



The Entry Tactic

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From 1934 Trotsky developed a tactic which involved the total entry of the Bolshevik-Leninists (the name used by Trotskyists at that time) into social democratic and centrist parties.

Trotsky did not regard it as a long term tactic, let alone an attempt to transform the social democratic parties into parties that could carry out the social revolution. Trotsky's criteria for the entry tactic was as follows:

- 1) that there was a serious leftward movement of the masses, that is, a revolutionary ferment leading to tensions between the rank and file and the leadership. The actual background for the 'French Turn' was the triumph of fascism in Germany and the awakening of the French workers to the danger it presented to them;
- 2) the formation, by the SFIO and the CP under mass pressure, of the very united front which the Trotskyists alone had fought for from 1930 to 1933. Now, owing to the small size of Trotskyist groups and Stalinist persecution of them, they risked being excluded from the united front;
- 3) an approaching revolutionary situation was drawing workers into the SFIO and obliging its leaders to adopt centrist rhetoric;
- 4) the split away of the right-wing (the 'neo-socialists') and the opening up of a factional struggle between centrist currents (e.g. the 'Bataille Socialiste' paper edited by Zyromski and Pivert) and the Blum leadership created severe tensions within the SFIO.

Trotsky concluded from these factors that:

"Its internal situation permits the possibility of our entering it with our own banner. The environment suits the aims we have set for ourselves. What is necessary now is to act in such a manner that our declaration will not in any way strengthen the leading bourgeois wing but rather will support the progressive proletarian wing; that its text and distribution will allow us to hold our heads high in case of acceptance as well as in case of dilatory manoeuvres or rejection. There is no question of dissolving ourselves. We enter as the Bolshevik-Leninist faction, our organisational ties remain the same, our press continues to exist just as do 'Bataille Socialiste' and others..."

Trotsky argued for entry on the full programme of the ICL/Fl. He insisted on a paper aimed at presenting this programme and propagandising for it-an 'action programme' which posed the key tasks of the coming period. He called for a specific orientation towards the youth.

There was to be no let-up in criticism of the reformist leadership and no amalgamation with the left reformist/centrist elements. The 'turn' was inaugurated in September 1934. The French Bolshevik-Leninists were divided on the issue of entry. A grouping around Pierre Naville denounced it as a capitulation. They split from the French section over entry but then entered the SFIO themselves shortly thereafter. Trotsky harshly criticised this split saying that Naville's intransigence was merely due to his being 'frightened by the prospect of a ferocious battle against a powerful apparatus'.

Once in the SFIO, however, Trotsky observed that Naville had, despite his apparent intransigence, '... abandoned the banner of the organisation, the programme. He does not wish to be more than the left-wing of the SP. He has already presented motions in common with the left-wing, confused opportunist motions, full of the verbiage of so-called left centrism.'

The same weaknesses were displayed later by another grouping in the French section around Raymond Molinier, when

the question of a final fight against expulsions was raised. The Trotskyists entered with about one hundred members plus some youth.

By June 1935 their forces were strong enough to force Blum to debate them at the Mulhouse Congress. Their membership rose to 300 by the summer of 1935. They were at their strongest in the Paris region (Seine Federation) where their principal resolution at its congress received 1,037 votes as against 2,370 for Bataille Socialiste and 1,570 for Blum and the Executive. They also formed a powerful tendency within the Socialist Youth where they co-operated with, and eventually won over, a grouping of youth led by Fred Zeller, who had previously supported the centrist Pivert.

Throughout this period the Trotskyists had maintained their full revolutionary criticism not only of Blum and the leadership, but also of Zyromsky and Pivert.

Armed by Trotsky with an action programme and with articles and pamphlets which explained the Bolshevik-Leninist Group's full revolutionary perspective and programme, they concentrated their fire on the opportunist practice of the united front being pursued by the French Communist Party and the SFIO. They stigmatised its empty parades. They attacked it as an unprincipled mutual non-aggression pact. They argued for committees of action and a workers' militia against the fascist menace.

However, events were moving to limit the duration of the "French Turn". These were:

- 1) The onset of the "Popular Front" policy (formed on 14 July 1935) linking the SFIO, the PCF and the bourgeois Radical Party-a line endorsed and generalised at the 7th Comintern Congress during July and August of that year.
- 2) The Stalin-Laval pact stated, "Stalin approves of French defence policy", that is, re-armament. This was initiated as a Franco-Soviet pact against Hitler but it was extended to PCF support for national defence. The Popular Front therefore became a vehicle for social-patriotic preparation for the second imperialist war.
- 3) The final collapse of the Comintern into social-patriotism sharpened the need to set in hand the formation of the Fourth International.
- 4) The Blum leadership - under Stalinist pressure-moved to expel the Bolshevik-Leninists.
- 5) Strikes, riots and mutinies broke out in Brest and Toulon, clearly indicating an approaching mass workers' struggle.

The Trotskyists had collaborated with Pivert and his followers over practical issues-workers' defence, defence against the party leadership. But they had not mixed their politics or ceased criticism of his left centrism. However, faced with the need to end their work in the SFIO and set up an independent party, the GBL hesitated.

All three tendencies in the leadership of the GBL fought the expulsion of GBL members from the SFIO on constitutional grounds, accusing Blum of being a "splitter". This was accompanied by a weakening (and even hiding) of their criticism of the SFIO leaders and of Pivert. Revealing his ingrained centrism, Pivert refused to consider leaving the SFIO and, just after the expulsions began, he split from Zyromski and set up the "Gauche Revolutionnaire" tendency.

This was designed to limit the number of SFIO members going to the GBL. During this period the GBL showed that they did not know when and how to leave the SFIO. They began making political concessions in order to remain in the party. Pivert was not criticised for fear of losing his (purely verbal) "support" against the expulsions.

In December 1935 Trotsky pointed out that "It is necessary to know not only how to enter but also how to leave. When you continue to hang onto an organisation that can no longer tolerate proletarian revolutionaries in its midst, you become of necessity the wretched tool of reformism, patriotism and capitalism."

All three tendencies agreed at this time that the GBL should set up a "mass paper" and that its programme should be something other than the full revolutionary programme. This was perhaps the first attempt by would-be Trotskyists to set up a centrist paper and organisation. But even on this point the organisation hesitated.

It was left up to the Molinier/Frank tendency to carry out the logic of this capitulation to social patriotism. They offered

to set up a joint 'mass paper' with Pivert. He refused. Undeterred, they launched such a paper - La Commune-themselves. For this they were expelled from the GBL for breaking discipline. The split lasted until June 1936, and effectively crippled the French Trotskyists, seriously limiting their ability to intervene in the great general strike of that summer. Trotsky summed up the principles of the entry work associated with the 'French Turn' in the article 'Lessons of the SFIO Entry'.

1. Entry into a reformist centrist party in itself does not include a long term perspective It is only a stage which, under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode.
2. The crisis and the threat of war have a double effect. First, they create the conditions in which the entry itself becomes possible in a general way, but on the other hand they force the ruling apparatus to resort to expelling the revolutionary elements.
3. To recognise in time the bureaucracy's decisive attack against the left wing, and defend ourselves from it, not by making concessions, adapting or playing hide and seek, but by a revolutionary offensive.
4. What has been said above does not at all exclude the task of 'adapting' to workers who are in the reformist parties by teaching them new ideas in the language they understand On the contrary, this art must be learned as quickly as possible. But one must not, under the pretext of leading the ranks, make principled concessions to the top centrists and left centrists.
5. Devote the most attention to the youth.
6. . . . firm ideological cohesion and perspicacity towards our entire international experience."

In the years 1933-38 other entry tactics included the entry of the British Trotskyists into the centrist ILP (1933-6) and then into the Labour Party; the entry of the American Trotskyists into the American Socialist Party (1936-7) and the entry of the Belgian Trotskyists into the Belgian Labour Party (POB). In each case-in so far as Trotsky himself could influence matters-the principles of the tactic remained the same.

Trotsky's view of the entry tactic as exemplified in the French turn, was firmly based on addressing an important section of the vanguard elements of the working class, of winning them to communism and the Fourth International. It was not viewed as a process of transformation of the Social Democratic parties into revolutionary or roughly revolutionary ones. This evolutionist distortion of the entry tactic which is current today, dates from the period of the degeneration of the FI in the late 1940s. It involves the creation not of a revolutionary communist tendency or faction in social democracy winning to itself leftward moving reformists or subjectively revolutionary elements. Instead it sets about the creation of a centrist current with the 'perspective' that this will automatically develop in a revolutionary direction under the pressure of objective circumstances.

Nowhere in Trotsky's writings will one find any advice to form blocs for propaganda with centrists-let alone with 'left' reformists. Quite the reverse! Trotsky's political intransigence vis-a-vis Pivert during the entry tactic-a figure one hundred times further to the left than a Bevan or a Benn -is a measure of the degeneracy of the post-war epigones of the Fourth International- Pablo, Mandel, Healy, Grant.

The perspective of the entry tactic must be to raise the full revolutionary programme within the reformist party. Around this banner, the best elements within that party must be rallied. To achieve this there must be a real prospect of a sympathetic response from advanced workers in the reformist party to the presence of revolutionaries.

On the basis of workers' democracy, the advanced elements must be prepared to tolerate, listen to and defend a revolutionary minority against the labour bureaucracy. The revolutionaries must address these workers with a revolutionary action programme, and specific 'united front' demands.

This way, via unity in action on immediate, and where possible, transitional demands, a hearing can be won for communist tactics and propaganda. A revolutionary tendency can thus be crystallised-winning workers from left reformism and centrism. Faced with the inevitable attack of the party bureaucracy and the capitulation of the fake left leaders, communists will wage an intransigent defence of their programme not fearing expulsion.

Communists have no strategic commitment to membership of reformist parties. Since their tactic is to win workers from reformism, their aim can never be to stay in at all costs. That would lead to programmatic concessions in order to remain. If the rank and file supporters recruited inside social democracy have really been imbued with communist ideas they can and, will be, won to face expulsion and an independent existence as a revolutionary organisation.

Of course, this cannot be done by inculcating a morbid fear of expulsion, of 'sectarianism' or isolation. A communist who cannot stand alone, cannot swim against the stream and cannot find the path back to the masses, is no communist.

The general practice of 'Trotskyists' with regard to the entry tactic has been far removed from Trotsky's method since at least 1951. The 'theorist' of this break from Trotsky's tactical method was Michel Pablo, Secretary of the Fourth International. Pablo's report to the Tenth Plenum of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International embodied this entryism 'of a special type' or 'entryism sui generis'.

Its very name suggested the break from Trotsky's method, and indeed Pablo did not conceal it. Referring to Healy's practice he remarked: 'It has been developed since then in a manner considerably different, I would almost say qualitatively different, from 'entrism' as it was practised by our movement in the years 1934-8.'

Pablo envisaged 'long-term entryism' in all countries whose working class movements were dominated by 'reformism or Stalinism'. Pablo's 'tactic' was initially justified on the basis of a perspective of imminent war and revolution, on an objective process of world revolution whose time-scale would not allow for the smashing of the reformist parties and replacing them with revolutionary ones. Recognising that, for Trotsky, 'it was not a question of facing the tasks of the war and revolution by remaining inside these parties . . .', Pablo recognised the difference of his conception and stressed it heavily:

"We are entering them in order to remain there for a long time banking on the great possibility which exists of seeing these parties, placed under new conditions, develop centrist tendencies which will lead to a whole stage of the radicalisation of the masses and of the objective revolutionary process in their respective countries. We wish in reality from the inside of these tendencies to amplify and accelerate their left centrist ripening . . . and to contest even with the centrist leaders for the entire leadership of these tendencies.' Pablo is insistent that the task is to 'help in the development of their centrist tendencies and to give it leadership.' The tactics employed are to avoid 'every manoeuvre and every policy which runs the risk of prematurely cutting us off from the great mass of these parties.'

The self-boycotting of Trotskyist policies involved in this was stated unambiguously in the report of the Austrian commission. Austria, with Britain, had been one of the two 'special cases' in the 1944-47 period where the new entryism had been given a trial run-in the case of Britain under Pablo's direct supervision and at the cost of messily liquidating the Revolutionary Communist Party.

Thus in Austria 'The activity of our members will be governed by the following directives: a) not to come out as Trotskyists with our full programme; b) not to push forward programmatic and principled questions.' Instead of the 'old Trotskyism', a melange of immediate reform demands and demands culled from the Transitional Programme was concocted-all centring on policies to be adopted by the reformist parties in office.

The formula Pablo advanced as the summation of the politics to raise in the entry was, 'The Socialist Party to power in order to apply a Socialist policy.' In British terms the slogan 'Labour to Power on Socialist Policies/a Socialist Programme.'

Pablo's position, practised today by the majority of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International, is thoroughly liquidationist. By this we do not mean simply or exclusively the organisational liquidation of Trotskyist groups. This definition of 'Pabloite liquidationism' pioneered by the International Committee opponents of Pablo (Cannon, Healy, Lambert) was crude and erroneous.

The decisive aspect of Pablo's policy was the political, the programmatic liquidationism enshrined in his version of

entryism. This took place despite the maintenance of an organisationally independent Fourth International throughout the 1950s. We completely reject 'entryism sui generis' as a tactic and we regard it as a departure, in principle, from revolutionary communism.

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