



The situation in Lithuania and the tasks of Trotskyists

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The Baltic countries?Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia?have become a central arena in the struggles for national self-determination and against Great Russian chauvinism in the USSR. The national question has become a central question of the proletarian political revolution. The Baltic states were violently occupied and annexed by the Soviet Army as a consequence of the reactionary Hitler-Stalin pact. Since then these countries have been nationally oppressed, with a Russian-dominated ruling bureaucracy making all important decisions concerning the Baltics on behalf of the Kremlin.

By 1987 the striving for national independence, provoked by this oppression and unleashed by the regionalisation and de-centralisation of perestroika as well as by glasnost, had led to the establishment of broad popular front movements. These movements were initially formed as a bloc between pro-perestroika Stalinists and secessionist nationalists.

As the crisis of the USSR has deepened and the conflict between the oppressed peoples and the central administration has unfolded, so the former have lost ever more ground to the increasingly strident restorationist nationalists. This has particularly been the case with the Sajudis in Lithuania, although it is a tendency which is being replicated elsewhere in the minority republics.

The right of self-determination

Sajudis has become the central voice of the Lithuanian people, pushing for separation from the USSR and the formation of an independent state. As revolutionary communists we unconditionally support the right of national self-determination up to the right of state secession. Lenin established the fact that nationalism, stimulated by national oppression, could not be overcome simply by appeals for the necessary international unification of the working class.

The proletariat of the oppressor nation (in this case the Russian) must first give the oppressed nationality or nation the unrestricted right of national self-determination. Only in this way can the foundations of a voluntary and equal federation between two peoples be laid. Our aim, therefore, is the transformation of the USSR into a voluntary federation of peoples on the basis of democratically planned property relations.

Trotskyists do not demand state separation as a matter of principle. However, we do defend unconditionally the oppressed nation?s right to secede. We are in favour of bigger associations of states which make possible a better development of the productive forces. The only way to a revolutionary solution of the national question is the common struggle of the working classes of the oppressed and oppressor nations. This is the quickest way to smash the Stalinist bureaucracy, the common oppressor.

Relating to the national question

Sometimes national oppression can lead to such deep resentment that the nation concerned struggles for secession. In 1938 when the Ukraine was in just such a situation Trotsky developed the slogan ?For an Independent Soviet Ukraine!?. In such cases, if revolutionaries completely oppose the strivings for independence of an oppressed nation by opposing secession, they objectively give aid to the Kremlin bureaucracy.

Our task must be to relate to the justified struggles born out of this oppression and at the same time fight against the restorationist nationalist leaders. Therefore, in keeping with the methods developed by Lenin and Trotsky, wherever it

is clear that the oppressed masses are striving for independence we raise the slogan 'For an independent workers' state.'

National oppression in the Baltics has now led to the first confrontation in Lithuania. The overwhelming majority of Lithuanian people want to secede from the USSR and found their own state. What character do the different forces involved in this conflict have?

The Kremlin bureaucracy under Gorbachev wants to build up the Baltics as a market economy bridgehead from which they can develop good trade links to imperialism in general and the Scandinavian lands in particular. Gorbachev has actively encouraged the transition to capitalist relations of production under the control of the central Russian bureaucracy. The new law on independence for the Soviet republics requires a two-thirds majority to vote for independence. This has to be confirmed after five years in order to become operative and then it has to be ratified by the supreme Soviet. Gorbachev wants to hem in independence with as many restrictions as possible, tying Lithuania to Moscow.

To allow an immediate separation would set a precedent for all the other oppressed nationalities in the USSR. To show any weakness in the face of these secessionist demands would undermine Gorbachev's stand in relation to the conservatives within the central bureaucracy.

The nature of the Lithuanian nationalists

Sajudis is a heterogeneous petit bourgeois nationalist force which has gone beyond a simple uncritical identification with the bourgeois Lithuania of the inter-war period. Its February 1990 election programme unequivocally espoused the denationalisation of the Lithuanian economy. Forces within Sajudis range from Stalinists, social democrats and Christian democrats to semi-fascist elements.

The majority split from the Lithuanian CP around Brasauskas is still a Stalinist party with a restorationist programme similar to the PDS (GDR) or USP (Hungary). It represents that wing of the bureaucracy which hopes to save its privileges through the re-introduction of capitalism. In order to secure a modicum of popularity the minority wing of the CP took part in the foundation of Sajudis too. Both of them ultimately want to found an independent state with capitalist property relations. On the basis of capitalist restoration they promise economic prosperity through a federation with Latvia and Estonia with strong economic ties to Finland. This project, however, is illusory through and through. The future of a bourgeois Lithuania would be that of a semi-colony dependent on one or other imperialism.

What then is this conflict really about? It is not about capitalist restoration in itself. The differences of opinion between the Kremlin and Sajudis on this are simply about the timing and form of its realisation. No. The conflict is about the Russian bureaucracy maintaining control over the process of independence and continuing the Russian prerogatives in Lithuania, in a way analogous to Finnish-Soviet relations after 1945.

For the moment, the imperialist countries have adopted a restrained position. Not one of the leading western states has yet recognised the independent state of Lithuania declared by Sajudis. On the one hand they support the growing deterioration of the USSR. On the other they want to maintain Gorbachev in power and prevent a conservative-Stalinist putsch. On this basis an imperialist intervention in the Baltic in the event of a military advance by Soviet troops against the Lithuanian nationalists is extremely improbable.

We are in favour of the recognition of Lithuania's independence by all other states including bourgeois states. But we do not call on bourgeois governments to take action against the USSR through economic sanctions, boycotts or diplomatic manoeuvres. We would oppose any such actions by bourgeois governments and condemn them as attempts to promote restoration. The main focus of our struggle is to urge the Russian and other Soviet proletariats to stay Gorbachev's hand, to recognise Lithuania's independence and to force the Kremlin to withdraw its troops.

In Lithuania Trotskyists are confronted by the problem that the overwhelming majority of the Lithuanian proletariat is nationalist and united behind the bourgeois Sajudis. The task of revolutionaries, therefore, must be to differentiate

between the progressive and the backward elements of this consciousness and to open the way to the transition to revolutionary class consciousness. While we unconditionally support the struggle for independence against the Stalinist bureaucracy, at the same time we fight to break the Lithuanian proletariat away from its bourgeois leaders. In doing so we raise the slogan, 'For an independent workers' State of Lithuania!' In addition a sovereign workers' Lithuania would re-negotiate its economic and military treaties with the USSR.

In the present confrontation in Lithuania we fight on the side of the oppressed nation against the Soviet army of occupation. We support the right of all Lithuanian conscripts not to serve in the Soviet Armed Forces (SAF). The presence of the Soviet troops not only directly suppresses the Lithuanian right of self-determination. Every day they forcibly maintain the Moscow bureaucracy's power encourages nationalism and creates ever more fanatical anti-communists. Although at present there is no campaign against the Russian minority in Lithuania this could rapidly change in the course of an escalating civil war. Lastly, the nationalism called forth by the Russian occupation obscures every class contradiction and thus binds the Lithuanian proletariat to the domestic bourgeois leaders.

In order to prepare the ending of the Stalinist occupation and ease the way to the political independence of the proletariat, we demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Lithuania and the whole Baltic region. The Soviet troops should be disarmed and their military equipment should be given over to a Lithuanian workers' militia. Without the building of a workers' militia the Lithuanian proletariat will continue to be completely at the mercy of Stalinist despotism. Such a militia would organise working class men and women as members of a class, not, as in traditional bourgeois armies, as individual citizens. Approximately one third of the troops in Lithuania are Lithuanian. It will be essential to split them from the SAF in order to build a Lithuanian workers' militia. At the same time we are in favour of intervening among the Russian sections of the Soviet troops, fighting for fraternisation and to spread the ideas of the proletarian political revolution into the whole of the Soviet Union.

The present threat of intervention

In the present struggle against the threat of Soviet military action against the Lithuanian independence movement, and in the event of a civil war, we fight against the Stalinist oppressor and are ready to make strictly limited united front actions (joint demonstrations against nationalist oppression and for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, limited military agreements in the case of armed confrontations with the Kremlin) with the nationalist forces.

A military defeat of the Lithuanian independence movement by the SAF would not only consolidate the national oppression. It would also destroy any possibility of an independent workers' movement developing and would drive the masses into the arms of fascist elements.

By contrast, the political revolution must transcend the struggle for national independence through the building of an independent workers' movement and the proletarian seizure of power. In countries which have been nationally oppressed by the Kremlin bureaucracy it is entirely natural that the political revolution starts with the struggle against the Stalinist occupier. Only sectarians would be surprised that, after decades of brutal national oppression and Stalinist rule, deep illusions in bourgeois democracy exist.

Revolutionaries must stand alongside the Lithuanian proletariat in its legitimate struggle for national independence, while fighting against bourgeois forces to build an independent workers' movement and an internationalist revolutionary workers' party.

The other Baltic republics

Estonia and Latvia are also nationally oppressed by the Russian bureaucracy. Bourgeois nationalist popular front movements (and in Estonia the 'general citizens' committee?) have been built in reaction to this. In contrast to Lithuania, however, there are stronger, mainly Russian speaking, minorities (30-40%). These form the core sections of the Estonian and Latvian working class, sections of which are organised around the Stalinist 'Interfront' grouping. However, other sections remain neutral or even side with the separatists. This was evidenced by the recent elections in

both republics. During the last elections Interfront mobilised against the politics of the Baltic nationalists.

The movement is dominated by the Russian bureaucracy and acts simply as the agent of the Kremlin bureaucracy in the fight against Baltic independence. The fact that its 'anti-separatist' propaganda is often peppered with 'internationalist' and 'socialist' phrases in no way alters its reactionary character. It is precisely this Gorbachevite bureaucracy which was, and is, the initiator of the market economy reforms. So long as the Interfront acts simply as the fifth column of the bureaucracy against the national right of self-determination, we cannot support it despite its proletarian social composition. This in no way excludes united fronts in the event that the Interfront actually does fight against restorationist measures.

The task of Trotskyists is the fraternisation of the workers of the Baltic nations with all other national minorities, ultimately overcoming all nationalism in the process. Therefore, the Russian workers of the Interfront must be broken from the Russian bureaucracy and won to support for the Baltic peoples' right to self-determination. Only collaboration between the Baltic and the Russian workers on this basis will provide a firm foundation for the struggle against the threaten of capitalist restoration.

For the defence of planned property!

The Lithuanian proletariat is threatened by the danger of capitalist restoration from both the Gorbachevites and Sajudis. The central task of Trotskyists is to mobilise the workers against this menace, to fight tenaciously against every measure attacking the planned property relations. The workers' movement, independent of the bourgeois forces, must build workers' councils as organs of struggle and of future power. In the fight against capitalist restoration united fronts, even with Interfront, are possible. On this question there can be no compromise with the bourgeois Sajudis. Our objective is to create an independent workers' movement which will fight every restorationist measure, as well as politically opposing the bourgeois Sajudis leadership, in the confrontation with the Stalinist army of occupation.

Despite possible limited united front actions with the bourgeois nationalists, revolutionaries must develop uncompromising propaganda and agitation against the restorationist politics of Sajudis and the growing threat to the working class that they represent. We must warn the Lithuanian workers that the bourgeois forces are ready to negotiate a deal with the Russian bureaucracy if they are faced with the danger of a working class and an independence movement running out of their control. Lithuanian bureaucrats and bourgeois alike fear an independent proletariat a thousand times more than they fear the Kremlin bureaucracy. The danger of a sell-out of both national and proletarian interests is, therefore, very great!

Trotskyists link the building of such an independent workers' movement to the overthrow of the bureaucracy and the proletarian seizure of power. Only workers' power in a Lithuanian workers' state could secure self-determination and prevent the capitalist restoration measures which would bring the impoverishment of the Lithuanian proletariat. The Russian and Polish minorities must both be granted their full democratic rights for national language and cultural expression.

The basis of a Lithuanian workers' state would be a democratically centralised planned economy in which all decisions would be discussed and decided from bottom to top by workers' councils. However, we are under no illusions that such a workers' state in Lithuania could survive for very long if the revolution did not spread to the USSR and other countries?indeed, ultimately world-wide.

Trotskyists are the greatest enemies of the Stalinist theory of 'socialism in one country' the fruits of which can now be seen in the world-wide collapse of Stalinism. We fight for the internationalisation of the revolution because socialism can only be realised on a global scale.

Workers' power is impossible so long as there is no Trotskyist party in the Baltic countries. Such a party must be armed with a programme which commits it to the overthrow of the bureaucracy and to the proletarian political revolution. That will necessitate the most determined struggle against all steps in the direction of capitalist restoration.

Although a proletarian party is internationalist through and through and rejects all nationalism, it unconditionally recognises the right of self-determination for oppressed nations.

Against the fake 'emancipation' of women and Gorbachev's reactionary 'back to the home' slogan we pose the full socialisation of domestic labour as the precondition for the full liberation of women.

Our goal is the building of a workers' state as the basis for the international expansion of the proletarian revolution. Socialism can only be realised world-wide. Such a party can only exist as a section of a new revolutionary communist International. The LRCI has dedicated itself to the building of such an International.

'Self-determination for the Lithuanians and for all the Baltic peoples!

'Withdraw the Soviet army of occupation!

'For an internationalist struggle against any Kremlin inspired blockade against the Baltic states.

'For immediate recognition of Lithuanian independence by all states! No to any campaign of sanctions by imperialism to help restore capitalism!

'Build a workers' militias!

'For an independent workers' movement open to Russian workers!

'Down with the anti-working class deal threatened between Sajudis and Kremlin!

'For proletarian political revolution! Down with the Stalinist bureaucracy! For workers' power in the Baltic workers' states!

'For a federation of independent workers' states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia!

Against the Soviet crackdown in Lithuania!

Adopted by the International Secretariat of the LRCI, 15 January 1991

The bloody assault on the TV station in Vilnius that left fourteen dead indicates that a decisive shift has taken place within the Soviet bureaucracy. Taking advantage of the diversion of world attention due to the impending imperialist holocaust in the Middle East, and of the USA's continued need for the USSR's agreement in the Security Council, the military and the KGB are set on coercing the nationalities that have refused to accept Gorbachev's new centralist federation treaty. But events in Vilnius and Riga portend an even more far-ranging change. The inner bonapartist clique around Gorbachev finds the limited democratic rights known as glasnost increasingly intolerable.

The military and KGB clampdown on the Baltic republics is not only a test-bed for the suppression of the movements for national rights and independence throughout the USSR; it is preparing the way for the destruction of freedom of speech, assembly and organisation throughout the USSR. In particular it threatens the newly emerging labour movement with the loss of the right to strike, to organise unions and political parties free of the bureaucratic dictatorship.

Such a presidential coup d'état was prepared by the majority of the Supreme Soviet which gave full powers to Gorbachev in December. Most of the so-called radicals and reformers were involved in this spineless capitulation. Their pretext was that the impending economic catastrophe required the forcing through of 'economic reform'—further and decisive restorationist measures. Gorbachev, they believed, was their only hope. If he were to fall, the reformers fear that Kryuchkov and Yazhov could carry out a bloody restoration of unbridled party dictatorship. This would have as one of its first consequences the halting and reversal of 'economic reform' and could even lead to a new outbreak of Cold War with imperialism. The 'radicals'—deputies from impotent parliaments and the 'governments' without state forces—thus surrendered their only possession: their sham sovereignty. The pitiful thousand or so people who heeded the radicals' call to demonstrate in Moscow against the bloodshed in Lithuania demonstrates the bankruptcy of these politicians.

The KGB and army chiefs claim that the intervention is aimed at preventing the restoration of 'the bourgeois system'. But there is not the slightest evidence that the Sajudis government planned an armed insurrection against the Soviet

forces, or contemplated pogroms against, or the oppression, of the Russian and Polish minorities. Certainly Landsbergis and Prunskiene are restorationists. But they have neither the state power nor the economic wherewithal to implement capitalism in the short term.

Their stated programmes are not in fundamental contradiction to those of the Kremlin. In fact, as the fall of Prunskiene's government demonstrated, none of the authorities—local, regional, republican and all-Union—dare even carry through a fundamental price reform, for fear of a mass explosion. Just such an explosion was about to engulf Sajudis, thanks to Prunskiene's economic measures. Landsbergis, fearing the overnight dissipation of the nationalists' mass base, moved rapidly to oust the luckless Prunskiene. This contradiction between the Sajudis leadership and its mass base probably encouraged the military to strike there and then in order to test the ground for a future coup by Gorbachev or a successor.

This legal coup d'état is not a defence of the planned economy and the dictatorship of the proletariat against capitalist restoration, any more than was Jaruzelski's 1981 crushing of Solidarnosc in Poland or Li Peng's bloody carnage in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Bureaucratic conservative counter-revolution, whilst it may temporarily slow or modify the moves to restore capitalism, can wreak even greater damage on the proletariat, the only living force capable of defending the workers' state.

It would destroy the class conscious proletariat's attachment to the workers' state, which would be finally identified with a bloody despotism of the privileged generals and bureaucrats. It would have to destroy the organisations and combativity of the Soviet proletariat and nationalities built up over the last five years. The brutality and carnage that this would entail would do more than any other single crime of Stalinism to destroy what remains of the gains of October 1917.

In Lithuania, and increasingly in the other Soviet republics, a majority of the working class identifies its primary interests with national independence. If the Kremlin brutally suppresses these legitimate national demands, the result will be the consolidation of the alliance of the Lithuanian workers with those restorationists who they consider to be pursuing independence. The only way to break the working class from this alliance is to grant full national independence. The class consciousness of the Soviet proletariat is low and confused as a result of over sixty years of Stalinist dictatorship and economic bungling and corruption, especially with regard to the defence of planning. Only freedom and democracy for the workers, the collective farmers and the nationalities will enable the toilers to learn the key lessons of struggle. Workers' democracy will permit the proletarian political vanguard to re-form around a Trotskyist party, committed to the defence of gains of October 1917 and the total destruction of the Stalinist dictatorship, that is, to a thorough-going political revolution.

That is why Trotskyists and all working class fighters must defend the Lithuanian people's right to self-determination, and the right of all the USSR's nations to separate statehood if they so desire it. The defence of the planned property relations and the workers' state is not identical with the continued unity of the USSR; indeed, it is most certainly incompatible with the continued existence of a forcible union of peoples, a Russian 'empire'. Lenin and Trotsky were not the founders or defenders of this bureaucratic parody of a 'free federation of peoples'. Its true father was Stalin.

The bloody massacres of the Gorbachev era—Georgia, Azerbaijan and now Lithuania—and his deceitful and bullying attempt to force the nationalities to stay within a centralised federation has fatally weakened any potential for co-operation and fraternity. That can only be restored if the proletariat of the USSR and particularly the Russian workers take up the battle for the right to free, immediate and unhampered secession. The trade unions should immediately call on the whole of the Soviet proletariat to launch a general strike to end the attacks on the Baltic states, to bring an end to Gorbachev's Presidential dictatorship and fight for the establishment of a regime of workers' councils.

Internationally the proletariat must fight for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all SAF and KGB troops from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

? Down with the bloody butchers of Vilnius! Soviet troops out now!

? Hands off Lithuania, Latvia and all republics desiring separation!

? For an independent workers' state in Lithuania!

? Down with Gorbachev's coup!

? For proletarian political revolution!

? No imperialist sanctions against the USSR!

? Defend the USSR against imperialist intervention!

Solidarity with Lithuania!

Adopted by the International Secretariat of the LRCI, 22 April 1990

We fully support the right of Lithuania to secede from the USSR and create an independent state. We condemn the actions of the Gorbachev government in the USSR which is attempting to prevent the recently elected government of Lithuania from exercising its right to secede. We condemn the strong-arm tactics of Gorbachev in the economic blockade and the use of troops within Lithuania. We call on all states to give immediate recognition to Lithuania as an independent state. We condemn the hypocrisy of the US and British governments in particular, who are refusing to recognise Lithuania. We recognise the right of Lithuania to seek provision of those goods which the USSR is blockading, notably energy sources, and we condemn the hypocrisy of bourgeois governments in refusing to supply free credits. These goods must be given without conditions as Lithuania has no hard currency.

We call on workers to support the right of the Lithuanians to secede. We call on workers to refuse to handle those goods which were destined for Lithuania but have been re-directed by the USSR as part of the economic blockade. We see this as elementary solidarity in the context of this specific action by the USSR. We are, however, opposed to any bourgeois governments imposing any diplomatic or economic sanctions against the USSR or using force to take supplies into Lithuania, all of which we would take as being actions hostile to the degenerated workers' state.

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