Chapter 7 - For a revolutionary communist international

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The working class needs a revolutionary party in order to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. Only a revolutionary party, which wins over the majority of the organised working class in the revolutionised unions, the factory committees, workers' militias and workers' councils, can take power.

Only a party can hold onto power against counter-revolution, protect it against bureaucratic degeneration and extend the revolution internationally. The building of a Leninist party in each country is the fundamental task of revolutionaries.

The revolutionary party must separate itself from all reformist or centrist elements while at the same time offering the firmest fighting unity to all layers of the working class. Any tendency to subordinate the party to united front bodies, or dissolve it into a permanent front which only addresses the masses on the basis of the lowest common denominator will lead the revolutionary party into centrist degeneration. The Argentinian MAS in the 1980s provides a classic example of this danger.

The Leninist vanguard party functions on the basis of democratic centralism. Democracy in the choice of leaders and the determination of strategy and tactics trains critical, self reliant cadres. Free expression of differences is thus essential.

Bureaucratism trains pliant tools not militant fighters. When serious and prolonged differences emerge in the party the formation of organised tendencies and even factions may be a "necessary evil". Therefore the right to form tendencies and factions must be jealously safeguarded. Just as Stalinism has corrupted and devalued the word "communism", so to it has turned Leninist party organisation into a bureaucratic caricature, based on a dead monolithism.

Centralised discipline is an essential means of concentrating all the force of the revolutionary vanguard on the bourgeoisie and its state. It renders each action of the party more effective. Discipline can be a life and death question when carrying on work in conditions of illegality, or in the face of brutal repression. Consequently, the revolutionary organisation is not a discussion club.

When political disputes are resolved by a vote inside the organisation then it is the duty of all members to carry out all decisions and actions that flow from such a vote, in a loyal and systematic fashion. After the carrying out of such decisions and actions it is entirely permissible to review the policy under dispute and attempt to change it. Such genuine democratic centralism is essential at all stages of party building.

Very often the initial stages of party building will be devoted primarily to propaganda. Where there are only a handful of revolutionaries in a given country the main task will be to clarify the most fundamental questions of programme.
Nevertheless, we always aim to test and apply our programme through intervention into the class struggle wherever possible. As the organisation grows to become a fighting propaganda group it will increasingly take part in mass struggles, fighting for leadership, making practical proposals for how struggles can be won and drawing the lessons of them in order to win over the most advanced elements of the class to the revolutionary programme.

The passage from the fighting propaganda group to the Leninist combat party cannot be achieved by launching a handful of cadre into shallow "mass work", or by making opportunist adaptations in situations of heightened class struggle. Where important leftward moving centrist forces exist within centrist or reformist parties it may be necessary to enter such organisations, with the twin objective of a united struggle against the right wing party leaders and the construction of a revolutionary tendency.

In this way the best class fighters can be rallied to the perspective of building a revolutionary party. This tactic is in no way an inevitable stage in party building. Nor does it have anything in common with the strategic "deep entry" practiced by various right centrist "Trotskyist" organisations since the late 1940s. These have become buried deep within the reformist parties and long ago abandoned the struggle for the revolutionary programme.

A genuine revolutionary party exercises a strong influence on the vanguard of the class. It is composed of communist cadres, has a sizeable national implantation in the advanced sectors of the proletariat, and is able to organise mass struggles. In revolutionary and pre-revolutionary situations the party must develop into a mass party in order to organise the masses for the seizure of power.

**For a mass revolutionary workers' party**

In many countries in the imperialised world, and even in certain imperialist countries, decades of capitalist growth have seen a massive expansion of the proletariat and its trade unions, without a corresponding growth in its political parties. The workers and the unions frequently remain loyal to bourgeois or petit bourgeois nationalist parties, or even to forms of Bonapartism. Under such conditions the fight to build a revolutionary party will be closely intertwined with the struggle for the political independence of the working class.

In the 1930s in the USA, Trotsky advanced the slogan of a workers' party based on the trade unions as a way of overcoming the political backwardness of the US workers and of answering the felt need for political organisation in the wake of the massive class struggles of the mid-1930s. This was in no way a call for a reformist, Social Democratic party, but a tactic advanced by Trotsky in the fight for a revolutionary party.

Generally an important device for making propaganda for class independence and to expose the bureaucrats' subservience to the bosses, the workers' party slogan can become on occasion a sharp agitational weapon. The call for a workers' party is a call for the trade unions to break with the open parties of the bourgeoisie and to fight for the construction of a party of the whole working class.

They should cease to pledge the loyalty of the working class to its class enemies. The unions are central to this call, precisely because it will generally become operative under conditions of heightened class struggle in which a massive influx of radicalised workers into the unions has taken place (USA in the 1930s, South Africa and Brazil in the 1980s).

In such circumstances the danger exists that if revolutionaries do not utilise the workers' party tactic and intervene in the process of its creation then the reformists themselves may well direct the radicalised workers towards the creation of a reformist party, or a renegotiated pact with the bourgeois or petit
bourgeois parties.

The workers' party tactic is not an inevitable stage in the political development of the working class. Its agitational use will depend upon the concrete circumstances in each country. However, we are quite clear that in fighting for the creation of a workers' party, we propose that it should be based on the revolutionary programme.

We fight to prevent a reformist or centrist noose being placed around the neck of the proletariat. But the nature of this party cannot be laid down in advance as an ultimatum. Its nature will be determined by the struggle between revolutionaries and the misleaders.

Where there is no tradition of mass political organisation of the working class, the political struggle inside the workers' party to defend the interests of the workers allows for the polarisation of the existing political tendencies within the working class. This is shown by the development of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) during the 1980s.

**The revolutionary International**

The imperialists and their henchmen in the semi-colonies and the workers' states co-ordinate their actions against the proletariat on an international scale through the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, Comecon, and military blocs such as NATO, the Warsaw Pact. Against their "Internationals", we have to build a working class mass revolutionary International, in order to overcome the chauvinism and racism that bourgeois society imposes on the ranks of the world working class.

The goal of this international will be the revolutionary destruction of capitalist and Stalinist rule throughout the world. It will take the lead in the liberation of the whole of humanity from the twin yokes of exploitation and oppression. The international dictatorship of the proletariat will lay the basis for a world socialist system and move to eradicate all traces of the old order in the march to world communism.

Before and after the revolution, the task of creating a revolutionary programme and party is an international one. There can be no question of fighting to build large national parties first and then linking them together in a mass international. National parties built in isolation will succumb to national narrowness and one-sidedness.

In the imperialist countries this will involve a tendency to accommodate to economism and social chauvinism. In the semi-colonies it will lead to yielding to petit bourgeois nationalism and to blunting the class independence of the proletariat.

In the Stalinist states it will result in accommodation to the "reforming" wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy. If the national pressures of each country are to be overcome it is vital to develop a global perspective and intervene in the international class struggle. At all times it is essential to forge practical solidarity between workers in different countries.

No proletarian revolutionary International exists today. The Socialist International collapsed into reformism in 1914 when its major sections supported their "own" bourgeoisie in the First World War. Today it acts as a co-ordinating centre for Social Democratic reformists and their anti-working class plans.

The Comintern, under the crushing weight of Stalinism, collapsed politically in 1933 when its policy facilitated Hitler's coming to power. In 1943 Stalin cynically dissolved it. Nevertheless, the links between Communist Parties and the ruling castes in the degenerate(d) workers' states are still strong.
A hidden bureaucratic international links a majority of the world's Communist Parties to Moscow. But the Kremlin no longer commands a monopoly of loyalty. Eurocommunism put distance between Moscow and the western CPs and for others Cuba and China provide an alternative source of inspiration and funds. All this testifies to the continued process of disintegration of the world Stalinist movement.

The last revolutionary International, the Fourth International (FI), founded by Trotsky in 1938, no longer exists. The FI was founded on the perspective that it would rapidly come to lead millions during the revolutionary crises provoked by the Second World War. This did not take place, as Stalinism and Social Democracy emerged strengthened from the conflict.

The FI, however, continued to operate with its pre-war perspectives of imminent war and revolution. Weakened by Stalinist and imperialist repression, and having suffered political and organisational dislocation and disarray during the war, the FI was unable to chart a course for the world working class in the new conditions which opened up after the end of the Second World War.

Between 1948 and 1951 the Fourth International moved further and further away from the Marxist method as it made a series of political adaptations, ceding the leading role in the class struggle to supposedly "centrist" forces of Stalinist, Social Democratic or petit bourgeois nationalist origin. The first and most dramatic example was that of Yugoslavia. Following the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, the FI declared that Tito was no longer a Stalinist and opposed the slogan of political revolution in Yugoslavia.

Underpinning this degeneration was a perspective of an impending world war which would be rapidly transformed into an international civil war. The failure to re-elaborate programme and perspectives led to the adoption of a systematic centrist method by the 1951 World Congress of the Fourth International; the FI was politically destroyed. In the Bolivian revolution of 1952 the centrist FI supported a bourgeois government of the nationalist MNR and criminally squandered the potential for proletarian power.

In 1951 the FI ceased to exist as a revolutionary organisation. In 1953 it ceased to exist as a united organisation when it split into warring centrist factions, none of which represented a political continuity with the revolutionary Fourth International of 1938-48.

After 1953 the International Secretariat (IS) side of the split pioneered the right centrist deviation of the FI. In its subsequent incarnation after 1963, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), this trend has consistently adapted to various Stalinist, petit bourgeois nationalist and social democratic trends. The main opposition to the IS after 1953 was the International Committee (IC).

Despite certain partially correct criticisms of the IS, the IC fundamentally continued to apply the method of the centrist FI. Its British section's deep entry work into the Labour Party was thoroughly opportunist. It bent the knee to petit bourgeois nationalism and Maoism. Its hallmark was a catastrophist perspective woodenly lifted from the 1938 Transitional Programme.

As with the "Socialist" and "Communist" Internationals, the legacy of the political and organisational degeneration of the Fourth International persists today. There exist several international centrist currents which claim its heritage and with which we are in political combat. Yet all of them share the same incapacity to use the method of Lenin and Trotsky to guide the world working class to victory. The task of the day is clear: the construction of a new Revolutionary Communist International.

The LRCI is the instrument for the creation of a new Leninist-Trotskyist mass revolutionary international. We do not start this struggle from scratch. We stand in the political tradition of Marx and Engels' First International, the struggle of the revolutionary internationalists inside the Second International, the first four
congresses of Lenin's Communist (Third) International, Trotsky's struggle for the defence and re-elaboration of the revolutionary programme, and the revolutionary positions of the Fourth International from 1938-48. We therefore begin our work on the basis of the struggles and programmatic gains of the last century and a half.

The struggle against centrism

Centrism occupies a middle position between revolutionary communism and reformism, eclectically combining theory stolen from the former and adapting to the "practical politics" of the latter. It is not a new phenomenon. Right from the outset of the Marxist movement, a century and a half ago, centrism has developed in the form of organisations moving rightwards away from revolutionary politics (the Socialist International pre-1914, the Stalinist Comintern in the 1920s and early 1930s, the Fourth International in the late 1940s and early 1950s). But as with the Pivertists in the French SFIO in the mid-1930s and tendencies within the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, we have also witnessed centrist tendencies moving leftwards away from reformism.

Centrism is congenitally incapable of leading the working class to victory. It makes fine sounding "revolutionary" declarations whilst refusing to commit itself to a definite strategy or a concrete programme. Unable to unite theory and practice, centrism's theoretical method is fundamentally based on impressionism: a light-minded development of "new theories" for an ever "new" reality which tramples on the doctrine and method of Marxism.

In the rapids of revolution centrism's wild zig-zags allow vital opportunities to pass and hand the initiative back to the consciously counter-revolutionary forces of Social Democracy and Stalinism. Hence its danger for the working class. Each time centrism has led the workers in a decisive conflict (Germany 1919, Italy 1920, China 1927, Spain 1937, Bolivia 1952, 1971 and 1976, to name but a few), the result has been disastrous.

The example of the POUM in the Spanish Civil War shows how a centrist organisation can obstruct the building of the revolutionary party. Far from leading the masses to victory, the centrist POUM provided left cover for the Stalinists' counter-revolutionary popular front and covered up for the betrayals of the anarchists, thus helping to pave the way for the crushing of the Spanish working class by Franco.

Centrism is above all a phenomenon of movement--of development or degeneration--to the left or the right. But in the absence of both mass revolutionary events and of a powerful revolutionary pole of attraction, centrism may be able to maintain itself for extended periods, taking on an ossified existence. This was the nature of the developing centrism of Karl Kautsky inside the Socialist International before 1914. Such right-centrism is consistently reformist in practice, but is prepared to use pseudo-revolutionary phraseology until its passage into the camp of reformism. This is the nature of many organisations around the world which claim to be "Trotskyist".

Sectarianism fears the living struggles of the working class. It justifies its inactivity in the name of the "preservation of principles". Sectarianism abstains from the mass organisations of the workers and prefers to hide in fake "revolutionary" bodies. In short, it has nothing in common with revolutionary Marxism and everything in common with centrism.

Despite what wooden sectarians might wish to imagine, sectarianism and opportunism are not opposites, but are the product of the same political method: both have no confidence in the ability of the working class to mobilise around the revolutionary programme. The opportunist seeks to dilute the programme, the sectarian abstains from decisive intervention in the class on the basis of that programme.
The essential identity of the two methods is shown by the sectarian lurch of the centrist Communist International between 1928-33, and the ultra-leftism of the USFI (1967-74).

The struggle against centrisms of all sorts has been a decisive feature of the construction of every revolutionary international. Marx and Engels fought against the anarchists; Lenin and Luxemburg led the fight against the centrist leadership of the Socialist International. The Comintern won over the left centrist syndicalists in France and the German USPD, and broke the left wing from the Italian PSI.

In the fight to build the Fourth International, Trotsky directed his polemics against the centrist forces emerging from the Comintern (e.g. Bordiga, Treint, Souvarine) and from the Social Democracy (e.g. the Independent Labour Party--ILP--in Britain and Pivert in France). At the same time he proposed unity in action with centrists wherever possible. This is the way we orient to today’s centrist forces.

The transition from centrism to revolutionary politics involves not merely a development but a decisive break. It is not a gradual or inevitable process. The great majority of centrist organisations have not become revolutionary.

Either they have disintegrated (like the ILP and the POUM in the 1930s) or they have degenerated into reformism (the MIRs of Latin America). Where centrist parties have become sizeable mass formations they cannot long balance between reform or revolution. Thus the PUM of Peru and Democrazia Proletaria in Italy are developing ever more pronouncedly reformist wings.

Forms of unstable centrism have also appeared during the last forty years under the impact of Maoism and of the Cuban Revolution, notably in the semi-colonies. Although the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1964-69) was in reality a bureaucratic faction fight, the radical phrase-mongering of the Maoist wing struck a sympathetic chord amongst both opponents of the Moscow Stalinists and anti-imperialist forces. Maoist groups in West Germany, Italy and a number of semi-colonies were founded upon radicalised, generally youthful forces, and many briefly passed though a period of centrist development.

The reactionary reality of Maoism, as expressed in the massacres of proletarian forces in Wuhan and Guangdong during the Cultural Revolution, and the rapprochement with Nixon and Pinochet, coupled with the rise in European Social Democracy, brought this period to an end in the early 1970s.

In the semi-colonial world the MIR groups, born under the influence of Guevarism and the Cuban Revolution, rapidly declined into Social Democratic, petit bourgeois nationalist or even outright bourgeois parties. Different in origin again, centrist tendencies inside the degenerate(d) workers’ states have developed, faced with the crisis of Stalinism. They combine revolutionary hostility to the regime with confused, often Social Democratic influenced, programmes.

The main form of centrism which currently exists on an international scale is that which has its roots in the degeneration of the Fourth International. Organisations which have developed from this root have put forward partial critiques of Social Democracy, of Stalinism or of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International.

Many have tried to re-establish a revolutionary continuity and yet in every case we know of this attempt has failed. None of these groups have been able to consistently put forward a revolutionary programme for the masses, nor to implement it in struggle on either a day to day basis or in the major revolutionary situations of the last forty years.

In general, their errors have been of little immediate consequence to the outcome of the struggles of the world proletariat due to their lack of implantation in it. Nevertheless, centrists who claimed to be Trotskyists
have played important roles in the failure of the 1952 revolution in Bolivia and in the throwing away of a

Corrupted by opportunist adaptation, these organisations have all repeated the mistake of the centrist
Fourth International by placing their faith in the "revolutionary process", in tailing this or that "left" tendency
within reformism or petit bourgeois nationalism in the hope that they will prove the new vehicle for the
disembodied "world revolution".

This is true of the systematic adaptation of the USFI. They consider Nicaragua to be a healthy workers'
state and do not fight to overthrow the bureaucratic Castro regime in Cuba. It is also the case for the
International Workers League, founded by Nahuel Moreno, which first adapted first to Peronism and then
to Stalism in its home country, Argentina.

It is to be found no less obviously in the tailing of petit bourgeois nationalists and reformists which led the
Lambertist current which founded the Fourth International (International Centre of Reconstruction) to hail
Algerian nationalists as "Bolsheviks", and today leads them to propose the construction of a "workers' internationa"l around a reformist programme centred on bourgeois democratic demands. The international
tendency around the British "Militant" group, which hides its origins in the Fourth International, aims to
transform Social Democratic parties.

The groupings around the British Socialist Workers Party and the French organisation Lutte Ouvrière tail
the spontaneous working class struggle and make no operative use of a transitional programme. The fact
that these organisations have continued to exist, in one form or another, for forty years, is a testimony to
their isolation from the international working class, not to the strength or validity of their politics.

The forces for a new International will include many of the best class fighters who currently find themselves
trapped within the centrist organisations. The sections of our own international organisation all have their
origins in breaks with centrisim. Splits, fusions and regroupments will prove necessary and for the LRCI it is
particularly important to engage in polemic and joint action with those centrists who falsely lay claim to be
Trotskyists. In this we start with Trotsky's injunction "programme first!".

Build the LRCI, build a Revolutionary Communist International!

Imperialism is a formidable enemy. It has rich resources which it uses to corrupt and coerce the
proletariat's reformist leaders; it deploys a huge state apparatus to oppress and kill workers all over the
world. But it cannot stop the class struggle that erupts ceaselessly out of capitalism's fundamental
contradictions. Every cycle of expansion and prosperity brings confidence to the struggle. In every crisis it
roused the exploited to further assaults against the rulers of the world.

Whether the opportunity comes sooner or later to cast all the agents of capitalism into the abyss, the world
working class needs an international revolutionary party. The LRCI is setting out to build such a world party
of communist revolution. We have begun with the elaboration of a series of revolutionary positions on key
international struggles, and with the re-elaboration of the international revolutionary programme.

This task is nearly fifty years overdue but in tackling it we base our programme on the politics and the
method of unfalsified Trotskyism, of revolutionary Marxism. Our objective is the construction of a new world
party of communist revolution, a refounded Leninist Trotskyist International.

Is the LRCI far from this goal? Are its forces too small faced with a challenge of this magnitude? It is
certainly true that our forces are weak, weaker by far than Trotsky's Fourth International at its foundation in
1938. We have as yet but a handful of cadres in a handful of countries. But we have no right to let this fact
daunt us, or deter us from taking up the struggle.

Despite a long mid-century period of imperialist stability, the imperialist epoch remains one of wars and revolutions. Yet events do not move at an even pace nor are parties built simply by a slow accumulation of cadres. There come periods of crisis and revolution when the tasks of years or decades can be accomplished in weeks or months. But for the proletariat to take advantage of such periods we must have a programme to build on and cadres to give leadership.

That is why there is no time to lose. We must lay the foundations now. We appeal to all militants who lay claim to the revolutionary traditions of the international proletariat, repulsed by centrist vacillations; we appeal to all working class fighters, revolted at the betrayals of reformism, petit bourgeois nationalism and the trade union bureaucracy: join

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