

# International Internal Discussion Bulletin

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# **I.I.D. Bulletin**

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# The Debate on Indochina

By Sterne

A discussion was begun in the December 1972 IEC [International Executive Committee of the Fourth International] on the meaning of the accords on Vietnam and the role of the antiwar movement. So far the discussion in the Fourth International has been exclusively oral. At the last IEC, notably, the minority tendency was content to broach these questions in Stateman's oral report,

the written resolution having a much more limited aim. On the other hand, the differences in analysis expressed at that time can be seen reflected in the *press* of each of the sections. The purpose of this document is to take up the discussion in written and therefore more systematic form, for it merits being followed up in the light of the most recent events.

## The Differences Over the Meaning of the Accords and the Roots of the Disagreement

Neither the members of the minority tendency nor the majority tendency had a completely consistent or fully worked-out analysis of the accords to present at the IEC. The minority has never said that the nine points of Kissinger and Le Duc Tho (the draft treaty made public in October 1972) represented *the* defeat of the Indochinese revolution. For their part, the members of the majority have never said that these points represented *the* (final) victory. A clear divergence has nonetheless appeared between those (the "majority") who saw the accords as *primarily marking an imperialist retreat* and those (the "minority") who saw them as marking *a retreat for the revolution*.

### *For the Majority Tendency*

"In any event, withdrawal of the U. S. armed forces from Vietnam and cessation of the bombing of both the North and South would constitute a shift in the relationship of forces in favor of the Vietnamese revolution. This would reflect imperialism's inability to break the heroic resistance of the Vietnamese masses as well as its retreat before the strength of antiwar sentiment in the United States itself.

"But in itself such a retreat does not guarantee the victory of the permanent revolution in South Vietnam. It only means that the revolutionary process will be able to develop with a reduced, but not eliminated, foreign interference." (The IEC Resolution of December 1972, point 2).

*For the minority tendency*, on the other hand, the "nine points represent a formula for maintaining the capitalist system and a foothold for U. S. imperialism in Vietnam. . . . The agreement thus represents a setback to the decades-long struggle of the Vietnamese people for independence and social justice." (Editorial in the SWP organ *The Militant* of November 10, 1972, signed by Linda Jenness, the candidate in the presidential elections.)<sup>1</sup>

This estimation was repeated after the publication of the accords on January 27. *Certain* articles in the SWP press have offered a more cautious judgment, making

a retreat of the revolution only a possibility:

"The accords outline a policy of collaboration between the PRG and the Saigon regime to set up elections for a new government. This can only work if the PRG agrees to Saigon's terms. *If this should occur, it would mean a major setback for the Vietnamese struggle. . . .*" (Barry Sheppard, *The Militant* of February 16. Emphasis added.) But the general tone remains the same and shows up in the press of other sections that adhere to the international minority: "Viet agreement protects Thieu dictatorship" was the headline on an article by Caroline Lund. (*The Militant*, February 2, 1973.)

"The peace accords do not mean a victory for the Vietnamese. They represent a victory for world Stalinism in its efforts to maintain the international status quo, and a success for U. S. imperialism at a time when faced with military defeat, but not a victory for the Vietnamese revolution." (February 22, 1973, issue of *Direct Action*, organ of the Socialist Workers League, the Australian sympathizing organization.)

"The 'nine points' are aimed in fact at establishing a situation of dual power where just about all the advantages would be on the side of the imperialists." (*Libération*, the French-language organ of the Canadian LSA-LSO, January-February 1973.)

This evaluation by the international minority of the fundamental meaning of the January 27 accords stems from a triple error in analysis. They are wrong about the components of the relationship of forces between the the revolution and counterrevolution in Vietnam. They underestimate the depth of the revolutionary dynamic in Indochina and the gravity of the strategic impasse in which the U. S. finds itself. They misjudge the role and nature of the subjective factor in the history of the Vietnamese revolution, that is, the Vietnamese Communist party.

Unfortunately, the documents published (both externally and internally) by the comrades of the minority are strangely brief on points two and three. While many of their publications pay a lot of attention, for example, to the role of Stalinism in regard to the Indochinese rev-

olution, very few if any seem to deal *systematically* with the particular driving forces of this revolution and the political history of its leaderships. So the majority and minority analyses have to be contrasted essentially on the basis of *oral arguments*.

## A. The Factors in the Relationship of Forces

In analyzing the relationship of forces facing the Indochinese revolution, the international minority makes a *double oversimplification*.

1. In the first place, they mechanistically define the *international* relationship of forces as the essential factor in the analysis. This is virtually the sole element that figures in their statements (for example, in the report to the YSA convention in December 1972, eight months after the start of the offensive launched in March and April, the relationship of forces in *Indochina itself* was left out altogether). But while the international relationship of forces has in fact *deteriorated* and is *relatively* unfavorable, the relationship of forces in Indochina itself (as we will see further on) has evolved *positively* in recent months as it has in recent years.

2. It is right and necessary to point up the consequences that the USSR and China's participation in the game of peaceful coexistence has had for the Indochinese revolution. It is correct and necessary to show how certain maneuvers helped to isolate the Indochinese fighters, such as when Nixon's trip to Peking was announced right after the PRG launched its diplomatic offensive in July 1971, when Nixon arrived in China right after the new bombing of the North, and when he made his trip to Moscow right after the mining of the DRV ports. It is correct and necessary to expose the policy of the Soviet and Chinese bureaucracies that have given the go-ahead to U. S. imperialism to concentrate unprecedented means of destruction in Indochina.

But it is also necessary to point out the limits that the American government's "global diplomacy" has run up against. This policy has been able to bring about a situation where the American antiwar movement has been dealt a severe blow and the remobilization of the world anti-imperialist movement has been slowed down. It has not been able to eliminate the *potential* danger posed by these movements. This is confirmed by growing mobilizations around the world in the months preceding the signing of the accords, culminating in the January 20 demonstrations. It has persuaded the USSR and China not to provide the political and military aid that would have enabled the Indochinese revolutionary front to win the final victory some time ago. It managed to get the "fraternal socialist camp" to bring the maximum pressures to bear on the Indochinese fighters. But these pressures have not gotten the Indochinese leadership to bow to the demands of peaceful coexistence. On the contrary, after the announcement of Nixon's trip to Peking, the Vietnamese CP asserted its *independent* orientation more openly than ever in statements as well as in acts.

At a deeper level, there may be a difference in our estimation of the relationship of forces now prevailing between the world revolution and counterrevolution.

*The minority starts off from a reduction of the relationship of forces to its international side alone, from de-*

*fining the isolation of the Indochinese revolution as virtually complete, from noting that the situation has been developing unfavorably for two years. From this it concludes logically that the present accords reflect this unfavorable evolution. The majority takes as its starting point a combination of the international relationship of forces and the relationship of forces in Indochina, an understanding of their contradictory evolution as well as their relativity.*

The method employed by the international minority is dangerous. It would tend in fact to present the worldwide counterrevolutionary policy of Stalinism as an insurmountable obstacle for struggling peoples. In this case, no revolution could win today before the victory of a political revolution in one of the main bureaucratized workers states or a proletarian revolution in one of the most important imperialist centers. The Yugoslav socialist revolution (1945) and the Cuban revolution were, nonetheless, able to win victory in a situation of relative isolation. They did not, of course, have to face such an imposing imperialist intervention. But neither did they go through such a prolonged process of revolutionary mobilization.

## B. The Impasse of U. S. Strategy

This double oversimplification in analyzing the relation of forces is not merely dangerous in method. It also reveals an *ignorance and a misunderstanding* of the situation in Indochina, that is, of how great a strategic impasse the U. S. A. finds itself in.

Very rarely do the publications of the international minority point out one of the essential lessons of the U. S. escalation in Indochina. That is, this escalation was not only permitted by the pusillanimity of international Stalinism but also dictated by *the failure of military and political intervention in each of its preceding stages*.

U. S. intervention in the aftermath of the 1954 Geneva accords made possible a temporary stabilization of the puppet Diem regime. But the uprisings that spread throughout the country after the NLF was formed in 1960 were to force the U. S. A. to engage in "special war" (sending U. S. "advisors"). It was the aborting of this "special war" that would lead the American government to decide on "local war" (sending 550,000 troops). In this way it managed to prevent the total collapse of the Saigon regime looming up in 1964-65. But the 1968 Tet offensive, along with the development of the antiwar movement and the demoralization of the U. S. expeditionary force, would seal the failure of this "local war." The U. S. response to this new failure was to be "Vietnamization." It did put the NLF on the defensive for a time in South Vietnam, but it was breached by the extension of the Indochinese revolution to Cambodia, the bloody collapse of the American-puppet offensive of February 1971 in lower Laos, the March 1972 revolutionary offensive in the South, and the resistance to the bombings.

*Every new step in the U. S. escalation was made from a defensive strategic position and on the basis of a defeat in the preceding stage. Today the January 27 accords mark a new change in the U. S. orientation, based fundamentally on the failure of a policy centered for fifteen*

*years on a military reconquest of Indochina.*

The U.S.A. finds itself in fact deprived of the use of its main offensive instrument in Vietnam—the direct military intervention of its forces (although the B-52 bombers are still intervening daily in Cambodia). At the same time the revolutionary forces remain intact and can wield a powerful offensive weapon—the political struggle of the masses (see further on). *It is in this sense, that the January 27 accords mark an imperialist retreat.*

How can anyone think that the puppet army can do tomorrow what it failed to do yesterday when it had the 550,000 men of the U.S. expeditionary force and American air and naval cover?

An article in *Intercontinental Press*, on the other hand, took up this problem and drew the following conclusion:

"In this respect the agreement represents a defeat for U.S. imperialism—one for which the Vietnamese people and the international antiwar movement may take full credit. . . . The central post-second-world-war effort of the American ruling class . . . has received a decisive setback. . . .

"The ability of the Vietnamese people to resist U.S. domination and the radicalization and mobilization generated by the antiwar movement will seriously restrict U.S. imperialism's ability to carry out similar interventions in other sectors of the colonial revolution. This in itself—whatever may be the final outcome of the struggle in South Vietnam—represents a major achievement for the world revolution." ("Meaning of the Ceasefire Agreement in Vietnam" by Jon Rothschild, *Intercontinental Press*, February 5, 1973, p. 101.)

How can you reconcile this judgment with the one made by the leadership of the Canadian LSA-LSO in its draft political resolution? "The ceasefire accord signed in January between Washington and its Saigon puppet, on the one hand, and the North Vietnamese and the Provisional Revolutionary Government on the other, contains many important concessions by the Vietnamese which, in their totality, amount to a serious setback to the Vietnamese revolution and by extension to the entire colonial revolution."

The accords can hardly represent *in essence* and *at the same time* a setback for imperialism and the revolution!

Once again this is not to underestimate the counter-revolutionary weapons the U.S. imperialists still hold in Vietnam. They are indeed many and considerable—the terror apparatus of the puppet regime, financial and economic aid, the mass of military matériel put at the disposal of Thieu, the effects of the policy of "forced urbanization," the constant threat posed by the bases in Thailand and the U.S. Seventh Fleet, the effects of Nixon's "global diplomacy," etc. . . . *In the last analysis, Washington is still able to use these weapons because the Vietnamese fighters had to agree to suspend their general military offensives before the Thieu regime was definitely destroyed. This makes it possible to show how much final victory still depends on a hard struggle.* But it does not itself imply that the accords marked a retreat for the revolution.

In order for there to be a retreat, the Vietnamese through the accords would have had to surrender gains already made or renounce further gains that could have been achieved. Is this the case?

A ceasefire in place enabled the liberation forces not to yield a single piece of liberated territory. To the contrary, around the time of the ceasefire announcement, the areas controlled by the liberation forces increased. *More important still, the liberated areas throughout Indochina are larger and form a geographically tighter bloc than ever before in the history of the war.*

As for the arms being held, the rearmament in recent months of the Saigon army has been carried out independently of the accords (and rather against their official spirit). The clauses dealing with future rearmament are double-edged. *But most importantly the essential new factor is the calling off of direct American military intervention and any more murderous escalation.* This is what weighs most heavily in the evolution of the purely military relationship of forces, regardless of the constant threat of resumed escalation, which in all probability would put the U.S.A. in a very difficult political situation.

In order to justify their analysis of the accords, the comrades of the minority often explain that the Vietnamese have agreed to recognize and legitimize the Thieu regime. In the *Militant*, Caroline Lund goes so far as to say that the "sovereignty" of the Saigon regime over *South Vietnam* [my emphasis] remains intact." (*The Militant*, February 2, 1973.)

We must be clear on this. The Saigon regime's staying in the *areas it controls* is not the result of the accords but of imperialist intervention and the betrayal of the Soviet and Chinese governments. *A pure and complete military victory was impossible in these conditions. And the Vietnamese leaders have never recognized the legitimacy of the Thieu regime.* They have simply recognized a fact, the existence of the puppet regime and their inability *in the immediate future* to sweep it out of South Vietnam. There is nothing else in the accords. Moreover, the comrades of the minority have "neglected" to reprint the many statements where the leaders of the PRG and the NLF continue to describe the Saigon regime as a *puppet* regime (that is, one without any legitimacy) and the PRG as the only representative of the people of South Vietnam.

"The Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, the only authentic representative of the South Vietnamese population. . . ." an appeal issued January 28 by the CC of the NLF and the PRG reaffirmed. "The struggle of our people in South Vietnam will have to overcome manifold difficulties and obstacles. The militarist and fascist forces, the instrument of neo-colonialism, that oppose the aspirations of our people have not yet given up their designs. . . ." an appeal stressed issued the same day by the CC of the Workers Party of Vietnam and the Government of the DRV. It would be good, to clarify the debate, if *Intercontinental Press* published the interviews that Vietnamese leaders like Nguyen Khắc Việt or Ly Van Sau have given to the French-language press. Here is one passage:

"The PRG . . . is . . . the sole legitimate and authentic representative of the South Vietnamese population. The Saigon regime cannot be legitimate—because it did not arise out of the people but was created by the United States. . . . Nor could it be authentic because it in no way represents the will of the people." (Ly Van Sau, the representative of the PRG in Paris, interview in *Politique*

On the contrary, while the PRG has never recognized the "legality" of the Thieu regime, the U.S. government has been forced to sign an accord granting what it rejected in 1954—formal recognition of the unity of Vietnam. We know that this doesn't mean that it will change its policy in accordance with this recognition. But it does represent an important *political retreat* for the U. S. A.

Finally, while the Vietnamese have in fact agreed to suspend their military offensives as the price they had to pay for a halt in the escalation, they have maintained the totality of their military forces. Here again the writings of the minority comrades are sometimes highly ambiguous: "There is no *explicit* [my emphasis] clause demanding the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from the South," Caroline Lund wrote referring to the January 27 accords. Instead of pointing to the very important victory won here by the Vietnamese, the comrades of the minority sow doubt. What information do they have to justify this? Nonetheless, the question of North Vietnamese troops was the object of the negotiations that took place in the period between the American presidential election and January 27. The U. S. A. in fact demanded the withdrawal of Northern troops, regroupment of the military forces in their areas, recognition of two Vietnams, the right to send in 5,000 to 20,000 troops in the name of the International Control Commission, the abandonment of any structure for "national conciliation," etc. Buoyed up by Nixon's triumph in the elections, they backed up such "demands" by the terrible military escalation we all know about; and there was no notable reaction from China or the USSR. Despite this, and in spite of the predictions of the minority comrades, the Vietnamese did not yield on any new concessions. Didn't this deserve to be highlighted?

*The (relative) "suspension" of the principal military operations is not symmetrical.* It gives a new role to the "political struggle." But in this struggle, the Vietnamese find themselves today in a better position than the Americans and their puppets. First of all, because they have a predilection for this field of activity. Secondly because the halting of the escalation makes it possible to extend, consolidate, and reorganize the liberated areas and thus to utilize them in the best way possible to back up the struggle in the urban areas. Finally, because the content of the accords (regarding democratic freedoms, prisoners, the unity and independence of Vietnam, etc. . .) favors the advance of these struggles, since the *inevitable* violations of the accords by Thieu will clarify the puppet role of his regime.

We do not mean to say that the final victory has been won. We know that as a result of the maintenance of the Thieu regime the U. S. A. still holds powerful weapons for pursuing its neocolonialist policy. The situation of dual power is being prolonged in Vietnam. *This is why the Vietnamese people still have to face a long, hard, and complex struggle. This, moreover, is what is being stressed primarily by our press.* This struggle will very likely comprise several tactical stages. It must lay the groundwork for achieving favorable conditions for *the urban insurrection*, the decisive question for the second Indochinese war. It began with the establishment of the ceasefire "in place," with a division of the country in a "leopard-spot pattern"

that seems to have come out largely to the benefit of the liberation forces. The present phase of the struggle has three major objectives—to avoid an open clash with the U. S. A. before the completion of the official American withdrawal; to extend, reorganize, and consolidate the liberated areas in order to utilize them most effectively as a weapon and as a backup for the struggle in the cities; to begin to break up the base of the puppet repressive apparatus by an appropriate policy of demoralization. *But the strategic position of American imperialism turns out to still be very weak in Indochina.*

American imperialism has managed to make five or six million persons in South Vietnam economically dependent on it and to build a considerable repressive apparatus. By its policy of "forced urbanization," it has profoundly transformed and partially broken down Vietnamese society. But it has not succeeded in bringing into existence a "national bourgeoisie" that could veil the imperialist presence to a degree and stabilize an apparently "national" government.

It has succeeded in bringing about relative isolation of the Indochinese revolution; it has not succeeded in forcing the Vietnamese Communist party to submit to the demands of peaceful coexistence. To the contrary, since the announcement of Nixon's trip to Peking, it has stepped up its statements expressing political independence and implicit but clear denunciation of the Soviet and Chinese policy. Here again the press of the minority has not reprinted these many statements, despite their political importance. This independent course has been affirmed not only in words but also in deeds. And nothing justifies saying that the pressures from Moscow and Peking can achieve today what they could not during the U. S. escalation.

Most importantly, all the weapons that are going to be brought to bear now were already in use *before* the signing of the accords and were, notably, a component part of "Vietnamization." This "Vietnamization" had, moreover, the benefit of the air and naval escalation, but still fell short of success.

*For this reason the majority thinks that the accords mark the failure of a policy of military reconquest by U. S. imperialism, and do not involve a setback for the Vietnamese revolution but lay out a framework that, no matter how difficult the present struggle, is strategically more favorable than a continuation of the escalation.*

### C. Revolutionary Dynamic of the Vietnamese Communist Party

"A key element determining what will happen in South Vietnam will be which of these two courses [class collaboration or advancing class struggle—Sterne] is followed by the NLF and the North Vietnamese leaders," Barry Sheppard wrote. (*The Militant*, February 16.) This is quite true.

But how have the minority comrades tried to answer these questions?

*Publicly*, they have been content to "pose some problems" and systematically promote distrust of the Vietnamese CP (in this connection, it seems, no mention is ever made of the role of the CP in the NLF and the PRG).



We will see that in the oral discussions they have gone much further in their characterization of this party.

"What will be the position of Hanoi and the NLF leaders as the class struggle unfolds in South Vietnam? This remains to be seen," Barry Sheppard stressed. (*The Militant*, February 9.)

"What will be Hanoi's response to this repression [by Thieu]? Will the North Vietnamese army come to the aid of local NLF forces as Thieu breaks the cease-fire? Will the North Vietnamese defend their own base areas or will they gradually withdraw? Will Hanoi put pressure on the PRG comparable to the pressure Moscow and Peking put on Hanoi itself? The answers to these questions can only be revealed in the course of the struggle itself. (Dick Roberts, *International Socialist Review*, the SWP magazine, December 1972.)

Paralleling these "probing questions," certain "historical references" are scattered throughout the articles mentioned, references that sometimes border on bad faith. One example is this passage in Barry Sheppard's article in the February 9 issue of *The Militant*.

"In 1960 the National Liberation Front was formed. *After this* [emphasis added], North Vietnam began to give support to the rebellion in the southern part of the country." Likewise, the March 9 *Militant* reprinted an excerpt from an article by the journalist I. F. Stone explaining that before 1960 the revolts occurred spontaneously *against* the line of the CP. According to him, the North only committed itself in the south *militarily* after the start of the U. S. escalation against the DRV in 1965. With incomplete facts you run the risk of coming up with a wrong analysis. The American comrades *still* neglect to point out that while it is true that from 1957 to 1959 *spontaneous* uprisings did occur *against* the orientation of the VCP, *the creation in 1960 of the NLF was the result of a discussion by the same Vietnamese Communist party (the Vietnam Workers party organized throughout the country)*. Aid from Hanoi did not come *after* the founding of the NLF (founded by whom?) or after the 1965 bombings of North Vietnam. While military aid increased slowly before 1965, the formation of the NLF represented a change in the orientation of the VCP, including the North Vietnamese leadership, which at that time committed itself totally to organizing resistance in the south.

In fact, the real answer to this question of the role of the Vietnamese leadership cannot be found in the documents of the American comrades. We must turn here to the oral discussions we have had. This is necessary, moreover, because this question is probably the most important one for understanding the analysis made by the minority.

The international minority defines the VCP as a *Stalinist party*. They do this on the basis of their own definition of what constitutes such a party. For the majority, a Stalinist party is a party that *subordinates* the interests of the socialist revolution in its country to those of a bureaucracy in a degenerated workers state. This is certainly not the case of the VCP which has had to carry on the struggle *against* the orientation set by the Kremlin and today by the Kremlin and Peking!

For the minority, a Stalinist party is one that advances *a program that in appearance is Stalinist*. The program assigned to the Vietminh and the NLF fronts by the VCP

appears to be a program for a *bourgeois democratic stage* of the revolution. The comrades of the minority, moreover, are unaware of the *basic programmatic documents* published by the Vietnam Workers party in which an analysis is developed that is largely one of permanent revolution.

One quotation, *out of dozens*, can illustrate these analyses:

"... the national liberation movement is developing not only on a large scale but also in greater depth, acquiring a new content. While national and democratic in its content, the national liberation revolution no longer fits into the framework of bourgeois revolution but is becoming an integral part of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale. This celebrated thesis of Lenin not only retains all its validity but has been confirmed still more clearly in our time by revolutionary practice. As a result, the offensive power of the national liberation movement grows more and more powerful, its role greater and greater; and it gravely threatens the home front of imperialism, creating conditions for propagating the socialist revolution worldwide. . . .

"Today a whole series of former colonies have won varying degrees of independence. For such nations, two roads open up—the road of capitalist development or an advance to socialism skipping the stage of capitalist development. The general tendency of our epoch, just as the internal situation in these countries, does not permit them to retravel the historic route of independent capitalist development in order then to wind up in the imperialist rut in the image of the Western countries. If they follow the path of capitalist development, they ultimately fall under the neocolonialist yoke of the imperialist countries." (Le Duan, "En avant sous le glorieux drapeau de la révolution d'Octobre" [Forward Under the Glorious Banner of the October Revolution], Hanoi, 1970, pp. 25-26.)

More enlightening is the way the minority responds to the problem raised by the evident gap existing between the moderation of the objectives set down in the programs of the Vietminh and the NLF, on the one hand, and the founding of a workers state in the North and the development in the South of an agrarian reform, on the other, which in many regions has already gone beyond dividing the land and begun "agricultural cooperation," that is, has surpassed the bourgeois democratic stage of agrarian reform.

The idea usually developed by the comrades of the minority is the following: The Stalinist party, the VCP, has never really *wanted* or *known how* to make a revolution. But it has been *forced* to do so by a revolutionary thrust of the masses (after all, isn't such a possibility envisaged in the Transitional Program?).

This "explanation" does not satisfy us. It does not explain certain decisions taken by the VCP *apart from* any consistent pressure from the masses (such as the decision to create the Vietminh and launch an armed struggle, which was made in 1939-41). It neglects the role that fell to the VCP in defining a long-term strategy for taking power (illustrated by the publication in 1947 of "La Résistance vaincra" [The Resistance Will Win] by Truong Chinh, which outlines the principles of prolonged revolutionary war). It underestimates the weight of the VCP

in the mass or "front" organizations (90 percent of the cadres of the liberation army in the first Resistance were members of the VCP, according to Giap).

And even if the VCP did take part in a revolution under the pressure of the masses, wouldn't this highlight the special character of this party? The French and Italian Communist parties have also been subjected to strong "pressures" by the masses in struggle. And the PCF and the PCI responded to these pressures by diverting or breaking these movements, refusing to let themselves be forced into leading a revolution "under constraint and duress." Doesn't this represent a *major* difference between the attitude of the VCP and the PCF or PCI in Europe, or the Indian CP, or the Cuban CP in the colonial world before the revolution? Doesn't this major difference have to do with the different ties between these parties and the Soviet bureaucracy?

The argument claiming that for thirty years the CP has led a revolution out of an instinct for self-preservation is obviously worthless. A nonrevolutionary party generally chooses nonrevolutionary means to defend itself—even if this signifies its fall (cf., the German CP, the Indonesian CP in 1965, and recently the Sudanese CP).

The important thing to understand is that a Stalinist CP cannot, against the orders of the Kremlin, take the lead of a revolutionary struggle without *beginning to break* with Stalinism in practice and at least partially in theory. This is why such phenomena can only be *exceptional* and requires an appropriate method of analysis. *Finally and above all, the minority overlooks the decisive role of the subjective factor in conducting such a revolution.* The Vietnamese revolution goes beyond any spontaneous insurrection that might carry reformist workers parties to power in spite of themselves. It represents more than three decades of an extremely difficult struggle. It has not benefited from a relative paralysis of imperialism like China in 1945 or Cuba. To the contrary, it has confronted and must still confront the mightiest and most determined imperialist power. How can anyone believe that such a process could develop without throwing up a single revolutionary leadership *in opposition* to the existing organizations? This would be assigning a peculiar potency to "objective factors" and the "objective dynamic of the class struggle"! This would be a strange kind of Pabloite spontanéism! And nonetheless this seems to be the analysis of the minority.

This appears clearly from the oral debates. It is suggested in articles: *"The emergence and development of a consistently revolutionary vanguard is an absolute necessity. Without it the Thieu regime and its Washington backers will isolate and destroy the liberation forces."* Obviously, there could be a lot of referring back to the meaning of the term "consistent." But the VCP, which is generally ignored, is *never* called a vanguard. Yet it has led a struggle culminating in the creation of a new workers state and fought the U. S. escalation in the South and the North to a standstill. This passage from Jon Rothschild's article in the February 5 *Intercontinental Press* seems to suggest that the future of the Vietnamese revolution depends entirely on the emergence of a new (Trotskyist?) leadership.

The analysis the minority makes of the nature of the Vietnamese CP obviously leads it to a pessimistic analy-

sis of the future. With the military pressure on the VCP and the "Vietnamese bureaucracy" weakening, it will be less *compelled* to continue the revolution and thus will have a tendency to betray. Finally.

If this analysis badly explains the past, it explains the present equally badly. Why would such a leadership so fiercely reject any new concessions after the publication of the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho accords in October, or at the February international conference in Paris unless it was to be in the best possible position for continuing the struggle? How can you explain what has happened since the signing of the accords? Has the continuation of the struggle been the act of Thieu alone? Are the calls for desertion and disobedience launched by the PRG to Thieu's soldiers; the organization of liberated areas; the constant "thrust" of the NLF to enlarge them; the appeals for struggle to achieve democratic freedoms, the right of return for refugees, and the liberation of the political prisoners simply stalling tactics? The Vietnamese revolutionists never miss an occasion to recall the objective of *reunification*; they even succeeded in getting the principle written into the January 27 accords. Is this also pure rhetoric, or are the "Hanoi leaders" ready to see Vietnam reunited under the capitalist mode of production?

In the April 6 issue of *The Militant*, this publication's editors worry whether the Vietnamese actually realize the intentions Nixon still harbors toward Indochina. Ly Van Sau answered them in advance by stressing: "Of course we know that it is not all over and that enormous difficulties remain. Certain of our friends in France are mistaken if they think they are opening our eyes to anything new by stressing the problems we are going to have to solve. (Interview in the March 7, 1973, *Tribune Socialiste*.)

The answer about the attitude of Hanoi and the PRG to the struggle opening up will not come from the "future" alone (Dick Roberts). It can also be found in the past and the present. There are two things about the VCP leadership that cannot be denied—a real and tenacious *will* to win and to finally achieve reunification of the south with the socialist north, and a *definite revolutionary skill!* Certain comrades of the SWP might accept these two claims. Why, then, refuse the title of revolutionary to the Vietnamese leadership?

Does this mean that we are uncritical tail-enders of the Vietnamese leadership? No. We have not forgotten the past, the period of the democratic front, the murder of the Trotskyists in 1945, the opportunistic diplomatic maneuvers of that time, the conspicuous delay of agrarian reform before 1953, etc. But when you want to make an *overall* judgment, what element should get the *primary* stress? These things, or the fact that the VCP bears not only the responsibility for the errors and wrong turnings of the Vietnamese revolution but also for its considerable successes?

The analysis the majority has made of the VCP should of course be deepened. The study of this party is only beginning. But it starts off from an analytical framework radically different from that of the minority.

In order to understand a party like the Vietnamese one, you have to start off from its historical evolution. Founded in 1930, the Vietnamese Communist party was caught in a contradiction between its belonging to the Stalinized Communist International and its very real involvement

in the Vietnamese class struggle. It first tried to reconcile the two sides of this contradiction. It succeeded without too much difficulty in the years 1930-35: A revolutionary upsurge in Vietnam fitted in with the "left course" (third period) of the Communist International. But this contradiction became explosive in 1936. The VCP found itself forced to adopt a "democratic front" line and abandon the slogans of radical agrarian reform and national independence. It is very likely that we are faced with a party in crisis in the years 1938-39.

The important thing is that in 1939, taking advantage of the break in the PCF's relations with Moscow owing to the war, the VCP was to reorient its policy in accordance with the needs of the struggle for national and social liberation in Vietnam. It was then to gradually take its distance from Moscow. In 1945, it took power and formed the DRV *against* the orders of the Kremlin which had ceded Indochina to the Western sphere of influence at Potsdam.

But this political rearmament of the VCP occurred in a largely *empirical* way. "The theoretical empiricism" of the VCP has deep roots. It is in fact the result of the three main "traditions" from which the VCP drew its sustenance in its formative period—the theoretical empiricism of the Stalinized CI, French Social-Democratic humanism, and the moralizing pragmatism of Vietnamese Confucianism. It is encouraged today by the very existence of bureaucratic deformations in North Vietnam and by the situation of the Vietnamese revolution (forced at the same time to assert its independence of the "big powers" of the "Socialist Camp" and win their aid) and by the absence of a large bourgeois nationalist party in Vietnam (which has always assured it an important margin for tactical maneuver). This makes it possible to explain why this political rearmament has not led the VCP to go back to the debates in the international workers movement and especially the debate between the Left Opposition and the Stalinists. Likewise it explains why the re-discovery of the strategic principles of permanent revolution has been accompanied by the use of the tactical formulas of the bloc of four classes (in the absence of a "national bourgeoisie" in Vietnam) and a misunderstanding of the essential nature of Stalinism.

This is not then a "revolutionary Marxist," i.e., Trotskyist party. But it is not a Stalinist party either, not in its program or its practice. Like the Chinese and Yugoslav parties, it has known how to refuse to subordinate its policy to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy and it broke away empirically from the Stalinized CI around the second world war. That the theoretical weaknesses of the VCP pose a danger to the future of the Vietnamese revolution, especially as regards the fight against the growth of bureaucratic tendencies, is, of course, true. This is why we think that our movement still has a role of its own to play in Indochina as well as elsewhere. But that these weaknesses necessarily prevent it from leading the revolutionary process as far as the seizure of power is not true! History has proved the contrary. There is room between the Social Democratic or Stalinist reformist parties and the Trotskyist revolutionary-Marxist parties for a whole gamut of centrist formations or groups that on the theoretical level are distinguished by revolutionary empiricism. The colonial revolution has given birth to

several such formations. The VCP is one of them.

We have always condemned the use by the Vietnamese leadership of formulations of the "national-union" type. Because, by obscuring the class conflict, they *can* cover up (and have on several occasions) an opportunist policy. Because they make it more difficult to educate the vanguard in the spirit of internationalism. Because they do not facilitate the mobilization of an international anti-imperialist movement.

But the use of these formulations by the Vietnamese leadership today does not necessarily imply that the VCP is following a class-collaborationist policy of the "popular front" type. Three elements make it possible to understand the present meaning of this policy:

— The deepgoing nature of the revolutionary dynamic in south Vietnam as well as in all of Indochina has long ago clearly brought out the *class content* of the colonial revolution.

— The hegemony of the VCP over the national liberation movement has destroyed any possibility for petty-bourgeois leaderships to play an independent role.

— The absence of a "national bourgeoisie" in Vietnam (since French colonization) and thus *the absence of a consistent bourgeois nationalist party* (of the type of the Chinese Kuomintang or the Indian Congress party) rules out the bourgeoisie reappropriating national sentiment for its own interests. To the contrary, the need of the Thieu regime to violate numerous articles (respecting Article 11 on democratic rights alone would mean the death of the puppet regime) reveals its attachment to the neocolonialist design.

*In this context*, the theme of "national reconciliation" has been utilized by the Vietnamese as one of the weapons to demoralize the troops and functionaries of the puppet regime and bring about fraternization.

This is not the place for an *exhaustive analysis* of the VCP nor a detailed *study of its history*. My only purpose is to show how an abstract reading of the clauses in the January 27 accords or the NLF or PRG program fails to give a basis for correctly answering the question of the role of the Communist party in the Vietnamese revolution.

\* \* \*

The triple error of estimation by the minority on the components of the balance of forces, the extent of the U.S.'s strategic impasse in Indochina, and the role of the subjective factor in the revolutionary dynamic has as a consequence not only misjudging the meaning of the accords.

— These analyses mask some of the most essential lessons of the Indochinese revolution (the strategic weakness of imperialism, the nature of prolonged revolutionary war, the dialectical relationship between the vanguard and the masses, etc. . . .) and thus obstruct the education of the international vanguard.

— They lead to the SWP taking for good coin any "news" that fits in with its "distrust" of the VCP. One of the gravest cases of this was an article published in *The Militant* of February 23 and *Intercontinental Press* of February 19 under the headline "Secret Accords on Laos Revealed."

On the basis of reports in the American press *alone* and despite Vietnamese denials, the SWP comrades considered it an established fact that Hanoi had negotiated secret clauses "authorizing" the U. S. A. to continue its bombing of Laos. It is *possible* (but by no means certain) that secret clauses do exist. But it is highly *improbable* that such a clause exists. The U. S. A. has no need for authorization from Hanoi to violate the January 27 accords on this point. And history should have taught the SWP comrades caution: In order to justify the resumption of the raids against the North, the American government has long explained that Hanoi broke the secret accords concluded in 1968 by attacking U. S. observation planes.

The DRV has always denied this. And the U. S. government has never published these clauses. In any case, it is not our task to puff up the statements of the U. S. press *without even publishing, apparently, the many Vietnamese declarations reaffirming the solidarity of the three Indochinese peoples, denying the existence of secret clauses, and denouncing the U. S. bombing of Laos and Cambodia.*

— Finally and most importantly, these analyses threaten to have a negative effect on giving impetus to the solidarity movement. But before taking up this problem, we must go back to the differences that have appeared between the majority and minority regarding the general orientation given in the past to this solidarity activity.

## The Debate on the Nature of the Solidarity Movement

### A. The Role of Revolutionary Militants in the Support Movement

The point of departure in the differences that arose in the past between the members of the present minority and majority can be defined in this way: The minority thought that the role of revolutionary militants was to *broaden* the support movement, while the majority thought that their role was to *broaden it by radicalizing it*.

Before going back over this difference, we must point out the special situation of the U. S. A. While they developed their solidarity work on the basis of the slogans "The NLF Will Win" or "Total Support Till the Final Victory," the members of the majority have long asserted that they thought it was correct to mobilize NPAC around the slogan of "Out Now." But the U. S. A. was a special case in two respects. It was the aggressor country; it was its troops that were involved in Vietnam. It was a politically backward country with neither a strong Communist party nor even a strong Social Democracy. Since the first duty of revolutionary militants was to bring into being a *mass opposition* to the government's policy, it was correct to gear the solidarity movement around such a central slogan. And the SWP undoubtedly played a decisive role in the development of the American antiwar movement.

But a twofold difference appeared regarding (1) the orientation of the *international* solidarity movement and (2) the dialectical relationship between the SWP and NPAC *in the U. S. A. itself*.

#### 1. The Orientation of the International Solidarity Movement

The SWP has always advocated extending the slogans and forms of action used in the U. S. A. to the international level. The Canadian LSA-LSO has in fact adopted this orientation. The English minority has fought vigorously for doing this. The majority has refused for three reasons:

(a) In the first place, the revolutionary far left, in the best of cases, could not hope to broaden the movement by basing its activity on too "elementary" slogans. Take the typical case of France. There a strong CP has mobilized regularly around the demands of "Peace in Viet-

nam" and U.S. Out." This CP is infinitely stronger than the far left. If the latter called for demonstrations on just the slogans advanced by the PCF, it would mobilize almost no one. Those susceptible to such political appeals already respond to the PCF. *The far left mobilized more militants around more radical slogans than around elementary slogans alone.* You can see that the main criticism made by the minority and developed at length in its document analyzing the European resolution (see the document by Mary-Alice Waters in a coming internal bulletin) [International Internal Discussion Bulletin, Vol. X, No. 3] proves particularly ridiculous. As the minority sees it in fact, if the majority agreed that the SWP should mobilize masses because such mobilizations were effective in the U. S. A., it thought that in Western Europe radical and *small* (deliberately kept small!) demonstrations were good enough because the only objective was to educate the vanguard.

We will come back later on to what enables the minority comrades to defend such a manifestly erroneous notion with so much perseverance, a notion that has been exposed so often by the members of the majority and especially at the last IEC.

In the U. S. A., many demonstrators may simply be for their country getting out of the mess in Vietnam; the same is not true elsewhere. For activists to go beyond mere humanitarian condemnation of the American escalation they must *take the side* of the Indochinese peoples. Their capacity for prolonged *activity* in the solidarity movement, as well as for resisting the Nixon demagoguery depends on their understanding of the struggle of the Indochinese fighters. This is why we have always wanted to endow the movements we led with an *anti-imperialist* understanding and not merely an *antiwar* one. This type of commitment is illustrated and promoted by the slogans "The NLF Will Win" or "Total Support Till the Final Victory." These are the kind of slogans that Barry Shepard characterizes in a terse phrase as a "mere expression of sentiment with no effectiveness as such," and which the Canadian LSA-LSO (whose country has no expeditionary force) rejects in these terms: "It is *NOT* more revolutionary to demand 'Smash U. S. imperialism' or 'Victory to the NLF,' (i. e., more revolutionary than demanding 'U. S. Out of Indochina Now!') for these de-

mands do not relate to the present consciousness of the masses and will not mobilize the masses." (Draft resolution for the 1972 Canadian youth convention, Bulletin in English, Vol. 8, No. 4).

(b) But the problem doesn't stop there. The specific role of the far left is not simply to mobilize particular layers that respond to radical solidarity slogans. By organizing a solidarity current that it can lead, the revolutionary vanguard must also bring pressure to bear on the whole movement with the aim of increasing the degree of mobilization. By its own mass initiatives, the vanguard play the role of locomotive with respect to other forces. Let's take the French example again. We were able (with the help of the deepgoing struggle of the Indochinese fighters) to achieve the following things.

—Stepped up mobilizations by the PCF, which feared losing the initiative too much in this field, especially in the year 1971-72.

—A shift to relatively more "left" slogans. While in the years 1965-67, it violently opposed the slogan "The NLF Will Win," it has since been forced to let its youth demonstrate to shouts of "With Indochina Until the Victory, Always." Today a new divergence has appeared over slogans. The PCF has advanced the slogan of "Nixon Has Signed, Vietnam Has Won." We have countered with slogans calling for unrelenting support ("No Truce in Support," "Total Support Till the Final Victory," etc. . . .)

—A broadening of the themes of mobilization (taking in the role of multinational companies, French government complicity, etc. . . .)

—A radicalization of the forms of mobilization. For two years we could hardly break out of the straitjacket of repetitive demonstrations less and less suited to the gravity of the U.S. escalation, except by a militant style of work in the rank-and-file committees and by some exemplary actions that remained small. The demonstrations of January 20, 1973, were, however, the culmination of these two years of remobilization. The demonstration called for the U.S. Embassy was banned by the government. But despite a considerable mobilization of police, it was possible to hold it. It succeeded in assembling 15,000 demonstrators, who had to organize in advance to break the police cordon. Thousands of others went directly to the embassy, or wandered off. This *mass* demonstration faced a head-on confrontation with the forces of order to demonstrate its determination to go to the U.S. Embassy no matter what. The reverberations of this demonstration were largely due to the decisiveness it showed. Moreover, the scope of the demonstrations in Paris and the provinces once again illustrated how in the past we were able to mobilize more people around radical perspectives and slogans.

If the January 20 demonstration was larger, *despite* the police ban, than those that preceded it (which fit in better with the "schema" of the minority comrades), this was because it offered a target suited to the depth of indignation that existed—the U.S. Embassy. Likewise, the actions that the Ligue Communiste was able to carry out in its own name got a broad mass response.

*Against the evidence of the facts*, Mary-Alice continues to claim in her document that such actions can only rule out our being able to achieve any mass mobilization.

Thanks to all this, we have helped to raise the degree of consciousness of the activists in the solidarity move-

ment and to prepare it for assuming its tasks in the difficult period following the accords.

(c) Finally the role of revolutionary organizations is also to educate more specifically the broad vanguard emerging in the solidarity movement. This vanguard is, in fact, not homogeneous, and it is important to know how at the same time to bring it into action as a whole as well as to raise its average level of consciousness by appealing to its advanced wing. Likewise, in separating out a *mass radical* solidarity current, we force, *by our initiatives*, the reformist formations to mobilize, so we reinforce the mass current that we help to inspire by being able to organize and respond to the specific problems of its broad vanguard.

The way our intervention is geared obviously differs profoundly according to the time and country. It depends on the organizational and political relationship of forces existing in each country. The conference of the European sections on Vietnam in the last quarter of 1972 showed how greatly the slogans and kinds of alliances we advocate in each country differed according to the degree of development of our sections, the far left, and the solidarity movement. In Luxembourg, our comrades are the sole inspirers of the high-school committees, whose program includes the basics of our analyses regarding Indochina. This corresponds to a situation where our section was formed in the face of a weak far left and a broad solidarity movement that manifested itself only very sporadically. On the other hand, in France, the Front Solidarité Indochine, in which the French section is active, was formed on a united-front platform oriented toward a struggle for the victory of the Indochinese peoples but also acceptable to various Maoist currents as well as radicalized Christians, etc. . . . This corresponds to a situation where the Ligue Communiste is strong enough to directly advance all its political positions on permanent revolution or Stalinism and where the framework for an on-going united-front policy is very different from Luxembourg.

But if the forms vary, the *principle* in gearing our intervention is essential, as we see it. It is in fact by knowing how *at the same time* to separate out a *mass radical* solidarity current, to *offer*, on the basis of initiatives that we together with this current give impetus to, a broader unity in action to all the forces mobilized on Indochina, to educate the broad vanguard by the activity of our revolutionary organizations, that we *at the same time* achieve our tasks of international solidarity and building the revolutionary party.

It is at this point that the general debate between the majority and the minority of the International on the relationship between the vanguard and mass in party building turns up in the discussion over the support movement for the Indochinese revolution.

The profound incomprehension shown by the minority of the way the majority poses this question is illustrated by this passage in Mary-Alice Waters's document:

"The major problem was not one of slogans, although the policy was reflected through slogans. Whether or not it is correct to carry banners saying 'Victory to the NLF,' or 'Solidarity with the NLF,' or some variant on that theme, is entirely secondary. The fundamental problem was one of *political orientation*. Once we decide that our perspective is to reach the masses, not just respond to

the 'concerns of the vanguard,' the question of what slogans to raise will resolve itself quite naturally in the course of such activity and the response to it."

We have tried to "reach the masses" and we have been able to combine mass work with inspiring a radical current. What the minority does not understand is how, in order to play a role in an anti-imperialist mobilization, we had to be able to fit solidarity activity into the channels of the youth radicalization and the formation of a broad vanguard.

## 2. Four Criticisms of the SWP

The SWP has in fact played a *very important* role in the development of the antiwar movement in the U. S. A. It has notably endowed it with the unity, the continuity, and organization it needed by fighting *against* the spontanéist currents. But we do not think, therefore, that its intervention was free from major weaknesses and errors.

(a) The first criticism we make of the SWP leadership is over their advocating the extension of their NPAC policy to the entire International and their *failure to understand the specific nature of this policy*.

(b) In the U. S. A. itself, in NPAC, the SWP comrades tended to make an identity between a "single *issue* movement" and a "single *slogan* movement." The slogan "Out Now!" not only became the main slogan but *virtually the only one*. And this occurred at a time when, with "Vietnamization," and then the approach of the accords, the situation was becoming much more complex than during the "local war" that made possible the emergence of the antiwar movement. Some years ago already, it was important to center a part of the agitation on *exposing the puppet regimes* in order to show their *political nature* and prepare the militants to act in a situation where the U. S. involvement was *essentially* (though not entirely) through the intermediary of these regimes. This theme was *present* in the activity of NPAC but it was completely *overshadowed*.

(c) Finally, the SWP aligned its activity completely with that of NPAC. Except for denouncing Stalinism, it did not conduct an *independent campaign of political explanation*, notably on the nature and driving forces of the revolutionary war in Indochina. It did not advance more radical *slogans of its own*, and more particularly it has not advanced a slogan of open solidarity with the *Indo-chinese revolution*. This has generally led it to present the Indochinese revolution more as a mere struggle for self-determination than a social revolution, a permanent revolution. Finally, it has not initiated activities of its own based on its slogans that would have enabled it to draw in part of the more advanced layers of the antiwar movement who already saw the objective as the *victory* of the "enemy," the Indochinese revolutionists.

As a result of these errors, the antiwar movement inspired by the comrades of the SWP has shown *great rigidity* in action, which has generally prevented it from responding to events in a short time and has made it much more difficult for it to continue its activity since the cease-fire. This difficulty in acting stems also, obviously, from the analyses of the situation made by the SWP comrades. A dangerous tendency has even emerged to reduce the activity of NPAC to a minimum and to

concentrate most of the effort on a campaign of exposing Stalinism carried on by the YSA (the youth group of the SWP). This notably was the orientation given to the YSA at the time of their convention in December 1972.

This passage from a report made to the December 1972 convention by the Joint SMC-NPAC Steering Committee Fraction illustrates the rigidity we mentioned:

"The National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) and the Student Mobilization Committee (SMC) are mass-action coalitions. They have existed on a basis of an agreement to march down the street *on a particular day under a particular demand*, attempting to mobilize in action the mass opposition to American involvement in Vietnam. If the accords are signed the U. S. will have agreed to withdraw its combat troops within 60 days. This fact plus the Vietnamese characterization of the accord as a 'just settlement' will cause the American people to feel that the war is over, even though all the basic social problems will still exist in Vietnam. This situation will curtail the ability of NPAC and the SMC to organize mass actions. In the event of the 9 points being signed, we believe that there is very little that the mass-action coalitions could do.

"This does not mean that we propose that NPAC and the SMC should be dissolved. The cease-fire has not been signed. . . . Over the longer term, assuming that the cease-fire is signed, there will remain a need for coalition forms to be available to respond to *possible developments in Vietnam*.

"NPAC and SMC's ability to respond in such an event will depend on their maintaining their character as coalitions based on mass action. There will be a temptation —because of the present narrowness of the coalitions— to forget that they exist *on a very simple and rigidly defined political basis*. NPAC and the SMC exist to build mass actions against the war. They do not have a worked out ideological framework, nor can they. *They are not organizations to defend political prisoners, or fight for amnesty or whatever*. . . .

"The recent perspective for NPAC and the SMC means that more areas will not be able to sustain paid staffs and rented offices. This will mean a post office box, a person responsible for the mail, etc., and minimal activities depending on the status of the cease-fire. One important part of this perspective will be that the coalitions settle their financial obligations and work out a serious plan for dealing with whatever political problems may arise as the result of debts. . . .

"It is our opinion that a call for an NPAC convention should not be issued at this time. It would obviously be difficult to build, and would very likely involve a confrontation between the assorted sects present at such gatherings and ourselves. There would be no major proposal for action and only a very thin layer of independents. . . ." [Emphasis added.]

The "mothballing" of NPAC had already begun when the Christmas bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong was launched and this raised problems. Nonetheless, the success —relative to the last demonstrations— of the January 20 mobilizations in the U. S. A. illustrates the potential retained by the antiwar movement.

Since then, *The Militant* has devoted a lot of space to the question of political prisoners (on the other hand,



it has remained strangely silent on the issue of amnesty for the tens of thousands of deserters or youth who resisted being drafted). But at the time of the mobilizations against Thieu's visit to the U. S., NPAC showed the same rigidity in its forms and themes of action. It mobilized around the three slogans "U. S. Out of Southeast Asia Now," "No More Support for Thieu," and "No U. S.-Imposed Regimes." *All of these express the need for American disengagement* (and all are obviously correct). But the problem of the political prisoners in Saigon has been presented rather more as an *illustration* of the situation that exists than as *an issue to mobilize around*. It is the U. S., however, that in the last analysis bears the responsibility for their fate. And it cannot be said that the slogan "Release the Civilian Prisoners Now" is "vanguardist."

This is not to suggest that the SWP bears the responsibility for the decline of the antiwar movement in the U. S. A. This was largely inevitable. But by its policy the SWP failed to adequately prepare a skeletal structure for the movement so that it could continue solidarity activity most effectively in the present conditions.

Finally, while the SWP took a leading role in animating the antiwar movement, it has remained *politically* in its wake, incapable of meeting the needs of the advanced layers of the movement.

### 3. *The Debates in the Majority*

Two debates that have unfolded among the majority of the International deserve to be pointed out.

A. Before the end of 1968, the anti-imperialist movement was very vigorous in Western Europe, and the sections of the Fourth International were a driving force in it. But after the explosion of the French May, these movements went into a profound decline, which with a few exceptions (e.g. Sweden) led to the disappearance of ongoing organizations devoted specifically to solidarity. It was only in the years 1970 and 1971 that anti-imperialist activity started progressively developing again, finding a new stability in 1972. In a European meeting on anti-imperialist work in October 1972, a debate began on the reasons for this profound lapse in support activity. Two basic reasons were put forward in the discussion:

— *Fundamentally*, this decline was *inevitable*. Around the French May the situation of the far left underwent a deepgoing change that brought about a general shift in focus of the activity of revolutionary militants toward the plants and the "national" problems of the class struggle, as well as *the breakup of the united student movement* that had been the foundation of the anti-imperialist organizations before 1968. In this context, consistent and continuous anti-imperialist activities on Indochina could only be developed by going *against the current* of the "natural" activity of radicalized militants. Whereas before 1968, the anti-imperialist movement was the training ground of the new revolutionary generation. It was in the years 1968-69 that our sections were consolidated; they did not have the strength immediately to buck the natural current and overcome, notably, the spontanist forces in this field. It was only after they had consolidated that they could *deliberately* revive the ongoing movement of solidarity with the Indochinese revolution. In this sense,

the hiatus was actually favorable, and all the more so because as far as "mass" public opinion went, the pause was fostered by the opening of negotiations in Paris, the halt in the bombing of the DRV, etc. . . .

This period illustrates in a negative way how dependent we are for meeting our international tasks on capturing the mass radicalization and orienting it around anti-imperialist themes. Four North American comrades attended this European commission meeting. They do not seem to have understood the meaning of the discussion that took place there. The proof of this is the peculiar interpretation given by Mary-Alice Waters to Germain's report to the IEC in December 1969 (see the next Internal Bulletin).

— *This said*, it is probable that in a good many European countries the resumption of systematic intervention in this field by our sections lagged relatively behind what was objectively possible. The pause was inevitable, but it could have been shorter. We were affected to some extent by the "inertia" of routine in this matter and in certain sections resumption of this work involved a virtual political reeducation of the new members. We probably could have gained a year in getting this activity going again, which obviously would have been precious time.

B. A difference appeared among the members of the present majority over the slogans to be advanced in the period that *preceded* the signing of the accords. Some defended the slogan "Nixon Must Give In Before the Thirty-First" (October 31 being the day initially set for signing the accords). Others opposed any slogan concerning the signing of the accords.

To some extent, this debate reflected minor differences in analysis regarding the relationship of forces that brought about the accords and the framework that they would provide for future struggles. But above all what was behind this debate was a difference over the *tactic* to use in the anti-imperialist movement to mobilize it at *that given moment*.

Those who objected to our proposing any slogan about the accords to the solidarity organizations—and notably any slogan calling on the U. S. A to sign them—feared that if we did so we would disarm the anti-imperialist movement *politically*. Insofar as the accords contained important concessions and repeated political formulas belonging specifically to the Vietnamese Communist movement, we would, by bringing pressure to bear for signing the accords *both* arouse hopes in the activists that the victory was won—and that therefore there was no need for keeping up support—and suggest that we supported the *content* of these accords with their concessions and erroneous political formulations.

Those who advanced such slogans, on the other hand, believed that *in that period* we could not impel mass actions without responding to the conjuncture that was largely dominated by the "battle for signing" [the accords]. They argued that if we thought the accords marked a *U. S. retreat* and opened up a framework for developing the struggles that was *preferable* to the continuation of the U. S. escalation and if our international activity could at that moment help the Vietnamese, it was politically correct and necessary in practice to put forward slogans that called, in the most militant terms possible, for signing the accords. In order to avoid the danger of demobilizing the movement in the wake of the accords being signed,

they proposed raising a *combination* of slogans, which should be:

- Adapted to the immediate conjuncture ("Nixon Must Give In").

- Reaffirm the Strategic Objective ("No Truce in Support," "Total Support Till the Final Victory").

- Prepare the way for the coming struggles ("Support Cambodia," "Free the Political Prisoners" . . .).

In the context of a common understanding of the solidarity movement and its essential objectives, the participants in the debate discussed "the best practical course of action in a special situation." The comrades of the international minority have sought to turn this discussion into a debate over *principle*, arguing that Trotskyists could not call for signing accords including such concessions without in fact recognizing the U.S.'s right to oversee the fate of the Vietnamese people and thereby violating *the principle of self-determination*. The analogy with Brest-Litovsk singled out by the international minority shows the abstractness of this method of putting the problem on the level of "principles." As the majority sees it, the content of the 1973 accords is different from that of the Brest-Litovsk agreements in 1918. The purpose of the latter was to gain a breathing space for the young Soviet republic that was under attack from all quarters; it represented a tactical retreat. The recent accords represent the definition of a new and more favorable framework for a continuing struggle. The Bolshevik party had to agree to relinquish very important territories won by the revolution. In Vietnam not an inch of liberated land has been given up — quite the contrary.

Above all, we cannot be compared to the German workers movement against which the Bolsheviks raised an outcry in 1918 because they called for signing the "unfortunate" "peace" of Brest-Litovsk. In a Europe where revolution loomed, and particularly in Germany, the Social Democratic workers movement had the *concrete possibility* of at least shaking the government of the Reich, and it was its passivity that forced the Bolsheviks to come to terms. Today the "joy" expressed by the international Stalinist movement over the signing of the accords reflects only its cowardly relief and unperturbed conscience over its betrayals, because it was also its passivity that forced the Vietnamese to accept the maintenance of the Thieu regime following the cease-fire. But we did not have the means to transform the international relationship of forces in a few weeks or a few months so that the problem of the accords would no longer be posed in such terms for the Vietnamese fighters. The problem for us was not "do we accept the compromise accords or do we sweep them away?" but "how can we have an effect on

the situation right now and how can we best prepare the way for tomorrow's struggles?". It is in this sense that the debate is about *tactics* and not *principles*.

The English section, for instance, has noted its disagreement with the French section over the slogans put forward in the solidarity movement. Here also the disagreement has shown up in our respective press. But the *conjunctural, tactical* nature of this difference is evident. The British Vietnam Solidarity Campaign reflects the same traditions as the French Comité Vietnam National before 1968 or the present Front Solidarité Indochine. These various solidarity organizations have developed according to a similar logic and around common themes. In France and England they have achieved a relationship of forces such that the Communist parties have been forced to partially redefine their policies, taking account of their existence. In Great Britain, the CP has found itself forced to follow our lead.

\* \* \*

Over and above these problems, the *general balance sheet* of the solidarity movement in Western Europe confirms the majority's overall analysis of the nature and role of the anti-imperialist movement. Our sections have been able largely to combine work in the anti-imperialist movement with training the new revolutionary generation and building the revolutionary party. Most importantly, *all* the solidarity movements inspired by far-left organizations (regardless of their political allegiance) that have played an important role in the mobilization in support of the Indochinese revolution have been movements that developed around a perspective of *victory* for the Indochinese peoples, that is, as *mass radical currents*. The comrades of the minority are familiar with this fact. It is a shame that Mary-Alice Waters did not grapple with it in her document.

Since the signing of the accords, mass actions have dropped off sharply. In many European countries, the situation of the solidarity movement at the moment is difficult. This is both because of the apparently confused situation in Indochina, as well as the development of other mass mobilizations (in the army, university reform, etc. . .). Nonetheless, we have just succeeded for the first time in setting up a European coordination for the solidarity movements in this area. This coalition has launched a European campaign that is to culminate May 12 in an international demonstration in Milan, Italy. But the coalition must continue its work after this first target date. The existence of this cooperation, moreover, testifies to the vitality of the groups involved.

## The Evolution of the Situation and Our Tasks<sup>2</sup>

The key question in the history of the second Indochinese war has been *winning the cities*. The first Indochina war, notably, arose out of urban insurrections (Bac Son in 1940; the August 1945, 1946, Hanoi uprising). The Vietnamese CP always kept up an important level of urban work. But the problem of insurrection in the cities was not to be posed again as an immediate objective before

the end of the first Indochinese war. Because of the nature of the imperialist involvement, it was a different matter after the fighting resumed in the South. On several occasions, the Vietnamese CP has given priority to "the battle for the cities." In 1964, as soon as the "special war" was checkmated, they prepared to send the bulk of their cadres into the urban areas. But the arrival of the U.S. expe-



ditionary force and the start of the bombing of the North made them change their immediate objectives. The 1968 Tet Offensive gave the coup de grâce without being able to consolidate a revolutionary power in the besieged centers. *The new political framework emerging from the signing of the accords on January 27 puts this decisive question back on the agenda.*

The "battle for a cease-fire in place" that developed around January 27 shows the extent to which, in fact, the reconquest of the countryside is no longer a decisive problem. "Vietnamization" has of course scored some points in South Vietnam, taking advantage of the fact that the Indochinese fighters were devoting their main efforts to Laos and Cambodia. But, strangled by the failure of the American-puppet operations in these two countries and shaken by the March-April 1972 offensive in the South, "Vietnamization" has revealed its weaknesses. The gains were only superficial and today the map of the liberated areas seems more extensive than ever. According to the accounts of foreign journalists in Saigon, the puppet forces retain military control only of the urban centers (with more or less of the surrounding territory) and the main roadways (which the NLF could cut abruptly if the necessity arose). A part of the coast and the central provinces are still "contested," but the *open* network of the revolutionists is supposed to be largely dominant, including in the rich Mekong Delta. According to Ly Van Sau (the PRG representative in Paris), since the signing of the accords the liberated areas have undergone a slow but constant expansion.

In what conditions can the "battle for the cities" be waged? To understand this, we must keep in mind the facts of the present balance of forces. The U. S. A. has powerful means at its disposal, consisting essentially of the *combined use* of military, police, and commando terror on the one hand, and a policy of "social corruption" on the other, based on the successes of its policy of "forced urbanization." But we have seen that *the U. S.'s strategic position remained weak* (see part one, end of point B) and that as a result the Vietnamese fighters were *both* in a more favorable position and confronted with the necessity of continuing a difficult struggle. What are the tempos likely to be?

## **A. Create Favorable Conditions for the 'Battle for the Cities'**

In order to win the "battle for the cities" and establish a revolutionary government over the whole of the territory, the Vietnamese fighters must assemble two essential conditions—a political situation interdicting Washington from resuming the escalation, and a situation permitting the relaunching of the urban movements.

1. A *political situation* preventing Washington from responding to a deteriorating situation with all its military means, going so far as to raze the cities to the ground. The Vietnamese military offensives, notably, have always had this as an objective. The 1968 Tet offensive did not open the way to "make a sweep" of the urban centers but it did ultimately create a general political situation (isolation in Vietnam and in the world, demoralization of the U. S. expeditionary force. . .) that interdicted the American government from continuing its "local war." The

March-April 1972 offensive not only created the conditions for relaunching guerrilla warfare in the whole of the territory and reextending the liberated areas. It created, *in a given international context*, the conditions favorable for signing the January 27 accords.

Today the Vietnamese fighters have *partially* achieved the political conditions that can paralyze renewed American escalation. The effect of the withdrawal of the last American prisoner and the last soldier officially involved in Vietnam was a dual one. On the one hand, now that the fate of its prisoners is settled, Washington has its hands free to maneuver. The Vietnamese have lost an important means of pressure. But this means of pressure did not stop much in the past. On the other hand, the American government is in a more difficult position to renew open, direct, and massive intervention. The policy of air and naval escalation has shown its limits. It cannot rapidly break an enemy that has shown his capacity for resistance and has had the time to reorganize. The international reactions at the time of the bombing of the dikes last summer and the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong this Christmas show, moreover, that a brutal and prolonged resumption of the escalation would probably touch off an unprecedented mobilization. The threat of a reescalation remains (and is still being brandished by American officials), but carrying it out would be apt to cost the American government a great deal without necessarily proving very effective.

But because this condition has still been only partially achieved (a general offensive by the revolutionists would probably enable Nixon to relaunch the escalation today), the Vietnamese fighters have sought and still seek to avoid a head-on clash with the Americans (during the withdrawal of their troops) as well as an all-out collision with the puppets. It is here notably that the solidarity movement retains an essential function—to counter the blackmail of the escalation threats with the danger the worldwide anti-imperialist movement represents, even potentially, for the U. S.

2. A situation permitting the *relaunching of the urban movements*.

Active before 1968 and in 1969-70, the urban movement has been paralyzed since the election of Thieu as president and subjected to an all-embracing and ferocious repression. The accords by themselves will not loosen this vise of repression; they only favor the emergence of a mass political struggle capable of confronting it.

But such a mass struggle could not arise in the urban centers immediately after the signing of the accords. Some mobilizations have occurred (Danang, Dalat, Mytho. . .) but they have been very limited. For the repression remains, and aside from the improbable case of the Saigon regime progressively disintegrating, the puppet apparatus will break down only when confronted with a social and military force that needs to be prepared in order to act. The signing of the accords marks a turning point in the conditions of the struggle in Vietnam and implies a *thoroughgoing reorganization of the forces on both sides*.

From the standpoint of the PRG and the NLF, this probably means:

—Reorganizing their urban network which was once again driven underground after the Tet offensive in 1968 and which now must prepare itself for waging a more open struggle.

—Extending the liberated areas to the maximum and reorganizing them militarily, economically, politically, and administratively. Many of these areas have suffered severely from the escalation. Another part of them have just left the status of "contested" areas (where the two governments exist side by side). Such reorganization is essential because these liberated areas are called upon to play a decisive role in the battle for the cities. Areas of refuge and retreat, they need to be both as extensive and as near as possible to the urban centers as well as militarily prepared for any counteroffensive. As a place for organizing the revolutionary government, they must aid in the social and political struggle. The NLF seems to have a large base among the refugees. The right for refugees to return to their villages—which is formally recognized by the accords—will probably be one of the important axes of the struggles to come. But this struggle will have all the more weight if the liberated areas are really able socially and economically to receive millions of new inhabitants. Likewise, the agrarian reform is one of the important levers in the work of bringing about demoralization and desertion in the puppet army.

—*Beginning* to break up the puppet repressive and administrative apparatus. While we cannot hope—aside from an exceptional case—to see the apparatus of the Saigon regime break up without a military offensive and/or an insurrectional uprising, we cannot expect either to see a progressive development of the urban movement unless the repressive apparatus begins to come apart. This is the significance of the campaign the NLF is waging now, calling for fraternization, disobedience, and desertion. The cease-fire in place has been very important for this, because it has increased the points of contact between the revolutionary forces and the puppet army, and thus facilitated this political work. In this context, we can better understand Thieu's refusal to implement the cease-fire. He is not trying simply to nibble away at the liberated areas or slow their expansion or hamper their reorganization. He is also trying to keep his troops in a state of alert in order to prevent desertions. The result of this undermining work is obviously hard to estimate because it can remain below the surface for a very long time. (In the April 6 FSI rally in Paris, Phan Thi Minh, the representative of the PRG, reported that 50,000 desertions had occurred in the puppet army in the space of two months).

## B. Questions

The present situation poses many questions for which, in the absence of information and more thorough discussion, we can only give the *elements* of an answer. The elements enable us, nonetheless, to better appreciate the terms of the situation and highlight certain tasks of support. They should also make it possible to advance the discussion more easily.

### *The Themes of Struggle in South Vietnam.*

Past experience sheds light on the way in which the struggles developed in similar situations. Every sector of the population mobilized around its own slogans (agrarian reform, the fight against higher prices and taxes, for

raising pensions, etc. . . .) and the whole movement was focused around a few *political objectives*. Today these focuses are—and will very probably remain for a whole period—the struggle for democratic freedoms—whose implementation is required by the accords—and the release of the civilian prisoners—which is called for *in principle* in the accords. *Because these two joint focuses will very probably dominate the present situation in Vietnam and provide a basis for extensive international solidarity work, they must occupy a special place in our mass activity today.*

### *The Tempos of the Struggles.*

Since the "battle for the cities" demands a deepgoing reorganization of the revolutionary forces, as a result of the fact that the Americans and their puppets still hold important cards, *the struggle begun today may prove long*. The key question with which the Vietnamese leadership is going to be confronted is determining the "favorable moment" (and by what process) to reactivate the struggles in the Saigon region. Time is working today rather in favor of the revolutionists, enabling them to prepare themselves better in the South (from the regroupment of military forces, with a new contribution of forces coming from the North it seems—does Dick Roberts think that Hanoi has already answered one of his questions?—to the reorganization of the urban movements) and by accentuating U. S. political "disengagement" internationally. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow time might work in favor of the puppet regime by enabling it to bring new economic and social instruments into play. But, let us repeat, this tomorrow or day after tomorrow may be rather far away. *This is why we must prepare our solidarity movement to keep up a prolonged activity—and this is why the anti-imperialist politicalization of the activists forming the skeleton of the solidarity movement is decisive today. It is harder now to act than when the genocidal escalation was being met with revolutionary offensives.*

### *The Framework of the Debate Inside the Vietnamese Leadership*

At every great turning point in the Vietnamese revolution, important discussions have taken place inside the leadership of the VCP. It is certain that the same is the case today.

*Prior* to the signing of the accords the question being debated was certainly not: "Should we sign the accords to win, militarily?" The Vietnamese have known for a long time that a purely military victory was impossible and that a "political solution" would be necessary. The terms of the debate were probably the following: "In the present concrete conjuncture, what price are we ready to pay for halting the U. S. escalation and getting a start at American disengagement?"

*Today*, the framework of the debate over the *immediate* tactic can probably be summed up in this way: "To what extent are we going to tolerate the violations of the accords by the Americans and their puppets and how should we respond to them? How far can we go in violating the accords in our favor (extending the liberated areas, sending in troops and materiel)." We have seen elsewhere the out-

line of the debate that must be going on over the tempo for advancing the struggle in the medium term.

### *The Question of the "Third Force"*

In order to understand the "third force" we have to go back to the source of the strength and weakness of the puppet regime, that is, the economic, ideological, and cultural upheavals brought about by American imperialism in Vietnam.

In order to find a mass base, the puppet regimes have turned to politico-religious currents (the upper echelons of the Buddhist and Catholic movements, especially the immigrants from the north, and the sects), as well as the urban "petty bourgeoisie." By a policy of "forced urbanization," spreading the "ideology of consumer society," and developing a "war economy" that made millions of persons dependent on the U. S. presence, the American government tried to strengthen this potential mass base for the Saigon regime. But the weight of the social contradictions, the strength of the revolutionary movement, and the transparency of imperialist domination provoked the outbreak of a political crisis in Saigon and displaced this potential mass base. This is this twofold process that about the appearance of a thoroughly heterogeneous "third force."

The puppet regime first found itself in conflict with the Buddhist movement (1963), and today it has come into conflict with a whole wing of the Catholic movement (especially the youth, whose leaders are in jail). It is probable, however, that the Catholic refugees from the North grouped in the fortified hamlets remain faithful to anti-Communism. The "third force" reflects both the profound shift to the left of the potential mass base of the puppet regime and the permanent crisis in the Saigon political apparatus despite the decision of the U. S. government to defend Thieu no matter what the difficulties. This "third force" thus represents a heterogeneous gamut of political currents and various cliques. It is honeycombed by the NLF on the one hand and by crypto-puppet forces on the other (of the type of "Big Minh").

The attention the NLF is paying to this heterogeneous "third force" corresponds to the importance of the objective process it reflects. It also corresponds to the need for making the maximum effort to find semilegal covers for activity in Saigon. But the nature of this "third force," as well as the repression it has suffered, explains why it has not been able to produce an *organized political force* capable of holding its own against both the NLF and Thieu.

### *The Future of the Neocolonialist Economic Policy*

The only chance in the long run for the American government to consolidate its presence in the urban areas lies in establishing a consistent neocolonialist policy. But two obstacles bar its way:

— The bases of the American policy of economic cooption lay in the parasitical and artificial development of a "war economy" linked particularly to the presence of the troops. Now they have to go over to a policy of industrialization and big public works.

— But such a reorientation demands time and most of

all something besides State Department aid. It requires large medium-term investments that the U. S. private firms as well as the other capitalist governments do not seem ready to grant. (See Kolko's article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* of March 1973 and reports such as the one claiming that investments being made in Saigon are planned to be realized by 1976.)

Today, with the dismantling of the last American bases and the isolation of Saigon, we are seeing instead an increase in the social crisis.

### *The Probable Perspective*

Since the American government is in a difficult position to resume its escalation, since the Vietnamese revolutionists will probably move gradually for an initial period, and since the American puppets cannot accept the reestablishment of democratic freedoms, the probability is that we are witnessing today the opening of a phase of still undetermined duration that will be marked by the obstruction and breakdown of the accords. The public confrontation will shape up around the next deadlines set by the accords and the failure to respect them — in particular around the nature of the elections to be prepared in Saigon and the political system prevailing there, while the political forces are regrouping under the surface. This phase will be rich in conflicts, confrontations, threats, periods of tensions, etc. . . . but it will be a difficult one for the solidarity movement because it will be *confused*. But most probably, this period will be a prelude to the spread of political and/or military confrontations, which will foreshadow the gear-in of military pressure operations and/or urban insurrectional movements.

## C. The Indochinese Context

The evolution of the situation in Cambodia and Laos is clarifying the situation in Vietnam and the minority/majority debate. In approaching this subject, we must always keep in mind both the fundamental solidarity that has linked the struggles of these three countries in the first and second Indochinese wars and the existence of three differentiated national realities that have strongly influenced the forms of combat in each.

### *1. In Cambodia*

Cambodia today is perhaps the conspicuous challenge to the method of analysis used by the international minority. This country finds itself particularly isolated internationally. In fact, while the USSR has always maintained links with the FUNK [Front Uni National Khmer — Khmer United National Front], it has always refused to recognize the GRUNK [Gouvernement Royal Uni Khmer — Khmer United Royal Government] and kept up diplomatic relations with Lon Nol. Today the U. S. A. is concentrating its air power on Cambodia where the B-52s are intervening massively and daily in very densely populated regions. From the standpoint of the minority, the isolation of the Cambodian revolution is still more grave because the revolution has just experienced an important setback in Vietnam.

Despite all this, the situation continues to develop favorably for the revolutionary forces in Cambodia. These last months have in fact seen the unfolding of a succession of FUNK offensives aimed at strategic points (the Kompong Thom region, the Mekong, the suburbs of the capital, etc. . .) which have regularly won new positions. Supplying Phnom Penh is still very difficult, and the Cambodian capital is frequently isolated and in danger of being sealed off. The crisis in the governmental circles is increasing. Movements of opposition to Lon Nol have made inroads into all strata of the urban population and even the army. Military actions by the FUNK have taken place virtually in the heart of the capital. The liberated areas embrace 80 percent of the territory and contain more than half the population.

*It is this situation that gives Cambodia its special place for the international solidarity movement. The country is in the front line of the military struggle in Indochina. It is up to the anti-imperialist movement today to fight for an immediate halt to the murderous escalation continued by the U. S. A. and to struggle in support of the FUNK offensives. And this need is all the greater in proportion to Cambodia's international isolation.*

Are a general offensive and the taking of Phnom Penh in the offing for tomorrow? Probably not. While the relationship of forces between the puppets and the FUNK is especially favorable to the latter, we have to take account of two important factors:

(a) *In the present state of things, a siege of Phnom Penh by the FUNK would probably mean the destruction of the Cambodian capital by the B-52s. The army of Lon Nol would put up enough of a fight to enable the air force to make the revolutionary armed forces and the population pay dearly for their victory. Moreover, the FUNK would not be sure of being able to hold a liberated Phnom Penh. This is why it is probably that the FUNK will wait for a better political situation in Cambodia and Indochina as well as internationally before launching the final offensive.*

(b) Furthermore, the Cambodian revolution is of more recent vintage and has less fighting experience than the Vietnamese revolution. The Khmers Rouges have a majority not only of the leading posts in the FUNK but in the GRUNK itself, it seems. At least this is what Sihanouk says. That is, the resistance is being led by those who resumed the armed struggle under the Sihanouk regime before Lon Nol's coup d'état in 1970.

But if Sihanouk and his followers have slight influence today in the ongoing struggle and no politico-military organization to oppose to the Cambodian Communists, once the seizure of power is completed, Sihanouk might gain weight because of the prestige he holds with the peasantry. *This is why the Khmer Rouge may feel the need to consolidate their revolutionary network gradually rather than win a lightning victory.* Statements by Sihanouk give credence to these two arguments.

In this framework, the tempos of the Cambodian revolution still depend partially on the evolution of the Indochinese revolution and especially the Vietnamese revolution. Major successes in Vietnam can open the way to creating the political conditions favorable for the final offensive, just as a stalemated situation in South Vietnam might lead the Indochinese revolutionists to go onto

a counteroffensive.

## 2. In Laos

The tempos of the revolutionary struggle in Laos have always been more strongly dictated by the Vietnamese conflict than in Cambodia. This is first of all because of the intrinsic weaknesses of this struggle. It is developing in a small country (three million inhabitants) more backward economically than the other Indochinese countries and lacking in a tradition of national unity and nationwide struggle (Laos is a mosaic of ethnic minorities). Secondly it is a result of the country's strategic importance. Laos includes both an important part of the Ho Chi Minh trail, areas of strategic military importance for Indochina, and a common frontier with theaters of guerrilla activity and areas of Communist and Meo unrest in Thailand.

After the 1954 Geneva accords, the Pathet Lao in particular paid the price of peaceful coexistence. Logically, if the comrades of the minority were correct, the accord on Laos should have been especially regressive. But in several of its clauses it is better than the one on Vietnam. The comrades of the minority recognize this since they have explained that these accords are closer to the 7 points of the PRG and the demands of the Pathet Lao than the January 27 accords on Vietnam.

To tell the truth, these accords are astonishingly favorable, even in the context of the majority analysis. In reality it seems that a de facto break has appeared between Souvanna Phouma and the Laotian extreme right. Phouma is supposed to have signed without the agreement of the extreme right. This would explain both the protests that have been expressed in the assembly in Vientiane and the present complete sabotaging of the accords. But such a break would also reflect the strategic impasse of imperialism in Indochina.

Despite the continuation of the U. S. aerial operations, the strategic positions of the PLF remain favorable and have been politically reinforced by the publication of the accords. But here also, in view of the special place that Laos occupies in the Indochinese front, it is probable that the tempos of the struggle in this country will depend in large part on the establishment of an *Indochinese* policy and the evolution of the situation in *South Vietnam*.

It is important for the revolutions in each of the Indochinese countries to remain in close subjective and objective solidarity. This is all the more necessary inasmuch as the liberated areas form a geographically cohesive bloc. The evolution of the relationship of forces in one country influences the others, and if today South Vietnam is still the heart of the Indochinese resistance—and this tends to set the pace for the whole—it also benefits from a favorable evolution in Laos and Cambodia.

## D. The International Context and Our Tasks

*The objective necessity* of maintaining international solidarity is obviously making itself strongly felt. The victory of the Indochinese revolution is still far from won. Internationally its role remains key. Its essential weakness lies in its relative international isolation. It is this relative isolation that explains, first of all, why the Vietnamese fighters were led to sign the January 27 accords and suspend their general offensives while the Thieu regime re-

mained in place. It is this relative international isolation that enables the top boss Nixon to continue his support to Thieu without worrying about violating the accords he has just signed. It is this relative international isolation that is giving Nixon's threats what little weight they have. While it is improbable that the U.S. will shift its Indochinese and international policy so as to resume a prolonged escalation in Vietnam, it is entirely possible that they will decide to stage scattered but murderous raids on the liberated areas in the South or the DRV for the purposes of intimidation, pressure, or giving a Nixon-style "warning."

In the face of this need, *our own responsibility is greater than ever*. The pro-Soviet Communist movement and the "orthodox" Maoist current are subordinating their policy to the needs of peaceful coexistence and an "international détente." They are finding in the situation excuses to justify complete passivity. The forces that mobilized episodically in solidarity with the Indochinese peoples for humanitarian reasons have now fallen back into a wait-and-see attitude. They may take up the protests against the fate of the civilian prisoners in Saigon but are (in general) incapable of developing systematic support work. We alone—along with a few other far left currents and individuals linked to the Vietnamese—can respond in a *consistent* way because our activity is not subordinated to the imperatives of peaceful coexistence and because the anti-imperialist education we have given the activists in the solidarity movement can enable them to *understand* the situation and thus to *act*.

It remains to be pointed out how *effective* the activity we can develop still is. In the present context a decline in the scope of this activity was and is almost inevitable. *But it should be recognized that it is as important to keep up minimum solidarity against the trend of natural mobilizations as to play our role when the solidarity movement was at its height.*

*The present function of the solidarity movement can be defined in this way:*

—First of all it is to continue to affirm our political support for the struggle of the Indochinese peoples, if only to let them know that the solidarity movement has not disappeared. It is also to continue to give the vanguard a practical education in anti-imperialism.

—Secondly *specific activity on certain issues is urgent*

*and necessary today*. It can have a (modest) influence on the course of the situation. This is true of activity on the issue of the civilian prisoners in Saigon, the evolution of the military situation in Cambodia, and support for the American deserters.

Finally, today's activity enables us to lay the groundwork for future action. *We are working under the assumption that the situation in Indochina will experience new periods of general and conspicuous confrontation* (whatever the forms) that will require massive and immediate solidarity, at the same time as permitting the redevelopment of a large-scale movement. A halt now in solidarity activity would mean the breakdown of the solidarity organizations and the depoliticalization of the activists called upon to provide the skeletal structure of the support movement. Our capacity to respond to any qualitative worsening (U.S. bombing of Vietnam, etc. . .) or improvement in the situation (an offensive in Cambodia, mass movements in the South, etc. . .) in the time and at the levels desired will depend largely on our ability to maintain our support work today.

In these circumstances the rule incumbent on our sections is particularly important. They must at the same time:

—Politically educate the activists of the support movement so as to enable them to keep up their activity.

—Prevent support work from being reduced to a narrow sectarian issue confined to the arena of small groups by developing it around activities that retain a mass impact (civilian prisoners, etc. . .).

—Develop our own campaign of political education around two basic themes—internationalism vs. Stalinism and peaceful coexistence on the one hand, and the colonial revolution and permanent revolution on the other.

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The international discussion around the Indochinese question must enable us not only to clarify the terms of the general debate that is developing between the international minority and majority. It must also permit us to refine and amend our analysis of the situation so as to help the International respond today to the tasks of solidarity that are incumbent on it.

April 1973

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1. Since *no resolution has been approved* by the minority, we are obliged to refer to articles in their press.

2. This part contains numerous conjunctural elements that may be obtained by the time this bulletin reaches the membership. Nonetheless, it seems essential to include it.

# Letter to the PRT (Combatiente)

By Ernest, Livio, Pierre, Sandor, Tariq, Delphin

Dear Comrades:

The balance sheet on Latin America is one of the central tasks in preparing for the approaching Tenth World Congress. The IEC plenum will be the first opportunity to make a tentative evaluation and to make more precise the points of view of the International leadership and the sections most directly involved, in the first place the Argentine and Bolivian sections. We hope you will be able to overcome all the technical difficulties and assure the active participation of a representative delegation from your party.

We think it necessary, however, to raise a few questions before the plenum takes place. It seems to us that this should facilitate the necessary clarification.

In the first place, we want to point out that whatever differences of judgment we may arrive at, the struggle the PRT and ERP have carried forward since the Fifth Congress represents an unquestionable gain for the Trotskyist and revolutionary movement. The party has profoundly changed the spirit and style of work of its members; it has launched an armed struggle that rapidly acquired considerable dimensions; it has won the status of being the largest organization fighting in this field; it has won great sympathy from proletarian and popular layers, making itself a real factor in the political battle in the country. The party has experimented with advanced forms of struggle, laying a basis for solving the decisive problem of the relationship between armed struggle and the mass movement.

It is absolutely lamentable that this lesson has not been learned by a minority of the International and that Trotskyist organizations have publicly dissociated themselves from PRT-ERP actions at precisely the moment when they should have shown the most complete solidarity with the Argentine comrades, the target of furious attacks from the world bourgeoisie. Moreover, it is inadmissible that the "La Verdad" group launched attacks on the Argentine section. This group nevertheless obtained — with the agreement of the PRT delegate — the status of sympathizing organization. This group, which provoked the party split in 1968, has lost sight of its most elementary obligations, devoting itself to factional maneuvers, attacking Latin American sections in its press, as well as the International leadership, and completely disregarding the decisions of the Ninth Congress. It has confirmed its profoundly opportunist and tail-endist orientation and methodology by hurrying to give a "left" cover to tricky maneuvers of the dictatorship and carrying out an unprincipled fusion with a socialist party lacking any revolutionary tradition and without the slightest real influence among the masses.

Having said all this, what are the questions facing the party, questions that have prompted us to send this letter?

At the beginning of a discussion that will necessarily be very full, we limit ourselves to indicating them as succinctly as possible.

We repeat: the actions developed by the party and the ERP since the Fifth Congress have had an indisputable impact, they have helped to counteract the dictatorship's maneuvers, they have gotten a considerable response among the popular strata, they have mobilized a sizable vanguard in struggle. But has the political line developed up to now really been able to establish a solid relationship between armed struggle and the concrete dynamic of the mass movement?

This question is all the more pertinent inasmuch as the armed struggle was not initiated during a defensive or stagnant stage but during a period of impetuous advance by the masses and, more particularly, by the most advanced proletarian sectors in the epicenters of social confrontation in the country. In such a context a linkup between the guerrillas and the mass struggle was objectively possible. In fact this was beginning to take place during the high point of the Córdoba mobilization, in the early months of 1971. The intervention in FIAT, the active participation of the ERP in the Vito-rizo [second Córdoba uprising], and even the action against Sylvester went precisely in this direction.

But these possibilities have not been exploited adequately and the actions during the last year have marked a regression from the standpoint of political content. This is the conclusion we draw based on the information at our disposal (above all, the party's communiqués, bulletins, and public press).

Perhaps this is owing to conjunctural factors and has only a purely tactical meaning? This is a question that deserves to be cleared up.

In our opinion there have been errors of estimate in judging the level attained by the armed struggle. The party has not made a clear distinction between an embryonic stage of civil war in which urban guerrilla actions are developing and a situation of revolutionary war in the strict sense. Thus there is a tendency to project and carry out actions suited to the second kind of situation but which involve very grave material and political dangers in the first kind of situation. This can be verified concretely from one angle that cannot be considered secondary. The enemy has to a large degree perfected his technique of repression, making a qualitative leap in this regard. The armed organizations have not been able to respond on the same level. As a result, while certain types of action have not ceased, they have become much less frequent. For others the price paid has been high (sacrifice or capture of many members and leaders, etc.). The action against Sallustro has clearly shown how objectives not commensurate with the relationship of forces can only lead into an impasse.



In general, the strategy of armed struggle has not been defined in a rounded way, and it is in this area, above all, that a discussion is necessary. At its Fourth Congress, the PRT correctly considered that the class struggle in Argentina had reached a stage where armed struggle was on the agenda. At its Fifth Congress it created the instrument to begin this struggle, the ERP. But its orientation underwent oscillations and rectifications. The Fourth Congress had given priority to rural guerrilla war based not only on "technical," but also social and political considerations. Taking into account the new situation created by the upsurge of 1969, the Fifth Congress proposed, although in insufficiently clear terms, combining rural guerrilla warfare and urban guerrilla warfare. In practice there is no doubt that the actions actually carried out were of an urban guerrilla type. But these rectifications were made in a fundamentally empirical way without undertaking a new overall definition. And, what is worse, we repeat, the urban guerrilla actions marked a regression from the standpoint of political content, despite an objective situation marked by repeated mass mobilizations.

Let's avoid any misunderstandings. We are not unaware of the fact that the PRT-ERP has never stopped initiating actions and that at times these actions have had very great impact in Argentina and elsewhere, proving to all that it had in no way been paralyzed by the repression. But in most cases these actions have been dictated much more by the need to defend or rescue cadres and activists and by logistic needs, than by a determined political end, by a long-range plan.

We have already mentioned the question of a strategic orientation for the armed struggle. But what is decisive in the end is the relationship between armed struggle and the dynamic of the mass movement. The objective conditions in the country (a profound crisis of the system, a high level of combativity on the part of the masses, the maturing of a broad social vanguard on different levels) make possible a direct linkup between the mass struggle and the armed struggle of the specialized detachments. This task remains unaccomplished.

We know that the PRT is not unaware of the problem. The attempt to create rank-and-file committees was aimed precisely at providing the party with the instruments for establishing a presence—legal or illegal—among the masses. But up to now mass struggle and armed struggle have simply been juxtaposed. The lack of a clear, overall strategic line, and the choice of armed actions of a certain type—a choice which in turn has largely followed from a certain estimation of the situation—has prevented the PRT, despite the prestige it has won, from winning any real political or organizational influence among the masses, in the trade unions, etc., as well as from building a real network of rank-and-file committees that would be able to go beyond sporadic actions.

Inasmuch as various articles and statements in the PRT publications have put forward some rough generalizations aimed at clarifying perspectives, we believe we see two essential ideas. The first idea—linked to the perspective of rural guerrilla war—is derived from the experience of China and Vietnam; this is the perspective of creating red zones, that is, zones which can escape control by the central power and represent the base of the people's army.

Although we do not exclude this variant for Latin American countries, including Argentina, it would, nevertheless, be a mistake to fail to recognize that the conditions of the revolutionary dynamic in China, namely (1) the socio-economic composition of the country, i.e., highly agricultural; (2) the existence of a party—prior to the launching of the peasant war—that had a very broad mass influence and was linked to the world Communist movement and through this to the tradition of the October Revolution; (3) the paralysis of the native ruling classes because of domestic as well as international reasons. Similar considerations hold for Vietnam, with qualification that since the conflict took on international scope Vietnam could count on the indispensable logistic support of the workers states. In all of this there is no analogy with the current situation in Argentina.

The second idea, which is more relevant to the perspective of urban guerrilla war and which corresponds more closely to the country's structure, involves a conception of areas of a certain measure of dual power in the poor neighborhoods—like the Algerian Casbah before the great roundups—a sea in which the combatants would be able to swim like fish. Leaving aside their propagandist value, the food distribution actions in the last analysis fit into this perspective. But it is one thing to carry out actions that take the enemy by surprise and win sympathy from a certain milieu and another to be able to really consolidate red bases in the urban areas. This could only come about if there were a very advanced crisis of the central power and the party already had a broad and solid base. These conditions clearly do not obtain, and it is impossible to see how they could be created in the immediate future.

Furthermore, all these questions should be raised in the context of a continually updated analysis of the situation in the country. Let us start from the analysis developed in one of the most recent issues of *Combatiente* that we have received (July 30, 1972). The article speaks of "three forms that the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie could theoretically take in the coming months. . . . A Brazilian type dictatorship, a populist coup of the Peruvian type, an *acuerdist* [from *Gran Acuerdo Nacional*—Great National Accord] coup or changes in the present government favoring *acuerdismo*," and it adds that the third variant is the most likely.

In its general lines this analysis seems to us to be well founded. But if the third variant is really the most probable, what conclusion follows from this? It follows that the government will have to maneuver with the mass movement, seek to gain time through economic as well as political concessions, let the masses enjoy a relative freedom of action.

Such a situation can be exploited for the benefit of the revolutionary movement on condition of avoiding any confusion in the area of analysis and perspectives. It will be necessary, above all, to combat any tendency to interpret the period of partial "democratization" ahead, if our hypothesis proves correct, as implying a perspective of "democratization" for an entire stage permitting full development of the mass movement, of the unions, and of the working-class organizations, with steadily widening gains. It must never be forgotten that there are no objective possibilities for the installation of a populist demo-

cratic regime in Argentina and that an experience like that of Peronism in 1945 can never be repeated. In the last analysis, the regime cannot achieve a stage of even relative stabilization, of economic growth, without super-exploiting the working class and breaking its strength on the trade-union as well as the political level. That is why, aside from a "democratic" interlude, the bourgeoisie cannot aim at any alternative save the Brazilian type. For this reason, from the working-class point of view, it is necessary to reject emphatically any orientation that involves disarming the armed-struggle organizations as well as any concession to spontanéist insurrectionalist views that lead in practice to allowing large-scale clashes to occur between an all-powerful repressive apparatus and empty-handed masses.

On the other hand, an opposite danger would be to fail to grasp all the potentialities of the stage looming up, to believe that the action of small armed groups could block such a variant from taking place (which means relying on the logic that the worse things are the better the chances for revolution, which revolutionists concerned about the interests and feelings of the masses cannot do), and failing to make the indispensable tactical adjustments. Such an attitude would lead to adventurism and would rapidly have very negative results.

Let us make it clearer. Above all, what has to be understood is that over and above the "acuerdist" bloc's proposals, and all the diversionist maneuvers, the "democratic" interlude will in any case be marked by great mass struggles, by a deepgoing process of clarification and demystification. (The Peronist movement will be the first to find itself facing agonizing choices.) A very rapid maturation of a very broad social vanguard will take place. In the framework of this perspective, developing *direct ties with the masses in the union and political area assumes an absolute and immediate priority and all initiatives in the armed struggle must be subordinated to this task.* The PRT and ERP should be prepared to assign their best cadres to the mass movement, cadres equipped with a rounded political education. And at the same time the defense of the mass mobilizations and actions from the attacks of the enemy should be assured. Only to the degree that they effectively exploit the possible "democratic" interval will the revolutionists be able to go over from an armed struggle, which consists essentially of urban guerrilla warfare carried on by specialized detachments, to an armed struggle in which sectors of the masses will be directly involved and where cadres coming directly from the working class and the most exploited layers of the population will play a role of primary importance.

It is necessary to prepare for this perspective with the greatest energy.

The Uruguayan example shows the difficulties and dangers that the PRT must confront. In spite of their strength and popularity—which were unquestionably greater than those of the ERP—the Tupamaros, far from exploiting the electoral interlude for their own benefit, have been placed in a very difficult situation.

There are, essentially, two reasons for this. In the first place, the Tupamaros did not succeed in building instruments that could maintain close links between the armed struggle and the masses. As a result, the traditional left organizations, mainly the CP and the CNT [Confederación

Nacional de Trabajadores], retained substantial dominance over the working-class and petty-bourgeois layers, and were thus able to lead and canalize the great mass mobilizations. In the second place, the Tupamaros endorsed the Broad Front in which workers parties allied themselves with bourgeois currents in backing a bourgeois personality for president. Such an operation did nothing but obscure the perspective for a revolutionary struggle which would not have an abstract anti-imperialist and democratic content, but a concrete anticapitalist dynamic, excluding any alliances with the bourgeoisie, or even sections of it. Support to the Broad Front could only promote all kinds of petty-bourgeois deformations, even among the combatants themselves.

Clarity on these key questions is absolutely necessary in Argentina also. We have already pointed out that the inability of the PRT until now to translate the prestige gained by its actions and the heroic sacrifice of its members into concrete gains in the working class, the unions, etc., represents a serious negative entry in the ledger. Judging from some resolutions and bulletins, we must say that this situation has been made worse by a very dangerous kind of political confusion. It is significant, moreover, that the PRT has not felt the need to express a criticism of the Tupamaros' attitude toward the Broad Front.

Obviously there may also be bourgeois sectors that oppose a fascist and military dictatorship and the revolutionary party should, naturally, exploit the contradictions of its adversary. But this does not in any way justify a political line of a united front with the bourgeoisie or with any part of it. It never justifies using formulations like those introduced in one Executive Committee resolution, which characterized the ENA, petty-bourgeois formation, and even bourgeois sectors, as "strategic allies." (See Bulletin 23.)

Above all, an alliance—which is necessary—with social layers cannot be confused with an alliance with political formations that have influence at certain periods in these layers (the Bolsheviks struggled hard against the Social Revolutionaries precisely to take away their peasant base). Furthermore, when you talk about a strategic alliance with the ENA, you are either using the term "strategic" incorrectly or falling into a centrist, opportunist amalgam. In reality our strategic perspective can have absolutely nothing to do with that of the ENA or any other petty-bourgeois formation: it is diametrically opposed. Their objective is to build a democratic regime, to bring about a bourgeois-democratic stage, as distinct from the socialist stage, which they relegate to the distant future. Our objective is to stimulate a dynamic of permanent revolution.

The PRT must explain without any ambiguity that taking advantage of legal or semilegal opportunities, exploiting a possible "democratic" interlude, in no way implies the slightest compromise, the slightest alliance with the bourgeoisie or with petty-bourgeois formations in its tow. The party must explain that while it might make tactical agreements with the Argentine CP, and even participate in a campaign around a common candidate of the workers organizations that call for socialism, it will not make the slightest concession to the CP's strategy and general methodology or those of other similar formations.

Any lack of clarity in this regard would be catastrophic for accomplishing the key political task, demystifying



Peronism, which continued to be the main obstacle blocking the Argentine working class from achieving its political independence as a class. The Peronist movement is condemned to be more and more violently shaken by its contradictions. But these contradictions can only be taken advantage of to advance the consciousness of the proletariat and to build a mass revolutionary party if the vanguard expresses an absolutely clear conception and orientation.

Clarity, even terminological clarity, is very necessary, since confused and openly mistaken orientations have been shown by even the sector of the international workers movement that has contributed the most in the past fifteen years to advancing the revolution in Latin America. Since the comrades of the PRT themselves have asked us questions in this respect, we will therefore make clear our opinion of the current political line of the Cuban leaders.

The Fourth International is the communist organization that has most energetically and enthusiastically defended the Cuban revolutionaries, whom the supporters of Moscow as well as Peking have frequently characterized in the past as ultraleftists or petty-bourgeois adventurers. We have stated that there is a qualitative difference between Cuba and the other workers states in that Cuba has not undergone bureaucratic degeneration. We have never indulged in facile criticisms and denunciations raising the cry of "betrayal" as have, however, some "friends" of Cuba, including even some armed-struggle organizations of Castroist origin.

This does not keep us from saying that bureaucratic tendencies have developed and that, to the degree that Cuba remains isolated and severely restricted by its need for aid from the Soviet bureaucracy, these will inevitably increase. Proletarian democracy based on organs of a soviet type, councils elected by the workers and peasants with members subject to immediate recall and structured in such a way as to form the real backbone of the workers state, do not exist in Cuba. This fundamental lack cannot be compensated for by the existence of other organs that play only a partial role, nor by the prestige of Fidel and the direct ties he and other leaders strive to maintain with the masses. Neither can it be claimed that the party bases itself *in practice* on democratic centralism as Lenin conceived it. It is enough to record that not a single congress has been held up until now—thirteen years after the fall of Batista and more than ten years after the official proclamation of the new Communist Party—and that the differences expressed in the leadership bodies are kept from the masses.

But it is some of the Cuban leaders' attitudes on the international level that we find most alarming. We by no means minimize the serious difficulties Cuba has to overcome. We understand the full meaning of what Fidel said last July 26: "When the hour of revolution comes for Latin America we have to integrate ourselves with the workers, with the workers and peasants, with the revolutionists. But this is being delayed. We cannot plan on an event that may be postponed for ten, fifteen, twenty or twenty-five years—as the most pessimistic say. Meanwhile, what shall we do? A small country, surrounded by capitalists, blockaded by Yankee imperialists. We will

integrate ourselves economically into the socialist camp!"

We do not in any way question the right—and the duty—of the Cuban leaders to establish economic and military agreements with the Soviet Union. But the problem is whether or not this involves subordination to the conceptions of the bureaucracy, whether or not the interests of the revolutionary struggle are sacrificed to the interests of a certain international policy. When, on his return from Moscow, Fidel praised the USSR unqualifiedly as a country where Marxism-Leninism reigned in the spirit of the October Revolution; when he unreservedly eulogized bureaucrats like Brezhnev and company; he sacrificed the needs of the fundamental struggle of the worker and peasant masses against this bureaucracy, which he himself has criticized in the past, to the needs of diplomacy. Likewise, he certainly doesn't help the struggle of the revolutionists when he goes even further than the leaders of many Communist parties in exalting the superbureaucratic Husak regime that organized trials in the purest Stalinist tradition against revolutionists and Communist Party and union members, whose crime was to oppose a bureaucratic regime that is no more than a blood-stained caricature of socialism.

But this has more direct consequences. The Cuban leaders have put a damper on the criticisms they made in the past of the Latin American CPs—criticisms that were correct and indispensable—thus refusing to carry forward the struggle against opportunist and centrist deviations and, objectively, helping to maintain illusions about these parties. And, still worse, they have taken completely wrong positions toward certain bourgeois regimes in Latin America. We repeat once again that we are not trying to put in question the right of a workers state to take advantage of the room for maneuver offered by interbourgeois struggles. But when the Cubans characterize the Peruvian army and the Velasco Alvarado regime as revolutionary, when they keep quiet about the repression against the Peruvian workers and revolutionists, they are adopting an opportunist attitude that we must criticize for the important reason that it involves confusion about the role to be played by bourgeois sectors in the Latin American revolution.

Precisely because the Cuban leaders are not bureaucrats, what we have just pointed out indicates the degree to which the Soviet bureaucracy still exercises its international influence, including in Latin America. Behind the Communist parties and their strategy, which remains profoundly opportunistic, behind the conceptions of revolution by stages and alliances with the "national bourgeoisie"—alliances that are more or less realized—lies the strategy and pressure of the Moscow bureaucracy. On the other hand, the events in Ceylon and Pakistan, the triumphant receptions of people like the queen of Iran in Peking confirm that the Chinese leaders play an analogous role. The inescapable conclusion is that Stalinism is not dead, is not a phantom, but a powerful reality, the reality of those bureaucratized parties and regimes. For this reason a struggle against Stalinism continues to be an elementary need, including in Argentina, whatever positions may be adopted conjuncturally by other revolutionary currents and in the first place, the current represented by the Cuban

leaders who have to their credit the historic achievement of having established the first workers state on the American continent.

We consider that a discussion is necessary around all these questions and that it can develop positively in the coming months within the framework of preparation for the Tenth World Congress. The entire International looks

forward to your contribution with the greatest interest.

October 31, 1972

Ernest, Livio,  
Pierre, Sandor,  
Tariq, Delphin

# Some Fundamental Differences Between the PRT and the International Majority

By Ernest, Livio, Pierre, Sandor, Tariq, Delphin

Before the plenum of the International Executive Committee, six members of the majority of the United Secretariat addressed a letter to the PRT comrades, in which they expressed their evaluation of the situation in Argentina and the party's orientation. The aim was to open a needed and urgent political debate and to provide an initial guide mark for it. After the distribution of bulletins No. 33 and No. 34, which review the differences between the PRT and the International Majority on some basic questions, we feel it is useful to intervene a second time in hope of stimulating a political and theoretical confrontation and avoiding a sterile dialogue of the deaf. We deeply regret that so far the leaders of the PRT have not mentioned our letter in any way although the text arrived in Argentina (in fact we received the Spanish translation, without any mention of who was responsible for putting it out). On the other hand, they have centered their polemic on so-called factional activity, even a conspiracy, those guilty being members of the PRT, the Brazilian POC, and the Ligue Communiste (including a member of the United Secretariat). This is not the place to give the pertinent answer that is required and that can be summarized as follows: no factional activity was organized by the United Secretariat or its majority.

The basic problem is not, in any case, to stir up false discussions over false problems. If some problems are posed, if relations have deteriorated, the reason is basically political, and it is on this level that one must seek clarity *from the start*. This is all the more true since the International is already engaged in the preparatory period for the Tenth World Congress, and consequently, each section, each tendency, and each member has the right to speak out on the problems that are posed (while continuing to apply the line adopted by the preceding congress). For our part, without pretending to exhaust the subject, we are stressing some questions here that must be settled.

## Marxist-Leninists or Trotskyists?

In summarizing the "ideological differences" between the PRT and "the European sections of the International" (actually it isn't a question of the European sections, but of virtually the whole of our movement), bulletin No. 34 says: "Our party considers itself to be Marxist-Leninist. In contrast the other parties of the International define themselves as Trotskyist."

From a formal point of view, it is necessary first of all to state that for a whole period our organizations most often called themselves "Bolshevik-Leninists," that the documents of the Founding Congress (1938) used the word Trotskyist in quotes, and that the statutes adopted by the Second World Congress (1948) suggested the name Internationalist Communist parties for our sections.

Even today we often use the characterization "revolutionary Marxists" in place of "Trotskyists."

We might add that the title Marxist-Leninists is no longer clear in and of itself. The pro-Soviet CPs, although fraudulently, do not cease claiming to be Marxist-Leninist, and the Maoist organizations and sects do the same thing with great fanfare. It is thus indispensable in any case to introduce a supplementary formula: what current do we represent among all those who claim kinship with Marxism-Leninism? We don't see any serious objection to accepting the characterization of Trotskyists, which originally was bestowed on us by our opponents.

But here a substantive question is posed, one which is, in the last analysis, decisive. It goes without saying that we are Marxist-Leninists on the basis of the fact that the Fourth International accepts the totality of the conceptions and method of Marx and Lenin, and constantly struggles against all those who consider them obsolete. But Trotsky made his own contribution to revolutionary thought. In the epoch of the first Russian revolution, he formulated the theory of the permanent revolution that Lenin accepted in its essence in 1917. And above all he analyzed the phenomenon of the degeneration of a workers state, introducing the scientific category of the bureaucracy, without which it is impossible to grasp what happened in the last half-century, in the Soviet Union as well as on the world scale.

That is why we specifically adhere to Trotskyism, which does not in any way imply that through it we differentiate ourselves in the slightest from the theoretical acquisitions of Marxism-Leninism. The disavowal of such a characterization can only be explained by a lack of clarity on the central problem of the struggle against *every* bureaucratic tendency and caste, or by an opportunist adaptation.

## Which Revolutionary International?

In tackling the "political differences," the bulletin specifically states: "Our party hinges the reconstruction of the Marxist-Leninist international as a revolutionary mass international on the participation in this process of those revolutionary parties that hold power such as the Cuban, Vietnamese, etc. At the congress we also included the Chinese, but now there are elements that we must study more closely which could possibly show that those comrades who characterized the Chinese party as a bureaucratized party were correct. The rest of the International bases a strategy for party building on the strength of its forces, independently of parties like the Cuban and Vietnamese."

This involves a key question requiring a clear answer. First, it is necessary to recall the following basic ideas:

1. Without a revolutionary International with a mass

base, meaning without a Leninist party organized as a world party, the proletariat will not be able to properly carry out its historic task of overturning capitalism on a world scale, and of rebuilding society on truly socialist bases. This is the idea that led Marx and Engels to found the First International and to take part in its practical activity in the difficult years, that led Lenin to launch the Communist International on the basis of the favorable conditions created by the victory of the October Revolution, and that inspired Trotsky's decision to proclaim the Fourth International in 1938, despite his consciousness of the immense obstacles.

2. The revolutionary mass International will be based not solely on the acquired knowledge of Marxism and Leninism, but also on that of Trotskyism (namely the theory of the permanent revolution and the conception of the historic necessity of the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of bureaucratic power). As a result, only those organizations or currents that have broken irrevocably with the bureaucracy, both within each country and on an international scale, will be able to participate in it.

This said, it is clear that the revolutionary International will be built by forces incomparably larger than those that today compose the Fourth International. In such a perspective, one would not a priori exclude the possibility that currents that have come under the influence of Stalinism or of more general bureaucratism, or that swung between Stalinism, centrism and revolutionary Marxism will, on the basis of their own experiences and a deep critical reflection, arrive at that position. That, in general terms, is our conception, which, while being totally principled, rejects all sectarian attitudes, all fetishism regarding present organizational forms.

As against this, the PRT comrades express an eclectic conception resting, in the last analysis, on a too summary and partial analysis—thus incorrect—of the real situation of certain Communist parties. The fact that, regarding the Chinese Communist Party (not a small detail), the authors of bulletin No. 34 must admit they were "possibly" deceived, should incline them to broaden their self-critical reflection and pay closer attention to the analyses of the International, which are the result of collective formulation developed and verified in practice on a world scale. They should pose the question for themselves of knowing if the proper role for a revolutionary vanguard is to define principled analyses and positions *before* others, if necessary going against the current, or to recognize a situation after it has even become obvious to the blind.

Moreover, the very terms of the problem are poorly posed in the PRT's documents. It isn't only the Fourth International that considers it impossible to develop a common effort to build the revolutionary International with the Communist parties mentioned by the Argentine comrades; these parties themselves don't envisage any step in such a direction and would consider any present initiative on our part as fantastic and grotesque, if not a provocation.

Can one ignore, moreover, that very serious differences have existed for many years among the parties mentioned in the PRT's Fifth Congress documents, that certain of them are oriented towards international groupings that oppose each other in a sharp struggle? Is it possible

to dispute that all these parties, including the Cuban and Vietnamese—about whom we will return—have not broken with the international centers of the bureaucracy, which is not without very concrete negative implications?

Finally: these parties, all rejecting the very idea of a revolutionary International as a world party, as it was conceived of by Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky, and, to the extent that they clearly express themselves on the subject, remain anchored in the concepts formulated by Stalin in the epoch of the dissolution of the Communist International and carried on by his successors. It is true that the Cuban leaders have differentiated themselves in a positive way in this arena as well, by the attempt at building the international movement that was the OLAS [Organization of Latin American Solidarity]. But precisely because this attempt did not have a solid theoretical and political base, because it was conceived in a solely Latin American perspective—thus being, at bottom, sectoral—because it didn't imply an unequivocal definition with respect to the Soviet and Chinese bureaucracy, it rapidly and lamentably went bankrupt, being unable—it must be added—to express an adequate strategy for Latin America either. All the revolutionaries of the continent have paid a very heavy price for this bankruptcy.

## Regarding Proletarianization

In defining what it calls the "methodological" differences, the PRT's bulletin says: "Our party characterizes the International and its sections as having a predominantly petty-bourgeois composition and character and poses proletarianization as one of the fundamental elements for building the International. The rest of the International, or at least the I.S. and the leadership of the European sections, have not posed this problem, preferring to fight against it as 'workerism,' 'moralism,' etc."

It is a fact that the composition of the Fourth International, including the PRT, is not yet predominantly proletarian and that the growth of our sections has been greater, up to now, in student or radicalized petty-bourgeois layers than in the working class. It is absolutely incorrect that the International leadership and the European sections ignore the problem.

The history of the revolutionary movement teaches us that during certain stages of the struggle, the vanguard can find a deeper echo among radicalized petty-bourgeois layers, in the intellectual and student sectors, etc., than in the working class. This often happened in the past. This has happened today not only in the case of the Fourth International, but also in the case of other currents of the revolutionary left (including, to limit ourselves to Latin America, the Tupamaros, and the Chilean MIR). We are perfectly conscious of the serious problems flowing from this.

As a matter of fact, our orientation, revolving around the centrality of intervening and developing roots in the working class—which is the orientation explicitly adopted by the greater part of our European sections and is reflected in the document for the coming world congress—is determined as much by the political conclusions flowing from the analysis of the situation in capitalist Europe, as by the necessity for a change in the social composition of our organizations. The results attained up to now remain incontestably modest. However, our sections

in Europe presently have a much more significant number of worker and unionized members than ever before, and, thanks to these members, to sympathizers, and to other contacts, they are in a position to exercise a real influence on the layers of new generations of workers who have been playing a growing role since 1968. Here are some components for concretely judging that could not be put in question by so-called "sociological" considerations, of populist inspiration, on the life style of European comrades or on the neighborhoods they've chosen to live in.<sup>1</sup>

But there is a supplementary consideration. Proletarian social composition and ties with the masses do not in themselves furnish any guarantee. There have been, and there are, reformist organizations that have a working-class composition, solid ties with the masses, and are led by members coming out of the proletariat. This doesn't prevent them from being truly reformist, therefore integrated in the capitalist system and dominated by an ideology originating in opponent classes. The decisive guarantee can only be political in nature: all depends on the orientation the organizations adopt, the total maturation of their cadres and members. All depends on it: including their growth in the working class.

## A Caricature of the Marxist Method

In the effort to seize on what they call "*el trasfondo ideologico*" [ideological background] of the conceptions of the Ligue Communiste and of an important sector of the International, the authors of bulletin No. 34 write:

"The fundamental shortcoming in the League's conception is that it essentially regards party building as a theoretical question, although it interprets theory from a non-Marxist point of view. We will try to explain briefly what we mean: the League feels that the key to building a revolutionary party is the theoretical and political education of its members, hence they conceive the development of revolutionary cadres as essentially a question of very broad study and research, mainly in the history of the world revolution and in current international revolutionary experiences. They cannot see that this studying and research is never ending, that it constantly pushes them toward dilletantism, that it cannot be correctly assimilated if it is not based on a truly revolutionary life style. That in the absence of truly revolutionary practice, without full intervention in the class struggle in their country, without a fusion with the workers vanguard and the exploited masses, without a revolutionary fighting spirit, or a proletarian way of life, it is impossible to correctly assimilate Marxist-Leninist theory or to thoroughly and accurately understand the complexity of the contemporary class struggle. As Marx said, it is 'being that determines consciousness . . .', the starting point for the education of a revolutionary militant is his way of life, his practice in the proletarian struggle. The compañeros in the French Communist League relegate the proletarianizing of intellectuals to second place, moreover they fight it and ridicule it, thus eliminating the possibility for a real assimilation of Marxism-Leninism.

"Leninism teaches that revolutionary theory is learned and assimilated in the life of the party; that revolutionary intellectuals bring in 'fragments of Marxism' to the party,

and in the party, through its revolutionary practice, the teachings of the classics, the dialectic are analyzed, studied, and assimilated in the process of concretely applying them, using them as a guide for action. What is involved, then, is a process whose axis is the revolutionary practice of the party, a process that goes from the study of texts to the concrete application of the general truths of Marxism toward solving the concrete problems of the revolutionary struggle, which results in new theoretical analyses, a return to the texts, and once again to concrete practice, etc., always using practice, that is, the results of applying the line laid out, as the criterion for truth.

"From that viewpoint, from the feeling that revolutionary theory originates in education, in books, and in information, they develop the criteria of analyzing and giving their opinion on the state of the class struggle in every country and on an international level. Because they consider themselves international revolutionists by virtue of their bookish contact with internationalism, they feel they have the right and the duty to give their opinion on the growth of the class struggle in any country whatsoever. This is the way they operate for the most part, drawing hasty, irresponsible conclusions without any real Marxist understanding of the situation, as in Cuba for example, where they jump to using the formulations of bureaucracy, Stalinism, etc., and to characterizing the growth of the Vietnamese Workers party as empirical, etc.

"We say that they have a non-Marxist understanding of theory because they claim that analysis is the be all and end all, that is, they try to make analysis the most important aspect of knowledge. As Marxism-Leninism has already shown us, the axis and culmination of the learning process is revolutionary practice, which at the same time is the only test of truth. Hence Marx disqualifies other theoreticians and distinguishes himself from them when he maintains in the *Theses on Feuerbach* that "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point however is to *change* it." It doesn't mean anything to a Marxist to analyze a social situation that he is not going to intervene in; to the compañeros in the League, however, it does. They dare to give their opinion and, above all, to formulate a line on processes and situations that they don't have the slightest possibility of intervening in and that they don't know anything about."

The citation is long, but it summarizes the conceptions of the authors of these lines quite clearly.

We have already spoken of the question of proletarianization. We could add here that well-developed militants of a revolutionary party, with very solid ties with the masses and able to intervene effectively at all levels of the class struggle, would unquestionably be a condition for grasping the situation in all its specific forms much better. Well, such a party does not exist at present, either in France or in Argentina. We thus have no choice but to base ourselves on the one hand on the general analyses developed through a rigorous application of the Marxist method, and on the other hand on the empirical indications that we draw from the still limited practice of our organizations. The question actually posed is, from the beginning, to know if our general analyses are correct (on this ground the PRT comrades prefer not to get involved, and for good reason!); in the second place, to know if we are moving in the direction of overcoming

our present limits, above all from the point of view of our social composition. But such a discussion must be concrete to be useful. If not, one may repeat empty generalities, one may swing between moralizing populism and gratuitous insinuations, ignoring the real situation.

We don't deny that impressionistic assessments—whose source should most often be sought in insufficient study and information rather than in the intellectual penchant or petty-bourgeois origins of their authors—sometimes appear in the organs of our movement. But there is a basic point that seems to escape the authors of the bulletin entirely. In the last analysis, the European sections arose from, or were profoundly rejuvenated through, the anti-imperialist mobilizations of the 1960s (Latin America, Vietnam). Through these mobilizations our members felt the need to be informed about happenings on other continents, to know their history, to analyze the dynamic of their revolution.

The imperatives of our struggle for hegemony within the new vanguards and in the most politicized layers of the workers developed in the same manner. It was—and remains—necessary to define oneself at each stage not solely in relation to the particular developments of the class struggle in which one is directly involved, but also in relation to the world situation, in relation to the decisive forces that operate on the international arena. This implies, among other things, an analysis of the orientations and practice of all the currents in the workers and the revolutionary movements. This implies a precise knowledge and constant criticism of the line of the Social Democratic or Stalinist bureaucracies, and of the degenerated workers states, of the USSR and China above all. It is, in the end, impossible to win cadres, to develop them, to push the construction of revolutionary parties without outlining at every stage a world perspective, without grasping and indicating each day how the struggle in each country and in each sector is indissolubly tied to the totality of the world process.

It is lamentable that the leaders of the PRT do not understand that it is a very *practical* political necessity that inspires the interest of our members in France, in Europe, and elsewhere, and that it has nothing to do with an unhealthy intellectual curiosity. But such an attitude explains to us, at least in part, why the PRT's publications are so poor, so primitive in terms of analysis of the world situation, including analysis of other countries of Latin America. When positions are taken, they are either marked by an extreme superficiality (see for example the unbelievable judgment at the time of the announcement of the Nixon-Mao meeting), or they are borrowed from other sources, above all Cuban, or they border on the most vulgar propaganda.

The authors of the bulletin outline, in passing, a self-criticism regarding a characterization of the Chinese CP. But they should draw the whole lesson of that situation. In *El Unico Camino*, which is linked up on this level to the tradition of Morenoism, some comrades of the PRT put Trotskyism, Maoism, and Castroism nearly in the same bag. The thrust of their position was to consider Trotskyism and Maoism as complementary. The Fifth Congress confirmed the same orientation two years later. Well, this kind of error was committed through lack of serious analysis, through adaptation to the climate of "Maoism" of the period, through pragmatism.

If the whole International had adopted the same position, we would have been literally disarmed at the moment it became imperative to demystify the so-called cultural revolution, to show that Mao was not, in any way, in the process of leading a struggle to smash the bureaucracy, but that he himself also represented a bureaucratic current, which, while differentiating itself with respect to Moscow, subordinated the requirements of the mobilized masses to the requirements of bureaucratic power, and subordinated the needs of the revolutionary world struggle to the diplomatic needs of his bureaucratized state.

The comrades of the PRT remind us of the basic truth that Marxism does not limit itself to interpreting reality, but must transform it, and that verification in practice is, in the last analysis, the decisive criterion.

Unhappily, their formulations, especially that there is no sense in analysing a social situation where one doesn't intervene, borders on a caricature of the Marxist materialist conception.

What they ignore is the autonomy—of course relative—of knowledge, thus of analysis. What they forget is that "the dialectical path of knowledge of the *truth*, of the knowledge of reality," proceeds from "living intuition to abstract thought, and *from that to practice*" (Lenin). What they confuse is the need for practical verification as the decisive criterion *in the last analysis* and an alleged necessity for a material empirical contact with reality as a condition sine qua non of all valid analysis.

The works of Marx and Lenin are generalizations on the highest level, preceded by the organization of a gigantic mass of empirical facts and developed through a scientific method. But it would be ridiculous to pretend that Marx could write *Capital*, or Lenin *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, thanks to a direct intervention in the social situation. Moreover, didn't Lenin explain that Marxism was the result of classical German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism, to wit, of generalizations developed as far as we can see outside of any practice of the working class? Of course, Marx and Lenin were only able to formulate their theories to the extent that they oriented themselves from the vantage point of the historic interest of the proletariat, and the validity of these theories was verified in light of the reality of the class struggle. But that has nothing to do with the idea that one can only make an analysis to the extent that one directly intervenes in a social situation. In parallel fashion, the sense of responsibility that should inspire a revolutionary in his judgments and criticisms of organizations and leaders who have effectively contributed to the historic struggle for the overthrow of capitalism is one thing. It is another thing to claim, as is sometimes done in discussions by the PRT comrades, that only those who have participated in a revolutionary process or who are engaged in armed struggle have the authority necessary to express themselves.

Moreover, let us reflect for a moment on the formulation used in the bulletin: "It doesn't mean anything to a Marxist to analyze a social situation that he is not going to intervene in." What does this mean concretely? Taken to its conclusion, a worker, even a revolutionary worker, should analyze only the situation in his factory, or at most his city or region. No one should engage in the slightest analysis of other countries, other parts

of the world. In practice, those who write these lines violate their own line when, under the impulse of unavoidable political necessity, they outline their analyses and judgments on things that are not related to their practical activity, to their direct experience.

The problem is thus, whether the analyses that *everyone* has to make, more or less systematically, even outside their own field of activity, are or are not based on real facts, on sufficient information, on a rigorous method. The problem is whether one draws adequate practical conclusions or not from the analyses. This is the heart of the problem, which cannot be made to vanish through hollow generalizations on the connection between knowledge and practical activity or through simplistic formulas having no relation with a materialist conception. Once again, comrades, concretize your criticisms and appraisals. Get into the heart of the question!

As for us, we are absolutely convinced that the Fourth International—even as it is now—is capable of developing the most valid analyses and generalizations to the extent that, on the one hand, it attaches itself to the living traditions of the revolutionary world movement, and on the other, it represents a center for collective elaboration in which the most diverse experiences and the richest empirical knowledge converge. We repeat: fundamentally the International is the essential component in the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism on the world scale, but it is first of all the irreplaceable instrument for that total knowledge that is indispensable to lead the struggle to a proper end. To deny or minimize the role of the International, to confine oneself to conceptions that are in principle or in fact federalist, means to be condemned to empiricism, to expose oneself to the risk of succumbing to powerful sectoral pressures, in such a way as to hinder a real understanding of the *general* (and thus also of the *particular*, which cannot be gained in all its meaning except within the framework of a total analysis). This can mean, in practice, renouncing independent revolutionary elaboration and contenting oneself with the crumbs that fall from the banquet table of others, coming under the influence, i. e., the ideological hegemony, of powerful bureaucracies endowed with a concept of the whole, which they determine as a function of their own conservative interests and not of the revolutionary interests of the proletariat.

These are the substantive methodological shortcomings which are, from the theoretical point of view, at the root of the eclectic positions of the PRT leaders and of their refusal to wage the consistent battle that is called for against the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers states. Their lame attitude in the face of the Chinese bureaucracy and their support to the Soviet bureaucracy in the invasion of Czechoslovakia—a reflection of the influence of the Cuban leadership on them—have been up to now the most obvious manifestations of such an attitude. In fact, there is a combination of analytical poverty, principled eclecticism, and practical opportunism. Breaks in the internationalist conception flow from this: the needs of the mass struggle in one sector of the world revolution are subordinated or sacrificed to particular tactical needs.

## Class Struggle in the Party?

There is another difference that must be underlined.

It concerns the method through which the leaders of the PRT characterize incorrect positions or criticisms that emerge in the party as the product of hostile class pressures. From this they go to using the notion of the class struggle within the party.

In principle we don't question that even revolutionary militants can come under the influence of a petty-bourgeois social milieu, and that, in given contexts, this can lead them to become vehicles of concepts or attitudes that are harmful for the organization. But consciousness of such a danger has nothing to do with the practice of automatically labeling any member who criticizes the party line or commits errors as an "objective" agent of the petty-bourgeoisie or even the bourgeoisie.

That method was brought into the workers movement by Stalinism: all the real or potential opponents of Stalin were regularly denounced as agents of imperialism, supporters of the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. Maoism has followed this example up to the present: the conflicts within the party and its leadership during the "cultural revolution" were explained as the expression of a class struggle between the defenders of socialism and the partisans of capitalism (it is true that a little later the number 2 defender of socialism, the well-loved Comrade Lin Piao, suddenly changed character, passing from the first category into the second . . .).

Far from being the result of an objective analysis developed after an exhaustive confrontation and a verification in practice, the sociological characterization was simply an instrument of ideological intimidation, a means to stifle debate, and an attempt to justify the bureaucratic and administrative measures (including physical elimination).

From a theoretical point of view, the method utilized by the PRT leaders, viewed in the best possible light, is inadequate (to the extent that one automatically, without any thought, looks for a class pressure behind every mistaken position, or position the leadership considers mistaken). But above all they ignore that the differentiations and differences in a revolutionary party have their objective base in the differentiations existing in the working class itself. The working class is in no way a single homogeneous entity. It is composed of multiple layers, which are differentiated by their objective situation in the socio-economic fabric, and by their experiences in struggle. As a result, the differences flow from the very real difficulty of developing, at each stage, a total correct analysis and of drawing from it all the tactical and strategic conclusions that flow from it. It is absolutely inevitable—above all in very dynamic situations where the facts of the problems and the needs for action can change with extreme rapidity—that different positions oppose each other within the same party on the character of a given stage, on the priorities of choice, on the methods to adopt, etc. The only way to use the internal dialectic flowing from this in a positive way, to avoid splitting the party organization, to reduce the contingent expenses, to assure—which in the last analysis is the most important—the most efficacious intervention in practice, is to have the most democratic confrontation of positions, without limitation of the right of criticism, of the right to organize tendencies, without the leadership enjoying a privileged position for the imposition of its own views. The practice of constantly leveling perjorative sociological



characterizations against all those who criticize the majority line can only impede such a political confrontation and thus harm the development and maturation of the party.

## The Vietnamese Communist Party

The appraisal of the character of the Vietnamese Communist Party is under discussion within the International and we will take the occasion to review it during the debate preceding the world congress. But we will state right now that we do not accept the position of the PRT comrades which puts the Vietnamese party on the same plane as the Bolshevik Party of Lenin's time.

It goes without saying that revolutionary Marxists cannot ignore or minimize in any way the historic contribution of the Vietnamese Communists to the fight against world capitalism in building a workers state in half their country and in inflicting a heavy defeat on American imperialism in a war whose ultimate goal was to crush the Indochinese revolution. Nor do we minimize—in fact we have already drawn attention to it in regard to the growth of our sections in Europe—the decisive importance that the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese had for the eruption of new vanguards throughout the world. It is for all these reasons that we don't share the position of those who characterize the Vietnamese party as Stalinist. What is involved in such a characterization, moreover, is a very partial view that grasps one side of a complex situation. We know that rejecting this characterization can pose problems of historic analysis and theoretical synthesis which merit ample discussion. But much graver problems are posed if one agrees to include in the category of Stalinism a party that has destroyed capitalism in its country and was, for a long period, in the vanguard of the struggle against imperialism on a world scale. Comrade J. Rousset, in his recent essay, correctly wrote:

"The PCV belongs to that generation of Communist parties that, before and after the second world war, broke in practice with the international politics of the Soviet bureaucracy. . . . Of all these parties, the PCV is the one that went the furthest in rediscovering the principles of Marxism." (P. 125.)

Concretely, the PCV has on several occasions shown its independence with respect to both Moscow and Peking on important questions, which leads it, among other things, to seek alliances and collaboration with sectors of the workers and revolutionary movement ferociously attacked by the Soviet and Chinese bureaucracies. It has in fact rejected the Khrushchevite and Maoist conception of co-existence and, in the face of developments in the South in the years following the Geneva compromise, it chose, although with initial hesitations and a certain tardiness, to get involved in the revolutionary struggle against the neocolonial regime and to give it leadership, conscious all the while that that would inevitably lead to a major confrontation with American imperialism. It grasped the dynamic of permanent revolution in the Indochinese revolution and systematically worked to pull out the roots of capitalism in the liberated zones of the South as well.

In other words, the PCV did not practice a policy of subordination to the so-called national bourgeoisie as did the Italian and French CPs in 1944-47, the Chinese

CP in 1925-27, and the Indonesian CP in the 1960s, and the fronts it set in motion were based on committees effectively tied to the masses, where the dominant classes had no way of making their interests prevail or of exercising important influence. On the other hand, the conception of the peasant war never had the result of negating the hegemonic role of the proletariat, exercised through the party.

Having said that, it shouldn't be forgotten that the theoretical generalizations of the Vietnamese Communists are not always free from ambiguity and that they implied and imply concessions to popular-frontist ideas of Stalinist origin. This has had, especially in certain periods, very negative results on the policy of the party (not only during the 1930s as Giap himself pointed out, but until the beginning of the 1950s with respect, for example, to agrarian policy). What is still more important is that this also risks impeding the theoretical and political clarification needed for the rebirth of the world Communist movement, since, thanks to the prestige gained through their struggle, all the conceptions of the Vietnamese Communists represent an extremely important reference point for Communist and revolutionary militants throughout the world. From the ambiguities in certain formulations—especially concerning relations with the national bourgeoisie—one can proceed as the Vietnamese have in the last twenty years, that is, through a struggle that broke through all theoretical limitations. But others could be led to proceed like the Indonesian Communists, who made an alliance with the so-called national, anti-imperialist bourgeoisie, etc., and ended up in a tragic defeat.

But the question of our attitude regarding the Vietnamese Communist Party implies a fundamental question: how should one characterize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam? We have said, and we repeat: capitalism was overthrown in North Vietnam and a workers state was installed. It is a historic gain. But the North Vietnamese workers state is not based on organs of real proletarian democracy. Of course, the party and the political apparatus in general have ties with the masses and, thanks to the role played during the last twenty-five years, to a large extent enjoy their confidence; which allowed them moreover to carry out the mobilization necessary to lead a war against imperialism and the Saigon puppet regime. But organs such as existed in revolutionary Russia, seen as instruments through which the masses in reality exercise their power and decide all political questions, do not exist. *This is an essential component.*

We add that in Vietnam also there isn't a separation between the state and the party, and the whole experience of a half-century in societies in transition shows that such an identity between the state and party is at once a manifestation and a supplementary cause of bureaucratism. This is all the more so since the party does not function according to the Leninist criteria of democratic centralism, but is still inspired by methods introduced into the Communist movement by Stalin, which exclude a free confrontation of different and opposing opinions and negate every right to organize tendencies.

The conclusion we draw from this is that the Vietnamese workers state, too, is characterized by a bureaucratic degeneration, even though a crystallized bureaucratic caste enjoying privileges comparable to those of the caste ruling



in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, or China does not exist.

## Dangers for the Cuban Revolution

The report contained in bulletin No. 33 indicates in the clearest way that the leaders of the PRT take a purely propagandistic and apologetic attitude in regard to Cuba. We have already touched on this argument in our letter. Here we will restate what we said by recalling three essential points:

1. Organs of true proletarian democracy, that assure the effective exercise of power by the masses, their direct participation in decisions on *all* the *political* questions, do not exist in Cuba either.

The CDRs [Committees for the Defense of the Revolution] have important functions and they are able, under certain conditions, to be instruments of mass organization and mobilization, but their functions remain limited. The Cubans themselves describe their tasks as follows:

"1. revolutionary vigilance as priority No. 1 of the CDRs; 2. information; 3. orientation of the population; 4. aid to the party and state in different tasks (instruction, health, local government, economizing resources, agriculture, food distribution, solidarity, civil defense, sports, etc. . . ." (Excerpt from a document by the National Leadership of the CDRs.)

It is thus clear that they are not highly political bodies, comparable to the soviets of the Russian revolution. Need we recall again, as we had to do many times in polemics with bureaucrats and centrists of all sorts, that such bodies were considered by Lenin and the Third International not as a national phenomenon, accessory components, but as typical components, indispensable for the victory of every revolution and for the growth of all socialist construction.

2. The Cuban party is not organized on the basis of democratic centralism. Once again, no one is denying its ties with the masses or disputing that there is any value in its original forms of recruitment. But it is a fact that there is no real democratic drawing up of decisions, there is no open confrontation of different points of view and orientations, which inevitably arise nonetheless. Do the comrades of the PRT forget the "detail" that fourteen years after the victory of the revolution, the party has not yet held its first congress? Moreover, they themselves explain their conception of democratic centralism, writing that "Democratic centralism is based on the following principles: the elaboration of a strategic line and a more general tactic for given periods, decided on by the membership as a whole at a congress. . . . organized tendencies can be formed. . . ."2 That is exactly what does not happen with the Cuban Communist Party.

3. The assertion of the report in bulletin No. 33 that careerism and bureaucratism have been practically eliminated does not, unhappily, correspond to the truth. Bureaucratic tendencies have also developed in Cuba and there are layers, notably of the middle cadres, that constitute a seedbed of bureaucratism, a grave danger for the future of the workers state. The methods of leadership and the management used by the regime are not of the kind to root out these tendencies which are, moreover, favored by the situation of Cuba's prolonged isolation in an American continent that remains capitalist, thus

making her economic development tortuous and contradictory.

The danger is all the greater today in view of the close relations established by the Cuban leadership with the Soviet bureaucracy and, what is worse, the attitude of unconditional support it adopted with respect to the Soviet bureaucracy. When one examines the perspectives of the Cuban workers state, one cannot forget that among the factors in play there is the growing influence of the powerful bureaucracy in Moscow, which is, from all evidence, interested in supporting the most conservative layers in order to favor a process of bureaucratisation. That is why it is very serious that the Cuban leaders more and more blur the necessary distinction between the legitimate accords with the Soviet Union having an anti-imperialist function and aiming to surmount the economic difficulties, and an attitude free from criticism towards the bureaucratic caste in power, its international orientation and its ideology. A corollary of this attitude is that they have renounced any substantial differentiation with respect to the Latin American Communist parties that Fidel and Che harshly criticized in the past, contributing in this way to the political maturation of a broad vanguard on the continent. If it is true, as the Fourth International holds, that the struggle against the opportunist, neo-Menshevik conceptions of the Communist parties is an inescapable necessity in the battle to build revolutionary parties in Latin America, here too the present orientation of the Cuban Communists in the matter is fraught with harmful consequences and should be legitimately criticized.

What is even more serious is that the Cuban leaders have a growing tendency to subordinate the needs of the revolutionary movements of other countries to the political needs of Cuba. They are moving in this way towards flagrant analytical distortions. The example of Peru, where the regime is lauded as revolutionary, where the army—the same one that destroyed the guerrilla movement—is also presented as revolutionary, is up to now the most significant: it is not the only one and the list is probably in the process of being dangerously lengthened. In Chile also, the support given, despite indirect warnings, to the Allende government and to its politics has certainly not facilitated the task of the revolutionary left, especially the MIR which was always very close to the Cuban revolution and its conceptions and leaders.

Such an attitude coexists with support for the revolutionary movements of certain countries under the heel of reactionary dictators. It is for that reason—as well as on the basis of an analysis of the internal situation—that our position of making a distinction between Cuba and the other workers states—in the sense that there is not yet a crystallized bureaucratic caste—remains valid. But, we repeat, dangerous tendencies, bureaucratic from the point of view of their social content and opportunist from the political point of view, effect and exercise a more and more negative influence. Latin American revolutionists should be conscious of this situation, they should understand that a purely propagandistic attitude vis-a-vis the Cuban leadership constitutes a very serious error that in the long run would not be without heavy political consequences. We all know—for us it is a basic truth—that the most decisive aid one could give the Cuban workers state is to develop the revolutionary struggle and overthrow capitalist power in the other Latin

American countries. Well, in certain countries at least, that struggle cannot be effectively led without rejecting the analysis of the Cuban leaders, without rejecting their orientation. In the last analysis, thus, any unconditional attitude would be harmful to the fundamental interests of the defense of the revolution.

## Again on the Problems Posed for the PRT

In our letter to the party, we outlined certain problems of orientation that are posed. We will have occasion to return to them later. Here we will limit ourselves to the following:

(a) The fundamental shortcoming of the PRT—determined in our opinion especially by the line followed after the very positive actions developed at the end of 1970 and the first few months of 1971—rests in the fact that it was not successful in fixing the relationship between armed struggle and the dynamic of the mass movement: more concretely, it hasn't developed a stable and consistent liaison between the intervention of the armed detachments and the struggles of the working class mobilized very broadly on a national level. This resulted in the armed actions being fundamentally inspired by logistical needs or by the need to protect or liberate militants hit by the adversary; in union work not being handled at all systematically; in no important outcome being registered in the campaign—correct in principle—for rank-and-file committees. *In conclusion, the PRT was not able to politically and organizationally capitalize on the prestige it won among broad layers thanks to its courageous armed actions.*

(b) As we already underlined in our letter, clarity has not been achieved in the party on the vital questions of a revolutionary strategy. At the same time, a too summary analysis ignored the difference between a trend towards civil war and the first stage of armed confrontation on the one hand, and revolutionary war per se on the other.

The consequence has been that *in practice*, the development of the ERP has been pursued as an end in itself, as the product essentially of the initiatives it itself took through the action of its combatants. Practice of this kind could not escape the danger of conceiving military strat-

egy in separation from a close relationship to political developments. In beginning with an analysis of the situation, notably the rise of the mass movement, the orientation should have been based not solely on the need for an urban guerrilla activity in general, but more precisely on the need for forms of armed struggle tied more and more to the mass movement (it would have been necessary, in other words, to develop the potential elements of certain factory actions around the *Viborazo*<sup>3</sup>). In that way it would have been possible to stimulate the formation of self-defense teams, embryos of worker militias.

(c) These shortcomings hindered the PRT's ability to play a major role in this stage of the class struggle, and weakened it considerably—from the political point of view—in the face of the tactical maneuvers of the dictatorship. Its inability to define, precisely and in time, its attitude toward the elections is very indicative in this respect.<sup>4</sup> Now if the elections actually take place, if the situation gives way to a compromise between Peronism and the military, and a—very limited—"democratic" interlude is thus produced, the PRT will find itself confronted with even graver difficulties than it faces today. If there is a turn, with an annulment of the elections—before or immediately after March 11—if there is a return to a situation where armed confrontation will be a new priority, the PRT will pay heavily for its inability to exploit the present stage to win worker cadres or those tied to the workers movement, to enlarge its base, to tie itself more deeply to the mass movement.

All the problems we have underlined, the importance of which no one would question, should be at the center of the discussion in the PRT and between the PRT and the International. This discussion is a vital necessity for the party and it could prove decisive for its future evolution, for the evolution of its relations with the rest of the world Trotskyist movement. It must develop without hindrance, in the greatest clarity, giving *absolute priority to the political elements* in the discussion rather than any organizational questions, no matter how legitimate they may be.

February 10, 1973

Ernest, Livio, Pierre,  
Sandor, Tariq, Delphin

1. Such "analyses" inevitably give rise to irresponsible chitchat and gossip whose end result—deliberate or not—is to obscure the political debate. For the information of comrades unaware of the facts, we can state in any case that both the fulltimers of the International as well as those of the European sections receive wages far below the average wages of workers.

2. We would add that according to the Leninist conception, the right to form a tendency is not limited to the period of preparation for a congress, even if it is above all in such a period that the confrontation between different points of view occurs.

3. *Viborazo* is the popular name for the second Cordobazo. A *vibora* is a serpent. On March 7, 1971 Jose Camilo Urriburu, the reactionary commissioner appointed by General Levingston to subdue the rebellious province of Cordoba, announced that he prayed for a chance to chop off the head of the Marxist serpent tempting the citizens of Cordoba. Thereafter serpents appeared on the walls everywhere, and the subsequent semi-

insurrectional explosion that brought down the Levingston regime became known as the *Viborazo*. [Translator's footnote]

4. Up to bulletin No. 36 (January 24), the leadership of the PRT had not yet expressed its position, limiting itself to outlining the two alternatives of abstaining or voting a blank ballot. It is curious that in mentioning the two "left" parties that ran candidates—Ramo's FIP [Frente de Izquierda Popular—Popular Left Front] and Coral's PST [Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores—Socialist Workers Party], bulletin No. 35 said: "Their sectarian policy did not permit a truly representative expression." We do not know whether there were manifestations of sectarianism in the Ramos and Coral campaigns. But it is striking that the bulletin forgets that the point on which they should be blamed basically is their opportunism: because they subordinated everything to participation in the elections, and they did not conduct a campaign of denunciation of the character of the elections organized by the dictatorship, in this way assuring it a "left" cover (we are abstracting here from the fact that Ramos and Coral can not be put in the same sack).

# Letter to the SWP Political Committee on the Formation of a Political Tendency

January 19, 1973

Political Committee  
Socialist Workers Party

Dear Comrades,

This letter is to inform you of the formation of a political tendency within the SWP for the purpose of participation in the discussions preceding and the deliberations of the Tenth World Congress of the Fourth International. As cothinkers of the Fourth International, precluded from membership by reactionary United States legislation, the SWP receives fraternal participatory rights and we request that similar rights be accorded our tendency so that the most comprehensive discussion may occur. It is not possible for this letter to present a full statement of our views; what follows is simply an outline of our basic orientation.

## *I. The Transitional Program*

Following the political leadership of the SWP, sections of the International such as the LSA/LSO have begun a theoretical accommodation to reformism and an adaptation to a petty-bourgeois milieu. These departures from the historic lessons embodied in the Transitional Program are marked by the gradual ascension of a minimalist "democratic" program, especially in day-to-day practice, and concomitant with this, the substitution of a multiclass "sectoral" approach for a proletarian class outlook. While this opportunist movement stems in part from the isolation of the parties from the class, it has reached a point qualitatively wherein no tactical turn of these parties can correct the problem by itself.

The strong emphasis on democratic demands in the imperialist countries in place of a program stressing transitional demands and the allied uncritical stance toward bourgeois democratic movements in general taken by the SWP and its allies within the International, are based on a thoroughly incorrect understanding of the theory of combined revolution and its application to imperialist and colonial countries.

The root of this error is the fundamentally idealist notion that the spontaneous tendency of development of democratic movements is toward revolution. This represents a tragic and dangerous misunderstanding of the historical process of permanent revolution, especially in the colonial countries, and it leads to the party's abdication of its responsibility for intervening among the masses with a class line.

The SWP's idea that "consistent nationalism leads to socialism" when speaking of the oppressed nationalities within the United States, is one example of this conception. In the fight for the liberation of women, the SWP

has adopted an overtly reformist position of restricting its propaganda to the simple reform of legalizing abortion. Again, the justification for this opportunism is that the struggle, in and of itself, will lead toward socialism.

Intermeshed with these theoretical deviations, the SWP has generated a "sectoral" analysis of social struggle. Replacing the program of the class with a series of "programs" for each sector, it seeks to mobilize these multi-class constituencies independently of each other and without relation to the class. This confuses the whole outlook of the Transitional Program.

The purpose of our program is to provide a *system* of demands leading to dual power and culminating in the seizure of state power. No social layer or class, other than the proletariat itself, and most decisively the industrial working class, contains the human material and social weight required for such an undertaking. While certain demands pertaining to the special needs of distinct oppressed groups and strata can and should be raised, to speak of a transitional program for any *single* oppressed group or social layer—such as students—creates deceptive illusions as to the objective conditions of class struggle and miseducates the ranks of the party.

The practical effects of this theorizing is the orienting of the party to these sectors instead of to the hard, serious work inside of the class. The youth orientation, which originated with the document "The Worldwide Youth Radicalization" has become an excuse for an exclusive and self-perpetuating student orientation which has failed to relate to young workers, soldiers or to youth of the oppressed nationalities or to train new cadre for eventual implantation into the class.

## *II. The Imperialist Countries*

The paramount task for the sections in the advanced countries during the epoch of the death agony of capitalism is the breaking of the grip of Stalinism and Social Democracy over the working class. A strategic orientation toward the class must be a priority of sections within the imperialist countries. The aborted revolutions of France (1968) and Italy (1968-69) serve to confirm this view.

At the same time, these events call attention to a new phase of class struggle in the advanced countries caused by a sharpening of the economic and social contradictions of world imperialism and characterized by a rise in the combativity of the working class and a generalized subsidence in the scope and importance of the student movement. The ability of the European and English sections to effect impressive gains over the last several years by shifting their orientations to the class in line with these changes has placed the International at an historic crossroads. For the first time, the International has the realistic opportunity of breaking out of its isolation and

emerging as a mass party of the working class. Hence, the success of the turn taken by these sections has immense import to the whole International.

The difference in the pace of the working-class radicalization in North America should not obscure the fundamental similarity of the work confronting the SWP and the LSA/LSO to those confronting these other sections. The continuing abstention from work within the class by these parties can only lead to an inability to intervene in the proletariat in the battles ahead. A refusal by the SWP and the LSA/LSO to take advantage of the possibilities that open up to us in the coming period have the probability of plunging these parties back into decades more of isolation and thus may well result in an historic defeat for Trotskyism in North America.

### *III. The Colonial Revolution*

The perspectives for the colonial countries are generally set forth in the Transitional Program: the building of a Trotskyist vanguard and the mobilization of the working class and peasantry around both democratic and transitional demands toward the seizure of state power and the creation of a dictatorship of the proletariat. Today, numerous differences remain within the International in terms of applying our theoretical program.

In the case of Palestine, the position adopted at the last convention of the SWP, that is, for a "democratic secular state in Palestine," stands in contrast to the correct slogan, "For a Unified Socialist Mid-East." This particular formulation of the SWP neglects the obvious need to point for a socialist solution to the Palestine struggle. Worse yet, to call for a "democratic secular state" without specifying its class character amounts to calling for the establishment of a bourgeois state. Such ambiguity is more than reminiscent of the two-stage theory of revolution of the Menshevik-Stalinists. At the same time the uncritical support to Al Fatah given by the SWP demonstrated an adaptation to the bourgeois democratic leadership of that national struggle.

The pattern to these errors is demonstrated in connection to the differences on Bangla Desh. While the SWP restricted its calls to the "self-determination of Bangla Desh," the United Secretariat correctly called for "Forward to the United Socialist Bengal" and "Forward Toward the Indian Sub-Continent Revolution." The mistakes of the SWP in this regard echo the political error mentioned earlier; the conception that democratic or nationalist struggles automatically develop into conscious revolutionary ones without intervention by the vanguard party. The fact is that while all bourgeois democratic tasks cannot be completed by the national bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie is quite capable of taking the leadership of such movements away from the revolutionary class and seizing control of the state for its own class interests. This has been the most frequent historical variant. There is no substitute for the necessity of building Leninist parties capable of winning the leadership of the workers and poor peasants away from the national bourgeoisie and over to a socialist program.

In the case of Latin America, we cannot agree with either the stated position of the SWP or the International majority.

The position put forward by the SWP which advocates

party building is poorly recommended both by the record of the SWP in the United States and by its sterile and mechanical nature. Intrinsic to the SWP's position is a transferring of their sectoral approach to Latin America, as their fraternal collaboration with the centrist PSA of Argentina shows.

We reject the positions of the International majority as well, but not for any pacifistic or legalistic reasons. We believe that the positions of the International majority, which envisage a continentwide strategy of armed struggle, represent an adaptation to guerrillaism.

The uneven social and economic development among the various Latin American countries does not necessarily preclude any continent-wide strategy. But at the same time to call for any strategy on a continental scale before developing a clear concrete analysis and perspective of each of the Latin American sections and countries is to remain in the realm of impressionistic abstraction.

The policy of the majority is not based on the working class, but rather is a substitute for the class and hence is adventuristic. We wish to make it quite clear that ultimately armed struggle (as the adjunct of the mass mobilization of the workers and peasants) will be the only way for the revolutionary victory in Latin America. The lesson of the necessity of arming the masses is one which must be driven home to counter the reformist influence of Stalinism and Social Democracy.

### *IV. The Workers States*

The current discussion on China is of value chiefly in the adoption of a more correct analysis of the role of Stalinism and its Maoist and other national variants. The International majority evidenced in its positions a critical error in the consideration of Maoism as bureaucratic centrism. This position, if not corrected can only lead to illusions about other Stalinist leaderships which in turn could lead to projecting a course that would be detrimental to the building of the International. There is a certain tendency in this direction evident in some of the European sections' positions toward the leadership of the DRV/NLF and the Seven-Point Program.

The SWP while holding a substantially more correct position vis-a-vis Stalinism and correctly criticizing the Seven-Point Program, has demonstrated an unwillingness to build a movement of solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution and defense of the workers state of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

### *V. The Fourth International*

We support the proposal for the rapid building of a genuinely democratic-centralist International within the framework of the Proposed Statutes published by the IMG. In this context we hold general agreement with the view put forward by Comrades Krivine and Frank in their contribution to the discussion entitled, "Again, and Always, the Question of the International." On this point we must reemphasize the necessity of the leaderships of the various sections and parties of practicing an extensive internal democracy and to provide for the rights of minorities to participate both in leadership and in international discussions.

We also wish to point out the harmful practices of the SWP: its lack of solidarity with the Argentine section when under repressive attack by the Lanusse regime, the refusal

in its press to acknowledge that the ERP-PRT is the section of the Fourth International in Argentina, its interference in the internal affairs of the IMG. All of these exacerbate the current differences in the International and foment a factional atmosphere. This only makes the working out of a correct solution to current differences more difficult.

Comradely,  
s/Bill Massey (Oakland-Berkeley Branch)  
s/John Shaffer (Houston Branch)  
s/Don Smith (Chicago Branch)

cc: United Secretariat  
International Majority Tendency

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If the price of a bulletin is omitted and replaced by an asterisk (\*), the bulletin is out of print.

The asterisks following the titles of articles indicate that the article is currently available in the following special compilations of reprints from the International Internal

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\*\*\* Discussion on China, 1968-1972 (\$1.50)

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