



# Breaking from Morenoism: The PTS and Argentine Trotskyism

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The Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo<sup>1</sup> (PTS) originates in the expulsion of 400-600 members from the Movimiento Al Socialismo<sup>2</sup> (MAS) in 1988.

Based primarily in Buenos Aires and consisting mainly of student activists, the expelled group was led by four MAS Central Committee members, including Emilio Albamonte and Hugo Ramirez of the current PTS, and one International Secretariat member of the LIT<sup>3</sup>, Leon Perez.

The pretext for their expulsion was their opposition to the MAS leadership's decision to form an opportunist bloc with the local Stalinists in the 1988 Argentine elections at a time when events in Eastern Europe and the USSR required a more, not less, sharply critical attitude to the Stalinist bureaucracy. The TBI<sup>4</sup> (as they were then called) had not developed beyond this partial and conjunctural criticism before their expulsion.

As a prematurely expelled tendency the TBI proved to be a politically heterogeneous grouping. Between 1988 and 1990 the PTS suffered three splits. The first was a split by a section of the student membership which returned to the MAS. The second was a split to the British Workers Revolutionary Party (Workers Press). The third was precipitated by the defection of Leon Perez who departed on a mini-mass party building project with ultra-left perspectives.

By 1991/2 these splits had reduced the PTS to around 150 members. Nevertheless, this period proved to be an invaluable one of ideological delimitation and political definition. The PTS still considered themselves to be an unjustly expelled public faction of the LIT, to which they demanded re-admission with full rights to argue their revolutionary case against the LIT leadership's centrism. They did this in concert with smaller groupings in Chile and Mexico which joined with them to form the Internationalist Faction (IF).

In polemics with the LIT they elaborated the main aspects of their politics. By the end of this period the PTS no longer considered themselves as left Morenoites (named after Nahuel Moreno, the recently deceased leader of the LIT), trying to return to a previous revolutionary phase of their tendency.<sup>5</sup> From this political base they set out to concentrate on youth work and develop work around a few key industrial plants where they had members or sympathisers.

By the end of 1995, when discussions began in earnest with the LRCI, the PTS had grown again to around 350 members including about 80 members of a politically affiliated, but organisationally autonomous, youth group JIR-TE<sup>6</sup> This figure also included around 100 university members organised around the journal *En Clave Roja*. The membership included unemployed workers, teachers and other public sector workers (including nurses) and a number of industrial workers, from engineering and other trades, most importantly in the shipyards of La Plata<sup>7</sup> where they organised a joint trade union list with other sympathetic militants.<sup>8</sup>

While over half the membership is concentrated in Buenos Aires there are important branches in Matanza, La Plata, Córdoba, Rosario and Neuquén. Half the membership are women and about three quarters are in their twenties. Up to October 1996 the PTS had published 100 issues of a fortnightly 12 page paper *Rebelión de los Trabajadores* (RT) and six issues of a theoretical journal, *Estrategia Internacional*.<sup>9</sup>

**The PTS critique of Morenoism and the history of the FI**

During the years 1993-95 the PTS deepened its critique of Morenoism. An article published in 1995 aimed to, 'draw us closer to a revolutionary programme and theoretical demarcation against the current from which we originated . . . ?

While starting with a critique of the policies of the MAS since the Malvinas War and the downfall of the military regime (1982-3) they insisted that:

? . . . in our understanding there were other errors and capitulations before those of this period, and that without doubt they were undertaken in the face of the sharpest points of the Argentine working class struggles. These were, without any room for doubt, those that occurred during the 'Peronist resistance' to the gorilla coup of 1955; in the revolutionary period opened by Cordobazo and that would end not before one of the greatest actions of the Argentine working class: the general strike known as 'Rodrigazo' with the smashing of the masses by the semi-fascist coup of Videla . . . ?<sup>10</sup>

In each of these periods Moreno was guilty of adaptations to the Peronist trade union bureaucracy and thus to left-Peronism.

Running throughout this centrist history of Morenoism, the PTS argued, was Moreno's brazen revision of the theory of Permanent Revolution, his explicit rejection of the leading role of the working class and its revolutionary party in the struggle to accomplish revolutionary democratic tasks and his rejection of the centrality of soviets in the struggle for power:

Moreno's reasons for rejecting these essential elements of Leninism and Trotskyism lie in a chronic objectivism. Moreno states that:

? . . . the objective force of the world revolution, combined with the crisis of leadership in the world proletariat and the insoluble crisis of imperialism, enables the February/national type revolutions from which the theory [of Permanent Revolution] was drawn, to go further; that petit bourgeois parties may take the power and initiate socialist revolution. ?<sup>11</sup>

He therefore concludes:

? . . . it is not necessary that it is the working class and the revolutionary Marxist party that may lead the process from democratic to socialist revolution. ?<sup>12</sup>

The PTS show how this false objectivism, which transforms the conscious political tasks of a revolutionary party into a spontaneous process independent of such a party, is identical to the centrism of Andrés Nin and the Spanish POUM which Trotsky polemicised against in the 1930s. They expose the vulgarity of Moreno's characterisation of the objective process as the historical locomotive which either stops at, or goes full speed through, certain stations.

If it stops at the station of bourgeois democracy then we have a 'democratic revolution'. Moreno gives the example of the Second World War which, in Western Europe, resulted in an 'anti-fascist democratic revolution'. However, if the train rushes through that station then we have a 'socialist revolution' regardless of who the train driver is?as was the case in the post-war states taken over by the Stalinists.

Moreno and the MAS's replacement of Permanent Revolution by an automatically self-extending 'democratic revolution', one leading to a 'workers' and peasants' government' composed of coalitions of reformist and even bourgeois parties, is integrally linked, say the PTS, to Moreno's open rejection of the strategy of soviets. In an article co-signed with Miguel Romero, Moreno states:

? . . . soviets were a feature of the revolutions after the First World War, but after that they have been the exception, or simply have not re-emerged?.

In contrast to this rarity, petit bourgeois leaders of the workers and peasants have come to the fore in all revolutions

since then. The conclusion of Moreno and Romero is that, 'for us the slogan of the Workers' and Peasants' government, is the main political slogan', one which 'constitutes the central aspect of all revolutionary politics'. Clearly, this replaces the strategic centrality of the soviet with the episodic tactic of the workers' and peasants' government turning both Leninism and Trotskyism on its head.

The PTS correctly insist:

'The workers' councils (soviets) ended up being established in the revolutionary Marxist programme . . . as the most finished form of organisation of the revolutionary masses, an organisation on the basis of which can be constructed a new state on the day following the destruction of the old bourgeois order. Nevertheless, Morenoism is a current that has persistently denied . . . this fundamental aspect of Trotskyist politics.'<sup>13</sup>

The conclusion of the PTS is that the overt revisionism of the 1980s represents the hardening or crystallisation of Morenoism into centrism:

'If in the earlier periods we can speak of serious political mistakes of a party with strong centrist traits, with the theory-programme of the 'Democratic Revolution' of the MAS, one enters into the terrain of open theoretical revisionism and crystallised centrism.'<sup>14</sup>

The LRCI appreciates the seriousness of this critique of Moreno's objectivism (processism) which coincides with the critique which we have made of post-1951 degenerate Trotskyism. since 1983.<sup>15</sup>

The weakness of this critique, in our view, is that despite its recognition of Moreno's errors in the 1950s and 1960s it still gives too great an emphasis to the rightward degeneration of Morenoism in the 1980s and implies continuing illusions in the 'left' Morenoism of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This is the period of Moreno's polemics with Ernest Mandel and Pierre Lambert. For example, the PTS have claimed that a 'principled thread of continuity' within the post-war Trotskyist movement can be seen in 'the fight between the North American SWP and the PST of Argentina against the diversion into guerrillaism in Latin America led by Mandel'<sup>16</sup>, as well as the lessons drawn by the Morenoite current from the Portuguese revolution.

While it is certainly true that Moreno was able to adopt a left stance vis-a-vis these tendencies (which he was in an unprincipled bloc with up until the two splits in 1979 and 1981 respectively), his 'leftism' was neither consistent with his past theories nor manifest in his own practice.

The LRCI does not believe that the PST was Trotskyist 'with centrist traits' but a centrist party with Trotskyist vestiges, or more correctly in Trotskyist disguise. We believe that the errors of Moreno were no less fundamentally centrist. Sometimes these errors had a sectarian, an adventurist or an ultra-left character rather than a rightist opportunist one. But, nevertheless, they propounded a false strategy and a distorted programme.

They were often so tactically ultra-left towards the mass workers' parties that they strengthened the latter's hold over the mass of the workers and isolated the vanguard from them. The overall 'leftism' of those who called themselves Trotskyists in the 1970s was the product of the objective situation of revolutionary upheavals in the semi-colonial world and of severe class struggles in the imperialist countries as well, a process which pushed some Stalinist parties to the left too.

What was positive in the years 1968-74 was the radicalisation of tens of thousands of workers and youth. These fresh, subjectively revolutionary forces forced the stagnant pseudo-Trotskyist right centrist groups of both the USFI and IC traditions to the left. It was not the remaining features of 'Trotskyism' in these parties which created this mass movement. It was the mass movement which discovered and revived isolated revolutionary aspects of historic Trotskyism within these organisations. But the inveterate centrist leaderships of these 'parties', which the workers and youth could hardly be expected to overthrow spontaneously, eventually wasted and dispersed this tide of revolutionary consciousness.

What was most positive in these years is that some groups of cadre recognised that a fight was necessary against the centrism of these leaders. The LRCI owes its own origins to these developments just as the PTS owes its origins to a reaction to the opportunist turn of Morenoism in the mid-1980s.

The fact that the leading cadre of the PTS came into political activity during Moreno's leftist period, and that they were steeled by a period of struggle under the military dictatorship but then witnessed Moreno's rapid rightwards evolution in the mid-1980s, probably accounts for their overestimation of this turn as the decisive one into 'crystallised centrism'.

We believe that the PTS has yet to resolve its view of the rest of the fragments of the Fourth International (FI). At one level they correctly recognise that, 'none of the divided Trotskyist currents found itself capable of overcoming their centrist conceptions and adopting a revolutionary strategy'<sup>17</sup>

Yet at the same time the PTS repeat the elision between healthy positions held by the increasingly disoriented, but still revolutionary, FI between 1944-48 with positions adopted by rival centrist fragments of the FI in the 1950s.

So, for example, it is false to identify 'the formation of the IC in the face of the Pabloite orientation towards sui-generis entryism into the Communist Parties'<sup>18</sup> as a point of principled opposition.

The opposition of the SWP(US) and Britain's Gerry Healy to Pablo was over the form of proposed entryist liquidation not the content. Healy, for example, was determined on maintaining his gross opportunism within the British Labour Party (1948-54) and resisted compulsory entryism into the British Communist Party. Healy and Cannon had accepted the perspectives and programme that underlay the entryism sui-generis two years before the formation of the International Committee.

Elsewhere, the PTS assesses the growth of 'Trotskyism' in both its USFI and IC forms in the years 1968-74 too uncritically, citing the daily papers of the LCR and the WRP; the 'strong vanguard parties' built in these years such as Moreno's PST or the USFI's PRT in Mexico.

We believe that if the PTS applies the method it used on Morenoism in the 1980s, measuring all the post-1951 'FI' currents they will discover the same fundamental revisions and crimes repeated over and over again. and not the 'many politically correct and principled fights in the heart of Trotskyism' or 'principled threads of continuity'.<sup>19</sup>

### **The PTS and the 'new world order'**

The PTS/IF's analysis of the significance of the historic events of 1989 and the original revolutionary impetus for change in the Stalinist states constitutes a major area of agreement with the LRCI. Both tendencies rejected the ultra-pessimistic outlook of the Stalinophile trends within degenerate Trotskyism who saw in the movements for democratic rights and national freedom in Eastern Europe and the USSR simply movements for counter revolution and capitalist restoration.

But the PTS/IF also rejected the facile over-optimism of the Stalinophobes who uncritically regarded those movements as the full reality of the political revolution. Such tendencies failed to observe the negative effects of 40-70 years of Stalinist repression on the consciousness of the masses. They overlooked the impact of the crisis of leadership, including the absence of a revolutionary Trotskyist international organisation able to intervene to help the Russian and East European workers create a revolutionary leadership.

Enormously positive too is the PTS/IF's recognition that the 'New World Order' is, in reality, a world of disorder, instability and crisis which provides real opportunities for revolutionary organisations to grow. But the PTS/IF also understand the obstacles that stand in the way of such opportunities being taken

Another important area of agreement with the LRCI is the recognition that the post-1989 Stalinist states remained workers' states despite the ousting of the Stalinist parties from power. Both tendencies agreed that after five years or more the process of capitalist restoration had not been completed anywhere (except in East Germany) and that this

process was encountering serious difficulties that could still call forth new struggles by the working class.

For both tendencies to agree on this, and to use similar terms to describe these states (moribund workers? states/workers? states in decomposition), certainly marks out the Trotskyist Faction (TF)<sup>20</sup> and the LRCI as being closer to each other on the test of these key world events than to any other tendency of which we know.

There are, however, differences in respect to the causes of the crisis and downfall of Stalinism as well as the nature of the obstacles in the path of completing capitalist restoration. The PTS/TF identified the developing economic crisis of the workers? states (the root cause of the collapse of 1989) as a product of the bureaucracies? various attempts to make the workers pay the cost of Stalinism?s economic failures. The LRCI agrees with this. But the PTS/TF, in our view, over-emphasise one factor - imperialist pressure. They state that ?Yankee imperialism? ?brought its crisis into the heart of the workers? states?<sup>21</sup>. Increased indebtedness to imperialism and the pressure of the arms race are cited as examples of this.

Certainly this was a vital factor in bringing the crisis to an explosive head in the 1980s. But it is not a sufficient explanation for the crisis. The stagnation in the economies of the workers? states began long before this period of imperialist pressure. Our view is that the root of the collapse lies in the internal contradictions of the Stalinist system of bureaucratic planning itself.

The USSR and Eastern Europe failed what Trotsky called ?the fundamental law of history?in the end that regime will conquer which ensures human society a higher economic standard.?<sup>22</sup> The bureaucracy attempted to plan the use of economic resources first and foremost to provide for its own privileges and for the enormous police/military apparatus to conceal and defend them, while simultaneously depriving the working class of any means of determining the plan.

For decade after decade, the promised transition to socialism and communism failed to materialise. Gradually the developmental dynamism of the first few decades of the original economic conquests was undermined. The working class?despite its initial enthusiastic mobilisation to achieve economic targets?was more and more alienated from its ?own? relations of production.

The system of bureaucratic planning suffered from a secular decline in productivity. Once this was recognised by the nomenklatura<sup>23</sup> factions of the once confident bureaucracy, suggesting major ?market reforms?, made their appearance. Factional struggle from the 1960s to the 1980s led the bureaucracy to experiment with far-reaching concessions to the market in an attempt to dynamise the economy.

We think that the PTS/FI insufficiently recognised the differentiation within the bureaucracy. They suggest in the Nine Theses that Gorbachev, after launching the policy of perestroika, was the leader of an ?open capitalist restoration? faction in the USSR. The LRCI disagrees with this assessment. In 1987 the LRCI argued<sup>24</sup> that Gorbachev represented a belated ?market socialist? response to the crisis of bureaucratic planning, a response that we had seen in Hungary and the CSSR (1968) and Yugoslavia (1965).<sup>25</sup>

But the crisis of the USSR?s economy was too deep, and the obstruction of the Stalinist command planners too great, for mere ?market socialist? measures to work. Yeltsin represented the (openly pro-imperialist) faction of the bureaucracy that broke with the nomenklatura and, in alliance with imperialism and social forces in the USSR outside of the ruling bureaucracy, urged a speedy, big-bang rush for capitalism. A large and influential sector of the intelligentsia and entrepreneurs in ?civil society? existed which served as an important starting point for the restoration process after 1989. Gorbachev, as a weak bonaparte, merely prepared the way, unleashing forces he could neither control nor ultimately arbitrate between.

With regard to the prospects for the restoration of capitalism the PTS over-estimate the strength of the working class now that Stalinism has been overthrown. There are many objective difficulties facing the imperialists and native pro-bourgeois forces in the moribund workers? states in Eastern Europe and Russia. Working class resistance to the destruction of social welfare and prospect of mass unemployment is one.<sup>26</sup> The PTS see the main obstacle, at least

outside Eastern Europe, as the strength of the labour movement:

?For this reason we also oppose those who believe that capitalism can be restored in Russia and China without fierce battles between the classes.?27

Russia and China are at very different stages of the restoration process and their ?models? of restoration cannot easily be compared. In the case of Russia the major working class strikes (e.g Russian miners) took place in 1988 and 1990, before the collapse of the CPSU.

Yeltsin secured total power in 1991-93 during which time he provoked a huge economic slump that destroyed savings, reduced real wages to 50% of the 1991 level and privatised the bulk of industry which passed the ownership of most enterprises into the hands of managers and workers.

Unionisation levels fell away and the miners? union became co-opted into the Yeltsin camp. The bureaucracy of the official trade unions gradually became incorporated into the managerial elite, thereby emasculating them as instruments of class struggle against restoration. To date the Russian workers have not found a vehicle for generalised resistance, protest being confined, by and large, to sporadic warning strikes against non-payment of wages.

The atomisation of working class consciousness in Russia is virtually total as a result of nearly seventy years of Stalinism and the unparalleled destructiveness of the of the purges. Will they be able to resist mass unemployment in the next period? We can refer to the experience of Poland, which underwent a similar economic catastrophe in 1990/91. And Poland?s workers had the advantage, in terms of self-organisation as a class, of the mass strikes of 1956, 1970, 1980-82, and of maintaining an underground Solidarnosc and winning its legalisation in 1989. Even with this background, the major strikes of the Polish workers in 1992/93 were against wage ceilings not mass sackings. Moreover, in Russia there is already hidden mass unemployment. But the social welfare system has not been reorganised to make this visible and official. Millions of workers remain attached to idle factories since this gives some access to some food rations and healthcare provision.

The major obstacles to restoration in Russia are, unfortunately, ones of constructing a stable capitalist state machine that can act as an executive committee of a fractious embryonic ruling class and breaking the resistance of the newly privatised factory managers to consistent commercial behaviour.

While these difficulties do allow for the working class to rouse itself into opposition to the remaining stages of the process, it will not do so simply out of spontaneous resistance to mass sackings, which in reality have already taken place. To generalise, we can say that the impact of the deep economic slumps in Eastern Europe and Russia early on in the transformation process provoked mass resistance but also broke it. Mass resistance in the future is likely to be the result of the difficulties of semi-colonial capitalism and sharpened levels of social inequality that flow from this.

Can we observe a common thread in the pre- and post-1989 perspectives that may account for these differences? If so it probably lies in the fact that the PTS/TF has, in our view, inherited from Morenoism (and indeed the whole IC tradition) an exaggerated view of the homogeneity of Stalinism inside the workers? states and of its hegemony and strength in the world labour movement. This is accompanied by a one-sided a view of the role of the apparatus of Stalinism as the chief agent of imperialism in the world.

In the latest issue of Estrategia the PTS argue that in the post-war period (pre-1989) ?the Stalinists, Social Democrats and bourgeois nationalists were able to hold the masses back behind a reformist strategy?28 which tied the revolutionary process up in a ?straitjacket?. Of these three political and ideological forces Stalinism was by far the strongest:

? . . . the mediations that are growing today (Islam, recycled Stalinism, various popular currents etc) are much weaker than the apparatus controlled by the bureaucracy of the Kremlin.?29

For the PTS the failure of imperialism to make some of its counter-revolutionary settlements and peace processes stick

is due to the lack of weight these non-Stalinist forces have in the working class and popular movements.

Imperialism is aware of the dangers in destroying all its agencies for class compromise inside the workers' movement and relying solely on open bourgeois forces. It needs post-Stalinist parties and ex-Stalinist social democratic parties and trade union bureaucracies to divert struggles. The events in 1995 in France show how, despite the low numbers in trade unions in France, the trade union bureaucracies were able to derail the movement towards a general strike.

The danger now is to believe that because Stalinism has fallen there is little to prevent workers' spontaneous struggles reaching a very high level of generalisation. This leads us to the PTS's assessment of the world situation after 1989.

### **A world pre-revolutionary situation?**

In an article in *Rebelión* in 1994 the PTS says that:

“... a new period of imperialist decay and the world pre-revolutionary situation (that opened in 1989 with the fall of Stalinism) marks a new opportunity to overcome the crisis of working class leadership.”<sup>30</sup>

Earlier in the same document it says that “the flight of the arrow follows ... a rising revolutionary curve.”

We feel there are two problems with such a summary of the world situation. The first concerns the use of the term “pre-revolutionary situation”; the second returns us to the question of Stalinism.

The LRCI described the events of 1989 as “an historic turning-point?”. The crisis that began in 1989 constituted a more widely generalised revolutionary situation, from East Germany to China, than had existed at any time since 1945-48. Despite the historic lost opportunity of political revolution in the years 1989-90 we believe that, in the medium to long term, the new period opened up by these events is one of greater instability than the forty five years after the Second World War:

1 because all the major imperialist powers are still locked into in a 25 year long period of depressed accumulation;

1 because inter-imperialist rivalry and regional bloc formation will grow, once robbed of the unifying “Communist Threat”;

1 because Eastern Europe and the CIS states are still more a source of instability than profit.

For these reasons, in the decades ahead, we recognise that the struggles in all parts of the world will be more inter-linked than at any time since 1945-48. Since 1991 the LRCI has recognised that we have entered a period which will be marked by deeper revolutionary crises than those which characterised the 1949-89 period.

But does this mean that we are in a “world pre-revolutionary situation” now?

We agree that we are faced with imperialist disorder in world politics. Events in Bosnia, in Afghanistan, in the Middle East and in Africa all bear this out. We agree that the ability of imperialism to expand economically is severely limited. We agree that this points in the general direction of future revolutionary struggles. But to recognise such trends within the present period is not the same as characterising it, on a world scale, as pre-revolutionary now.

A global pre-revolutionary situation would only be likely in the event that capitalism suffered an overthrow in at least one important country - imperialist or semi-colonial. The PTS have, rather, suggested that the pre-revolutionary situation opened in 1989 and that this has led:

“... in a slow, delayed, tortuous and unequal way to an explosive wave of processes developing as far as the West.”<sup>31</sup>

The PTS describe the character of the struggles of the new world order thus:

“They manifest themselves in the form of basic struggles, mostly spontaneous (the continuity of the Intifada until its

deactivation with the signing of the 'Peace Accord', the anti-Poll Tax revolt in Britain in 1991, Los Angeles in 1992, Santiago del Estero and the later Argentinian revolts in 1994 and 1995, the peasant revolt in Mexico, etc.) . . .

'We are witnessing a slow but insistent increase of real proletarian activity, whose maximum expression was the general strike of the French service workers in November-December 1995. There were similar important manifestations in the battles led by the reanimated working class of the Southern Cone of Latin America. Direct workers' actions were combined (the petrol workers in Brazil, the general strikes in Bolivia and Paraguay, many demonstrations which confronted the 'charra' bureaucracy in Mexico on the First of May this year, etc.) with others which were a mixture of revolts and workers' action (for example, the revolts of the state employed workers in the Argentinian provinces) and important actions of the peasant movements (many demonstrations and land occupations in Paraguay, actions of the 'Sem Terra' of Brasil, etc.).

'Besides, this is all an expression of the process of increased proletarian activity in workers' struggles (which ended up with the combative mobilisation of students) in South Korea, the strike waves that we saw in Greece, Denmark and Belgium, the current mobilisation of workers in Turkey, the workers' movement that toppled the government of Berlusconi in Italy and the strikes and demonstrations which took place in the different European countries against the 'austerity' plans imposed by the Maastricht Treaty.'<sup>32</sup>

We do not dispute the fact that there are very important linkages and interconnections between struggles today. The unification of Germany in 1990 speeded up the process of EU integration, led to the Maastricht criteria for European Monetary Union and to a series of austerity packages throughout the EU which has heightened the level of class struggle.

Obviously the most important of these so far was the French strike wave of 1995. The 1992 constitutional crisis in Italy, based on the outcry against Tangentopoli was also a product of the end of the Cold War leading as it did, within three years, to the collapse of Christian-Democracy and the transformation of the pariah PCI into the PDS as a party of government.

But the links between the struggles should not be exaggerated. Different struggles have different goals and achieve differing levels of generalisation. They do not constitute a single wave of undifferentiated proletarian revolt that would mark the period out as one that is pre-revolutionary on a world scale.

In the USA major strikes, such as the one in General Motors in 1996, are important defensive struggles but not yet examples of a class wide offensive heralding the transformation of the balance of class forces. The Million Man March organised in 1995 by Louis Farrakahn does not represent, despite its formal similarity, an upsurge on the scale of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s or the Black revolt of the inner cities.

In Africa the defeats inflicted on the working class in Nigeria by repression, the Rwandan genocide and succeeding wars, and the triumph in South Africa of a democratic counter-revolution, have also weakened the capacity of the workers to wage offensive struggles (in the former cases physically, in the other ideologically). In Asia the sporadic struggles of the South Korean working class and the Indonesian and Burmese democratic struggles stand out, but they are not yet typical of the class struggle across the continent.

In Latin America struggles have erupted, particularly in Bolivia and Argentina, since the end of 1993. In Central America there was a revival during 1995 of struggles in the public sector as well as the Zapatista movement in Mexico. In Brazil the oil workers struck but suffered a defeat. In Nicaragua the Sandinistas have suffered a second crushing electoral defeat after abandoning nearly all their anti-imperialist rhetoric.

Last, but not least, the workers of the Stalinist states are still suffering the effects of atomisation in the aftermath of 1989 and have not yet founded truly independent and effective movements of class struggle capable of halting or even slowing the restoration process.

On the other side of the class struggle balance sheet we have to register the undoubted successes enjoyed by the

bourgeoisie. These include the major victories won by neo-liberalism over the workers' movement in the 1980s - in the USA, Britain, Bolivia etc.

The effects of these defeats are both material (ending of economic and military support to anti-imperialist struggles) and ideological (the discrediting of Communism, Marxism, Socialism, etc). We have to register imperialism's military victories over the semi-colonies, such as in the Gulf War, and the imposition of reactionary peace deals - South Africa, Middle East.

We believe that revolutionary realism requires us to take into account the defeats suffered as well as the new struggles emerging. That is why the LRCI believes that from 1991 onwards we have been in a reactionary phase, a 'democratic' counter-revolutionary result of the failure of the political revolution in Eastern Europe. The massive move to the right of the entire world labour movement, in Europe, Latin America, and Africa bears witness to this and is a product of it.

Despite our disagreement with the generalised label for the world situation given by the PTS, the comrades do recognise that the current crises and struggles are not linear or guaranteed to have progressive outcomes. They outline three alternative perspectives for the coming period. First, a 'world crash' as a result of a financial crisis which would combine the intensified resistance of the mass movement with increased inter-imperialist conflict. The second alternative would be a generalised development of the present period of defensive resistance, above all in Europe as a result of Maastricht, which would 'open up a popular and workers' counter-offensive like the period of 1968-76.'<sup>33</sup>

Finally, 'the last possibility (less probable) would arise through the generalisation of partial defeats like the war in ex-Yugoslavia combined with a consolidation and qualitative leap in the process of capitalist restoration in Russia. . . '<sup>34</sup>

This 'would mean a historical retreat for the world working class which would be forced to resist in a much more adverse situation. This hypothesis would lead to a deepening of inter-imperialist contradictions in 'dividing up the pot', which leads us back to the first hypothesis but in much more adverse conditions for the proletariat and the exploited.'

Here we are brought back to our points of agreement with the PTS/TF: we are in a world where the inability of imperialism to really or permanently restore order will take us towards more and more pre-revolutionary situations in countries most affected by the crisis over the coming years and that precursors of this, in the form of explosive defensive struggles against the bourgeois offensive, are already developing. For this reason two and a half years ago the LRCI recognised in its Third Congress Perspectives that:

'Taken together all these factors [description of elements of the crisis and world disorder] indicate that pre-revolutionary and even revolutionary situations will develop as the effect of the bourgeoisie's initial successes wears off. The developing synchronisation of a truly world arena of capitalism's historic crisis means that any serious victories will precipitate world pre-revolutionary situations in a way they did not in the period 1948-89.'<sup>35</sup>

### **Tactics towards centrism**

In their latest journal the PTS 'affirm that the struggle for the reconstruction-refoundation of the Fourth International is a task which assumes absolute relevance.'<sup>36</sup>

They do so for three reasons. The first we have already dealt with - the false belief in 'principled threads of continuity' in post-1951 Trotskyism. A further reason for seeking to rally vanguard forces for a revolutionary international with this slogan is:

' . . . because the historical premises on which the Fourth International were founded are still relevant. We continue to see an epoch of wars, crises and revolutions. Trotsky's definition of fascism and the popular front have as much relevance today as they did then, that they are extreme resources with which the bourgeoisie confronts the threat of revolution. The crisis of humanity continues to be centred around the crisis of leadership of the world proletariat.'<sup>37</sup>

Surely, if the nature of the epoch is the reason for raising this slogan then it is also an argument for refounding the

Third International. If the reason is more specific—that Trotsky's own contributions to Marxist theory and strategy remain valid—then we have to recognise that this legacy is also claimed by the centrists who originate in the collapse of the Fourth International after 1951. Centrism has carried out its errors in the name of these theories and under the banner of the Fourth.

Finally, the slogan has validity, according to the PTS, "because the building of a revolutionary leadership on an international scale could not emerge on anything other than the basis left by Trotsky and the Fourth International. No other political tendency has put forward any better revolutionary conclusions to those contained in the Trotskyist programme."<sup>38</sup>

Here the PTS lapse into the mistake of the "orthodox Trotskyists" of the IC tradition. The PTS assumes that the "Trotskyist Programme" lies in pristine condition waiting to be reclaimed by its rightful owners, set aside and ignored by 50 years of centrism. Not at all. This programme has been used and abused by the Fourth International and no other. We cannot "return" to the Transitional Programme any more than Trotsky could "return" to the programme of Lenin's Comintern or the Communist Manifesto.

Trotsky's work, his fight and his International form part of our revolutionary heritage, just as much as Lenin's revolutionary Third International does. But just as Trotsky broke with the Third when it was still a centrist International because it could not be used for revolution, so today's revolutionaries base themselves on this heritage and move on.

The "Fourth International" cannot be written to, visited or debated with; it has no fixed address because as a single unified organisation it ceased to exist in the 1950s. The organisational disintegration and splintering of the FI expresses its programmatic degeneration. This cannot be reversed by reconstructing the fragments into a whole. For this reason we talk of the refounding of a Leninist and Trotskyist International on a renewed programmatic basis.

The slogan "reconstruct the FI" has been common amongst groups within the IC tradition since the 1953 split. It indicated that despite all the criticism of "Pabloite revisionism" its members did not regard the split as definitive nor themselves as the continuity of the FI. It is no surprise that the IC groups never created a democratic-centralist FI but contented themselves with denouncing revisionism and calling for "reconstruction", i.e. the putting together of the pieces, usually on the conservative ("orthodox") basis of a "return" to the Transitional Programme. This was the common view when we first published *The Death Agony of the Fourth International and the Tasks of Trotskyists Today* (January 1983).

We posed things differently. We held that the fundamental task was to re-elaborate the Transitional Programme so that it provided an operative basis for an international tendency. We hoped to do this in common with other tendencies. Most tendencies, however, denounced us as revisionists for suggesting that the Transitional Programme was not "valid today"—a perfectly adequate basis for reconstructing the FI. Today, hardly a shred is left of this attitude. But also most of the groups who held it have disintegrated, collapsed into the USFI or accommodated to Stalinism, Social Democracy or like WRP (Workers Press) dissolved themselves into a mish-mash coalition of greens and semi-anarchists.

Despite the fervour of the PTS for using the slogan of reconstruct-refound the FI as a rallying call, in launching *La Verdad Obrera* in September this year the PTS set aside the slogan of founding this new party as an Argentine section of a "refounded" Fourth International; it finds no place in the draft programme of the new movement. Why?

This will be kept as the private opinion of the PTS to be used as a weapon only against the fragments of "Trotskyist" centrism internationally; but meanwhile the Argentine workers are told to "fight for the construction of a world party of revolution"<sup>39</sup>. But what number or name shall this be and what shall its relationship be to the Fourth which the PTS advocate elsewhere be refounded or reconstructed? And if the Argentine workers are asked to join the struggle for "a new revolutionary workers party" in Argentina then why not a new International of which this party is but a component?

If the name and the number are not decisive in Argentina then why are they decisive outside Argentina? And if not in

Argentina, which has a long tradition of 'Trotskyist' parties with influence in the working class, where else can it be more relevant?

In essence the only reason must be that the Fourth slogan is aimed tactically and narrowly by the PTS at the rank and file of centrist groups of Trotskyist origin. But for us, the task is not to 'reunify' or 'reconstruct' the FI out of the degenerate fragments of Trotskyism but, rather, to rally the best elements within those fragments and outside them to a new, unspotted programmatic banner.

In the first place, this means that genuine Trotskyists must set as their central task the re-elaboration of the Trotskyist programme, refocusing it towards the new period of economic and political crisis that has opened up in the 1970s and 1980s. For all these reasons the task facing us is to create a revolutionary International once again 'a new International' linked programmatically to, and in full continuity with, Trotsky's Fourth International and Lenin's Third and based on a re-elaborated Transitional Programme.

### **The PTS/TF-LRCI discussions**

The PTS/TF is the only avowedly Trotskyist grouping, known to us, which has evolved resolutely leftward, towards genuine Trotskyism since the great turning point of 1989. Such a new trend, if it develops over the coming years, can lay the basis for the refoundation of a new revolutionary international in the longer term, a vital task for the new millennium. But this should not be confused with the widespread 're-thinking' of the fundamentals of Leninism and Trotskyism and regroupment projects which reject both a common programme and a common discipline (democratic centralism).

The inspiration for these 'new ideas' invariably turns out to be not new at all but warmed over Bernsteinian Revisionism, Menshevism, etc. What does need to be revised today is not the genuine legacy of Lenin and Trotsky but the terrible falsification of it, peddled by the Stalinist parties and the pseudo-Trotskyist parties and Fourth Internationals, as well as the national sects that have dominated the Left for over forty years during the prosperity of the long boom and the heyday of world Stalinism.

The importance of the PTS is that it developed its trajectory towards genuine Trotskyism in conditions when the general evolution of the large 'Trotskyist' groupings has been clearly and consistently rightward.

The PTS is also the only fighting propaganda group which stands as equal in size to the largest 'Trotskyist' organisations in its own country (MAS, MST and PO). It is an organisation which, having developed roots amongst youth and students over the last five years, is now striving to root itself in the vanguard elements of the Argentine working class presently fighting against Menem's vicious attacks on their economic and social conquests.

As a result of its programmatic work and its successes in party building the PTS is, we believe, also in a position to play a very important role in the creation of a new revolutionary International in the coming years.

In its latest journal the PTS express the challenge that faces our two tendencies very well:

'We are against any dogmatic perspective which while it proclaims formal adherence to the principles and programmes left by Trotsky, in practice and in daily struggle, denies it. Every truly revolutionary tendency must base themselves on programmatic unity, treating the programme as the common understanding of all the revolutionary tasks. It is not enough to claim formal adherence to the legacy of principles left by Lenin and Trotsky. In order to achieve this programmatic basis it is also necessary to reach a common understanding of the major historical events after the death of Trotsky and the degeneration of the Fourth International during the post-war period.'<sup>40</sup>

To deepen fraternal relations to the point of fusion with the PTS/TF on this basis would be of immense significance to the LRCI and its project of building an international tendency capable of building a new International. For this reason considerable resources need to be devoted to achieving this in the years ahead.

In this process of discussion and shared experience the LRCI recognises that we have a great deal to learn since no section of the LRCI has reached a similar stage of party building. The considerable size and implantation of the PTS in youth work, in a smaller way in the unions (private and public sector) oblige it to undertake a considerable amount of systematic work in the day-to-day class struggle. In addition the political evolution away from degenerate Trotskyism (Morenoism in its Argentine form) obliges the leadership of the PTS to undertake a great deal of internal education and cadreisation to ensure that its young membership fully understands, approves and can fight for these ideas.

The PTS's latest turn, towards building a Movement for a Revolutionary Party<sup>41</sup> with its worker and youth supporters and allies on a new programmatic basis, is a major project. In our epoch, as Trotsky said, no new revolutionary programme can be developed on the national terrain alone. The discussions between the LRCI and the PTS on its latest turn demonstrate that both of our tendencies understand this very well. In the coming months we aim to build on these discussions so that advances made by the PTS turn in Argentina are matched by a firm advance towards regroupment between our tendencies internationally.

## Footnotes

1 Workers Party for Socialism

2 Movement Towards Socialism.

3 International Workers League, founded in 1982, which the MAS was the leading and largest section of. See Trotskyist International No9 for a critique of the LIT and MAS in the 1980s.

4 International Bolshevik Tendency.

5 The launch of the paper *Rebelión* in 1991 to replace *AS* signified the new turn away from being an external faction of the MAS.

6 *Joventud de Izquierda Revolucionaria- Trabajadora/Estudiantil* (Revolutionary Left Youth - Workers/Student)

7 La Plata, about 50 miles south of Buenos Aires, is the capital of the province of Buenos Aires

8 *La lista marón*

9 They have also produced a collection of articles from their paper between 1988-94 which summarises their critique of Morenoism over national and international issues. JIR-TE produced an irregular paper *Hasta La Victoria*

10 'Notes for a history of Argentine Trotskyism?', by Hugo Ramirez and Pablo Cortina in *Estrategia Internacional* no 4/5 July 1995

11 'The Strategy of Soviets in the Struggle for a Workers Republic?', Emilio Albamonte and Fredy Lizarrague, in *Estrategia Internacional* No 4/5 p11

12 *ibid*

13 'The Strategy of Soviets in the Struggle for a Workers Republic?' *op cit*

14 *ibid*

15 See, *The Death Agony of the Fourth International, Workers Power and Irish Workers Group*, London 1982

16 'By way of an editorial?' in *Estrategia Internacional* No6 July 1996 p12.

17 *ibid*

18 *ibid*

19 *ibid*

20 The Internationalist Faction changed its name at an international meeting in January 1996.

21 'Nine Theses on the Dynamic and Structure of the World Revolution?' in *Estrategia Internacional* No3 1993 p?

22 *ref*

23 i.e. the ruling stratum of the bureaucracy responsible for appointments and the self-perpetuation of the caste.

24 'Theses on Gorbachev?' and 'Gorbachev and the Soviet Working Class?' in *Permanent Revolution* No6, London, 1987

25 These measures involve the retention of central planning at least via banking but with market incentives and a degree of autonomy for the enterprises. See 'Plan Versus Market?', *Trotskyist Bulletin* no9 London 1996

26 See 'Understanding the restoration process?' *Trotskyist International* No7 and 'On the brink of capitalism?' *Trotskyist International* 16 1995. Unfortunately the working class did not actively resist the break up of direct planning agencies during 1989-92, mistakenly seeing in these part of the apparatus of repression and impoverishment.

27 ?By Way of an Editorial? op cit p10. It is not clear whether the PTS feel that such class battles lie ahead in central Europe, lie behind us or are not necessary for capitalism to be restored there. But articles written early in 1993 on Eastern Europe and Poland suggest that the same class battles were necessary. See EI no3

28 ibid p7

29 ibid. The comrades elsewhere repeat that today there is ?a lack of a reliable agent of any weight in the heart of the masses comparable to Stalinism.? ibid p8

30 ?Post-1989?, Rebelión No59

31 ?By Way of an Editorial? op cit p6

32 ibid

33 ?By Way of an Editorial? op cit p10

34 ibid

35 Trotskyist International No 15, 1994 p5

36 ?By Way of an Editorial? op cit p12

37 ?By Way of an Editorial? op cit p12

38 ibid

39 ?Declaration of Principles? adopted by PTS Open Congress that launched the new movement.

40 ?ibid

41 See Workers Power No206 for an account of the Movement for a Revolutionary Workers Party and its new paper La Verdad Obrera

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