radical (petty-)bourgeois-populist formations often do play an influential role among the working class and the oppressed in these countries. Petty-bourgeois-populist formations also play an increasingly influential role among migrants – a growing sector of the working class – within imperialist countries. Under certain circumstances, new petty-bourgeois-populist forces can possess an influential role among sectors of the workers and youth in imperialist countries (e.g., the Occupy Movement in the US; PODEMOS in Spain)

23. Given the conditions in colonies and semi-colonies, even the national bourgeoisie, or sectors of it, can at times be forced to form alliances with oppressed classes against reactionary forces. This is also true for bourgeois forces among oppressed layers in the imperialist countries (e.g., migrants, oppressed nations). The national bourgeoisie can suddenly find itself crushed and exploited by imperialist big capital, discriminated against via national oppression, or oppressed by imperialist armed intervention or by local military

forces acting for imperialism. Under such pressure, bourgeois nationalist parties not only resort to anti-imperialist rhetoric but, on rare occasions, may also enter into a real struggle with the imperialists or their local agents.

24. Normally, under such conditions, it is the radical petty-bourgeoisie which engages inconsistently in such struggles and with whom the proletariat can form a *democratic or anti-imperialist united front*. But we cannot exclude the possibility that a bourgeois party, with a mass plebeian following, might also do so. Under such conditions, it too might be included in the proposal for a democratic or anti-imperialist united front. This is possible, of course, on the condition that the proletariat's hands are not tied, nor is it forced to renounce the struggle for power – let alone any promised political support for a bourgeois government; such a united front would *not* be a popular front.

25. In semi-colonies (and even under certain very specific circumstances in imperialist countries and degenerated workers states), politically bourgeois forces which have a mass plebeian following, or even a working class following, and which suffer from systematic social oppression (e.g., ethnic and national minorities, women) could participate in actions based on united front principles without this transforming such a bloc into a popular front. Clearly, the actions would be defensive and limited in scope and duration.

26. The key question would then be whether the demands which such a bloc would fight for are sufficient for, or even necessary, for the workers' *own* struggle at this particular conjuncture. Bourgeois parties of the nationally oppressed, or bourgeois women's organizations, might be drawn into united actions or campaigns, especially where their leaders hold the allegiance of large sectors of the oppressed, particularly of the oppressed workers. For the revolutionary party, the aim of such a united front, other than maximizing opposition to bourgeois reaction, would be to break away the proletariat elements from the bourgeois leadership of the oppressed. Towards this goal, joint action would contribute by exposing the character of this leadership in the course of the struggle.

The United Front Tactic and the Non-Revolutionary Leaderships of the Workers and Oppressed

27. The permissibility or non-permissibility of any united front does not depend upon the past record of the leaders of the other parties in the bloc. If the formation of a united front becomes necessary with mass workers' organizations led by today's versions of Kerensky, Noske, Zorgiebel or Stalin – all of whom, in their original incarnation, were responsible for the murder of revolutionary workers – we cannot nevertheless rule out forming a united front with them. Forming a united front with counter-revolutionary leaders is a necessary evil, hence the famous dictum that the united front might get struck with "the devil and his grandmother." That's to say that the offer of forming a united front

does not constitute a vote of confidence for counter-revolutionary leadership to whom it is proposed.

28. Thus, the freedom to criticize these leaders throughout the common action is an essential principle of the united front. Such criticism must be directed at the vacillations of the bloc partners in carrying out the objectives of the united front, as well as their broader political failings. There should be no common propaganda, as this can only be done at the cost of placing aside important – even decisive – differences between revolution and reformism. The only common publications which are permissible are those specifically associated with the united front (e.g., strike committee bulletins, leaflets for mobilizing demonstrations) and which are designed *only* to agitate for the united front demands and objectives. The precise balance between common action and criticism cannot be established by some predetermined formula. We reserve the right to criticize our partners before, during, and after the common action. When, and in what form, we exercise that right depends on concrete judgments made in specific circumstances. But it is obligatory that such criticism be made.

29. The united front must be addressed to the rank and file as well as to its leadership. However, we reject the notion of coalescing a united front from below, *only* because it is a self-defeating and ultra-left trap. If the workers could indeed be persuaded to abandon their leadership by such a direct and unilateral appeal, there would be no need for the united front in the first place. The purpose of directing the united front appeal to the leaders is to draw the latter into action. It is in this way, rather than by means of declamatory exposure, that we can prove to the masses how fatal the limitations of their leaders actually are.

30. In the great majority of cases, the proposal for a united front will remain just that, and no practical agreement will be reached with the reformist, populist, and other leaders to whom it is addressed. In such conditions, the proposal will remain part of an agitational and popular propaganda campaign aimed at the rank and file members of the non-revolutionary organizations.

31. Even when some success has been achieved in breaking away radicalized workers from their non-revolutionary leadership, the united front continues to retain its full validity and force for those who remain behind. In such cases, implementing the united front from below may indeed bear fruit, after the non-revolutionary leaders have refused to act in concert with the revolutionaries. As an extension of what we wrote above (see Thesis 29), at this point it is necessary to combine denunciations of the leaders with proposals for action aimed at the rank and file or individuals under revolutionary leadership. But even here part of the aim of this tactic is to generate pressure from within the organization upon its leaders to act. If successful, this can only have the effect of drawing even more layers into action.

32. Dissolving the united front can be as important as forming it. When the united front has served its purpose, and its goal has been either achieved or lost,

the united front needs to be redefined or dismantled and the appropriate lessons drawn for the forces involved. The following circumstances may necessitate the dissolution of the united front: (1) When it is maintained only as diplomatic or literary exercise and entails no obligation on the part of bloc partners to act; (2) When bloc partners are actually sabotaging or undermining the aims of the united front either by not implementing it or by compromising with the class enemy; (3) When the partners of the united front refuse to take seriously its extension to other mass forces, and instead restrict membership in the bloc to sect like proportions. Where such circumstances necessitate dissolution of the united front, at the same time revolutionaries must still attempt, as far as possible, to continue the united struggle with the informal leaders of the rank and file, encouraging them to split with the organization's formal leadership and establish their own, while winning over to their own ranks the best elements from their respective non-revolutionary organizations.

33. Short-term blocs with centrist organizations without mass influence can be legitimate for the purpose of organizing practical actions. They are subject to the same principles as those for the examples of the united front discussed above. However, they cannot, as Trotsky repeatedly emphasized, really be considered as united fronts given the lack of influence of these organizations among the working class and the oppressed. For small communist pre-party organizations, such short-term blocs should only play a secondary role in comparison with proposals for cooperation directed to the mass organizations.

34. While adhering to the above considerations is a necessary condition if the united front is to be principled, it is not sufficient in itself to guarantee either its principled nature or its success. Only a concrete analysis of a situation can determine what the correct basis for a united front proposal is. Leadership and experience, accumulated over years through involvement in the class struggle, is required to determine what united front demands are permissible and necessary and to which forces these demands may be addressed. However, by understanding the basic purpose and principles of the united front, revolutionaries can prevent many unnecessary basic errors.

II. Various Applications of the United Front

35. The united front tactic was elaborated by the Bolsheviks and first codified at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1922. By that time, the post-war revolutionary tide had ebbed. Throughout the world, the capitalist classes were on the offensive and the young Communist Parties had failed to win over a majority of the working class in most developed capitalist countries. At the same time, a wave of anti-imperialist liberation struggles began in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. However, in these latter countries, the working class represented only a small fraction of the population and bourgeois forces wielded huge influence with large sectors of the petty-bourgeois, peasant-dominated population. Under such conditions, the Comintern developed the workers united front tactic as well as the anti-imperialist united front tactic.

36. Obviously, there have been important developments since the 1920s and '30s. While at that time, the huge majority of the world proletariat was situated in the old imperialist countries, today quite the reverse is true and the focus of the proletariat has moved to the South. At the same time, there are increasing divisions within the respective proletariats of the imperialist metropolises, divisions between the privileged labor aristocracy (the traditional main bases of the reformist parties and trade unions) and the broad mass of the working class. During the course of decades, social democracy and Stalinism underwent intense bourgeoisification and were integrated into the accepted political milieu of many bourgeois states. While this occurred, in parallel there arose new layers of radicalized, mostly young, workers and oppressed. However, because of the substantial weakening of *authentic* revolutionary forces, the radicalization of the younger generation in most cases has led to the formation of new populist or radical-reformist formations. Revolutionaries must attentively study these changes, and should incorporate into their tactical arsenal the lessons gained. To do so, they should apply the method elaborated by the Comintern and, later, the Fourth International to current concrete conditions. Primarily, we should be aware of the dominant influence among the working class and the oppressed which (petty-)bourgeois forces wield, as a result of the developments just cited. Clearly, rather than making the application of the united front tactic superfluous, these developments only augment its importance.

37. The Marxist united front tactic contains, firstly, the *workers' united front*. Its goal is the broadest possible *unity of the working class* in the concrete struggle against the bourgeoisie, together with the splitting the proletariat away from its reformist and populist leaders. Furthermore, the Marxist united front also encompasses the *democratic or anti-imperialist united front*. The goal of this latter united front is to create an alliance with the *non-proletarian oppressed classes*

under the leadership of the proletariat in a common struggle against reaction (racism, dictatorship, imperialism, etc.), while wresting away leadership from the same (petty-)bourgeois forces to which these non-proletarians previously looked.

38. However, such categorizations must not be understood schematically. In real life, there are often overlaps and combinations with characteristics of both the workers' united front and the democratic or anti-imperialist united front. In any case, with few exceptions, the same principles apply for all forms of the united front. As we mentioned above, bourgeois workers' parties (social democracy, Stalinism) play a dominant role for the working class in only a relatively few countries – mainly in Western Europe. Furthermore, these parties have and are continuing to rapidly bourgeoisify. Thus, the workers' united front should be directed not only to the traditional reformist organizations but often also to (petty-)bourgeois populist forces which wield a significant influence inside the working class. Furthermore there are numerous political class struggles (e.g., against imperialist war, against racism, for democratic rights) which by their nature mobilize not only organizations of the working class but also of other oppressed layers and classes.

The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony within the United Front

39. The central task of revolutionaries consists in always focusing their attention on the struggle for *proletarian hegemony* in their application of the united front tactic. This means, in particular, the need to fight for the strengthening of the revolutionary forces within the united front at the expense of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces (social democracy, Stalinism, petty-bourgeois populists, Islamists, etc.). This is because the latter constellations constitute an obstacle to the political independence of the proletariat and other oppressed layers and, it follows, makes them politically dependent on the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the paramount importance of achieving the political hegemony of the proletariat also requires revolutionaries to advance the creation of an alliance with the peasants and other oppressed layers *under the leadership of the proletariat*.

40. In order to establish proletarian hegemony within the framework of the united front, Communist Parties must make demands on the reformists, petty-bourgeois-populists, and centrists to defend the interests of the workers and the oppressed against the capitalist offensive. Such demands are manifested in the slogan raised by the Comintern "*March separately, strike together.*" No less, communists need to also demand that the non-communist organizations of the working class, the peasantry, the urban poor, oppressed nations, migrants, etc. (parties, trade unions, etc.) break with the bourgeoisie and take up the struggle for workers' and popular councils and militias.

41. We must remember that the entire objective of the united front is to achieve maximum unity in action in the struggle of the proletariat against the

bourgeois ruling class and imperialism by means of an alliance between it and its allied layers. At the heart of the united front is the struggle for *class independence* from the bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers. Thus, its guiding principle is the challenge which the revolutionary organization addresses to reformist and populist leaders of mass workers and oppressed organizations: “*Break with the bourgeoisie!*” This being so, the tactic of the united front is applicable to a range of scenarios, from the most limited and defensive actions up to a broad-based mass offensive against the entire bourgeois order. The latter is typical of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations, when the gauntlet is thrown down as a challenge to the reformist and populist misleaders “*Break with the bourgeoisie; take the road of struggle for a workers’ government!*” or for “*a workers’ and peasants’ government!*” as circumstances dictate.

42. The principles of the workers’ united front find a wide range of applications in trade unions and similar mass organizations. But the united front cannot be restricted exclusively to the trade unions as the Bordigists sought to do. Rather, it’s equally applicable at times of heightened class struggle, and even more so by political parties claiming to represent the interests of the workers respectively the oppressed and which, in fact, actually do organize broad sections of the proletariat or the peasants and other oppressed layers. In such contexts, the purpose of the united front is to drag the reformist and populist leaders out of their union offices, their parliamentary chambers, their banquets and secret meetings with the class enemy, into the streets and force them to join the class struggle – i.e., participate in mass demonstrations, picket lines, etc., and, in revolutionary conditions, onto the barricades. The fact that these leaders may ultimately prove themselves to be lackeys of the bourgeoisie can be no argument for not proposing a united front to them. What is decisive is that these traitors still hold, if not the confidence, then at least control over large masses of the proletariat and, it follows, the revolutionary party has not yet won the confidence or the organized leadership of these masses.

43. In both imperialist and semi-colonial countries, revolutionaries should initially direct the united front tactic towards workers’ organizations or mass organizations with strong roots among the working class. This includes not only trade unions and workers’ parties, but also organizations representing proletarian women, migrants, youth, etc. Proposals can be made to traditional bourgeois workers parties (mainly social democrats and Stalinists) as well as to newer workers’ parties (e.g., the former *Democratic Labor Party* in South Korea or the *Partido de los Trabajadores* in Bolivia). In exceptional circumstances, where centrists wield mass influence, this tactic can also applied to them (e.g., FIT in Argentina)

44. Moreover, the united front tactic also plays a central role in the struggle against fascism (*anti-fascist united front*). Here, each fascist movement must be specifically analyzed and distinguished from versions of right-wing populism and Bonapartism, as fascism aims at a “*particular governmental system based*

on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society" (Trotsky). The anti-fascist united front cannot be separated from other forms of this tactic (one that fights for democracy, etc.); it adheres to the same rules and principles applied in other variations of the tactic. The libertarian and ultra-left approaches tend to differentiate the anti-fascist struggle from the general one (which focuses on social and democratic realms). This differentiation results in two fundamental errors: (a) The ultra-left forces act in place of the working class and; (b) the adoption of a Popular Front tactic involving bourgeois parties and churches, which assume strong political influence in such alliances. A special feature of the anti-fascist united front is the need to create from the outset joint self-defense groups of workers (whether unionized or not), migrants and leftist activists against fascist forces. This is because, neither the police nor the judiciary are reliable forces in the struggle against fascist attacks; rather they protect the latter. Yet another deviation from the united front is the so-called "red-brown" strategy in which the left forms an alliance with fascists to fight against capital and its state.

45. Petty-bourgeois forces often have tremendous influence on the working class in semi-colonial countries and among oppressed peoples or migrants in imperialist metropolises. Various examples of this would include: Castro-Chavista organizations in Latin America (the Bolivarian parties and organizations in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and populist mass organizations in Argentina, etc.); certain Islamist-populist organizations in the Middle East and Asia (e.g., Hamas, al-Qadri's PAT in Pakistan, various FSA and Islamist rebel groups in Syria, Libya, and Egypt, and the Houthis in Yemen); progressive-populist organizations in Asia and Africa etc.; the Northern Irish Sinn Fein/IRA before its capitulation in 1998; Sinn Fein in the Republic of Ireland, the Basque HB and its successor organizations, CUP in Catalonia, etc.; numerous migrant organizations in the imperialist countries, and organizations of blacks in the US and Britain, etc.

46. Furthermore, revolutionaries should also apply the united front tactic to mass organizations which represent other oppressed layers (e.g., poor peasants, urban poor, lower strata of the intelligencia, etc.). Here, appropriate examples would include: the MST or various *favela* organizations in Brazil; militant peasant organizations in Africa; and various petty-bourgeois democratic groups in Egypt, Tunisia, etc. Similarly, petty-bourgeois nationalist organizations of oppressed peoples (e.g., the Palestinian Balad party in Israel) and of migrants should also be approached.

47. Finally, revolutionaries must always consider new formations spawned by developments on the ground. In the last few years, in light of the rapid bourgeoisification of traditional reformist workers parties and the failure of centrists, new petty-bourgeois populist forces have emerged in imperialist countries; for example the Occupy Movement in the US in 2011 and PODEMOS in Spain. Such formations can wield broad influence among the working class

and youth. Consequently, revolutionaries should apply the united front tactic towards such formations as well.

48. Soviets are the highest form of a united front. They appear in a revolutionary situation and reflect a contradiction: on the one side, the power of the exploiting class, many times in a form of a popular front, as opposed to the power of the working class on the other. One of these two opposing forces must win and smash the other. Without revolutionary leadership of the Soviets, they will be led by reformists, bourgeois forces, populists and centrists who will subordinate the working class to the power of the capitalist class. Within the soviets, revolutionaries must fight for leadership with the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets.*" However, in certain situations *other* forms of working class organizations can be the force that leads the revolution. For example, when Soviets are still under the leadership of reformists and centrists who represent an earlier phase of the revolution, actions committees can take the lead and represent the majority of the active workers. After the revolution, the Soviets in power manifest working class power. They can be form a socialist coalition government only with forces that defend the socialist revolution. By contrast, the slogan of the counter revolution is "*Soviets without the Communists.*"

The United Front Tactic and Bourgeois Forces

49. As Trotsky wrote in the *Transitional Program*, the Marxist tactic of the united front is based on an "anti-bourgeois" thrust, thereby emphasizing the need to counterpose organizations of the working class and its allied layers and classes to all blocs with the parties or individual representatives of the bourgeoisie. The proletariat does *not* refuse the support of sympathetic individuals from the bourgeoisie for its *own actions*. In the imperialist countries, the bourgeois parties are incapable of any systematic progressive actions and revolutionaries must therefore oppose these parties' participation in common fronts with organizations of the workers and oppressed. Under *all* circumstances revolutionaries reject any call for support of a government of the reformist workers parties with the parties of the bourgeoisie, a "Left" coalition or Popular Front. If an organized pseudo-united front or popular front is formed between mass workers' organizations and bourgeois-imperialist parties, revolutionaries must strive to develop tactics for expelling the latter from this front by demonstrating to the workers that bourgeois parties are incapable of mass struggle; that they only obstruct and betray such struggles; and that the reformist leaders constantly use the need to retain their support as a pretext for actually avoiding vital struggles.

50. Things are somewhat different with regard to bourgeois forces in semi-colonial countries or ethnical or national oppressed layers within imperialist countries. Given imperialist oppression, these bourgeois forces are under constant pressure from above. At the same time, they often wield significant

influence over the workers and other oppressed layers who create pressure from below. Thus, under certain circumstances, in such cases the application of the united front tactic towards bourgeois forces can be justified; for example: the Chinese Kuomintang in the 1920s; the Baathists when they resisted US aggression; the Muslim Brotherhood after the 2013 coup in Egypt; the *Red Shirt*-movement in Thailand during the struggle against the coup, etc. In any case of coup d'état, revolutionaries should defend a popular front or a bourgeois-populist government against the counter-revolution, *without* lending it any political support (e.g., the 1973 coup against Allende in Chile; that of 2013 against the Morsi government in Egypt; against the government of the Taksim party in Thailand in 2006 and 2014; and the PT-led popular front government in Brazil 2016).

51. At the same time, revolutionaries should never forget that the bourgeoisie of oppressed peoples will immediately betray the struggle at the next possible opportunity. Hence, revolutionaries must under no circumstances subordinate or curtail their own demands, immediate or historic, for the purpose of winning such uncertain allies from the petit bourgeoisie or maverick bourgeois notables. In imperialist countries, the bourgeois strata of the oppressed are the main force for compromise and surrender of the interests of the oppressed. Therefore, the proletariat must strive to break their hegemony, disintegrate their "popular fronts," and replace them with a united front led by the working class under the leadership of the revolutionary party as early as possible. However, it still may be necessary to organize common actions with and even participate in existing popular front campaigns with the aim of breaking bourgeois hegemony.

52. Given the bourgeoisie's vacillating character and constant readiness for treachery, revolutionaries reserve no place for it in the united front. By contrast, they do actively seek the participation of plebian and poorer sectors of the petit bourgeoisie. *At no time* must the working class sacrifice its struggle and refrain from making independent class demands against native capitalism and the national bourgeoisie in order to secure a united front with it. Doing so would constitute a joining a popular front.

53. The anti-imperialist united front tactic in no way implies giving support to so-called "anti-imperialist governments." Communists cannot, under any circumstances, give support to a bourgeois government, i.e., to a government of their own exploiters. Any government claiming to be "*above classes*" or representative of "*the people as a whole*" is peddling deceptions. We *do* support any serious action of such governments taken against imperialism (e.g., the nationalization or expropriation of imperialist corporations) or against a right-wing coup d'état. The working class and the oppressed *can* lend their support to the fight for democratic rights, insofar as these rights allow them to organize and develop their own revolutionary struggle. But such struggles and slogans should never become an end in themselves, being seen as self-contained or self-limiting once erected. Rather, soviets must eventually replace even the freest

parliaments; and a workers' dictatorship the democratic republic.

54. Communists should support and participate in military actions taken against imperialism (e.g., in Nicaragua against the *Contras*, in Argentina against Britain in the Malvinas, in Afghanistan and Iraq against imperialist aggressors, in Palestine against Zionism); in such struggles they should fight for the arming of the workers and the oppressed, and for the establishment of democratically controlled workers' and popular militias. Similarly, where civil war erupts around a rebellion against a dictatorship, communists may enter a military united front, whenever possible as an independent armed force, accepting common discipline in battle, making agreements under a common command. We recognize that military united fronts are one form of the united front—a form not qualitatively different from united actions for political goals. When we call for the military victory of such movements in their fight against imperialism or its agents, we are not endorsing victory for their political program. Within such a united front we struggle for our own program and fight to split the workers and poor peasants away from the bourgeoisie, steering it towards a road leading to a workers' and peasants' government.

The United Front Tactic and Slogans about Government

55. The united front tactic also involves making demands on the "*parties of petty bourgeois democracy*" (Trotsky) – i.e., social democrats, Stalinists, petty-bourgeois populists – to break with the bourgeoisie and struggle for a workers' and peasants' government or (in most imperialist countries) a workers' government. In moments of acute political crisis this can become *the* major slogan of the day. What is an authentic government of the workers and peasants? One that takes decisive actions to disarm the bourgeoisie and arm the workers and peasants; one that aids the workers and peasants in the struggle to seize the key vantage points of capitalist power – the banks and the big monopolies. Clearly such measures cannot be carried out via electoral and parliamentary politics. To reformist workers and peasants who harbor illusions that they, in fact, *can* achieve this, we say: "*Go ahead, elect your parties to office; force them to attempt taking such measures if you can; but be ready, if your leaders take any serious measures threatening private property, to mobilize your unions and your parties for the inevitable bourgeois declaration of civil war. We will critically support your parties' electoral victory and defend them against bourgeois attack.*" To centrist workers who believe that a combination of a parliamentary victory and independent mass mobilization is sufficient we say: "*It is suicidal to tie workers' mass actions to electoral timetables, to respect majorities and minorities, and to fail attacking the real core of the state, and its special bodies of armed men, out of some notion of constitutional or legal scruples. The 'workers' and peasant government' that does not win over the soldiers and their weapons, tearing them away from the bourgeois officer corps; the high command, etc., that does not arm a workers' and peasant militia and disarm and*

dissolve the police force will have its throat cut."

56. For communists to support the taking of power by any non-revolutionary political force, two main conditions must prevail. First, it must be a mass organization of the working class or the oppressed. Second, communists must make it clear that they will remain in political opposition to such a government. Revolutionaries would defend this government against any attempted overthrow by right-wing forces, without at the same time lending it any political support. They would also support only those governmental measures which really serve the interests of the workers and oppressed.

57. Under certain exceptional circumstances, communists can themselves form a common government with non-revolutionary forces drawn from the workers and peasants. Such a government would not yet constitute the proletarian dictatorship. But, as the Communist International made clear, with strict conditions attached, communists could offer their backing to this government. Such a government must be based on workers' and peasants' councils and militias. It should at once attack and disarm the bourgeoisie as a class. It should impose workers' control of production and allow full freedom of criticism of the government's actions by communists. In such a government, communists may constitute a minority. In short, such governments are revolutionary workers' and peasants' governments, transitional to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Communists would seek to use their positions in such a government to complete the overthrow of the capitalist class and to install a new revolutionary dictatorship.

58. However, it is utterly wrong to assume that revolutionaries must fight for governments of parties representing the "*parties of petty bourgeois democracy*" as a necessary and unavoidable stage. In certain cases, communists will call for non-revolutionary parties of the workers and peasants to take power. They will combine such support with putting forth a concrete transitional program (expropriation of the bourgeoisie, public works programs, etc.) as well as the demand that these governments should base themselves on mobilizations and mass organizations of the workers and oppressed (soviets, trade unions, etc.). At the same time, revolutionaries should never stop warning the working class and the poor peasantry that such a bourgeois workers' and peasant government will maintain and reinforce the capitalist state. We can never call for a government of bourgeois forces, or for a coalition between workers' and peasants' parties and such forces.

59. The united front tactic also recognizes the possible entry of communists in non-revolutionary – reformist, petty-bourgeois populist or centrist – parties (i.e., the tactic of entrisism). This tactic is legitimate under certain conditions: the party represents a significant sector of the radical workers, oppressed or youth moving to the left; there is a true possibility to openly argue for the revolutionary program within the party. Such entrisism will not be of long duration, since the party leadership will not tolerate a consistent communist

opposition, and a longer stay inside the party could only be achieved through opportunist adaptations. This is proven through the experience of various centrist groups which lodged themselves for years or decades in such parties (e.g., the CWI in the past and the IMT until today, the Morenoites in their Peronist phase, the Lambertists in social democracy).

The United Front Tactic during Elections

60. Revolutionaries should also, if possible, apply the united front tactic during election campaigns. Elections, particularly in periods of low-level class struggle, are an important arena of class struggle. Revolutionaries strive not to stand aside when class-conscious sectors of the proletariat participate in the electoral campaign and the elections themselves; rather they undertake to intervene with appropriate tactics. This means that, when it is not possible for revolutionary communist candidates to stand, we can give electoral backing to the candidates of the mass working class organizations, in particular those who have the support of the most militant sections of our class. In general, critical support for non-revolutionary workers parties is a legitimate tactic for helping class-conscious workers to overcome their illusions in reformist leaderships. However, this tactic must not be applied schematically. In situations where a bourgeois workers' party (usually as a governmental party) serves as a whip or executioner in the implementation of serious attacks on the working class – austerity programs, imperialist wars, racist hatred, attacks on democratic rights, etc. – it is necessary that revolutionaries *not* call for the electoral support of this party, with the aim that vanguard workers will break with it. Concretely, we would either call for critical support for another party which better reflects the desire of the progressive workers and oppressed to fight back or, if such a party does not stand at the elections, call for a blank vote.

61. In countries, where no bourgeois workers' party (not even a reformist one) exists or where the existing bourgeois workers' parties are already so degenerated that they repel the workers' vanguard, revolutionaries call upon the workers' vanguard and mass organizations to found a *new workers' party* (or "*Labor Party*"). Here, too, interim stages are conceivable. Revolutionaries might support alliances towards such a goal or the foundation of new organizations of oppressed layers (e.g., migrant organizations) which could also stand at elections.

62. The demand for a *Labor Party* is a special application of the united front tactic used by small Communist forces engaged with larger working class formations (e.g., trade unions) in countries where a mass bourgeois workers' party does not exist. Such a Labor Party must be independent of the capitalist and petit-bourgeois parties, and during election campaigns run against them. This tactic can be successful in a period of intensified working class struggle, something which we can anticipate in the coming period. Such a party should

not be political propaganda block that merely hides the betrayal of the reformist and the centrists. Rather, within the framework of a Labor Party, Communists do *not* call for a reformist measures as a step forward, but struggle for the adoption of the full transitional program as the program of this party. In this way, Communists constitute the revolutionary tendency, one that fights for the leadership of the party by exposing the betrayal of the reformists and the centrists in the actual struggle. This can be done by making a minimal number of appropriate transitional demands which unify and mobilize the workers and the oppressed against the capitalist class enemy, using the tactic of the united front with other forces against the common enemy according to the principle “*march separately, strike together.*”

63. When no bourgeois workers’ parties with mass influence exist, or those that do exist are subject to such massive bourgeoisification, if at the same time there are petty-bourgeois populist parties with mass influence among the working class or the oppressed, critical electoral support for the latter is legitimate. The Bolsheviks did so for the petty-bourgeois populist parties of the Trudoviks and the Social-Revolutionaries in Russia; later on the Communist International did the same towards populist forces in Mexico in 1923, as did the US-Trotskyists with the Farmer-Labor Party in the 1930s. Today, such forces might be petty-bourgeois populist in semi-colonial countries (e.g., Evo Morales and the MAS at the first elections in 2005; Julius Malema’s EFF in South Africa; Sinn Fein in the Republic of Ireland; the Palestinian Balad party as well as the Joint List in Israel, etc.). Such critical electoral support could also be applicable for petty-bourgeois nationalist parties of oppressed nations (e.g., militant parties of the Tamils in Sri Lanka like the TNA; the Northern Irish Sinn Fein/IRA before its capitulation in 1998; the Basque HB and its successor organizations; CUP in Catalonia; etc.). This could also be applicable to new petty-bourgeois populist parties in imperialist countries, like George Galloways’ RESPECT in Britain.

64. Critical electoral support should only be given while simultaneously denouncing these parties’ bourgeois or petty-bourgeois programs, challenging them to break with the capitalists and fight them not only in words but in deeds. Note, however, that communists can never call for a vote for or the taking of power by parties or candidates of the bourgeoisie – neither in imperialist nor in semi-colonial countries. Revolutionary Marxists advocate a workers’ and peasant government and not a government of the workers, peasants and sectors of the bourgeoisie. The latter would be a popular front government. Such openly bourgeois parties directly represent the ruling class against which revolutionaries seek to mobilize the workers and oppressed. Electoral support for such a party would not represent a step towards class independence but rather towards subordination of the workers and oppressed to the bourgeoisie. We should demand that all workers’ and peasants’ parties break with bourgeois candidates whom they have enrolled on their list, or break from a popular front

list. In certain circumstances we may still vote for the candidates of the workers' or peasant party on a popular front list, if we take care not to vote for, or crossing off the list, the bourgeois candidates.

Summary

65. To summarize: the united front tactic is a central tool for the Bolshevik-Communist organization (a) to achieve the broadest possible unity of the working class and its allied oppressed layers and classes, and (b) to undermine the ominous dominance of the reformist, petty-bourgeois-populist or centrist leaderships and replace them with a determined revolutionary leadership. The most important requirement for this is an independent and clear profile of revolutionary communists as well as the successful founding of a Bolshevik combat organization.

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The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto

Programme of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

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I. The world we live in

II. A new historical period of revolutionary character

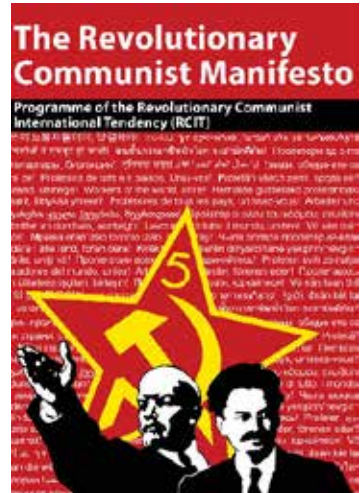
III. The world we are fighting for

IV. The leadership we have and the leadership we need

The struggle for the unions * Changes in the working class * Action Committee - factory committees - Councils * The democratic protest movements

V. The Program of the Revolution

An action program to save the humanity from the misery of capitalism * Cancel the debts! Expropriate the banks and speculators! * Against wage cuts, job insecurity and unemployment! * Fight inflation! For the adjustment of wages to inflation! For price control committees! * Defence of public services! Fight the privatization! * An end to the "business secret"! For workers' control! For a public employment programme! * No division – Joint fight, regardless of nation, and location! * No more tax breaks for the rich! Expropriate the super rich! * Against the attacks on education! Education for all under control of the working class and youth! * Revolutionary Struggle for Democracy * Free the oppressed peoples from the clutches of the banks and corporations! * Support the national liberation struggles of oppressed peoples! * Fight against the super-exploitation and national oppression of migrants! * Fighting fascism * Save our planet from the capitalist climate catastrophe! * Jobs and housing for the poor in urban slums! * The land to the peasants! Organise the agricultural workers! The land to the peasants! Organise the agricultural workers! * Joint struggle for women's liberation! * Combat the sexual oppression of church and state! * An end to the oppression of young people! * Down with militarism and imperialist war! * The arming of the working class and the oppressed * For a workers' government, based on the poor peasants and the urban poor Joint struggle for women's liberation! * Combat the sexual oppression of church and state! * An end to the oppression of young people! * Down with militarism and imperialist war! * .The arming of the working class and the oppressed * For a workers' government, based on the poor peasants and the urban poor



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*The Road from
Revolution to the
Restoration of Capitalism*



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency*

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Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice

*Looking Back and Ahead after
25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism*



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

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Russia as a Great Imperialist Power

By Michael Pröbsting, March 2014

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By Michael Pröbsting, August 2014

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V. Summary

About the Author

Michael Pröbsting was born in Vienna (Austria) in 1967. He became politically active when he was 14 years old and has been an organized Trotskyist militant since the age of 16. After five years of membership in the *United Secretariat of the Fourth International* of Ernest Mandel, he joined the *League for a Revolutionary Communist International* (later renamed to *League for the Fifth International*) in February 1989. He served on the leadership bodies of the Austrian section from 1989 and of the LRCI/LFI since 1994, until he and his comrades-in-arms were expelled by the majority of this organization in April 2011. Soon after this, they founded the *Revolutionary Communist Organization for Liberation* in Austria and the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* which has sections and activists in 11 countries. He serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

As part of his international political work, Michael Pröbsting has spent lengthy periods in Occupied Palestine (Israel) in 1985, Eastern Germany during the political revolutionary process of 1989-91, Britain in 1994, and during the revolutionary period in Argentina in 2002. In addition, he gained experience in workers' and anti-imperialist movements during numerous visits to Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Kosovo, Serbia, Ukraine, Russia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Germany, Britain, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, and the USA.

Michael Pröbsting is the author of many articles and pamphlets in both German and English. He has also authored books on Migration (*Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration*, 2010) and the Arab Revolution (*Die halbe Revolution. Lehren und Perspektiven des arabischen Aufstandes*, 2011). In addition, he has contributed to a book on Rosa Luxemburg (*Rosa Luxemburg – "Ich bin ein Land der unbeschränkten Möglichkeiten"*, 1999) as well as to the *The Credit Crunch – A Marxist Analyses* (2008), the latter of which has been published in English, German, and Turkish). In 2013, he published *The Great Robbery of the South*, which analyses the super-exploitation and oppression of the semi-colonial world (often referred to as the "Third World") by the imperialist powers and monopolies. During the same year he published a book dealing with the capitalist restoration in Cuba (*Cuba's Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism*). In 2014, Pröbsting published a book entitled *Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice. Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism*. It elaborates the theoretical foundations of the revolutionary party as well as their practical implementation under present conditions; it is entitled. His latest previous book appeared in 2015 and deals with the history of Greek capitalism and its deep crisis in the present period. It is entitled *Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony. The Contradictory Development of Greek Capitalism, Its Failed Attempts to Become a Minor Imperialist Power, and Its Present Situation as an Advanced Semi-Colonial Country with Some Specific Features*.

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The Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) has sections in Pakistan (Revolutionary Workers Organisation, RWO), Sri Lanka (United Lankan Workers Party, ULWP), Brazil (Corrente Comunista Revolucionária, CCR), Israel/occupied Palestine (Internationalist Socialist League, ISL), and Austria (Revolutionary Communist Organisation LIBERATION, RKOB). In addition the RCIT has members in Venezuela, Yemen, Tunisia, Germany, USA and Britain.

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The united front tactic is a crucial instrument for revolutionaries under today's circumstances in which the mass organizations of the working class and the oppressed are dominated by social democratic, Stalinist and petty-bourgeois-populist forces.

The purpose of this document is both to summarize the main ideas of the Marxist united front tactic while at the same time explaining its development and modification which have become necessary due to political changes which have transpired in the working class liberation movement since the tactic's original formulation.

In this book we initially summarize the main characteristics of the united front tactic and elaborate the approach of the Marxist classics to this issue. We then outline important social developments in the working class and the popular masses as well as in their political formations in recent decades. From there we will discuss how the united front tactic should be applied in light of a number of new developments (the rise of petty-bourgeois populist parties, the decline of the classic reformist parties, the role of national minorities and migrants in imperialist countries, etc.). The eight chapters of the book are accompanied by nine tables and five figures.



Michael Pröbsting has been a revolutionary activist for 35 years. He is the author of numerous articles and pamphlets in German and English. He has published books on the World Economy (2008), Migration (2010), the Arab Revolution (2011), Imperialism and the Third World (2013), Cuba (2013), on the revolutionary party (2014), and Greece (2015). He is the International Secretary of the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency*.