

A RECALL TO ORDER

(An Open Letter from the International Secretariat of the Fourth International to the Members and Leadership of the Socialist Labour League)

The July-August 1959 issue of *Labour Review* contains an editorial entitled "In Defence of Trotskyism." The objective result, as well as the subjective scope, of this article is in glaring contradiction with its title. Ever since the beginning of 1957, which saw unity negotiations once more initiated by the Fourth International with the organizations which form the "International Committee," exchange of argument and polemics has remained internal — on both sides. Today the S L L abandons this attitude and publicly attacks the Fourth International, thereby seriously jeopardizing any chance of early unity of the world Trotskyist movement. This is therefore no contribution to the defense of Trotskyism; it is rather a contribution to weakening it. It contributes to the confusion which exists in broad progressive layers of the working-class movement about the nature of the Trotskyist organizations. It is another act that tends to discredit Trotskyism in Great Britain.

Under the circumstances, the Fourth International, created by Leon Trotsky, to which he adhered till the day of his death, and which continues to defend his ideas, his programme and his tradition, has no other choice but to answer these public attacks blow by blow. It regrets that, through no fault of its own, this public polemic, difficult for the great majority of advanced workers to understand, must start again. At the same time, however, there is also a progressive side to this irresponsible initiative of the S L L leadership. This discussion will allow many young comrades who have but recently joined the Trotskyist movement in Great Britain to understand better the significance and the purpose of the Trotskyist policies of the Fourth International, so slanderously misrepresented by the *Labour Review* editorial.

WAR AND REVOLUTION

After some historical introduction for the benefit of readers who do not know exactly what the Fourth International is and when and why it was founded, the authors of the *Labour Review* editorial, speaking about the cold war, arrive at the true scope of their article, the denunciation of "Pabloism," a creed which, they say, is adhered to by the present Fourth International leadership. This is how they define this creed.

It was in this period [of the cold war], under the pressures of Stalinism and imperialism, that certain prominent individuals in the Fourth International, headed by Michel Pablo, secretary of the international executive committee, began to *revise and reject the fundamental principles of the Marxist movement*. It was these revisions which caused a split in the Fourth International in 1953.

[*Labour Review*, July-August 1959, p 35.]

Here we have a statement of immaculate logic. Of course, if the leaders of a Marxist organization "revise and reject the fundamental principles of the Marxist movement," this can only cause a crisis and a split. No true Marxists, and certainly no such principled Marxists as Comrades Burns and Sinclair, the authors of the editorial in question, could stay for a long time together in a single organization with outspoken revisionists. And we are ready for the big blow, for the very next words tell us that "Pabloism had as its central thesis . . ."

If the reader is concerned by matters of programmatic principle, he will pause in his reading to ask himself: which of the tenets of Marxism will our orthodox principled comrades of *Labour Review* consider so fundamental that "revision and rejection" could only mean crisis and split? The thesis of the class struggle? Of the dictatorship of the proletariat? The Leninist theory of the state? The Trotskyist definition of the Soviet Union? The necessity of building a new revolutionary leadership throughout the world, for which the FI was founded? The defense of the Soviet Union? The Leninist conception of the revolutionary party? The principles of workers' democracy? The theory of the permanent revolution? The necessity of unconditional support of the revolutions of colonial peoples against their imperialist oppressors? The necessity of opposing class collaboration in peace and war inside a capitalist country? The necessity of a political revolution in the U S S R in order to restore Soviet democracy?

Dear reader, you are quite wrong. All these fundamentals of Marxism have nothing to do with the "crisis and split" in the Fourth International. The authors of the *Labour Review* editorial do not even pretend that the present FI leadership has "revised and rejected" them in any sense whatsoever. No, the "fundamental principles of Marxism" which we are said to have "revised and rejected" are beautifully described by Burns and Sinclair as follows:

Pabloism had as its central [!] thesis a deeply pessimistic prophecy of inevitable and immediate war. The forecast not only presumed the organic incapacity of the American and European working class to prevent such a war — thereby dismissing their revolutionary potentialities — but also attributed to the imperialist rulers a power, homogeneity and stability which they did not possess. [. . .] Since the 'inevitable', 'immediate' war would be a war against the Soviet Union, Pablo declared that by its very nature it would be an international civil war, a 'war-revolution'. The world was already being polarized between the forces of revolution and the forces of imperialism. Working-class bureaucracies, both Stalinist and right-wing, were in a vice. On the

one side was the irreversible march of imperialism to war — a war against the whole working class. On the other hand was the irreversible revolutionary wave. [Ibidem, p 35.]

We shall return to the subject itself in a minute. But some preliminary remarks are necessary. The authors pompously committed themselves to denounce a “revision and rejection of the fundamental principles of Marxism.” And the “central thesis” of this revisionism is pessimistic prophecy about the inevitability and the nearness of the imperialist war. Now we beg Comrades Burns and Sinclair: Please, show us the textbook, of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and even minor figures, where optimism or pessimism according to the inevitability and/or short-term or long-term perspectives about war is considered a “fundamental principle of Marxism.” In the twenties, Trotsky had predicted as probable an Anglo-American imperialist war. It so happened that this war never broke out. Did he thereby become a “revisionist”? When Hitler took power, Trotsky called upon the Soviet government to mobilize the Red Army immediately, for war was inevitable within two or three years. In fact war broke out only six and a half years later. Marx and Engels made many statements of the same nature. But perhaps, in the eyes of these distinguished Marxologues Burns and Sinclair, Marx was a little bit revisionist himself.

The old Romans had a neat saying for this kind of thing; it comes from the poet Horace: “The mountains are in labor, but they bear only a ridiculous mouse.” If indeed the “rejection and revision of the fundamental principles of Marxism” amounts to nothing more than a wrong and pessimistic analysis of the world situation, some comrades of the S L L might well ask their leaders, did this justify provoking an international crisis about it, not to speak of a split? Could this not have been settled by discussion and by experience?

The case of Burns and Sinclair is even worse than it looks *prima facie*. For this terrible “central thesis” of “Pabloite revisionism” was adopted *as early as Autumn 1950* by the *unanimous world movement*, with the exception of some French comrades. Burns and Sinclair were its staunch supporters for three long years. They had it unanimously adopted and confirmed at the conference of the British section of the F I which they headed. Till the very day of the split, they never said, murmured, or wrote a single word or line — not to say a discussion document — against this “central thesis.” A strange way of “giving battle.” A strange kind of “revisionism” which remained invisible to these orthodox critics for three long years. And so distinguished an “orthodox Trotskyist” as Comrade James P Cannon commented as follows on this “central thesis” adopted by the Third World Congress and the Xth Plenum of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International, as late as 29 May 1952:

I think the Third World Congress made a correct analysis of the new post-war reality in the world and the unforeseen turns this reality has taken. Proceeding from this analysis, the Congress drew correct conclusions for the orientation of the national Trotskyist parties toward the living mass movement as it evolved since the war. Further, the Tenth Plenum, in its basic document on the tactical application of the Third World Congress

line, has faithfully interpreted, amplified and concretized the line of the World Congress.

Note well, this is the same Tenth Plenum document where Comrades Burns and Sinclair discovered the “central thesis” of “Pabloite revisionism.” And Comrade Cannon continues, on the nature of the Third World Congress and Xth Plenum documents:

We do not see any revisionism there. All we see is an elucidation of the post-war evolution of Stalinism and an outline of new tactics to fight it more effectively. We consider these documents to be completely Trotskyist. They are different from previous documents of our movement, not in principle or method, but only in the confrontation and analysis of the new reality and the tactical adjustment to it.

This definition by Comrade Cannon we wholeheartedly approve. It is the correct answer to the nonsense of the *Labour Review* editorial. There was of course only one sort of “revision” in these documents — not a revision of Marxist principles, but a revision in the analysis of the world situation, for the very simple reason that that world situation had changed in some fundamental aspects compared to 1938.

Let us briefly summarize the contents of these documents relative to the problem of war. World War I and World War II had been inter-imperialist wars. But it is obvious that the capitalists can slit one another’s throats only if they are not under the immediate threat of being overthrown by their respective workers (as they were after November 1918, when Foch let the Reichswehr have additional machine-guns to fight the German revolution). So it was absolutely correct to say, in the past, that an imperialist war could break out only if the workers’ movement was paralyzed (as in 1914), or crushed (as in the years from 1933 to 1939). The defeat of the Spanish revolution directly opened the road to the war.

But World War III will be an entirely different kind of war. It will not be an inter-imperialist war. It will be a war by an imperialist alliance, headed by American imperialism, against the Soviet bloc, the colonial revolution, and all active and class-conscious forces of the international labor movement. We hope that, at least on this point, there is no difference of opinion between the comrades of the S L L and the Fourth International.

Now one can visualize two sorts of wars by an imperialist alliance against workers’ states. One is the kind of war in which an imperialist alliance tries to crush an incipient danger for itself. This was the nature of the 1918-1920 wars of intervention in Russia. This was also, in a certain sense, the nature of the Korean war against revolutionary China. And under such conditions, it is still correct to say that the ability of the metropolitan workers’ movement to paralyze the criminal arm of imperialism could successfully stop the war. As a matter of fact, this is what happened in 1918-1920. Incidentally, it did happen also in a very limited sense in 1950-51, when the British Labour Party was the timid and unprincipled spokesman of the British and European workers’ opposition to MacArthur’s plan of using the atom bomb against revolutionary China.

But there is also another kind of imperialist war against workers’ states and colonial revolutions which can be visualized. Not a war under conditions of crushing military superiority for imperialism (these were still

the conditions of 1950, when the USA retained the monopoly of the A-bomb), but a war of despair and self-defense by a dying class, which is not ready to leave the scene of history without a last-ditch fight for its existence. This is the kind of war the Third World Congress documents spoke about — with the full approval of the authors of this strange *Labour Review* editorial. And this is in all probability what World War III will be like.

The relationship of forces has turned with breathtaking speed against American imperialism. In 1945 it looked like the master of the world. Then came the colonial revolution. China was lost to it. North Vietnam was lost. The atomic monopoly, nay even military superiority, was lost. Within 15 or 20 years, economic superiority will be lost as well. The colonial revolution will “irresistibly” — we shall come back to this “revisionist” formula — spread from country to country. Sitting on top of the greatest stockpile of wealth and power which was ever accumulated on this planet, the leaders of US imperialism see a world evolution in which they will lose country after country, continent after continent, till they will be isolated in their own hemisphere, nay their own country, economically strangled, socially threatened with imminent overthrow.

There is only one hypothesis which, under these conditions, makes war improbable. It is the hypothesis that US imperialism has already been so decisively weakened that it is no longer capable of a last desperate attempt at self-defense. This is the illusion the Stalinist leaders seem, for the time being, to be laboring under. It is not the task of the Trotskyist movement to voice reformist illusions of this kind. No class has left history without defending itself by all means at its disposal. American imperialism still possesses tremendous means. It is mobilizing them, preparing for war. By far the most probable variant is that, sooner or later, it will throw them into the arena.

But can the international revolution not stop American imperialism? To a great extent it cannot. For each spread of the revolution is precisely followed by military intervention. There was military intervention against the Chinese, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Malayan, Kenyan, Tunisian, Moroccan, Guatemalan, Egyptian and Iraqi revolutions. There is military intervention against the Algerian revolution right now. There is no guarantee that any new revolutionary outburst will not be threatened by the same intervention. There is nothing “pessimistic” in this analysis, for if the list of countries we have enumerated is carefully reread it will be found that the majority of them successfully defeated this foreign counter-revolutionary intervention.

It may be objected: but what you have just proved is only a *general tendency*, not a precise timetable. This is true. The general tendency contained in the Third World Congress documents was correct. More precise predictions turned out to be incorrect. At the Fifth World Congress we made a long self-criticism on the subject. But it must not be forgotten that since August 1950, there have been four occasions on which we stood at the very brink of war: when the Chinese Army crossed the Yalu; when the US atomic armada was already sailing into the Bay of Tonkin to relieve the siege of Dien Bien-Phu; when the Suez affair broke out; and when the American marines landed in the Lebanon to counteract the Iraqi revolution. Each time some specific

reason at the last moment saved the situation: inter-imperialist rivalry; the hope to come to an understanding with the colonial bourgeoisie; the high profits reaped in periods of boom; the conciliatory policies of the Kremlin, etc. But to understand why on all these occasions there has been no world war, is also to understand why the tendency towards World War III will remain and become more and more dangerous.

The only basis for a long-term “deal” between the Kremlin and Wall Street would be the ability of the Kremlin to guarantee the world status quo. It cannot do this, for two reasons: firstly because ever since 1946 the colonial revolution has become an autonomous force, which does not obey the Kremlin’s orders; secondly because the technical, economic, and social progress of the Soviet Union itself constantly changes the status quo. Under these circumstances, in the long run, the alternative for imperialism will be: to die fighting, or to die without fighting. We should have no doubt about the choice it will make. The only power which could prevent that would be the American working class, by taking power away from the monopolists. This would mean civil war in the USA — and it will be admitted that that has not been quite so much on the calendar of world events since 1950, as the possibility of the sudden outbreak of World War III.

THE BUREAUCRACY AND “MASS PRESSURE”

The *Labour Review* editorial, we have just seen, indicated that the “central thesis” of “Pablo’s revision and rejection of the fundamental principles of Marxism” consisted in “a pessimistic prophecy of inevitable and immediate war.” We have already seen that this sentence contains at least three pieces of nonsense. There is nothing “pessimistic” about it — in the present world context. There is nothing “fundamental” or “principled” about it — it is a matter of analysis, not of principles. And it has nothing whatsoever to do with “revisionism.” If the worse comes to the worst, it is nothing but a wrong analysis of world evolution, which stands to be corrected by fraternal discussion and practical experience, on some occasion — and not by a split.

But perhaps we have been unjust to Burns and Sinclair. Perhaps what they wrongly called the “central thesis” of “Pabloite revisionism” was only some starting point. Perhaps we finally get at the devil’s tail when we read in the Editorial, on p 35:

But these irreversible developments did not mean that the working class and the oppressed peoples in struggle would come into ever sharper conflict with their bureaucratic leaders; or that the latter would seek, as in the past, to head off and destroy revolutionary development. On the contrary: according to Pablo, the conflict between the interests of the bureaucracy and those of the working class would be overcome. The bureaucrats would be swept along by the revolutionary wave, which would end imperialism.

One expects to find some substantiation for this serious accusation. No quotation follows. One reads on. No proof whatsoever is brought forward. The only quotation which follows — and which, incidentally, is taken out of the same Xth Plenum document in which Comrade Cannon found nothing revisionist and which he called “completely Trotskyist”! — says that the reformist

mass parties will make some leftward turns during a revolution:

These organizations cannot be smashed and replaced by others in the relatively short time between now and the decisive conflict. All the more so since these organizations will be obliged, whether they wish it or not, to give a leftward turn to the policy of the whole or at least a part of the leadership.

Now if that statement is looked at from all sides, from left to right, upside and down, nothing can be found wrong — not to say “revisionist” — about it. In a revolutionary period, leftward turns are made by the whole or part of Social-Democratic bureaucracies; isn't that so? Didn't that happen in 1918-1921, when “whole or parts” of the reformist bureaucracy of most European countries went as far as adopting — in words — the slogans of dictatorship of the proletariat and of soviets (the Austrian S P, the Norwegian Labor Party, the reformists inside the Independent S P of Germany, the French S P, the Italian S P, and many others)? Didn't it happen again in the period 1934-36, when such typical reformist bureaucrats as Léon Blum and Largo Caballero wrote that Hitler had won in Germany because the Social Democracy had been unable to build a dictatorship of the proletariat? Why shouldn't the same thing happen at the next revolutionary wave? Even that scoundrel Guy Mollet got himself elected general-secretary of the S F I O in 1948 on a leftist platform, during the revolutionary postwar upsurge!

Of course, the authors of the *Labour Review* editorial — the authors, not Comrade Pablo! — draw from this quotation (the only one they find to substantiate their strong accusation!) the following conclusion:

The bureaucrats were trapped by the revolutionary wave and forced to act counter to their nature — ‘whether they wish it or not’. To use words properly [mind you: the words “to act counter to their nature” are Burns's, not Pablo's!] they were forced to *change their nature*; for if a counter-revolutionary no longer acts as a counter-revolutionary, he ceases to be one.

Burns and Sinclair take a quotation which says that in times of revolutionary upsurge Social-Democratic bureaucrats, in whole or in part, in order to keep their treacherous control over mass parties, will make leftward turns — a hypothesis confirmed dozens of times in the history of the labor movement. They draw from that quotation the conclusion that — because of a left turn? — these bureaucracies can no longer act in a counter-revolutionary way (something which no document of the Fourth International, no document of Comrade Pablo, ever said), and then *they* accuse the F I of having “revised” Marxism by stating that — the bureaucracy has changed its nature! What kind of “dialectics” or “polemics” are these?

But more of the same is to come, for we now catch our unprincipled critics in the very act of deforming quotations. In order to “prove” that Pablo defends the revisionist thesis of bureaucratic self-reform, our clumsy falsifiers have *simply suppressed from their quotation two sentences where Pablo says the exact opposite!* For in the original Xth Plenum Report (printed in *Quatrième Internationale*, February-April 1952 issue), we find between the first (“countries where the reformist movements embrace the political majority of the working

class . . .”) and the second sentence (“These organizations cannot be smashed . . .”), quoted by Burns-Sinclair, the following passage:

In all these countries it is extremely probable, except for some new and at present unforeseeable developments, *that the radicalization of the masses and the first stages of the revolution*, of the objective revolutionary situation, will manifest themselves within these organizations. The main forces of the revolutionary party of these countries will spring up by *differentiation or disintegration of these organizations*.

Now any child reading these sentences *purposely deleted* by Burns and Sinclair from their “quotation” can understand that what Comrade Pablo said — and what everybody, including Comrades Cannon, Burns and Sinclair considered quite “orthodox Trotskyist” — was only that a revolutionary mass upsurge in a country with an established working-class mass party would begin by causing a differentiation *within* that party; that it would lead on the one hand to a leftward move of the bureaucracy (or parts of it) and on the other to the emergence of a genuine revolutionary tendency; that through the *struggle between* these tendencies the reformist party would disintegrate and a new revolutionary mass party would emerge, exactly as happened in most European countries between 1918 and 1923.

Comrades of the Socialist Labour League!

Ask your leaders why they have to lower themselves to the Stalinist methods of misquotation and slander, in order to fight their factional struggle against the Fourth International. You know where such methods lead; don't tolerate them in your organization! No honest discussion is possible when people, driven by factionalist passion, cynically distort not only speeches but even writings, and insinuate that comrades say the contrary of what is actually written down. The accusation of Burns and Sinclair, that the Fourth International defends the revisionist thesis that the contradiction between the working class and the bureaucracy is being overcome, was already disproved in the very passage which they “quote”! The only thing this passage says is that the *inevitable struggle between the bureaucracy and the workers* will, during a revolutionary period, *start within* the working-class mass parties, and not by the workers leaving these parties by the thousands!

THE STALINIST BUREAUCRACY AND MASS PRESSURE

But falsifiers Burns and Sinclair have still another ax to grind. The Fourth International is alleged to have made its peace not only with the reformist bureaucracy, but also with the Stalinist bureaucracy. Two “quotations” (we have just seen what they are worth!) are brought forward to “confirm” this sweeping accusation. The first reads as follows:

In countries where the C P's are a majority of the working class they can, under exceptional conditions (advanced disintegration of the propertied classes) and under the pressure of very powerful revolutionary uprisings of the masses, be led to project a revolutionary orientation counter to the Kremlin's directives, without abandoning the political and theoretical baggage inherited from Stalinism.

Again we may ask: what is wrong with that statement? It comes, it is true, from the document "Rise and Decline of Stalinism," which, for the S L L, is considered heretical literature. But it was also made at great length (and in a much less limited way) by the Third World Congress documents — documents which were enthusiastically hailed by Comrades Cannon, Burns, and Sinclair.

The quotation speaks about "exceptional circumstances." If words mean anything, this means that this hypothesis is the *exception*, not the rule. Why then mention it at all? Because "exceptional circumstances" do occur from time to time. And it so happens that this "revisionist" perspective "rejecting the fundamental principles of Marxism," is nothing but an explanation of events which have already happened and which could — not as a rule, but in some exceptional case — happen again.

Please answer us, Comrades Burns and Sinclair: has capitalism been destroyed in Yugoslavia? Has it been destroyed in China? Has it been destroyed in North Vietnam? By whom has it been destroyed in these three cases? By genuine revolutionary parties, Trotskyist parties? Of course not. By the Communist Parties of Yugoslavia, China, and Vietnam. Did these parties, at the time of their conquest of power, still keep "the political and theoretical baggage inherited from Stalinism"? Of course they did. The Yugoslavs started to break with that heritage only three years later, and have not yet completed the process. As for the Chinese, they have hardly begun, not to speak of the Vietnamese. But did they not take power contrary to the directives of Stalin? Of course they did. Is that a general rule for the future? No, only in extremely exceptional cases will such a thing repeat itself.

So if we carefully read this "revisionist thesis," without letting ourselves be carried away by passionate invectives, we find that it corresponds literally to objective reality, objective truth. To read into this statement any idea that the contradictions between the Soviet bureaucracy and the working masses have been overcome, needs an extreme degree of bad faith.

The second quotation which proves our kowtowing before the Stalinist bureaucracy is another striking example. It concerns the concessions which the Soviet bureaucracy had been forced to make in increasing number to the pressure of the Soviet masses. Comrade Pablo wrote:

The dynamic of their concessions is in reality liquidatory of the entire Stalinist heritage in the U S S R itself, as well as in its relations with the satellite countries, with China and the Communist Parties. It will no longer be easy to turn back. [...] Once the concessions are broadened, the march towards a real liquidation of the Stalinist regime threatens to become irresistible.

Now again, from this quotation Burns and Sinclair draw the conclusion that "according to Pablo," the contradiction between the Soviet bureaucracy and the Soviet masses "has been overcome," that the Soviet bureaucracy will liberalize itself or that Pablo puts a question mark above the necessity of a political revolution in the U S S R. Once more these are of course absolutely slanderous deductions — not proved by a single word which is actually quoted. The only thing this quotation says is that under pressure of the masses, the Soviet bureaucracy was obliged to make concessions

to the people which have proved irreversible and which open the road to the overthrow of the Stalinist regime. There is nothing wrong with this statement; it is a correct analysis of what happened in Russia in 1953.

In reality, the Fourth International was the first working-class organization which understood that the relationship of forces between the Soviet workers and the bureaucracy had fundamentally changed in the workers' favor. This change is precisely the factor that determines the *pre-revolutionary character* of the present situation in the U S S R. This is a fundamental change compared with the prewar situation. Burns and Sinclair seem not to realize this even today. But the National Committee of the S W P understood it very well, for it stated in a resolution of April 1956:

A new stage has opened in the continuing development of the Russian revolution. The masses of the Soviet Union, who were politically expropriated by the bureaucracy under Stalin, and who suffered its brutal rule for nearly three decades, are evidently once again in motion; they have already forced far-reaching concessions from the bureaucracy and more can be expected to follow. [...]

[...] The [XXth] Congress [of the C P S U] thus marks the beginning of a new, profoundly revolutionary stage in the Soviet Union. *The immediate reason for the concessions, as we have indicated, was the palpable pressure of the masses which has grown so great that the bureaucracy calculates it cannot be suppressed simply by sweeping purges as in the days of Stalin — it is more expedient to bend with the pressure in hope of avoiding being broken by it.*

A revolution, in history, is very often preceded by evolution, concessions from the enemy, shadow fights which prepare the real thing. There is nothing "revisionist" in stating this; it is, on the contrary, the ABC of Marxism. Revisionism is the denial of the thesis that this process of pressure and concessions needs to transform itself into a revolution, a direct mass action, a qualitative "leap," in order to achieve final victory. Deutscher and other people who thought that the bureaucracy could reform and suppress itself, were revisionists; if they still think so today, they are still revisionists. But Pablo nowhere said or wrote that. On the contrary, *in the same article* from which Burns quotes, nay, in the same paragraph, he explicitly states that Stalin's heirs make the said concessions to mass pressure "in order to survive as the Bonapartist leadership of the privileged bureaucracy." A few sentences earlier he explicitly states that it would be fundamentally wrong and dangerous to conclude that the new leaders have been reforming themselves and that they can successfully "democratize from above the Stalinist bureaucratic and police regime."¹

¹ The *Labour Review* editorial distorts a third quotation from an article by Comrade Pablo. On p 37, the authors quote part of his article, "Democracy, Socialism, and Transitional Programme" (which originally appeared in *Fourth International* no 6, Spring 1959, p 34): They attempt to create the impression that Pablo proposes "precisely the present policy of the British Communist Party." But in order to arrive at that result, they quote two paragraphs which in the original text do not follow one after the other, but are separated by the following: "In both cases, the parliamentary origin of the workers' government would in

And again we must ask you, comrades of the Socialist Labour League: Why is it that Comrades Burns and Sinclair, who have often known how to fight capitalists, reformist bureaucrats, and Stalinists with correct arguments, have to resort to crude slander, distortion, and falsification in their irresponsible fight against the Fourth International? Perhaps for the same reason why the Stalinists, who more than once have correctly polemized against capitalists and even against the Social-Democratic stooges of capitalism, cannot honestly refute Trotskyism but must resort to slander, vilification, and forgeries? Is it because they are basically wrong in this fight?

HOW TO BUILD REVOLUTIONARY MASS PARTIES

The *Labour Review* editorial insists strongly upon the necessity of building "an alternative leadership." It sees in the building of that leadership the main goal of the Fourth International. We completely agree with that statement. That is what the Fourth International was created for: to give a new, genuinely Marxist, genuinely revolutionary leadership to the workers of the world. The question is not whether one agrees or not with that mission; no one can be Trotskyist and put a question mark above it. The question is *how* we are going to attain these goals *in practice*.

Experience has taught that it is not enough for a group of people to *say* or *claim* that they are "the alternative leadership," in order to be recognized as such by the masses. They must conquer the *political* confidence of the advanced workers, and, in the end, of the majority of the working class of their country. This is not an easy task. The Stalinists, in many countries, have been trying to do this for more than 40 years, with little or no result. We Trotskyists have been trying to do it for 25 years. At least there exists a huge body of experience in this matter. It might have been thought that Comrades Burns and Sinclair, who attach so much importance to this question, would at least summarize some of the lessons of these rich experiences. They do not even attempt to. Instead, they content themselves with hollow and pious incantations: "Slow, painful, uphill work"; "building an alternative leadership"; "smashing the bureaucrats' hold over the working class"; "practical struggle to win leadership." All well and good, but please tell us *how* this will be done.

We can at least give one example how it cannot be done. *Labour Review* devotes quite some space to denouncing the class-collaborationist policy of the CP of Great Britain. There is no doubt that the British Stalinists have been guilty of that crime at many periods of

fact be the result of the revolutionary united-front mobilization of the masses. *This mobilization, as well as the adequate organization of the masses*, would then be the guarantee that a workers' government might apply its transitional programme against the inevitably fierce resistance of the bourgeoisie." (Emphasis added.) Now this is exactly what the Transitional Programme says on the subject. Are Burns and Sinclair against the united front? Are they against the united front government? Are they against the united front government supported by mass committees? Of course this proposition applies only to countries where the working class is politically divided between two mass workers' parties, not to Britain. In Britain the formula is of course the Labour Party government.

their existence, to a greater extent perhaps than any other European CP (we recall their fight for a coalition government in the 1945 general elections). But it is also undeniable that, at other periods, the British Stalinists have shown quite courageous examples of militancy among the organized workers and the unemployed. The "third period" (1928-1933) was typical of that. It was a period of great economic crisis, which brought unheard of misery to many layers of the British working class. It was a period which witnessed the extraordinary betrayal of the MacDonald group. It was a period of numerous militant class actions led by the Communists. Yet when that period was over, and a trial balance was drawn of the relationship of forces between the reformist Social-Democratic Labour Party and the Communist Party, the conclusion had to be reached that the former had grown stronger compared to the latter, and not the other way round.

As a great number of similar experiences in other European countries confirm the same rule, we may formulate it in the following way. In countries with an old-established political mass movement, to which the overwhelming majority of the workers give political allegiance, no alternative leadership will be built up essentially through leading militant strike actions on the economic front. If they act in an intelligent way, individual revolutionaries (like individual Stalinists) can win very strong positions in this way as shop-stewards or even as union leaders on a regional or national scale. But this nowise means that the workers who follow them in a strike or a militant action against union bureaucrats are ready to follow them politically into a new party, group or league. And those who follow them there will not stay for long, if they remain outside the organized mass party of labor.

We can draw a second conclusion from this experience. In all countries with organized mass parties of the working class, to which the majority of the class gives allegiance, no *mass* revolutionary party will be built mainly by *individual recruitment* (i.e. winning over, through propaganda or the example of militant actions, individual members of the mass party, or groups of 4, 5, 10, 12 members at a time). There is no example of such a process of building an alternative leadership of the working class, either in the history of the Third International, or in the history of the Fourth International. Revolutionary mass parties will be built through *splits inside the reformist (or Stalinist) mass parties*, splits not of a couple of hundred or even a couple of thousand members, but splits which draw away the majority (or a very strong minority) of all the politically conscious members of these parties. That is the way the Communist mass parties of Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, France, and Italy were built in the early twenties. And in countries like Britain, Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, where the Communists failed to do that job efficiently — notwithstanding Lenin's correct and far-sighted advice — the CPs have remained politically isolated sects right up to this day.

Of course these lessons from forty years' experience apply only to countries where a politically organized and conscious working class exists. They do not apply to countries where there exists a strong trade-union movement, but no mass political party of the working class. They certainly do not apply to countries where there exists no mass labor movement at all. It was in these

latter conditions that our Ceylonese comrades, whom Burns approvingly sets up as an example, have been able to build an independent Trotskyist mass party which has won over the majority of the workers of their country. But inasmuch as the conditions under which our Ceylon comrades — in a certain sense also our Bolivian comrades — work are exceptional and not the rule, for in most countries of the world there exists today a working-class mass movement, either purely trade-union, or trade-union as well as political, the lessons of their splendid achievement cannot be applied to countries where these conditions do not exist, without miseducating the movement, leading it into a dead end and causing repeated demoralization and disintegration.

The terrible example of the French allies of Burns — whom he has himself characterized in a recent document of the International Committee — as a “small opportunist sect,” should give much matter for thought to the members of the S L L. A few years ago, this Lambert group, which counted some excellent militant workers in its ranks, boasted also that it was building an “alternative leadership for the French workers” because it had played a leading role in some unofficial strikes and had brought together some militant unionists — outside of the mass movement. Today it has practically collapsed when these inflated dreams proved absolutely unrealistic.

We have spoken of countries where a politically conscious and organized working class exists, and about countries — like Ceylon — where at the time of the foundation of the L S S P there existed neither mass unions nor mass parties of the working class. But there exists a third category of countries, countries with a strong trade-union movement, but no politically organized masses of workers. In these countries, according to the thoroughly rotten, defeatist, pessimistic, and revisionist outlook attributed to the present Fourth International leadership, there is slight probability that the mass of the workers will at one bound jump from a total lack of political consciousness to political consciousness at its highest level: revolutionary Marxism, Trotskyism. That is why that allegedly treacherous leadership proposes for such countries the “rigmarole” of “transitional parties,” i e, mass labor parties based on the unions. The *Labour Review* editorial scornfully denounces such a proposition as revisionist through and through. Unfortunately for the authors of that editorial, the real patent-right of that proposal does not belong to the I S of the Fourth International but to — Comrade Trotsky, who made it in 1938-9 to the S W P. It was adopted enthusiastically by the S W P and has been kept ever since as a main plank in the S W P programme!

The only “innovation” we have made is to extend the same idea to some countries with the same conditions (mass unions but no independent working-class political party) such as Argentina, Morocco, and Tunisia. We still wait for any argument to tell us why this is correct in the U S A but wrong in Argentina — where, incidentally, our comrades have conquered quite some influence in the unions owing to this slogan, and where they got 15,000 votes in the province of Buenos Aires, 25 % of the Stalinist vote.²

² As an indication of the principled character and political homogeneity of the policy of the International Committee, it may be noted that while Burns is now opposed to entrism in Social-Democratic and Stalinist Parties, his Argentine

Comrades Burns and Sinclair wind up this passage of their indictment of the Fourth International with the following sweeping assertions:

What is the essence of Pablo's theories? They are a complete negation of the Marxist conception of the *conscious intervention* of the F I. If one accepts the Pabloite dogma of irresistible processes, then the entire struggle for correct working class leadership, and therefore for the building of it, becomes completely redundant. If ‘objective conditions’, the ‘new reality’ as Pablo called it, can make bureaucracy act as a revolutionary force, then what earthly purpose does the Marxist movement serve? Why should Marxists put forward their own policies against those of the present leaders of the working class? Why should the Marxist movement fight to build itself as a realistic alternative before the working class, if “mass pressure” can cut revolutionary channels along which the present leaders or at least sections of them, will have no option but to travel?

But it is not simply a question of running away [!] from the difficulties of building a revolutionary movement, and covering one's retreat by an artificial and mechanical scheme of ‘irreversible processes’ which will bring the victory of socialism. [*Labour Review*, p 37] ³

Now this is indeed a childish rigmarole, to use a word which Burns and Sinclair seem to like. *Labour Review* has produced no shadow of a proof that the present F I leadership abandons to either bureaucrats or “irresistible processes” and “objective conditions” the tasks of building a new revolutionary leadership or of achieving the victory of world revolution. What the F I consistently pointed out in this connection since 1950 was the fact that, *contrary* to the 1923-1943 pre-war period, the relationship of forces on a global scale had irreversibly swung against capitalism, and that therefore objective conditions were globally *favorable* to the building of revolutionary mass parties, and not unfavorable as before the war. *Labour Review* has not quoted a single sentence proving that the F I thinks that the bureaucracy can reform itself or become revolutionary. What the F I *did* say in this connection was that the bureaucracy would split under the pressure of the revolution,

political ally Moreno has entered — the *bourgeois nationalist* Perón party!

³Burns and Sinclair make quite a play about “irreversible” processes. If one believes in “irreversible processes,” why fight for the revolution? How little they understand about the concrete ways to bring about victorious revolutions! Marxists never thought that the objective conditions alone “could do the job”; but they always thought — and still think — that certain objective conditions, certain “irreversible processes,” are *necessary prerequisites* for a successful revolution. The National Committee of the S W P showed a better understanding by voting in its April 13-15 session a resolution on the XXth Congress of the C P of the Soviet Union, which has this to say about “irreversible processes”: “The slogan ‘back to Lenin’ is thus a proletarian slogan which the masses will inevitably fill with their own revolutionary socialist content. Naturally, this will not occur in a day. The workers are yet unorganized. The bureaucracy will fight desperately as it nears its doom. The entire process will have its ups and downs and even reversals. *The important thing is that the process has begun and in the final analysis it will prove to be irreversible. [!]*”

and that some parts of it would go along for *part of the way* towards the revolution, a unanimously recognized fact in Hungary (Nagy!), Poland (Gomulka!), Yugoslavia (Tito!), Germany 1918-23 (part of the U S P D - leadership), etc.⁴ The idea of a revolutionary mass movement being led only by those who have been "pure from birth" is of course a childish sectarian illusion. But in all this there is not the slightest proof of the assertion that the FI is "running away from the difficulties of building a revolutionary movement." Far from "running away" from those difficulties, it is tackling them, not without success, in more than thirty countries throughout the world.

For the first time in its history, the Fourth International had tried to work out a rounded theory of the concrete way to build revolutionary mass parties in various parts of the world. To this, Burns has nothing to oppose but slanderous invective and empty phrases. It is not in this way that a Marxist movement gets educated; and it is certainly not along such a road that it becomes a mass movement.

AN IRRESPONSIBLE TURN IN GREAT BRITAIN

But the heart of the matter is the new tactical decision of the Burns group concerning "independent work." In order to understand the thoroughly unprincipled, monstrously irresponsible nature of this turn, the young comrades who have recently joined the S L L should consider the following facts.

For more than 13 years, the Burns group — before the split, during the split, and after the split — has been violently and totally opposed to the public activity of a Trotskyist organization in Britain. As we have argued above, it has argued that the mass revolutionary party of the British workers will be born as a result of differentiation within the Labour Party — not only the unions affiliated to the Labour Party but the Labour Party as a political organization, with its annual conferences, its local branches, etc. It has argued at great length that any independent Trotskyist activity, which draws forces away from that work inside the Labour Party and jeopardizes the security of that work, should be condemned and stopped as a disruption of the building of a revolutionary mass party in Great Britain.

As late as 6 July 1957, Comrade Burns wrote a letter to the IS, in the course of the then unity negotiations. We wish to quote the following passage from that letter:

We must disagree with you when you maintain that our attitude toward Comrade G's group is ultimatistic. Our movement in Britain discussed for many years the tactics and strategy for the construction of the Revolutionary Party. By an overwhelming majority, the International movement as a whole decided with us that the entrust tactic was the best way to do this. As far as we are aware, no decision has ever been taken by your bodies to reverse this, and certainly the International Committee is fully in support of this policy. *More than ever* we are convinced that this is the correct road for our movement.

⁴Burns himself wrote in May 1957 on the Polish events: "A section of this native [Polish] bureaucracy began to lean on the masses to counteract the demands of the Kremlin." ("The Fight against Pabloite Revisionism," p xiii in the IS *Internal Bulletin*, edition of July 1957.)

The G group are in favour of the ex-RCP policy of "open work" and we for our part have no desire to resume the old discussions of the forties. What happened to the RCP and the majority of its leaders should be instructive enough in this respect. [...]

[...] When we say that they must disband the R S L, we are simply repeating that our movement rejects the tactic of "open work" and there is nothing ultimatistic about this. It is simply a statement of fact. [...] We for our part will not tolerate any resumption of the old factionalism and for this reason *we are absolutely opposed to any forms of activity which will repeat the wasteful practices of the past, re-opening old issues which have long been settled by history.*

We do not agree with Comrade Burns' description of the activities of the R S L at that time. But for the rest, we were and are in full agreement with everything said in that letter concerning the entrust tactic in Britain, as the best way to build the revolutionary party. We were and we are opposed to an orientation towards independent activities which are "the wasteful practices of the past." Like Comrade Burns, we considered this question an issue "which had long been settled by history."

Barely two years after writing that letter, Burns now has completely reversed his position on this fundamental issue. Now he is in favor of independent activity. Now he wants to build the S L L not only as an independent working-class organization, but even — there can be no other meaning given to the *Labour Review* editorial — as a Trotskyist one.

Now first of all we may ask: Did the Burns group prepare this fundamental turn by a thorough-going discussion, by a deep-going analysis explaining why this break with 14 years of political struggle and experience suddenly became necessary? There was no discussion. There was no conference. The decision was made at the top, with breath-taking celerity. It was approved after a short discussion which *followed* instead of preceding this fundamental turn.

One should expect Burns and Sinclair to give at least a short explanation of the reasons for this fundamental turn, of their "analysis and assessment of the present situation in Britain" — as they accuse us of clinging to the entrust tactic without such an analysis. But the only explanation for the building of the S L L as an independent organization is to be found in one paragraph:

The Socialist Labour League has not come into being by accident, but out of the struggles of the past year, which showed that such an organization was needed by the British working class. It has come into being to intervene in the experience of the working class, to organize, educate and prepare the vanguard which is drawing fundamental lessons from the employers' offensive, from rank-and-file resistance and from Right-wing betrayals. It has come into being at a time *when the growing militancy in industry is not yet being carried into the Labour Party*. It has come into being to fight for class struggle policies inside [?] the Labour Party and the trade unions, so continuing and carrying forward in present-day conditions the best traditions of Trotskyist work within the mass or-

ganizations of the working class. [Ibidem, p 38 — emphasis added.]

What a curiously self-contradictory statement! The S L L, we are told, has been born out of the struggles of the past year. True, for, a year before, Burns still considered the dissolution of an independent group an absolute precondition for unity! But that means that the S L L is a child of the conjuncture, of recent events. Nowhere in this document is it proved that the mass of the British workers have abandoned their political allegiance to the Labour Party. Nowhere is it argued that the radicalization of the British workers as a class will not find its first mass expression *inside* the Labour Party, through the building of a new left wing. The only thing Comrade Burns argues about is that *this has not yet happened*. That is the only objective justification he gives for his turn.

It so happens that the very same position had been defended by Jock Haston and his group in the old R C P *against* Comrade Burns! The sectarians argued that it was no use entering the Labour Party, as long as there was no immediate prospect of a mass left wing inside it. In the meantime we have to conduct militant struggles and attract vanguard elements to the party, they said. Comrade Burns, with the support of the International, answered that argument by saying that it would be too late to wait until such a left wing actually had come into existence in order to enter the L P; that we should be there before, in order to play our role in building this left wing right from the start. In other words: the entrust tactic was *independent of the passing conjuncture*, “boom” or “slump,” temporary growth or stagnation of the left wing in the L P. It was a general line, correct for a whole historical period, as long as these three factors continued to exist:

- 1) Strength and self-confidence of the British working class.
- 2) Political allegiance of the big majority of that class to the Labour Party.
- 3) Certainty that each wave of radicalization of the working class would find its mass expression inside the L P, by the building of a new left wing.

Nothing has happened since 1957 to change these basic conditions. Nothing justifies therefore the fundamental turn which was implicit in the setting up of the S L L. It was an *impressionistic manoeuvre*, born from temporary conditions and impatience, opposed to the thoroughgoing analysis of the conditions for building a revolutionary class party in Britain, which British Trotskyists had achieved after fifteen years of discussion and experience!

Why was the S L L formed? Between Bevan's break with the left on the question of nuclear disarmament and the present moment, the left inside the Labour Party was undoubtedly disorganized and dispirited. At the same time, militant workers responded hotly to the employers' offensives in the shops. Thereby they came into headlong conflict with the right-wing union bureaucracy. There seemed to be a contradiction between this radicalization in the shops and the “lull” inside the Labour Party, including the Labour Left. Those were the reasons for the hasty building of the S L L.

Now the very moment the printers' ink had dried on the *Labour Review's* editorial, we witnessed the appearance of a *new mass left wing inside the Labour*

Party: the left wing concentrating around the problem of unilateral nuclear disarmament and some other no less important issues: nationalization, the 40-hour week, etc; and for some time it even looked likely that this left wing would get a majority at the next L P Conference! This left wing is broader than the Bevan wing of the early fifties. It has especially a much larger union basis. It has linked some very important economic demands to its foreign-policy platform. And its political demands are more advanced than those of the late Bevanites.

Of course Frank Cousins, as a person, might be not an ounce better than Bevan as an individual. But that is not the point. We have never judged left-wing tendencies through illusions in their bureaucratic leaders; we appraise them for their importance in raising the average political consciousness of hundreds of thousands of workers. The formation of the Bevan tendency had that effect; the present Cousins current will have the same.

This event, of very great importance for the future of the labor movement and the class struggle in Britain, did not take us by surprise. British and international Trotskyists had been trained for 15 years to expect just that — after the wave of trade-union militancy of the past months.⁵ It was *inevitable* that that wave should find political expression inside the Labour Party. That is what the International — and Comrade Burns himself — had been predicting for years and years.

It is not surprising that the comrades who have joined the S L L from the C P, impatient with the lull and the generally sad state of affairs inside the L P in 1958 and the beginning of 1959, were eager to strike out on their own. They did not have the experience with the Labour Party we had. They had not been educated with the general lessons which the Trotskyist movement has drawn from 40 years of experience of the British left. But Burns, Sinclair, and the other old Trotskyists should have restrained them and warned them that a new and bigger left wing would come up inside the Labour Party. Instead, in their unprincipled manner, they yielded to that pressure, and started their independent organization *at the very moment* the new and broad left wing was being born!

Comrade Burns might reply, with fake indignation: “We have no intention of abandoning the entrust work. Didn't we write that the S L L would fight for class struggle policies *inside* the Labour Party?” Unfortunately, that statement is nothing but an empty and hypocritical formula. A French writer once said that hypocrisy is nothing but vice presenting its respects to virtue. We may say that Burns's hypocritical formula about

⁵ As late as May 1958 the Burns group adopted a political resolution that says: “Formalists, sectarians and Stalinists begin their assessment [of the L P] by considering the leaders. All the political demands of the workers must turn in the direction of the Labour Party. [...] The growing demands for socialist policies among the working class must be demands on the Labour Party, which at this stage appears as the only alternative to Toryism. [...] In the period of mass action opening up, new forces are going to move into action. *Will they by-pass the Labour Party? On the contrary, we reaffirm our opinion that the central political experiences of the working class will be geared to developments in the Labour Party. The fight for revolutionary leadership is impossible without roots in this mass party of the British working class.*”

“fighting inside the Labour Party” is nothing but his bad conscience paying respect to his own former principles, which he has now so irresponsibly thrown overboard.

The way the S L L was launched rendered its existence within the Labour Party practically impossible, for anybody who has no illusions about the nature of the right-wing bureaucracy. But let us admit that the naïve founders of the S L L were taken by surprise by the Transport House ban. This ban is, however, a fact. Now if the S L L had wanted to stay inside the Labour Party, it would, after this ban, have had to disband under protest. Nothing of the sort happened. It decided *openly to defy the bureaucracy*. Under the present circumstances, such a defiance inevitably leads to expulsion. Burns says that only ten members of the S L L have been expelled till now. We do not know if these statistics are not a bit gilded on the edges. In any case, more and more expulsions will follow. A big part of the old Trotskyist cadres, who had worked for more than 10, in many cases nearly 20 years, inside the Labour Party, will find themselves outside the Labour Party — at the very moment the struggle between the left and the right wing is flaring up again, stronger than ever before. A policy which has such a result, after all the past discussions and experiences of British Trotskyism, is an utterly irresponsible one. It destroys by one stroke of the pen the results of a long period of energetic and fruitful revolutionary work.

Some comrades might reply: “What do you propose instead? Capitulation before Transport House?” We should ask these comrades to read carefully some chapters of Lenin’s *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*.

The British Labour Party is the strongest working-class organisation in Europe. It is governed by a treacherous right-wing bureaucracy, which acts as a stooge of the capitalist class. It manipulates the mass movement through a rotten bureaucratic apparatus. The struggle with this apparatus is a life-and-death struggle for the future of socialism in Britain. To say that you will “openly challenge” their rules, and refuse to retreat, *when you are not strong enough to win the support of the majority of the workers*, means only to withdraw from the field of struggle for the cause “of purity,” to leave these millions of workers politically at the mercy of the right wing and some confused centrist oppositionals. To retreat before the attack of the right wing is neither “unprincipled” nor “dishonorable.” It is absolutely indispensable in order to break in the long run the hold of the labor fakery on the mass movement.

There is nothing new or “revisionist” about this thesis. It has been applied in the recent past by Comrade Burns himself. Some years ago the bureaucracy banned the left-wing paper *Socialist Outlook*. Comrade Burns had some influence in that paper. He defended — correctly — the position that the editors of the *Outlook* should stop publishing their paper under protest. Was that “capitulation before Transport House”? Of course not. Was it perhaps “refusal to build an alternative leadership,” or “replacing revolutionary action by pressure of the masses”? Nonsense! It was an indispensable step for safeguarding the vanguard’s chances of linking up with hundreds of thousands of leftward-moving workers, i.e., for a successful fight against Transport House.

You may ask your leaders: Why don’t the same arguments apply to the present situation? Do they really think that the Labour Party has lost the political allegiance of the majority of British workers? Do they really think that under present conditions, in the given relationship of forces, they are stronger than the L P bureaucracy? It is one thing to defy Transport House when you have say two or three million votes behind you; it is something else to “defy” the bureaucracy and to be kicked out from the arena of struggle because of an utterly fantastic over-estimation of your own forces.

We should like to add a last word on this subject. Through the present issue of the *Labour Review* the S L L now presents itself openly as a *Trotskyist* organization; but Burns still upholds the legend that it wants to work “inside the Labour Party.” Can anyone imagine greater confusion? Has he never heard about the Transport House ban against the C P joining the L P? Does he not know that even at the time Attlee and Stalin were close allies this ban was not lifted? Does he not know that Transport House rightly considers Trotskyism a variant — and from its own point of view, a more dangerous variant — of communism? How can anybody in his right senses think a single moment that Transport House is going to accept the affiliation of an officially Trotskyist organization to the Labour Party? Isn’t it clear under the circumstances that the building of the S L L means the end of the entrism tactic, the sudden irrevocable liquidation of the fruits of ten years’ hard work?

The comrades who have recently joined the Trotskyist movement coming from the C P might not understand why we argue with so much passion on this point. To understand that passion, we ask them one thing: *Demand from your leaders the documents on entrism produced between 1945 and 1949!* Study the arguments brought up on both sides during the discussion. Study especially the very documents then written by Comrade Burns. Perhaps you will then understand that even if the S L L should gain many more members than it has at present, but *outside* the L P, it would be an incommensurably lesser threat to the bureaucracy than a hundred Trotskyists *inside* that Party. Perhaps you will also learn, then, that, to use comrade Burns’s own words, the “open work” of the S L L, whatever may be the courage, enthusiasm, and combativity of its militants or its momentary progress, will in the long run prove to be nothing but a waste of energy, a source of disappointment, discouragement, and demoralization. No one should reopen a debate on this issue “which has long been settled by history.”

BACK TO INTERNATIONALISM!

The *Labour Review* editorial ends with a confused page on internationalism; another expression of bad conscience on the part of Comrades Burns and Sinclair. They solemnly reaffirm their adherence to the idea of an International, which is more than “a simple sum of parties” (ibidem, p 39). But at the same time, they subtly revise the basic Trotskyist, i.e., Marxist, conception of an International based upon democratic centralism on a world scale, i.e., the *World Party of Socialist Revolution*, as Trotsky named it.

Now the comrades who have joined the S L L coming from the C P may regard with some distrust the idea of

any kind of "centralism" (even be it democratic) in an International. They know the sad experience of the Comintern and of the Cominform. They know how the Kremlin used to "lay down the line," and how the C Ps, all over the world, used to follow, in a servile and abject manner, all the twists and turns decided by the Soviet bureaucracy.

But our International has nothing in common with practices of this kind. How could it have? It has no state power; it has no apparatus of its own; it has no financial means other than those which the sections put at its disposal; it is not dominated by a single section; it cannot bring any kind of "pressure" on any section, except, of course, the pressure of ideas, documents, and discussion. That is the way the International has functioned in the past, when Comrade Burns also was a member of its leadership. That is the way it functions today.

The *Labour Review* editorial makes some dark insinuations about this subject. It says (*ibidem*, p 39):

The International will not be built by a group of impressionistic 'world strategists' handing down the tactical line to each country; nor by commentators charting the 'irreversible processes'. An international movement will be built by helping national movements to reach a thorough understanding of the realities of the struggle in their own countries, and of their tasks.

If by "handing down the line" Burns and Sinclair mean the kind of *diktats* the Stalinist Comintern used abruptly to apply, this is nothing but slander of the Trotskyist movement. We dare them to give a single example of any such thing having been done by the Fourth International, in any country. If, on the contrary, they mean that the International should not express its opinion on the main tactical problems confronting the sections, and should not submit these opinions to international and national discussion, then what does the second sentence mean? How can you a help a national section to reach "understanding of the realities of the struggle in their own countries," without discussing the main tactical problems, and, above all, the problem of the correct road to building a revolutionary mass party?

In fact, Burns never was against such discussions and even international decisions in the past. As long as he was a member of the International majority he pushed the International leadership, again and again, to intervene in the British section in order to "speed up" the solution of the crisis, to intervene in many other sections with the same goal, to "expel," "crush" and "eliminate" all kinds of tendencies with whom he had tactical differences. Happily, the International never followed this kind of advice, and always *discussed* for many years tactical problems of sections, before taking any definite decision. What Burns really means, therefore, is this: as long as I am with the majority, I want the right to apply strictly the rules of democratic centralism on an international scale. But if, unfortunately, I find myself in an international minority, than I want it put down that there shall be no international "meddling" in my "internal affairs." In that case, the International must be reduced to a letter-box and a discussion club. This is the reality that underlies the "principled" "orthodoxy" of comrade Burns. For really orthodox Trotskyism is above all attachment to the idea and the organi-

zation of the International, as Comrade Trotsky taught us so many times.⁶

We have quite a number of other outstanding witnesses on this subject. Comrade Cannon told an S W P convention in November 1946:

Internationalism, as the Trotskyists have conceived it, means first of all international collaboration. But in our view this international collaboration must signify not only the discussion of the problems and tasks of co-thinkers in other countries — this is where platonic internationalism begins and ends — *but also the solution of these problems, above all our own specific problems, in action.* [*Fourth International*, February 1947, p 43.]

That has always been the conception of Trotsky; that has always been the practice of the Fourth International. And here you have another statement on the same subject:

The additional factor which aggravates the sectarian sickness of the British section is the past history and evolution of the present majority leadership. Their unprincipled split from the Fourth International in 1938, which they defend to this day, is a source of constant miseducation in the party. Their *inability to understand the role of international democratic centralism* and to abide by the decision of the 1938 Founding Conference of the F I on the British question, merges today with the organisational abuses of their sectarian policies. On the international field

⁶ Burns and Sinclair write that "the supreme task for Marxists today, as the International Committee sees it, is to establish the political independence of the working class through the construction of *powerful revolutionary parties in every country, parties which will provide the solid foundations for the Fourth International.*" (*Ibidem*, p 38.) Further on, they write: "The conference will be a step [!] toward the eventual [!] unification of the international revolutionary forces into a world party on a realistic [!] basis, with a centre whose functions can develop [!] as the growth of the movement permits the rise of representative executive bodies with an authority that has been earned by work." (*Ibidem*, p 39.)

Our authors espouse here the old centrist formula — "First build national parties, then a "really authoritative" International" — against which Trotsky fought all his life. Here is an excerpt from one of Trotsky's polemics against the I L P on this subject:

"It is necessary to understand first of all that really independent workers' parties — independent not only of the bourgeoisie, but also of both bankrupt internationals — cannot be built unless there is a close international bond between them, on the basis of self-same principles, and provided there is a living interchange of experience, and vigilant mutual control. *The notion that national parties (which ones? on what basis?) must be established first, and coalesced only later into a new International* (how will a common principled basis then be guaranteed?) *is a caricature echo of the history of the Second International: the First and the Third Internationals were both built differently. But today, under the conditions of the imperialist epoch, after the proletarian vanguard of all countries in the world has passed through many decades of a colossal and common experience, including the experience of the collapse of the two Internationals, it is absolutely unthinkable to build new Marxist, revolutionary parties, without direct contact with the self-same work in other countries. And this means the building of the Fourth International.*"

it is reflected in their permanent distrust of the patient educational efforts of the International Executive Committee, and their constant skirmishing on secondary issues.

[*Internal Bulletin* of the R C P, Special 1947 Conference Number — emphasis added.]

You know of course who wrote those sentences which call upon the International to “lay down the tactical line.” It is Comrade Burns himself.

If Trotskyists attach paramount importance to the International and internationalism, it is not only for reasons of principle. It is also because of the immense importance of an international organization for working out a correct political line. Marxism teaches us that knowledge is impossible without action. Politics are today world politics; national problems are inextricably linked with international ones. You cannot correctly formulate an international analysis behind an office desk or before a typewriter. Such an analysis must be tested by the practical experience and action of revolutionists all over the world. It must be the result of the confrontation of these experiences. Outside an international organization, such a real confrontation is impossible. Outside an international organization, revolutionists inevitably make grave errors of interpretation. To name only one example: the terrible mistake the “International Committee” and Comrades Burns and Sinclair made on the Algerian question — and note well, the Algerian revolution is today the most important revolutionary movement going on in the world — by “discovering” that the M N A, a moderate nationalist organization which today openly collaborates with butcher de Gaulle, was a “working class,” nay a “Bolshevik” party, which should be supported against the F L N even in its acts of individual terrorism within the anti-imperialist camp — this terrible mistake would never have happened if the Burns organization had remained within the Fourth International.

FOR A UNITED WORLD CONGRESS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL!

Having given lip-service to the idea of the International, Burns sets out to explain that the “time has come to reorganize the Fourth International and build it as a powerful international party linking the vanguard of the working class throughout the world.” A pompous and slightly ridiculous statement. *For Burns and his “International Committee” have now been trying to “reorganize” (i.e., to split) the Fourth International for six long years, and they have completely failed in this task.*

They split the International in 1953, without any previous political discussion. They set up a “rival” international, with a “rival” international leadership. In four countries of the world, Britain, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Canada, they got the majority of Trotskyists. In thirty countries, this majority stayed with the Fourth International. That was the situation in 1953; that is the situation today. For six years, the “International Committee” has tried to split the Trotskyist organizations in the other countries, or to set up new organizations. They only could assemble a few individuals here and there, whose only common principle was their opposition to the F I majority, without a common programme, not to speak of a common analysis of the world situation or a tactic worked out in common.

If, after these six years of failure — during which the

Burns group made undeniable numerical progress in Britain, but during which many sections of the Fourth International made very important advances, and many new sections were founded — if, we say, after these six years Burns says that *today* he will start “reorganizing” the movement, this is only dust in the eyes of his membership, a diversionist manoeuvre to turn it away from what it really wants: *reunification of the world Trotskyist movement!*

In our opinion, the split of 1953 was an irresponsible one, because the differences between the two tendencies were only tactical ones, not differences in principles. The comrades of the S L L may differ with us on this subject. But they could hardly deny what Comrade Cannon stated in a letter to the Ceylon section of the Fourth International (March 1957): that since the split the positions of both tendencies had come very close to each other. Since then, grave differences have appeared only on the question of the Algerian war, and these differences seem also lately to have disappeared. Therefore, there is today no practical nor principled political justification for the split in the world Trotskyist movement.

The Fourth International must hold its Sixth World Congress in 1960. Burns announces an international conference of the “International Committee” for the same year. If both conferences convene, one can tell in advance what will happen. There is nothing to be “assessed,” for the situation in the revolutionary world movement is very clear. There are some national sects (like the American De Leonites, the Italian Bordiguists, the German Brandlerites), which will attend neither of these conferences. There is the Yugoslav C P, which will not be present either. And there are the Trotskyist organizations, of which the overwhelming majority will be represented at our Sixth World Congress, and a minority at the conference of the “International Committee.”

This would only consolidate and perpetuate a split which nobody can justify any longer today. It would tend to confuse and discourage those willing but insufficiently informed sympathizers who are now thinking of joining the Trotskyist movement in some countries such as England. It would be nothing but a manifestation of childish factionalism, in view of the tremendous problems we have to solve, and the tremendous progress a unified movement could make.

We therefore call upon you *to organize together with the F I the united world congress of Trotskyism in 1960.* The conditions for doing this are simple, and your leaders had already agreed upon them in 1957. Let us set up a parity committee which will lay down the rules of international discussion and material organization prior to and during that congress. Let there be an understanding and agreement, already proposed by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International in 1957, that whatever tendency remained in the minority at that congress would not be the victim of any kind of “repression” or “organizational measures,” that that minority should get greater than merely numerically proportional representation on all leading bodies of the International, including the International Secretariat, and that some of the powers transmitted by the statutes of the International to the I E C, in case of differences within sections, should be reserved only to World Congresses during a transitional period of healing the split. If any supplementary orga-

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nizational guarantees are asked, we are ready to examine them most attentively. All these problems can be fraternally discussed and solved, *for the political differences allow such a solution.*

Comrades of the SLL!

It is time to recognize the facts of life. The Fourth International, World Party of the Socialist Revolution, cannot and will not be "reorganized" because it exists, functions, and grows, with the support of the overwhelming majority of Trotskyists. Your goal should be to unify with that International, not to set up a smaller rival one. This must and can be done in the coming

year, if your leadership abandons its sectarian factional attitude on the question of unity. Divided from the International, you will experience new and harsh disappointments. United with it, you will participate in a new and higher stage of building a revolutionary vanguard in the world.

Forward towards a united world congress of Trotskyism in 1960!

Forward towards a united Fourth International!

THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT
OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

September 1959