

The Democratic Socialist Party & the Fourth International

**Jim Percy
& Doug Lorimer**

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Resistance Books 2001

ISBN 1876646 12 8

Published by Resistance Books, resistancebooks.com

Introduction

On August 17, 1985 the National Committee of the Democratic Socialist Party (then named the Socialist Workers Party) voted to end the party's affiliation to the Fourth International, the international organisation founded in 1938 by the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky and his supporters around the world.

This decision, which was subsequently endorsed by the DSP's 11th Congress, held in Canberra in January 1986, was the result of a process of rethinking within the DSP about many of the ideas it had shared in common with other parties adhering to the Trotskyist movement.

This pamphlet contains the text of two reports adopted by the DSP National Committee which provide an outline of some of the results of this process of rethinking. The first is a report adopted by the DSP National Committee in October 1984, in which Jim Percy, then the national secretary of the party, outlines the DSP leadership's criticisms of Trotskyism as a distinct ideological and political current in the international working-class movement. The second is a report adopted by the DSP National Committee in August 1985, in which Doug Lorimer motivated the decision to disaffiliate from the Fourth International. ■

Trotskyism & the Socialist Workers Party

By Jim Percy

The final section of the resolution which we propose to submit to the 12th World Congress of the Fourth International next year, *The Struggle for Socialism in the Imperialist Epoch*,¹ discusses the development of a mass international revolutionary movement and presents an assessment of the problems that have hindered the Fourth International from contributing to its development.

This report will seek to flesh out many of the points made in that section of the resolution.

If we are going to contribute to the process of building a mass revolutionary international movement we have to deal with the question of Trotskyism. We have to deal with it even though many of us would like to put that era behind us and move on to new things. We don't have very much choice but to deal with it, because we're part of an international organisation — the Fourth International — that has and continues to be regarded by both others and by the bulk of those in it as the organisational embodiment of Trotskyism.

Secondly, we have to deal with it because, even though for some time now our own party has not referred to itself as Trotskyist, our way of thinking has been moulded by the history of the Trotskyist movement since it has been from this movement that we traced our origins as a political current in this country.

Perhaps the first place to begin is with the question of why we don't think it's very useful politically to call ourselves Trotskyist. Obviously, one of the key reasons is to avoid placing any unnecessary barriers in the way of us developing relations with the Marxist revolutionaries in Cuba, Central America and Indochina and those who look to those revolutionaries as an example. The revolutionary leaderships in these countries are extremely suspicious of those who call themselves Trotskyists. They regard Trotskyists as ultraleft and sectarian.

Of course, in the past we've always said: yes, the Cuban Trotskyists were extremely ultraleft and sectarian. And we've come to the same conclusion about the Vietnamese Trotskyists. But in the case of Cuba we've always said the Cuban Trotskyists weren't really Trotskyists, they were followers of the bizarre cult of Juan Posadas, who had broken with the world Trotskyist movement, with the Fourth International. We argued that we and those in the Fourth International who were the "real" Trotskyists had avoided the sectarianism of groups like the Posadistas.

We said the same thing about the followers of Gerry Healy, Pierre Lambert, and Nahuel Moreno — they weren't the "real" Trotskyists but sectarian aberrations from "genuine" Trotskyism.

But here we have a big problem: The overwhelming majority of those in the world today who regard themselves as Trotskyists are not among those we have regarded as the "real" Trotskyists; they are not members of the Fourth International. And the Trotskyists outside the Fourth International regard those in it in the same way — as "fake" Trotskyists. Considerable time has and is spent by all these people debating who are the "real" Trotskyists, fighting over who are the "real" political heirs of Trotsky, and denouncing other Trotskyists as "revisionists", "betrayers", etc.

An extraplanetary observer, looking at this phenomenon from outside, totally objectively, would think there's something wrong with the bunch as a whole, would think that something bad has happened with this lot.

Of course, it's true that a lot of the problems that the Trotskyist movement has faced flow from objective difficulties, from the fact that the Trotskyist movement "was born amidst defeats", as we once wrote about it.

From 1923 onwards the world revolution went into a twenty year period of decline characterised by a whole series of defeats such as the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union, the victory of fascism in Italy, Germany and Spain, and the outbreak of World War II. This was the period in which the Trotskyist movement was formed as a distinct current.

And we have to say, no matter what mistakes were made by Trotsky and those around him, that the struggle they waged to reorient the communist movement in order for it to prevent those defeats was a heroic one.

This long period of defeats was not reversed until 1943 with the Soviet victory over German imperialism at the battle of Stalingrad and the revolutionary upsurge by the Italian workers that brought down Mussolini's dictatorship. But the new period of rise in the world revolutionary process that began with these two victories did not lead to the overcoming of the isolation that the Trotskyist movement suffered in the previous period. Given the defeats the working class had suffered in the 1920s and '30s, and the

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role that the Soviet Union, headed as it still was by Stalin's bureaucratic oligarchy, played in defeating Nazi imperialism, it was perhaps inevitable that it would be to the still massively larger communist parties that broad masses would turn to find an instrument to push forward the world revolutionary process. The Trotskyist movement was thus overwhelmingly bypassed by the revolutionary upsurges that followed in the wake of World War II.

Isolation & the circle spirit

But these objective difficulties had another effect. They led to the development of a "circle spirit" in the Trotskyist movement. Since its formation, the Trotskyist movement has been largely isolated. It didn't have a mass base in the unions of the imperialist countries; it wasn't leading big peasant struggles in the colonies and semicolonies. In that situation, its written program was all the movement had, the thing that justified its existence. And because of this, there developed a strong tendency to spend a lot of time in an endless elaboration of the written program. Now, elaborating the program — that is, trying to maintain Leninism, trying to understand the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, trying to understand what was happening with the world revolution as a whole — might have had a certain relevance in the '20s and the '30s. But since the end of World War II, since the world revolution has been on the ascent, winning important victories, we have to say that it's long past time for revolutionaries to have broken through that earlier isolation and found their way to the masses, to have made the emphasis of their activity implementing rather than elaborating a revolutionary program.

Furthermore, it's one thing now to look back with the benefit of hindsight and decide that conditions in the '30s were too difficult, and therefore perhaps it wasn't objectively possible for them to break out of their isolation. But that sort of understanding of the character of the period comes only after the fact. At the time, it wasn't obviously inevitable that the working class would suffer the defeats it suffered, yet many Trotskyists had already reconciled themselves to isolation.

In any case, to a large extent the Trotskyist movement has persisted in that approach well beyond the time when objective necessity forced it to do so. We even made a virtue of that necessity. We quote a little bit of a document of the Fourth International from 1953-54 in the resolution. Here is more of the quote:

This principled origin of the Trotskyist movement represents its great strength. For the first time in the history of the workers' movement, an international organisation was constituted exclusively on the basis of agreement of the cadres with a precise program, strategy, and tactics. But at the same time in this strength lay a sure danger of great

weakness because of its being cut off from the workers' movement: that of the transformation of the Trotskyist organisation into a discussion club and into an academic sect of Marxist critics of Stalinist policy. The founders of the Fourth International, especially Leon Trotsky, were to such a degree conscious of this danger that as early as 1933 they concentrated all their efforts upon rooting the Trotskyist nuclei in the mass movement, upon reestablishing ties with this movement wherever they had been broken, and upon selecting a new generation of Trotskyist workers' cadres ...²

You'll find that sort of statement made often in Trotskyist resolutions: Historically, there is an understanding in the Trotskyist movement of the danger of isolation. You'll see statement after statement of the need to root ourselves in the mass movement. But the fact that the way the Fourth International was constituted — that for the first time an organisation is constituted exclusively on the basis of agreement of the cadres with a precise program, strategy and tactics — was seen as a historic advantage indicates an underestimation of the problem of isolation.

That whole method of constituting an international is a mistaken one. In the end it's no strength at all. That's not how real parties or programs are developed and formed.

The Trotskyist movement began with a lot of cadres within the Soviet Communist Party in the 1920s. But the fight against Stalinism that developed in the CPSU, which had real roots in the needs of the masses, went down to a terrible defeat. And the attempt to build a major international current as a result of that fight also was largely unsuccessful; it remained an isolated process throughout the international communist movement. Around the world only a few thousands of cadres were won from the Stalinists.

And in 1933, after the victory of Hitlerism in Germany and the refusal of the Communist International to even acknowledge that there was anything wrong with the policy that its German party had pursued up to that time, it was decided to break with the Communist International and form new parties in every country. No distinction was made in this new policy between different communist parties. To develop new parties with an international program was the Trotskyist line for all countries.

It was decided to do that even where the Trotskyist formations were small and weak, perhaps consisting of a handful of propagandists, perhaps only of left critics with no roots in the mass movement. But that meant that these small, weak, isolated groups began to determine the life of the Fourth International.

That was the objective weakness of the movement, right from the start. A certain attempt was made to overcome this real weakness — the fact that it wasn't built on

developed revolutionary parties, or parties with real team leaderships, real weight in the mass movement — by substituting an international centre that would give adequate guidance to the movement around the world. And of course, while that centre was led by Trotsky, a very great Marxist revolutionary was leading this process. But there was a danger there, the danger of Cominternism: the danger of directing parties, trying to substitute for the development of real leadership. And this inevitably led to a series of splits.

I'll never forget going to a convention of the US SWP once at Oberlin, which began with a talk which was written by George Breitman and delivered by Joe Hansen. It was called "The Rocky Road to the Fourth International". This was to start off a major national conference of the US SWP. I never heard a more depressing talk. It would go along like this: On the initial International Executive Committee there were eight members, six ratted, one was killed by the fascists, one was still alive. And this sorry tale went on right through the '30s.

All right, we're not criticising them; they were in the framework of objective difficulties. But after Trotsky dies, you have a bigger problem: Who's going to substitute for Trotsky? What's the new leading party? What should be the new strength of the centre? Who's the new genius? How do we substitute for the fact that we don't have living parties, a real living experience in each country?

An international centre is formed made up people who have never had experience in building real parties, with broad team leaderships, a centre made up of people who have had little experience in revolutionary mass struggles. But because of the weakness of the national sections of the Fourth International these people, or in some cases, one person, is looked to to provide the precise program, strategy and tactics for the whole movement.

So the process of universalising the tactics which should be followed by the International all around the world began. But, above all, that method tends to universalise tactical mistakes. In the 1950s the Fourth International made the tactic of complete immersion in the mass reformist parties a universal tactic. In the late 1960s, when it finally broke with that tactical schema, it adopted a new one — guerrilla warfare — and universalised it to all its Latin American sections. Then when it finally disposed of that tactical schema and its accompanying ultraleftist errors for the advanced capitalist countries, it decided to adopt another universal tactical schema — the "turn to industry" as elaborated at the 1979 World Congress.

This Cominternism that the Fourth International fell into, was of course also a grave danger for the Comintern itself. Lenin, when he proposed and led the formation of the Third International, was gambling, was staking a lot on rapidly developing

revolutionary parties in a number of countries. And the situation from 1917 to 1923 looked exceedingly ripe for revolutions, for eliminating the isolation of the Bolshevik Party.

The tactics pursued by the Comintern were designed to split the social democratic parties, to carve out mass communist parties, to overleap the fact that Lenin and his party had been a very isolated minority in the Second International. There were no other living parties of the same sort, of the same size, of the same experience, of the same potential for leading revolutions at that moment. He plunged a lot on that tactic. And, to give Lenin his due, it almost came off. There was no objective reason that the German revolution in 1923 had to be defeated. It failed because of the weakness of the leadership of the German Communist Party, because it didn't have a leadership team that had been built and steeled over the previous 20 years, as the Bolshevik Party had been in Russia. The lack of such a leadership team had its roots in the failure of the revolutionary leaders in the old German Social Democratic Party, to understand, as Lenin had from 1903 on, the need to consciously create a politically homogeneous, democratically-centralised vanguard formation.

Making a fetish of 'program'

The attempt to create an international centre in Moscow that could substitute for the weaknesses of the national communist parties in the end failed. After Stalin's bureaucratic faction gained control of the strongest party in the Comintern, the CPSU, the centralism of the Comintern enabled the Stalinists to impose their domination over most of the communist parties and subordinate them to the diplomatic needs of the Soviet bureaucracy. The communist parties in the main became obstacles to the further development of the world revolution.

But if the idea of a centralised international revolutionary organisation led to tragedy in the case of the Third International, in the case of the Fourth International it became a farce.

At least the Comintern had a centralised organisation based on mass parties, with real roots in the class struggle. The Fourth International, however, sought to build a centralised organisation on nothing but small propaganda groups united around a written program.

Moreover, when you are small you have a tendency to collect the windbags and to substitute for the fact that you have no real mass weight, with a certain arrogant posing: to talk about your claims to continuity with Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky — as though you could inherit a program instead of forging one in life, in the class struggle itself. And then this written program is elevated above everything else, because

if you've got nothing — you've got no mass press, you've got no trade union implantation, you've got very few cadres, you don't have a functioning team — at least you have “the program”. Remember all the sayings we were brought up on: The program will conquer the party; the program will conquer all these things.

This hype built up even during the '30s. So, in the founding programmatic document of the Fourth International, the *Transitional Program*, Trotsky could state that “there does not a single revolutionary current on this planet, really meriting the name”.³

Think what it means to say that in 1938: The few thousands of people in the Trotskyist movement were the only revolutionaries in the world. Seven years later, there are big revolutions — and they aren't led by the “only revolutionaries”. Yet I don't think we ever lost that view of ourselves until around 1979. That's what we were brought up on: We were it. That's where the roots are of our problem in the International today in regard to the Cubans. Remember how many formulations we tried to find to avoid calling them revolutionary Marxists, to avoid saying they're the same as us — except that in reality they're a good deal better at it than we are!

I was struck, in the Allen [Myers]'s report on the Vietnamese Revolution,⁴ by the passage he quoted from the 1973 article on the Vietnamese Communist Party by Feldman and Johnson. What was the Fourth International's role in relation to the VCP? asked Feldman and Johnson. “To provide programmatic guidelines to the Vietnamese revolutionists”, they answered. The few thousand members of the Fourth International, who've never led a revolution, are to provide “programmatic guidelines” for a party that has led, through 30 years of the most difficult struggle imaginable, 50 or 60 million people to victory over the mightiest imperialist power on Earth. Can you think of anything more ludicrous?

But that sort of grotesque posturing flows inevitably from the view that the Fourth International is the only organisation of revolutionaries in the world, the only ones with a fully thought out revolutionary program.

So the written program is elevated to our distinguishing feature. The implication is that it is a finished program. But in reality, that's not how a program is developed at all. Our resolution points this out. In it we note that among the key problems of the Fourth International have been:

1 A view of program abstracted from the practice of parties, which leads to judging other currents by their words rather than their deeds and thus to the view that the Fourth International is the only Marxist revolutionary current;

- An attitude towards other class-struggle or revolutionary currents that downplays their achievements and seeks for programmatic differences rather than practical agreements;

- A reluctance to put our program into practice, as seen in the failure to orient to the industrial working class and establish a base there when the conditions for doing so exist.⁵

This idealistic view of program reaches its extreme with organisations like the Healyites, who can't even recognise revolutions when they occur, because they don't accord with the Trotskyist program. That's the extreme form in the Trotskyist movement. But it's actually the same method, the same error, committed by comrades who think that revolutions are instant coffee or dinner parties — that everything is going to be a perfect, pretty affair. No, they're very violent affairs, as Engels pointed out.

There are many in the Fourth International who accept this in words but when faced with a living revolution with all its inevitable warts throw their hands up in horror. They want an all or nothing revolution, a perfect revolution.

This attitude is generally found far more in the advanced capitalist countries. Think how grotesque it is. Think of the standard of living that we enjoy in this country today, the comfort that we enjoy — even us, who give most of our money to the party. We live a great life compared to the Vietnamese “bureaucrats”. It's just grotesque for us to accuse them of being “privileged”. Millions of them spent years of their lives risking death every day. But we, from the comfort of our middle-class existence, can make those statements. And people continue to do so in the Trotskyist movement today. Where is their sense of proportion if they continue to do that?

This “dinner party” attitude is very common. I remember it was one of the things that shocked Doug Lorimer and me at the US SWP's 1980 conference when we heard Jack Barnes explaining why the US SWP had to drop the position it had had in common with us of supporting the Soviet Union's use of troops to aid the defence of the Afghan revolution from the imperialist-backed landlord counter-revolution. Barnes said: “... we are fighters for the world proletarian revolution ... not a 10-cent revolution today, then a 50-cent revolution tomorrow.” For him it was all or nothing; he wanted either the full 50 cents' worth today, or nothing at all!

This sort of childish attitude comes from an ultraleft view also of what is possible in politics and in the world revolution today: The view that, as it says in the *Transitional Program*, conditions are rotten ripe for revolution. There it is, right at the beginning: All that is lacking is the leadership.

We insist on that so much, we get it wrong. The conditions aren't ripe for revolution here. Even if we were leading the trade unions today, the conditions would not be ripe for revolution here. They're not always ripe. There's such a thing as a revolutionary crisis. True, the conditions leading up to a revolutionary crisis are prepared by the sorts of struggles we are engaged in today. But you have to deal with the real world. A

refusal to do that was apparent in the view of the August Revolution in Vietnam in 1945 that we used to have. Here you have a small formation, the Vietnamese Communist Party, which has only recently begun to develop any sort of armed forces. It's manoeuvring with extreme skill, intelligence and cunning to get on to the board. But that was not good enough for us, who thought that instant socialist revolution was possible. In our old view all the VCP had to do was call the masses into the streets. That approach ends up as mere preaching from the sidelines. It ends up with the view that all that we face is betrayal — that's the only problem. Everything would be right if people would just adopt our line.

We have to have a certain humility, a certain shame for our past on this. We don't have to beat our breasts, this is not a church, no one has to forgive us our sins. But for the future let's keep a sense of proportion. Let's learn this lesson quite well.

It's a funny feature of the Trotskyist movement, almost a rule of thumb: The less achievements you have, the less is your humility. Perhaps that's so because once you get into the real world, once you start moving in the direction you want to go, you begin to understand how far you still have to go and the complications of politics, the difficulties of revolutionary politics. That is, once you've started to take revolutionary struggle seriously, building a revolutionary party seriously and realising that it's not a parlour game, you begin to estimate in a different light the achievements of others who've done far better than you.

It's characteristic of sectarianism to elevate principles above real motion. We would have been falling prey to that error if we had failed to adopt our more flexible line on the Labor Party after seeing the political developments this year and the motion they produced.

Sectarians love to create principles where there are no principles, to develop a dogmatic, schematic view of theory. This then justifies all their worries about the dangers of involvement in the mass movement — the danger of popular frontism, the danger of stagism and so on.

Well, did this all come from Trotsky? Perhaps some of the errors did. We should keep that in mind as we continue to study things that Trotsky said and did and wrote. But it's not a question of individual blame. All of us were caught in this trap, including Trotsky — and he had a right to be caught in it, given his revolutionary achievements. But we were all caught in this trap, this dead end. The question we faced was how to break out of it.

The real point is that for last 25 years our movement has had a chance to break out of this trap, to break out of this dead end. With the victory of the Cuban Revolution, we had that chance. But the Fourth International hasn't yet seized this chance.

This abstract, dogmatic, schematic elevation of theory above practice is not Leninism. We noted this two years ago and called attention to it in a report on preparing the party to meet the crisis.⁶ In the report, we quoted two passages that Trotsky wrote about Leninism. These passages are what make me think Trotsky was caught in a trap rather than that Trotsky was a Trotskyist. The first was:

Marxism is a method of historical analysis, of political orientation, and not a mass of decisions prepared in advance. Leninism is the application of this method in the conditions of an exceptional historical epoch. It is precisely this union of the peculiarities of the epoch and the method that determines that courageous, self-assured policy of brusque turns of which Lenin gave us the finest models, and which he illuminated theoretically and generalised on more than one occasion ...

Leninism cannot be conceived of without theoretical breadth, without a critical analysis of the material bases of the political process. The weapon of Marxist investigation must be constantly sharpened and applied. It is precisely in this that tradition consists, and not in the substitution of a formal reference or an accidental quotation. Least of all can Leninism be reconciled with ideological superficiality and theoretical slovenliness.⁷ The second passage is equally instructive for us today:

... The simple appeal to tradition never decided anything. As a matter of fact, with each new task and at each new turn, it is not a question of searching in tradition and discovering there a nonexistent reply, but of profiting from all the experience of the party to find by oneself a new solution suitable to the situation and, by doing so, enriching tradition. It may even be put more sharply: Leninism consists of being courageously free of conservative retrospection, of being bound by precedent, purely formal references, and quotations.

Lenin himself not so long ago expressed this thought in Napoleon's words: "On s'engage et puis on voit" (start fighting and then see). To put it differently, once engaged in the struggle, don't be excessively preoccupied with canon and precedent, but plunge into reality as it is and seek there the forces necessary for victory and the roads leading to it.⁸

We should think about that, read it again. Because that's not been the method of the Trotskyist movement in country after country.

We should be aware of the differences here. We think that the Trotskyist movement has been too much Trotskyist and not enough Leninist. But many people in the Fourth International still think that the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and Trotsky's fight against that founded a new historical current that has superseded Leninism. But there has already been sufficient historical test of that view. It hasn't been the Trotskyist movement that has led revolutions. It's been those who understood

Leninism best who have led them.

Two errors

The problem with the circle spirit and the idealist approach of the Trotskyist movement, the problem with the endless elaboration of the program, is not just that it's a wrong method, but also that you don't end up with the right program. It couldn't be otherwise.

It's not just the fact of isolation, of the objective difficulties, that has led to the defeat of the Trotskyist movement. There have been successful revolutions in semicolonial countries, and the Fourth International has not been in the leadership of these revolutions. It often missed them entirely until they were well on the way. It couldn't see them happening, couldn't understand them. Nicaragua is a classic example. In Vietnam too, we couldn't see what was happening, couldn't see the depth of that revolution. We always thought it was going to be sold out.

Well, there have not been that many revolutions, you could say that this was accidental, but the fact that we miss revolutions that are actually happening in other countries — we can't even see them even though they're on the TV and in the newspapers — means that you'd have to suggest that there's something wrong with our precise program, strategy and tactics.

I think we can point to two big errors that we're trying to unravel all the ramifications of. Maybe we'll find more but these are the ones that are most important, at least at the moment, leaving aside the method and the elevation of principles and all the things that I've talked about so far. There are two big political errors. We note them in the resolution on page 94.

The first one is Trotsky's theory of revolution in semicolonial countries — his theory of permanent revolution. We explain what we think is wrong with this theory in a way that will not force people to decide whether Lenin or Trotsky was right in the debate before 1917 on the strategic course, stages and class alliances in the Russian Revolution. We've taken that approach because we think it's more important to agree on political line as it applies today, than to agree on history. So we describe the error this way:

An underestimation of the role of national liberation struggles within the worldwide fight for socialism, in particular a programmatic error of downgrading the anti-imperialist united front and the democratic stage of revolution in the semicolonial countries, from which flow a sectarian attitude towards national liberation movements; this error was largely responsible for the delay by the majority of the FI in recognising the creation of a workers' and peasants' government in Nicaragua in July 1979.⁹

One phrase that you'll hear over and over again in the Trotskyist movement after

every revolution that takes place, wherever it takes place, is “this revolution confirms Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution”. It’s a peculiar idea, to say the least. We’d be much better in regard to Nicaragua to say the revolution confirms the Sandinista theory of revolution — and then try to understand the Sandinista theory.

Doing that, in our opinion, would lead you to study the basic source of the theory that has guided the Sandinistas, the Cubans and the Vietnamese — Lenin’s writings on the Russian Revolution.

This is not a minor question. The whole theory of permanent revolution has had a devastating effect on the Fourth International, on its ability to be even part of the leadership of national liberation revolutions. There’s an empirical recognition of this fact by the majority leaders of the Fourth International. The Nicaraguan revolution has forced them to redefine what is meant by the permanent revolution theory in order to try to make it fit the reality of the revolutionary process there.

For a long time, the majority denied that there was a workers’ and peasants’ government. In Nicaragua; they said there was a situation of dual power within the government between the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary representatives of the worker-peasant masses. Our criticism of their failure to understand just what had happened in Nicaragua in July 1979 now causes them great embarrassment because they have a much more favourable attitude to the Sandinistas today than they did then. So they now say we have a proletarian dictatorship in Nicaragua. By using this label, they not only justify their more favourable attitude towards the Sandinistas — which of course is a healthy and very encouraging development — but they can also, they think, “confirm” the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution.

The central leaders of the Fourth International appear to be moving in an empirical way toward the Leninist two-stage theory of revolution in the underdeveloped countries but, by saying this is really what Trotsky’s permanent revolution theory means, they continue to facilitate the miseducation of the great majority of the members of the International. When you talk to members of the International who are still educated or trained by them, or who simply read Trotsky’s writings on his theory of permanent revolution, they still think of it as we used to think of it. They draw the conclusion that we’re against a stages theory of revolution.

I talked to a young Turkish comrade in Europe who had heard the terrible news on the grapevine that we no longer call ourselves Trotskyists and perhaps was a little interested and probing to see what this meant. She was quite surprised when I pointed out that I was in favour of a stages theory of revolution. She has been hacking away in the Turkish community and in the revolutionary organisations abroad to try to put forward Trotsky’s theory of no-stage revolution in Turkey. That’s what Trotskyists

hammer at. You've got a group of Trotskyists who hack away in the Turkish immigration, to try to carve out a Trotskyist current of ultraleft propagandist sectarians based around an ultraleft, sectarian theory of revolution.

The majority leaders refusal to accept that reality, the test of actual revolutions, have repeatedly confirmed the *incorrectness* of Trotsky's permanent revolution theory means that the mistake made in regard to Nicaragua will be repeated again.

We see the same problem in the discussion that came up around the Malvinas war, or around Iran. The majority leaders still don't understand the anti-imperialist axis of these revolutions, of the struggle that must take place in these countries. Perhaps we could see this most clearly around Vietnam. We should now study the Vietnamese Revolution. That's where the clearest evidence is, because it took place over so long a period of time, under such innumerable tactical forms. A study of that would tell us that that's the way to do it in difficult circumstances.

We described the second major error like this:

An overestimation of the place, within the tasks confronting the workers' states and within the socialist revolution, occupied by political revolution against the ruling castes in the bureaucratized socialist states.¹⁰

We could probably generalise and expand that description a little further. There's a real problem of Stalinophobia within the Trotskyist movement — that is, a hatred and fear of Stalinism so intense that it distorts your political judgment and your attitude to the world class struggle. The clearest expression of it is in regard to the socialist states, and this is where it most needs correction.

The International majority fail to approach politics in the socialist states from the framework of an anti-imperialist axis and to subordinate the tasks to that framework and that axis.

We can see the effects of Stalinophobia in our own history. Why couldn't we learn from Vietnam? Why were we unable to learn from the Vietnamese Revolution the same lessons we learned from the Sandinistas? Leave aside that we were a little more callow, a little less mature. The main reason we couldn't learn from Vietnam was because of Stalinophobia. We were Stalinophobes; we didn't think they could teach us anything because we thought they were Stalinists.

This Stalinophobia comes not only from the origins of the Trotskyist movement, but also from the situation in the advanced capitalist countries. Most of the sections of the International in the advanced capitalist countries are small and of course subjected to the pressures of the anticommunist propaganda that prevails in imperialist countries. That can make it seem terribly important to distinguish yourself from the ruling bureaucracies of the Soviet Union and the East European states, with the result that

the bureaucracies themselves begin to appear as a more important historical factor than they really are.

I don't think we've finished our discussion around these two errors by any means. We have to continue to think about what's happening in the Soviet Union, what's happening in Eastern Europe. How do we bring up to date Trotsky's theory of the bureaucracy? Granted it's a given starting point, most of us when we get our education on the Soviet Union don't read past Trotsky's 1936 book *The Revolution Betrayed*. We take that as the be-all and end-all, the finished word on it. But there have been tremendous changes in the Soviet Union since then which can't be dealt with just by reading Trotsky's articles from the '30s.

Stalinophobia is also clearly the problem confronting the majority of the International in taking the next step on the Cuban Revolution. Why can't they take the next step? Because Fidel Castro embraced Brezhnev, because the Cubans make nice statements about the Soviet leaders. This is why we can't make headway with them on the Cuban question. We can't push it that final distance because of the majority's Stalinophobia.

The comrades think they've solved the problem with the new position they've taken on Nicaragua. But that's a time bomb for them. At a certain point they will have to recognise it's the same as Cuba, that there is no fundamental difference. If Nicaragua survives it will have to have the same basic relationship with the Soviet Union that Cuba has. If it doesn't it'll inevitably be defeated by US imperialism.

These two errors meant that we have distorted the axis of the world revolutionary struggle. The Fourth International has been overly concerned with struggles in the advanced capitalist countries — its strongest sections have usually been in these countries. The revolutions in the oppressed capitalist countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa were seen as a "long detour" — the real and decisive revolutions would come later in the imperialist countries. The analysis of Lenin and the early Comintern in regard to the axis of the world revolution as a result of the development of imperialist capitalism and its effect on the labour movement in the advanced capitalist countries — its creation of a labour bureaucracy — was downplayed or dismissed by the Trotskyist movement.

As a result the Trotskyists in the advanced capitalist countries have been marked by ultraleft and opportunist errors. In the 1950s, a confusion about the role and possibilities of the social democracy led to the burial and decline of Trotskyist parties in this milieu. In the late 1960s and the 1970s a voluntarist underestimation of the obstacles posed by the labour bureaucracy led to adventures and defeats.

Far from having a program for revolutions in every country, the failure to

understand the axis of the world revolution in the 20th century and the real relationship between the different sectors of the world revolutionary struggle, contributed to the failure to develop an adequate revolutionary program and practice in any country.

Internationalism & an international

I mentioned earlier the wrong method of building the International. This is inherent in the attitude of the majority, as expressed in the “Report on the Present Stage of Building the International”, presented by Segur and adopted by the United Secretariat in January.¹¹ It’s really not very different from the attitude of the early ’50s — that you get your program, strategy and tactics right, and that then becomes the framework for everything else. But it has been modified somewhat by the real world. These comrades are serious; they’re trying to build parties the same way we are; they’re trying to grapple with things.

They don’t agree with our answers at the moment, and we’re discussing things with them.

But there’s still a failure to understand the real world, because of the failure to recognise that it’s not the programmatic documents you write, but the things you do in the class struggle, that really matter. For instance, Segur’s report says that we’re worse off today than at almost any other time in terms of building an international revolutionary organisation. We’re tiny and weak, but we’re the only ones even calling ourselves an international. The big parties don’t have an international; they just have fraternal relations between parties.

This is one of the tragedies of the Fourth International. This idea has been imbued in people so strongly: Because we don’t have a big international like Lenin had in 1921, things are terrible. It makes people demoralised or pessimistic because they can’t find a revolutionary task to fulfil as part of an existing mass international revolutionary movement. They don’t see the form they expect, so they can’t figure out how to do it. The Sandinistas or the Cubans aren’t telling us what to do, so therefore there’s no international.

We reject the idea that we’re worse off today than at any time in the past. How can you say that when we have the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution and the revolutionary developments in Central America? Here are mass formations that are trying to extend the world revolution.

But people get worried because these formations aren’t part of an international. You get a fetishism of the form. Because Marx called for an international before any revolutionaries had state power, and then there was the Second International before there were any socialist revolutions, and Lenin called for a Third International before

the Russian Revolution, they assume that the same form must exist today. It doesn't matter if there are only a few little parties calling themselves the international — it's better to have that than nothing.

That's an unrealistic view of politics. You have to look at why there's no mass international today. And in any case the relations today between parties that stand at the head of state formations will not be the same as the relations between parties in the Third International. What kind of relations between parties are needed is a very concrete question, but people get into this framework of we need a new international, we must have a new international. So the US SWP puts out their magazine called *New International* and says the lack of that is the source of our problems.

But that's not the situation at all. We're able to develop relations with different revolutionary parties and currents around the world. The principle is not an international; the principle is internationalism, international collaboration among revolutionaries. That's the key point: The form is secondary.

There are concrete things we can do to develop international collaboration with the Cubans, with the Sandinistas, with the Vietnamese. The problem is that the Fourth International is not doing them. We should link up with their parties wherever they exist: in Nicaragua, we'd join the Sandinistas; in Cuba we'd join the Communist Party. We'd join them to loyally build them. The same is true of other places where there are genuine revolutionary formations. We don't have to create our own particular current in every country that agrees with our program if there are living revolutionary forces. We might have some differences with them, but perhaps by common work they'll be sorted out.

The obstacle to doing this is a fetishisation of the form — and of the abstract program, since it all flows from the program. Here's how it's put by Segur in the report to the United Secretariat. Talking about currents that are actually leading revolutions, he says: "These currents are capable of rediscovering a revolutionary practice on the basis of their own experience ..." The idea seems to be that they don't read books like we do, they have to stumble on things in practice. "... but they do not immediately pose the question of the program of world revolution and the rebuilding of a revolutionary international."¹²

In other words, these currents, like the Sandinistas, figured out how to make a revolution in their own country. That took a lot of their energy and time, so they didn't figure out how to do it in Poland. Therefore, there is something wrong with them; they're not really revolutionary Marxists. That's what that means.

In the end, the essence of internationalism is that you seek to make a revolution in your own country. This is part of the world revolution — of internationalism. It's not

a new idea — Lenin insisted on this approach during World War I. He pointed out that there were plenty of people expressing fine sentiments about international solidarity, but who could not and would not act against their enemy at home, against their “own” bourgeoisie. Lenin knew it’s one and the same struggle.

Today in many advanced capitalist countries we see the same thing in the labour movement. Many offer solidarity with revolutions abroad and this is positive. But their practice at home is one of servile collaboration with their own ruling class, which in the long run, undermines their “internationalism”. And in the Trotskyist movement, it’s very common to see people who write and say a lot of fine things about revolutionary struggles abroad, but who abstain from the task of actively seeking to build a broad revolutionary movement in their own countries.

Clearing away obstacles

Now, it’s a feature of Trotskyism to say: Yes, everyone else commits errors but we’re the genuine, true one of the 57 varieties. And you can always define a slightly different mix for every Trotskyist current. Some didn’t do this, some weren’t so Stalinophobic. If you’ve got 57 varieties, you’re going to get a fair range of these errors, mixed in different proportions and different ways. There’s one thing for certain: Everyone thinks they’re the real one, they’re the best one — they’re the only one, usually. What about us? Are we just doing the same thing? Is this just our own revised Trotskyism — junk Trotsky and here we go?

It’s true that our resolution is in the same mould of bringing our theory up to date. We are getting rid of as much of Trotskyism as we’re currently capable of seeing is wrong, reviving our understanding of Leninism and Marxism as a whole. But what we insist on is that we’re engaged in a learning process. Nicaragua began the process of breaking us free, the process of bringing down the whole superstructure we’d built up. Because we were very, very good systematisers. I remember, as a party, at the time of the 1970s faction fight in the Fourth International we wanted to go the whole hog. We wanted a line and a principle on everything. We started to take it to its logical conclusions as far as we could.

Now most of that superstructure is crashing down. That’s good.

What’s the next step? We have to remember we’re still tiny. We’ve solved nothing fundamentally. All we’ve done is clear the debris out of the road. The real question is how do we build parties. The resolution makes this point:

While an understanding of these mistakes is helpful, they are not to be overcome primarily by refining programmatic documents. Without the immersion of sections in the day-to-day battles of the class struggle, the attempt to correct errors will lead

only to new programmatic distortions.¹³

That's still the case. We're only at the threshold, we're getting rid of the superstructure, we're clearing the debris. We've been getting a better understanding in order to move ahead. The resolution is a first stab. We still haven't discussed thoroughly at all many of the lessons of the most recent phase of the world revolution. We haven't discussed that thoroughly, haven't assimilated many of the lessons of the Nicaraguan revolution for instance, an understanding of how revolutionary unity is achieved, of how you build a revolutionary party.

As we learn, we're also learning to demystify the Russian Revolution — the view that the Bolsheviks started out with this perfect, finished program, and so the masses naturally came flocking in. Demystifying the past helps us to learn about it. But also there are new lessons we haven't assimilated from the revolutions that are occurring today.

So by no means do we now have the lessons necessary for final victory. All we've done so far is get back on the board. But I think we do have the lessons needed for the next steps. We can affirm something very clearly out of all that we've seen, all that we've learned. Nothing we've learned detracts from the pressing necessity of continuing to try to build a revolutionary vanguard party. I want to affirm that very strongly in the process of this preconference discussion.

That's the heart of our program. Why do we say that? Because if you say that you need to build a revolutionary party, you are saying that it's possible, that this is the epoch of revolutions. You're saying that building a revolutionary party is relevant because we can and must proceed towards the socialist revolution, and secondly, that that process needs to be prepared through the party training a vanguard capable of leading their class. That's the heart of our program still: We're revolutionists. That's our strategy for revolution. It doesn't solve the bigger problem of how to build it, obviously, but you have to start there.

In the past there have been three methods or approaches to building a revolutionary party. This is a little schematic, but by trying to pull out the features of each one, perhaps we can get an idea of mistaken approaches.

One is the programmatic proclamation method. That was a feature of us in the past. We were quite marked by this; some would still criticise us as being too much marked by it. Of course, this was not all we did — we were always an activist party, leading struggles and so on. But you'll see in our resolutions that we're marked by that as well, even though we don't have as bad a dose of that as some others. The method is simple: You proclaim yourself the one revolutionary party, with the one true revolutionary program. You proclaim it, therefore you are. That's overwhelmingly

the method of an ultraleft or dogmatic sect. One of the things we're trying to do in the election campaign is shift away from that method of proclamation and get involved in building something real.

The second approach is the passive waiting method, the our day will come method: Once something else happens in the class struggle, then we'll start to grow. This view usually implies a very narrow conception of the mass movement; it's usually associated with workerism or some other schema of that sort. The De Leonists had the most classic case of this — it's not a new deviation. But it's one you can always fall prey to: History is on our side, all we have to do is march with our class, get with our class, eventually, as history matures, it will sweep us forward and so on. I think this characterises the Socialist Workers Party in the United States today.

The US SWP today has it all worked out: Once there's an invasion of Central America, then the working class will begin to build a "real antiwar movement", they will be in the trade unions, therefore they will lead this "real antiwar movement", their day will come. There's no understanding of the motion that's there today, and that has to be led today. At whatever level of struggle the masses are today, we have to attempt to lead that struggle. Be part of that. It's in that process that the party proves its relevance.

The latter is the third method, the genuinely Leninist method. It's more difficult to understand. It's not so simple. It's much more difficult to do. We seek to understand it better. Of course, many stupidities have been committed in the name of Leninism, but I think that this is the approach.

What are some of the lessons we need to talk about, what are some of the new emphases, some of the new changes we want to make? Where are some of the problems we still have to investigate, still to solve in this process? Now part of the problem is, of course, that we don't yet know all the questions to ask. So any discussion like this is always provisional. We're not going to find the finished way of doing this; we have to keep probing away at it, picking away at it.

We're seeking to build a vanguard party. There are some lessons from the past we can say are still relevant. The vanguard party will relate to all sectors of the mass movement, not just the most oppressed — it will also seek to lead in the labour aristocracy, the white collar unions, in bourgeois arenas, in every area. It's going to be an independent party, that is, it will maintain a class independence, though this idea can be misinterpreted. For example, in the document that we wrote four years ago, we said:

Moreover, the very *conception* of a party as the proletarian vanguard presupposes its full and unconditional independence from all other organisations. This means that

whatever blocs, coalitions, compromises, or tactical manoeuvres it carries out are permissible so long as it always puts forward its own positions clearly and in its own name and explains the aims and limits of temporary manoeuvres and agreements.¹⁴

That's dead wrong. That would not have allowed us to have a discussion with the Socialist Party of Australia. That's another example of seeking to limit what tactics are permissible in the construction of a party, making another abstract principle so we can keep our purity and not have to worry about things like that. It doesn't work. We should have no preconceptions, about what we can and must do to build a party. We'll find more and more things we have to do to help us move forward. Think of Lenin's method, of what he did to build a party and when and why and how.

But we're an important nucleus. It's very important, in fact it's essential, that we don't waste what we've done so far, that we preserve and develop the cadre that we've created. A party is essential, and we're one component of that. We must estimate the start we've made very realistically. We're not the essential component till we've won, at least in part, the vanguard in this country, the social vanguard — until we're starting to win more and more of the people who are fighting back. We shouldn't pretend that we've made more of a start than we have. We must be quite realistic; quite cold, about that process. We know we need to continue with our patient political work, building the party and its institutions.

Lenin's method

What was Lenin's method, the method that we're beginning to understand a little better? The key is struggle. It's the struggle of the masses out of which a vanguard develops, and which we seek to mould into a party. The program and organisation of the party are directly tied to the mass movement, they flow out of the mass movement. So the first test of an aspiring vanguard party is: What are you doing and what are you leading? That's the test. We've got to stress that more and more. The loyalty of revolutionaries is tied to the living struggles of the working class and its allies.

That's the way the program of the party is developed. We must continue to build our confidence in this approach. We've got to be prepared to live by what we say on this.

I want to quote a fairly famous passage from Lenin's *“Left-Wing” Communism* which poses another level of problem which I don't think we can pretend to have fully assimilated, grasped and understood yet, but which is one we have to take up as well. Lenin is discussing how the Bolshevik Party developed — that it didn't develop overnight and so on.

“The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of a revolutionary party

maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism.” Lenin often says a great deal in a few words, and that’s the case here. To make a revolution, you have to be a real revolutionist, with the qualities Lenin names. Think about the history of the Vietnamese Communist Party, for example, and what was necessary for its victory. Lenin continues:

“Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and — if you wish — merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people — primarily with the proletariat, but *also with the non-proletarian masses* of working people.” So the party’s tasks aren’t confined to one particular layer — industrial workers or white-collar workers or whatever. It seeks to lead the *broadest* masses.

“Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, *from their own experience*, that they are correct.” That’s a central point. The correctness is proved in practice: Once the masses see that strategy and tactics are correct, *then* they are correct, not before. It’s the test of life. What we vote here doesn’t tell us whether or not we’re correct; it only tells us what we’re going to test out in practice.

Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning. On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.¹⁵

The program arises out of mass struggles. We have to think what that means for us. I think that’s fundamentally the reason we still haven’t written those two, three or four books on Australia. The heart of our discussion has been on our own class struggle here, but it’s still a fact that we’re small, and the revolutionary movement in this country is at an early stage in comparison with the international situation, in comparison with the advance of the revolutionary movement in Nicaragua or Cuba or Vietnam, where we’re reading book after book after book on the lessons of those struggles. This tells us something. We can’t suck all this material that we are going to need to make a revolution out of our current cadre. The party is a thinking machine, but it still has limited links with the masses. We still have limited experiences, limited cadre, limited

resources. It's not fertilised by enough understanding of the revolutionary movement in this country because the revolutionary movement in this country hasn't risen to the extent that it has in some other countries. That flows from what we're saying about how the program is developed.

Nevertheless, we do think we've said enough, done enough, understood enough to take the next step. We understand the Accord. If we had more time and resources, we'd have a staff pumping out the counterpropaganda to the stinking ACTU research staff who prostitute themselves for capital. If we had a bigger party, if we had more resources, we'd be taking every one of their figures and cracking them apart. That would be part of the process, part of the exposure, part of our revolutionary work. At the moment we've got enough for the main lines, to take us the next step forward as we intervene in the class struggle as it is today. That's about what we can expect. We can always strive to do better, but there are some objective limits for the moment.

Another observation I think we should understand: The program of a particular revolution is primarily developed in the living class struggle of that country. Yes, it's set in an international context. But our revolutionary program in this country won't include a point on Spain in 1936, for example. We want to limit the number of points of demarcation we have to make with other revolutionaries. We may discuss these questions in our party school, all of us will read history, some of us will make a study of it. That means that when we undertake polemics we have to keep a sense of proportion. We have to debate with the currents that are affecting the class struggle; it's correct for us to go after the CPA and the AMWU on the Accord and other issues affecting the class struggle in Australia today. It's correct for us to draw those lines of demarcation, but not about other continents, other periods and so on. What makes you a revolutionist is not having a program for 20 other countries.

On this we can learn a good deal from the Cubans, who very seldom engage in polemics with anyone. It's not a "weakness" of the Cubans or the Sandinistas that they don't have a "full program" for the class struggle in Iran. That's one of their strengths — their understanding that revolutionaries should unite on the tasks before them, the tasks they can affect.

Learning from the Cubans

And there's no doubt in my mind that Cubans understand Lenin's method of building a vanguard organisation. We have their living example, but here is an interesting passage that illustrates just how conscious these comrades are about this question: it's from a speech by Jesus Montane Oropesa, an alternate member of the Political Bureau of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee, given to an international

conference on theory held in Havana a few years ago.

It is true [he says] that the Latin American and Caribbean revolutionary movement has been significantly enriched during the last 25 years, and this heritage contains useful lessons of great value which no fighter in our countries can ignore.

Notwithstanding, we believe that nothing could be less Marxist than to elevate today's revolutionary experiences into prescriptions for all future situations.

We are sure of one thing, however: the advance of the people's processes on this continent and the development of their potential will be largely dependent on the subjective factor — the ability of the revolutionary vanguards and their leaders. The importance of this ideological element is steadily increasing. As always, those who learn from others and think for themselves will lead the struggle. Those who do not lack determination and courage will deserve to be in the vanguard. Those who demonstrate the ability to judge situations, mobilise the people, win them over, advance along the path of unity, select the most effective methods of struggle for every stage and carry out a correct strategy by means of equally correct tactical measures will deserve to be leaders.¹⁶

It's the understanding contained in this rich passage that we have been moving towards. We hope we understand it all much better today.

Organising the party

What about the question of discipline that Lenin points out, given the fact that we're at such an early stage of our implantation in the class struggle here? Does it mean we really shouldn't have any discipline at all? The first thing we should say is that we've got to keep a sense of proportion about this. We should compare what happened with the US SWP. They lost all sense of proportion over the last four years, or they decided on a split and carried it out in a most incredibly stupid way. And the fact that they've done that has led to a certain questioning.

I don't think there's a member of our National Committee who didn't start to wonder — what the hell can we really believe in, is that us, could that happen here? I don't think there's a single one of us who hasn't asked that question. If we haven't, we should.

Of course, there's a dilemma here: We can't junk everything while we think it out, we can't junk party norms by saying — hell, we're not quite sure about the experience of this US party; does that indicate we're doing something totally wrong? Let's all stop our revolutionary work for a while, anything goes, do your own thing, don't give any money, forget it. No, we're not going to do that. There is a bottom line. In the end, the question we're really going to have to answer is: Was it a worthwhile struggle over the

last 15 years to assemble the members we have together today? Was that a worthwhile effort? Not the question of could we have done it better; we can answer that question easily, no one is going to deny that it could have been done better. But was it worthwhile to have got this far? Does that put the class struggle in this country in a better situation for the next step forward? Does that put us in a better situation to intervene in the class struggle as it's unfolding now? Or have we become an obstacle to that process? Are we an obstacle, are our methods and our politics an obstacle?

That's the question we have to answer. I think there is no doubt about how we do answer it. Those people and organisations that haven't managed to do it would love to have developed in the way we have in the last period. They would feel better if they had the sort of thinking machine we have in the party as a whole to try to understand the class struggle today. That's an asset for the working class in the country, if we can move ahead from here.

Nevertheless, we know that for a number of reasons we have done some things wrong, and we've made some steps to change the way we function organisationally — to be more realistic, less clownish, to use Lenin's term.

Whether all of the steps we've taken will pass the test of practice remains to be seen. Nevertheless, I think what's most positive is our willingness to experiment, to try out new methods of organising the party. It's this approach that has made possible the development of the party in the last few years.

We have a stronger, more self-confident party because we have an inclusive leadership; because of our industrial implantation; because we're an ambitious party; because over the last four years we've started thinking things out for ourselves. All these things have been part of it.

In other words, our organisational principles are developing through concrete measures like these. They change when someone comes up with a good specific idea to help the party move forward. Are there other measures we have to take? If we can find them we should take them, but it's a concrete discussion we've got to enter into, not a moping around and worrying that maybe it's not all been worthwhile.

We also have to remember that centralism and democracy are tied together. You can't have democracy in an organisation if you don't also have centralism. But we don't want federalism. Centralism is one of the gains and achievements of our party that no other party in this country has; it's one of the strengths of our party. It would be off the wall to go over to a federalist structure. You'd find that you would be rebuilding branches, or we'd be contracting rather quickly.

We don't pass motions in the party instructing branches to do anything. I don't remember the National Executive ever passing such a motion. We win by authority,

by persuasion, or we let it go if we don't get agreement. That's the basis of the authority of the party leadership today — activity, building the party, building the revolutionary movement. That's the basis on which our national leadership has been chosen and will be chosen again at the end of this year.

So we can't answer definitively this question of what sort of organisation we need, given what Lenin says in that quote. All we can do is take each step as we see it. To answer that in a finished manner is like trying to answer the problem of what sort of finished program we need. We've got to take it one step at a time. So far the steps we've taken seem to be necessary. That was the political judgment we made, and we had to keep doing that. We always have to be thinking of what other steps we can take, what other dangers we might have fallen into, where we need to push next. But the truth is still concrete: What precise change can be made?

In the meantime, there's a bottom line. There are rules, we function under them, we'll have to continue to do it. We aren't going in for the super-democracy that makes a mockery of Leninism: discussion for its own sake and so on. We expect loyalty to the party. We have to be able to test out our line in practice. In the end it's a political judgment as to when you impose discipline. You have to assess what does the party as a whole want, what does the membership of the party want on a particular question, before you can carry it out.

A real problem is to breathe life into the steps we've already taken, which means a better implantation in the life of the working class. That is a necessary part of figuring out what steps come next.

The functioning of the National Committee poses a certain dilemma: How should a National Committee function in a country the size of the United States but with a population one-fifteenth the size of the US population? That's a hell of a problem. At the moment we've got a very big National Executive; that means that a lot of discussion will tend to take place in the National Executive. But my impression this weekend is that we have a real discussion and a real thinking process here, and that's been my impression of the National Committee meetings over the last three or four years, and back even further. But it's a thing we can always improve on. Is there a better model for National Committee meetings? Should they be more frequent and, if so, how will we pay for them? Let's look at that as we get bigger and get a little bit more experience.

But there is no block to any member of the National Committee or the party as a whole fully participating in the process of thinking things out. We've got a line, we think it's right; but we don't know everything, and if anyone comes up with good ideas, then let's go with them. We're involved in a very gruelling process of building a party. It's a tiring process, especially when you begin to know what needs to be done and try

to live up to the demands of that. And the period we're in is marked overwhelmingly by a crisis of cadre: Every branch leadership says there are so many openings, but we just don't have enough cadre, and the new members are not yet developed enough to take advantage of the openings. That's the kind of period we're in; we should press ahead.

We're also rather lucky that we've been building a party in a generally good period for the world revolution. We haven't seen the defeats of the 1930s or the passivity of the 1950s. There have been steps forward and steps back, but by and large the radicalisation that developed in the '60s has continued. This means we have been given two chances. We had the chance to make our mistakes when the party was young. The revolutionary events in 1979 and since have given us a second chance. If we correct our errors and don't waste this second chance we can set out once again on the road to building a party in this country as part of an international revolutionary movement and be confident of progress and success. ■

The 12th World Congress of the Fourth International & the future of the Socialist Workers Party's international relations

By Doug Lorimer

This report has two purposes. The first is to give an assessment of the 12th World Congress of the Fourth International, which was held in the last week of January and the first week of February this year. And the second is to explain the motivation behind the decision taken by the National Executive on June 27 to recommend to this National Committee meeting that our party cease its affiliation to the Fourth International.

I will take up the second question later in the report. I want to begin with an account of the recent Fourth International congress.

As comrades will recall our party submitted two major line resolutions for discussion and vote at the World Congress “The Cuban Revolution and its Extension” and “The Struggle for Socialism in the Imperialist Epoch”.

We sent a delegation consisting of four comrades — Jim Percy, John Percy, Sue Reilly and myself. In the lead up to the congress Comrade Roberto, one of the leaders of the Mexican section of the Fourth International — the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) — informed us of his agreement with our Cuba resolution and he agreed to report on it at the congress.

Initially we had planned to present counter-reports to those of the United Secretariat majority under only three of the major agenda items — the world political situation, Central America, and the question of building the Fourth International.

At the United Secretariat meeting that preceded the congress, the United States SWP insisted on having counter-reports on all the major items even though they had

presented no written counter-line resolutions on these questions. The USec majority agreed to their demand even though previously it had been agreed that only those delegations presenting written a counter-resolution on a particular question could have an oral counter-report on that question. Given this, and the fact that we had positions on all of these questions that we considered were distinctively different from both the USec majority and the US SWP, and moreover, our written counter-resolutions covered all of these topics, we decided to commit ourselves to the presentation of counter-reports on the three other major agenda points — Poland, socialist democracy, and an item that the agenda committee entitled “Workers and farmers government/ In defence of permanent revolution”.

Doing this obviously involved considerable effort on our part, particularly, given the small size of our delegation and the fact that as a minority we were also allocated specific time for interventions during the discussions on these agenda items. However, all of us in the delegation were satisfied that we had done a capable job of presenting our point of view, even if we didn’t make much headway in convincing many other delegates of its correctness.

The first item on the congress agenda was the question of procedural motions and attendance. Under this, Larry Seigle from the US SWP moved to seat as observers “those from the USA, Canada and Australia who are appealing their exclusion from the section or fraternal section in those countries to this World Congress”. This was counterposed to the recommendation of the outgoing international Executive Committee, which had met the previous day, to seat as delegates with full voting rights representatives of the two organisations that grouped together most of the 107 comrades purged by the US SWP leadership in last two years — that is, representatives from Socialist Action (SA) and the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT).

At the IEC we’d moved a resolution that Dave Deutschmann and Lynda Boland (two members of the pro-US SWP grouping in this country), who arrived at the congress site without our prior knowledge or approval, be excluded from the congress sessions and the hotels where delegates were accommodated. This motion was passed, with the US SWP and other members of its undeclared international faction being the main ones voting against.

Seigle’s motion to the congress was a crude attempt to put Deutschmann and Boland in the same category as those purged by the US SWP. This typically cynical manoeuvre by the US SWP was decisively rejected by the congress. I should just add that, as comrades who have read the congress minutes that were sent out to the branches several weeks ago know, the congress refused to consider the so-called appeals of Boland and Lee Walkington, since they had not been expelled from our

party, but had left voluntarily. The appeals by four of those who had been expelled in late 1983 for organising a secret faction — Dave Deutschmann, Deb Shnookal, Nita Keig, and Ron Poulsen — were considered and rejected by the congress by a 3-to-1 majority.

Following the vote to seat representatives of SA and the FIT as fraternal delegates, US SWP leader Jack Barnes called for a meeting of all those IEC members who voted against, claiming this decision amounted to the de-recognition of the US SWP as the fraternal section of the Fourth International in the US. At this meeting, attended only by those who were already part of Barnes' undeclared international faction, it was decided to constitute a formal IEC faction for the duration of the congress. This faction then, on a printing press it hired for the two weeks of the congress, printed up an "Appeal to delegates by 18 IEC members" that centred totally on organisational disputes.

So right from the beginning of the congress it was apparent that the Barnes faction was not interested in clarifying the political issues before the congress but with engaging in organisational manoeuvres. That this is the only perspective they had and have was confirmed by the content of the counter-reports and interventions in the discussions on the main political reports that they presented during the congress.

For example, under the first major item — the world political situation — Brian Brewster, the leading member of the Barnesite faction in the British section, presented a rant against all the supposed deviations being made by other sections of the Fourth International. For example, the Mexican PRT was denounced by him for its supposed capitulation to "bourgeois electoralism", because of its attempts to form united electoral tickets with other left formations such as the Mexican Communist Party. The same accusation was made against us because of our support for the Nuclear Disarmament Party. He denounced the European sections for supposedly capitulating to "petty bourgeois pacifism" because of their support for and involvement in the antinuclear missiles movement. His counter-report seemed to be aimed at firming up the Barnes faction, rather than convincing those whom he was polemicising against.

Debate on world political situation

The majority report on this question, which was presented by Ernest Mandel, was devoted largely to an exposition of generalities with which no one would disagree such as the current stage of the capitalist economic crisis, the revolutionary potential of the working class, etc. While the report was obviously designed to be as uncontroversial as possible, so as not to provoke the evident differences that existed within the majority bloc, it completely failed to address the real concerns that many majority delegates

had. There was considerable expression by many of them of dissatisfaction with Mandel's report and this was reflected in the vote on it, where it received the lowest vote of any majority report, 58 out of 93.

By comparison the USec majority's world political resolution received 66 votes in favour.

As we have noted before, the key problem with the majority's approach to the world situation is their failure to understand the anti-imperialist axis of the world class struggle; their view that it proceeds along two axes of approximately equal weight — the anti-imperialist axis in the capitalist countries and the antibureaucratic axis in the bureaucratized socialist states. This leads them into a series of errors of approach and practice. I'll come back to the most significant of these in describing the majority's views on some of the other major agenda points.

Alan Jones from the British Socialist League presented a counter-report which contained many elements of the point of view we presented in our counter-resolution on "The Struggle for Socialism in the Imperialist Epoch" and in the counter-report we presented to Mandel's.

Jones explained the centrality of the rise of imperialist capitalism to the course of the world revolutionary process in the 20th century — that the creation of a labour bureaucracy through imperialism's colonial superprofits was the key factor in retarding and delaying the socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries; that imperialist domination and exploitation of the dependent capitalist nations created better objective conditions for revolution there, and that this was why the "Third World" had been and continues to be the most dynamic sector of the world revolutionary process.

He correctly criticised the view that had gained currency in the European sections after the May-June 1968 events in France that revolution was on the agenda in Western Europe. It was this view, he noted, that because it totally underestimated the strength of the labour bureaucracy had led to an underestimation of the problems of building revolutionary parties in Europe and to numerous ultraleft errors in the 1970s.

He also pointed out, correctly in our opinion, that the analysis made in the world political resolution adopted by the 11th World Congress in November 1979 contained serious elements of this same error. It had downplayed the continuing centrality of the national liberation revolution and wrongly talked about the predominance of the working class of the imperialist countries in the world class struggle. This error was even more glaring in that it was made after the July 1979 victory in Nicaragua.

Jones pointed out that while there were some very important battles being waged by the workers in the imperialist countries, and he cited the British miners' strike as the key example, these were of far less significance than the unfolding revolution in

Nicaragua, since the latter involved not merely a defensive struggle against the capitalist austerity drive but the overthrow of capitalism itself.

However, while making these correct points, Jones' report suffered from two major drawbacks.

Firstly, it failed to place the question of democratisation of the bureaucratically-ruled socialist states within the anti-imperialist framework he outlined for approaching the class struggle in the capitalist world. Like the majority, Jones placed the anti-bureaucratic struggle in relative isolation from the struggle against world imperialism.

Secondly, he presented an extremely mechanical, objectivist analysis of the socialist revolutions that have occurred in the oppressed countries.

He explained that the reason socialist revolutions had succeeded in colonial and semicolonial countries like China, Vietnam, Cuba and Nicaragua was because imperialist domination made the local capitalist class much weaker in relation to the working class than was the case in the imperialist countries. While this is certainly true, Jones made this the prime factor in explaining why socialist victories had occurred in these particular countries.

For example, he explained that the reason why Cuba had been the first Latin American country to have a socialist revolution was because it had been the last to win independence from Spain and had been the most heavily dominated by US imperialism. This, he said, had made conditions easier there for carrying out an anti-capitalist revolution.

The problem with this "explanation" is that it explains nothing. Surely better objective conditions existed in Cuba to make a revolution during the 1930s depression than in the midst of the world capitalist boom. Why then had the revolutionary upsurge in Cuba in the early 1930s failed while the movement led by Fidel Castro in the late 1950s succeeded?

Or we could take the case of Indochina. Certainly the Vietnamese bourgeoisie was very weak and that made conditions easier for revolution. But by the same token, the Indonesian bourgeoisie was very weak as compared to the Indonesian working-class movement. The intervention of half a million French troops in the late 1940s and early '50s, and the subsequent intervention of a similar number of US troops in the 1960s made conditions much more difficult for carrying out a successful revolution in Vietnam than those faced by the three-million strong Indonesian Communist Party. Why then did the Vietnamese masses succeed while the Indonesian masses were crushed?

Jones' explanation cannot account for these contradictions for the simple reason that it eliminates the importance of the subjective factor — the consciousness of the masses as reflected and developed by a revolutionary leadership. He preferred to

explain the Cuban and Vietnamese victories as the result of purely objective factors because he didn't want to look at the politics — the program and strategy — that enabled these victories to occur. Because that might lead to the conclusion that the Fourth International's program and strategy are wrong.

Debate over 'permanent revolution'

This refusal to seriously confront the lessons of the revolutions that have and are occurring in the oppressed countries was also evident in the debate on the next item on the World Congress agenda — the debate over permanent revolution.

This point was added to the agenda at the insistence of the Barnesites, who claimed that it was the central issue facing the Fourth International.

Given this, their counter-report on the question was eagerly awaited by many of the delegates. However, it proved to be a complete letdown. The Barnesites' reporter, Malik Miah, avoided any discussion of even the real theoretical issues in dispute. Instead, he treated the delegates to a condescending primer consisting of little more than the following argument, with which no-one would have disagreed: Working farmers are potential allies of the working class; in order for the working class to take power there needs to be a worker-farmer alliance. Miah avoided any discussion of what this meant for revolutionary strategy in the dependent capitalist countries where, in general, working farmers are the majority of the population and the chief obstacle to social progress is foreign imperialism. That is, he avoided the debate around the Trotskyist permanent revolution theory as opposed to the Leninist two-stage strategy — the question that was supposed to be debated under this item of the congress agenda.

The Barnesites did decide to take up the theoretical debate on permanent revolution, though not in the agenda item specifically set aside for it. Mary-Alice Waters devoted the bulk of her counter-report on Central America to it and Barnes made it the centrepiece of his counter-report on building the Fourth International.

There was some conjecture as to why the Barnesites hadn't spoken about the permanent revolution issue under the agenda item allocated for this discussion but were doing it under other agenda points. One "explanation" was that Barnes had misread the agenda. That may have been a rather cynical way of looking at it, but it was far less cynical than the actual way the Barnesites treated the congress. They deliberately avoided any serious political discussion. Where they did join the actual discussion it was only to make the most pedantic arguments.

For example, the USec majority has adopted the position that Nicaragua is a proletarian dictatorship, and has been since the Sandinista victory. At same time the

majority says Nicaragua is not yet a socialist dictatorship of the proletariat. The Barnesites worked themselves up over the use of the term “proletarian dictatorship”. This term, they formalistically insisted, can only be used to refer to a regime based on a nationalised, planned economy, which of course does not yet exist in Nicaragua. They were incapable of getting beyond labels to the real political content of the issue.

In our opinion, and we explained this in our counter-report on this item, the USec majority has empirically shifted from adherence to Trotsky’s single-stage, simultaneous democratic and socialist, permanent revolution theory toward the Leninist two-stage position.

The majority leaders now recognise that the revolution in the oppressed capitalist countries must unfold in two stages — a democratic stage in which the revolutionary vanguard seeks to mobilise the broadest multi-class alliance against imperialism and its agents, followed by a socialist stage in which the revolutionary vanguard seeks to mobilise an alliance of the workers and other sectors with interests opposed to capitalism.

In an interview published in the June 17 *International Viewpoint* in which he assesses the World Congress, Daniel Bensaid, who was the majority reporter on this item at the congress, says:

While the bourgeois democratic and socialist tasks are not separated in time by a Chinese wall, they are not totally telescoped either. The proletariat can have different allies at different times in the revolutionary process.

This represents an advance in the comrades’ thinking. Unfortunately, the majority leaders refuse to acknowledge that this view is in contradiction with Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, which explicitly excludes the idea of a distinct democratic stage preceding a socialist stage. They claim that their new view is in fact what Trotsky’s theory *really* says. But if that were true why is it that they have only come to this view now, 43 years after Trotsky founded the Fourth International and made his theory one of the cornerstones of its programmatic basis.

In reality the majority leaders are being forced to redefine the theory of permanent revolution in order to reconcile it with the experience of the Nicaraguan revolution, which has convincingly demonstrated that the revolutionary process in the oppressed countries unfolds in two fairly distinct stages. In order to reconcile this fact with the permanent revolution theory the majority leaders now use the term “dictatorship of the proletariat” to describe the revolutionary regime in the first, democratic, stage of this revolution. This is because Trotsky’s permanent revolution theory is based on the idea that in order to solve the democratic tasks (agrarian reform, national independence) the workers in the oppressed capitalist countries have to take state power out of the

hands of the local landlord-capitalist class and its imperialist masters.

Of course, this position isn't in conflict with the Leninist two-stage theory. Vietnamese Communist Party leaders like Truong-Chinh, for example, point out that "in the countries which carry out the new-type bourgeois democratic revolution [that is, one lead by the proletarian vanguard], the worker-peasant dictatorship is a transition state due to grow into the dictatorship of the proletariat, of which it constitutes the basis and for the establishment of which it paves the way." At the same time they point out that the worker-peasant dictatorship, considered historically, is a form of the proletarian dictatorship.

That is, as we've explained it, the worker-peasant dictatorship or workers' and peasants, government is the first stage of the proletarian dictatorship, a regime transitional to the full, or socialist proletarian dictatorship.

Using the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" to describe the revolutionary regime in the first, democratic, stage would only be a problem if you made no distinction at all between the nature of the regime in this stage and in the subsequent, socialist, stage. That would lead to confusing and mixing up the stages.

This is precisely the problem with the Trotskyist permanent revolution theory. It asserts that 'in order to carry out the democratic tasks the proletariat must take state power. But it rules out the need for a distinct period in which, because of its alliance with all of the peasants, including the rich peasants, against imperialism and the bourgeois-landlord oligarchy, the working class does not immediately embark on the fulfilment of socialist tasks (expropriation of capital and the creation of a nationalised, planned economy). To the contrary, the Trotskyist theory asserts that once the revolutionary workers possess state power they are forced, no matter what their intentions are, to *immediately* implement socialist measures. Since, according to the permanent revolution theory, democratic and socialist tasks are telescoped together, that is, carried out simultaneously, no distinction is drawn between the character of the revolutionary regime that solves the democratic tasks and the regime that implements the socialist tasks.

Fortunately, the USec majority comrades do not do this. They do draw a distinction between the "proletarian dictatorship" in the democratic stage and what they call a fully consolidated, or the socialist, dictatorship of the proletariat.

The real problem with the majority's position is that they want to put the label of "permanent revolution" on a position that is, and has been since 1905, counterposed to "permanent revolution". Doing this only creates confusion and miseducation. And it leads to maintaining an unnecessary obstacle to discussion and collaboration with those revolutionaries who agree with the Leninist position, and therefore reject the

ultraleft, Trotskyist permanent revolution schema.

Nevertheless, the USec majority's position, in terms of its real content and in terms of how they see it applied in practice, is actually better than that of the Barnesites who pay lip service to the Leninist strategy, but who in fact remain trapped in the Trotskyist schema. This is because the Barnesites are unable to relate their theoretical positions to practical activity. While acknowledging the need for a multi-class alliance to win the democratic revolution, they reject the political forms that such alliances assume, particularly in Latin America today.

In his *International Viewpoint* interview, Bensaid refers to an example of these forms.

“In Uruguay”, Bensaid asks, “should we join the Frente Amplio, a broad front which does include a bourgeois party but also embodies the united resistance to the dictatorship, which has been the political expression of the united reorganisation of the trade union movement, which gave rise to a thousand local and street committees, etc., in Montevideo?”

On this particular question the USec majority leaders are in favour of the Uruguayan Trotskyists being in the FA.

The Barnesites, on the other hand, are opposed to any participation in the FA because it is a multi-class *electoral* alliance. This position flows from their view that it is unprincipled for Marxists to participate in or support any electoral coalition that is not based on an explicitly socialist program. Leave aside whether this is correct or not in the imperialist countries, in countries like Uruguay such a position is patently sectarian since the immediate task confronting revolutionaries is not to fight for the implementation of a socialist program. It is to fight for a revolutionary democratic, anti-imperialist program. It was through fighting for just such a program that the Cuban revolutionaries in the late 1950s and the FSLN in 1979 succeeded in winning the mass support that enabled them to take power and to create the conditions for *then* moving forward to socialist measures.

Socialist democracy discussion

The Nicaraguan revolution has obviously been a major factor in forcing the majority comrades to adjust their views on revolution in the oppressed countries. Unfortunately, they have drawn some false conclusions from the Nicaraguan experience. These were exemplified in the discussion on the question of socialist democracy.

At the last World Congress in November 1979 an indicative vote was taken on a draft resolution on this question and it was referred to the next congress for a decisive vote. At the 1979 World Congress we and other delegates, including those from the

US SWP, opposed the majority document. We considered it to be based on an abstract, normative method that did not place the question of socialist democracy within the framework of the struggle to take and hold workers' power.

While some minor changes were made to the document before it was presented to this World Congress it still has this essential flaw.

It lays down a series of what amount to idealised prescriptions of what should and shouldn't be done by revolutionaries.

For example, it insists that there has to be a multi-party system, there has to be what it calls pluralism, and it condemns the view that a proletarian dictatorship requires a one-party state.

The majority comrades mistakenly think that Nicaragua has confirmed the correctness of their position, because there is a plurality of parties in the National Assembly. They ignore the fact that Nicaragua is the most obvious one-party state in the world. The army is called the Sandinista People's Army. The same is true of the police. I don't know of another country in the world where the institutions of the state, the army and police for example, take the name of the ruling party.

What happens when the Sandinistas, as they may have to as the war deepens, ban the other parties, all of which to one degree or another are opposed to their revolutionary government and aid the contras in one way or another? Will the comrades, saddled with their illusions that Nicaragua is more "democratic" than Cuba, because there's a "multi-party system" in the former, drop their enthusiasm for the Sandinistas and adopt the same lukewarm attitude toward them that they have toward the Cubans?

The majority mistakenly identifies socialist democracy with the existence of a plurality of parties and insists that only when the latter exists can there be real socialist democracy. But, as we've pointed out in our Cuba resolution, the ideal situation, the goal we strive for, is not a multi-party system, but a system of peoples' power in which the masses have the right to form different parties, but in which revolutionary Marxists seek to win, by persuasion, the masses to support only one party — the revolutionary Marxist party.

The lack of socialist democracy in the East European socialist states has nothing to do with whether one party or many parties exist. In most of these countries there formally exist multi-party political systems. The problem is that all of the parties there are instruments in the hands of a bureaucratic oligarchy. Cuba and Vietnam are socialist democracies, whatever their limitations due to their economic backwardness and the pressure of imperialism, because they have genuinely representative institutions of popular power and the ruling parties are not instruments for a caste of privileged

administrators, but are instruments of the revolutionary vanguard of the masses.

Attitude to anti-bureaucratic struggle in Eastern Europe

The counter-position by the Fourth International majority of their abstract principles of socialist democracy to the measures that may have to be taken in order for the working class to take and hold state power against imperialism is also reflected in their attitude to the question of the struggle to democratise the bureaucratically-ruled socialist states.

In the *International Viewpoint* interview Bensaïd gives an example of this when discussing the debate on Poland at the World Congress. He says that there was “a very small minority that tended to reduce the struggle against the bureaucracy to a fight for democratic reform of the institutions of the Polish state.”

He goes on to say: “Their view was that the task was not to overthrow these institutions, inasmuch as they were part of the defences of the workers’ state against imperialism.”

“Our view”, he says, speaking of the majority’s position, “to the contrary was that one of the most interesting things about the experience of the Polish revolution was that it showed, or confirmed, the need to destroy the key elements of this state apparatus, its repressive supports, which serve to oppress the working class of these countries.”

The majority thus puts the task in relation to the state machine, particularly its repressive apparatus — army, police — in a post-capitalist country like Poland on the same plane as the task confronting the workers of an imperialist country like Australia. This is an erroneous and extremely dangerous position.

In a bureaucratised socialist state, the repressive apparatus has a dual role and character. It is used to defend the social conquests of the proletariat, the new socialist forms of property, against imperialism, and it is used by the bureaucratic oligarchy to protect its material privileges and monopoly of political power against the working class. The Soviet army for example has not only been used to suppress working-class struggles for socialist democracy as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, but also to stop capitalist restoration, as in World War II.

This dual nature of the repressive apparatus of the bureaucratised socialist states means that one cannot, in advance, say that this apparatus as a whole will have to be destroyed in order for a genuine and radical democratisation to occur. As the experience of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 showed, some sections of the repressive apparatus will most probably have to be destroyed — those, such as the secret police that are highly privileged and identify most closely with the bureaucracy against the workers.

But this cannot be said of the whole repressive apparatus. This was shown by the Hungarian experience where whole units of the army, including the officers, went over to the workers' side against the bureaucratic oligarchy. Whether sections of the state apparatus will have to be destroyed will be decided by struggle, by whether they stand in the way of the working class carrying through a radical democratisation.

The same cannot be said of the repressive apparatus of the imperialist states. In an imperialist country, the repressive institutions of the state are instruments deliberately trained for suppressing the working class and protecting the property and power of the imperialist ruling class. They have no progressive role whatsoever. Historical experience has shown that they can't be reformed so as to serve the working class' interests. They will have to be dismantled, "smashed", as Lenin put it, and new repressive institutions created that are based on the working class and defend its property and class power.

The error the Fourth International majority makes flows from their failure to understand the anti-imperialist axis of the world revolution, including the anti-imperialist axis of the struggle to make the bureaucratised socialist states better and stronger instruments of the workers in opposing imperialism, through the radical democratisation of the institutions of these states.

By failing to view the anti-bureaucratic struggle from within the anti-imperialist axis of the worldwide struggle for socialism, and not subordinating it to the latter, they only see the anti-worker side of the repressive apparatus. They ignore the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist side.

Just like those who fail to place the struggle for democracy in bureaucratised trade unions within and subordinate to the struggle against the bosses are led, no matter what their intentions, into providing objective aid to the class enemy, the Fourth International majority's approach to the antibureaucratic struggle in the USSR and Eastern Europe, leads them objectively to reactionary positions.

An example of this is their support for the so-called independent peace movement in Eastern Europe. Even though this movement raises demands, such as opposition to military conscription, that would weaken these socialist states in the face of imperialism, the Fourth International majority ends up thinking such demands either don't matter or are even progressive, so long as these movements oppose the ruling bureaucracies. Such a position leads them to adapt to the anti-communism of many of the middle-class pacifists in the Western peace movement, which in turn is really a capitulation to the imperialist rulers' hostility to what is progressive in the bureaucratised socialist states.

The description I have so far given of the Fourth International majority's general

political positions, I should point out, is somewhat distorted, since it does not take into account the views of many of these comrades on the political situation in their own country, their approach to party-building, the work they are doing in the unions, in solidarity with Central America, etc. As before, our judgement is that on these areas we believe that the comrades have a basically similar approach to ourselves. Unfortunately, I can't reflect that in a report on the World Congress since the congress itself did not orient to these areas. As Bensaid notes in his interview: "Some 80% of the time was devoted to discussing general programmatic questions and the remaining 20% to the conception and functioning of the International." The latter reference was perhaps an elliptical way of saying that a considerable amount of time was devoted to organisational disputes.

The lack of time devoted to the practical political work of the sections caused considerable dissatisfaction among most of the delegates and was reflected even before the congress in the pre-congress discussion in many sections. For example, in the French Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) only about half of the party's membership participated in the voting on the congress documents and the election of delegates to the LCR's pre-World Congress conference.

In many ways this apathy has a healthy side to it. More and more comrades in the Fourth International are less and less interested in the interminable discussion of what appears to them as very abstract programmatic issues and the organisational wrangling that has tended to dominate the political life of the International. They are interested in general programmatic debates only in so far as they have relevance to the practical political work of party-building.

But the dominance of discussion of what can easily be seen as rarefied theoretical questions and the incessant factionalism within the Fourth International are inevitable products of the way the Fourth International came into existence as an international organisation based on small propaganda groups united around a "precise program, strategy and tactics", as the 1954 World Congress put it, rather than around big mass struggles. This feature of the Fourth International remains largely true today.

The tendency to elevate written programmatic positions above practical activity in the class struggle continues to dominate the thinking and approach of the Fourth International leadership. This could be seen in the majority's approach to the Central American revolutions and the question of building a mass international revolutionary movement, which were the other two major points on the congress agenda.

Central America

Comrade Sergio Rodriguez, one of the central leaders of the Mexican PRT, presented the majority report on Central America. As with the report he gave to the 1982 IEC meeting, there was nothing in his report that we would have substantial disagreement with. The analysts of the development of the revolutionary process, of the role and policies of the FSLN and FMLN, were basically the same as those presented in our resolution on “The Cuban Revolution and its Extension”. The report was however, fundamentally flawed by what was left out of it — the role of the Cuban revolution and its leadership, and the meaning of the conscious extension of the socialist revolution in Central America to the question of recomposing the international revolutionary vanguard.

As I pointed out earlier, Comrade Roberto presented the point of view that we shared in common on the question of Cuba under this item on the agenda. While this was the one report reflecting our views that received the highest delegate vote, it was still only a tiny minority. While it received only eight votes, there were a considerable number of abstentions — 13, many of which came from the PRT delegation. This indicates that at least comrades from the PRT were thinking about the arguments we raised, even if they were not yet convinced.

It was clear however, that the majority at the congress wanted to avoid the Cuba question. The very fact that the Fourth International leadership at the May 1981 IEC changed the characterisation of the Cuban leadership that the Fourth International had traditionally had — from a view of them as genuine Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries to the view that they are some sort of centrists — and refused to place a discussion of this issue on the World Congress agenda, further indicates this.

In his report, Rodriguez made one brief reference to the Cuban leadership. He noted at the beginning of his report that the leaderships in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Cuba represented the overcoming of the crisis of revolutionary leadership in that area of the world. And that was as far as he or any other leader of the majority were prepared to go.

This attitude demonstrates the most glaring problem with the outlook and approach of the Fourth International majority. Here we have a congress of a small international revolutionary organisation — with no more than 10,000 members worldwide — but nevertheless, an organisation whose proclaimed goal is to help overcome the crisis of revolutionary leadership and to make revolutions. And on the other hand, we have the overcoming of the crisis of leadership in a part of the world in which revolutionary developments can and are having tremendous repercussions on Latin American and world politics. But what do these momentous developments mean for the role of the

Fourth International in terms of its stated goal of building a mass revolutionary international movement? Apparently for the Fourth International majority, very little at all.

The attitude of the Fourth International majority was very clearly expressed by Daniel Bensaid in his interview in *International Viewpoint*.

Referring to Nicaragua he says: “In a way, the Nicaraguan revolution represents a challenge for us. It is a revolution made by others, and at the beginning we understood it badly.”

One would think that the Fourth International has actually been leading revolutions and that Nicaragua had been an exception to that pattern. Bensaid does not explain why “we understood it badly.” It certainly wasn’t because the Fourth International lacked information, since it had observers in the country within days of the July 1979 victory.

Further on, Bensaid acknowledges that it was the Sandinista’s policy that enabled the Nicaraguan revolution to triumph. But then he says a recognition of this fact can lead to a “danger” of falling “into a certain masochism and false humility”.

“Other people have made revolutions. We should learn from them”, he says, rhetorically presenting the argument of those who he alleges wish to be “masochists” and adopt a “false humility”.

“We reject this”, he replies. Why? Here is Bensaid’s explanation: “Of course, we always have to learn from experiences. But we are a historic current that preserves one little thing, in particular, an international view of revolution, and which from its origins has represented an alternative view of Stalinism.”

I’ll return to this view that Bensaid expresses later, since it encapsulates the heart of the problem with the Fourth International. For the moment let us continue to consider Bensaid’s explanation of why it would be wrong for the Fourth International to “learn” from those who’ve actually succeeded in making revolutions.

“We”, he says of the Fourth International, “who have maintained a programmatic tradition for decades, should not run away from it at the very time that other people in Latin America are discovering that the democratic and socialist phases of the revolution are part of the same process, when the Salvadoran CP, under the pressure of events, is rejecting the old Menshevik and Stalinist theory of ‘two revolutions’, a democratic one and a socialist one separated in time.”

“It is not for us to retreat at a time like that!” Bensaid exclaims. “It is not for us to hang our head or eat humble pie when history proves you right.”

Just think what he’s saying: Other people have made revolutions, but history has proved the Fourth International right. That such an attitude can be expressed by

someone who considers himself a Marxist, a Leninist, is what really should cause us to “hang our heads”.

It apparently doesn't even enter *his* head to ask: if the Fourth International is and has always been right, why hasn't it led any revolutions? Why, if the Fourth International was always right, did it understand the Nicaraguan revolution “badly”? If the Nicaraguan revolution succeeded because of, not in spite of, the policy of the FSLN, surely it proved *them* right? And couldn't the reason why the Fourth International understood the Sandinista revolution “badly” be because it wasn't right, because it had a wrong policy?

The refusal to acknowledge that other people — those who made revolutions — are right and the Fourth International has been wrong makes a mockery of the statement that “Of course, we always have to learn from experiences.” In reality, this becomes a ritualistic incantation similar to that made by any sect.

Contrasting the supposed situation at the time the Fourth International was founded with the situation today Bensaid says:

The spectrum of political forces in the international workers' movement today is much more open-ended. There are not only Stalinists, social democrats and the Fourth International. There are intermediary positions that have strong bases of support. The situation, therefore is much more complex. The question of forming new parties is being raised everywhere in Latin America. We must participate fully in these processes, while continuing to keep our sights set on the need for the Fourth International and defending its program.

Just what are these “intermediary positions that have strong bases of support”? When you consider what they really represent and compare Bensaid's approach to them one begins to get an idea of the dead-end that the Fourth International is in.

The “intermediary positions that have strong bases of support” that Bensaid is referring to are the Cuban Communist Party, the FSLN and the FMLN. And what do they represent? One is a revolutionary Marxist party that has nearly half a million members, millions of supporters and a leadership that is doing everything it can to aid the extension of the socialist revolution right on the doorstep of US imperialism. The second is a revolutionary vanguard organisation that is consciously consolidating its mass support and building a socialist state. And the third is a mass revolutionary movement that is being consciously led in the battle for power. It is the actions of these revolutionary leaderships with mass support that has raised the question of forming new parties “everywhere in Latin America”.

How does the Fourth International leadership propose to respond? They say they must “participate fully in these processes”. But at the same time continue “to keep our

sights set on the need for the Fourth International” and to defend its program, since this has supposedly been proved right — though not by the Fourth International leading revolutions, but by other people doing this with a different program.

The comrades refuse to see that by continuing to keep their sights on building an international organisation on a program that is different from those of the people who have made revolutions they are blocking any real possibility of participating fully in the process of building of new parties in Latin America. These parties will not be built through identification with the Fourth International and its program. They will be built only by identifying fully with the mass revolutionary parties in Nicaragua and Cuba, by assimilating the lessons, the policies, the program, that enabled those parties to make revolutions.

Fourth International

This gets to the heart of the problem with the perspective of building the Fourth International: its very existence is an *obstacle* to the revolutionaries who are in it participating fully in the process of building a new international revolutionary movement, one with mass influence. This is because it is counterposed to the mass international revolutionary movement that already does exist and that is extending itself, particularly in Latin America.

Bensaid himself alludes to this, unintentionally, in the quote I cited earlier:

[We] are a historic current that preserves one little thing in particular, an international view of revolution, and which from its origins has represented an alternative view of Stalinism.

But the international revolutionary movement that the Cuban Communist Party and the FSLN represent has done far more than “preserve an international *view* of revolution” and “an alternative *view* of Stalinism”. It has promoted the actual international extension of the revolution. It has presented an alternative to “Stalinism”, that is, to the reformist communist parties and the bureaucratic leaderships in the USSR and Eastern Europe, *in practice*. The failure of the Fourth International majority to see this shows that for them words are more important than deeds.

Moreover, because the Fourth International majority has a false conception of the framework of the world revolutionary process, because they fail to see that the anti-bureaucratic struggle is secondary to the overall struggle against world imperialism, they make the question of their particular view of “Stalinism” a shibboleth — a point of honour to distinguish themselves from the mass revolutionary international movement that does exist, a justification for their separate existence from this movement.

We think organisations like the Cuban Communist Party, the FSLN, the FMLN, and the Vietnamese Communist Party are dealing with present political developments most dynamically and creatively. There is a growing current of revolutionary fighters around the world who are seeking to learn from these parties, which have had the most recent experiences of leading mass revolutionary struggles. There is no need to build a political current separate and distinct from them.

If the revolutionary cadres who constitute the Fourth International are really going to participate in the process of building new mass parties and a new mass revolutionary international movement then they must break with the idea that because they have an alternative view of “Stalinism” this justifies being in a separate “historic current”. That is, they must break with Trotskyism and its international organisational expression — the Fourth International.

New mass revolutionary parties will not be built, even in the imperialist countries, through the perspective of building the Fourth International. This is not only because it is too small but also because it is too politically narrow. It is an international organisation built around a “precise program, strategy and tactics”, moreover, a program which has key elements that have been repeatedly proven wrong by the revolutionary victories that have occurred this century. And, no matter what corrections have been made by its individual sections, the Fourth International as a body, because of the very way it conceives of itself, has a false, idealistic view of how a mass revolutionary international movement will be built.

Real Marxist parties are not developed through debates around abstract programmatic questions, nor by agreement on a “precise program, strategy and tactics”. It is the big, living revolutionary developments that act as a beacon for important sections of the working-class political vanguard, and that enables this vanguard to be crystallised into genuine Marxist parties by enabling abstract programmatic differences to be settled by living experience, by learning from those who have made revolutions.

The recomposition of the revolutionary vanguard in the imperialist countries, as was the case in the early 1920s, will come about through an identification with, and orientation to, the big revolutionary events in the world, to the living revolutions, and their revolutionary vanguards. Those who fall or refuse to follow this course, even if they carry out revolutionary work in their own countries, and even if they have some international organisation, will become irrelevant to the process, just as the IWW in the US and Australia became irrelevant in the early 1920s because of their failure to orient to the Russian Revolution and become an integral part of the international current that sought to learn from it.

What is involved in orienting to the revolutionary leaderships that have succeeded

in winning power is not becoming a cheer squad for these revolutions and their leaderships, nor seeking some sort of franchise from them. What is involved is establishing relations so that we can engage in a political discussion — an exchange of views and experiences — so that we can learn the lessons of how they built parties, how they made revolutions.

Obstacle to real internationalism

The continued existence of the Fourth International as an organised international current distinct from the current represented by those leaderships that have succeeded in making revolutions and are consciously working to extend the revolutionary process, is an obstacle to its members fully developing those relations.

Well, if we think that the Fourth International is an obstacle to fully participating in the process of building new revolutionary parties and a new, mass, international revolutionary movement, the question is obviously posed, should our party remain in it?

It is the view of the National Executive that we shouldn't. We could continue to argue within the framework of the Fourth International for our views, but we don't think this would be of much value. If the shock of the Nicaraguan revolution is not enough to cause the Fourth International majority to reconsider its fundamental course, no amount of argument on our part will change it. If the comrades are going to rethink their course, it will only be as a result of further shocks, of further revolutions made by "other people".

In the meantime, we cannot afford for our own party-building work to wait for the comrades in the Fourth International to wake up to the realities of the world. Our own continued affiliation to the Fourth International is becoming an obstacle to the possibilities that are opening up to us to establish the political relations we seek with those revolutionaries who have mass influence.

Does this mean we are turning away from internationalism? Such a view could only be made by those who confuse a particular *form* of international *organisation* with internationalism. Our conception of internationalism involves developing international collaboration. It involves the fraternal exchange of views and experiences among revolutionaries based on a willingness to learn from others, while thinking for ourselves. The forms through which this occurs are totally secondary.

Far from turning away from internationalism by leaving the Fourth International, we are turning toward a more *real* internationalism, toward international collaboration with those revolutionary forces that are really extending the world socialist revolution.

Does this mean we are breaking political relations with the revolutionaries in the

Fourth International? No, we are simply terminating our participation in the Fourth International as an international organisation. We want to have relations, exchanges of views and experiences, with anyone who wishes to have such fraternal relations with us. But we refuse to have such relations held hostage to a particular organisational form.

We want the international relations that we establish to be based on the same criteria that the Cubans have. Fidel Castro outlined those in a speech he gave in 1967.

We conceive of Marxism as revolutionary thinking and action [he said] Those who do not possess a truly revolutionary spirit cannot be called communists.

Anyone can have “eagle” for a last name without having a single feather on his back. In the same way, there are people who call themselves communists without having a communist hair on their head. The international communist movement, to our way of thinking, is not a church, it is not a religious sect or Masonic lodge that obliges us to hallow any weakness, any deviation, that obliges us to follow the policy of a mutual admiration society with an kinds of reformists and pseudo-revolutionaries.

... What is important are the revolutionaries, those who are capable of making revolutions and developing themselves in revolutionary theory.

Many times practice comes first and then theory. Our people too are an example of that. Many, the immense majority of those who proudly call themselves Marxists-Leninists, arrived at Marxism-Leninism by way of the revolutionary struggle. To exclude, to deny, to reject a priori all those who from the beginning did not call themselves communists is an act of dogmatism and sectarianism. Whoever denies that it is the road of revolution which leads people to Marxism is no Marxist although he may call himself a communist.

“This will be our line of conduct. It is the line that has guided our conduct in relations with the revolutionary movement”, Fidel concluded.¹⁷

This will also be the line of conduct that we will seek to follow. We will judge people by their actions, and enter into relations with them accordingly. And we hope and expect other revolutionaries to treat us the same way. ■

Notes

Trotskyism and the Socialist Workers Party

- 1 SWP, *The Struggle for Socialism in the Imperialist Epoch* (Pathfinder Press [Australia]: Chippendale, 1984), pp. 91-102.
- 2 “Rise, Decline, and Perspectives for the Fall of Stalinism” in *The Development and Disintegration of World Stalinism* (Education for Socialists/National Education Department of the Socialist Workers Party: New York, 1970), p. 26.
- 3 Trotsky, “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International”, *The Transitional Program and the Struggle for Socialism* (Resistance Books: Chippendale, 1999), p. 59.
- 4 Myers, *The Vietnamese Revolution and its Leadership* (Pathfinder Press: Sydney, 1984).
- 5 SWP, *The Struggle for Socialism in the Imperialist Epoch*, p. 95.
- 6 Percy, “Preparing the party to meet the crisis”, *Socialist Worker*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (December 1982).
- 7 Trotsky, “The New Course”, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* (Pathfinder Press: New York, 1975), pp. 96 & 98.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- 9 SWP, *The Struggle for Socialism in the Imperialist Epoch*, p. 94.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 11 Segur, “Report on the Present Stage of Building the International” (adopted by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, January 26, 1984), *International Internal Discussion Bulletin* (SWP: New York), Vol. XX, No. 4 (July 1984), pp. 14-15.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 SWP, *The Struggle for Socialism in the Imperialist Epoch*, p. 95.
- 14 “The world capitalist crisis and the coming Australian socialist revolution”, Draft political resolution for the Socialist Workers Party 8th national conference, printed as a supplement to *Direct Action*, No. 320, October 8, 1980, p. 17.
- 15 Lenin, *‘Left-Wing’ Communism — An Infantile Disorder* (Resistance Books: Chippendale, 1999), p. 31.

- 16 Montane, "Revolutionary Perspectives in Latin America and the Caribbean", *Intercontinental Press*, January 31, 1983, p. 60.

The 12th World Congress of the Fourth International ...

- 17 Castro, *Those Who Are Not Revolutionary Fighters Cannot Be Called Communists* (Merit Publishers: New York, 1968), pp. 49-50. ■

Reprinted here are two reports from 1984-85 relating to the decision of the Democratic Socialist Party (then called the Socialist Workers Party) to end its affiliation to the Fourth International, the international organisation founded in 1938 by Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky and his supporters around the world.

Resistance books