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Front page: Contingent of the Austrian Section of the RCIT at a demonstration in solidarity with refugees on 19.3.2016 in Vienna. The banner reads: “Open the Borders! Refugees stay with us!”

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The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement and the United Front Tactic Today (Part 2)

On the Application of the Marxist United Front Tactic in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the Present Period

By Michael Pröbsting, Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, May 2016

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.”*¹⁰³

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.”*¹⁰⁴

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 precondition: 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.¹⁰⁵

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 proletarian; 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).”*¹⁰⁶

*“‘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;”*¹⁰⁷

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.”*¹⁰⁸

This principle of the Marxist party theory has been confirmed numerous 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.”*¹⁰⁹

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.”*¹¹⁰

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.

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 adaptation 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.”*¹¹¹

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.¹¹²

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 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.¹¹³

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.¹¹⁴

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 1938.¹¹⁵

Later the communists in China – following the advice of Sneevliet who acted as a Comintern emissary – deployed a similar tactic. The communists were very 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 1927.¹¹⁶

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.¹¹⁷

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.'"*¹¹⁸

He repeated this assessment in 1928.¹¹⁹ Later in the 1930s, when the Bolshevik-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."*¹²⁰

"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 en-

*tirely 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?"*¹²¹

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.¹²² 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.

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.¹²³

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 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%.¹²⁴

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.¹²⁵ 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.¹²⁶ Consequently, Lenin argued that the Duma elections be used to create an alliance between the working class with the poor peasantry.¹²⁷ 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 representing the poor peasantry (the *Trudoviks* and the S.R.).¹²⁸ 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.”*¹²⁹

*„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.”*¹³⁰

*„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.”*¹³¹

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 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. " ¹³²

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 ballot, 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. " ¹³³

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." ¹³⁴

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.

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 propaganda or to its activity in general. Above all, the right of criticism of every Party will be fully preserved." ¹³⁵

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. ¹³⁶

"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 fight. 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, 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." ¹³⁷

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 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.¹³⁸ Lenin 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.”¹³⁹

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

geois 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.”¹⁴⁰

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.¹⁴¹ 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 ouvrier.”¹⁴²

“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.”¹⁴³

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.”¹⁴⁴

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.”¹⁴⁵

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.

Order from our contact address past issues of the RCIT’s Journal Revolutionary Communism!

The image shows five covers of the journal 'Revolutionary Communism'. Each cover features a red header with the journal title and a central image with text overlays. The covers are:

- Cover 1 (September 2012):** Headline: "South Africa: The Miners fight, ANC/SACP betrays". Sub-headline: "plus: Revolution in Libya, Greece, WikiLeaks, Bosnia, Turkey, Maoism". Image: A woman speaking at a microphone.
- Cover 2 (August 2012):** Headline: "China as an imperialist power: background, influences and tactics". Sub-headline: "plus: South African Miners Strike, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Canada". Image: A crowd holding red flags.
- Cover 3 (June 2012):** Headline: "Elections, United and the struggle for workers' Government". Sub-headline: "plus: Programme for Pakistan, France, these Imperialism, Zimbabwe...". Image: A crowd holding red flags.
- Cover 4 (January 2012):** Headline: "and Resistance in Pakistan". Sub-headline: "General Strike in Greece". Image: A crowd holding red flags.
- Cover 5 (September 2011):** Headline: "Revolutionaries of the Arab Revolution". Sub-headline: "Rising of the Poor in Britain". Image: A crowd holding red flags.

Each cover also includes the journal title 'REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM', the subtitle 'THE JOURNAL OF THE REVOLUTIONARY INTERNATIONAL TENDENCY (RICT)', and the issue information. A red star with a hammer and sickle is visible in the bottom left corner of the first cover.

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 ultimatumists. 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 *Democratichi 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).¹⁴⁶ 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 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.¹⁴⁷ 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 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."*¹⁴⁸

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."*¹⁴⁹

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.¹⁵⁰ 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.¹⁵¹

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 Communist 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 do so at the moment of its birth."*¹⁵²

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.¹⁵³

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 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." ¹⁵⁴

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 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." ¹⁵⁵

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." ¹⁵⁶

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. ¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, 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 (dis-

guised 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."¹⁵⁸

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 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.""¹⁵⁹

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."¹⁶⁰

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 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 of 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.¹⁶¹

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.¹⁶²

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.

New Book!

Michael Pröbsting: 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

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a new English-language book – *GREECE: A MODERN SEMI-COLONY*. The book’s subtitle is: *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*. It contains six chapters (144 pages) and includes 12 tables, 35 figures and 4 maps. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

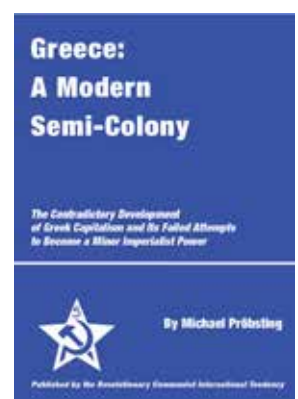
The following paragraphs are the back cover text of the book which gives an overview of its content.

Greece is at the forefront both of the capitalist crisis in Europe as well as of the class struggle. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that what the Arab Revolution has been for the world in the past few years, Greece has been for Europe.

Subsequently, the question of the class character of Greece is of crucial importance both for the domestic as well as for the international workers movement: Is it an imperialist

state, a semi-colonial country or something else, and what are its specific features?

In Chapter I we outline a summary of the Marxists’ theoretical conception of imperialist respectively semi-colonial states. In Chapter II we give a brief historical overview of the development of Greek capitalism. In Chapter III we deal with Greece’s failed attempt to become a minor imperialist power. In Chapter IV we outline the historic crisis of Greek capitalism from 2008 until today. In Chapter V we elaborate the most important programmatic conclusions and in the last Chapter we present a summary in the form of theses. The book contains 12 Tables, 35 Figures and 4 Maps. ■



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.¹⁶³

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.¹⁶⁴ As the Bolsheviks have stated many times, Russia at that time was an, albeit backward, imperialist country.¹⁶⁵ 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 tactics included a call for critical electoral support for this party as well as entering the FLP and forming a revolutionary faction from with-

in.¹⁶⁶ 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."*¹⁶⁷

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."*¹⁶⁸

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.



NEW RCIT PUBLICATION!

The Origins of the Jews

By Yossi Schwartz, July 2015

Chapter I: What are the origins of the Jews?

Chapter II: The Rise of Anti-Semitism

Chapter III: Anti-Semitism and Zionism

Chapter IV: The Russian Revolution:

Bolshevism, the Bund, and Stalinism

**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.).

The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today

The Marxist Theory of Permanent Revolution and its Relevance for the Imperialist Metropolises

By Michael Pröbsting (International Secretary of the RCIT)

Price: €3 / \$3,5 / £2 (plus delivery charges)

Order the pamphlet via our contact address: rcit@thecommunists.net

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.¹⁶⁹ 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 imperialist 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.”*¹⁷⁰

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.”*¹⁷¹

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.¹⁷²

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.

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!¹⁷³ 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.¹⁷⁴

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.¹⁷⁵

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 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"*.¹⁷⁶

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.¹⁷⁷

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 didn't participate in this project.¹⁷⁸ 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 con-

tribute 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.¹⁷⁹ 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 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."*¹⁸⁰

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.

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.“ ¹⁸¹

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.“ ¹⁸²

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 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.“ ¹⁸³

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 economico-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.“ ¹⁸⁴

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 held in 1938.¹⁸⁵

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."*¹⁸⁶

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."*¹⁸⁷

Lenin gave a few concrete examples for such struggles of non-proletarian oppressed 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."*¹⁸⁸

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 nationwide 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 our camp increasing numbers of the proletariat."*¹⁸⁹

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."*¹⁹⁰

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 support 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.”¹⁹¹

Lenin’s approach was adopted in the Comintern’s resolutions on the agrarian question in both the Second and Fourth Congress.¹⁹² 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.¹⁹³

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.”¹⁹⁴

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.¹⁹⁵ 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 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.

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Endnotes

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122 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*".

123 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.

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

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

126 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)

127 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 Ballet, the Streets.*

128 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.

129 V. I. Lenin: The Boycott (1906), in: LCW 11, p. 148
 130 V. I. Lenin: Social-Democrats and Electoral Agreements (1906), in: LCW 11, p. 283
 131 V. I. Lenin: Social-Democrats and Electoral Agreements (1906), in: LCW 11, pp. 286-287
 132 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 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)

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On the coup in Brazil see footnote 70.

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

172 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

173 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.

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

175 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 RKO 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/>

176 Tina Sanders: Kindermörder Israel!“ Antizionismus und Antisemitismus in sozialistischen und antiimperialistischen Gruppen in Österreich anhand der Beispiele RKO 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/>

177 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/>

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

179 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.

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

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

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

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

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

185 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.

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

187 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)

188 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)

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

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

191 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

192 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

193 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

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

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

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The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

The Author: Michael Pröbsting is a revolutionary activist since 34 years. He is the author of many articles and pamphlets in German and English language. He published books or contributed to books on Rosa Luxemburg (1999), on the World Economy (2008), on Migration (2010) and the Arab Revolution (2011). In addition to *The Great Robbery of the South* and *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?* he also published in 2014 the book *Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice. Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism*. He is the International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency.

What the RCIT Stands for

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) is a revolutionary combat organisation fighting for the liberation of the working class and all oppressed. It has national sections in a number of countries. The working class is composed of all those (and their families) who are forced to sell their labor power as wage earners to the capitalists. The RCIT stands on the theory and practice of the revolutionary workers' movement associated with the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky.

Capitalism endangers our lives and the future of humanity. Unemployment, war, environmental disasters, hunger, and exploitation are all part of everyday life under capitalism as are the imperialistic oppression of nations, the national oppression of migrants, and the oppression of women, young people, and homosexuals. Therefore, we want to eliminate capitalism.

The liberation of the working class and all oppressed is possible only in a classless society without exploitation and oppression. Such a society can only be established internationally.

Therefore, the RCIT is fighting for a socialist revolution at home and around the world.

This revolution must be carried out and led by the working class, for only this class has the collective power to bring down the ruling class and build a socialist society.

The revolution cannot proceed peacefully because a ruling class never has nor ever will voluntarily surrender its power. By necessity, therefore, the road to liberation includes armed rebellion and civil war against the capitalists.

The RCIT is fighting for the establishment of workers' and peasants' republics, where the oppressed organize themselves in councils democratically elected in rank-and-file meetings in factories, neighbourhoods, and schools. These councils, in turn, elect and control the government and all other state authorities, and always retain the right to recall them.

Authentic socialism and communism have nothing to do with the so-called "socialism" that ruled in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and which continues to do so in China and Cuba, for example. In these countries, the proletariat was and is dominated and oppressed by a privileged party bureaucracy.

Under capitalism, the RCIT supports all efforts to improve the living conditions of the workers and oppressed, while simultaneously striving to overthrow this system based on economic exploitation of the masses.

Towards these ends, we work from within the trade unions where we advocate class struggle, socialism, and workers' democracy. But trade unions and social democracy are controlled by a bureaucracy perniciously connected with the state and capital via status, high-paying jobs, and other privileges. Thus, the trade union bureaucracy is far from the interests and living conditions of

its members, based as it is on the top, privileged layers of the working class – a labor aristocracy which has no real interest in replacing capitalism. Therefore, the true struggle for the liberation of the working class, the toppling of capitalism and the establishment of socialism, must be based on the broad mass of the proletariat rather than their "representative" from the upper trade union strata.

We also fight for the expropriation of the big land owners as well as for the nationalisation of the land and its distribution to the poor and landless peasants. Towards this goal we struggle for the independent organisation of the rural workers.

We support national liberation movements against oppression. We also support the anti-imperialist struggles of oppressed peoples against the great powers. Within these movements we advocate a revolutionary leadership as an alternative to nationalist or reformist forces.

While the RCIT strives for unity of action with other organizations, we are acutely aware that the policies of social democrats and pseudo-revolutionary groups are dangerous, and ultimately represent an obstacle to the emancipation of the working class, peasants, and the otherwise oppressed.

In wars between imperialist states we take a revolutionary defeatist position: we do not support either side, but rather advocate the transformation of the war into a civil war against the ruling class in each of the warring states. In wars between imperialist powers (or their stooges) and a semi-colonial countries we stand for the defeat of the former and the victory of the oppressed countries.

As communists, we maintain that the struggle against national oppression and all types of social oppression (women, youth, sexual minorities etc.) *must* be led by the working class, because only the latter is capable of fomenting a revolutionary change in society. Therefore, we consistently support working class-based revolutionary movements of the socially oppressed, while opposing the leadership of petty-bourgeois forces (feminism, nationalism, Islamism, etc.), who ultimately dance to the tune of the capitalists, and strive to replace them with revolutionary communist leadership.

Only with a revolutionary party fighting as its leadership can the working class be victorious in its struggle for liberation. The establishment of such a party and the execution of a successful revolution, as it was demonstrated by the Bolsheviks in Russia under Lenin and Trotsky remain the models for revolutionary parties and revolutions in the 21st century.

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For a 5th Workers International to be founded on a revolutionary program! Join the RCIT!

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No socialism without revolution!

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