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## The exile of Trotsky and the Russian Opposition

As we have seen in the previous notebook, the rise of Stalinism did not go unchallenged in the Communist Party of Russia.

Starting at 1923, at times in the midst of great confusion, the tendencies that resisted the hollowing out of the soviets by the state apparatuses and the upholding of the interests of national capital over the world revolution would later constitute the *Left Opposition*, which had Trotsky and Rakovsky as its most qualified spokesmen.

*"The struggle of the Left Opposition in the years '23-28 takes place at different levels. We will not go into a detailed analysis. Let us briefly recall the main themes:*

*1. On the domestic level: struggle against the growing bureaucratization of the party and the state, struggle against the danger of the kulaks [the agrarian bourgeoisie] and struggle, on an ever increasing level, against the "nepman" [private petty-bourgeoisie born in the heat of the state capitalism of the NEP].*

*The Opposition advocated a new course of anti-bureaucratic measures, an agrarian policy that defended the poor peasantry against the kulaks, a progressive collectivization of the countryside that would be based on greater industrial development and economic planning.*

*2. At the international level: struggle against the Stalino-Bukharinist course (Anglo-Russian committee, allied with Chiang Kai-shek in the Chinese revolution).*

*On the theoretical plane, which guided all international politics, it fought against the theory of "socialism in one country", and defended the Bolshevik program that Trotsky called for in the theory of "permanent revolution".*

Jacques Roussel, *Les enfants du prophete*

From the moment he arrived in Prinkipo in exile, Trotsky clandestinely tried to create ties with the Russian opposition, which at that moment was confined in the penal camps. It was a moment of lively debate and growing demoralization encouraged by the Stalinist fraction's *left turn*.

Both the oppositionists and Trotsky, and before them Lenin, expected a new counterrevolutionary outbreak and perhaps a civil war led by the agrarian bourgeoisie (the kulaks), itself supported by the *NEPmen* and the imperialist powers. They rightly saw in the economic rightism of *socialism in one single country* a weakening of the workers in relation to *that* bourgeoisie. They also could see in *socialism in one country*, a typically centrist and ultimately suicidal class collaborationist policy that prepared the conditions for a triumphant counterrevolution. That is why they called the bureaucracy *Thermidorian* (it prepared the counterrevolution but it was not itself the counterrevolution). That is also why its economic policy had placed the emphasis on the monopoly of foreign trade and on the collectivization of the countryside as a way to avert the ever present danger of the kulaks and its alliances.

*"For several years now the gulf between town and country had widened and deepened. The 25-6 millions of small and mostly tiny and archaic farmsteads could not feed the rapidly growing urban population. The towns lived under a constant threat of famine. Ultimately, the crisis could be solved only through the replacement of the unproductive smallholding by the modern large-scale farm. In a vast country*

*accustomed to extensive agriculture, this could be achieved either by the energetic fostering of agrarian capitalism or by collectivization- there was no other choice. No Bolshevik government could act as the foster parent of agrarian capitalism - if it had so acted it would have let loose formidable forces hostile to itself and it would have compromised the prospects of planned industrialization.*

*There was thus only one road left, that of collectivization, even though the all-important questions of scale, method, and tempo had still to be resolved. Years of official hesistation had led only to this, that the decisions had now to be taken under conditions far worse than those under which they might have been taken earlier. Stalin's attempt to combine the most contradictory policies, to appease the well-to-do farmers and then to requisition their produce, had infuriated the peasantry. His long lasting reluctance to press on with industrial development had been no less disastrous. While the country was unable and unwilling to feed the town, the town was unable to supply the country with industrial goods. The peasant, not being able to attain shoes, clothes, and farm tools, had no incentive to raise his output, still less to sell it. And so both the starving town and the country famished of industrial goods were in turmoil.*

*The decisions about the tempo and scale of industrialization and collectivization were taken in conditions of an acute scarcity of all the human and material elements needed for the two-fold drive. While workers went short of bread, industry was short of skilled labor. It was also short of machinery. Yet machines stood idle for lack of fuel and the raw materials whose supply depended upon the rural economy. Transport was disrupted and could not cope with increased industrial traffic. The supply of nearly all goods and services was grievously inadequate to the demand. Inflation was rampant. Controlled prices bore no relation to the uncontrolled ones, and neither reflected genuine economic values.*

*All the ties and links between the various parts of the social body were cut, except for the bonds of misery and desperation. Not only had economic intercourse between town and country once again broken down, so had all normal relations between citizenry and state and even between party and state. There was no extreme of deception and violence to which both the rulers and the ruled were not prepared to go in the scramble. The kulaks and many 'middle' and even poor peasants, were implacable in their hatred of the 'commissars'. Arson and killings of party agents and agitators were daily occurrences in the villages. The mood of the peasantry communicated itself to the working class by having among its ranks many newcomers from the countryside. In the twelfth year of the revolution the poverty of the nation and the neglects and the abuses of government provoked a revulsion so bitter and widespread that something great and terrible had to happen or had to be done soon in order either to suppress or to release the pent-up emotions".*

- Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*

The implementation of collectivization could have seemed like a triumph for the left, after all it was the basis of its program. It is precisely for this reason that Stalin combined it with a strengthening of the repression of members of the Opposition.

*"Without severe perspecution, the left turn would have only brought fresh adherents into the ranks of the Opposition, because it marked the bankruptcy [of the earlier Stalinist policy]. But persecution alone, without the left turn, would not have had the effect it had had".*

Rakovsky, *Internal Bulletin of the Opposition*, 1929

The turn to the left, the collectivization, demoralized a good part of the Opposition that continued to discuss - as we saw in the previous notebook - in the penal camps. Paradoxically, the forced capitulations of the *Trotskyists* and the liberation of hundreds of them gave way to executions and open terror. Stalin mistrusted the capitulators and their effect on the city. The camps would soon be repopulated and, on an ever increasing scale, turn into extermination camps for some ten thousand leading oppositionists. Most of these oppositionists were veteran party members.

But, in spite of everything, the majority of the Opposition with Trotsky himself at the head continued to see the bureaucracy as an *excrescence* of the proletariat, not as an expression of the needs of nationalized capital, that is, as a *deformation* of the power of the soviets, not as a *bourgeois layer*.

The political difference between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the *Trotskyist* Opposition is only recognizable for the workers in the slogan of *socialist democracy*. It is not an easy slogan since, as we saw in the previous notebook, the proletariat had been renewed. Most of the workers did not belong to the soviets that made the Revolution. In response to that slogan, Stalinism would present a massive amount of figures, which were often scandalously false, in order to demonstrate the supposed *socialist development of the productive forces*. This in turn was intended to demonstrate the possibility of *socialism in a single country*. Trotsky would insist that the meanings of collectivization and industrialization within a national perspective contradict those of a worldwide revolutionary perspective, that those within a framework of bureaucratic dictatorship contradict those within framework of real Soviet power.

In fact, by 1932 the Russian proletariat had already doubled from 10 million to 20 million industrial workers. Collectivization had accelerated the accumulation of capital, industrializing Russia at full speed. But at the cost of an unprecedented exploitation of the workers who would live in the most brutal rationing and scarcity. It was state capital that was fighting on two fronts between a peasantry that it dismantled and proletarianized and a new proletariat stripped of a memory of struggle and continuity, of peasants who have arrived in the city, which even refused to express itself in what was still *theoretically* its own state.

*"While our peasantry is being proletarianized, our working class is becoming completely infected with the peasantry's spirit".*

Y. Grev. *Bulletin of the Opposition*, 1930

It's no exaggeration. In that year, in the Donetz basin, 40% of the miners were expropriated kulaks. The volume and speed of the transformation lead the bureaucracy to resort to generalized terror to sustain itself. The more the proletariat had grown and become concentrated, the more the bureaucracy feared it, the more freedoms were taken from it and the stronger became the disciplinary regime. Strikes were suppressed without question. Critical workers were accused of treason. The penal camps were expanded to accommodate hundreds of thousands of non-politicized workers. Forced labor had become a regular productive resource.

The bureaucracy was no longer *centrist*, in contrast to what the Opposition expected. It was not *shifting to the left* as the right previously had done, in an attempt to reconcile the agricultural bourgeoisie and the proletarian state. Already openly identified with the *State Plan* with the accumulation and reconstitution of national capital *in* the state, it was no longer able to coexist even

with the letter of the laws that were supposed to serve as a tool of the exploited class. In 1936 Stalin would approve a new constitution. The soviets would then formally disappear as assemblies with electable and revocable delegates. They would then formally and legally become committees of representatives of the party of the bureaucracy and its organs.

### **The Start of the International Communist Left**

Let's go back to 1928. The other task Trotsky gave himself upon arriving at Prinkipo was to organize the fight against Stalinism on a global level. His view of the International would parallel his view of the Russian state. For Trotsky, to the extent that soviets continued to exist *formally* - and would continue to exist on paper until 1936 - the Russian state was a *workers' state* and the state capitalism built by the NEP and accelerated by the bureaucracy at the expense of the workers and their organs was a *conquest* of the proletariat in the exercise of its dictatorship. And in the same way that in the Russian state he continued to see the *soviet state*, his vision at that time was that the CPs continued to group the militant vanguard of the class and that it was necessary to *recover* them in order to recover the International. The objective of the class had to be to *recover* its organizations, in Russia those of the state, in the rest of the world those derived from the International, especially the CPs. That is why Trotsky's idea at that moment, and would remain so for a long time, was to create a left-wing fraction of the International, like the Left Opposition in the Russian party.

The first focus of Trotsky's efforts would be in France. From the outset he encouraged the formation of a single pole of opposition to recover in the French CP the internal democracy and the programmatic bases of the Third International (the first four congresses), including Souvarine, the zinovietists of Treint and the Italian Bordigist exiles.

It was not a question of creating a political platform that would go beyond the Third International, neither was it a question of organizing a new party... it was a question of defending the parties created in the heat of the revolution only eight years before!

Because, let's make it clear, he was not trying to be a *broom wagon* that would collect any anti-Stalinist position, he was looking for those that departed from the defense of the Russian Revolution and Marxism, rejecting those that, like Souvarine in France, defended a revision of Marxism, rejected the need for a party, and even revised the idea of proletarian revolution. Trotsky never lost the global perspective: the retreat of the revolution in Russia and the difficulties of the proletariat in the rest of the world are part of the same process and consequently, contradictory forces beat under the tendencies in each party. Not all of them are revolutionary, neither in the Russian party nor in the others.

*"I am still deprived of the possibility of working systematically. As yet I am far from adequately acquainted with the publications of the European oppositional groups. I am therefore compelled to postpone until later a general evaluation of the tendencies within the Opposition. We are headed toward such difficult times that every actual and even every potential comrade possesses for us an immeasurable value. It would be an impermissible mistake to repel a single comrade, all the more so a group of comrades, out of a careless evaluation, biased criticism or any exaggeration of the differences in opinion.*

*Nevertheless, I believe it is absolutely indispensable to submit a few general considerations which are in my opinion decisive in evaluating this or that group or tendency within the Opposition.*

*The Opposition is now taking shape on the basis of a principled ideological differentiation and not of mass activity. This corresponds to the character of the present period. Similar processes occurred in the ranks of Russian Social-Democracy during the years of the counter-revolution and, at an international level, in the ranks of Social-Democracy during the period of war. Mass activity as a rule subsumes secondary and episodic differences of opinion and aids the fusion of friendly and close tendencies. Ideological groupings in periods of stagnation or ebb, on the contrary, always tend sharply towards differentiation, splits, internal struggles. We cannot jump out of the period in which we live. We must pass through it. A clear, precise ideological differentiation is unquestionably necessary. It lays the foundation for future successes.*

*The general line of the Comintern leadership has more than once been defined by us as centrism. It is self-evident that centrism, moreover a centrism equipped with an arsenal of repression, must drive into opposition not only all consistent proletarian elements but also the more consistent opportunists.*

*Opportunism in the Communist movement expresses itself as an urge to reestablish under present-day conditions the pre-war Social-Democracy. This is most graphically revealed in Germany. The present Social-Democracy is infinitely far from being the party of Bebel. But history testifies to the fact that Bebel's party became transformed into the present Social Democracy – which means that Bebel's party had already become completely inadequate in the pre-war era. All the more hopeless are any attempts to resurrect Bebel's party or even a left wing of that party in the present conditions. Yet, insofar as I am able to judge, Brandler, Thalheimer and their friends direct their efforts primarily toward this end. Souvarine in France gravitates less consistently but nonetheless apparently in the same direction.*

*There are, in my opinion, three classic questions which provide a decisive criterion for appraising the tendencies of world communism. These questions are:*

- 1. The policy of the Anglo-Russian Committee.*
- 2. The course of the Chinese Revolution.*
- 3. The economic policy of the USSR in connection with the theory of Socialism in one country.*

*Some comrades may perhaps feel astonished that I do not mention here the questions of party regime. I do so not through oversight but very deliberately. A party regime has no independent meaning; it derives from party policy. The struggle against Stalinist bureaucratism evokes sympathy among the most heterogeneous elements. The Mensheviks too are not averse to applauding at this or that attack that we direct against the bureaucracy. This provides the basis incidentally for the stupid chatter of the Stalinists, who try to make it seem as though our position is close to the position of the Mensheviks. For a Marxist, democracy within a party as well as within a country is never an abstraction. Democracy is always conditioned by the battle of living class forces. For the opportunists, revolutionary centralism is bureaucratism. It is evident that they cannot be our militants. Whatever suggestion of solidarity that comes from the part of the opportunists has for its basis here only ideological confusion or, what is far more frequent, malicious intent.*

*(1). On the question of the **Anglo-Russian Committee** I have had occasion to write a great deal. I do not know just what has been published abroad. I am informed that rumors have been spread abroad that I had presumably opposed the breaking up of the Anglo-Russian Committee and agreed to it only as a concession to Zinoviev and Kamenev. Just the contrary is true. The Stalinist policy in the Anglo-Russian question will forever remain as a classic model of the politics of centrism shifting to the right, holding the stirrups for avowed fakers and being rewarded by them with a kick in the mouth. The Chinese and Russian questions because of the peculiar conditions in China and Russia present great difficulties to European*

communists. It is otherwise with respect to the question of the political bloc with the heads of the English trade unions. Here we confront the fundamental problem of European politics. The Stalinist course in this question constitutes the most flagrant, the most cynical, and the most disastrous trampling under foot of the fundamentals of Bolshevism and the theoretical ABC of Marxism. The experiment of the Anglo-Russian Committee reduced to almost zero the educational value of the great 1926 strikes and retarded the development of the English working class movement for a number of years to come. Any one failing at this late date to understand this is no Marxist, no revolutionary politician of the proletariat. It is of no import that such an individual may protest against Stalinist bureaucratism. The opportunist course of the Anglo-Russian Committee was possible only through waging a struggle against the genuine revolutionary elements of the working class. And this in its turn was inconceivable except through suppressions and repressions, especially in a party with so revolutionary a past as the Bolshevik party.

(2). On the **Chinese question** I have also written a great deal in the last few years. I may perhaps succeed in publishing what I have written in a special volume. The study of the problems of the Chinese revolution is an indispensable condition for the education of the Opposition and for an ideological differentiation among its ranks. Those elements that have not yet taken a clearly defined position upon this question reveal thereby a nationalist narrow-mindedness which is itself an unequivocal symptom of opportunism.

(3). Finally, the **Russian question**. Due to the conditions created by the October revolution, three classic tendencies of socialism: (a) the Marxist tendency; (b) the centrist tendency; and (c) the opportunist tendency, have expressed themselves most clearly under Soviet conditions. In the USSR we see the right wing linked with the skilled intelligentsia and the small proprietors; the center balancing itself between the classes on the tight-rope of the apparatus; and the left wing representing the vanguard of the proletarian vanguard in the epoch of reaction. By this I do not of course mean to say that the left wing has been immune from error or that we can dispense with serious and open internal criticism. But this criticism must have a clear class basis, namely, one of the above-mentioned three historical tendencies. Any attempt to deny the existence of these tendencies and their class character, any attempt to ignore them will inevitably end in a pitiful debacle. This road is most frequently taken by unconsciously right wing elements or those of the right-wing who do not wish to frighten their own left wing prematurely.

Brandler and Thalheimer, so far as I know, during all these years have held that the policy of the Central Committee of the CPSU on economic questions was absolutely correct. That is how matters stood prior to the Stalinist left turn. Therefore, it would be logical for them to sympathize with the policy which was most openly conducted in 1924-1927, and which is represented today by the wing of Rykov, Bukharin and the rest. Souvarine apparently likewise tends in this direction.

Naturally I cannot here raise the economic question of the USSR in its full scope. What is stated in our platform remains wholly valid. We could only profit if the Right Opposition were to give a clear and precise criticism of our platform on this question. To facilitate this work for them, I shall here outline a few basic considerations.

The right-wingers consider that the present difficulties could be surmounted if more play were given to individual peasant economy. I do not undertake to deny this. Placing a stake on the capitalist farmer (the Europeanized or Americanized "kulak") will indubitably bear its fruits, but these will be capitalist fruits which would at one of the very next stages lead to the political collapse of the Soviet power. Reliance upon the capitalist farmer in 1924-1926 passed through only its initial stages. Yet it led to bolstering in the

*extreme the self-confidence of the urban and rural petty-bourgeoisie; it led to their capturing many of the rank and file Soviets; it raised the power and the self-confidence of the bureaucracy; increased the pressure on the workers, and brought the complete crushing of party democracy. Those who are incapable of understanding the inter-relationship between these factors can in general understand nothing in revolutionary politics. The course toward the capitalist farmer is absolutely incompatible with the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is necessary to choose.*

*Let us however take the purely economic aspect of the question. Between industry and peasant economy there is a dialectic interaction. But the motor force is industry, which is an infinitely more dynamic beginning. The peasant needs manufactured goods in exchange for bread. The democratic revolution under the leadership of the Bolsheviks gave the peasant land. The socialist revolution under the same leadership continues to give the peasant less goods and at a higher price than did capitalism in its day.*

*Precisely for this reason the socialist revolution, in contrast to its democratic base, is endangered. In the face of a scarcity of manufactured goods the peasant replies with a passive agricultural strike – he does not bring to the market the grain already in his possession nor does he increase the area sowed. The right wing considers that it is necessary to allow more play for the capitalist tendencies in the village; to take less from the village and to lower the tempo of industrial development. But this implies that the quantity of agricultural products on the market would increase while the quantity of the manufactured goods decreases still further. The disproportion between them which is at the root of the present economic crisis would be further aggravated. A possible way out would be to export the grain of the farmers, i.e. the richer peasants, and to give it finished imported European products in return. In other words, this means instead of a *smychka* (working alliance) between the cooperative peasant economy and the socialist industry, a *smychka* between an exporting farmer economy and world capitalism would be established. The state would be transformed not into the builder of a socialist economy but into an intermediary between domestic and world capitalism. There cannot be any doubt that these two partners would quickly elbow this intermediary aside, beginning of course with the monopoly of foreign trade. For, a free development of farmer economy, receiving from abroad everything it requires in return for grain exports, presupposes free commodity exchange and not foreign commerce monopolized by the state.*

*The right-wingers sometimes say that Stalin has applied the platform of the Opposition and demonstrated its inadequacy. Certainly, Stalin became frightened when he bumped his empirical forehead against the consequence of the "farmer" (kulak) course which he so blindly pursued in 1924-1927. Certainly, in making a leap to the left, Stalin utilized segments of the Opposition platform. The platform of the Opposition excludes above all a line towards a self-sufficing isolated economy. It is absurd to try to divorce Soviet economy from the world market by a brick wall. The fate of Soviet economy (including the agricultural sector) will be decided by the general tempo of its development and not at all by the degree of its "independence" from the world division of labor. All economic plans of the Stalinist leadership have up to now been erected on the decrease of foreign commerce in the next five to ten years. This cannot be called anything but petty-bourgeois cretinism. Such a posing of the problem has nothing in common with the Opposition. On the contrary, it flows wholly from the theory of socialism in one country.*

*Stalin's drive to raise industrialization supposedly brings him closer to the Opposition. But only in appearance. Socialist industrialization presupposes a great and thoroughly thought-out plan in which internal development is intimately bound with an ever-increasing utilization of the world market, along with the staunch preservation of the monopoly of foreign trade. Only along this road is it possible – not to*

*liquidate, nor to eliminate, but to mitigate the contradictions of socialist development in a capitalist encirclement; to reinforce the economic power of the Soviet republic, improve the economic relations between the city and the village and intrench the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Stalinist policy of empirical zigzags only worsens the situation.*

*These are the three basic criteria for the internal differentiation of the Opposition. These three criteria are taken from the life of three countries. Naturally, each of the other countries has problems of its own, and the attitude towards them will determine the position of each individual group and every individual communist. Some of these new questions may tomorrow come to the forefront and make all the others recede to the background. But today the three foregoing questions appear to me to be decisive. Without taking a clear and definitive position on these questions it is impossible to find any place for oneself among the basic groupings of communism”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *The Groupings in the Communist Opposition* (March 31, 1929)

In spite of all the difficulties with the French Communist left groups, Trotsky's continuous correspondence led to the formation of a small grouping pole in September 1929 around *Le Verité*, from which the *Ligue Communiste* with Molinier, Naville, Frank and Rosmer would almost immediately emerge, and which managed to begin to have a certain echo in the trade union base organised in *Union Ouvrière*. But as early as 1930 the *trade unionists* distanced themselves from the *Ligue* and in 1931 Rosmer and Collinet split to create the *Gauche Communiste*. In just a few months it was clear that keeping it up *was impossible*. Various manifestations of demoralization reigned among the various small groups to which the Zinovievist and Trotskyist opposition had been reduced to by being expelled from the party. As Rosmer wrote:

*“The great misfortune of all these groups is that they find themselves outside all action; and this fatally accentuates their sectarian character”.*

- Alfred Rosmer

The saddest thing is that the attitude of the different groups is nothing more than an expression of the demoralization of an opposition that had not even begun to fight. A very clear example can be seen in Maurice Paz. Paz, who was an ideologically communist lawyer, had published in France the texts of the Russian Opposition during the previous years on its funds and acted as its delegate in Paris. When he met Trotsky in Prinkipo and Trotsky had asked him to start organizing the Opposition around a joint weekly, the moral problems immediately became apparent: Paz demanded to lead while assuring that the conditions for the project would not be met. Trotsky recognized the problem without difficulty.

*“Comrade Paz, I speak frankly and even brutally in order to save whatever may still be saved. It is no longer time for mincing words, for the situation is too serious. I am neither a fanatic nor a sectarian. I can very well understand a person who sympathizes with the communist cause without leaving his milieu. Assistance of this sort can be very valuable for us. But it is the assistance of a sympathizer. I discussed this question in a letter to my American friends. Eastman had written to me, without mincing words himself, that such was his personal situation. He designates himself a "fellow-traveller," does not aspire, in his own words, to any leading role in the movement of the Opposition, and is content to assist it. He does translations, he has turned over his copyrights to the Militant, etc. And why? Because he cannot give*

*himself entirely to the movement. And he has acted correctly.*

*You must understand that the person who is the "axis," that is, the leader or one of the leaders of the revolutionary movement, assumes the right to call upon workers to make the greatest sacrifices, including that of their lives. This right involves no less important responsibilities. Otherwise, every intelligent worker will inevitably ask himself, "If X, who calls me to the greatest sacrifices, uses four-fifths or two-thirds of his time not to assure my victory but to assure his bourgeois existence, that shows that he does not have confidence in the imminence of the coming revolution." And this worker would be right.*

*Leave aside the program, please! It is not a matter of program. It's a matter of revolutionary activity in general. Marx once said that a single step forward for the movement is worth more than ten programs. And Marx was an expert at programs just the same and even at manifestos, at least as much as you and I!*

*To conclude. Your letters and above all your political attitude show me that communism is for you a sincere idea rather than a dominant conviction of life. And yet this conception is very abstract. Now, at the moment it is necessary ( it would have been necessary a long time ago) to undertake action which requires all of your time, you begin instinctively to oppose it because you employ a double standard of behaviour. When you are invited to take part, you reply, "There are insufficient resources and forces." And, when the others begin to look for the resources and the forces, you say, "If I am not the axis, I am opposed." What you are doing is unheard of! Even if you do not have confidence in the weekly paper, you ought to wait quietly and not sabotage it! You have no experience in those matters, and you go on blindly toward a new catastrophe! Tomorrow you will invoke theoretical, philosophical, political, and philological differences to justify your position. It's not hard to understand how that will end up! If you don't want to enter the arena, wait quietly, keep a friendly neutrality, and don't present the sad spectacle of an unprincipled opposition, dictated by exclusively personal reasons".*

- Leon Trotsky, (July 11, 1929)

It is interesting to note that the only ones at that time who proposed that the bureaucracy is a bourgeois layer, an excrescence of state capitalism, were the German Zinovievists and Souvarine in France. Trotsky, as well as all the other Marxist tendencies at the time, could not comprehend a bureaucratic counterrevolution just as they could not imagine a capitalism without individual capitalists.

*"How can anyone think or believe that power could pass from the hands of the Russian proletariat into those of the bourgeoisie peacefully, by way of a quiet, imperceptible bureaucratic change? Such a conception of the Thermidor is nothing but reformism à rebours. The means of production which once belonged to the capitalists remain in the hands of the Soviet state till this day. The land is nationalized. Social elements that live on the exploitation of labor continue to be debarred from the Soviets and the Army".*

- Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*

One of the most belligerent in this respect at the time was the *Italian fraction*, led by Bordiga, which had been publishing *Prometeo* since 1928 and which would continue to consider Stalinism to be "centrist" even beyond the Second Imperialist World War. On September 25, 1929, Trotsky writes to them for the first time and notes the programmatic agreement between the Russian and Italian

opposition.

*"In recent years we have seen that, for a number of leading revolutionists in France, opposition has served only as a stage on the road of retreat from Marxism – a retreat to reformism, trade unionism or simply to skepticism..."*

*The Syndicalist League, lead by Monatte, is itself an embryonic party, selecting its members not on a trade-union basis but on but ideological grounds, on the basis of a certain platform, and seeking to influence the trade unions from the outside, or, if you prefer, to "subject" them to its ideological influence. But the Syndicalist League is a party which does not act as such, which has no clear theory or program, which has not become conscious of itself, which masks its nature and thereby deprives itself of the opportunity of development.*

*Souvarine, in the struggle with the bureaucratism and the disloyalty of the official Comintern apparatus, has also arrived, although by different route, at a denial of political activity and of the party itself. Proclaiming the [Communist] International and its French section as dead, he considers it at the same time unnecessary for the Opposition to exist, since, according to him, the necessary political conditions are lacking for it. In other words, he denies the need for the existence of the party – at all times and under all conditions, as the expression of the revolutionary interests of the proletariat.*

*That is why I attach such importance to our solidarity on the question of the party, its historical role, the continuity of its activity, its obligation to struggle for the influence over any and all forms of the labor movement. On this question, for a Bolshevik, i.e., a revolutionary Marxist who has passed through Lenin's school, there cannot be any concessions".*

- Leon Trotsky, *Letter to the Italian Left Communists* (September 25, 1929)

It is not only the attitude towards the party that excites him, but also the characterization of the Russian state.

*"I note with pleasure that on the basis of your letter in Prometeo there is complete agreement between you and the Russian Opposition on the question of defining the class character of the Soviet state".*

The enthusiasm, however, would be short-lived. On April 21, 1930, he sent a second message, disheartened by the absence of Italians in the Paris conference, which brought together the international opposition for the first time:

*"A few months ago you addressed an open letter to me to which I replied at the time. Now it seems to me the time has come to address an open letter to your group.*

*A pre-conference of the International Left Opposition was recently held in Paris. This pre-conference is a serious step forward because it was made possible only as a result of long preparatory work of an ideological character. Your group, before whose eyes all this work unfolded, did not find it, however, possible to take part in this conference. This extremely important fact of absenteeism prompts me to pose the following questions before you:*

1. Do you conceive that communism can be nationalistic in character? This is, for example, the position of Urbahns, who while ritualistically repeating the formulas of internationalism, has created a purely German sect, without any connections throughout the world, and therefore without any revolutionary perspectives. **And so, do you regard yourselves as a national tendency or as part of an international tendency?**

2. If your answer to this question were to read that you are entirely satisfied with your isolated national existence, then there would be no room for any further questions. But I have no doubt that you consider yourselves internationalists. In that case a second question arises: **to what particular international tendency do you belong?** Today there are three basic tendencies in international communism: the Centrist, the Right and the Left (Leninist). In addition there are all sorts of ultra-Left splinters floundering between Marxism and anarchism. Until now we considered that you stood closest to the Left Opposition. Your dilatory position we ascribed to your desire to acquaint yourself with the development of the Left Opposition. But a dilatory position cannot be maintained permanently. Life does not wait, neither in Italy nor throughout the world. In order to join the International Left there is no need whatever for false "monolithism" in the spirit of the Stalinist bureaucracy. What is needed is genuine solidarity on the basic questions of international revolutionary strategy that has stood the test of the last few years. Partial tactical disagreements are absolutely unavoidable and cannot serve as an obstacle for close common work within the framework of an international organization. 'What are your disagreements with the Left Opposition? Are they of a principled or episodic character? A clear and precise answer to this question is indispensable.

3. Your non-participation in the international pre-conference can be interpreted politically that you are divided from the Left Opposition by differences of a principled character. If that is so, then a third question arises: **Why don't you proceed with the organization of an international faction of your own tendency?** Because you cannot possibly hold the view that the revolutionary principles which are good for the whole world are no good for Italy, or vice versa. A passively conciliatory attitude toward the Left Opposition coupled with a reluctance to join it and with a refusal to intervene in the life of the communist vanguard in other countries is characteristic of nationalistic socialism or nationalistic communism which has nothing in common with Marxist communism.

Your answer to these questions is of serious importance not only from the international but, in the first instance, from the Italian point of view, insofar as these two viewpoints can be counterposed in general. The illegal character of the Italian Communist Party makes it difficult to follow its development closely. Nevertheless it is possible to accept as unquestionable that within the framework of Italian Communism there are in addition to the official faction, your own group and the rightist group (Tasca), numerous revolutionary elements who have not yet openly defined their positions. Under these conditions you represent one of the factors of indefiniteness. Yet it is precisely the illegal existence of the party that demands with doubled force the full principled clarity of the leading groups. Your reply is bound to facilitate and hasten the ideological crystallization within the proletarian vanguard in Italy. Needless to say, the Russian Opposition would be happy to learn of your decision to join the International Left".

- Leon Trotsky, *An Open Letter to the Italian Left Communists* (April 22, 1930)

The rupture was actually inevitable because there was never a willingness for international work on the part of the Italians. When the answer was received, the Jesuit *method* that makes the Italian left famous, along with its recurring problems, by then became apparent. Just like the squid "disturbed" by the class movement in the peace of its exclusive and querulous depths, the Italians choose to squirt ink, to confuse with empty arguments and to swim back to the quiet solitude of their sectarian isolation as soon as possible. All the approaches of the International Communist Left to the Italian current that then begins to be known as *bordigism*, will find since then the same pattern of response.

*"Your extensive letter, dated June 3, received. Unfortunately, instead of dispelling misunderstandings, it increases them.*

*1. There is no "contrast" whatsoever between my last Open Letter and my last year's answer to your own open letter. All that separates them is several months of intense activity by the International Communist Left. At that time a certain amount of vagueness in your position could have appeared as episodic, and in part even unavoidable. Quite obviously, the conditions in which Comrade Bordiga, the authoritative leader of your faction, found himself might have explained for a while the dilatory character of your position (without, of course, reducing its harmful aspects). In replying to your Open Letter, I took this very important, even if personal, circumstance fully into account. I am sufficiently acquainted with Comrade Bordiga, and value him highly enough to understand the exceptional role he plays in the life of your faction. But, as you will undoubtedly grant yourselves, this consideration cannot cover all the others. Events are taking place, new questions are arising and clear answers are needed. Today the conservative vagueness of your position is becoming a more and more dangerous symptom.*

*2. You say that in all this time you have not departed by an iota from the platform of 1925, which I had called an excellent document in many respects. But a platform is not created so as to "not to depart from it," but rather to **apply** and **develop it**. The platform of 1925 was a good document for the year 1925. In the five years that have elapsed, great events have taken place. In the platform there is no answer whatsoever to them. To attempt replacing answers to questions which flow from the situation in 1930 by references to the 1925 platform is to uphold a policy of vagueness and evasiveness.*

*3. You explain your failure to participate in the Paris Conference (of the International Left Opposition) by saying that our letter of invitation was lost in the mail. If nothing more were involved, it should have been so openly stated in the press. I found no such notice by your group in Verité. Has it perhaps appeared in Prometeo? However, it's clear from your whole letter that it's not at all a case of our letter getting lost.*

*4. You say that "ideological preparation for the Conference was totally lacking." To me this assertion seems not only false but downright delirious. In France the ideological preparation was especially intense and fruitful (Verité, La Lutte de Classe, pamphlets). In all countries last year there took place an intense ideological struggle which led to a differentiation from alleged "comrades." The break with Souvarine and Paz in France, Urbahns in Germany, Pollack's little group in Czechoslovakia and others, was the most important element in the ideological preparation for the conference of genuine revolutionary Communists. To ignore this most important work is to approach the problem not with a revolutionary but a sectarian criterion.*

5. Your conception of internationalism appears to me erroneous. In the final analysis, you take the International as a sum of national sections or as a product of the mutual influence of national sections. This is, at least, a one-sided, undialectical and, therefore, wrong conception of the International. If the Communist Left throughout the world consisted of only five individuals, they would have nonetheless been obliged to build an international organization **simultaneously** with the building of one or more national organizations.

It is wrong to view a national organization as the foundation and the international as a roof. The interrelation here is of an entirely different type. Marx and Engels started the communist movement in 1847 with an international document and with the creation of an international organization. The same thing was repeated in the creation of the First International. The very same path was followed by the Zimmerwald Left in preparation for the Third International. Nowadays it is far more imperative to take this road than in the days of Marx. It is, of course, possible in the epoch of imperialism for a revolutionary proletarian tendency to arise in one or another country, but it cannot thrive and develop in one isolated country; on the very next day after its formation it must seek for or create international ties, an international platform, an international organization. Because a guarantee of the correctness of the national policy can be found only along this road. A tendency which remains shut-in nationally over a stretch of years, condemns itself irrevocably to degeneration.

6. You refuse to answer the question as to the character of your differences with the International Opposition on the grounds that **an international principled document is lacking**. I consider such an approach to the question as **purely formal, lifeless, not political and not revolutionary**. A platform or program is something that comes as a result of extensive experiences from joint activities on the basis of a certain number of common ideas and methods. Your 1925 platform did not come into being on the very first day of your existence as a faction. The Russian Opposition created a platform in the fifth year of its struggle; and although this platform appeared two and a half years after yours did, it has also become outdated in many respects.

When, later on, the program of the Communist International was published, the Russian Opposition replied with a criticism of it. This critique, which was – in essence and not in form – the fruit of collective work, was published in several languages, as have been most of the documents of the Opposition in recent years. On this terrain there occurred a serious ideological struggle (in Germany, in the United States). Problems of trade union policy, “The Third Period,” the Five-Year Plan, collectivization [of Russian agriculture], the attitude of the Left Opposition toward the official [Communist] parties, and so on all these principled questions were submitted in the recent period to serious discussion and theoretical elaboration in the International Communist press. This is the only way of preparing the elaboration of a platform, or more accurately, of a program. When you declare that you haven’t been offered a ready-made “programmatic document,” and that consequently you are unable to answer questions concerning your differences with the International Left, **you thereby disclose a sectarian conception of methods and means for arriving at an ideological unification; you demonstrate how isolated you are from the ideological life of the Communist Left.**

7. The groups that united at the Paris Conference did not at all aspire to mechanical monolithism, nor did they set it as their goal. But they are all united in the conviction that the living experience of the last few years assures their unity, at least, to the extent of enabling them to continue collaborating in an organized form on an international scale, and in particular, of preparing a common platform with the international

forces at their disposal. When I inquired how deep-going were your differences with the International Left, I did not expect a formalistic answer, but a political and revolutionary reply to the following effect: "Yes, we consider it possible to proceed to work together with the given groups, among whom we shall defend our own views on a number of questions."

But what was your answer? You declare that you will not participate in the International Secretariat until you receive a programmatic document. This means that others must, without your participation, work out a programmatic document, while you reserve the right of final inspection. How much further is it possible to go along the road of dilatoriness, evasion and national isolation?

8. Equally formalistic is your statement that you find unacceptable the statutes of the French Communist League, which solidarize with the first four World Congresses of the Communist International. In all likelihood, there is not a single French comrade who holds that everything in the decisions of the first four Congresses is infallible and immutable. It is a question of the **basic strategic line**. If you refuse to rest on the foundations lodged by the first four Congresses, then what is there left for you in general?

On the one hand, you refuse to accept the decisions of the first four Congresses as the basis. On the other, you flatly reject or ignore the programmatic and tactical work of the International Left in recent years. What then do you propose instead? Can it be the very same platform of 1925? But with all its virtues this platform is only an episodic document which doesn't offer today an answer to a single one of the current problems.

9. Strangest of all is the impression produced by the section of your letter where you talk with indignation about "an attempt" to create a new Opposition in Italy. You speak of a "maneuver," of a new "experiment in confusion," and so forth. So far as I am able to judge, this refers to a new split inside the ruling centrist faction of the Italian Communist Party, with one of the groups striving to draw closer to the International Left. Wherein is this a "maneuver?" What's the "confusion" about? Whence does confusion emanate? The fact that a group, splitting from an opponent faction, is seeking to merge with us, represents a serious gain. Naturally, the merger can take place only on a principled basis, i.e., on the basis of the theory and practice of the International Left. The comrades who belong to the Italian Opposition have personally sent me letters and a number of documents. I replied fully and explicitly to the questions these comrades put to me. I will continue to do so in the future as well. For my part, I, too, posed a number of questions to these comrades. In particular, to my query concerning their attitude to the Bordiguists, they replied that, despite the existing differences of opinion, they consider collaboration both possible and necessary. Where is the "maneuver"?

On the one hand you consider that the International Opposition does not merit you taking part in its collective labors. On the other, you evidently deem that the International Opposition has no right to get in touch with Italian Communists who declare themselves in solidarity with it. Dear comrades, you lose all proportions and you go too far. This is the usual fate of shut-in, isolated groups.

Naturally, it may be considered unfortunate that relations and negotiations with the new Italian Opposition are going on without your participation. But the fault is yours. To take part in these negotiations you should have taken part in the entire activity of the International Opposition, that is, entered its ranks.

10. As concerns the Urbahns group, you request information concerning its entire activity so as to be able to take a definite position. And you recall in this connection that in the platform of the Russian Opposition, the Urbahns group is mentioned as being ideologically close. I can only express my regret that up 'til now you have not deemed it your duty to arrive at a definitive opinion on a question that has agitated the entire International Opposition for many months; led to a split in Germany and later to the formation there of a united Left Opposition, completely severed from Urbahns. What is implied by your reference to the Russian platform? Yes, in its time we defended the Urbahns group (just as we defended Zinoviev's group) against Stalin. Yes, we once thought we could succeed in straightening out the political line of the **entire** Urbahns group.

But history did not come to a standstill. Neither in 1925 nor in 1927. After our platform was published, events of no small importance took place. The Zinovievists capitulated. Leninbund's leadership began to **move away** from Marxism. Inasmuch as we do not cut political ties lightly, we tried in dozens of articles and letters to get the Leninbund to change its policy. We did not succeed. A number of new events pushed the Urbahns group still further away. A considerable section of its own organization broke with it. Political evolution is chock-full of contradictions. Not infrequently it has carried, as it still will, yesterday's comrades or semi-comrades to the opposite side. The causes for the split between the International Opposition and the Leninbund were discussed publicly by the entire Oppositional press. I have personally said everything I had to say on this subject in a special pamphlet. [*The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition*, see FI, October and December, 1946, February and March, 1947.] I have nothing to add, all the more so because we are discussing here events that have occurred. You raise this question not in connection with the facts themselves but in connection with my letter. This shows once again the extent to which you ignore the actual political and theoretical life of the International Opposition.

- Leon Trotsky, *To the Editorial Board of Prometeo* (June 19, 1930)

The evolution of the Opposition in the Anglo-Saxon world is no more promising. Trotsky tried to take Ridley and Chandu Ram to a materialist terrain. Ridley and Chandu Ram, however, had published a theses on *the situation in England, the Left Opposition and its relations with the Comintern* that was impregnated with idealism and the most lamentable schematism. It proclaimed -against all material evidence- the imminence of fascism in Great Britain and the collapse of the trade unions.

*"According to the theses, the trade unions from their arrival represent "imperialist organizations". They can live so long as they benefit by the super-profits of British capitalism; now, once its privileged position is forever lost, the trade unions can only disappear. To struggle to capture the present trade unions is nonsense. The revolutionary dictatorship will, in the proper time build new "economic organizations".*

Trotsky reminded them that the idea that *Great Britain is currently in a transitional phase between democracy and fascism* is only true on such a general plane that it is not at all the order of the day.

*"Democracy and Fascism are here considered as two abstractions without any social determinants. Evidently, the authors wish to say: British Imperialism prepares itself to free its dictatorship from the grasp of the decadent parliamentary cover, and to enter upon the path of open and naked violence. In general this is true, but, only in general. The present government is not an "Anti-Parliamentary" Government; on the contrary, it has received an unheard of parliamentary support from the "nation". Only the rise of the revolutionary movement in England can force the government to tread the path of naked, ultra-parliamentary violence. This will without a doubt take place. But at the present time this is not so. To place*

*today the question of Fascism on the first plane has no justification. Even from a distant perspective one can doubt to what extent it is appropriate to speak of "Fascism" in England. Marxists must in our opinion, proceed from the idea that fascism represents a different and specific form of the dictatorship of finance-capital, but it is absolutely not identical with the imperialist dictatorship as such. If the "party" of Mosely and the "Guild of St. Michael" represent the beginnings of fascism, as the theses declares, it is precisely the total futility of both named groups that shows how unwise it is to reduce already today the whole perspective to the imminent coming of fascism".*

The general tone of the theses led to: a defense of the abandonment of the struggle to recover the parties of the Comintern, especially the German one, and the demoralization of the workers who follow those parties. Trotsky, angrily replied,

*"The revolutionary workers do not leap from organization to organization with lightness, as individual students do".*

- Leon Trotsky, *Tasks of the Left Opposition in England and India* (November 1931)

The situation of the groups in the United States was not much better. Trotsky was horrified by Shachtman's stance on the European situation, especially the German one, and asked the *Communist League* of America to clarify which positions pertained to the organization and which ones were the personal opinions of its leaders.

*"I am well aware that it is not easy for America to immediately understand the internal struggles of the European Opposition and to adopt a precise position on the matter. And no one can demand that from them. However, they have to understand that it is not very good here that Comrade Shachtman, presumably with the support of the American section, takes a position at critical moments that is totally opposed to the struggle that the progressive elements of the Opposition have been waging for some time and on the basis of which a certain selection was made".*

What was going on? Why was the map of international opposition, inside or outside the main nucleus, so disastrous?

The Internationals until then had a nucleus hardened by real and massive class struggles: the League had been the leading nucleus of the First International, Bebel's SPD and Liebknecht had created a mass organization in the midst of Bismarck's antisocialist laws, the Bolshevik party had been the heart of the Russian Revolution.... The theoretical and moral nucleus of the international opposition had been the Russian opposition, but this was only present on the European stage through Trotsky and his family nucleus (Natalia, Lev).

*"Trotsky was expelled from the party in 1927 and then from Russia. Most left-wing opposition members were forced to submit and "repent" after suffering exclusion from the party. They were sent to prison and to "socialist" deportation camps, where they would all end up murdered or executed by traitors and foreign agents. **The Russian opposition was physically liquidated.** Then came the turn of the Stalinists themselves who had experienced the October revolution. **The Bolshevik party was also physically liquidated.***

*It was an immense loss for the Revolution and for the International Opposition. Nowhere else had there existed a revolutionary party comparable to the Bolshevik one, tempered in the dire hardships of clandestinity, revolution, civil war, and power. With its extermination all revolutionary communist traditions had perished. The disappearance of the Russian left opposition was, in particular, an irreparable loss, as they were the bearers until the end of revolutionary, theoretical and **organizational** capital amassed in many years.*

*Communist continuity was practically taken up solely by Trotsky”.*

Jacques Roussel, *Les enfants du prophete*

The real question was not the fragility of the small nuclei that arose here and there, the demoralization of the French and Germans or the sectarianism of the Italians or the student banality of the Anglo-Saxons. The point was that Trotsky could not replace an entire militant generation that was perishing in the Stalinist camps. He did much to avoid being captured as a fetish through the sectarian battles that were fought out by the grime of the left expelled from the Komintern. He also made a huge effort to redirect its derivatives. Stuck between the more or less delirious or sectarian tendencies of the oppositionists and the treacherous Stalinist offensive, Trotsky emphasized a certain Bolshevik conservatism around which to organize a skeleton of international organization.

The way out of the stagnation of the International Communist Left could only be opened up where the opposition was linked, for the first time outside Russia, to a revolutionary mass movement. In 1931 this limited the expectation fundamentally to two countries: Germany and Spain.

### **Germany: Hitler or Revolution**

Trotsky did not see much promise in the German opposition groups either.

*“The so-called Wedding group comprised the Trotskyists proper, but far more influential was the Leninbund which published the Fahne des Kommunismus and was led by Hugo Urbahns. There were also other tiny, ‘ultra-left’ sects such as the Korschists, so-called after Karl Korsch, a theorist who had in 1923 been Minister of the Communist-Socialist Government of Thuringia. The Zinovievists, Maslov and Fischer, were by far the strongest group; but, paradoxically, after their inspirer had surrendered to Stalin, they themselves took up an extreme anti-Stalinist attitude; similar to that of the survivors of the Workers’ Opposition in the Soviet Union; and in their attacks on official communism they went ‘much further’ than Trotsky was prepared to go. They argued that the Russian Revolution had run its full course, and that the Soviet Union had ushered in an epoch of counter-revolution; that nothing was left there of the proletarian dictatorship; that the ruling bureaucracy was a new exploiting and oppressing class basing itself on the state capitalism of a nationalized economy; that, in a word, the Russian Thermidor was triumphant. They added that even the foreign policy of Stalinism was becoming indistinguishable from that of the Tsarist imperialism. Consequently, no reform could resuscitate the rule of the working class- only another proletarian revolution could achieve that. They also considered it hopeless to aim at a reform of the Third International which was a ‘tool of the Russian Thermidorians’ and exploited the heroic October legend in order prevent the workers from facing realities and to harness their revolutionary energy to the engine of a counter-revolution. It went without saying that those who held this view did not feel themselves bound by any solidarity with the Soviet Union, still less by the duty to defend it; and they pointed to the very fact of Trotsky’s banishment as conclusive evidence in favor of their attitude. ‘The expulsion of Trotsky’, they wrote; ‘marks the line at which*

*the Russian Revolution has definitively come to a halt”.*

- Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*

But the problem once again is the demoralization resulting from the defeats provoked again and again by the KPD leadership since 1919.

*“When we evaluate the history of Germany since 1914, we must say that the present Communist Party is the weakest of all Communist parties that could have been formed under the exceptional conditions of German development. The objective conditions worked for communism; the party leadership against communism. The result was — a profound shake-up of the party, disappointment and distrust of the party leadership, the growth of skepticism, etc. All this creates in the working class a mass of dispersed, unsatisfied, and oppositional elements, some of whom are completely fatigued, spent (only the revolution can bring them to the surface again), while others have retained their revolutionary freshness but cannot find a correct line and a trustworthy leadership. We must add: not only the history of the party as a whole, but that of the left faction as well, is full of contradictions, zigzags, mistakes, and disappointments; therefore — a considerable number of sects, with their customary proscriptions "against" participation in the trade unions, "against" parliamentarism, etc. This means that the Left Opposition must be created on a soil that is overcrowded with the remnants and splinters of former breakdowns. Under these conditions, the role of the leadership takes on exceptional significance.*

*What critically thinking left workers, not only outside the party but inside it as well, demand at present of the leadership, above all, is not political infallibility — this is impossible — but revolutionary devotion, personal firmness, revolutionary objectivity, and honesty. These criteria, which were formerly taken for granted in the revolutionary party, have today gained exceptional significance in view of the bureaucratic decay that has set in during the last few years: leaders are appointed from above, apparatus people are hired as the businessman hires clerks, party functionaries that change their opinions on command and persecute and lie when they are told to do so, etc.*

*The process of disintegration may — it is not at all impossible — seize single intermediary layers of the Opposition insofar as the Opposition, especially in its first stages, attracted not only revolutionists but also all sorts of careerists. This in turn leads to a sentiment of skeptical indifference among oppositionist workers on the question of leadership: "All are careerists more or less, but one, for instance, can at least write articles, whereas the other cannot even do that." This explains first of all why many critically inclined workers can reconcile themselves to the party regime — they have never seen another! Secondly, why the majority of the oppositionist workers remain outside of the organization. Thirdly, why inside the Opposition the less pretentious workers reconcile themselves to the presence of schemers, since they look upon them as "specialists," as an unavoidable evil, i.e., as the Russian worker looks upon the bourgeois engineers. All this is the result of great defeats on the one hand and of the disintegrating bureaucratic regime on the other.*

*The German Opposition is not developing in a vacuum. Not only in the Leninbund but in the organization of the Bolshevik-Leninists as well I have within the last two years observed methods which have absolutely nothing in common with the regime of a proletarian revolutionary organization. More than once I have asked myself in astonishment: do these people think such methods are methods of Bolshevik education? How can intelligent German workers tolerate disloyalty and absolutism in their organization? I attempted to express my objections in letters to several comrades, but I have been convinced that fundamentals which*

*appeared to me elementary for a proletarian revolutionist have found no echo among some of the leaders of the Opposition, who have developed a definite conservative psychology. It can be characterized in the following manner: extreme, often sickly sensitivity in relation to everything that concerns their own circle, and the greatest indifference in relation to everything that concerns the rest of the world. I attempted in circulars and articles, without mentioning any names, i.e., without striking at the egoism of the younger comrades, to call attention to the necessity of a decisive revision of the internal regime in the Left Opposition. I did not run up against any objections; on the contrary, I found the very same formulations in the official publications of the German Opposition. However, in practice, the directly opposite road was taken. When I again broached the question of this disparity, in my letters, I was met with irritation.*

*A whole year passed with these attempts to regulate the matter without provoking a sharp organizational crisis. The comrades whose policies appeared particularly dangerous to me occupied themselves in the course of this time mainly with the consolidation of the position of their own circle. They achieved a measure of success in this — at the expense of the ideological and organizational interests of the German Opposition. In the general work of the latter, there can be noticed a certain lack of initiative, stagnation, laxity. Nevertheless, a fierce struggle is being conducted for the self-preservation of the leading circle. In the final analysis this leads to a deep internal crisis, the basis of which consists of the contradiction between the progressive needs of the development of the Left Opposition and the conservative policies of the leadership”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *The Crisis in the German Left Opposition*

At that time it is not yet evident to what extent the demoralization that Trotsky points to in his analysis affects the entirety of the German proletariat. And yet it will be the key to understanding the petty-bourgeois reaction and the rise of Nazism that was already germinating at that moment.

*“Only a few months had passed since the beginning of the world-wide economic crisis, the Wall Street panic of October 1929, and the whole edifice of the Weimar Republic was shattered. The Great Slump had struck Germany with devastating force and thrown six million workers out of employment. In March 1930 Hermann Müller, the Social Democratic Chancellor, was forced to resign: the Socialist-Catholic coalition on which his government rested had collapsed. The coalition partners could not agree whether or by how much the government should cut the dole it paid out to the unemployed. Field-Marshal Hindenburg, the relic and symbol of the Hohenzollern Empire, now the Republic’s President, dissolved Parliament and appointed Heinrich Brüning Reichskanzler. Brüning ruled by decree, enforced a rigidly ‘deflationary’ policy, cut expenditure on social insurance, dismissed government employees en masse, reduced wages and salaries, and crushed small businessmen with taxes, thus aggravating the distress and the despair of all. In elections held on 14 September 1930, Hitler’s party, which had polled only 800,000 votes in 1928, won six and a half million votes; from the smallest party in the Reichstag it became the second largest. The Communist Party, too, increased its vote from about three million to over four and a half. The Social Democrats, who had for years ruled the Weimar Republic, lost; and so did the Deutschazionale and the other parties of the traditional right wing. The election revealed the instability and the acute crisis of parliamentary democracy.*

*The leaders of the Weimar Republic refused to read the omens. Conservatives viewed the emergence of the Nazi movement with mixed feelings: disconcerted by their own losses and by the violence of Nazism, they were nevertheless reassured by the rise of a great party which declared implacable war on all working-class organizations; and they hoped to find in Nazism an ally against the left and possibly a junior partner in government. The Social Democrats, frightened by Hitler's threats - he strutted the country proclaiming that the 'heads of Marxists and Jews would soon roll in the sand'- decided to 'tolerate' Brüning's government as the 'lesser of the two evils'. The Communist Party exulted in its gains and made light of the huge increase in the vote for Hitler. On the day after the election, the Rote Fahne, then the most important communist paper in Europe, wrote: 'Yesterday was Herr Hitler's "great day", but the so-called electoral victory of the Nazis is only the beginning of their end.' The 14th of September [Rote Fahne repeated a few weeks later] was the high watermark of the National Socialist movement in Germany - what follows now can be only ebb and decline.'*

*Several months later, after the towns and cities of Germany had had their first taste of the terror of Hitler's Stormtroops, Ernest Thaelmann, the leader of the Communist Party, told the Executive of the Comintern in Moscow: 'After 14 September, following the sensational success of the National Socialists, their adherents all over Germany expected great things from them. We, however, did not allow ourselves to be misled by the mood of panic which showed itself...in the working class, at any rate, among the followers of the Social Democratic Party. We stated soberly and seriously that 14 September was in a sense Hitler's best day after which there would be no better but only worse days.' The Executive of the Comintern endorsed this view, congratulated Thaelmann, and confirmed its Third Period policy which committed the Communist Party to reject the idea of any Socialist-Communist coalition against Nazism and obliged it to 'concentrate fire on the Social Fascists'.*

- Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*

Trotsky responded as soon as he received the response to his proposal to evaluate the *communist party's parliamentary victory in the light of revolutionary tasks*. The result, obviously, is not triumphalist but alarming... and at its basis is the more than justified inability of the German proletariat to trust the KPD. It was an incapacity that alienated the petty bourgeoisie of the *party of revolutionary hope* (communism) by throwing it into the arms of the party of *counterrevolutionary hopelessness* (fascism). But what can the International that comes from proclaiming a phase of insurrection and seizure of power - the "third period" - do in the middle of a phase of ebb and economic recovery?

*"The official press of the Comintern is now depicting the results of the German elections as a prodigious victory of Communism, which places the slogan of a Soviet Germany on the order of the day. The bureaucratic optimists do not want to reflect upon the meaning of the relationship of forces which is disclosed by the election statistics. They examine the figure of Communist votes gained independently of the revolutionary tasks created by the situation and the obstacles it sets up.*

*The Communist Party received around 4,600,000 votes as against 3,300,000 in 1928. From the viewpoint of "normal" parliamentary mechanics, the gain of 1,300,000 votes is considerable even if we take into consideration the rise in the total number of voters. But the gain of the party pales completely beside the leap of fascism from 800,000 to 6,400,000 votes. Of no less significance for evaluating the elections is the fact that the Social Democracy, in spite of substantial losses, retained its basic cadres and still received a considerably greater number of workers' votes than the Communist Party.*

*Meanwhile, if we should ask ourselves what combination of international and domestic circumstances could be capable of turning the working class towards Communism with greater velocity, we could not find an example of more favorable circumstances for such a turn than the situation in present-day Germany: Young's noose, the economic crisis, the disintegration of the rulers, the crisis of parliamentarism, the terrific self-exposure of the Social Democracy in power. From the viewpoint of these concrete historical circumstances, the specific gravity of the German Communist Party in the social life of the country, in spite of the gain of 1,300,000 votes, remains proportionately small.*

*The weakness of the positions of Communism, inextricably bound up with the policy and regime of the Comintern, is revealed more clearly if we compare the present social weight of the Communist Party with those concrete and unpostponable tasks which the present historical circumstances put before it.*

*It is true that the Communist Party itself did not expect such a gain. But this proves that under the blows of mistakes and defeats, the leadership of the Communist parties has become unaccustomed to big aims and perspectives. If yesterday it underestimated its own possibilities, then today it once more underestimates the difficulties. In this way, one danger is multiplied by another.*

*In the meantime, the first characteristic of a real revolutionary party is to be able to look reality in the face.*

*With every turn of the historic road, with every social crisis, we must over and over again examine the question of the mutual relations of the three classes in modern society: the big bourgeoisie, led by finance capital; the petty bourgeoisie, vacillating between the basic camps; and finally, the proletariat. The big bourgeoisie, making up a negligible part of the nation, cannot hold power without the support of the petty bourgeoisie of the city and the village, that is, of the remnants of the old, and the masses of the new, middle classes. In the present epoch, this support acquires two basic forms, politically antagonistic to each other but historically supplementary: Social Democracy and fascism. In the person of the Social Democracy, the petty bourgeoisie, which follows finance capital, leads behind it millions of workers.*

*The big German bourgeoisie is vacillating at present; it is split up. Its disagreements are confined to the question: Which of the two methods of cure for the social crisis shall be applied at present? The Social Democratic therapy repels one part of the big bourgeoisie by the uncertainty of its results, and by the danger of too large levies (taxes, social legislation, wages). The surgical intervention of fascism seems to the other part to be uncalled for by the situation and too risky. In other words, the finance bourgeoisie as a whole vacillates in the evaluation of the situation, not seeing sufficient basis as yet to proclaim an offensive of its own "third period," where Social Democracy would be unconditionally replaced by fascism, when, generally speaking, it would undergo a general annihilation for its services rendered. The vacillations of the big bourgeoisie – having its basic parties weakened – between Social Democracy and fascism are an extraordinarily clear symptom of a prerevolutionary situation. With the approach of a real revolutionary situation, these vacillations will of course immediately come to an end.*

*For the social crisis to bring about the proletarian revolution, it is necessary that, besides other conditions, a decisive shift of the petty-bourgeois classes to the side of the proletariat. This will give the proletariat a chance to put itself at the head of the nation as its leader.*

*The last election revealed – and this is its principal symptomatic significance– a shift in the opposite direction. Under the impact of the crisis, the petty bourgeoisie swung, not in the direction of the proletarian revolution, but in the direction of the most extreme imperialist reaction, pulling behind it considerable sections of the proletariat.*

*The gigantic growth of National Socialism is an expression of two factors: a deep social crisis, throwing the petty-bourgeois masses off balance, and the lack of a revolutionary party regarded by the popular masses as the acknowledged revolutionary leader. If the Communist Party is the **party of revolutionary hope**, then fascism, as a mass movement, is the party of **counter-revolutionary despair**. When revolutionary hope embraces the whole proletarian mass, it inevitably pulls behind it on the road of revolution considerable and growing sections of the petty bourgeoisie. Precisely in this sphere, the election revealed the opposite picture: counterrevolutionary despair embraced the petty-bourgeois mass with such force that it drew behind it many sections of the proletariat.*

*How is this to be explained? In the past, we have observed (Italy, Germany) a sharp strengthening of fascism, victorious, or at least threatening, as the result of a spent or missed revolutionary situation, at the conclusion of a revolutionary crisis in which the proletarian vanguard revealed its inability to put itself at the head of the nation and change the fate of all its classes, the petty bourgeoisie included. This is precisely what gave fascism its peculiar strength in Italy. But at present the problem in Germany does not arise at the conclusion of a revolutionary crisis, but just at its approach. From this, the leading Communist Party officials, optimists ex officio, draw the conclusion that fascism, having come “too late,” is doomed to inevitable and speedy defeat (Die Rote Fahne). These people do not want to learn anything. Fascism comes “too late” in relation to old revolutionary crises. But it appears sufficiently early – at the dawn – in relation to the new revolutionary crisis. **The fact that it gained the possibility of taking up such a powerful starting position on the eve of a revolutionary period and not at its conclusion, is not the weak side of fascism but the weak side of Communism.** The petty bourgeoisie does not wait, therefore, for the party to bring new disappointments in order to improve its own chances of success; it bases itself upon the experiences of the past, remembering the lesson of 1923, the capricious leaps of the ultra-left course of Maslow-Thälmann, the opportunist impotence of the same Thälmann, the ramblings of the “third period,” etc. Finally – and this is the most important – its lack of faith in the proletarian revolution is nourished by the lack of faith in the Communist Party on the part of millions of Social Democratic workers. **The petty bourgeoisie, even when completely thrown off the conservative road by circumstances, can turn to social revolution only when the sympathies of the majority of the working class are for a social revolution.** Precisely this most important condition is still lacking in Germany, and not by accident.*

*The programmatic declaration of the German Communist Party before the elections was completely and exclusively devoted to presenting fascism as the main enemy. Nevertheless, fascism came out the victor, gathering not only millions of semi-proletarian elements, but also many hundreds of thousands of industrial workers. This is an expression of the fact that in spite of the parliamentary victory of the Communist Party, the proletarian revolution as a whole suffered a serious defeat in this election – to be sure, of a preliminary, warning, and not decisive character. It can become decisive and will inevitably become decisive, if the Communist Party is unable to evaluate its partial parliamentary victory in connection with this “preliminary” character of the defeat of the revolution as a whole, and draw from this all the necessary conclusions.*

***Fascism in Germany has become a real danger***, as an acute expression of the helpless position of the bourgeois regime, the conservative role of the Social Democracy in this regime, and the accumulated powerlessness of the Communist Party to abolish it. Whoever denies this is either blind or a braggart.

*In 1923, Brandler, in spite of all our warnings, monstrously exaggerated the forces of fascism. A hesitant, evasive, defensive, and cowardly policy had emerged, based on this erroneous evaluation of the correlation of forces. This destroyed the revolution. Such events do not pass without leaving their mark in the consciousness of all the classes of the nation. The overestimation of fascism by the Communist leadership created one of the conditions for its further strengthening. The contrary mistake, this very underestimation of fascism by the present leadership of the Communist Party, may lead the revolution to a more severe crash for many years to come.*

*The danger becomes especially acute in connection with the question of the tempo of development, which does not depend upon us alone. The malarial character of the political curve revealed by the election speaks for the fact that the tempo of development of the national crisis may turn out to be very speedy. In other words, the course of events in the very near future may resurrect in Germany, on a new historical plane, the old tragic contradiction between the maturity of a revolutionary situation on the one hand and the weakness and strategical impotence of the revolutionary party on the other. This must be said clearly, openly, and above all, in time.*

*It would be a monstrous mistake to console oneself with the fact, for instance, that the Bolshevik Party in April 1917, after the arrival of Lenin, when the party first began to prepare for the seizure of power, had fewer than 80,000 members and led behind itself, even in Petrograd, not more than a third of the workers and a far smaller part of the soldiers. The situation in Russia was altogether different. The revolutionary parties came out of the underground only in March after an almost three-year interruption and suffocation of political life that existed prior to the war. The working class during the war renewed itself approximately 40 percent. The overwhelming mass of the proletariat did not know the Bolsheviks, had not even heard of them. The vote for the Mensheviks and SRs in March-June was simply an expression of the first hesitant steps after the awakening. In this vote, there was not even a shadow of disappointment with the Bolsheviks or accumulated lack of faith in them, which can arise only as the result of a party's mistakes, verified by the masses through experience. On the contrary. Every day of revolutionary experience in 1917 pushed the masses away from the conciliators and to the side of the Bolsheviks. From this followed the stormy, inexorable growth of the ranks of the party, and particularly of its influence.*

*The situation in Germany has at its root a different character, in this respect as well as in others. The German Communist Party did not come upon the scene yesterday, nor the day before. In 1923, it had behind it, openly or in a semiconcealed form, the majority of the working class. In 1924, on the ebbing wave, it received 3,600,000 votes, a greater percentage of the working class than at present. This means that those workers who remained with the Social Democracy, as well as those who voted this time for the National Socialists, did so not out of simple ignorance, not because they awakened only yesterday, not because they have as yet had no chance to know what the Communist Party is, but because they have no faith, on the basis of their own experience in the recent years...*

*Inside the Communist Party itself, and particularly in the circle of its supporters and the workers voting for it, a great lack of faith in the leadership of the party had accumulated. From this grows what is called the "disparity" between the general influence of the party and its numerical strength, and particularly its role in the trade unions – in Germany such a disparity undoubtedly exists. The official explanation of the disparity is that the party has not been able to "strengthen" its influence organizationally. Here the mass is looked upon as purely passive material, which enters or does not enter the party, depending exclusively upon whether the secretary can grab every worker by the throat. The bureaucrat does not understand that workers have their own mind, their experience, their will, and their active or passive policy toward the party. The worker votes for the party – for its banner, for the October Revolution, for his own future revolution. But by refusing to join the Communist Party or to follow it in the trade-union struggle, he says that he has no faith in its daily policy. The "disparity" is consequently, in the final analysis, an expression of the lack of confidence of the masses in the present leadership of the Communist International. And this lack of confidence, created and strengthened by mistakes, defeats, fictions, and direct deception of the masses from 1923 to 1930, is one of the greatest hindrances on the road to the victory of the proletarian revolution....*

*The normal, natural change of tactics, with the present turn of the situation in Germany, should have been the acceleration of tempo, the sharpening of slogans and methods of struggle. This tactical turn would have been normal and natural only if the tempo and slogans of struggle of yesterday had corresponded to the conditions of the preceding period. But this never occurred. The sharp discordance of the ultra-left policy and the stabilized situation is precisely the reason for the tactical turn. What has resulted is that at the moment when the new turn of the objective situation, along with the unfavorable general regrouping of the political forces, brought Communism a big gain in votes, the party turned out to be strategically and tactically more disoriented, entangled, and off the track than ever before.*

*To make clearer the contradiction fallen into by the German Communist Party – as did the other sections of the Comintern, except the German Communist Party fell deeper than the rest of them – let us take the simplest comparison. In order to jump over a barrier, a preliminary running start is necessary. The most important thing is to start the run on time, not too late and not too early, in order to approach the obstruction with the necessary reserve of strength. Since February 1928, and especially since July 1929, however, the German Communist Party did nothing but take off. It is no wonder that the party began to lose its wind and drag its feet. The Comintern finally gave the command, "Slower!" But as soon as the party, out of breath, had started to move at a more normal pace, it began to confront, not an imaginary but an actual barrier, which might require a revolutionary jump. Will there be enough distance for the run? Shall the turn or a counterturn be made? These are the tactical and strategic questions which appear before the German party in all their sharpness.*

*In order that the leading cadres of the party should be able to find a correct reply to these questions, they must have the chance to evaluate the next section of the road in connection with the strategy of the past years and its consequences, as revealed in these elections. If, in opposition to this, the bureaucracy should succeed, by cries of victory, in drowning the voice of political self-criticism, this would inevitably lead the proletariat to a catastrophe more terrible than that of 1923...*

*The turn in the Comintern combined with the turn in the situation, puts new and exceptionally important tasks before the Communist Left Opposition. Its forces are small. But every current grows together with the growth of its tasks. To understand them clearly is to possess one of the most important guarantees of victory”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany* (September 1930)

In January 1932, the situation is ever more alarming. In a capitalism stimulated by the state but strangled by its internal market, doomed almost *immediately* to war, **the methods of democratic domination are no longer enough for the bourgeoisie**. Nor is a conservative government such as that of Brüning at the time, which governed by decree and was supported indirectly by the social democrats, sufficient. By identifying that government as *already* fascist, the Stalinists succeed in playing down Hitler's triumph and thus collaborated in it.

*“There is a threshold beneath which the working class of Germany cannot drop willingly nor for any length of time. Moreover, the bourgeois regime, fighting for its existence, is in no mood to recognize this threshold. The emergency decrees of Brüning are only the beginning, only a testing of the waters. Brüning's regime rests upon the cowardly and perfidious support of the Social Democratic bureaucracy which in its turn depends upon the sullen, halfhearted support of a section of the proletariat. The system based on bureaucratic decrees is unstable, unreliable, temporary. Capitalism requires another, more decisive policy. The support of the Social Democrats, which cannot forget its own workers, is not only insufficient for capitalism's purposes, but has already become irksome to it. The period of halfway measures has passed. In order to try to find a way out, the bourgeoisie must absolutely rid itself of the pressure exerted by the workers' organizations; these must be eliminated, destroyed, utterly crushed.*

*At this juncture, the historic role of fascism begins. It raises to their feet those classes that are immediately above the proletariat and that are ever in dread of being forced down into its ranks; it organizes and militarizes them at the expense of finance capital, under the cover of the official government, and it directs them to the extirpation of proletarian organizations, from the most revolutionary to the most conservative.*

*Fascism is not merely a system of reprisals, of brutal force, and of police terror. Fascism is a particular governmental system based on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society. The task of fascism lies not only in destroying the Communist vanguard but in holding the entire class in a state of forced disunity. To this end the physical annihilation of the most revolutionary section of the workers does not suffice. It is also necessary to smash all independent and voluntary organizations, to demolish all the defensive bulwarks of the proletariat, and to uproot whatever has been achieved during three-quarters of a century by Social Democracy and the trade unions. For, in the last analysis, the Communist Party also bases itself on these achievements.*

*Social Democracy has prepared all the conditions necessary for the triumph of fascism. But by this fact it has also prepared the stage for its own political liquidation. It is absolutely correct to place on the Social Democrats the responsibility for the emergency legislation of Brüning as well as for the impending danger of fascist savagery. It is absolute balderdash to identify Social Democracy with fascism”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*

The theory of social-fascism, however, still fails to make a distinction. By identifying social democracy with fascism it ignores the contradiction between two forms of domination and therefore the battle that will be immediately imposed on the German proletariat.

*“The eleventh plenum of the ECCI came to the decision that it was imperative to put an end to those erroneous views which originate in “the liberal interpretation of the contradictions between fascism and bourgeois democracy, between the parliamentary forms of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the outright fascist ones...” The gist of this Stalinist philosophy is quite plain: departing from the Marxist denial of an absolute contradiction, it ends up generally denying any existence of a contradiction, even of a relative one. This error is typical of vulgar leftism. For if there be no contradiction whatsoever between democracy and fascism – even in the sphere of the form of the rule of the bourgeoisie – then these two regimes obviously enough must be equivalent. Hence the conclusion: Social Democracy equals fascism. For some reason, however, Social Democracy is dubbed social fascism. And the meaning of the term “social” in this connection has been left unexplained to this very moment. Nevertheless, the nature of things does not change in accordance with the decisions of the ECCI plenums. A contradiction does exist between democracy and fascism. It is not at all “absolute,” or, putting it in the language of Marxism, it doesn’t at all denote the rule of two irreconcilable classes. But it does denote different systems of the domination of one and the same class. These two systems: the one parliamentary-democratic, the other fascist, derive their support from different combinations of the oppressed and exploited classes; and they unavoidably come to a sharp clash with each other.*

*Social Democracy, which is today the chief representative of the parliamentary-bourgeois regime, derives its support from the workers. Fascism is supported by the petty bourgeoisie. Social Democracy without the mass organizations of the workers can have no influence. Fascism cannot entrench itself in power without annihilating the workers’ organizations. Parliament is the main arena of the Social Democracy. The system of fascism is based upon the destruction of parliamentarism. For the monopolistic bourgeoisie, the parliamentary and fascist regimes represent only different vehicles of dominion; it has recourse to one or the other, depending upon the historical conditions. But for both the Social Democracy and fascism, the choice of one or the other vehicle has an independent significance; more than that, for them it is a question of political life or death.*

*At the moment that the “normal” police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium – the turn of the fascist regime arrives. Through the employment of the agents of fascism, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy. The bourgeoisie demands a thorough job from fascism; once it has resorted to methods of civil war, it insists on having peace for a period of years. And the fascist agents, by utilizing the petty bourgeoisie as a battering ram, by destroying all obstacles in its path, does a thorough job. After fascism is victorious, finance capital gathers directly and immediately with its steel tongs, all the organs and instruments of domination, of leadership and education: the entire state apparatus together with the army, the municipalities, the universities, the schools, the press, the trade unions, and the cooperatives. When a state turns fascist, it doesn’t only mean that the forms and methods of government are changed in accordance with the patterns set by Mussolini – the changes in this sphere ultimately play a minor role – but it means, primarily and above all, that the workers’ organizations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an*

*amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to prevent the independent crystallization of the proletariat. Therein precisely is the gist of fascism...*

*The contradictions within German capitalism have at present reached such a state of tension that an explosion is inevitable. The adaptability of the Social Democracy has reached that limit beyond which lies self-annihilation. The mistakes of the Stalinist bureaucracy have reached that limit beyond which lies catastrophe. Such is the threefold formula that characterizes the situation in Germany. Everything is now poised on the razor edge of a knife”.*

It is obvious that the social-democratic-fascist relationship was actually, from a class point of view, the relationship between democracy and fascism. Not because the proletariat must choose between them - on the contrary, it must impose its own alternative - but because if the bourgeoisie gave free rein to the fascist offensive, the base of the proletariat's mass organizations (the then still existing legacy of social democracy) would be attacked violently and perhaps decisively.

*“There are no “class distinctions” between democracy and fascism. Obviously this must mean that democracy as well as fascism is bourgeois in character. We guessed as much even prior to January 1932. The ruling class, however, does not inhabit a vacuum. It stands in definite relations to other classes. In a developed capitalist society, during a “democratic” regime, the bourgeoisie leans for support primarily upon the working classes, which are held in check by the reformists. In its most finished form, this system finds its expression in Britain during the administration of the Labour government as well as during that of the Conservatives. In a fascist regime, at least during its first phase, capital leans on the petty bourgeoisie, which destroys the organizations of the proletariat. Italy, for instance! Is there a difference in the “class content” of these two regimes? If the question is posed only as regards the ruling class, then there is no difference. If one takes into account the position and the interrelations of all classes, from the angle of the proletariat, then the difference appears to be quite enormous.*

*In the course of many decades, the workers have built up within the bourgeois democracy, by utilizing it, by fighting against it, their own strongholds and bases of **proletarian democracy**: the trade unions, the political parties, the educational and sport clubs, the cooperatives, etc. The proletariat cannot attain power within the formal limits of bourgeois democracy, but can do so only by taking the road of revolution: this has been proved both by theory and experience. But it is precisely because of that these bulwarks of workers' democracy within the bourgeois state are absolutely essential for taking the revolutionary road. The work of the Second International consisted in creating just such bulwarks during the epoch when it was still fulfilling its progressive role.*

*Fascism has for its basic and only task the razing to their foundations of all institutions of proletarian democracy. Has this any “class meaning” for the proletariat, or hasn't it? The lofty theoreticians had better ponder over this. After pronouncing the regime to be bourgeois – which no one questions Hirsch, together with his masters, overlooks a mere trifle: the position of the proletariat in this regime. In place of the historical process they substitute a bald sociological abstraction. But the class war takes place on the soil of history, and not in the stratosphere of sociology. The point of departure in the struggle against fascism is not the abstraction of the democratic state, but the living organizations of the proletariat, in which is concentrated all its past experience and which prepare it for the future”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*

It is interesting here to highlight the conclusion that appears indirectly and that will hang over the discussions of the 1940s. Once those pockets of *proletarian democracy* disappear as a *relevant* reality, that is, when the *legacy of social democracy* has disappeared - or has not even come into existence - the *place of the proletariat* in the democratic regime does not respond to the conclusions drawn in Germany. This will not only concern post-war Germany or Italy or post-Franco Spain. The question is much deeper because it raises the question of the relationship between trade unions and the universalization of state capitalism, which would become inevitable and irreversible not only in the case of fascism or Stalinism, but also, in the case of the Revolution not succeeding before the end of the world imperialist war, in parliamentary democracies.

*"In the January issue of the French periodical Cahiers du Bolchevisme we read, "The Trotskyists behave in practice like Breitscheid; they accept the famous Social Democratic theory of the 'lesser evil,' according to which Brüning is not as bad as Hitler, according to which it is not so unpleasant to starve under Brüning as under Hitler, and infinitely more preferable to be shot down by Groener than by Frick."*

*This is not the most stupid passage, although - to give it due credit - stupid enough. Unfortunately, however, it expresses the gist of the political philosophy of the leaders of the Comintern.*

*The fact of the matter is that the Stalinists compare the two regimes from the point of view of vulgar democracy. And indeed, were one to consider Brüning's regime from the criterion of "formal" democracy, one would arrive at a conclusion which is beyond argument: nothing is left of the proud Weimar Constitution save the bones and the skin. But this does not settle the question so far as we are concerned. The question must be approached from the angle of **proletarian democracy**. This criterion is also the only reliable one on which to consider the question as to when and where the "normal" police methods of reaction under decadent capitalism are replaced by the fascist regime.*

*Whether Brüning is "better" than Hitler (better looking perhaps?) is a question which, we confess, doesn't interest us at all. But one need only glance at the list of workers' organizations to assert, fascism has not conquered yet in Germany. In the way of its victory there still remain gigantic obstacles and forces.*

*The present Brüning regime is the regime of bureaucratic dictatorship or, more definitely, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie enforced by means of the army and the police. The fascist petty bourgeoisie and the proletarian organizations seem to counterbalance one another. Were the workers united by soviets, were factory committees fighting for the control of production, then one could speak of dual power. Because of the split within the proletariat, because of the tactical helplessness of its vanguard, dual power does not exist as yet. But the very fact that mighty organizations of workers do exist, which under certain conditions are capable of repelling fascism with crushing force, that is what keeps Hitler from seizing power and imparts a certain "independence" to the bureaucratic apparatus.*

*Brüning's dictatorship is a caricature of Bonapartism. His dictatorship is unstable, unreliable, short-lived. It signalizes not the initiation of a new social equilibrium but the early crash of the old one. Supported directly only by a small minority of the bourgeoisie, tolerated by Social Democracy against the will of the workers, threatened by fascism, Brüning can bring down the thunder of paper decrees but not real thunderbolts. Brüning is fit for dissolving parliament with its own assent; he'll do to promulgate a few decrees against the workers; to proclaim a Christmas truce and to make a few deals under its cover; to break up a hundred meetings, close down a dozen papers, exchange letters with Hitler worthy of a village druggist - that is all. But for greater things his arms are too short.*

*Brüning is compelled to tolerate the existence of workers' organizations because he hasn't decided to this very day to hand the power over to Hitler, and inasmuch as he himself has no independent means of liquidating them. Brüning is compelled to tolerate the fascists and to patronize them inasmuch as he mortally fears the victory of the workers. Brüning's regime is a transitional, short-lived regime, preceding the catastrophe. The present administration holds on only because the chief camps have not as yet pitted their strength. The real battle has not begun. It is still to come. The dictatorship of bureaucratic impotence fills in the lull before the battle, before the forces are openly matched.*

*The wiseacres who boast that they do not recognize any difference 'between Brüning and Hitler,' are saying in reality; it makes no difference whether our organizations exist, or whether they are already destroyed. Beneath this pseudo-radical phraseology there hides the most sordid passivity; we can't escape defeat anyway! Read over carefully the quotation from the French Stalinist periodical. They reduce the question to whether it is better to starve under Hitler or Brüning. To them it is a question of under whom to starve. To us, on the contrary, it is not a question of under which conditions it is better to die. We raise the question of how to fight and win. And we conclude thus: the **major offensive must be begun before the bureaucratic dictatorship is replaced by the fascist regime**, that is, before the workers' organizations are crushed. The general offensive should be prepared for by deploying, extending, and sharpening the sectional clashes. But for this one must have a correct perspective and, first of all, one should not proclaim victorious the enemy who is still a long way from victory".*

- Leon Trotsky, *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*

But what did Trotsky propose then? An alliance with social democracy? Quite the contrary.

*"Either support Brüning, or fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat. No third course is given. Social Democracy, by voting against Brüning, would change at once the correlation of forces-not on the parliamentary chessboard, whose chess pieces might surprisingly enough be found underneath the table - but on the arena of the revolutionary struggle of the classes. After such an about-face, the forces of the working class would increase not twofold but tenfold, for the moral factor holds by no means the last place in the class struggle, particularly during great historical upheavals. Under the impact of this moral force, the masses of the people, one stratum after another, would be charged to the point of highest intensity. The proletariat would say to itself with assurance, that it alone was called to give a different and a higher direction to the life of this great nation. Disintegration and decomposition in Hitler's army would set in before the decisive battles. Battles of course could not be avoided; but with a firm resolution to fight to victory, by attacking boldly, victory might be achieved infinitely more easily than the most extreme revolutionary optimist now imagines.*

*Only a trifle is lacking for this: the about-face of Social Democracy, its taking the road of revolution. To hope for a voluntary shift on the part of the leaders after the experiences of 1914-1922 would be the most ludicrous of all illusions. But the majority of Social Democratic workers - that is something else again; they can make the turn, and they will make it; it is only necessary to help them. And this turn will be not only against the bourgeois government, but against the upper layers of their own party...*

*we wage battle with the Stalinist leadership in the Comintern precisely because it is incapable of breaking up Social Democracy, of tearing the masses from under its influence, of freeing the locomotive of history from its rusty brake. By its convulsions, its mistakes, the Stalinist bureaucracy allows Social Democracy to regain its foothold again and again.*

*The Communist Party is a proletarian, anti-bourgeois party, even if erroneously led. Social Democracy, though composed of workers, is entirely a bourgeois party, which under "normal conditions" is led quite expertly from the point of view of bourgeois aims, but which is good for nothing at all under the conditions of a social crisis. The leaders of the Social Democracy are themselves forced to recognize, though unwillingly, the bourgeois character of the party".*

- Leon Trotsky - *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*

But there is no way: the KPD and SPD paralyze their own bases. As Trotsky has predicted, a full capitulation was coming.

*"Till the end, Trotsky refused to believe that the German labor movement was so devoid of any power of self-preservation as to put up almost no resistance to Nazism and to collapse ignominiously under its first onslaught. For nearly three years he had argued that it was inconceivable that Hitler should win without a civil war. The inconceivable had now happened: on 30 January 1933 Hitler had become Chancellor, before socialists and communists had even begun to marshal their immense resources for a fight. A week later Trotsky stated: 'Hitler's accession to power is a terrible blow to the working class. But this is not yet the final, the irretrievable defeat. The enemy, whom it was possible to rout while he was still climbing up, has now occupied a whole series of commanding posts. He has thus gained a great advantage, but the battle has not yet been fought'. Even now there was still time, for Hitler had not yet seized total power; he had to share it with Hugenberg and the Deutschnationale. The coalition he headed was unstable and riddled with contradictions. He still had to strip his partners of all influence, and to obtain exclusive control of all the resources of the state. Until then his position remained vulnerable. Socialists and communists could still strike back - but it was desperately late: 'what is at stake is the head of the German working class, the head of the Communist International and...the head of the Soviet Republic'.*

*We know now from numerous German archives and diaries how great indeed was the vulnerability of Hitler's first government, as it came into being. Even a month later, on 5 March, after the Nazi raid on the Karl Liebknecht House in Berlin and after the Reichstag fire, in elections held under an unbridled Nazi terror, the socialists and communists still polled 12 million votes, not to speak of the nearly 6 million votes cast for the Catholic opposition to Hitler. We also know of the quarrels, the rows, and the mutual distrust between Hitler and his partners, which might well have disrupted their coalition if those millions of socialists and communists had moved into action. As early as February 6 Trotsky observed that the working class 'was not conducting any defensive battle but was retreating, and tomorrow the retreat may well turn into a panic-stricken rout'. He concluded rather abruptly with this grave passage;*

*"In order to expose more clearly the historic significance of the party's decisions...in these days and weeks, it is, in my view, necessary to pose the issue before Communists...with the utmost sharpness and plainness: the party's [continued] refusal to form a united front and to set up local defense committees, committees which might become Soviets tomorrow, will be nothing less than a surrender to fascism, a historic crime tantamount to the liquidation of the party and of the Communist International. Should such a disaster happen, the working class will have to make its way towards a Fourth International; and it will have to make it through mountains of corpses and years of unbearable sufferings and calamities".*

*Even before these words appeared in print, the great, mass organizations of German labor, its parties and trade unions, its many newspapers, cultural institutions, and sports organizations all lay in ruins".*

- Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*

Philobureaucratic historiography - Deutscher included- attaches great importance to Trotsky's assertion that the surrender of the Comintern to Nazism would necessarily open the way to a Fourth International. It is obvious: there could be no doubt that the Comintern was dead and that it was not possible for the the KPD, or any other Stalinized communist party to be "recovered". However, Trotsky did not immediately understand this.

Trotsky, discouraged because a historic defeat was on its way and also because the Opposition was unable to influence the bases of the party, would later directly address the social democratic workers, agitating them, pushing them to the united front and demonstrating what the united front *is*, which implies neither programmatic concession nor the slightest acceptance of the cult of the nation or democracy.

*'The Vorwärts prides itself every day on the fact that hundreds of thousands of Social Democrats died during the war "for the ideal of a finer and freer Germany" ... It only forgets to explain why this finer Germany turned out to be the Germany of Hitler-Hugenberg. In reality, the German workers, like the workers of the other belligerent countries, died as cannon fodder, as slaves of capital. To idealize this fact is to continue the treason of August 4, 1914.*

*The Vorwärts continues to appeal to Marx, to Engels, to Wilhelm Liebknecht, to Bebel, who from 1848 to 1871 spoke of the struggle for the unity of the German nation. False recourses! At that time, it was a question of completing the bourgeois revolution. Every proletarian revolutionist had to fight against the particularism and provincialism inherited from feudalism. Every proletarian revolutionist had to fight against this particularism and provincialism in the name of the creation of a national state. At the present time, such an objective is invested with a progressive character only in China, in Indochina, in India, in Indonesia, and other backward colonial and semicolonial countries. For the advanced countries of Europe, the national frontiers are exactly the same reactionary chains as were the feudal frontiers at one time.*

*"The nation and democracy are twins," the Vorwärts says again. Quite true! But these twins have become aged, infirm, and have fallen into senility. The nation as an economic whole, and democracy as a form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, have been transformed into fetters upon the productive forces and civilization. Let us recall Goethe once again: "All that is born is doomed to perish."*

*A few more millions may be sacrificed for the "passage," for Alsace-Lorraine, for Malmedy. These disputed bits of land may be covered with three, five, ten tiers of corpses. All this may be called national defense. But humanity will not progress because of it; on the contrary, it will fall on all fours into barbarism. The way out is not in the "national liberation" of Germany, but in the liberation of Europe from national barriers. It is a problem which the bourgeoisie cannot resolve, any more than the feudal lords in their time were able to put an end to particularism. Hence the coalition with the bourgeoisie is doubly reprehensible. A proletarian revolution is necessary. A federation of the proletarian republics of Europe and the whole world is necessary.*

*Social patriotism is the program of the doctors of capitalism; internationalism is the program of the gravediggers of bourgeois society. This antagonism is unyielding...*

*“Very good, but we Social Democrats propose nevertheless to come to power by democracy. You Communists consider that an absurd utopia. In that case, is the united front of defense possible? For it is necessary to have a clear idea of what there is to defend. If we defend one thing and you another, we will not end up with common actions. Do you Communists agree to defend the Weimar Constitution?”*

*The question is a fitting one and I will try to answer it candidly. The Weimar Constitution represents a whole system of institutions, of rights and of laws. Let us commence from the top. The republic has at its head a president. Do we Communists agree to defend Hindenburg against fascism? I think that the need for that doesn't make itself felt, Hindenburg having called the fascists to power. Then comes the government presided over by Hitler. This government does not need to be defended against fascism. In the third place comes the parliament. When these lines appear, the sort of parliament emerging from the elections of March 5 will probably have been determined. But even at this juncture one can say with certainty that if the composition of the Reichstag proves to be hostile to the government; if Hitler tries to liquidate the Reichstag and if Social Democracy shows a determination to fight for the latter, the Communists will help Social Democracy with all their strength.*

*We Communists cannot and do not want to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat against you or without you, Social Democratic workers. We want to come to this dictatorship together with you. And we regard the common defense against fascism as the first step in this sense. Obviously, in our eyes, the Reichstag is not a capital historical conquest which the proletariat must defend against the fascist vandals. There are more valuable things. Within the framework of bourgeois democracy and parallel to the incessant struggle against it, the elements of proletarian democracy have formed themselves in the course of many decades: political parties, labor press, trade unions, factory committees, clubs, cooperatives, sports societies, etc. The mission of fascism is not so much to complete the destruction of bourgeois democracy as to crush the first outlines of proletarian democracy. As for our mission, it consists in placing those elements of proletarian democracy, already created, at the foundation of the soviet system of the workers' state. To this end, it is necessary to break the husk of bourgeois democracy and free from it the kernel of workers' democracy. Therein lies the essence of the proletarian revolution. Fascism threatens the vital kernel of workers' democracy. This itself clearly dictates the program of the united front. We are ready to defend your printing plants and our own, but also the democratic principle of freedom of the press; your meeting halls and ours, but also the democratic principle of the freedom of assembly and association. We are materialists and that is why we do not separate the soul from the body. So long as we do not yet have the strength to establish the soviet system, we place ourselves on the terrain of bourgeois democracy. But at the same time we do not entertain any illusions”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *The United Front for Defense: A Letter to a Social Democratic Worker (February 1933)*

In these last desperate attempts to avoid a German defeat without a fight is the key to understanding one of the most costly, if not harmful, tactical turns in the history of the revolutionary movement: the *French turn*.

### **The French turn**

After the German disaster Trotsky became convinced that in France -and throughout Europe- "Events are leading inevitably and irresistibly to a conflict between the proletariat and Fascism"... but the path, because of the peculiarities of the political expressions of the French petty bourgeoisie, was different in France.

*“French Fascism does not yet represent a mass force. On the other hand, Bonapartism finds support, neither sure nor very stable but nevertheless a mass support, in the Radicals. Between these two facts there is an inner link. By the social character of its base, Radicalism is the party of the petty bourgeoisie. Fascism can only become a mass force by conquering the petty bourgeoisie. In other words, **Fascism can develop in France above all at the expense of the Radicals.** This process is already under way, although still in its early stages...*

*Will it be revolutionary socialism or Fascist reaction which will first offer the middle classes, boldly and broadly, the most convincing program and, what is the most important, win their confidence by demonstrating in words and deeds its ability to smash every obstacle on the road to a better future?*

*On this question depends the fate of France for many years to come. Not only of France, but of all Europe. Not only of Europe, but of the entire world...*

*Contemporary society is composed of three classes: the big bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the “middle classes”, or the petty bourgeoisie. The relations among these three classes determine in the final analysis the political situation in the country. The fundamental classes of society are the big bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Only these two classes can have a clear, consistent, independent policy of their own. The petty bourgeoisie is distinguished by its economic dependence and its social heterogeneity. Its upper stratum is linked directly to the big bourgeoisie. Its lower stratum merges with the proletariat and even falls to the status of lumpen proletariat. In accordance with its economic situation, the petty bourgeoisie can have no policy of its own. It always oscillates between the capitalists and the workers. Its own upper stratum pushes it to the right; its lower strata, oppressed and exploited, are capable in certain conditions of turning sharply to the left. These contradictory relations among the different strata of the “middle classes” always determine the confused and thoroughly bankrupt policy of the Radicals, their vacillations between the bloc with the Socialists to calm down the base, and the national bloc with the capitalist reaction to save the bourgeoisie. The final decomposition of Radicalism begins when the big bourgeoisie, itself in an impasse, does not permit it to vacillate any longer.*

*The petty bourgeoisie, the ruined masses of city and country, begins to lose patience. It assumes an attitude more and more hostile towards its own upper stratum. It becomes convinced of the bankruptcy and the treachery of its political leadership. The poor peasant, the artisan, the petty merchant become convinced that an abyss separates them from all these mayors, all these lawyers and political businessmen of the Herriot, Daladier, Chautemps and Co. type, who by their mode of life and their conceptions make up the big bourgeoisie. It is precisely this disillusionment of the petty bourgeoisie, its impatience, its despair, that Fascism exploits. Its agitators stigmatize and execrate the parliamentary democracy which supports careerists and “Staviskys” but gives nothing to the toilers. These demagogues shake their fists at the bankers, the big merchants and the capitalists. Their words and gestures correspond to the feelings of the small proprietors stuck in a blind alley. The Fascists show boldness, go out into the streets, attack the police, and attempt to drive out parliament by force. That makes an impression on the desperate petty bourgeois. It says to itself: “The Radicals, among whom there are too many swindlers, have definitely sold themselves to the bankers; the Socialists have promised for a long time to abolish exploitation but they never pass from words to deeds, the Communists one cannot understand at all – today it is one thing tomorrow another; let’s see if the Fascists cannot save us”...*

*Does this mean that the passage of the petty bourgeoisie to Fascism is inevitable and inescapable? No, such a conclusion would be shameful fatalism.*

*What is really inevitable and inescapable is the end of Radicalism and all the political groupings which link themselves to its fate.*

*Under conditions of capitalist decadence there is no longer any place for a party of democratic reforms and "peaceful" progress. Whatever path events take in France, Radicalism will disappear from the scene, rejected and dishonored by the petty bourgeoisie which it has definitely betrayed.*

*Every conscious worker will become convinced by the experience of every passing day that our prediction corresponds to reality. New elections will bring defeats for the Radicals. Whole sections will cut away one after another, the popular masses below and groups of frightened careerists above. Departures, splits, betrayals will follow uninterruptedly. No manoeuvre nor any bloc will save the Radical Party. It will draw into the abyss with it the "party" of Renaudel-Deat & Co. The end of the Radical Party is the inevitable result of the fact that bourgeois society can no longer overcome its difficulties with the help of so-called democratic methods. The split between the base of the petty bourgeoisie and its summit is inevitable...*

*The petty bourgeoisie is economically dependent and politically atomized. That is why it cannot conduct an independent policy. It needs a "leader" who inspires it with confidence. This individual or collective leadership, i.e., a person or party, can be given to it by one or the other of the fundamental classes – either the big bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Fascism unites and arms the scattered masses. Out of human dust it organizes combat detachments. It thus gives the petty bourgeoisie the illusion of being an independent force. It begins to imagine that it will really command the state. It is not surprising that these illusions and hopes lift the head up of the petty bourgeoisie!*

*But the petty bourgeoisie can also find a leader in the proletariat. This was demonstrated in Russia and partially in Spain. In Italy, in Germany and in Austria the petty bourgeoisie gravitated in this direction. But the parties of the proletariat did not rise to their historic task.*

*To bring the petty bourgeoisie to its side, the proletariat must win its confidence. And for that it must have confidence in its own strength.*

*It must have a clear program of action and must be ready to struggle for power by all possible means. Tempered by its revolutionary party for a decisive and pitiless struggle, the proletariat says to the peasants and petty bourgeoisie of the cities: "We are struggling for power. Here is our program. We are ready to discuss with you changes in this program. We will employ violence only against big capital and its lackeys, but with you toilers, we desire to conclude an alliance on the basis of a given program." The peasants will understand such language. Only, they must have faith in the capacity of the proletariat to seize power.*

*But for that it is necessary to purge the united front of all equivocation, of all indecision, of all hollow phrases. It is necessary to understand the situation and to place oneself seriously on the revolutionary road...*

*The Belgian Workers' Party, for example, adopted the pompous plan of De Man with all its "nationalizations". But what sense was there in it when the party did not lift its little finger to realize it? Programs of Fascism are fantastic, false, demagogic. But Fascism carries on a fierce struggle for power. Socialism can advance the most scientific program but its value will be equal to zero if the vanguard of the*

*proletariat does not unfold a bold struggle to capture the state. The social crisis in its political expression is the crisis of power. The old master of society is bankrupt. A new master is needed.*

*If the revolutionary proletariat does not take power, Fascism will inevitably take it!*

*A program of transitional demands for "the middle classes" can naturally assume great importance if this program corresponds, on the one hand, to the real needs of the middle classes, and on the other, to the demands of the development towards socialism. But once more the center of gravity does not exist now in a special program. The middle classes have seen many programs. What they need is confidence that the program will be realized. The moment the peasant says: "This time it seems that the working-class parties will not retreat" – the cause of socialism is won.*

*But for that it is necessary to show in action that we are firmly prepared to smash every obstacle in our path".*

- Leon Trotsky, *Whither France?* (November 9, 1934)

The PCF and the SFIO (the socialist party) had just formed a *United Front* after the fascist uprising overthrew Daladier's government and replaced it with a Bonapartist regime. But Trotsky was clear about where would lead: \*October '34 and \*the Spanish *Workers' Alliances* being controlled by socialist *ministers*.

*"In Spain as in Austria it was not revolutionary methods which were defeated but opportunist methods in a revolutionary situation. It is not the same thing"!*

Leon Trotsky, *Whither France?* (November 9, 1934)

And why talk about the trajectory of the PCE during the republic?

*"In an exceptionally favorable situation the Austrian and Spanish Communist Parties, fettered by the theory of the "third period" and "social Fascism", etc., found themselves doomed to complete isolation. Compromising the methods of revolution by the authority of "Moscow" they barred, thereby, the road to a truly Marxist, truly Bolshevik policy. The fundamental faculty of revolution is to submit to a rapid and pitiless examination all doctrines and all methods. The punishment almost immediately follows the crime.*

*The responsibility of the Communist International for the defeats of the proletariat in Germany, Austria and in Spain is incommensurable. It is not sufficient to carry out a "revolutionary" policy (in words). A correct policy is needed. No one has yet found any other secret of victory".*

- Leon Trotsky, *Whither France?* (November 9, 1934)

Neither Stalinism nor social democracy were revolutionary parties anymore. The foreseeable outcome of the United Front between the socialists and the Stalinists was the well-organized bulk of the class being directed to surrender power to fascism without a struggle, as would have happened in Spain if the proletariat had not responded spontaneously with the vigorous insurrection of July 19, 1936 to the military uprising.

*"If the proletarian vanguard represented in the united front correctly treads the path of struggle, all the obstacles established by the trade-union bureaucracy will be overthrown by the living torrent of the proletariat. The key to the situation is now in the united front. If it does not use this key it will play the lamentable role which would inevitably have been played by the united front of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries in Russia in 1917, if the Bolsheviks had not prevented them from doing so".*

- Leon Trotsky, *Whither France?* (November 9, 1934)

In other words, the only way out is to enter the United Front **as if it were a unitary class organization**, that is, a soviet... through the only door that was open: the SFIO. It was the beginning of *entryism* and apparently gave immediate results.

*"Give doesn't mention that the French comrades have won the 6,000-member Federation of the Seine to our program of action and that our youth are in the leadership of the Seine Alliance with its 1,450 members. We do not wish to exaggerate the revolutionary weight of this success. There is more to do than we have succeeded in doing in the three-and-a-half months that have passed since our entry. But really one would have to be deaf and blind to fail to grasp the radical change in the activity of our French section and the enormous possibilities that have opened before it".*

- Leon Trotsky, *Once more on our turn* (December 15, 1934)

But there were profound changes that Trotsky was not able to see. Although the younger part of the French proletariat was sensitive to the arguments of the Bolshevik-Leninists and managed to transmit that push promptly to the local trade union organizations and the SFIO, neither the party nor the trade unions were unitary organizations comparable to those of the Second International, let alone a soviet. But it was still a moment of historical transition. The United Front was perceived by both sides as a step that was forced by circumstances. Circumstances that could lead to a radicalization that would subvert the leadership or could channel the restlessness of the workers towards the creation of a coalition government with the republican petty bourgeoisie. The leaderships of the CP and the SFIO, like those of PSOE-UGT in the *Workers' Alliances*, were systematically questioned by the base of the organizations. The fact that they were not isolated events had determined the policy of socialist sabotage in the failed insurrectionary general strike of 1934.

That is why the *united front* between social democrats and Stalinists could only push the leaderships of the CPs and SPs towards their conversion into *popular fronts*, that is to say, to reinforce their positions of power by adding radicals and republicans while at the same time threatening an organic fusion. If the *French turn* had one virtue, it was to precipitate the events.

The outcome is clearly reflected in the resolutions of the VIIth Congress of the Comintern: popular fronts were created and the CPs were directly and immediately subordinated to the exigencies of the imperialist war.

*"The decisive betrayal of Stalin and of his Comintern crew opens us to great possibilities not only within the Comintern but also within all the working-class organizations, especially in the trade unions. Up to quite recently, every stage of the radicalization of the masses implied inevitably a new flow towards the Stalinists. This was precisely the cause for our isolation and for our weakness. Going to the left meant going to*

*Moscow, and we were looked upon as an obstacle on this road. Today, Moscow has taken on an aspect which means the obligation to support the imperialism of France, Czechoslovakia, etc. For us it is no longer a question of propounding the subtleties of the theory of socialism in one country and of the permanent revolution but of posing squarely the question: Are we the willing slaves of our own imperialism or its mortal enemies? Even if the differentiation within the framework of the Communist Party does not take place quite rapidly (although we may also expect catastrophic upheavals, above all if we know how to intervene), the basic flow of the masses toward the CP must inevitably slacken and even stop”.*

Leon Trotsky, *A New Turn is Necessary* (June 10, 1935)

As the imperialist war was being prepared, the conditions for the formation of the revolutionary parties began to come back into view.

*“The struggle of the different tendencies against us coincides today almost entirely with the ideological indoctrination for the new imperialist war. Opposition to the war must coincide to an ever increasing degree with sympathy for the Fourth International. The condition for success is ruthless struggle against the slightest concession to the theory of national defense. The inevitable regroupment in the different working-class organizations (Communist Party, trade-unions, etc.) must open for us an outlet to the working-class masses. It is necessary to orient ourselves in this direction with all the required independence. This regroupment can result in the **creation of a revolutionary party** within a set and quite close period of time.*

*It is absolutely essential to speed up the preparatory work for the Fourth International. The revolutionary elements that will separate themselves during the general regroupment inside the working class must have the possibility of directly joining an international organization that bases itself on the entire experience of the revolutionary struggles”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *A New Turn is Necessary* (June 10, 1935)

The *entryist* phase could not but be finished.

*“The Bolshevik-Leninist group **must know how to effect a new turn**, which is the logical development of the previous stage. Without, of course, making the slightest concessions, it is necessary to concentrate nine-tenths of the efforts upon the denunciation of the Stalinist betrayal”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *A New Turn is Necessary* (June 10, 1935)

To sum up, the *French turn* has served to improve the base of the Communist Left, confronting it with the real discussions within the class, but it has not fulfilled its ultimate purpose. It was then clear that the *United Front* of the supposedly *working-class* parties was nothing like a soviet. The socialist parties, even the Youth leagues, were no longer those mass organizations of the Bebel-era proletariat: it was in their nature to dilute the most backward and conservative parts of the proletariat into a mixture in which the dominant element was increasingly being made up of the corporate petty bourgeoisie.

*“Not only is the SFIO not a revolutionary party but it is not even a proletarian party. It is petty bourgeois, not only in its policies but also in its social composition. This party opened to us certain possibilities, and it was correct to have formulated and utilized them. But these possibilities are limited. The Mulhouse Congress, together with the repercussions that will follow it, should more or less materially limit these*

*possibilities. The prestige gained by the Bolshevik-Leninist Group must transform itself by flooding light upon the workers. But the workers are primarily outside of the SP: in the CP, in the trade-union organizations, or in any organization”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *A New Turn is Necessary* (June 10, 1935)

Since then, neither Trotsky nor the International as long as it was such would continue to support *entryism*. The experience had been instructive... but the scars remained. In Argentina, entryism had truncated the consolidation of the local Communist Left and paved the way for the nationalist elements that would end up finding their match in the degenerated SI of the forties. In the U.S. and Britain, unlike France, *entryism* would provide the new *parties* with a few thousand militants and a solid base... a petty bourgeois one. It was a false training that would end up cementing the most blatant opportunism. It would also incubate the future undertakers of the Fourth International: from Cannon and the SWP to Pablo (Raptis).

But while Trotsky focused on France, the center of gravity of the class conflict had shifted to Spain.

### **The Spanish Revolution**

The end of the world war had economically hit the Spanish bourgeoisie with brutal force. If we add to this the disaster of the colonial war, the growing contradictions within the ruling class and their inability to halt the mobilization of the workers, we would understand the commitment of the Catalan bourgeoisie -which at that moment feared being excluded from the ruling group- and the monarchy to the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1921-1930).

Its historical role had become the gaining of time for the bourgeoisie in its process of unification and reorganization of the state. Primo had secured early Spanish state capitalism, not only by protecting the Catalan bourgeoisie but, what would eventually be more important, by incorporating for the first time an organization that had represented the workers' movement, the PSOE.

*“The dictatorship prolonged the life of Spanish capitalism for seven years. Not because it had effective national support, apart from the support that came from the military, the Church, the circles of the nobility and the great bourgeoisie, but because it coincided with the most successful financial period in the world after the 1914-1918 war. This allowed it to associate with the big bourgeoisie, neutralize the small one and incorporate one of the strongest workers organizations in Spain: the Socialist Party. It has already been indicated under another title to what extent it served as a support to the dictatorship by providing it with state councillors and national assembly members. But the monarchy was doomed. In the depths of the masses enormous energies were accumulated. The dictatorship had postponed, not prevented the opening of the revolutionary period.*

- G. Munis. *Jalones de Derrota, promesa de victoria, 1947*

That is why the first blows of the 1929 crisis would be enough to leave the dictatorship without support among the ruling class.

*“Primo de Rivera's dictatorship has fallen without revolution. It fell due to internal exhaustion. This means, in other words, that in its first stage the problem was solved by the maladies of the old society and not by the revolutionary forces of a new society... After this event, the ruling classes, represented by their political groups, are obliged to adopt a clear position before the popular masses. And so we observe a paradoxical phenomenon. The same bourgeois parties that, thanks to their conservatism, quit carrying out any serious struggle against the military dictatorship, then put all the blame of the dictatorship on the monarchy and declared themselves republicans. Indeed, one could believe that the dictatorship has been suspended all along by a fine thread from the balcony of the Royal Palace, and that it only rested on the support, partly passive, of the most solid layers of the bourgeoisie, which paralyzed with all their forces the activity of the petty bourgeoisie and trampled on the workers of the cities and the countryside....*

*If the thread that kept the monarchy afloat was held by Primo, how could the monarchy survive afterward? Especially in such a "republican" country? At first glance this seems like an unsolvable enigma. But the reason is by no means that complicated. The same bourgeoisie that "suffered" from the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera did, in fact, sustain it, as it currently does. In the same way, it supported the monarchy by the only recourse left to it, that is, by declaring itself republican and thus adapting itself to the psychology of the petty bourgeoisie, in order to deceive and paralyze it as best as possible...*

*Spain had long ago finished the phase of bourgeois revolution. If the revolutionary crisis is transformed into revolution, it will overcome bourgeois limits and, in the event of victory, it will have to hand over power to the proletariat”.*

- Leon Trotsky, 1930

It is in this context marked by the decomposition of the monarchy and a dismantled communist party that the Left Opposition was formed in Spain.

In Luxembourg, one of the founders of the Biscayan nucleus of the first PCE, García Lavid, who worked as a metallurgist and went by the pseudonym of Henri Lacroix, had joined the International Left Opposition and since 1929 had been trying to reorganize his old left-wing comrades such as Esteban Bilbao, who organized a dozen comrades in Vizcaya, most of whom had been expelled by the Zinovievist and Stalinist leadership after Bullejos, Trilla and Ibarruri. In an active correspondence he called them back to action...

*“against the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the CI, for the purity of communist ideas, for the international revolution and against the bastard idea of socialism in a single country proclaimed by Stalin and all those who march with him behind the new Russian bourgeoisie towards social-democratic opportunism”.*

Out of this upheaval came the conference of February 18, 1930 in Liège in which the Spanish Communist Opposition (OCE) was born.

*“Those of us who put all our enthusiasm, faith and hope into defending the political platform of the Communist Opposition of the International Left must recognize that not only were those who daily declared that the Communist Left had been liquidated through the deportation, imprisonment, and assassination of the Russian oppositionists wrong, but that we ourselves committed an error when we believed that the struggle for our ideas had to be very hard and difficult, and that our progress would be slow”.*

- Henri Lacroix (García Lavid) *Some considerations on the Communist Opposition. Communism #5, September, 1931*

It can be said that the Spanish Communist Opposition (OCE) is the only organization of the Spanish opposition with an international perspective, after refining their positions through a critique of the trajectory of the PCE and the CI.

*“The Left Opposition, just like its international organization, did not place its problems only on the Spanish national political plane but on the international terrain, and it opposed the very policy of the EC of the CI. Therefore, both the Agrupación de Madrid and the Federación Catalano-baleár wanted to separate completely from the Left Opposition in order not to “engage” with the CI.*

- Juan Andrade, *Apuntes para la historia del PCE, 1981*

But if that isolated the Communist Opposition of Spain from the rest of the opposition, it served to reorganize the party's foundational current. The group began to operate in the interior in September 1930, soon forming a radio in Vizcaya around Lavid and Esteban Bilbao and another in Madrid around Andrade and his group. Once a young man named Manuel Fernández Grandizo (G. Munis) had attended the Liège conference, a radio had emerged in Llerena that would have more than 400 members in 1935 and would be politically decisive regionally. Minor nuclei would then form around Salamanca and Asturias.

In Barcelona, Nin, who planned to undertake the task of organizing the Opposition on his return from Russia, delayed the constitution of the Opposition, and joined only after having been rejected as Maurín's right-hand man. Nin, in spite of Trotsky criticizing his *flag-waving*, would in practice avoid the formation of the ICE in Catalonia as a political force, but would try very hard to keep up appearances. From a global perspective it can be said that Nin was no more than an agent of Catalanism in the ICE and that if he opposed Maurín and Arquer it was from a centrist and shameful perspective of a trade unionist regionalism that they all shared and whose final expression was none other than the POUM.

The OCE first published *Contra la Corriente* in 1930 from Liège and from 1931, in Spain, the magazine *Comunismo*, which soon became the main Spanish Marxist magazine with a circulation, surprising for the Spain of the time, of 1,600 copies. *Comunismo* would become the main theoretical reference of the communist left that emerged later in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile.

In 1930, the Spanish bourgeoisie is a much more solid and powerful than it had ever been. In Spain there remained the remnants of feudalism in the countryside, but there was by no means an opposition between the bourgeoisie and the landowners, heirs of feudalism. Nor is there even the illusion of an independent development of national capital in the event of a fantastic *revolutionary triumph of the bourgeoisie*. Imperialism is an immediate reality for Spanish capital, excluded from the colonial and international markets by the great powers at a time of new trade and currency wars.

*“The intertwining of interests between capitalism and the old feudal elements was in effect in 1930. It is not possible to mark a division in the economy between purely capitalist and feudal lines. One could only construct a division if they were to abstract the economy from its evolution and its daily relations, considering as isolated categories what was a composite of two elements of different origin. Not one of the components of the landed nobility could be described as purely feudal, let alone as a whole. To a greater or*

lesser degree all had invested and increased their funds in capitalist enterprises. The Society of Jesus was both a great landowner and the richest capitalist entrepreneur. Romanones, the well-known monarchical ruler, was a great landowner in Guadalajara, the most important landlord of houses in Madrid, co-owner of the mines of Peñarroya and shareholder of the main financial institutions. The Dukes of Alba and Medinaceli, the first among the landowners of feudal prosapia, were also mixed with financial and industrial enterprises. The most important shipping companies, the rich Ybarra oil factories, the northern railways and some textile industries in Catalonia belonged to the Church. The Church was also mixed up with the mining, iron and steel and financial companies. For its part, the bourgeoisie easily became a landowner, sometimes implementing feudal methods of exploitation. To be able to speak properly of two economies, feudal and capitalist, it would be necessary to have the Romanones landowner fight with the Romanones businessman and financier; it would require the Church, as the political support and economic terrain of feudalism, to go against the Church as a great captain of industry; it would be necessary to do the impossible; namely to suppose two parts of the same unity to be absolutely antagonistic towards one another. (...)

And what could the Spanish bourgeoisie, which had just allowed itself to be seized, after a few cannon shots, by the last remnants of its decrepit empire, expect in terms of external expansion? The world market was already captured by other bourgeoisies; the oppressed nationalities, oppressed by England, the United States, France, Germany, or by their vassals. It was too late for the Spanish bourgeoisie to compete in the foreign market. The weakness of the Spanish bourgeoisie was enough to initiate the revolutionary crisis (...)

Thus, the two fundamental conditions that determine the bourgeois democratic revolution, namely the opposition between the feudal and the capitalist class and the existence of greater possibilities for the latter to expand, were totally absent. The bourgeois-democratic revolution was impossible. To speak of it was beyond utopian. It was demagogically reactionary”.

- Grandizo Munis, *Jalones de Derrota promesa de victoria*, 1947

In these conditions, how could one think that the proclamation of the Second Republic on April 14 was the sudden and final triumph of an elusive "bourgeois revolution" which was missed during the previous century? Only the petty bourgeoisie really desired it on April 14. The PSOE was more discreet, the account of April 14 as a revolution was clearly an aberration, but a convenient aberration that allowed it to wash away the shame of its institutional participation in the dictatorship. In an article published in issue 1 of "Comunismo," the theoretical magazine of the Spanish Communist Left, and written during the week following the proclamation of the new form of state, Esteban Bilbao clearly pointed out **that what was before us was not the feudal state, but bourgeois capitalism with all its weapons at its disposal; here there were no servants to be liberated from the yoke of aristocratic despotism, but workers from both the city and the countryside striving to break the chains of bourgeois exploitation.**

“Against the opinion of the ideologues of the petty bourgeoisie, theoretically represented in the provisional Government (...) we affirm categorically that the Spanish monarchy is by no means a feudal state. This is a political lie of the "revolutionary" democracy that, in order to pretend that there is a liberatory struggle that in reality does not exist, creates a phantom with which to divert the popular masses from the true path of the revolution. It is a maneuver by means of which the ruling bloc tries to hide its reactionism in the service

*of big capital. The very foolish believe that they can mock the historical designs by cloaking the formidable social truth through a lyrical sleight of hand. No, the Spanish monarchy does not constitute a feudal state. The foundation of the Spanish monarchical state, since September 1923 was not the property of the aristocracy considered as such, but was rather the property of the capitalist bourgeoisie. It matters little whether the aristocracy, old or new, has been preserved, as cold cuts, in the body of the state. In the dominant spheres of the state machine the semi-feudal remnants are effective to the extent that they are bourgeois, not aristocratic. The Spanish monarchical state acts in function of the capitalist apparatus, not in function of aristocratic caste privilege. Alfonso himself was nothing more than an official at the service of the discovery of monopoly capital, for whose "work" he received his per diem from the bourgeoisie he served. The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera was the broom that swept the remains of aristocratic filth, putting the state machine entirely in the hands of industrial and financial capitalism.*

*It is true that in the Spanish countryside there is an urgent need for a revolution to liquidate the latifundista property. The peasants will have to divide the land violently dispossessing their current semi-feudal holders of all their privileges. There is something of "democratic revolution" in this problem, due to the backwardness of the Spanish countryside. But a democratic revolution led by whom? By the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia? Today we are not, despite the "doctrinal" senility of Marcellin Dominic and company, living the times of the "Tennis Court Oath". Things are very different in present-day Spain than they were in France in 1789. At that time the bourgeoisie was the revolutionary vanguard that had behind it the entire general mass of the countryside under the ferocious yoke of the feudal state made up of the aristocracy and the church and, at the top, the absolute monarchy of divine right. Then the bourgeois ideology was, yes, the living and dynamic theory of the revolutionary needs of a class rising to power. That is why the peasantry, led by the bourgeoisie, was able to carry out its democratic revolution by destroying the feudal state. This happened in France a century and a half ago. Since then things have changed a little here, even for Spain. The bourgeoisie is no longer the champion of the "national" revolution. Jealous of its privileges, it lives entrenched in the stronghold of the state dedicating all its energies not to liberate the peasants, but to exploit them. From this exploitation it draws not a few resources with which to feed its domination. The slogan for the peasantry is no longer: "with the bourgeoisie to the destruction of the feudal state" but this other: "with the proletariat to the destruction of the bourgeois state". How can the bourgeoisie, big or small, be the initiator of the peasant democratic revolution?*

- Esteban Bilbao, *Despejando la niebla*, 1931

April 14 was not a sudden revolutionary spasm of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie had already merged with the state. Nor was it an impossible seizure of power by a petty bourgeoisie - rural and urban - without its own forces. And of course it was not, nor did anyone ever claim it, the political result of the struggle of the working class. It was, however, a change in the political apparatus of the Spanish bourgeoisie, finally cohesive in a state capitalism, which thought that by dispensing with the monarch and giving the petty bourgeoisie a parliamentary apparatus, it could better confront a workers' movement on the rise since the beginning of the century.

That is to say that even if it was not like a southern *February revolution*, it does not mean that under the petty-bourgeois racket revolutionary conditions were not maturing. Trotsky's analysis at the time coincided fully with that of the OCE.

“1. The monarchy has lost power, but it hopes to win it back. The possessing classes are still firm in the saddle. The bloc of the republicans and the socialists has based itself upon the republican upheaval in order to hold back the masses from the road of the socialist revolution. No faith in words. Give us deeds! In the first place: arrest the most prominent leaders and supporters of the old regime, confiscate the property of the dynasty and its most compromised lackeys! Arm the workers!

2. The government, supporting itself on the republicans and socialists, will make every effort to extend its base towards the Right, in the direction of the big bourgeoisie and will seek to capitulate in order to neutralize the church. The government is an exploiters' government created to protect itself from the exploited. The proletariat is in irreconcilable opposition to the government of the “socialist” republican agents of the bourgeoisie.

3. The participation in power of the socialists means that violent clashes between the workers and the socialist leaders will increase. This opens up great possibilities for the revolutionary policy of the united front. Every strike, every demonstration, every approach of the workers to the soldiers, every step of the masses towards the real democratization of the country will henceforth collide with the resistance of the socialist leaders acting as men of “order”. It is therefore all the more important for the Communist workers to participate in a united front with the socialist, the syndicalist and the non-party workers, and to draw them under their leadership.

4. The Communist workers today constitute a small minority in the country. They cannot aspire to power immediately. At the present moment, they cannot set themselves as a practical task the violent overthrow of the republican-socialist government. Any attempt of this sort would be a catastrophic adventure. The masses of workers, soldiers and peasants must pass through the stage of socialist republican illusions in order to rid themselves of these illusions all the more radically and conclusively. Not to be trapped by phrases, to look the facts straight in the face, to persist in preparing the second revolution, the proletarian revolution.

5. The task of the Communists in the present period is to win the majority of the workers, the majority of the soldiers, the majority of the peasants. How can this be done? By carrying on agitation, by training cadres, by “explaining patiently” (Lenin), by organizing. All this on the basis of the experience of the masses and the active participation of the Communists in this experience: a **broad and audacious united front policy**.

6. The Communists do not take any step, with the republican-socialist bloc or with any part of it, which either directly or indirectly could restrict or weaken the Communist freedom of criticism and agitation. Everywhere the Communists will tirelessly explain to the masses of the people that in the struggle against every form of monarchist counter-revolution, they will be in the front ranks, but that for such a struggle **no alliance is needed with the republicans and the socialists, whose policy will inevitably be founded on concessions to the reaction and will tend to cover up its intrigues**.

7. The Communists issue the most radical **democratic slogans**; complete freedom for the proletarian organizations, freedom of local self-administration, election of all officials by the people, admission to suffrage of men and women from the age of eighteen, etc., formation of a workers' militia and later on of a peasants' militia. Confiscation of all properties of the dynasty and of the church for the benefit of the people, above all of the unemployed, the poor peasants, and for improving the conditions of the soldiers. Complete separation of church and state.

*All civil rights and political privileges to the soldiers. Election of officers in the army. The soldier is not an executioner of the people, nor an armed mercenary of the rich, nor a Praetorian but a revolutionary citizen, blood brother to the worker and the peasant.*

**8. The central slogan of the proletariat is that of the Workers' Soviet.** *This slogan must be proclaimed, tirelessly and constantly popularized, and at the first opportunity we must proceed to realize it. The workers' Soviet does not mean the immediate struggle for power. That is undoubtedly the perspective, but one which the masses can attain only through their own experience and with the help of the work of enlightenment of the Communists. **The workers' Soviet today means the assembling of the scattered forces of the proletariat, the struggle for the unity of the working class, for its independence.** The workers' Soviet takes up the questions of strike benefits, of feeding the unemployed, of connections with the soldiers in order to prevent bloody encounters with them, of connections between the city and country in order to assure the alliance of the workers with the poor peasants. The workers' Soviet includes representatives of the army corps. It is in this way and only in this way that the Soviet will become the organ of the proletarian insurrection and later on the organ of power.*

*9. The Communists must immediately work out a revolutionary agrarian program. Its basis must be the confiscation of the lands of the privileged and rich classes, of the exploiters beginning with the dynasty and the church, for the benefit of the poor peasants and the soldiers. This program must be concretely adapted to the different parts of the country. In every province, each with its own economic and historic peculiarities, there must immediately be created a commission for the concrete elaboration of the agrarian program, in close cooperation with the revolutionary peasants of the locality. We must know how to hear the voice of the peasants in order to formulate it in a clear and accurate manner.*

*10. The so-called Left socialists (among whom there are many honest workers) will invite the Communists to make a bloc and even to unite the organizations. To this the Communists answer:*

*"We are ready in the interests of the working class and for the carrying out of definite concrete tasks to work hand in hand with any group and with any Proletarian organization. Precisely towards this end do we propose to create Soviets. Workers' representatives belonging to different parties, will discuss within these Soviets all the timely questions and all the immediate tasks. The workers Soviet is the most natural, the most open, the most honest and the healthiest form of this alliance for common work. In the workers' Soviet, we Communists will propose our slogans and our solutions, and we will endeavor to convince the workers of the correctness of our course. Each group must enjoy full freedom of criticism in the workers' Soviet. In the struggle for the practical, tasks proposed by the Soviet, we Communists will always be in the front ranks."*

*This is the form of collaboration which the Communists propose to the socialist, the syndicalist and the non-party workers.*

*By insuring unity in their own ranks, the Communists will win the confidence of the proletariat and of the great majority of the poor peasants, they will take power arms in hand, and they will open up the era of the socialist revolution".*

- Leon Trotsky, *Ten Commandments of the Spanish Communist* (April 12, 1931)

From 1932 onwards, the OCE experienced a two-pronged crisis that gradually polarized between the *Lacroix group* and the Andrade-Nin axis on the one hand, and the Spanish direction and International on the other. The maneuvering of Nin, Andrade and Gorkin will at all times prevent Spanish debates from connecting with international ones, which would be harshly criticized again and again by Trotsky.

The crisis will, however, break out on a common plane which partially revealed Nin's strategic intentions. While the change of name from OCE to ICE (*Spanish Communist Left*) despaired Trotsky, who understood its political meaning, García Lavid -and after him Munis and Bilbao- are revealed to be against the idea of presenting electoral candidates in a generalized manner in the elections of '32 and not only where the PCE has been surpassed by OCE or is absent. Nin and Andrade are taking steps to present the founding of a political party by the hand of the BOC (Workers and Peasants' Bloc) as a *fait accompli*, subordinating the development of the OCE to the convenience of Maurín's group, which continues to aspire to a posteriori regrouping with the PCE without breaking with the Stalinist Comintern. The crisis, which would become evident with the resignation of a good part of the CC (Central Committee) following that of García Lavid, would be resolved bureaucratically with the transfer of the CC from Madrid to Barcelona.

The key to the Spanish Revolution was not, of course, with the small and provincial BOC and its *Stalinism with reservations*, but was rather to be found in the environment of the old socialist party. The apoliticism and inconsistency of the CNT gave the PSOE the political leadership of the great majority of the working class and condemned the union to lag behind the parliamentary schemes of the socialist leaders without ever undermining effectively the democratic and republican illusions that adorned them. That is why the *united front* policy, as Trotsky defined above, was key in the Spanish Revolution. OCE/ICE would only develop it consistently in the regions of the northern slope of Sierra Morena, in Badajoz and Seville, where the PSOE initiated the republican stage and exercised total political hegemony. There, effectively, the left would very soon obtain the leadership of the strike movement and would consolidate a nourished organization that would bring behind it the bases of the UGT and CNT and even the Stalinized PCE. In that year of 1933, the federation of trade unions created by the ICE would already constitute the majority in Llerena and the adjacent regions.

In the rest of the territory, the ICE was no more than a propagandist group and played its part in promoting the formation of *Workers' Alliances*, united front organizations that could only arise from the *radicalization* of the socialist base and that the socialist leaders tried to disable from day one.

*"The social democrats, who were losing their positions and sinecures because of their traditional submission to capitalism, felt the need to defend them. They needed to resort to speaking to the masses in a radicalized language that is deep down totally devoid of revolutionary content. The social democrats tried only to prevent the disappearance of capitalist democracy, under which its leaders were comfortably paid collaborators and officials. Throughout Europe, the Second International was shaken by this need to defend itself. To the international situation was added the particular situation of Spain, where the philofascist reaction was gaining ground and the socialists were in danger of being definitively fired. Frosting on the cake. The fighting effort of social democracy had to be greater in Spain, because the danger was more direct. So it was, indeed.*

*Becoming an exponent of defense, Largo Caballero went so far as to speak of overcoming bourgeois democracy and of the need to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. The formidable echo aroused by Caballero's words proves to what extent the proletariat and the peasants, having suffered the experience of the Republic, were ready to carry out their offensive for the socialist revolution, the historical need existed; since the anarchists and communists were unable to take advantage of it, it burst, like a waterfall dam, by the breach of the shining socialist radicalization. It is true that for the latter it was not a real movement for proletarian revolution, and that its maximum scope was to oblige the bourgeoisie once again to admit socialist collaboration. For the masses, however, what counted was the promise of social revolution. As soon as they saw a prospect of fighting for something better than bourgeois democracy, its laxity disappeared almost overnight. This was, in fact, due to the inability of all workers' organizations to orient them to the struggle.*

*In reality, the socialists wanted neither organs of workers' power, nor a mass offensive. Their desires seemed to perfectly align with the existing political tension. They contributed all their organic strength and their argumentative capacity to block the workers' and peasants' struggles. To this end, they invented a theory of insurrection worthy of the Nobel Prize for stupidity: No partial movements, no waste of energy; strikes, demonstrations are useless and harmful. Everyone to remain silent, obey and wait for the newest socialist strategists to give the order of insurrection. The utopian and romantic conspiracism of the 19th century found its grotesque caricature in the newly radicalized leaders. Armed with this argument: with the airs of conspirators of yesteryear, the socialists prevented the mass movement from growing, sabotaged and led to the loss of strikes that could have been easy and important triumphs for the future of the movement, producing mistrust and even discouragement among the masses and breaking the revolutionary connection between the countryside and the city. To illustrate the awfulness of socialist tactics (in a reality perfectly thought out political calculation) I will quickly refer to the most important of the strikes that were sabotaged and led to defeat: the peasant strike in July.*

*Consciously or unconsciously, the Federación de Trabajadores de la Tierra had chosen to declare the strike during the best moment, considered from both the economic and political point of view, the constraints of harvesting did not allow much resistance from the bosses; the tension and fighting capacity among the agricultural laborers had reached its peak; If the countryside waited to strike, it would have retreated before the bosses and suffered the consequent disorganization. Politically, the occasion was also the most propitious. The Gilroblista reaction had been forced to take a step back, as a result of the political strike against its demonstration in El Escorial (April). The Lerroux cabinet itself was fired and replaced by Samper's: a prototype of weak government destined to disappear quickly by the left, or by the right, depending on whether the workers' movement showed itself to be stronger or weaker. After Samper's government there was only room for the passage to another strong government with direct representatives of the philofascist majority of the chamber, or the dissolution of the chamber and the call for new elections, which would have meant a formidable defeat for the reaction, leaving the road free of obstacles to develop the revolutionary movement to reach the point of a duality of powers.*

*About one hundred thousand workers of the countryside stopped working since the first day of the movement's declaration. The government sent thousands of guards, previously concentrated in the agricultural areas, to fight them. The strike was going to be a certain failure without the solidarity of the urban proletariat. By allowing the peasants to be defeated, the cities would be isolated, deprived of their powerful support for later revolutionary movements. Even if the agricultural strike was very inopportune,*

*which it was far from being, the proletariat had the duty to support it with solidarity strikes in order to reduce the proportions of the defeat and for the peasants not to feel abandoned and betrayed. It was the ABC of revolutionary strategy at the time. Arguing like so, the delegate of the Communist Left in the Workers' Alliance of Madrid presented a plan of solidarity strikes spread out in the main cities of the country and limited to a period of 48 hours, which assured beforehand its success. The peasant strike would have extended from the most advanced regions to the backward ones, covering 300, 400, 500 thousand men. The government would have been forced to disperse its repressive forces in the countryside and to concentrate a very important part in the cities. Its capacity to contain the offensive would have suffered a significant decline. And the agricultural workers, supported by the cities, would have raised the intensity of their offensive to the maximum. With the excellent political conditions of the masses, the solidarity of the city with the countryside would have prevented, in the worst case, the strikers from suffering a serious defeat. The workers of the fields had to feel accompanied by those of the factory.*

*But the socialist bureaucrats, terrified by the importance and offensive character of the movement, categorically refused to make the slightest gesture in favor of the strikers. All the reasoning, all of the arguments pointing out the danger of isolating the proletariat and reinforcing the reaction found deaf ears in the socialist representatives. And, without them, it was difficult to declare solidarity strikes. There was a risk of failure also in the cities, which would have increased the proportions of defeat. As usual, the vote of the delegate of the Communist Left was joined only by the trade union vote (the Tobacco Federation did not yet belong to the Alliance). The workers of the countryside suffered a terrible defeat. Dozens of them fell dead and thousands were thrown in jail. The entire countryside was cut off from the rising revolutionary movement. No help could be expected from the movement during that period, as was clearly demonstrated during the October movement. Not only did the peasants feel betrayed, the city workers themselves saw as a dreadful precedent the way in which they were abandoned.*

*Similarly, the socialists brought about the defeat of other workers' strikes, mainly the Madrid Graphic Arts strike. The various political general strikes that were declared with complete success in the capital between the months of March and October were almost in spite of the socialists, who resisted until the last moment the proposals of the Communist Left. When they were finally forced to accept the declaration of strike, they did so under their name, stealing the initiative from the Workers' Alliance, in order to prevent it from actually becoming a leading organization and from being considered as such by the masses. A similar robbery was committed by the Administrative Commission of the U.G.T. on the occasion of the magnificent movement of solidarity with the strikers of Zaragoza, which had quickly brought them victory. This initiative was also presented to the Alliance by the delegate of the Communist Left. It was eventually accepted after the socialists tried to avoid it many times, but the next day it appeared as a private proposal by the U.G.T. In all this miserable and disloyal attitude was seen the deliberate intention of reducing the united front to bureaucratic fiction, of cutting off the development of Workers' Alliances as organizations of revolutionary power, and of limiting the movement of the masses to the advantage of the socialists, that is, to facilitate their return to governmental collaboration.*

*October made it clear. The Socialist Party, and Largo Caballero personally, had announced the insurrection if the President of the Republic gave Gil Robles' representatives access to the government. That conditionality proves how far they were from a true revolutionary criterion and from thinking firmly about the insurrection, which admits no condition other than the very needs of the revolution. As the delegate of the Communist Left had announced in the Alliance of Madrid, the defeat of the peasants emboldened the*

reaction, convinced it even more of the revolutionary impotence of the socialists, and marked an evolution of power to the right. The puppet Samper withdrew, Alcalá Zamora called forth Lerroux again, introducing into the government several representatives of Gil Robles.

The news came out in the afternoon of October 4. According to the solemn socialist promise, the entry of the philofascists into the government automatically meant insurrection. Both the proletarian masses of Madrid and all the important cities of the country firmly believed that it was an armed struggle. Previous political strikes had maintained a great spirit of struggle and confidence in victory. When the composition of the new government was known, the general strike took place spontaneously. As the day fell, several tens of thousands of workers invaded the streets of Madrid waiting for the sign of combat, determined to fight to the death, confident that they would be distributed a minimum of indispensable weapons to launch an attack on barracks, post offices, telegraphs, ministries and other vital centers. The government itself felt terrified and paralyzed by the immense mass that invaded the streets. The assault and civil guards, armed even with machine guns, passed by the workers' groups without daring to dissolve or even search them. They assumed them to be armed and did not dare to harass them. In reality, the workers had only a few old pistols which were practically useless. The Socialist Party, which months before had made better use of arms, only distributed very few pistols and rifles to small groups that could not possibly try anything serious with them. The groups, or rather, the individuals that were armed, limited themselves to harassing the public force, to shoot while hiding on the roofs. This was a far cry from any offensive or insurrectionary attempt. It was late at night, when the decision of the Socialist Party was known. Its conspiratorial boasting and promise to unleash the revolution were reduced to a call for a peaceful general strike, demanding the president of the Republic to force the resignation of the government. But this time, the Socialist Party gave the order in the name of the Workers' Alliance. At last it was discovered what the socialists understood by the Workers' Alliance: a parapet behind which to give legal responsibilities if it went beyond the political opposition, what was permitted by bourgeois laws. But the Alliance of Madrid did not meet once during the nine days of October. Only the representative of the Communist Left, the Trotskyist organization, was present at the called for meetings.

Thrown into the street waiting for decisive actions, the working masses could not believe what they saw and heard. During the night nothing happened, except some unimportant shooting. Concentrations of several thousand workers, totally unarmed, had tried to attack some barracks. They were quickly dispersed by machine guns. The next day the masses flooded the streets again, looking for news, still waiting for weapons and orders of struggle, thinking, not yet considering themselves to be betrayed, that the previous day's order and lack of action were a war ploy of which the socialists had boasted so much. The attitude of the police forces soon made them fall out of their illusion. The weaknesses and fears of government the day before had disappeared and they were now insolent, brutal, and aggressive. The government felt stronger, evidently. It was already sure to dominate the situation in Madrid. The socialist threats and conspiracies ended, in the end, with a shameful desertion, in the midst of excellent conditions to present the government with a fully-fledged battle. The Socialist Party did not in fact lack the indispensable minimum weapons; after all, the attendance of the masses could not be greater. With all this, the Party did not know how to, nor did it want, to do more than a prolonged strike of nine days that would be disturbed by an unproductive shooting that restarted every afternoon. The mysterious conspiracy plan that was to bring victory, which the socialists had mentioned so much in order to contain the revolutionary movement in the previous months and prevent its dialectical development, did not appear anywhere. Nor could it appear, because it did not exist.

*The only conspiracy in the plot of socialist radicalization was panic in the face of the eventuality of having to put words into action. That conspiracy did appear in October clearly and everywhere.*

*In Catalonia, the government of the Generalitat, which had ventured to proclaim the dreamed Catalan republic, quickly capitulated before the government troops, without trying to mobilize its important resources. Its symbolic resistance did not go beyond four cannon shots and a white flag. The soldiers, once out of the barracks, were not even given the opportunity to turn their weapons against the government, in which there was no small chance of success. The local Workers' Alliance, essentially led by an ancestor of the P.O.U.M., the BOC, has been incapable of practicing a policy that would induce anarchists to accept the united front. It used the Alliance as an instrument against the CNT, instead of using it to attract it and defeat its apoliticism. The result was the disorganization and division of the Catalan proletariat. Imitating the Generalitat from another level, the Catalan Alliance limited itself to organizing a demonstration of a symbolic request for arms from the Generalitat, and seeing that the latter was not giving them to it, it dissolved the demonstration and ended its action. It was the opinion of the Aliancist leaders that nothing could be attempted without the Generalitat. It was in this idea where defeat could be found.*

*Only in Asturias did the October movement take on a true insurrectionary character. Was it on the initiative of the Socialist Party, or did the particular conditions of the region allow the miners to take action before the top leaders could counteract it? I am firmly convinced of the latter. In the book to which I referred, I believe I can demonstrate this in detail. Within the limits of this article we can only cite the most salient facts that persuade me in this sense:*

- 1. The miners had some weapons and abundant dynamite, taken from their own mines. They knew how to manipulate it perfectly as a weapon of war.*
- 2. The middle and lower leaders of Asturian socialism, directly in contact with the miners and often the miners themselves, were often among the most revolutionary of the Spanish Socialist Party. These men took radicalization and the march towards the dictatorship of the proletariat seriously, and not as a political maneuver.*
- 3. The insurrectionary movement began in Asturias precisely on the periphery, where the decision belonged to the low and middle leaders. While in the capital of the province, Oviedo, the seat of the regional committee, there was, as in Madrid, only a peaceful strike. It was the miners who, concentrating around Oviedo, took the city by storm.*
- 4. Finally, the non-insurrectional character of the movement in Madrid and the rest of Spain means that the movement in Asturias took place against the will of the top socialist leadership, both national and regional. It is inconceivable that an order of insurrection was given for Asturias and another for a peaceful strike for the rest of the country. And let us repeat it, those who have lived the October days in Madrid will not be able to deny in good faith that there were possibilities of insurrection and its triumph. There was no insurrection there because the leadership of the movement did not want it, because it deserted the masses at the necessary moment. The Asturian insurrection was, for sure, a surprise to the higher socialist leaders.*

*The miners had strayed from the direction of the socialists. Well equipped with dynamite, upon learning of the general strike order and the composition of the new government, they threw themselves on the barracks of the Civil Guard and took almost all of them. The Asturian socialist bureaucrats, the Belarmino Tomás, González Peña, etc. had to accept the fait accompli; weren't the miners there, in front of them, encircling Oviedo?*

*The Asturian Workers' Alliance, despite being the best formed, due to the participation of the anarchists, also showed its unsuitability as an organism of workers power and even as an insurrectionary leading center. In the course of the struggle, the primitive Alliance, which along with numerous committees fled, had to be replaced by another. The mode of representation was much more democratic and the representatives much closer to the masses than the socialist priests that constituted the previous one. The needs of the struggle indicated the sense in which the Alliances had to be modified. The socialists had tried to preserve them to the extent that they were tight bureaucratic knots that paralyzed the initiative of the masses instead of giving it an organized course".*

- Grandizo Munis, *Red October in the Spanish Revolution* (1943)

In fact, the Workers' Alliances, denying the aspirations of the Spanish internationalists, never even come close to being soviets. To act from them in the face the whole class is to act from the outside, accepting in the best of cases the sterilizing filter of the socialist popes (Asturias) and in the worst of cases (Catalonia) the subjection to the nonsense of the petty bourgeoisie and its Generalitat. Trotsky's conclusion was that if *French turn* made sense anywhere it was precisely in Spain.

*"For our part, we will always repeat it: the biggest mistake made by any of the sections has been that of the Spanish section that did not know how to enter the Socialist Party in time, at the beginning of the armed struggle".*

- Leon Trotsky, *February 28, 1935*

According to Andrade's argument, the need for the class to equip itself with a revolutionary leadership is just the opposite of joining the PSOE... or any other organization.

*"The future lies in the united front, but also in the organic independence of the vanguard of the proletariat. In no way, by a circumstantial utilitarianism, can we merge with an amorphous conglomerate, bound to break at the first contact with reality. As sad and painful as it is for us, we are willing to remain in these principled positions that we have learned from our boss, even at the risk of having to walk part of our way to triumph apart from him.*

- *Comunismo*, 1934.

And so, in 1935, at a critical time of retreat from the struggle, the ICE broke with the discipline of the International Opposition and dissolved in the BOC to form the POUM. The BOC had all the *cons* of the PSOE and at least three more: its nationalism, the limitation of its geographical scope, and that, despite thinning the ICE members 10 to 1, did not have any real possibilities of influencing any mass as it only had 5,000 members. However, it had three major bureaucratic attractions to add value to Nin's actions since 1931: it kept the local organizations *intact* - being the Catalan BOC and having the ICE atrophy voluntarily in Catalonia meant that they did not overlap; despite the fact that the respective central committees were already in Barcelona; furthermore, Nin's intimacy with Maurín allowed the *process* of the common program to be resolved without major problems.

In the face of a dissolution disguised as a merger, the break-up of the minority was inevitable.

*"Dear comrades:*

*We assume you are already aware of our decision to withdraw from the Communist Left, but if you are not, take this to be an official announcement.*

*We have exhausted every means of persuasion to prevent you from going into a dead end; we have done everything possible not to poison the discussion with personal questions, so that it would be easy for everyone to come to the right position, but we have come to the conclusion of the futility of our efforts. The worst of our fears has been fulfilled: that the organization instead of reacting boldly and bearing all the risks of a difficult situation, hesitates, folds its arms and sits, preferring to fall into sectarian passivity rather than move politically. Encouraging these hesitations with a sentimental concept of unity and calling for an artificial discipline would be a crime.*

*By withdrawing, we hope that those who agree with us will have enough energy to make up their minds, and we will be able to reorganize our ideological movement on new bases.*

*It does not cease to sadden us that an organization that believed itself revolutionary has shown shameful signs of indecision in a difficult situation. For what do we want all our ideological courage, but to face the great situations?*

*The ultimate solution of becoming an extension of the BOC, which as a national reality does not exist, seems to us to be a lamentable way to disguise vacillation. Nobody dares to support our independent organization any more, but just as nobody dares to move in the necessary direction, they remain in the same position, wanting to hide before themselves and before others the great problem with a simple change of name. In other words, it is now called an extension of the new Catalan party or BOC, instead of the Communist Left.*

*In this case, we decided to break away, without the slightest bitterness, in the certainty that the decision of a few will be the one that saves the indecision of the others and also in the certainty that soon we will be collaborating together again.*

*Cordial communist greetings.*

- Esteban Bilbao, Fersen, G. Munis, Alfonso G. Rodríguez, Antonino Alvarez, Gil Chaves, Esteban Barrios, Jesús Blanco.

Nin's response was to write to the International Secretariat of the International Opposition demanding sanctions against Fersen for breaking the *discipline of the organization*. The YES answer was signed by *Martin* (A. Leonetti), founder of the Italian PC and first editor of *l'Unitá* which, by the way, was against *entryism*. Leonetti begun by reminding Nin that it was he who had broken the discipline and asked for a reconsideration of the merger.

*"The question of "organizational discipline": You say that the organization has rejected the two propositions and has upheld the point of view of the BOC. Such a decision of the organization must be rejected; but you know as well as we do that, if there is a national discipline of organization, there is also an international discipline of organization; in our opinion, your organization should discuss this question again, take up again total independence from the BOC and let us know your decision. The future of your organization depends entirely on this.*

*The case of Fersen: We have no contact with these comrades, so we have not been able to contact them in order to influence them in one way or another. We are opposed to the fact that they have acted in their own discipline, without reaching, in the first place, an agreement with the international organization and the Socialist International. But we assume the responsibility for any kind of sanction against them. The prestige and authority of our organization must be established by means of a clear, firm and correct policy. If, on the one hand, you have come so far as to seek fusion with the Partit Català Proletari, you cannot refuse to collaborate with these comrades who are so close to you and proclaim themselves of your ideas. If you think this might be useful, you can invite comrade Fersen and others to contact us, so that we can invite them to work together with the organization, as I have done so far”.*

Nin's response, which marks the break-up of the majority with the international organization, is full of childish insolence and varied pettiness, among which he leaves no opportunity to try to stain the minority in the same way he had done with García Lavid year and a half before.

*“Finally, a word on the Fersen affair. His departure has not had the least impact on our organization, which has unanimously condemned his conduct; his influence is null and void. On the other hand, we have reason to suspect that he and the comrades who have followed him have acted more for pragmatic than idealistic reasons. Moreover, despite their efforts they have not been able to force the Socialist Party to admit them into its ranks. If you want to keep in touch with them is your business, our organization is not interested at all. Short of time, we cannot send you the information you ask for. On the other hand, given your utter misunderstanding of Spanish affairs, we do not think they would be useful to you”.*

- Nin by the CEN of the ICE

In reality, the new POUM of Andrade, Nin and Maurín rush head on to the Popular Front that Stalinism was hoisting like a flag that same year after the VIIth Congress of the Comintern; as Andrade himself recounts almost half a century later:

*“In mid-1935, the Seventh Congress of the Communist International was held in Moscow. It was the culmination of the process of degeneration of official international communism, the great turn towards the tactics of the People's Fronts. Dimitrov proposed to modify the tactics and even the strategy of the CPs. It was necessary to establish a flexible system of alliance, not only with the Socialist Parties and other workers' organizations, but also with the democratic parties of the bourgeoisie. It was necessary to fight for democracy in general and for the national interests of each country. From then on, the communists began to apply to themselves the title of patriots and not that of revolutionaries.*

*Naturally, the Spanish CP immediately undertook its transformation from an ultrarevolutionary wolf into a peaceful democratic sheep, and synchronized its action by virtue of order. Immediately after the Moscow agreements became known, the Spanish Political Bureau addressed a letter to the Socialist Party proposing: to carry out union unity through the entrance of the CGTU (artificial creation of the CP) in the UGT, to develop the AO (Workers' Alliance), to create the Popular Bloc, and to march towards the organic unity of the two parties. The United Workers' Front was abandoned for the Popular Front. (...)*

*Largo Caballero was made into the "Spanish Lenin", the leader of the imminent revolution. The defects of vanity of the old social democrat leader were known, so it was a question of flattering him so that he could carry out the policy defined by Dimitrov. At the time, the policy of the Popular Front could not find much on opposition from the part of the Socialist Party. After all, the Socialist Party was utilizing the same tactic that*

they had used since the proclamation of the Republic: to use the collaboration of the working and peasant masses to carry out the policy of the democratic bourgeoisie.

- Juan Andrade *Notes on the history of the PCE*, 1981

But in 1935 it was Andrade himself who signed off on the entry of the POUM into the Popular Front. The indignation that was produced among the minority and in the international organization was immense.

*“Juan Andrade forwarded his book to me twice, each time with glowing dedications, in which he calls me his “leader and teacher.” This fact, which under different conditions would have only made me happy, compels me at present to announce all the more decisively in public that **I never taught anybody political betrayal.** And Andrade’s conduct is nothing else but **betrayal of the proletariat for the sake of an alliance with the bourgeoisie**”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *The Treachery of the Spanish “Labor Party of Marxist Unity”* (January 22, 1936)

*“The Spanish revolution has developed at a very slow pace. The revolutionaries have thus benefited from having a relatively important period of time to gather the vanguard around them in order to live up to their tasks at the decisive moment. Today, we must openly say that the Spanish “left-wing communists” have let this very favorable deadline pass completely by and that they have not shown themselves to be any better than the socialist and “communist” traitors. And there was no shortage of warnings! The greater is the responsibility of an Andres Nin, or an Andrade. With a correct policy, the communist left could have found itself today, as a section of the Fourth International, at the head of the Spanish proletariat. Instead, it vegetated in the confusionist organization of a Maurin, without a program, without a perspective, without any political importance. The action of the Marxists in Spain begins with the condemnation of the whole policy of Andrés Nin y Andrade, which was and continues to be, not only faulty, but criminal”.*

- Leon Trotsky, *What should the Bolshevik-Leninists do in Spain?*, April 22, 1936

The BOC had meanwhile become the largest Catalan *communist* political organization. Programmatically its trajectory was a succession of disasters: it ranged from the embracing the concept of a workers' and peasants' party, to the idea that the BOC's own "workers' groupings" could replace the soviets in a revolution, to support for Macià and his attitude to the October 34 insurrection.

*When I say that the A.O. (Workers’ Alliance) subordinated the interests of the revolutionary movement to those of the Generalitat, I support myself in the words of Joaquín Maurín, words that, being pronounced after the mentioned events had occurred, are more revelatory. Maurín was the leader of the Bloque Obrero y Campesino (BOC), the strongest party in the A.O., and consequently the main inspiration for it. Here is how, according to him, the A.O. raised, during the culminating days, October 4, 5 and 6, the problem of the revolutionary movement in its relations with the conflict between the Lerroix-Gil Robles and Companys-Dencás governments:*

***The Generalitat has in its hands, therefore, the possibility that the counterrevolution could be crushed. Success or failure depends on the Generalitat, which is presented with the following dilemma: to rebel and fight to victory, or to submit and be crushed in a few hours or in a few days. The petty-bourgeois Generalitat and with it the Statute of Catalonia have only one possibility of salvation: to march***

forward with all the consequences that that would bring. It is very probable that the Generalitat would fear the derivations that the insurrectionary movement may acquire, that the petty bourgeoisie would distrust the working masses. It is necessary to try, as far as possible, to ensure that this fear does not arise, for which reason **the workers' movement will stand beside the Generalitat** in order to put pressure on it and promise it help without **putting itself in front of it**, without trying to have an advantage over it in the first moments. What really matters is for the insurrection to begin and for the petty bourgeoisie coupled with its armed forces to not have time to retreat. We'll see what will happen.

Joaquín Maurín. "Towards the Second Revolution", pp. 124 and 125. Subrayados de G. Munis.

That was the guide for the conduct of the A.O., the night of October 4, while the movement began throughout the country. Following it, the A.O. cut off its great possibilities of action, reducing itself to the role of radicalizing reflex of the Generalitat. What victorious revolutionary movement could there be when the said workers' representatives start off by revealing that the initiative of the insurrection depended not on the proletariat, but on the secondary quarrels of one part of the bourgeoisie against another?

Bourgeois, fully bourgeois, rather than petty bourgeois as Maurín claims, was the Generalitat. Starting from the premise: "the Generalitat has in its hands, then, the possibility that the counterrevolution will be crushed", was the equivalent to proclaiming: "the proletariat is impotent without the patronage of the regional bourgeoisie, big or small". The A.O. was based on ideas rejected by the international revolutionary movement since the Russian experience of 1905. Simultaneously, the specifically proletarian demands ceased to exist, placing the demand to maintain the survival of the regional government in the gravitational center of the movement. The A.O. did not conceive of the events that came upon it as an essentially workers' movement, which should seek the support of the regional petty bourgeoisie, but conversely, a movement of the latter, to which the Alliance granted the support of the proletariat and the peasants. Maurín himself admits this on the same page of the book cited:

"Although it is true that an insurrectionary movement exclusive of the working class could not triumph in Catalonia, because the fundamental conditions were not present, if a revolutionary bloc of workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie with a government of the Generalitat is produced, temporarily, the insurrection has an almost guaranteed triumph, because the Generalitat has the military organization: 3,000 armed policemen"....

Maurín could have expressed himself more clearly if he referred to it as a bloc of petty bourgeoisie, workers and peasants. After all, the only thing he tries to justify with such an analysis is the impossibility of independent worker action - something which is absolutely indispensable even if the dictatorship of the proletariat could not be established through it - and the need for the movement to subordinate itself to the Generalitat. The heart of the movement had to be the nationalist petty bourgeoisie. Bad analysis; worse consequences.

The regionalist problem produced a thick smokescreen between the Catalan A.O. and the Spanish revolutionary movement. The reasoning that Maurín exposes to us completely disregards the Spanish proletariat. According to this reasoning, the only thing that exists is Catalonia and the Generality; the rest of the peninsula is characterized merely by the presence of a central government eager to annihilate the regional. This localist myopia has been a serious permanent defect of the Bloc, and later of the P.O.U.M., which is where the origin of its worst errors can be traced. But the limits of existence are not determined by the visual radius of myopes.

- G.Munis. *Jalones de derrota, promesas de victoria, 1947.*

The weakness of the Catalan A.O. vis-à-vis the Generalitat and the Catalan petty bourgeoisie was dressed up with the argument of national self-determination. It must be said that the succession of absurdities on the *national question* of the Spanish communist groups was set by a very high standard: the PCE of Bullejos, when the Republic was proclaimed, demanded the self-determination and immediate independence of the Basque Country, Galicia and Catalonia. And, paradoxically, while the Argentine Communist Left, a direct result of the influence of the ICE, clearly understood what national liberation signified, in Spain the prestige of Nin's Moscovite past led to the continual adoption at the ICE conferences of his *theses on the national question*, albeit with increasing hesitation. But the BOC went even further than Nin, who in 1933, had predicted in the pages of *Comunismo* that the Catalanism of the BOC would destine it to

*"definitively become a petty-bourgeois far left, successor to Macià's left and, like this one, destined to epically fail after an unavoidable period of great and rapid progress".*

The truth is that both the (Catalan-Balear Communist Federation) FCCB and the BOC that perpetuated it were organizations of an inveterate opportunism and a very low theoretical level, united by chauvinism and the cult of the local leader.

*"The BOC, mainly its de facto leader, was also looking for a way to reach a greater national audience among the working class, therefore allowing it to transform itself into a national party: Iberian and not only Catalan as it had been until then. Despite the fact that it had almost the same origin as us, that is to say that it came from a split with the Communist Party, there was quite a lot that differentiated us from it in terms of formation, theoretical education, tactical conceptions and, above all, in political thought, as had been revealed through a harsh polemical exchange (...) **we considered the BOC as a kind of federation of groups of friends, whose politics were directed by the "genius" of its leader.***

*The BOC suffered a serious internal crisis, some leaders and militant workers had abandoned it in order to enter the PC and submit to Stalinism, which we believe was for the purpose of ensuring the existence of a force, with a voice and a vote, that would be independent of social democracy and official communism. The merger between the two organizations was therefore being imposed. We considered that although the BOC suffered from a spirit of frivolity and cult of personality, as well as from the remnants of Catalan nationalism, which was completely alien to us, a new party of national character emerged from the merger that had prospects of extending to all regions. We believed that, if the Catalanist mentality of the BOC did not carry a great weight, the merger would end up imposing itself as the necessary Spanish revolutionary organization, and would finally gain the political clarity that was lacking at the beginning.*

- Juan Andrade Preface to *"The Problems of the Spanish Revolution"* by Andrés Nin, 1971.

In fact, Nin, Andrade and other leaders of the majority were never confused about the BOC and Maurín, they were simply opportunistic. The majority of the ICE, which had willingly given up on the prospect of growing in Catalonia, hoped to correct its course by relying precisely on what made the BOC a dead body from a class point of view: its absolute dependence on a leader devoid of discourse and tactics.

The workers' insurrection of July 19, 1936, which foiled the military coup d'état of the previous day, found the POUM in the midst of a recruitment campaign and the minority of the ICE preparing the constitution of an International Opposition group around G. Munis.

What is certain is that in the class war strategy with which the military conducted the war that began, the ICE strongholds became a priority target because they were the main insurrectionary focal points. The result is that in the first days of war, the composition of the POUM is practically reduced to that of the BOC.

An example is given by the Llerena radio. After the merger with the BOC, the people of Llerena have become the second largest local section of the POUM, surpassed only by Barcelona. We could discuss the extent to which the centrist policy of the new party weakened its capacity for organization and response. Although some managed to live to defend Badajoz, most of the former ICE militants, at that time almost all of whom had become POUMistas, were killed in the brutal repression and massacres that followed the fall of Seville. Between the square and the cemetery of the capital Llerena alone, 200 militants were shot. Siem who was organizing the POUM in Santiago de Compostela would be imprisoned and assassinated by the Francoists there. Félix Galán was shot in the square and Pablo Grandizo, printer of almost everything published by the ICE, ended up behind the gates of the cemetery just like José Martín. Only Munis was saved, who at that time was in Mexico from where he would return with the first shipment of weapons for the workers insurrection.

The POUM's few possibilities to evolve from centrism to class positions had been essentially cut off at the height of the Spanish Revolution.

From the first moments of the military uprising of July 18, 1936 there was a decantation of the political forces. The PCE and the PSOE were the first to close ranks with the republican state and government.

*"The moment is difficult but not hopeless. The government is confident that it has the means to crush this criminal attempt. If its means are insufficient, the Republic could count on the solemn promise of the Popular Front. It is ready to intervene in the struggle as soon as its help is requested. The government rules and the Popular Front obeys".*

- *Joint note of the PSOE-PCE, July 19, 1936.*

What was happening, however, was very different. On July 19, workers across the country rose up and confronted the coup plotters directly. The republican state collapses into most of "Republican Spain". The roof of the Popular Front dissolved like a sugar cube before the advance of the class. The army was defeated in practically the whole country.

With the Revolution asserting itself, the bourgeoisie and what remained of the state strove to gather forces to form a government led by Martínez Barrio and encouraged by the Popular Front. The Popular Front itself suggested capitulating to the coup plotters.

*"Since days before, the masses, mobilized spontaneously, at the initiative of the C.N.T., of half socialist and half Stalinist militants, and by other small organizations, were materially speaking, the owners of the street in the main cities. Real power had become concentrated in the masses and barracks. The clash was inevitable. As soon as the constitution of the new government was announced through the radio, an*

*explosion of anger erupted in violent demonstrations, expressed through the shouts, "Down with Martínez Barrio"! The socialist and Stalinist parties themselves had to accede to the desire of the masses, and support, as parties, the demonstrations. Thus, humiliatingly repudiated by the reaction, before whose sword it bowed, combated and insulted by the masses, Martínez Barrio's attempt to capitulate remained trapped within the heart of the popular front that had encouraged it. The situation did not admit half-measures. In order to subdue the boundless masses, the Government needed to wield the same military force that revolted against the masses and against the Government; in order to subdue the military it was necessary to arm the masses. (...)*

*Once the capitulations failed, nothing could prevent the masses from arming themselves and attacking the military. On the contrary, the workers' parties of the popular front themselves had to run from the tail to the head of the masses, so as not to be dismantled themselves, and so that the armament would remain under their deleterious control, as much as possible".*

- G.Munis. *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria*, 1948

The class collectivized factories and fields, confronted fascism with its militias, and the country was filled with committees that de facto seized local power and production. But the myriad of committees, confused by the CNT and the weight of anarchism, and lacking a political organization of sufficient size and development, could not centralize as a consequence. They could not affirm class power, and inevitably... the structures of the state found an unexpected truce from which to reconstitute themselves. Especially the Generalitat.

*"The masses, although continually rejected by the Popular Front, were determined to contest the reaction.. Arming themselves in spite of the Government, they defeated the military in the majority of the territory. Of course, wherever they could conquer, at the right time, a minimum of weapons. The result of the days of July 19 and following was the almost complete destruction of the bourgeois state. The so-called legal government - or the governments, taking into account that of Catalonia and later that of the Basque Country- neither represented nor possessed any real power. The defeat of the bourgeois armed forces at the hands of the proletariat and the peasants automatically led to the disappearance of the bourgeois state. This was a formidable revelation of what happens to the bourgeois state during revolutionary times. Once their coercive bodies are disarmed, the bourgeoisie disappears.*

*At the same time, all of Spain was studded with Committees made up of workers, peasants and militiamen, who exercised political power, executed justice against the reactionaries, expropriated the bourgeoisie, patrolled streets and highways. Any of these committees had more real power than the famous legal government of the Popular Front. This is because there is no legality other than that sanctioned by historical events. The fallacy of the bourgeois-democratic theory sustained by the Popular Front, appeared clearly. The historical process - without any conscious factor helping it, we insist - destroyed the bourgeois state, simultaneously forming the cells of a new proletarian state. The Popular Front was caught red-handed committing an anti-historical action. And everything anti-historical, to a greater or lesser degree, is counterrevolutionary.*

*On several occasions, the author of this article has described the situation resulting from atomization of power in the July days. This description, atomization of power, seems to me to be more applicable to the situation in Spain than the description that applied to the Russian revolution: "dual power". Dual power presupposes the existence of two powers that compete respectively for total power. Something very*

different occurred in Spain. The bourgeois power, in spite of its formal survival, lacked effective power, in spite of the fact that the Stalinist and Socialist parties proclaimed from the top their lungs, "The Government rules, the Popular Front obeys"! This was indeed the case, with the exception that the Popular Front was not obeyed by the masses, not even by the majority of the militants of their own parties. On the other hand, the committees constituted by the masses lacked coordination and the collective capacity to claim all power for themselves and to seize it. Each committee was a small government, a tiny workers' state within its radius of action. The power lost by the bourgeois Popular Front government was held by the Committees, unequally distributed among them. From this I deduce that in order to characterize the situation more exactly in the weeks following July 19, it is necessary to define it as the atomization of power in the hands of the proletariat and the peasants. They were fully aware of their local power, although they lacked awareness of the need to coordinate their power nationally. During the first weeks, the bourgeois government lacked the capacity and will to fight against the nascent workers power. Duality cannot be spoken of until later, when the Government of the Popular Front comes around, realizes that it lives, regroups the armed forces at its disposal and begins to challenge the committees of the proletariat and the peasants for power.

- G. Munis. *"Historical Significance of July 19"*, 1938

The PCE, in continuity with Moscow's line, tried to defend the republican state not only against fascism, but also against collectivizations. The result was that the PCE, beneficiary as well of Soviet aid, had become the new *party of order* and multiplied its recruitment among the petty bourgeoisie. As PCE leader Fernando Claudín reported:

*"Many petty-bourgeois elements come to the ranks of the PCE, attracted by the reputation acquired by the party as defender of order, legality and small property. And the PCE brings, above all - or place under its direction through the JSI - a large contingent of the youth not yet forming the traditional trade unions and workers' organizations".*

José Díaz's report to the CC in May 37 shows that in front of the 150,000 wage earners that the party includes (which includes agricultural and industrial workers, civil servants and business executives) stand more than 100,000 small proprietors (professionals and farmers) along with 20,000 women of whom there is no social affiliation. The external witnesses, linked to the PCE at the time, corroborate this data in their testimonies.

*"The CP is today, in the first place, the party of the administrative and military personnel. In the second place, it is the party of the petty bourgeoisie and affluent peasant groups. In the third place, it is the party of the public employees. Only in the fourth place is it the party of the workers".*

- Frank Burkenau. *El reñidero español*, 1971.

The sociological analysis of militancy reflects the extent to which popular front politics and the transmission belt party have succeeded in attracting social sectors whose objective was to save the republican democratic state and not to make socialist revolution.

What has happened in the meantime to the newborn POUM? At the time of the military uprising Maurín was in Galicia, captured by the insurgents and was believed to have been murdered. Only Nin had the ability to assume the position of the Secretariat. The cult of personality and the bloc mentality is so ridiculous, so anti-Marxist, that Nin assumed the position of "executive secretariat", since the position of "general secretariat" belonged according to them ad eternum to the man presumed dead.

*"Unfortunately, civil war broke out before an understanding of the problems of the two merged organizations could have solidified (...) The absence of its leader Maurín, had created among the former blocistas a defensive reflex against the leaders of the party coming from the ICE, to which they attributed the intention to "seize the POUM" and "impose Trotskyism". Because of this situation, Andrés Nin was limited in his functions as a political secretary, which affected him painfully during the year of civil war he lived through. I believed that Nin neither wanted to nor was able to react resolutely against this state of affairs.*

- Juan Andrade. *Preface to "The Problems of the Spanish Revolution" by Andrés Nin, 1971.*

In Catalonia, the POUM, which had already in '36 entered in the electoral pact of the Popular Front on the grounds that it was in order to turn it into a united front of workers' parties, was irremissibly going to the other side of the class border. Nin himself entered the government of the Generalitat during the war, the same government that served as the base structure for the reconstitution of the republican state and the crushing of workers autonomy and its collectivizations.

*The P.O.U.M., jumping from the popular front to the opposition and from the opposition to the popular front, lacked its own political line; it plainly sheltered itself in the shadow of the socialist left, or in the shadow of anarcho-syndicalism, artificially lengthened by the automatic sunset of the capitalist sun. Result: at the time of the military insurrection, the workers' organizations either supported the capitalist state with all their forces, like reformism and Stalinism, or approached it, like the C.N.T., the F.A.I. and the P.O.U.M. In spite of everything, the capitalist state and society, without anyone deliberately proposing it, fell to the ground, crumbled as a consequence of the workers' triumph over the reactionary insurrection.*

*The Marxist theory that proclaims the need to destroy the capitalist State and to create a workers' State based on socialist relations of production and distribution of the producing classes, in possession of labor instruments, received in Spain, on 19 July, the most brilliant demonstration. In the Russia of 1917, the double social process of destruction of the old State and creation of the new was consciously and powerfully aided by the Bolshevik Party. But in Spain the same process was consummated not only without the help of any organization, but dealt with the deliberately harmful influence of reformism and Stalinism and the unintentionally negative influence, although to a lesser degree, of anarcho-syndicalism and POUMist centrism. The events have an undeniable and instructive value for the world proletariat. The bourgeois state emerged stronger out of the armed collision wherever the military triumphed; but it was totally destroyed wherever the proletariat triumphed and the rudiments of the basic organs of a new proletarian state were created. Consequently, the workers parties infeuded by the formula: "neither social revolution nor fascism, but bourgeois democracy", should be accused of criminality. For if this had represented, however minor, a real necessity of historical evolution, the defeat of the military on July 19 would have confirmed it by spontaneously invigorating parliamentarism, the popular front, and in general all the institutions of the bourgeois state. The ghostly life to which all of them were suddenly reduced*

*demonstrates the anti-historical, reactionary character of that formula, and, as a consequence, of the workers' parties that made it their own.*

*Anarchism and POUMism, although they did not cease to conciliate the popular front, appeared to the left of it, thus were in excellent conditions to assure to the government-committees the complete possession of political power. By itself, the grand and excellent anarchist militancy would have easily guaranteed success, if its spontaneous activity leading towards the creation of a new State had not been stopped on its tracks and channelled towards the bourgeois State by the anarchist leadership itself. For its part, the P.O.U.M., although incomparably less influential, had sufficient resources and numerical strength to conquer the proletarian majority by means of an energetic revolutionary policy, and to thwart the tortious intention of Stalinists and reformists. But it was already clear that the workers' organizations, since constitution of the popular front, could not see beyond Kerensky; Lenin and the Trotsky were nowhere to be found in them. At the moment when the popular front, with the bourgeois state, received a mortal blow, when, dominating all social relations, the treacherous influence of Stalinism and reformism could be quickly uprooted, anarchism and POUMism join them, they accede to their reactionary maneuvers, give them viability, cut off from the Committees-government the step towards power on a national scale, and save the bourgeois state from the final blow. It is the combination of two deliberately pro-capitalist tendencies, and two other semirevolutionary tendencies, which prevented Julio's work from crystallizing and consolidating, which later caused the retreat of the revolution and Franco's triumph.*

- G.Munis. *Jalones de derrota, promesas de victoria*, 1948

On July 19, the proletariat destroyed the power of the bourgeoisie; because class power was not centralized, the state began to reorganize itself and concentrate the few forces it has left. It is then, and until the days of May, that there emerged a situation of dual power. The republican state and the working class -organized in a thousand committees and militias- would exercise it temporarily while the workers would continue to lack a revolutionary direction.

The balance between classes would end in May 1937, when the republican state and the PCE feel strong enough to take power again, and completely destroy the autonomous expressions of the class, beginning with the militias and workers' control.

*"During the days of May 1937, everyone was placed in their rightful place. That result was only could only come about through the fight, because it made defeat inevitable. (...)*

*In its second stage, the balance of powers had been tipped much to the favor of the capitalist side, whose State, relying on rifles and machine guns made in Russia, struggled to reconstitute "order". But the elements of dual workers' power resisted, and did not resign themselves to allowing themselves to be dissolved peacefully, in spite of the pressures exerted even from the leadership of the most radical organizations. The Stalino-capitalist reaction was continuously looking for occasions to attack the revolution. At the end of April, the Department of Public Order, wanting to put into practice the agreement of the Generalitat referred to in the previous chapter, prohibited the circulation and exercise of the functions of the Control Patrols. The armed workers that constituted them were stationed at strategic points and disarmed 250 guards sent by the Generalitat to replace them. By the same date, the Generalitat sent legions of carabinieri to the border to replace the workers' committees that had controlled it since July. The majority were pushed back and disarmed. The Generalitat sent new reinforcements, and the struggle for control of the border between capitalist power and workers' power became widespread,*

developing with particular intensity in Puigcerdá. Antón Martín, one of the best militants of the region, enemy of the collaboration, was assassinated by the troops. The resistance was strong and the proletariat won many victories, but capitalist power tended to impose itself. While the workers' committees that controlled the border belonged almost all to the C.N.T., this same C.N.T. collaborated loyally with the capitalist power. Victory thus became defeat.

Many other armed clashes between capitalist and worker forces occurred in diverse areas. But although in Catalonia, contrary to the rest of Spain, censorship still did not exist, the CNT press was either silent on the events or undermined their significance, representing them as "regrettable incidents", as if they were mistakes taken on the part of the government or of the workers. The Stalinist press, it goes without saying, interpreted them with all the perfidy of its reactionary designs, presenting the resisting workers as fascists or bandits. Before being materially disarmed, the proletariat had already been ideologically and organically disarmed. But a proletariat that a year earlier had defeated and dismantled the Spanish army could not have all its gains taken away without a serious struggle. The isolated clashes between revolution and counterrevolution, while gradually weakening the former, left the latter unsatisfied, increasingly anxious to impose its full rule. A general and decisive confrontation was coming; the Stalino-capitalist reaction wanted it, sought it and would provoke it.

In fact, on May 3, 1937, at 2 hours and 45 minutes of the evening, the commissioner of Public Order, Rodríguez Salas (Stalinist), protected by an order of the advisor of the Generalitat, Aiguadé (Esquerra Republicana), burst in with a band of guards in the central telephone building. It had been operating in perfect condition since July, under the supervision of the committee elected by the workers themselves. But the new reaction, already quite advanced, could not freely progress knowing that the telephones were in the hands of the workers. On the other hand, determined to seek the opportunity to machine-gun the masses and humiliate them, the reaction deliberately planted their demands in the most brutal way possible. The Stalinist Salas invaded the telephone exchange with a greater deployment of forces than necessary to assume an advanced position. The workers categorically refused to depose the authority of their Committee, and fought fire with fire. Caught by surprise during work, they had to retreat to the upper floors of the building, leaving the ground floor in the hands of the two companies of guards commanded by Salas.

The sounds of the first shots spread through Barcelona like a surge of electricity: "Betrayal, betrayal!" the thought that for months gnawed the mind and nerves of the proletariat, now furrowed its face, pale with rage, and got it to move its arms in order to find weapons. The cry spread from corner to corner, to the working class neighborhoods and factories, even to the other Catalan cities and towns. The general strike took place immediately, spontaneously, without any other approval, at most, that of the lower and middle leaders of the C.N.T. Barcelona was covered with barricades with a miraculous rapidity, as though the barricades were hidden under the pavement since July 19 and a secret mechanism had brought them to the surface all of a sudden. The city was immediately in the hands of the insurgents, except for a small sector in the center. Unanimous response of the proletariat: quick and passionate action. The Stalinist provocation became another triumph of the proletariat, just as the military provocation in July of the previous year had become a great revolutionary triumph. The domination of the proletariat was undeniable even to the enemies of the revolution. In the working-class districts, the government forces surrendered without resistance or accelerated their defeat by handing over their weapons to the men at the barricades. Even in the center, civilian guard posts and carabinieri prudently declared themselves to be

neutral. The same Colón hotel, the central Stalinist den, went so far as to raise the flag of neutrality.

In the hands of the Government there was only a small triangle with the Telefónica building at its apex, the upper floors where the workers resisted to the end, and the line between the leadership of Security and the Palace of the Generalitat as its base. Apart from this, there was no Stalino-capitalist reaction, but only a **few focus-points that could be easily defeated**. Unlike other insurrections in Barcelona, it did not even have the artillery of Montjuich. The batteries of the castle were still in the hands of workers, and the shots were precisely targeted at the Generalitat. They were ready to fire at the first order of the C.N.T.

The insurgent workers did not have to think about seizing the governmental triangle, nor did the shots of the adversary stop them; they were halted by the C.N.T.'s own leadership. The immense majority of the rebels belonged to it. Although the conduct of the anarchist leadership had already aroused serious misgivings among the workers, they still had confidence in the C.N.T. It was their organization; with it and for it they had fought for many years. It was natural and forced by the circumstances that, given the lack of another organization with enough force to provide the necessary direction, that the workers, forming a narrow fence of barricades around the zone of the Generalitat, waited for the command of the C.N.T. Who among them was not persuaded that the C.N.T. would put itself at its head with the purpose of disarming the enemy definitively and incapacitating it for new reactionary traps?

The C.N.T. spoke, but not as the workers expected, in order to act as its head; it spoke from the barricade and for the barricade in the telephonic triangle - the leadership of Security-Generalitat. Since day 3, the leaders of Barcelona had made an effort to contain the insurrectionary torrent. On the 4th, García Oliver and Federica Montseny, ministers in the government of Largo Caballero, arrived by plane from Valencia, together with a representative of the U.G.T., Hernández Zancajo, in order to use their joint influence to lift the workers' siege on the capitalist powers. They immediately used the radio microphone to condemn the action of the workers and order: "fire". García Oliver in particular, emboldened by his responsibilities to capitalist power, blew kisses at the assault guards. For a long time, García Oliver's voice were hammered into workers' ears at the barricades: "fire; kisses to the assault guards".

On the same day, the 4th, this manifesto was distributed in the barricades:

C.N.T. F.A.I

"Lay down your arms; embrace each other like brothers! We will have victory if we unite: we will find defeat if we fight among ourselves. Think about it. Think about it well; we stretch out our arms to you without weapons; do the same and everything will end. May there be harmony among us".

Moments later, the C.N.T broadcasted:

**"Let it be the government of the Generalitat that purges in its bosom the bad work that could have been done by whoever it may be, and no matter how much advice is said".**

And it was followed by a new call to lay down one's arms.

The workers could not believe their ears or their eyes. The C.N.T. from which they expected everything, on the other side of the barricade! At the moment when the heavens should have been stormed, as Marx would say, the heavens were coming down on them instead. Without a doubt, in no revolution have the insurgents experienced such unexpected and brutal disappointment. The outcome of revolution and war,

of the battle between capitalism and socialism, slavery and freedom, of Franco with the good offices, Stalinists and reformists, and the proletariat, was elucidated at that moment; it was even elucidated whether Europe would be irremediably condemned to the catastrophe of imperialist war or would be saved from it by the international revolution, and the high leadership of the C.N.T. had come to call the struggle a fratricide and to send kisses to the hitmen of capitalism! It was not the revolution, but the counterrevolution that found itself an ally. It was a devastating test for the anarchist leadership, one of those supreme tests provided by the exigencies of historical action, from which an organization comes out transformed, whatever its previous traditions and merits. More than once, mainly on July 19, Spanish anarchism had demonstrated an opportunistic streak, but up until the days of May 1937 there was still time for it to correct itself. The spontaneous and formidable proletarian insurrection fought the **negation of humanity** with its capacity to move the human process, because ideas have to become real or else be denied as such as ideas. Anarchism denied itself in the days of May. (...)

The anarchist leadership, because it was already practiced in collaborating, was only able to see darkness outside of it. It did not ignore that the proletariat was fighting for revolution at that moment, and that counterrevolution, mainly represented by Stalinism, would relentlessly triumph. Precisely because it was aware of this, the words of the manifesto C.N.T.-F.A.I. were addressed to the stalinists: "...we stretch out our arms to you without weapons; do the same and everything will end. May there be harmony among us". What would have happened to the great French revolution if, when the Prussians and the French emigrants were at the gates of Paris, the Jacobins had extended their unarmed arms to the Girondins, instead of expelling them from power as well as energetically ridding themselves of all those who conspired against the revolution? Undoubtedly, Louis XVI would have been restored to the throne. Thus our anarchists, lacking the resolve of the Jacobins, saved the Spanish Girondins at the very moment when the masses were preparing to exterminate them, and paved the way for the Restoration: Franco. (...)

It is not possible to ignore the attitude of the P.O.U.M. during the days of May. It was the last political test from which it emerged definitively marked as an impotent centrist party, placed like an inert crossbeam in the path of the masses. During the infamous trial that the Stalin-Negri government put the leaders of the P.O.U.M. through, after the May defeat, after having the untenable false accusations of espionage dismissed, the stalinists accused the leaders of the P.O.U.M. of wanting to replace "the legally constituted Government" with a revolutionary one. Nothing could be further from the truth. As I had the opportunity to say to some POUMist militants at the time, the Stalin-Negri court gave the P.O.U.M. the grace to give it the elaborated revolutionary program it was missing and to attribute to it a political activity during the days of May that it lacked completely.

The attitude of the P.O.U.M. during the barricade fight was a docile reflection of that of the C.N.T. Its militants, like those of the latter, took up arms and behaved courageously. The organization as a political body was absolutely non-existent... or it existed dangerously inclined towards the triangle Telephonic-leadership of General Security, from where the anarchist leaders spoke of concord. Once the struggle was unleashed, the executive committee of the P.O.U.M. went to meet with the regional committee of the C.N.T. The regional committee, absolutely determined to force the workers to lay down their arms, sent the P.O.U.M. to its home assuring it that it would be called if necessary. Meanwhile, the pacifiers, the "firefighters", using the derogatory term with which the workers designated them, they continued throwing, from the radio and from Solidaridad Obrera, their streams of fraternity. The effective meaning of this fraternity can be deduced from two culled facts of a thousand. On the 4th, the C.N.T. having decreed a

*truce in the struggle, while negotiating in the Generalitat with the counterrevolutionary leaders, government forces of the Civil Guard took advantage of the "fraternal" truce to seize the station in France. The next day the C.N.T. gave orders to withdraw from the barricades, declaring: Neither victors, nor defeated; everyone in peace. But it was the day of greatest worker casualties. However, after natural hesitations were produced after the order became known, the workers chose to disobey it. Some abandoned barricades were immediately recovered. The distance between the leadership and the mass could not have been more total.*

*What did the P.O.U.M. do when presented with such excellent opportunities? Its leaders report having made very combative and revolutionary proposals in the meeting with the regional committee. Let us believe them without further proof. But a revolutionary leadership is not only distinguished by its revolutionary proposals, but above all by its activity to put them into practice when other leaders oppose them. The leadership of the P.O.U.M. remained constantly in tow of the anarchist leadership, fearing to separate from it when it refused to march with the masses. On the third day of struggle, when the C.N.T. gave the order to leave the barricades, the POUMista leadership repeated the order. It immediately rectified, once, having contradicted the order of the "friends of Durruti" and the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain (Trotskyists), the workers disobeyed the instructions of the C.N.T. Finally, when the last barricades disappeared, Solidaridad Obrera announced the end of the struggle as a triumph for the workers. Gloomy echo: La Batalla repeated: "Having been crushed the attempt (of provocation) by the working class, the retreat is imposed". What political value, what suitability to lead the revolution can the workers attribute to a party that pretended to pass for victory the defeat that weeks later would produce its own illegality and the assassination of its secretary general? Evidently, at that moment the P.O.U.M. deliberately deceived itself, and deceived the masses, in order not to be forced to renounce all collaboration and to undertake a fight to the death against the traitors. Thus it was reduced to the sad role of accomplice of accomplices.*

*Only the two new groups already mentioned, the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain and the "Friends of Durruti", were placed entirely on the side of the proletariat during the days of May. None of these organizations had participated, neither a little nor a lot, in the initiation of the movement. But both supported it energetically from the first moment, they made an effort to unite it and to give it political objectives.*

- G. Munis, *Jalones de derrota, promesas de victoria*, 1948

After the "events of May", a savage repression is unleashed against the Marxists. The PCE and the Russian secret service, which also control the republican military intelligence (SIM), maintain irregular torture and detention centers. Soon the disappearances begin. Among the most famous: Nin, whose body will not be discovered until 2008 in Alcalá de Henares.

The PCE also wants to put on a show in the style of the Stalinist trials in Russia. It is the *famous trial against the POUM* in which it wants to present, in a rigged trial, the POUM as a Trotskyist and Trotskyism as a conscious tool of fascism to force a defeat of the Republic.

The majority of the *Bolshevik-Leninist Section* falls between January and early February. They are held incommunicado for a month in a prison of the PCE - the so-called *Cheka* - run by Grimau and harshly tortured. They are accused of being Franco's spies, of murdering a Polish GPU agent and of planning the murders of Negrín, of the main leaders at the time of the PCE (Díaz, Ibárruri, Comorera) and of the PSOE (Prieto, Largo Caballero, etc.). A joke of a trial is made behind closed doors and without a

defense. Finally, in March they are transferred to the Model (prison in Barcelona) to rest before testifying in the trial against the POUM. Munis does it on March 11, presents himself before the court as the leader of Spanish Trotskyism and refutes the accusation that the POUM is Trotskyist. In the Model, he encouraged the regrouping of POUMistas and members of the Spanish section of the still *International Left Opposition*, which was about to declare itself the Fourth International. They all agree that there is,

*“the need for a political struggle for clarification within the POUM, with the intervention of the Bolsheviks-Leninists”.*

Transferred to the *state prison* in December, he would become one of the leaders of the mutiny of the revolutionary prisoners and confined in the dungeon of those condemned to death in Monjuic. His hearing is moved to January 26, 1939 to separate it from that of the POUM. In the chaos of mass desertions that accompanied the retreat from Barcelona, Munis and some members of the POUM and SB-I managed to escape, saving themselves from being shot at the last minute and going to various refugee camps in France.

In the French concentration camps, the publication of analyses began and a debate was being developed, emerging first in the republican prisons, on the attitude to be taken before the IVth International. The majority of the current, grouped around the magazine *Nuevo Curso*, believes that there are no conditions for the proclamation of an International to be something more than pie in the sky, especially because everyone agrees that the defeat of the Spanish revolution supposes the defeat of the world proletariat and opens the doors to a new imperialist war. In spite of everything, the entire section, that is, the survivors of the camps, is constituted as the Spanish section of the Fourth International.

Munis, who was born in Mexico, managed to leave France in order to meet Trotsky in Mexico City and obtain visas. The battle against the Stalinist slander campaign that presents him, along with Victor Serge and other European exiles as *agents of the Gestapo*, takes place in an increasingly violent atmosphere that preludes Trotsky's assassination in May 40.

### **The Fourth International**

If not having offered resistance to Hitler's seizure of power made it clear that the Third International was dead from a class point of view, the Spanish Revolution made it clear that Stalinism was no longer simply *thermidorian*, **it was not just a reactionary excrescence of the Revolution that opened the doors to bourgeois counterrevolution....**

*“Precisely when the revolution reached its pinnacle in Spain in 1936, the Stalinist counterrevolution consolidated its power in Russia for many years, through the extermination of millions of men. Consequently, its Spanish section had deliberately, since July 19, behaved as the standard bearer of the counterrevolution, compromised since the beginning, and shameless since May 1937. Following strict orders from Moscow, it pounced on a proletariat that had just annihilated capitalism. This fact, attested by thousands of Stalinist documents of the time, represents a definitive reactionary mutation of foreign Stalinism, in accordance with the previous mutation of its matrix, Russian Stalinism.*

*A reflection conditioned by the different parts of the IVth International and of others who look at it with disdain, assigns to Stalinism an opportunist and reformist role, of class collaboration, comparable to that of Kerensky or Noske. A serious mistake, because what Stalinism did was to politically direct the counterrevolution, and implement it with its own weapons, its own henchmen and its own uniformed and secret police. It immediately stood out as the far-right reactionary party in the red zone, essential to annihilate the revolution. As in Russia, and much earlier than in Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, etc., the so-called Communist Party acted as the owner of capital, monopolized by one of its own States. It is impossible to imagine a more profoundly anti-communist policy. Far from collaborating with the bourgeois republican parties or with the socialist party, which still had a reformist streak, Stalinism had them collaborate with it, soon appearing to its left, as traditional democrats. Many were stunned and fearful at the same time, contemplating the treacherous anti-revolutionary expertise of a party they still regarded as communist. But they gave in, after all, through their own maneuvers they had covered before the enormous workers' wave.*

- G. Munis, *Reaffirmation*, 1977

That is to say, Stalinism was already the head of the counterrevolution itself and as such the working class had gone from arming itself with the critique of the Opposition, in scarce circles and minority organizations; to arming itself with.... arms. When the Spanish proletariat, rifle in hand, defended its Revolution against Stalinism, a profound change had occurred.

The defeat of the Spanish proletariat left to the bourgeoisie the way to a new imperialist world war. The workers and the world had before them a new massacre. It was not only the International Communist Left that saw it clearly. So did Stalin. The memory of Lenin remained fresh and both Trotsky and he recalled the contrast between the loneliness of the internationalists in August 1914 and the first proletarian reactions against the war only two years later. The war had been the midwife of the Revolution. Trotsky drew revolutionary consequences: despite the misery of the revolutionary forces grouped together by the Opposition, a new International was more urgent than ever. Stalin, for his part, knew the immense pressure of the social forces that he barely kept compressed in a box in an increasingly oppressive and violent way. He feared a new revolution more than anyone else and also realized that the outcome of the war, whether or not it became a revolutionary civil war, would depend to a large extent, as in 1917, on the existence of a political organization of the class.

In Stalin's Russia what remained of *Lenin's party* formed a part of the mass of (literal) slaves. Thousands, apparently tens of thousands of militants, had been in forced-labor camps for more than a decade, suffering torture and abuse. In spite of everything, they fought, organized strikes, maintained their cohesion as a group and gave shape to a lively discussion and political elaboration.

After so many years, Stalin realized that not even the most brutal methods and mass murders would subdue the *Trotskyists* and ordered the massacre of GPU chief Yezhov. Beyond the sinister parody of the *Moscow trials*, Stalinism culminated in the systematic and massive extermination of the remaining cadres of the old Bolshevik party.

*"For over ten years Stalin had kept the Trotskyists behind bars and barbed wire, and subjecting them to inhuman persecution, demoralized many of them, divided them, and almost succeeded in cutting them off from society. By 1934 Trotskyism seemed to have been stamped out completely. Yet two or three years later Stalin was more afraid of it than ever. Paradoxically, the great purges and mass deportations that followed the assassination of Kirov gave fresh life to Trotskyism. With tens and even hundreds of thousands of newly-banished people around them, the Trotskyists were no longer isolated. They were rejoined by the mass of capitulators, who ruefully reflected that things might have been different if they had held out with the Trotskyists. Oppositionists of younger age groups, Komsomoltsy who first turned against Stalin long after Trotskyism had been defeated, 'deviationists' of every possible variety, ordinary workers deported for trivial offenses against labor discipline, and malcontents and grumblers who began to think politically only behind barbed wire - all these formed an immense new audience for the Trotskyist veterans.*

*The regime in the concentration camps was more and more cruel: the inmates had to slave ten or twelve hours a day; they starved; and they wasted away amid disease and indescribable squalor. Yet the camps were once again becoming schools and training grounds of the opposition, with the Trotskyists as the unrivaled tutors. It was they who were at the head of the deportees in nearly all the strikes and hunger strikes, who confronted the management with demands for improvement in camp conditions, and who by their defiant, often heroic behavior, inspired others to hold out. Tightly organized, self-disciplined, and politically well-informed, they were the real elite of that huge segment of the nation that had been cast behind the barbed wire.*

*Stalin realized that he would achieve nothing by further persecution. It was hardly possible to add to the torment and the oppression, which had only surrounded the Trotskyists with the halo of martyrdom. They were a menace to him as long as they were alive; and with war and its hazards approaching, the potential threat might become actual. We have seen that since he had first seized power he had to reconquer it over and over again. He now decided to rid himself of the necessity to go on reconquering it; he was out to ensure it once and for all and against all hazards. There was only one way in which he could achieve this: by the wholesale extermination of his opponents; above all, of the Trotskyists. The Moscow trials had been staged to justify this design, the main part of which was now carried out, not in the limelight of the courtrooms, but in the dungeons and camps of the East and far North.*

*An eye-witness, an ex-inmate of the great Vorkuta camp but not a Trotskyist himself, thus describes the last activities of the Trotskyists and their annihilation. There were, he says, in his camp alone about a thousand old Trotskyists, calling themselves 'Bolshevik-Leninists'. Roughly five-hundred of these worked at the Vorkuta colliery. In all the camps of the Pechora province there were several thousands of 'orthodox Trotskyists', who 'had been in deportation since 1927' and 'remained true to their political ideas and leader till the end'...*

*'Apart from these genuine Trotskyists', he goes on to say, 'there were about this time more than one hundred thousand inmates of the camps in Vorkuta and elsewhere, who as party members of Komsomoltsky had joined the Trotskyist Opposition and had then, at various times and for various reasons,... been forced to "recant and admit their mistakes" and to leave the ranks of the Opposition.' Many deportees, who had never been party members, also regarded themselves as Trotskyists. These numbers again must include oppositionists of every possible shade, even some of Rykov's and Bukharin's adherents, and newcomers of the young and youngest age groups, as our eye-witness himself indicates.*

*'All the same', he remarks, 'the Trotskyists proper, the followers of L.D. Trotsky, were the most numerous group.' Among their leaders he lists V.V. Kossior, Posnansky, Vladimir Ivanov, and other authentic Trotskyists of long standing. 'They arrived at the colliery in the summer of 1936 and were put up...in two large shanties. They refused categorically to work in the pits. They worked only at the pitheads for not more than eight hours a day, not ten or twelve hours, as the regulations required and as all other inmates labored. They ignored the camp regulations ostentatiously and in an organized manner. Most of them had spent about ten years in isolation, first in jails, then in camps on the Solovky Islands, and finally at Vorkuta. The Trotskyists were the only groups of political prisoners who openly criticized the Stalinist 'general line' and openly and in an organized manner resisted the jailers.'*

*They still proclaimed, as Trotsky did abroad, that in case of war they would defend the Soviet Union unconditionally, but seek to overthrow Stalin's government; and even 'ultra-lefts', like Saprnov's adherents, shared this attitude, though with reservations*

*In the autumn of 1936, after the trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev, the Trotskyists arranged camp meetings and demonstrations in honor of their executed comrades and leaders. Shortly after, on 27 October, they began a hunger strike - this was the strike in which, according to the account quoted earlier, Sergei, Trotsky's younger son, took part. The Trotskyists of all the Pechora camps joined in and the strike lasted 132 days.*

*The strikers protested against their transfer from previous places of deportation and their penalization without open trial. They demanded an eight-hour working day, the same food for all inmates (regardless of whether they fulfilled production norms or not), separation of political and criminal prisoners, and the removal of invalids, women, and old people from sub-Polar regions to areas with a milder climate. The decision to strike was taken at an open meeting. Sick and old-age prisoners were exempted; but the latter categorically rejected the exemption'.*

*In almost every barrack non-Trotskyists responded to the call, but only 'in the shanties of the Trotskyists was the strike complete'.*

*The administration, afraid that the strike might spread, transferred the Trotskyists to some half-ruined and deserted huts twenty-five miles away from the camp. Of a total of 1,000 strikers several died and only two abandoned the strike; but those two were not Trotskyists. In March 1937, on order from Moscow, the camp administration yielded on all points; and the strike came to an end. In the next few months, before the Yezhov terror reached its height, the Trotskyists benefitted from the rights they had won; and this raised the spirits of all other deportees so much that many of them looked forward to the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, hoping that a partial amnesty would be promulgated.*

*But presently the terror came back with fresh fury. The food ration was reduced to 400 grams of bread a day. The G.P.U. armed criminal prisoners with clubs and incited them against the Oppositionists. There were indiscriminate shootings; and all political prisoners were isolated in a camp within the camp, surrounded by barbed wire, and guarded by a hundred heavily armed soldiers, day and night. One morning, towards the end of March 1938, twenty-five men, mostly leading Trotskyists, were called out, given a kilogram of bread each, and ordered to collect their belongings and prepare for a march. 'After giving a warm farewell to their friends, they left the shanties; there was a roll call and they were marched out. In about fifteen or twenty minutes a volley was suddenly fired about half a kilometer from the shanties, near the steep bank of a little river, the Upper Vorkuta. Then a few disorderly shots were heard, and silence fell.*

Soon the men of the escort were back, and they passed by the shanties. Everyone understood what march it was the twenty-five had been sent on.'

On the next day no fewer than forty people were called out in this way, given their bread ration, and ordered to get ready. 'Some were so exhausted that they could not walk; they were promised they would be put on carts. With bated breath the people in the shanties listened to the creaking of the snow under the feet of those who were marched away. All sounds had already died down; yet everyone was still listening tensely. After about an hour shots resounded across the tundra.' The crowd in the shanties knew now what awaited them; but after the long hunger strike of the previous year and many more months of freezing and starvation, they had not the strength to resist. 'Throughout April and part of May the executions in the tundra went on. Every day or every other day thirty to forty people would be called out...' Communiqués were broadcast over loudspeakers:

'For counter-revolutionary agitation, sabotage, banditry, refusal to work, and attempts to escape, the following have been executed....' 'Once a large group, about a hundred people, mostly Trotskyists, were taken out...As they marched away, they sang the Internationale; and hundreds of voices in the shanties joined in the singing.' The eye-witness describes the executions of the families of the Oppositionists - the wife of one Trotskyist walked on her crutches to the execution place. Children were left alive only if they were less than twelve years of age. The massacre went on in all the camps of the Pechora province and lasted until May. At Vorkuta 'only a little over a hundred people were left alive in the huts. About two weeks passed by quietly. Then the survivors were sent back to the colliery, where they were told that Yezhov had been dismissed and that Beria was in charge of the G.P.U.'

By this time hardly any of the authentic Trotskyists or Zinovievists were left alive. When about two years later hundreds of thousands of new deportees, Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians, arrived in the camps, they found among the old inmates many disgraced Stalinists and even a few Bukharinists, but no Trotskyists or Zinovievists. An old deportee would tell the story of their extermination in whispers or hints, because nothing was more dangerous even for a wretched deportee than to draw on himself the suspicion of harboring any sympathy or pity for the Trotskyists.

The terror of the Yezhov period amounted to **political genocide: it destroyed the whole species of the anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks**. During the remaining fifteen years of Stalin's rule no group was left in Soviet society, not even in the prisons and camps, capable of challenging him.

No center of independent political thinking had been allowed to survive. **A tremendous gap had been torn in the nation's consciousness; its collective memory was shattered**; the continuity of its revolutionary traditions was broken; and its capacity to form and crystallize any non-conformist notions was destroyed. The Soviet Union was finally left, not merely in its practical politics, but even in its hidden mental processes, without any alternative to Stalinism. (Such was the amorphousness of the popular mind that even after Stalin's death no anti-Stalinist movement could spring from below, from the depth of the Soviet society; and the reform of the most anachronistic features of the Stalinist régime could be undertaken only from above, by Stalin's former underlings and accomplices.)

While the trials in Moscow were engaging the world's awestruck attention, the great massacre in the concentration camps passed almost unnoticed. It was carried out in such deep secrecy that it took years for the truth to leak out. Trotsky knew better than anyone that only a small part of the terror revealed itself through the trials; he surmised what was happening in the background. Yet even he could not guess or

visualize the whole truth; and had he done so, his mind would hardly have been able to absorb its full enormity and all its implications during the short time left to it. He still assumed that the anti-Stalinist forces would presently come to the fore, articulate and politically effective; and in particular that they would be able to overthrow Stalin in the course of the war and to conduct the war towards a victorious and revolutionary conclusion. He still believed that there would be a regeneration of the old Bolshevism to whose wide and deep influence Stalin's ceaseless crusades paid tribute. He was unaware of the fact that all anti-Stalinist forces had been wiped out; that Trotskyism, Zinovievism, and Bukharinism, all drowned in blood, had, like some Atlantis, vanished from all political horizons; and that he himself was now the sole survivor of Atlantis".

- Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet: The Life of Leon Trotsky*

It is no coincidence that the *May days*, the start of the final Bolshevik massacre in Russia and the founding of the Fourth International followed one another in just 18 months. When the Spanish Revolution was defeated, the road to war was opened, but also the possibility of its transformation into a civil war, into a new world revolutionary wave. Stalin's response was to massacre the Bolshevik party, while the response of that of the International Communist Left was to try to constitute as soon as possible and at all costs the International that Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht lacked in 1914.

The Fourth International had a modest constituent congress: 21 delegates representing organizations from 11 countries crammed together for an entire day in the Rosmer flat in Paris. Most of the discussions focused on whether or not to proclaim the International. The opposition was led by the Polish delegation - a continuation of the party re-founded by Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches. Its position, although a minority one, appeared in a good part of the sections: the previous internationals were linked to the ascendant phase of the class struggle, founding an international after the Spanish defeat could easily be an *empty gesture*. It was necessary to consolidate organizations based on real revolutionary processes and on developments capable of generating a traction similar to that exercised by October on the workers of the world, in order to proclaim the new International. That is to say, those who were opposed to the idea proposed to forge valid organizations before proposing a world alternative to the class.

Given the real state of the opposition, it was true that proclaiming the International in 1938 was not equivalent to launching a freighter in the middle of the storm, but rather to launching a flotilla of poorly caulked fishing boats. Shachtman, who chaired the meeting - Trotsky was already confined in Mexico and Lev Sedov had just been assassinated in Paris by the GPU on February 16 - did his best to close the debate without excessive argumentation accusing the Poles of being *Mensheviks*. His inappropriate attitude was the first sign of one of the dangers involved in proclaiming the International in those conditions. The parties that had the most options to grow and to *influence* were those that were the furthest from forging themselves in the real class struggle, while the most active, inevitably decimated by the ferocity of a triumphant counterrevolution, tended to be underrepresented. In other words, the more eye-catching the organizational outcomes of a leader and the more inflated he was by them, the more likely he was to represent nothing more than bureaucratic inertia or *intellectual adventurism*. Shachtman, Canon, Frank or his protégé Mandel, would be a good example of the latter categories; while the most active would be represented by everything that would constitute the *left wing* in the 1940s and within it the internationalist faction.

But in 1938, Trotsky, who assured Natalia Sedova that what he most wanted was to *have only two more years* to construct a successor to the historical internationals, thought that what was important at that moment was to found it on solid political foundations and he dedicated to writing the defining text of that congress: the *Transition Program*. This program, just like the program of the Third International that came before it in 1919 and to a large extent that of the Second International in 1889, *lagged behind world events from the very moment it was approved* (G.Munis). Although it was not clear at the moment it would become so later.

*“Leon Trotsky made the mistake of asserting that state property in Russia was introduced because of the 1917 revolution. In reality it was because of the non-transformation of that permanent revolution into a socialist revolution, its only raison d'être. Capital passed to the State, and far from losing its nature it was refined and went acquiring increasingly brutal characteristics as the counterrevolution arose and was consolidated; political counterrevolution, yes, because only politically did the revolution of 1917 remain intact, before being destroyed.*

*Departing from such an error, Trotsky believed that, being at war, the usurper of power that is Stalinism would be forced to make concessions to the proletariat and that the latter would resume the revolution. The Kremlin, on the other hand, reinforced its terrorism at the same time as the Nazi armies advanced inside Russia. The western sector of the old capitalism, far from being the enemy of the Russian property system, ran to its aid and saved it from defeat by scorning the offers of peace that Hitler simultaneously made to it. In other words, the internal contradictions of capitalism, the cause of the war between Germany and the Westerners, were far greater than what was supposed to be the irreconcilable opposition between the capitalist property system and the Russian system. The proof was there: there was no such opposition. Russia was subjected to the internal contradictions of the world capitalist system, and nothing more”.*

G. Munis. "Analysis of a vacuum", 1971-72

It is by no means the case that Trotsky - and with him the majority of the new International - was unaware that such a scenario might be the one they were living in. He simply needed more to reconsider the idea - defended by Lenin during the NEP - that state ownership, under a soviet-led state, i.e. by the organized working class, would have a socialist character.

*“If contrary to all probabilities the October Revolution fails during the course of the present war, or immediately thereafter, to find its continuation in any of the advanced countries; and if, on the contrary, the proletariat is thrown back everywhere and on all fronts - then we should doubtlessly have to pose the question of revising our conception of the present epoch and its driving forces. In that case it would be a question not of slapping a copy book label on the USSR or the Stalinist gang but of reevaluating the world historical perspective for the next decades if not centuries: Have we entered the epoch of social revolution and socialist society, or on the contrary the epoch of the decadent society of totalitarian bureaucracy?”*

- Leon Trotsky, *The USSR in War*, 1939

Trotsky, for whom the unconditional defense of the USSR only made sense if understood as a revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucracy, was well aware that if indeed the bureaucracy had become an independent class as a state form of the bourgeoisie, a revolutionary International would discover it in practice. In other words, it would have to choose between its fidelity to the revolution

and its defense of state property. Trotsky took it for granted that it would opt for the former.

*"On the other hand, Trotsky also hoped that other revolutions would triumph and liquidate Stalinism at its roots. What came about was an enormous territorial extension of Stalinist rule, its apotheosis. Trotsky's analysis was evidently mistaken, as he himself had anticipated himself in the case that his predictions did not turn out true".*

G. Munis. "Analysis of a vacuum", 1971-72

The reality was that after his assassination, the International split in two: between the internationalists and the *main* parties, such as the American SWP.

The road to the collapse of the International began, while Trotsky was still alive, with the *Emergency Conference*. The German troops had entered Paris and nothing seemed more prudent than bringing the organs of the International to the United States, a neutral country then that would still take two years to join the war. As a consequence, the SWP would become the center of the organization, a center only compensated and supervised from afar, at a time when travel and communications were little less than heroic, by a Trotsky who was harassed and attacked in Mexico until his assassination by Stalinist agents in 1940.

A few weeks after Trotsky's death, the S.W.P. begins to make a speech that is increasingly "defensist" and "antifascist". The call for *war on war*, for the *transformation of imperialist war into revolutionary civil war* was converted into an ambiguous call to *not support or intervene* in the war. Cannon, the main leader of the S.W.P., offered to, in the case that the United States entered the war, support the Roosevelt government if they were to allow the unions to take charge of the military formation of the workers. However, although it is obvious that the S.W.P. with that policy did not pose any danger to the war effort of the American bourgeoisie, in 1941 the main party leaders were tried in Minneapolis. Their defense, unlike that of Luxemburg or Liebknecht, was shameful. At one point of the trial, it went so far as to say,

*"Both our members and the workers we influence have to go to war and do what the rulers of this country tell them to do. As long as we do not have a majority behind us, we are not in a position to do anything but obey orders".*

Instead of turning the trial into a judgement against militarism and imperialism, they play with ambiguity by reducing the party's aspirations to a *political opposition* that Cannon sums up by continuing to call for *America to change its foreign policy*.

*"It was while the American party was absent from the Russian war that the first symptoms of deviation were noted. Shortly thereafter, while everybody was thrown in the slaughter, the S.W.P. deliberately took back the revolutionary formulations against the imperialist war, and refused to fight against it. It tried to justify these actions by utilizing such language to camouflage itself from the eye of the police and by adapting its tones to what the then patriotic ears of the proletariat were receptive to. But the most despicable and at the same time tragic thing about opportunism is that, despite cutting off its access to the education and revolutionary mobilization of the masses, it still cannot avoid the blows of the reaction unless it submits entirely to it. Thus the leaders of the S.W.P. were sarcastically accused by their government of internationalism and revolutionary defeatism, the very thing they avoided, and went to jail for a year*

*and a half or two for a crime they had to duty to commit, but of which they were always careful not to commit[...]*

*The American S.W.P. leaders had little of the fiber and mental consistency of a Liebknecht. They proclaimed before their judges, not the need to transform imperialist war into civil war, but into a real war against fascism. The American government was clumsily accused of inability to account for Berlin, and its press presented stupendous programs to defeat Hitler. The words, revolutionary defeatism, made them cringe and express opposition. All internationalist formulations were carefully crossed out of magazines and newspapers, including the simple word **"imperialist"** unless it referred to the national enemy. Throughout the war - an overwhelmingly demonstrative fact in itself - they did not organize a single act against it, nor did they pass out a single leaflet. The English I.L.P. and the Spanish P.O.U.M. were even terminologically similar. In a word, the S.W.P. substituted the revolutionary policy for the bourgeois and Stalinist policy of antifascism.*

*All this was done in the name of tactics and educational efficiency. It is an old custom for opportunists to present their abandonment of principles as practical or as a way to ease the lives of the masses, at the same time as; in moments of repression, as an unavoidable legalist form of protection. They try to deceive the class enemy when in reality they are deceived by it; they boast of educating and winning the masses, while softening the revolutionary content of their own militants. The masses cannot be attracted to revolutionary principles and action but by the most delicately crafted formulations and attitudes.*

*The example of the S.W.P. spread. Shortly after its opportunistic turn, the English section of the Fourth International, which had achieved considerable growth by supporting the strikes that those of Labor and the Trade Union had condemned patriotically, was also put on trial. Its main leader, the accused, also invoking "practicality", chose to repeat the miserable opportunist chatter of the Socialist Worker's Party in order to defend himself.*

*The harmful repercussions of these two examples cannot be understood without taking into account that the United States was then the headquarters of the World Executive Committee and that due to the war the press of the American party -the press of the English party to a lesser degree- was the only one capable of reaching all the sections and groups in the countries not occupied by Germany and Japan.*

*Shouts of protest were immediately raised. The author of these lines, then a member of the World Executive Committee, gave the alert as early as 1941, by reporting the first alarming symptoms of opportunism before the impudence to which it gave rise. After this, the Spanish Group that had emigrated to Mexico, which included militants from France and other countries, publicly distanced itself from the American majority and from the Executive Committee, practicing from then on an independent policy. At the same time, it drafted an energetic and critical document that called for proletarian internationalism, bringing discussion to all the sections with a view to a future world congress. We will see later what was the result. But that was not the only criticism of opportunism. Others arose in China, South America, in the very bosom of the S.W.P. Later critiques in France would come to the light.*

*Thus, during the middle of a world war and with the victory of one side or the other undecided, the policy of the Fourth International, mainly articulated by the American party, appeared to seriously abandon internationalist principles and tasks. That failure, that capitulation, it can be said bluntly, created a despicable subterfuge for those responsible for it. Since it was clearly impossible for them to be faithful to proletarian internationalism, they invented their own fidelity to the principles of defending Russia as a*

*degenerated workers' state, more comfortable since Russia, after it became friends with Hitler, had become the beloved ally of the respective homelands of the opportunists.*

*At the Fourth International, Russia's defense was never anything other than a contestable opinion subject to the contrast of experience. In its heart were accepted living tendencies radically contrary to the notion of the degenerate workers state; they were reprimanded, however, after their surrender to the patriotic antifascist S.W.P. and executive committee. On the other hand, the lack of internationalism, in a larger sense, its abandonment during the war, was incompatible with belonging to the organization, because evidently, those who had not remained firm in the face of the immense force and maneuvers of national defensism were disqualified for any decisive revolutionary action. In New York, the internationalism of the Fourth International was slain. The defense of Russia became its main criterion of filiation. The consequences of this lie were devastating”.*

G. Munis, *The IVth International*, 1959

The political response would come, already in 1941, from Natalia Sedova - old militant and recent widow of Trotsky - to which will be added the group exiled in Mexico of the Spanish section. Sedova, Munis and Peret tried to bring forth a debate by denouncing the attitude first of the S.W.P and then of the International Secretariat. They demanded the holding of the second congress which is compulsory by statute and which the Americans and their allies in France and Great Britain would manage to delay until 1948. Their criticisms were engendering a set of positions that would end up giving rise to a left-wing fraction in the organization. This left-wing faction departed from a criticism of the betrayal of internationalism led by the American leadership.

It is no coincidence that the internationalist faction was also nourished by *Spaniards*, that is to say, by militants who lived the Spanish revolution with the section in exile -including those in France- as well as by Greeks, Vietnamese, Italians... that is to say, of those countries in which the proletariat is revolutionarily facing the war: Italy in '43, Greece in '44, Vietnam in '46... the role of Stalinism as head of the counterrevolution that was first seen in Spain, was repeated country by country... and the International could not succeed in placing itself in the revolutionary vanguard. When in 1946 the SI published a *Manifesto* for the *pre-conference* with which it wanted to tie the *Second Congress*, reducing it to *Conference*, the left responded with what in the previous four years has already become a practically complete programmatic alternative.

*“The Fourth International will not be able to fulfill its revolutionary mission if it does not unreservedly abandon the defense of the USSR in favor of a policy of ruthless struggle against capitalism and its accomplice, Stalinism. In order to conduct this struggle victoriously, it is necessary to reveal at every step and in practice the counterrevolutionary character of the Russian bureaucracy that stands in the interior as a class in formation, that oppresses Eastern Europe and Asia. It is necessary to unmask the lie of its "nationalizations" and agrarian "reforms", to develop fraternization between occupiers and occupied, clearly declaring that neither one nor the other has anything to defend in Russia, but to destroy everything the same as in any capitalist state, as well as the agents of the Kremlin participating or not in the government. Fraternization between occupiers and occupied must be the central theme of our agitation in the occupied territories, regardless of the occupying power. It is the only way to combat chauvinism both among the defeated and among the victors, and to prepare an international front of the exploited against the exploiters. At the same time, the evacuation of all occupied territories, including those occupied by the*

*Russians, must be demanded with increasing insistence.*

*In the rest of the world, we must show at all times that Stalinism is only the national agent of the foreign policy of the Kremlin, whose interests are always opposed to those of the socialist revolution, which would be its definitive ruin; that the fate of the workers is totally indifferent to it; that it is the best defender of the national bourgeoisie because it does not foresee any future other than that linked to the fate of the Russian counterrevolution.*

*Therefore, the slogan of the PS-PC-CGT government for France, and any similar slogan in any other country, must be abandoned because it only aims at breaking the revolutionary thrust of the masses by handing over the vanguard to the GPU.*

*The policy of united front from organization to organization in the present stage, must be abandoned as far as the traditional "workers" parties are concerned. It must be replaced, from now on, by proposals of a united front to the minority workers' organizations that are capable of producing immediate results, such as, for example, the anarchists. However, the united front, in precise and immediate tasks must be advocated in the factory, in the locality and if possible in the region.*

*Our transitional program should be polished in the same way. For the time being, the demand for the Constituent must disappear, as well as all the slogans that rest on a progressive conception of our program for the masses in the present stage. The world today is going through an acute revolutionary crisis and our organization must prepare itself for the decisive struggles that lie ahead, since no further development of capitalism can be expected, be it peaceful or not. So we must tirelessly raise, popularize and explain the slogan of the formation of democratically elected workers councils in the workplace, so that they could be established at the first opportunity. To this slogan must be added all the consequences it implies: formation of workers militias that obey only the committees elected by the masses, disarmament of the bourgeois forces, congress of the workers' committees, dissolution of the bourgeois state and creation of the workers state.*

*At the same time, on the economic plane, the agitation must insist fundamentally on the sliding scale of wages, coupled with the sliding scale of working hours with no decrease in wages, with all its ramifications: set in motion by the workers of factories closed by the capitalists, seizure of the assets of the capitalists by the workers starting with profits of the war and of the black market, and finally the confiscation of factories and lands by the workers committees democratically elected in the workplaces.*

- Benjamin Péret. *"The Exegetes' Manifesto"*, 1946

When the Second Congress of the Fourth International is finally held in 1948, the sections and groups that since 1943 have taken an independent position from the International Secretariat (IS), are a minority reduced in numbers by repression and by the infamous maneuvers of the SI itself to reduce their representation. The leadership prevented the renunciation of internationalism by its *reference* groups during the last war from even being discussed. The denunciation and rupture was as inevitable as the drift of the majority that would end up approving in the third congress of the *no longer International* that the main contradiction of capitalism would no longer be the class struggle (bourgeoisie against proletariat) but the confrontation between the USA and Stalinist Russia, an explicit renunciation of Marxist continuity, communism, internationalism... and even decency.

*"the 1948 Congress refused to condemn participation in capitalist national defense under the guise of resistance, and passed a political resolution elevating the Russia-U.S. rivalry to the level of the world's main contradiction. It actually disregarded the essential proletariat-capitalism conflict on a terrestrial scale, the exclusive guide of a revolutionary organization. On the one hand, and on the other, the **Fourth International ceased to be such since that congress**".*

- G. Munis. "Fifty Years After Trotskyism," 1982.

*"The renunciation of internationalism broke down and sterilized any evolution or position that did not depart from the most radical rectification. It was not because of the errors of Trotsky that the degeneration of the Fourth International took place, just as the degeneration of the Third was not due to the mistakes of Lenin. It was the renunciation of internationalism that makes impossible any programmatic correction and limits the role of the dissenting to that of the democratic left-wing of the Stalinist counterrevolution.*

*"In spite of the damning experience, the main Trotskyist parties, freed up from the commitment to internationalism during the war, committed to national defense, drew the opposite conclusion; **Stalinism extends socialist property, regardless of how it affects the proletariat itself**. It was simply crucial for them to cover up their serious revolutionary deficiencies with something. That is why their current position, which the League adopted, has much more to do with Stalinist deception than with political or sociological error.*

*The mistakes of the teachers can often mortally wound the disciples. Thus, what for Trotsky was a mistake, at most a confusion, reaches in Trotskyism the proportion of falsity, of crass opportunism and even of capitulation. But it is necessary to emphasize that in this metamorphosis, existence also precedes consciousness. Having washed its hands, in the midst of a world war, of the principle: "turn imperialist war into civil war", this Trotskyism stripped itself of the essential and most life-giving aspects of revolutionary thought, ruling out the possibility of correcting errors and of making even minimal theoretical progress. Since it settled on national defense (resistance), no theoretical understanding or even attempt at one could be found. What could be found was a string of chicaneries and defensive attitudes that were becoming ever more contemptible until it arrived at its current position. In the formal and organic sense, it had gone back to what was the Left Opposition to the Third International during the middle of the 1920s and the first two years of the 1930s, in spite of the criminality and filth that since then has been accumulating in Stalinism; politically, it is slow and has its head bowed before the extension of that same Stalinism (for it, prowess) in Eastern Europe, China, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba and even in Egypt, where 15 or 20,000 Russian soldiers hold the sacred standard of Islam versus that of Israel.*

In short, **the retrogression of Troskism was originated by its rupture with internationalism, not by Trotsky's error regarding the nature of the Russian system**, which gentle critics affirm. The practical and theoretical defense of the Russian system presupposes during the world war and continues to demand today a strict rejection of the idea of a degenerated workers' state and of all the presuppositions that engendered it. On the contrary, **neither the defense of Russia nor that of any Stalinist country can be practiced without rejecting internationalism, that is, the world proletariat**, in order to enlist at the orders of the enemies that same proletariat.

G. Munis. "Analysis of a Vacuum", 1971-72

The rupture of the International and the departure of its internationalist tendency coincides with the moment in which its program is culminating the open phase with the formation of the International Communist Left in 1929-30:

- The *transitional program* had freed itself of the idea that state property is a *socialist* element or tending towards socialism, a conception inherited from the Third and Second International.
- The understanding of the nature of Stalinism and bureaucracy had become clarified in the critique. The concept of the *degenerated workers state* had been surpassed and then Stalinist Russia had already begun to be understood as a capitalism of an imperialist state.
- The immediate postwar period had made necessary a critique of the tactic of having the *united front* include social democrats and Stalinists already definitively integrated in the state.
- The impossibility of national liberation, not to mention progressive national liberation not contradictory with the working class in the colonial countries, had become clear in China first and in Vietnam later.

The critique of the **“\*working class nature”\*** of Stalinism and the affirmation, for the first time, of a program based on what distinguishes decadent capitalism, marks the culmination of the stage of the *Communist Left* opened by Trotsky in 1929. There is still, however, one very important element for the definition of communist tactics: the trade unions. But the debate, which begun already at the end of the war, would have to take place in a new international framework.

### **We are resuming, because we have never really stopped**

The rupture, advanced in the Second Congress, becomes formal in the Fifth Plenum of April 1949. In September the decision was made public and definitive with the publication of the *Explicación y llamamiento a los militantes, grupos y secciones de la IV Internacional de la sección española* (Explanation and call to the militants, groups and sections of the IVth International of the Spanish section).

The *call* brought forth militants from all over the world: Vietnamese who were taking refuge in France in the face of the threat of the Stalinist persecution and massacre (with the French colonial government acting as an accomplice), such as Ngô Văn; French who came from groups that have tried to practice revolutionary defeatism during the occupation and in Vichy's France, such as Maximilien Rubel, the Pennetier-Gallienne current of French Trotskyism with recognized militants such as Sonia Gontarbert, Sophie Moen or Edgar Petsch. Counting Munis and Benjamin Peret -who have returned from Mexico- and the nucleus of Spanish militants who came to the struggle during the Spanish revolution and who at that moment were refugees in France -Esteban Bilbao, Jaime Fernández, Paco Gómez, Agustín Rodríguez- the grouping adds up to more than fifty people in France alone. Soon the *Communist Party of Italy* and revolutionary factions from Mexico, Denmark, Yugoslavia, Greece and Germany would begin contact with them.

They published a Manifesto that affirmed that:

*The crisis of today's society is the most important and decisive one in the history of Humanity. Up to the present, social evolution and the revolutions that have confirmed and developed it have always led to the rise to power of a new ruling class. But evolution, revolutions, decadence and the previous renaissances have produced all the material and human elements necessary to put an end to all exploitation of one class by another and to allow Man to confront, without social divisions, the outside world, Nature and put*

them at his service. The instrument of this social upheaval is the proletariat, the working class that cannot be emancipated by the oppression of another class, but only by the liberation of all Humanity. A century ago the proletariat began its heroic revolutionary struggle, but since then it has always been betrayed by the organizations that had called it to the struggle for revolution. The First International only pointed the way before its dissolution; the Second International suddenly leapt into the field of capitalism in 1914 after a long period of bureaucratic and parliamentary adaptation; the Third International, which really represented the world revolution for a few years, quickly became an external instrument of Russian counterrevolution and its betrayal was, for this very reason, infinitely more serious than all the previous ones. The treachery of these organizations, mainly the so-called communist organizations that for a long time usurped the prestige of the Russian revolution, was not only a desertion in the middle of the battle, but meant that all the organic and ideological strength of these organizations was dedicated to serving the worldwide counterrevolution, regardless of imperialist rivalries. From then on, these organizations went from being revolutionary to being conservative, to becoming auxiliaries to the police, the courts and the state in general. Thus, the proletariat is trapped in communist, socialist and trade union organizations whose ultimate aim is to help the police, the army, the courts and the state to make proletarian revolution impossible. This all prevents the proletariat from rebelling and allows capitalism to drag on a decadent existence.

Today's capitalism only offers society a darker future, a future of wars, a police and bureaucratic regime led by fascists, Stalinists or both, a continuous degradation of the standard of living and culture, an intensified slavery of meaningless chain work and forced-labor camps, the destruction of culture and technical knowledge by means of technology itself (atomic bomb), the sinking of Humanity into a new barbarism. It no longer has the right to exist. All the energies of the proletariat and of the exploited classes in general must aim at a single objective: its destruction.

In reality, it would be a relatively easy task if the proletariat only had to defeat the individual capitalists and the armed forces of its state. Class against class, revolution against reaction, victory would undoubtedly and quickly belong to the proletariat, since the bourgeoisie is degenerated and, psychologically, is known to be defeated beforehand. But the forces of order and counterrevolution have found new sources of strength and are drawing new energies from the organizations that once belonged to the workers. The old socialist parties are no longer, as Blum said, more than the loyal agents of capitalist affairs. The so-called communist parties (in reality, the most anti-communist parties that exist) are no more than the loyal representatives and agents of the Russian counterrevolution, as they have demonstrated on many occasions and admitted in hundreds of statements. Linked to bourgeois democracy, socialist reformism degenerates with it; linked to Russian counterrevolution, Stalinism is corrupted with it and will live, or perish, with it. But the characteristic of the Russian counterrevolution is the concentration and exacerbation of the old capitalist exploitation in the hands of the State, which produces a concentration of violence, of the police and bureaucratic methods of totalitarianism, which traditional capitalism has never achieved even with Mussolini, Hitler or Franco. Indeed, the existing regime in Russia concentrates in its hands the ownership of the means of production and, consequently, the exploitation and judicial and police violence that serve to protect it, to an extent that history has never before known. To an extent that even surpassed the case of ancient Egypt and imperial Rome in decadence. Private ownership of the means of production, a sign of old capitalism, has given rise in Russia, under the aegis of Stalinist counterrevolution, to capitalist ownership by the state, which transfers all power and most of the profits of exploitation into the hands of Stalinist bureaucrats. In the countries of Western Europe, particularly in

*France, it is the Stalinist parties and their trade union bureaucrats (CGT) who have control of the working class and impose themselves on it by all means, through the employment of a hypocritical demagogy in the name of socialism and the Russian Revolution, to imposing force in all its forms in the factories, to the assassination of revolutionaries. Knowing that the natural evolution of capitalism (automatic concentration of property in state property) favors its interests, Stalinism tries to affirm the domination of its bureaucrats over the working class to impose itself on individual capitalists as the best representative of capitalism in general, that is, as the best defender of the system that consists in making the masses work for the benefit of the privileged, in maintaining the separation of Man from the means of production, as savior of all rotten forces of order in general, in the face of the disorder and anarchy of the rebellious masses.*

*Thus, the real enemy of the proletariat and of the social revolution is not constituted mainly by the individual capitalists, whom the proletariat could defeat with a simple slap, nor by its police, its army, its courts totally discredited and prostituted, but by the Stalinist political and trade union cadres who replace the State wherever it is incapable of fulfilling its task: to keep the working class skeptical and demoralized. Today, in our age of capitalist decadence, they are the true representatives of the state. However, the most important historical task of the proletariat is to destroy the state machinery, a task that must be carried out lest the social revolution never occur.*

*It follows that, without destroying Stalinist power as a party and union bureaucracy (CGT) and that of the reformist bureaucracy (CGT-FO) or its counterparts in the other countries, the proletariat would be condemned to impotence and slavery and instead of social revolution there would only be decadence and barbarism.*

*The great problem of this epoch, the terrible tragedy of the proletariat, consists precisely in the temporal contradiction between the more than complete maturity of the historical, objective and subjective conditions of the social revolution and its organic and practical inability to carry it out. Therefore, the union between possibilities and historical facts can only be achieved through a revolutionary organization of the proletariat. It is to this task that we, the Internationalist Workers' Union, intend to contribute. All the small organizations that exist outside of reformism and Stalinism have shown themselves powerless to unite the proletariat under a militant banner, including the official organizations of the Fourth International from which we have just emerged. The Fourth International has not integrally maintained the traditions of proletarian internationalism and continues to support the defense of Russia without seeing that the counterrevolution has been fully carried out there. It thus acts as a left-wing of Stalinism in all countries. In this way, the Official Fourth International only cancels out its own revolutionary potential. This is what gave rise to our movement, the International Workers' Union, which aims to organize the French, European and worldwide proletariat to achieve its great historical goal: **the socialist revolution.***

- *Manifesto of the International Workers Union. Paris, 1949*

The organization made a remarkable effort: **it began by publishing the paper by section** and by establishing an international magazine. It established relations with groups that remained faithful to internationalism during the war, engaged in a vigorous debate with some of them, such as *Socialism and Barbarism*.

In 1952 Benjamin Péret began publishing a debate with anarcho-syndicalist internationalists on the nature of trade unions. It is the basis of what would be published in 1960, along with a series of later Munis articles, that would become known as *Unions Against Revolution*. Not all the UOI (International Workers' Union) shares the anti-union evolution of the Spanish section, the Italians and especially the French are involved in the rank-and-file union structures. However, it would not be possible to have the necessary debate.

The Spanish section was become increasingly focused on creating a clandestine structure on the peninsula. Péret, posing as a French commercial traveller, had made several trips and *awakened* former comrades of ICE and GBLE. The efforts brought them their first victory: the tram strike of '51 in Barcelona. Eager to strengthen their presence, Munis, Costa and some others wanted to pass clandestinely into the interior. Bilbao, old founder of the first PCE, which is the oldest of all in age, considered that idea to be *adventurist* and irresponsible and, as a result, harshly opposed it. Finally, the Spanish police dismantled the entire group in December 1952. Munis was sentenced to ten years and Costa to eight, while the rest of the militants were only sentenced to one year. **This was because none of them confessed during the tortures.** The group did not begin to recover from the *fall* until 1957 when Munis was released from prison on bail and escaped to France.

Meanwhile the UOI if not formally, in practice was increasingly lacking in drive. The differences between their stances on the unions would lead to the exit of the French group and Vietnamese group. The French group would reorient itself towards trade unionism while the Vietnamese would later lean towards councilism. The group was not reconstituted until 1957-58 hand-and-hand, again, with the Spanish section.

The *Fomento Obrero Revolucionario* (FOR) was born, an acronym that will be maintained until our decade and that in the 1st issue of its Spanish publication was presented in this way:

*"Ideologically we are not starting, we are resuming, because we never really stopped. We come from far back, from the earliest times when men rose up in rebellion; we continue on our way, a long road still ahead. We link up with the noblest revolutionaries of yesteryear and are already breathing life into those of tomorrow. From idea to idea, from man to man, we are the imperishable instant of the protesting energy of the individual throughout history, the continuous affirmation of human needs in the face of the contingencies of the reactionary political day-to-day reality. To be a man in our era, it becomes ever more imperative than ever to act revolutionarily. We exercise our function as men without lies, fear nor adulterations. Thus, we do not begin, we continue; what begins is our publication, Alarma, and a new day in the persistent duel against the grim Spanish reaction.*

*We are men of civil war and men of afterward, united by an ideology that surpasses borders, that virtually suppresses them, an indispensable requirement for socialist action today. Many of us, veterans and newcomers, have known the prisons of sacred Spain; some also those of the Russian police. None of us are guilty of Francoism nor Stalinism. Tyranny, exploitation, never deceived us, even hidden under the disguise of communism or democracy.*

*Our political ancestry comes from Marx and Engels, the First International, the revolutionary years of the Second and Third, Liebknecht, Luxemburg, Lenin, Daniel de Leon, Trotsky, the opposition to Stalinist counterrevolution in Russia. In regard to the events we connect with the Paris Commune, the Russian revolution of '17, the German revolution of '18-23, the hundreds of thousands of men murdered by the*

present Russian system, in its destruction of the revolutionary tendencies; with the Spanish insurrection of the 19th of July 1936 against the clerical-military reaction and the insurrection of May 1937 against Stalinism and Popular Front; with the hundreds of thousands of men murdered by Francoism. We also uphold the insurgent action of the German, Polish, Hungarian proletariat, etc., against the kinglets of Moscow.

By itself, what has been said entails a revolutionary program without mitigations, a program whose breadth, facets and tactical modalities can be deduced from this fact, a consequence of recent history: Washington and Moscow, Moscow and Washington are symmetrical and complementary factors of the world counterrevolution. We need to say it as unequivocally as possible, because we do not play the anti-Franco democrat. We aspire to group together revolutionary men, not stand-ins. Our anti-Francoism pierces to the roots of the system, and our demand for freedom, unhappy with legal fictions, demands economic equality. We have nothing to do with, nor will we ever accept having anything to do with the anti-Francoists of Russian inspiration, who give us another tyranny. Nor do we have anything to do with the democrats that reek with the stench of Washington, who, in order to compete with Russia, propose secret freedoms to us in confessionals shored up by American bases. If 26 years ago Franco's victory was due to the collusion of Stalin, Roosevelt and Hitler against the workers revolution, today the sinister buffoon will lose ground when the proletariat resumes its activity and Spanish capitalism sinks again. We consider it our first obligation to warn against any policy that leans toward Washington or Moscow.

Franco's triumph has not invalidated any of the social factors that produced the great revolutionary upheaval of the 1930s; on the contrary, it has widened and exacerbated them[...]

What the events have brought us again is the **unshakeable opposition between the socialist revolution, an immediate necessity, and the preservation of capitalism in any of its forms**, basically the same great struggle as the 1930s, but much more pressing. It is important for us to begin to affirm it and with all the more precision since the revolution finds itself once again crossed in its path by the same parties that during the civil war made it retreat for Franco's benefit. But now everything has become even more outrageous: these parties want, seek, have acquired in part the direct alliance of Francoist, military, clerical and Falangist elements. [...]

At the heart of the Spanish political crisis, we reaffirm, **there is nothing but the need for socialist revolution**. A need buried by long decades of theocracy and the military. A need teacherously, misguidedly or carnivalescely disguised by men and organizations that, if they were not false, could have aided in having it met. That need is still present and the dilemma is undeniable:

*it is between socialist revolution and any tyranny that ranges from Moscow to Washington”.*

- Beginning, 1958

The death, almost immediate, in 1959 of Bilbao and Péret, is a very hard blow for the Spanish group. Munis himself is about to be handed over to the Spanish authorities and lives clandestinely between Paris, Genoa and Milan in an extremely precarious situation. In spite of everything, *the nucleus M is formed*, the executive of the organization (Munis, Costa, Paco).

In 1960, a Milanese printing press published *Unions Against Revolution*. In 1961 it published *For a Second Communist Manifesto*, which was a true programmatic summary of everything learned by the class vanguard since 1929.

The *M nucleus* would first be joined by several nuclei in Paris and Southern France and later on by those in Asturias (*Nucleus Felix Galán*, in honor of the ICE revolutionary of Llerena). The latter would end up actively intervening in the Asturian mining protests and strikes of 1961 and 1962 - a new emergence of assemblies and committees, now called *workers' committees* - which open a period of rising class struggle that, born then in Spain, would later extend throughout the world until the end of the 1980s.

From 1970, it developed new nuclei in Spain (Barcelona), France, Italy, Greece and a group of sympathizers on the west coast of the United States. All of them developing more or less regular publications. The expulsion of the immature Barcelona nucleus in 1988, however, marked the passage to a new phase of weakness that corresponds to the impasse that the class struggle has reached globally.

Only the French section would remain active during the following decade, abandoning paper publications in 1993 and going on to publish exclusively on its website until 2006. That year a series of reconstitution initiatives began around *FOR-continuité* in France and from 2017 onwards in Spain, which, on June 22, 2019, had resulted with the foundation of *Emancipation* as a world political and internationalist organization.