

## The Lambertists - Road to Nowhere

### *The Pseudo-Marxism of the so-called "Fourth International" founded by Pierre Lambert and its historical background*

By Yossi Schwartz, Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), November 2017, [www.thecommunists.net](http://www.thecommunists.net)

#### Part I: Historical Background

In 1938 the revolutionary Communists, who opposed counter-revolutionary Stalinism, formed the Fourth International, led by Leon Trotsky. While it was small it had a perspective of becoming a mass party following the war, based on the assumption that Stalinism would not survive the war, and a very sharp class struggle will spread in the world. That would enable the Fourth International to become a mass party of the working class.

However, the Fourth International was unable to function as a world revolutionary party during WWII. Many of its cadres were murdered either by Stalin or the Nazis and its social base was small among the working class. The pressures on the weak sections of the FI pulled the sections of the Fourth International apart. In many ways it was the responsibility of the American SWP, the strongest section of the FI, to keep the FI as a world party. However, the SWP was unable to do so.

That does not in any way diminish the heroic struggle of the Trotskyists during the war, especially in occupied France, where they advocated a unity of the French and German workers.

France was an imperialist country whose capitalist class in its majority collaborated with the Nazis. De Gaulle's small army was fighting to restore French imperialism.

The historian Pierre Broué wrote that in 1940 the French Trotskyists were divided mainly into two tendencies far from that of Trotsky. The majority of the POI, organized around the committees which published *La Vérité*, outlined a strategy according to which the bourgeoisie of an occupied country becomes the natural ally of the workers' movement, and the latter devotes itself completely to "*national resistance*". On the other hand the *La Seule Voie (The Only Road)* group, which became the CCI, denied that an imperialist nation could ever become an oppressed nation following a military defeat, and considered that national demands were "*the importation of bourgeois ideology into the proletariat in order to demoralize it.*"

The Secretary of the Fourth International, Jean Van Heijenoort in New York City, opposed (and correctly so) this line as he wrote:

*"The big French bourgeoisie has already succeeded in arriving at an understanding with Hitler. National resistance is concentrated in the poorer sections of the population, the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the peasants, the workers. But it is the latter which give the most resolute character to the struggle and will know how to connect it with the struggle against French capitalism and the Petain government."*

Jean Van Heijenoort reminded the Trotskyists of Trotsky line:

*"To the fascist 'reconstruction' of Europe; that is to say, to the perpetuation of misery and ruin, we oppose the Soviet United States of Europe [...] In the face of oppression and dictatorship, the workers will not abandon the struggle for democratic liberties (freedom of the press, of assembly, etc.) but they must understand that this struggle cannot revive the decaying bourgeois democracy which has engendered this very oppression and dictatorship. The only democracy now possible in Europe is proletarian democracy..." (1)*

Heijenoort formulated the correct revolutionary position

*"We give full recognition to the right of national self-determination and are prepared to defend it as an elementary right of democracy. This recognition, however, has no effect on the fact that this right is trodden underfoot by both camps in this war and will hardly be respected in case of an imperialist 'peace.' Capitalism in its agony can meet this democratic demand less and less. Only socialism can give nations the complete right to independence and put an end to every national oppression. To speak of the right to national self-determination and keep silent concerning the only means of its realization, that is, the proletarian revolution, is to repeat a shallow phrase, disseminate illusions, and deceive the workers." (2)*

As Daniel Bensaid explained:

*"La Vérité, the clandestine organ of the PCI, reappeared in August 1940. The concern to combat chauvinism in the workers' ranks will be concretized in France in 1943 with the publication of Arbeiter und Soldat (...). From the beginning of 1944, La Vérité denounced the projects of 'breaking up' Germany. (...) For the Trotskyist organizations, the war will mark a rupture of generational and organizational continuity. The pioneers and founders disappeared for the most part, either under the blows of repression, or by laxity and demoralization. To the victims of fascist or colonial repression, one has to add the victims Stalinist repression, including Trotsky himself, who was reached by the assassins in Mexico in August 1940." (3)*

The SWP was unable to maintain the unity of the revolutionary world party not simply because of legal restrictions that forbade any American party to become part of a world party, but because of political weaknesses that were manifested already a short time after the assassination of Leon Trotsky. In 1941 the US imperialists charged 29 members of the Socialist Workers Party with sedition and conspiracy to overthrow the government. The party's offices in Minneapolis were raided on June 27. The leaders of the party were brought to a trial that lasted one month.

The SWP National Chairman James P. Cannon wrote in 1942 a pamphlet *"Socialism on Trial"* where he outlined the SWP's conduct during this political trial. It is clear from the pamphlet that the SWP opposed the war drive being conducted by US imperialism under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Democratic president since 1933. However, the SWP has not presented the revolutionary position that: "The main enemy is at home," but with the line that the real enemy is German imperialism. The party explained that the coming war had nothing to do with democracy, but everything to do with increasing the wealth and power of the "Sixty Families"—the Duponts, Morgans, Rockefellers and so on—who controlled the country and who will not fight Hitler. (4)

In reality the American capitalists fought against Nazi Germany and the SWP's line disarmed the working class politically. The positions that the SWP took during the trial point out to the weakness of the SWP as a revolutionary party. Grandizo Munis, a leading Spanish Trotskyist, objected to the terms of the defense of the SWP leaders during the Minneapolis trial, which he regarded correctly as making concessions to Defencism and Social Patriotism.

Manuel Fernandez Grandizo was born at Larena in Estremadura, and joined the Spanish section of the International Left Opposition at its conference abroad in Liege in Belgium in February 1930, where he supported Francisco Garcia Lavid in his disagreements with Andres Nin inside that organization. He also supported Trotsky's policy of the entry of the Spanish section into the youth of the Socialist Party, which he joined in 1935, and opposed the liquidation of the Spanish Trotskyists into the POUM. He left Spain for a brief while to join his family in Cuba, returning on the first boat on hearing of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

On his arrival, he reconstituted the Section of the Left Opposition as the Spanish Bolshevick-Leninists, who published the first issue of their paper *La Voz Leninista* on 5 April 1937 after their exclusion from the POUM. They took part with the *Friends of Durruti* in the defense of the revolution against Stalinist provocation during the Barcelona 'May Days' in 1937, but their small group of comrades was penetrated by a GPU spy, Leon Narvitch, and, after he had been killed by a POUM action squad revenging the death of Nin, Munis and his group were arrested on 12 February 1938. They were accused of killing Narvitch and of planning the assassinations of Prieto, Comorera, Negrin, La Pasionara and Diaz. After much torture, including a simulated execution of Munis, their trial was fixed for 29 January 1939 but, three days before this, France's troops entered Barcelona, and both prisoners and jailers made off. Munis escaped to France, and then managed to get out to Mexico, where he led the Spanish Trotskyists in exile and was a close collaborator of Natalia Trotsky". (5)

In the transcript of the trial, we find:

*Q: Is it a question of principle that there should be no compensation for property expropriated from the Sixty Families?*

*A: No, it is not a question of principle. That question has been debated interminably in the Marxist movement. No place has any authoritative Marxist declared it a question of principle not to compensate. It is a question of possibility, of adequate finances, of an agreement of the private owners to submit, and so forth.*

*Q: When you say, "nonsupport of the war", just exactly what would the party do during a war, which would indicate its nonsupport of the war?*

*A: Insofar as we are permitted our rights, we would speak against the war as a false policy that should be changed, in the same sense from our point of view, that other parties might oppose the foreign policy of the government in time of war, just as Lloyd George, for example, opposed the Boer War in public addresses and speeches. Ramsay MacDonald, who later became prime minister of England, opposed the war policy of England during the World War of 1914-1918. We hold our own point of view, which is different from the point of view of the two political figures I have just mentioned, and so far as we are permitted to exercise our right we would continue to write and speak for a different foreign policy for Americas*

*Q: Now, until such time as the workers and farmers in the United States establish their own government and use their own methods to defeat Hitler, the Socialist Workers Party must submit to the majority of the people—is that right?*

*A: That is all we can do. That is all we propose to do.*

*Q: And the party's position is that there will be no obstruction of ways and means taken by the government for the effective prosecution of its war?*

*A: No obstruction in a military way, or by minority revolution; on the contrary, the party has declared positively against any such procedure".*

Cannon's answers in the Minneapolis' trial are a distortion of Trotsky's *Proletarian Military Policy* and his perspective of the need to prepare for an armed revolution. An article by the Marxist historian Pierre Broué in *Revolutionary History* dealing among other questions with this trial correctly observed: *"The political history of the Fourth International during the Second World War certainly demonstrates the strength of the current, which, under the flag of 'orthodoxy', often confined itself to pacifist positions, considering armed struggle to be participation in the war and in the union sacrée, and an acceptance of the war, purely because it was armed struggle. This current was simultaneously sectarian and conservative."* (6)

The party known today as the *Independent Workers Party* and prior to that OCI (Internationalist Communist Organization) in France (The Lambertists) is a splinter from the party which was born from the unification of the POI and the CCI in 1944. This splinter, right wing centrist party was shaped by Lambert.

Lambert's real name was Pierre Bousset. He was born in 1920 into a Jewish family which had emigrated from Russia, fleeing the Tsar's pogroms at the turn of the century. At the age of 14, he joined the Communist Party of France, but was expelled a year later for opposing the pact between France and the Soviet Union.

Lambert joined the left socialist party led by Marceau Pivert but was expelled in 1939 along with other supporters of Trotsky for his political position and sentenced to three years in prison. When France capitulated to the Nazis, he escapes and returned to Paris under the German occupation. In December 1943, he joined the *Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste* (POI). Between 1943 and 1944 Lambert helped to unite French Trotskyists in the *Parti Communist Internationaliste* (PCI), which was the French section of the FI.

## **Pabloism**

The restoration of the European capitalist system after the war led to the economic boom in Europe and in the USA. It strengthened Social Democracy in Western Europe. Stalinism was also strengthened as a result of its victory in the war against Nazi Germany. The Social Democrats and the Stalinists derailed the revolutionary wave that swept Europe at the end of the war and deflected the workers' struggle into mere economic demands instead of socialist revolution.

The weak Fourth International that was reunited after the war was also influenced by the boom, and also by the victory of Stalinism over Nazi Germany, and began to develop a political perspective, theories and political practice in the direction of centrism.

Already in 1946 centrist tendencies were observed in the different sections. In the case of France *"Serious differences arose [...] between the International leadership and the majority of the leadership of the PCI (France) which gained control of the party during its Third Congress (1946). These differences revolved principally around (a) the application of the Transitional Program to the existing conditions in France, and (b) the false policy of the leadership in relation to Stalinism. The International sought to correct the opportunist*

*course of the PCI, its vulgarization of the party's positions reducing the Transitional Program to a mere trade union level and its adaptation to Stalinism." (7)*

Even more serious symptoms were manifested in the letter sent to Tito in 1948 by the leadership of the FI. The letter was written as if the Yugoslavian Stalinist Party was a centrist organization moving to the left. The leaders of the FI wrote:

*"Comrades, your Congress which is about to meet, the delegates which will compose it, and the thousands of communist members whom they will represent, find themselves, on this day following the Cominfors fulm resolution against your party, confronting decisions of truly historical import. Three roads are open to YOU and YOU must choose one of them. Your choice will decide for years, if not Michel Pablo for decades, the fate of your country and of its proletariat, and will exercise a profound influence on the evolution and future of the entire world communist movement. ....[ ] Finally, there remains the third road, the most difficult, bristling with the most obstacles: the genuine communist road for the Yugoslav party and proletariat. This road is the road of return to the Leninist conception of socialist revolution, of return to a world strategy of class struggle. It must start, in our opinion, with a clear understanding of the fact that the Yugoslav revolutionary forces can only become stronger and consolidate their positions thanks to the conscious support of the working masses of their own country and of the entire world. It means above all to understand that the decisive force on the world arena is neither imperialism with its resources and arms nor the Russian state with its formidable apparatus. The decisive force is the immense army of workers, of poor peasants and of colonial peoples, whose revolt against their exploiters is steadily rising, and who need only a conscious leadership, a suitable program of action and an effective organization in order to bring the enormous task of world socialist revolution to a successful conclusion." (8)*

Ironically, the same leadership of the FI that criticized the PCI for adoption to Stalinism and the union bureaucracy adopted itself to counter revolutionary Stalinism in the form of Tito in Yugoslavia.

While this was a serious error that was influenced by the Tito's break with Stalin, only in 1951 the FI became irrevocably centrist. In the third congress of the FI, Michel Pablo, the International Secretary of the FI wrote:

*"Can one seriously believe that all the rest, that is to say, the actual transformation of capitalism into socialism is no more than a matter of a few decades?" (9)*

*"People who despair of the fate of humanity because Stalinism still endures and even achieves victories, tailor History to their own personal measure. They really desire that the entire process of the transformation of capitalist society into socialism would be accomplished within the span of their brief lives so that they can be rewarded for their efforts on behalf of the Revolution. As for us, we reaffirm what we wrote in the first article devoted to the Yugoslav affair: this transformation will probably take an entire historical period of several centuries and will in the meantime be filled with forms and regimes transitional between capitalism and socialism and necessarily deviating from "pure" forms and norms." (10)*

Another revision that came with the perspective of centuries of "deformed workers state", was the deep entryism, a.k.a. "entryism sui generis" into the mass reformist parties without struggle for the revolutionary program.

*"In order to integrate ourselves into the real mass movement, to work and to remain in the masses' trade unions for example, 'ruses' and 'capitulations' are not only acceptable but necessary." (11)*

This Pabloite perspective of centuries of "*politically transitional forms*" (deformed workers states) is the key to the adoption of all centrists to Stalinism, Social Democracy and bourgeois nationalism that allegedly can replace the revolutionary working class and its leadership. Who needs a revolutionary party when the only possibility that is open to humanity is centuries of transitional forms like Stalinism in power?!

This perspective, as we know, was utterly false. The Stalinist bureaucracies faced several attempts of political revolutions by the working class (East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968 and Poland 1980/81) until it collapsed in the Soviet Union and East Europe in 1989-91. Capitalism has been restored in Cuba while Russia and China became imperialist states. The social Democracies or the nationalists have not overthrown the capitalist system and replaced it with deformed workers' states in any place. Thus, authentic Marxism (through its counter-revolutionary negation) has proven that it is a scientific analysis and that revisionism is an enemy of the working class.

## Part II: Pabloism and the OCI-PT

When the Fourth International split in 1953 both wings were centrist, far away from Lenin and Trotsky's revolutionary politics. (12) The opposition to Pablo that set up the International Committee of the FI was composed mainly of the American SWP, the "Club" led by Gerry Healy and the French PCI.

Contrary to the legends that different groups who were at one time or another affiliated with the ICFI tell about themselves, the ICFI did not fight the Pabloists on theoretical, programmatic or strategic level, but only on the organizational level as they refused to liquidate themselves into the Stalinist parties.

The SWP began to struggle against Pablo only when the leadership of the SWP discovered that Pablo supports the faction led by Bert Cochran inside the Socialist Workers Party that opposed the leadership of Cannon. The faction accused Cannon of sectarian attitude toward the American Stalinist party.

As to the French section, in 1952 the leaders of the Fourth International (Pablo, Mandel) removed the Central Committee of the PCI and replaced it with Michelle Mestre and Pierre Frank, who accepted the International's policies. This *forced* them to fight against Pablo and Mandel.

As to the legend of the "anti-Pabloism" of the IC, the leadership of the FI (including the groups that in 1952 formed the ICFI) knew that the POR - the FI section in Bolivia - was politically supporting a popular front government (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario - MNR) that subordinated the working class to the bourgeoisie. The POR claimed that by putting pressure on the MNR, the nationalists will overthrow capitalism. Yet they all kept quiet as it happens in many similar situations, the popular front that demoralized the workers was overthrown by the military.

Furthermore, the Lambertists following the letter to Tito were very enthusiastic about this perspective of courting the Yugoslav Stalinists.

*"For a while, activity with the "Titoites" — supporters of the Tito regime in Yugoslavia, which had fallen out with Stalin in summer 1948 — appeared to offer the PCI a way out. Like many Trotskyists, Lambert had been expelled from the CGT in 1950. He started work in Force Ouvrière, and, helped by funds from the Yugoslav embassy, was able to start a newsletter advocating trade-union unity on a democratic basis. The PCI also organized some 300 volunteers to go to Yugoslavia in work brigades. But all that was based on gross illusions about the nature of the Tito regime; ended embarrassedly when Tito backed the USA in the Korean war; and anyway brought the PCI little profit". (13)*

As we shall see the Lambertists who refused to liquidate themselves into the Stalinist parties moved in the direction of social democracy. It is not an accident that Lionel Jospin, the social democratic Prime Minister of France in 1997-2002, was in his youth a Lambertist.

Moving in the direction of Social Democracy was not a straight line. In the first few years after the split of the FI, the politics of the Lambertists resembled anarcho- syndicalism more than revolutionary working class Bolshevism. Its paper *La Vérité* featured headlines such as: *"The odious comedy of elections will change nothing. Let's prepare the struggle for power!"* (16 December 1955); *"General strike for bread and*

*peace*" (28 September 1956 and against 19 September 1957); "*War and poverty or socialist revolution*" (27 December 1956); and "*The general strike can win 10,000 francs increase for all and peace in Algeria*" (17 October 1957).

However, when De Gaulle came to power in 1958, the group moved to the right and declared that the working class is incapable to fight politically. The call for a general strike was dropped and was replaced with the call for Constitutional Assembly, their main demand even today in many countries like in Palestine. This resembles Menshevik politics of two stages more than Trotsky's strategy of the Permanent Revolution.

At the time of the split of the Fourth International the French Lambertists called themselves the PCI (Parti Communiste Internationaliste). Later on, in 1967, they changed the name to the *Internationalist Communist Organization* (French: *Organization Communiste Internationaliste*, OCI).

In 1963 the SWP left the ICFI and returned to the International Secretary of the FI. One of the key issues that led to the split in the ICIF was the Cuban Revolution. The leaders of the SWP (Canon and Hansen) claimed that the Cuban revolution was very different from Stalinism (a clear cut Pabloist position). This led the SWP back to the International Secretary of the FI which they had condemned in 1953 as traitors to the socialist revolution.

The OCI left the ICFI in 1971. In 1973 the OCI took the position of defeatism for both Israel and Egypt during the war. This was a clear betrayal of the Marxist position of revolutionary defeat for Israel, a settler colonialist state, while Egypt is a semi colony.

Lambert split from Healy, rejecting his methods, but by the 1960s Lambert's group, in its internal organisation, had adopted bureaucratic control of the membership much like Healy's and the same bureaucratic regime of Pablo already in the 1950s, when Pablo and Mandel replaced the central committee of the French section.

In 1981, the OCI again renamed itself as the "*Internationalist Communist Party*". In 1984, it formed a *Movement for a Workers Party*, with different currents including Anarchists and independent socialists. Those who opposed it like Stephan Just were expelled. In 1989, historian Pierre Broué was also expelled.

In 1991, the Movement for a Workers Party declared itself the *Workers Party*. Since 2002 it calls itself the *Independent Workers Party* (POI). The POI is not a party but a political block of four distinct organized "tendencies": the CCI (Trotskyist), "anarchist", "Communist", and "Socialist" tendencies.

The degeneration of the ostensible "Trotskyist" organizations in France has been observed by many:

*"But talking of the PG's crisis partly misses the point. The entire French left, after all, is in crisis. From the post-Trotskyist New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) to the Greens (EELV), and the PS, every political organization is hampered by plummeting membership, factional disputes, poor electoral results, and a complete lack of strategic vision for the future. Even the "Lambertist" Independent Worker's Party (POI), one of France's far-left sects that still claims four thousand members, is on the verge of collapse."* (14)

Over the years they came under heavy Islamophobic influence:

*"Lambert's most famous ally was Alexandre Hébert. Hébert, a self-proclaimed anarcho-syndicalist, was operationally a careerist bureaucrat and the little Napoleon of the Force Ouvrière union in Loire-Atlantique from*



1947 until 1992 (now succeeded by his own son, Patrick!). Moreover, as I discovered when I interviewed Hébert in researching a study of May 1968, his attitudes to immigrants are racist. In 1995, he contributed to Jean-Marie le Pen's paper *Français d'abord* ("The French first"), outlining his hostility towards immigrants. Hébert and his periphery joined the *Parti Travailleurs*". (15)

What we have seen, whether in the case of the United Secretary of the FI, and in the case of the ICFI, and in the case of the Lambertists, is the forces-at-work of historical laws concerning the degeneration of parties that were once revolutionary. Ironically, they seem very similar to the processes of the degeneration that Stalinism underwent on the political and organizational levels, with the difference of not possessing the power of a state apparatus.

The POI has taken the position of exit of imperialist states from the EU on the grounds that it is the first stage on the road to socialism. A typical Menshevik stagist position!

The Lambertists, like other organizations of the far left, have failed the duty to stand up against imperialist wars with a revolutionary position. As we have written in our *Open Letter to All Revolutionary Organizations and Activists*:

*"The centrists of various hues – "revolutionaries" in words, but opportunists in deeds – are part of the problem, not the solution. As a general rule they opportunistically adapt directly to the bureaucratic apparatus of the mass organizations and thus, indirectly, to this or that imperialist Great Power. We specifically name, among many others: the CWI led by Peter Taffee, Alan Woods' IMT, the Lambertists as well as the Mandelist NPA in France who consistently fail to support the resistance against the imperialist occupation in those countries which are victim to the imperialist powers (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, etc)." (16)*

Those who study the history of the working class know that the POUM, for example, that once declared itself a Trotskyist organization was later denounced by Trotsky himself when they support the popular front in Spain during the revolution of 1936-39, know that the POUM has since disappeared from the historical stage.

These days the Lambertists are trying to penetrate semi-colonial countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. But any honest revolutionary in these continents should ask himself/herself: is the Lambertist politics a way out of the imperialist control of the oppressed people, or just another version of capitulation to imperialism?!

Only the working class in alliance with the poor peasants and the poor urban population, led by a revolutionary party, can liberate the oppressed people in Africa, Asia and Latin America!

## Footnotes

- (1) Gabriela Liszt: The Trotskyists' Struggle Against Nazism in World War II, <http://www.leftvoice.org/The-Trotskyists-Struggle-Against-Nazism-in-World-War-II>
- (2) Ibid
- (3) Ibid
- (4) Dave Holmes's introduction to the Pamphlet, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1941/socialism/index.htm#intro>
- (5) Grandizo Munis (1912-1989), in: Revolutionary History, Vol.2 No.2, Summer 1989
- (6) Pierre Broué: How Trotsky and the Trotskyists confronted the Second World War <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol3/no4/brouww2.html>
- (7) Fourth International, New York, Vol. IX, No. 8, December 1948, pp. 251-57, and Vol. X, No. 1, January 1949, pp. 28-31.
- (8) International Secretariat of the Fourth International: An Open Letter to Congress, Central Committee and Members of the Yugoslav Communist Party, 1948, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/yugoslavia/yugo01.htm>
- (9) Michel Pablo: On the Duration and the Nature of the Period Of Transition from Capitalism to Socialism, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pablo/1951/06/stalinism.htm>
- (10) Michel Pablo Where Are We Going? (January 1951), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pablo/1951/01/where.html>
- (11) Spartacists: Genesis of Pabloism, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/icl-spartacists/1972/genesis.htm>
- (12) For a more detailed history of the centrist degeneration of the Fourth International we refer readers to Michael Pröbsting: Healy's Pupils Fail to Break with their Master (Reply to Socialist Fight / LCFI). The revolutionary tradition of the Fourth International and the centrist tradition of its Epigones Gerry Healy and the "International Committee", October 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/healy-and-fourth-international/>; Workers Power (Britain) and Irish Workers Group: The Death Agony of the Fourth International, London 1983
- (13) <http://trotskyist.blogspot.co.il/2008/02/lambertists.html>
- (14) <https://tinyurl.com/ybe9lrh4>
- (15) <http://trotskyist.blogspot.co.il/2008/02/lambertists.html>
- (16) <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/open-letter-revolutionary-unity/>