
Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League

**—a bulletin series consisting of material
hostile to Trotskyism and the Spartacist
League**

BULLETIN NO. 2

Reprint of "The Fall of Allende and the Triumph of the
Chilean Counterrevolution—The Spartacist League
and the Strategy of Abstentionist Putschism"

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Prefaced with letter to Spartacist League Central
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THE FALL OF ALLENDE AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHILEAN COUNTERREVOLUTION

THE SPARTACIST LEAGUE AND THE STRATEGY OF ABSTENTIONIST PUTSCHISM

"....Opportunism is always ready, when conditions demand it, to establish its reputation on a clamorous radicalism to be used in other countries. Naturally, this exportation of radicalism consists for the most part of words...."

--L. Trotsky, The Crisis of the Right-Center Bloc

[Includes as preface letter
to Spartacist Central Office
by Cmrd. Small, added by S.L.]
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Preface: letter from Small to Spartacist C.O.

Feb. 12, 1974

Dear comrades,

I have been reading the recent diatribe of the so-called "Communist Internationalist Group" (Benjamin and presumably Cunningham et al.) It has taken this wretched group over a year since their departure from the SL to issue a public collective statement, as they themselves note: "Although this represents our first public statement as a group, the group in fact existed in loose form since mid-1972." (on the basis of what, one wonders!) Ostensibly a document on "The Fall of Allende and the Triumph of the Chilean Counterrevolution", it is actually a compilation of old slanders ~~again~~ against the SL, too numerous to list in detail.

One cheap shot which should be discarded right off by readers is the much-emphasized charge that the SL "did not write a single article or leaflet ~~with~~ [on Chile] for two years; nor for that matter was there any discussion on this central question." (emphasis in original) The authors note that there was a detailed analysis of the Chilean pop front in Spartacist #19 (Nov-Dec 1970), three years before the debacle in Chile, and another major forewarning in Workers Vanguard of Dec. 1972 ("Pop Front Imperils Chilean Workers"), but obviously they think that these forewarnings by the SL were not enough and more should have been written. ~~It~~ This problem could easily have been corrected by them, since Cunningham ~~was~~ was editor of Spartacist from 1968 to mid-1972, when he resigned, and Benjamin was editor of Workers Vanguard from issue #1 (Oct. 1971) until he also resigned in 1972. Their document does not claim ~~that~~ that they wrote any internal discussion documents on Chile while in the SL-- because they wrote none! (unless they kept it to themselves). If they claim that they were somehow muzzled on the Chilean issue while in the SL (and no such claim is made in their document) then how come, we might ask in response, they had no public statements about Chile or anything else from the summer of 1972 to Nov. 1973?

At any rate, the ~~real~~ reason I'm writing is to attempt to answer one of the few substantive historical questions in the document, one which hangs on a single quote from Lenin. The authors are attacking the SL position, derived from Marxism-Leninism-Trotskyism, that we do not call on the bourgeois state to outlaw and disarm fascists or other reactionary forces since such a call merely creates illusions about the bourgeois state (especially in the case of pop front governments) and makes it easier for the bourgeois state to disarm the workers. The authors of course argue that one can make such calls, and to bolster their Menshevik case they quote the following from Lenin, written at the time of the Kornilov revolt against the Kerensky regime:

...the all-important thing now has become the intensification of our campaign for some kind of "partial demands" to be presented to Kerensky: arrest Milyukov, arm the Petrograd workers, summon the Kronstadt, Vyborg and Helsingfors troops to Petrograd, ~~then~~ dissolve the Duma, arrest Rodzyanko, legalise the transfer of the landed estates to the peasants, introduce workers' control over grain and factories, etc., etc. We must present these demands not only to Kerensky, and not so much to Kerensky, as to the workers, soldiers and peasants who have been carried away by the course of the struggle against Kornilov...

--Lenin, "To the Central Committee of the RSDLP" (Aug. 30, 1917)

Does this mean Lenin was calling on the bourgeois state-- i.e., the

bourgeois Armys, police, etc.-- to "arrest Milyukov" etc.? The answer can be found simply by looking at what the Bolsheviks were actually doing in these crucial days, as related by Trotsky in his History of the Russian Revolution:

Toz the Bolshevik leaders of the districts, Kornilov's uprising had not been in the least unexpected. They had foreseen and forewarned, and they were the first to appear at their posts. At the joint session of the Executive Committees [of the districts district soviets]. on August 27, Sokolnikov announced that the Bolshevik party had taken all measures available to it in order to inform the people and prepare for defense; the Bolsheviks announced their readiness to co-ordinate their military work with the ~~organs~~ organs of the Executive Committee. At a night session of the Military Organisation ~~of the Bolsheviks~~, participated in by delegates of numerous military detachments, it was decided to demand the arrest of all conspirators, to arm the workers, to supply them with soldier instructors, to guarantee the defense of the capital from below, and at the same time to prepare for the creation of a revolutionary government of workers and soldiers.

(Vol. II, p. 229, Ann Arbor-- emphasis added)

Clearly, the Bolsheviks were calling on the incipient workers state of the soviets, then dominated by the Mensheviks and SRs, to effect the arrests, not the bourgeois state! Why then did Lenin address himself to Kerensky at all? Most ~~was~~ likely because Kerensky was formally a member of the presidium of the Petrograd Soviet, as well as head of the coalition government. This contradiction was made use of by the Bolsheviks to gain a majority in the Petrograd Soviet. As Trotsky described the events:

We represented almost half of the membership, and yet there was not a single Bolshevik in the presidium...nothing but a vote on the lists of candidates along party lines could solve the problem now. I asked whether the list of our opponents included Kerensky; formally, he was a member of the presidium, al though he did not attend the Soviet, and showed his disregard of it in every way. The question took the presidium by surprise. Kerensky was neither liked nor respected, but it was impossible to disavow one's ~~own~~ prime minister. After consulting one another, the members of the presidium answered: "Of course, he is included." We wanted ~~nothing~~ nothing better. Here is an extract from the minutes: "We were convinced that Kerensky was no longer in the presidium [tumultuous applause], but we see now that we have been mistaken. The shadow of Kerensky is hovering between Chiedze and Zavadye. When you are ~~asked~~ asked to approve the political line-up of the presidium, remember that you are asked in this way to approve the policies of Kerensky [tumultuous applause]." This threw over to our side another hundred or so of the delegates who had been vacillating.
2 (Trotsky, My Life, p. 319, Pathfinder)

Thus one could with some formal legitimacy call on Kerensky to make use of the workers power to "arrest Milyukov", although Lenin's demands are obviously aimed in content at arming the workers against both Kornilov and Kerensky.

Allende's situation was somewhat different, since he was simply the leader of a coalition government and not a titular leaders of a soviet. (The Chilean SP had nothing like the quasi-governmental authority of the Petrograd Soviet!)

Comradely. *Frank*
Mark S.

INTRODUCTION

1

The readers of the following analysis of the September coup in Chile may find the form of the presentation unnecessarily oblique: after all, who on earth needs an extended critique of some irrelevant position of the Spartacist League? Were this the sole point of the critique, were our main target in this polemic the SL, we would not have wasted our time writing it. Nor are we particularly interested in another description of the successful coup and the failure of the anti-rightist forces to prevent it...most of the "left" press have dealt with the more obvious failures: the lack of a Marxist party to lead the struggle, the class-collaborationist orientation of the mass Chilean Socialist and Communist parties, the left's illusions about Allende, etc.

We wrote this piece to answer the question posed by historical methodology...was there a correct strategy which, if taken, would have led to a working-class victory in Chile and the establishment of workers' power? If, as we believe, there were, then the failure to prevent the rightist counterrevolution is only a negative confirmation of Marxist analysis, not a repudiation of it, and consequently there are invaluable historical lessons to be learned from the experience.

The incapacity of the Chilean working class to assume power in a situation ripe for such a struggle -- and the resultant counterrevolutionary coup which revenged itself upon the working class for this failure -- represents an enormous setback for the international working-class movement. In the context of recent history it is the greatest catastrophe for the communist movement since the annihilation of the Indonesian Communist Party and the physical extermination of hundreds of thousands of its cadres and supporters in 1965. The years of the Popular Unity government were represented by a climate of social and economic chaos in Chile, due to the hesitation, irresoluteness and mystical belief of Allende and his followers that a peaceful transformation to socialism was possible there; the junta, together with the execution of militants and the smashing of the organs of open working-class activity, will undoubtedly issue in a protracted period of more or less social "stability" and outward class peace. This upcoming period is one in which the working class will have to utilize clandestine means to rebuild its organizations.

If the history of the working class under European fascism in the 30's is any indication, the present period is certain to bring with it a restoration of bourgeois democratic aspirations and illusions among the working class. Allende himself was overthrown; Allendeism, the belief in the reformist road to power, has not been overthrown...the social democrats and the

alinists internationally will see to that. How well this point is understood by proto-Marxists internationally as in Chile, how capable they are of adjusting their strategy and tactics accordingly, will prove an important component in the capacity of the working class to construct the revolutionary party.

A precondition for the construction of the international revolutionary party is the destruction of not only the social democratic and Stalinist fantasies about peaceful roads to working-class power, but also the fantastic notions about revolution emanating from such local outfits as the Spartacist League and Progressive Labor.

Although this critique takes the form of a polemic against the line of the Spartacist League -- to be precise we should say lines, for we have isolated at least three separate, contradictory lines over three consecutive issues of their paper -- we do not want to give the erroneous impression that we think their utter confusion in the face of a situation such as Chile on the brink of counterrevolution is in any way unique; the line taken by the left-Stalinist Progressive Labor Party in the September 3, 1973 issue of Challenge and further restated in the November issue of PL magazine in many respects has the same view as the SL's September 13 Workers Vanguard supplement on Chile. In many aspects of the SL's line, in fact, they are typical of the pretenders to the leadership of the Marxist movement, a leadership which for its authority and influence relies on a massive ignorance of the history of communism on the part of its following. The central purpose of this article, then, is to do what we can to remedy that situation by a discussion of the central strategy by which Marxists can shape and give direction and clarity to the struggles of the working class. For us this strategic method, represented in the Bolshevik struggle to power in Russia in 1917, and in Trotsky's writings on German fascism and the Spanish revolution in the 30's, is a vital aspect of the road to power for the working class and how we think the lessons of this history should have been applied in Chile. To contrast this with the "methods" of the SL, we believe the following critique demonstrates without serious challenge that they suffer from the single most critical failure of understanding a "communist" leadership could have -- the total inability to analyze a revolutionary situation correctly and devise a revolutionary strategy for it. This is after all the situation every communist organization supposedly lives for, and the SL has proven itself completely unable to comprehend in a Marxist fashion even a single aspect of it...even in retrospect! As for the SL's repetition of the central theme of the Transitional Program, that the workers' movement chiefly suffers from opportunism, incomprehension and the crisis of leadership, we demonstrate -- to the hilt! -- that they are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

In his introduction to The Permanent Revolution, Trotsky makes the point that the essence of revolutionary strategy and

tactics lies in grasping the specific features and peculiarities of each nation which are necessarily brought about by the law of uneven development. In general, this is the overall problem of insufficient concreteness, and our own critique undoubtedly can be faulted for its over-abstractness, for its reliance on generalities and argument by analogy. To some extent, this is the problem of insufficient data: without the presence on the scene of reliable, competent, trained Marxists it is impossible to assemble enough material (or to trust what you can get) to make all the evaluations necessary to show what is correct and what is not in a rapidly-shifting complex of events. In the critique we argue that in the circumstances that no genuine Marxist party was in evidence in Chile a policy of entry into the Socialist party was the only possible tactic by which a small nucleus of revolutionary Marxists could have constructed a mass-based communist party capable of contending with the social democrats and the Stalinists for hegemony over and leadership of the Chilean working class, and this policy is obviously correct in terms of Chile after 1970. But such a general policy would not have answered the question of what to do -- i.e., entry or a separate organization -- before 1970 in Chile, or in countries where the social democratic or Stalinist formations do not possess the same features -- a mass working class base, parity in size and influence between the CP and SP -- as those in Chile. Similarly with the question of Chilean fascism: we have had to rely heavily on Spanish, Italian and German models from the 1930's. Obviously we do not consider the junta "fascist" in any scientific meaning of the term, and in the critique the analogy between the Chilean junta and the regime of the Greek colonels is stressed.

But there appears to be a growing fascist movement in Chile on which the junta presently leans for active support. The relation of the bourgeois/militarist reaction to this movement -- whether they reinforce and prepare it for power in the face of proletarian resistance to the military regime -- will depend exclusively on the development of the class struggle in the next period, the features of which at the moment we cannot determine, even in outline form. Nevertheless the form of working-class resistance to this potential wholesale mobilization of the middle class in the service of the bourgeois counterrevolution is a central question for the Chilean revolution.

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We noted above that the SL had three separate, distinct lines on the coup shortly before and immediately following the September coup in Chile. We deal with these lines, their mutual exclusiveness and their significance at some length in the article, and will not repeat our points here. For the benefit of anyone who wishes to check our account and our interpretation against the original texts, he will find all the material we used in three articles in the SL public press:

- a. The "semi-manifesto" in the August 3, 1973 issue of WV. It is one column long, and surrounded with pictures of the mid-summer attempted coup.
- b. The August 31 issue, which contains the article, "Do We Call on the Bourgeoisie to Outlaw Fascism?". We subject this production to extended criticism below; it is a repudiation of the central line in the August 3 semi-manifesto.
- c. The September 13 "Supplement," contained in the September 14 issue of WV. This contains the new central thesis of the present and continuing SL line.

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The following critique was finished some time before this introduction was written, and in the meantime the SL has published its November 23 issue, which includes a polemic against the Chilean line of the CPUSA, "Lame Brains in Turbulent Waters," which extends further the SL's own attempt to rewrite the lamentable history of their own approach to the popular front in Chile. It is an elemental duty of political sanitation to expose this historical revision for the fraud it is.

The title of the SL polemic is itself a political error: the soporific cuteness of this title (a high-school-like parody of a recent autocritique by Gus Hall on the CP's electoral policy, "A Lame Dick in Turbulent Waters") carries the clear implication the line of the pro-Moscow Stalinists on Chile is due to stupidity -- like the 1926 Anglo-Russian Committee, maybe? -- and is in turn only one more incident in a series demonstrating the flat incapacity of the SL to comprehend or evaluate contemporary Stalinism and the "Russian Question." The author of the WV piece berates the CP for following Stalin's prescription that "paper will take anything written on it," and proceeds immediately to demonstrate how the SL itself uses exactly the same technique in the creation of the "uniquely correct line."

In the text of the polemic they follow the by now standard pattern of patting themselves on the back while sweeping their own history under the rug: "The Spartacist League, not afraid to swim against the stream ["not afraid to swim against the stream"!] was the only one of all the ostensibly Trotskyist organizations ["...only the Workers League..."] to take a clear stand against the popular-front UP government from the beginning. In fact, of course, the SL only responded to the situation in Chile after the 1970 elections had placed Allende and his Popular Unity party in power and that in an article by Robertson (!) motivated almost exclusively by the need to attack the SLP and the Workers League, i.e., a piece full of resounding generalities written: "for the archives," to be dusted off and quoted when the occasion arose. The SL quotes this article from the November-December 1970 Spartacist to prove they wrote it, quote another solely descriptive passage from WV in December 1972, and bridge the two quotations with this sentence:

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The SL repeatedly warned in its press that this popular-front regime was leading to a massacre of the workers and peasants... [emphasis added]

"Reputedly warned"? Hogwash. We were in the SL for the period from December 1970 to 1972, most of the period of time covered by that sentence, and we know the SL wrote exactly nothing about Chile, warning or anything else, in their public press (or anywhere else). We demonstrate this beyond question on page 3 of our following critique, where we write, emphasizing it in the original as follows: "...they did not write a single article or leaflet for two years; nor for that matter was there any [internal] discussion on this central question." Etcetera. So far as the self-proclaimed correct program and methodology of the SL is concerned, the question of where the "uniquely correct line" comes from, this little documented incident of re-writing their own history as a cover-up aptly demonstrates our conclusion that...it's just made up!

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The charge of "cynicism" is quite frequently thrown around in the pseudo-Marxist movement; how aptly, is dealt with in part iii of this introduction. But what other than "cynical" can i fit the person who researched the SL files, discovered the SL had had nothing at all to say for a period of two years on what Robertson himself stated represented the "sharpest" expression of revolution or counterrevolution in Chile -- note that after the December 1972 piece there was another eight months (!) hiatus on the subject -- and then coolly sat down to lambast in the most sanctimonious fashion everyone else around and to claim that in this period of demonstrated unconcern with the issue that "the SL repeatedly warned in its press...blah, blah, blah?" If this isn't cynicism, we would like to hear of one other word in the English language which more accurately conveys the exact meaning of such an approach!

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In the light of the above incident, and of the flip-flops of the SL line in the month and a half period around the time of the September Chilean coup, we should make our position on the matter clear. We do not demand the SL remain consistent and eternally maintain their passive abstentionism (evidenced in the August 31 NY line) in the face of an enormous social crisis and massive defeat. We do say that the adventurism the SL substitutes for passivity is no improvement, is actually criminal, and to the extent the line were carried out in Chile would destroy the possibility of creating a Marxist vanguard party together with its future cadres. But even this is overshadowed by the truly wretched technique by which they make their switch in lines. They do not seize on the opportunity for a serious evaluation of the origins of the demonstrated lack of concern they showed in their response to the existence of the radically

unstable popular front government in Chile from 1970-1973, or the approach which led them to write their August 31 line (cf. the text of the following critique), nor the putschist reversal of this line in a matter of a few days after August 31. Rather, in the Stalinist manner, they change their line in the dead of the night, with no analysis of their errors, or even such of a reference to them (the August 31 "clarification" on their August 3 line is worse by far than the original), and then came out all disgustingly self-righteous to cover up their inactivity and lack of concern to pretend they have been constant and true in their preachments for the last three years! What possible course of action could anyone, loyally trying to follow the SL line, in all its wanderings, do? In books by Lewis Carroll, it is entirely possible to believe six impossible things before breakfast; no one has yet demonstrated, or ever will, that a Marxist organization can be built by means of such unserious flopping about.

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From what we have written in the critique itself, it will become clear that the approach the SL takes toward the rightist junta's seizure of power in Chile and the fall of Allende's Popular Unity government represents in crudest imaginable form a sharp irreconcilable break from the rudiments of Marxism and Marxist strategy itself. Hereafter this outfit stands publicly exposed not merely as some sort of defective or deformed "revolutionary" organization but only as a poor, opportunistic joke, whose demonstrated lack of concern for the revolutionary forces in Chile and their basic, real, present needs is manifest, and whose "political" horizons do not extend measureably beyond their own appetites for followers and the general instincts of whomever they're "regrouping" toward -- PL, the French OCI, etc. -- now or next week.

As a consequence, we have chosen to quote so heavily from "authoritative" sources such as Lenin, Trotsky and others. We would have quoted far more than we did; reasons of space alone prevented us from copying as an appendix to our work the whole section, subtitled "Lessons of the Russian Experience" from Trotsky's What Next? (in The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany, pp. 184-189); every word in these six pages is a hammer blow against revisionist pretences of the SL stripe and a masterful statement of a Leninist approach to revolutionary strategy. We quote these passages not out of any desire to play games in the pseudo-Trotskyist sandbox, or for reasons of point-scoring, or baiting the SL because they do not recite the rhetorical rosary of Marxist phraseology in the proper order (even the SWP [!] knew that what was missing in Chile was a Leninist party), or for reasons of textual talmudic hairsplitting, or even because we consider authorities like Lenin and Trotsky infallible, sacrosanct or their views impervious to challenge, but solely because the SL dishonestly, disloyally justifies and puts forth their own revisionist repudiation of Marxism in the name and under

the cover of "orthodox Leninism" and "orthodox Trotskyism", as the sheer number of self-serving, out-of-context references to or quotations from Lenin and (especially) Trotsky they throw at the reader would alone indicate.

Shortly after we left the SL we were subjected to an internal torrent of vindictive Robertsonian abuse and slander which alleged that in leaving the SL we had abandoned in theory and in practice the international party, the transitional program, etc., which add up to the denial of the validity of Marxism itself for this epoch. The motive for this campaign of villification was transparent: the construction of a river of sewage to blunt the impact of our attacks. We are content to leave the determination of the political content of these charges to the reader. To the SL, we issue a blunt challenge: if you do not believe partial, democratic, "transitional" demands are applicable to the present situation in Chile after the triumph of the junta's coup, say so openly. Or even at the point of the coup? If so, do they then hold that the Transitional Program is not applicable in a situation where the question of dual power is clearly posed, as they would clearly appear to hold? If they actually believe what they imply, that the Bolsheviks took power under the banner of "the dictatorship of the proletariat," and not in the name of the "partial" demands: Bread, Land and Peace, through the counterposed organizational medium of political power in the hands of the soviets, let them say this, too, but openly. It is clear from everything they have written on Chile, to go no further here, that the SL operates with a totally different ("unique?") programmatic conception of the road to power than was shared by Lenin and Trotsky (and every other revolutionary Marxist we know of); Trotsky based his transitional program on the 1917 struggle of the Bolsheviks who believed -- and operated on this belief -- that a program consisting of transitional demands was precisely the proper mechanism for revolutionary action. The SL should state their own program and take up their differences with the 1917 experience accordingly, also. The same thing goes for the conception of the vanguard party as a section of a Marxist International; clearly, unquestionably, as we take pains in the critique to show, the SL holds (cf. September 13 WV Supplement) a revolution in Chile, and presumably anywhere else, can be made in the absence of a Leninist combat party, without an international communist party. They should state what material/historical changes have transpired to render the International obsolete, no longer a critical necessity (critical in the sense that without it, there will be no revolution); they should go further and state when and under what circumstances Marxists should/should not call and work for such a no-longer-necessary instrument. And so on, all down the line of their actual differences. But in no case whatsoever have they the right to continue hiding their real views in the fashion of epigones behind the skirts of Lenin and Trotsky, who fought all their lives for distinctly different views.

It is clear from the above and from the text that follows that the SL's approach to Marxism is not that of learning and applying revolutionary strategy but the manipulation of Lenin and Trotsky as cult-figures to pander to the gross ignorance of their members and supporters (the "clods," in Robertson's choice phrase). It requires only the barest familiarity with Marxist history to show the scope and range of the differences between "Spartacism" and revolutionary Marxism. For this reason we have insisted on placing their quotes into their historical context, dealing with them in the concrete circumstances to which they refer. Our elaboration of the point in the critique where we examine the meaning of the SL's truncation and distortion of Lenin's letter of August, 1917 to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party (cf. pages 14, ff.) in particular demonstrates that what Lenin was actually saying is directly counterposed not only to the SL's general line (the SL says they never call on the bourgeoisie to outlaw fascism; in an analogous situation Lenin called on Kerensky who stood at the head of a bourgeois government to do just that) but also to the apparent meaning of the fragments the SL quotes. The fact of the matter is that Lenin and Trotsky do not agree anywhere with what the SL chooses to present as their politics.

How do we account for this? To some extent, we have concluded, because the SL is not interested in the revolution in Chile, or anywhere else, but only in winning over the more naive and impressionable of American radicals taken in by flamboyant parading and "super-left" stances. But that is only part of the reason, for this is nothing new for the SL and did not spring up overnight. No. This substitution of rhetoric for politics is amazingly similar to and originates from the same source as the line of the Comintern after the rise of the post-Leninist triumvirate to power -- the fact is the SL leading body, like the Stalin clique, is cynical about, does not foresee, does not believe in the possibility of the proletarian revolution. That is what stood behind the bureaucratically-sponsored ultra-left tear in Bulgaria and Estonia in 1924-25 after Lenin's death unleashed Zinoviev, that is what happened in the Canton soviet under the instructions of Stalin, that was what lay behind the theory of "socialism in one country," as every novice around the "Trotskyist" movement can tell you. What the SL program for Chile represents, in short and on a mini-scale, is the liquidation of the proletarian revolution and the socialist perspective as the concrete alternative to the slide back to barbarism.

"Never have the lines between revolutionary Marxism and opportunism been clearer," says the SL. "They are drawn in blood, the coin in which betrayals are paid." Despite the illiterate metaphor of drawn lines paying coins in blood, the sense of what is being said is true. It is only necessary to add this blow at opportunism strikes the SL harder than its presumed target. It is a truism of the body of analysis created by Marx that sectarianism and adventurism duplicate opportunism, and all these deviations spring from the same political source. The line, bloody

or otherwise, which separates Marxism from revisionism does not stem from an occasional misevaluation of social forces or differences over tactics, but fundamentally and in the last analysis over a differing estimate of the capacity of the working class to make the communist revolution. The difference between ourselves and those who set policy in the SL is of this magnitude. Revolutionary situations and the response to them, as existed over months if not years in Chile, together with imperialist wars represent the surest test for revolutionaries. We have done nothing more in this critique to establish this point than consult the public record of the SL on the question and compare it with Marxist strategy in analogous situations. And as we have shown, above and below to the point of exhausting the question, for the Robertsonites there is no party, there is no international, there is no transitional program, there is no strategy to fight the counterrevolution, there is no conception of the self-defense of the working class -- there is instead putschist rhetoric which escapes the charge of criminal betrayal only because of the SL's incapacity to do anything with its views.

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We had absolutely no illusions in the SL and its leadership by the time we walked out, but at the time we thought it would degenerate over an extended period to its basic core of sectarian abotentionism in conformity with its political views, a little less openly and consistly opportunist, and considerably nuttier, than the Workers League. It hasn't; by a process unknown to us it has somehow accumulated most of the attributes of "Third Period" Stalinism, with only a cracked, peeling facade of Trotskyism and a drawerful of quotes and jargon remaining. Perhaps had no situation of the magnitude of Chile intervened, if no response had been urgently demanded of the SL leadership to say something in their paper about the Chilean situation, they could have plodded along down the same old path for years. But it is clear now that the diametric contradiction between their verbal claim to represent some variant of Trotskyism and their real politics has been forced by events out into the public view. Our critique will then present an interesting problem for the SL leadership; it must either maintain a stony public silence on the question, together with an internal hate/ridicule campaign (the most likely variant), or defend their line, and thus break wholly with their last pretense to Marxism (as they have done in actuality a long time ago), or they must repudiate their line. The latter course is the only responsible one, of course, which is why they dare not pursue it. For it is clear that the "regime" was directly involved in the formulation if not the actual writing of this incredible line, and the critic inside the SL -- in the very unlikely case one now exists -- would be forced to ask himself...what are the roots of this abcess and how can it be torn out?

It makes an interesting question, n'est ce-pas?

...It is now being said that it is the duty of the vanguard to engage in an Aktion in order 'to speed up the [coming of the] revolution.' Let me read you the following passage: 'The most important thing is the ideological conquest of the vanguard. Without it even the first step toward victory becomes impossible. Yet from there to the final victory is still quite a distance. One cannot win with only the vanguard. To engage the vanguard in decisive struggle before the entire class... and the broad masses have taken a position by which they can either support the vanguard directly, or at least express their benevolent neutrality...would not be merely folly, but a crime as well.'

The man who wrote this is fortunate that he has not yet been labeled a 'Levite,' though he still has every chance to become one. He is Lenin.

--Levi's defense before his expulsion in April 1921 from the German Communist Party, Was ist das Verbrechen?

The question of Paul Levi: we have quoted extensively from Paul Levi's Our Course Against Putschism in the critique of the SL's Chile line of abstentionist putschism which follows. The reader may well find this issue obscure. Since few contemporary radicals are aware of Levi, his role in the Communist International in the era of Lenin, the 1921 German "March Action," his polemic against adventurism, etc., a brief explanation of the historical role of the man and his work is in order here. We will not conceal from the reader that an exhaustive consideration of the Levi case, his fall from power in both the German Communist Party and the Comintern, and the meaning and implications of this fall, has proven an important component in our development as Marxists in the past year and a half. Without diverging into further detail at this point, the political questions raised by this historical examination represent a central dividing line between ourselves and most of the contemporary "left."

Levi was a contemporary of Lenin, knew Lenin in exile in Switzerland during World War I, and was a supporter of the Luxemburg-Mehring-Liebnecht antiwar revolutionary Spartacusbund in the wartime German Social Democracy.

With a backdrop of German defeat in the World War and the Russian Revolution in the East, a series of organizational ruptures took place in the German Socialist movement in 1917 and 1918; out of some of the remnants of these splits, Luxemburg and the Spartacus nuclei founded the German Communist Party on the last day of 1918. A few weeks later a largely spontaneous workers' uprising in Berlin -- what has gone down in history as the "Spartacus Putsch" -- was crushed by the social democratic government with the aid of protofascist Freikorps troops, and in the aftermath of repression the leading cadre of the KPD were murdered. The leadership of what was left of German

communism after the uprising -- demoralized, isolated and discredited -- fell to Levi.

It is no exaggeration to say that after the death of Luxemburg, Levi, in all probability, was the only revolutionist outside Russia who understood the rudimentary politics of Bolshevism; the subsequent history of the Comintern bears out this assessment. It was under Levi's leadership that German communists fought against the virus of ultra-leftism which affected the whole movement, even into the leadership of the Russian party and the Comintern. It was under his leadership that in a period of less than two years the KPD grew from a handful of militants to a party of hundreds of thousands of members. His polemic from prison against the sectarian leadership of his own party on the approach to take to the social democrats at the time of the 1920 Kapp putsch, was considered exemplary by Lenin; he initiated the tactic of the united front in western Europe, in a similar manner to that outlined by Lenin in "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder". Not accidentally, he sat as chairman to the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920.

Moreover the polemic Levi wrote in response to his party's adventure in the March Action, Our Course Against Putschism, is quite closely related to Lenin's "Left-Wing Communism" in its conceptual elaboration of the relationship between the Marxist party and the class, and it is this aspect of his work which we have made use of in our critique. In fact these two works, together with Trotsky's The New Course and The Lessons of October, are the finest and most comprehensive theoretical statements on the nature of the communist party in the period following the Bolshevik Revolution. (Interestingly enough, all these works are effectively ignored by the present-day "Trotskyist" epigones, although for narrow purposes of chronic internal factionalism the tendency which calls itself the "International Committee of the Fourth International" -- more on them in part III of this introduction -- has partially rehabilitated The Lessons of October.)

Levi came into conflict with the leading strata of the Comintern after the Second Congress in two major areas, the continuation of the Comintern ultra-left line -- later generalized specifically as the "theory of the offensive" -- and over the tactic of the mechanical application of the "21 Points" of affiliation to the Communist International, to split sections along presumed reformist/revolutionary lines. In the former case, one would have presumed his political congruence with Lenin, who wrote "Left-Wing Communism" specifically for the Second Congress of the CI. But the political focus resulting from the discussion of the "21 Points" against reformism and centrism gave the Congress a decided "leftist" bias, and Lenin's work did not get the attention it deserved for another year.

Since Lenin's and Trotsky's "leadership" of the Comintern was only nominal, and since in any case the critical practical

day-to-day work was in the hands of the blowhard G. Zinoviev, the president of the CI (then on an adventurist tear), and his private camarilla of Radek, Bela Kun and assorted incompetent Bulgarians and Hungarians -- known as the "Little Bureau"; in contemporary Watergate terminology, the "Comintern plumbers" -- friction between the leadership of the CI and established leaders of national parties was a foregone conclusion. Originating a tactic known in the Trotskyist movement today as "Pabloist" organizational manipulation, Zinoviev engineered a method of work of creating private factions in national sections wherever the leadership would not kowtow to the "Little Bureau." Levi in no way objected to the principle of the "21 Points"; nevertheless, together with the mechanical splitting operation in reluctant or faction-ridden national parties run by "Little Bureau" wildmen, these methods were guaranteed to ruin the Communist International in short order.

The particular instance which led to the explosion between Levi and the CI came at the Livorno conference of the Italian Socialist Party in late January, 1921, where the split forced by the Bulgarian Kristo Kabakchiev and the Hungarian Matyas Rakosi (after World War II the notorious Stalinist hatchetman and butcher of the Hungarian workers) destroyed the party, breaking it right down the middle into a majority reformist right and a sectarian abstentionist minority ultra-left led by A. Bordiga -- but without creating a communist nucleus. Levi objected; Rakosi forced a principled vote of confidence for the Comintern line in the KPD Zentrale (analogous to the Politburo). The Levi-Zetkin "right" lost the vote by a narrow margin, and resigned their leadership posts. A defacto but not immediate open split along right-left lines in the German party was thus consummated. (The best available assessments of the March Action and its implications are Helmut Gruber's International Communism in the Era of Lenin, Werner Angress's Stillborn Revolution, a massive and perhaps definitive study of the failure of German communism from 1919 through the German October in 1923, and two short studies which appeared in the pages of the American Fourth International in 1942-43, Walter Held's "Why the German Revolution Failed" and a reply to Held by Marc Loris, "The German Revolution in Lenin's Time." The Gruber book offers the best documentary treatment together with a running political commentary on the interdependence of the German and Italian events. Gruber and Angress are bourgeois scholars not sympathetic to communists; by coincidence, both Held, murdered with his family by Stalin while fleeing from the Nazi advance, and Loris, were former secretaries to Trotsky.)

The following month after the change in the German leadership of the party the March Action took place, which Levi subsequently characterized as "the greatest Bakuninist putsch in history." The KPD at this time was formally led by Brandler, Thalheimer and Prolich, who were to play such a lamentable role in the revolutionary year of 1923, where the question of communist revolution in Germany was posed...and under their leadership

was lost. The 1921 uprising lasted about a week and was characterized by reckless firebrand propaganda, the setting of the unemployed against the employed workers at factories, by the setting of the communists against the German working class, and attempts to "galvanize" the workers by means of provocations and indiscriminate terrorism; the action was broken by the police after a week, and the KPD was severely discredited.

The open dispute which followed shook the Comintern and pointed a finger of responsibility at the Zinoviev leadership and its functionaries in Germany, the notorious Bela Kun and J. Pogany (Pepper, of later CPUSA fame) among them. The line taken by the Zentrale (and backed by the Comintern leadership) justified the action. Self-righteously it blamed the German workers and not its own tactics for the defeat, and promised to do the same thing again as soon as possible. Unable to get a hearing inside the KPD whose leadership was concerned only to cover up its own and the CI's dirt, Levi went outside the party to publish Our Course Against Putschism in the belief that the future of the German Party and the fate of the German Revolution depended on a complete airing of the March mistakes in full view of the working class. Instead, he was simply expelled from the KPD on grounds of violation of discipline and lack of political loyalty and subjected to a campaign of intense vilification as a "renegade" and a traitor by the Action's initiators; the most famous (infamous) of these attacks is K. Radek's "Der Fall Levi," reprinted in part in the Gruber book cited above.

The Levi case was a central feature of the Third Congress of the Comintern in June 1921; the March Action was the main reason for the repudiation of the "left" course which until then had dominated the CI. Lenin and Trotsky demonstratively placed themselves "on the right" at this congress. The theory of the offensive was repudiated and replaced with an orientation to mass work. But in order to head off a split in the Comintern and salvage the new German leadership, discussion on the Action was severely limited, and a "compromise to the left" -- actually an unprincipled and terribly unwise capitulation to the left -- was negotiated by Lenin and Trotsky, in which Levi's expulsion from the KPD was upheld by the CI while his line was accepted nearly in all respects. Naturally, for the Little Broom and their friends, this was read as their compromise to the right.

Walter Held, cited above, describes the political context of the compromises, and the way Trotsky (and presumably Lenin) read their significance, in this manner:

The 'compromise to the left' on the German question was approximately as follows: The 'March Action' was an advance insofar as the German party led large masses into the struggle; it was nevertheless a grave error insofar as the party forsook a defensive line in favor of an offensive one; Levi's criticisms, although generally correct,

signified a breach of discipline and therefore his expulsion was justified.

That Trotsky was not altogether satisfied with this compromise was clearly evident both in his report and participation in the debates. Thus he attempted as far as possible to weaken the position that the March Action was a step forward. "When we say that the March Action was a step forward, we mean -- I, at least do [Held introduces a parenthetical remark that Trotsky evidently thought it necessary to limit himself] -- the fact that the Communist Party stands before us as a united independent self-sufficient party which has a possibility of independently entering the proletarian struggle." After this concession to the general rhetoric of the Congress, the speaker adopted an altogether different tone when he discussed the March adventure more concretely. "The March Action is not to be defended....The attempt of the party to play a leading role in a great mass movement was not successful...and when we say we'll throw Paul Levi out the window and we discuss the March Action in confusing phraseology as 'a first attempt', 'a step forward', we are, in a word, with phrasemongering covering up the critique, but we have not fulfilled our duty."

That this compromise to the left was in fact a capitulation to the ultra-lefts can easily be seen in this conclusion of Held's:

...While they treated the putschists with velvet gloves, the theses [of the Russian delegation] anathematized the critics of the ultra-leftists. It is no wonder, then, that the leaders of the March Action had no misgivings about "adopting in principle the theses presented by the Russian delegation" and only expressed objection to "Trotsky's interpretation of the theses."

--H. Held, "Why the German Revolution Failed",
Fourth International, January 1943, pp. 21-2

This method of dealing with Levi and its implications and certainly as a precedent was perhaps the worst mistake the Communist International in the era of Lenin and Trotsky -- the first four congresses -- ever made. An expulsion for the formal reason of "breaking discipline" when the action undertaken by the party was an error bordering on a crime against the working class was outrageous; further, to repudiate a spokesman for a counterposed political line while adopting his line is a flat denial of the Leninist practice of factional democracy. It is illogical to boot; to expect ultra-lefts to carry out a "rightist" line, which they neither believe in nor understand, is absurd. In all probability the fate of the German Revolution two years later was sealed by this Congress, since clearly the failures of 1923 were predominantly due to the incapacity of the subservient Brandler-Thalheimer leadership which replaced Levi. While it is of course an open question as to whether Levi could have

led the German Communist Revolution, it is unquestionable that the leadership which followed him could not. They, the "lefts" of 1921 made every single symmetrical rightist error possible in missing the opportunities of 1923!

In the aftermath of the failure of the German October two years after the Third Congress, and especially after the left opposition repeatedly came in conflict with later bureaucratically-sponsored actions of various kinds (as for example the Canton soviet) Trotsky and what was to become the Fourth International sharply projected the compromise line of the Third Congress, although Trotsky had been a spokesman for it at the time to some degree -- refusing to call the Action a "putsch." Hereafter, instead, Trotsky would characterize the period of the CI up to the June 1921 Congress as one of "adventurism" and "putschism." Gone from his polemics now are the conciliating cover phrases; instead, referring to the disgusting Stalin-Zinoviev habit of passing off defeats as victories, substituting bluster and super-militant ultra-leftist rant for Marxist analysis and classifying opponents as demoralized elements, liquidators or rightists -- all the hallmarks of the German and ECCI "left" after the failure of the March Action -- he singles out as the top clique's targets all those who "were able to see better and more clearly the events of yesterday, today and tomorrow." This line is taken from Strategy and Tactics of the Imperialist Epoch, one of Trotsky's most important theoretical works of the late 1920's. In another passage from this work, strangely reminiscent of the quote from Levi at the heading of this section, he wrote: "Had the Lefts of that time triumphed at the Third World Congress, Lenin would have been classed together with Levi, Clara Zetkin, and others in the right wing on the same grounds." Trotsky retained this evaluation thereafter, and it appears, for example, in a thesis presented to a 1936 Fourth International preconference, "The Evolution of the Comintern." It is only regrettable that the opportunity and time never arose when Trotsky had the opportunity to rethink and systematically reconsider the line and role he and Lenin played at the Third CI Congress, for this is in part where the seeds of the defeat of the 1923 revolution were sown.

It is worth noting here that the Held piece which we have quoted above and with whose thesis we substantially agree develops its historical perspective from this later view of Trotsky. It is an exceptional piece; after the death of Trotsky the Fourth International in effect junked this view and reverted to the earlier view held by Lenin, Trotsky and the "Russian theses" at the time of the Third Congress. The reason for this reversion raises questions far beyond the scope of this note on Levi. The Marc Loris answer to Held is in the latter vein. Central to his thesis is the denial that the 1921 Action was a putsch, and to prove his case he quotes voluminously from various writings of Lenin, Trotsky et. al. in 1921...and carefully forgets to mention the way the question was handled by his own movement over the 14 years after 1926!

...lawyers without clients, doctors without knowledge or patients, billiard-playing students, commercial travellers and various more or less unsavory journalists of the gutter press.

-- Marx, on the Italian section of the First International.

The authors of the following analysis of the Chilean counterrevolution and some central political issues flowing from it -- the Communist Internationalist Group -- is a small organization composed mainly of former leading members of the Spartacist League. Although this represents our first public statement as a group, the group in fact has existed in loose form since mid-1972. We walked out of the SL at that time in the aftermath of a tragi-comic, totally inept attempt to form a faction, a tendency, or at least some kind of oppositional grouping to the sheer political insanity and self-serving brutality of the clique at the top which owns the SL. As the month-long crescendo of denunciations, violations of elemental communist-moral norms, apartment ransackings, the vituperous revving up of the internal gossip mills, theft of private correspondence, confessions, psychological pistol-whippings, extorted or voluntary self-condemnations, and unanimous votes rose to a shrieking climax, we concluded that neither the "struggle" we were trying to wage, godawfully poor as it was, nor the SL, were worth the effort, and acted accordingly. The SL justifies this rupture, which took out roughly a third of its elected leadership, as a by-product of its "transformation"; for our part, we "transformed" ourselves from a collection of desperate, pathetic "SL loyalists" to outside observers of an apolitical "political" madhouse in the period of about a month.

The whole history of the SL -- from before the time it was even self-advertised as a "League" to the present -- is one long history of "clique fights", of "smoking out" oppositionists before they even know they are oppositionists(!) through the mechanism of an internal political police network of "listening posts" unknown to the membership and accountable not to the organization but only to Robertson. Typical of the SL operation is that our grouping was smashed and wholly fragmented -- and the whole membership of the organization lined up against us in a series of compulsory (and unanimous) condemnatory votes -- before we were able to hold even a single meeting of the people who would have made up our tendency! In fact, such an internal meeting never took place.

Had we been able to function unmolested as a tendency (i.e., within the narrowly-restricted bounds of vindictive harassment afforded dissidents in the Communist Party...or even the SWP) for an outside period of perhaps six months, it is entirely within the realm of possibility (as Robertson himself has privately confided) a large minority of the

RCY itself and probably the majority of the then unbroken RCY leadership could have been won to our 'opposition' for the evident reason that their criticisms of and declared hostility towards the "Robertson regime" paralleled and in some cases even antedated our own hesitant articulation of them. It is worth noting here that it was precisely from this section of the SL, at the time the RCY National Committee, that the most flaboyant and self-accusatory mea culpas, repudiations, self-condemnations, etc., and -- later, of course -- grovelling "negotiated" hosannahs to the formerly contemptible Robertson leadership emanated (copies available on request). The hyped-up opposition-breaking witchhunt atmosphere served the regime to this extent, however, that at the time we left the SL we had not had the opportunity of developing any clear articulated critique of the SL phenomenon as a whole, its program (with which at the time we believed ourselves in general agreement -- as in the daily repeated and never evaluated ritual phrase for internal consumption, "the uniquely correct program") its history or organic relation to its organizational and programmatic progenitors, the American Socialist Workers Party and the British Healyite Socialist Labor League. We had no "program", in other words, at that time which went substantially beyond our feelings of disgust, loathing -- including a heavy dose of self-loathing for having put up with such a sinkhole of crap for so long! -- and simple hatred of this savage caricature of a communist organization mouthing many of the words of the ideals to which we were committed while practicing the direct opposite.

At the same time, however partial and inarticulate -- for want of an appropriate analytical model -- were our "rampant cliquist proclivities" (the overripe prose is the SL's, not ours) and so forth, what was clearly indicated was a fundamentally counterposed way of looking at the whole conception of Marxist: historical methods and the Leninist conception of the revolutionary party and its purpose. These of course are only two examples out of many. Yet at least this much is implied in our very early recognition of the SL internal life as that of a "Byzantine cellar", whose corrupted morality was destructive of communist consciousness and beneath contempt, whose "program" was at least totally divorced from reality, whose "functioning" (sic!) was non-existent and whose trade union/working class orientation was a cruel hoax and a fraud upon the membership. A simple enumeration of our earliest differences with the SL on the question of the vanguard party alone is sufficient to indicate counterposed political, theoretical and ethical approaches to Marxist theory and practice. Limitations of space prevent more than the sketchiest evaluation of these components here. But it is self-evident to any revolutionary that the struggle for the Marxist party is primarily a central theoretical/political problem, not an "organizational"/subordinate issue (an incredible anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist separation whose origins lie in Cannon's SLP), a political problem which contains in itself all of the struggle for a consistent, materialist, Marxist world view. For ourselves in the SL, despite our own wishes and

attempts, finally we could not shut our eyes to the empirical data of stupid brutality and near-paranoid induced anxiety which is the norm of internal life or reconcile it with the professed SL fight for a communist program, and it was this contradiction which pushed us into a suicidal confrontation with the SL "regime" in order to maintain our ability to see the world around us and salvage at least some shreds of our Marxist communist integrity. We did not draw our conclusions rapidly, or rush them to their programmatic conclusions, for a relatively long period of several months because we did not know whether we were simply dealing with a freak outfit or whether these deformities had their origins elsewhere. Indeed, we thought at the time of the "clique fight" and even for a while afterwards, that we had simply been smoked out and pushed into a fight prematurely (1) as a result of the top clique's preemptive strike against us; indeed, it is self-evident, now, that had we been able to take off our blinders earlier and articulate our real differences with this piece of 'ossified lunacy' we would have walked out months or even years earlier.

* * * * *

We consider a short simple narrative of the internal life of the SL more than sufficient grounds to explain to anyone conversant with Stalinist organizational practices our walkout from that organization. We have little interest in the telling of horror stories about SL "regime" lunacies beyond those necessary to flesh out an otherwise abstract statement and to convey to the reader a feel for what it is like inside. At the same time we will attempt to analyze the historical/political basis of pseudo-Trotskyism trying for the first time to our knowledge to go beyond simple namecalling and retailing of extra-political and psychoanalytical outrages to thereby render a political account of the existence of the international plethora of screwball outfits -- the SL, Workers League, Socialist Labor League, the French OCI and Lique Communiste, etc. -- which pass themselves off to the general public and their own memberships as "Marxist" and "Trotskyist".

The SL has made quite a career for itself publicly washing the dirty laundry of the so-called "Trotskyist" movements and it is impossible to guess what in fact they would fill their pages with if most of these insignificant outfits were to do the working class a favor and go away. But after they expose the atrocities (more or less accurately, so far as we can tell) of whomever they're carrying a knife for this week, they stop far short of attempting a historical, programmatic, methodological explanation of what these groups are, where they came from and -- even more importantly -- how they get away with it. This failure to undertake a materialist explanation of the "fake left" is by no means accidental; on the contrary, given Robertson's stress on "continuity" for self-justification, there are an awful lot of rocks -- labelled Cannon and Healy, in the main -- that he dare not let his members look under! So, while it is no

doubt interesting to learn Progressive Labor is as screwed-down, screwed-and-bound Stalinist inside as they appear to the world outside, that a prominent leader of the Ceylonese "Trotskyists" openly flirts with the CIA and is "protected" (!!!) in this by the SWP, that the Labor Committee becomes more megalomaniac, more crackpot week by week, that Healy's English Socialist Labor League beats up even more internal dissidents than political opponents (they underwent their transformation some time ago), that the SWP uses "Watergate" tactics against its dissidents (!), that the Workers League's Woblforth is a political swine who changes his views with the same regularity that he changes his socks...while all of these are undoubtedly true and probably even underplayed, the hows and whys of these anti-working-class, anti-communist abominations are never explained, and for self-evident reasons.

The internal SL regime has gotten even worse, over the years, as it approaches its projected Healyite-Cannonite norms -- in Marv Treiger's words, "worse than any Stalinist organization I've ever been in" (this from a perspective of ten years in the Stalinist/Maoist movement!) -- while its outside sanctimonious hypocrisy and pretense of "factional democracy" has become even more shrill. We offer the reader a few descriptive incidents:

Item: The Leninist Faction/Spartacist League Fusion:
During the early months of 1972 a tendency professing an "anti-reformist" semi-Healyite, "left-Trotskyist" program began to develop out of a prior opposition in the SWP, taking the name of the "Leninist Faction." The LF was virtually identical programmatically to the SL, at least on paper, and organizationally more competent than any prior SWP opposition since 1953. Typically, the SL did not attempt to develop the group politically but confronted it organizationally, posing the question to them: abortion or capitulation. To this end, it transformed its sympathizer, pro-SL co-thinkers inside the faction into SL agents (who repeatedly denied this to their then co-factionalists). When fusion discussions among the leaderships of the two organizations stalled over two questions -- inviting the politically similar SL-expelled Vanguard Newsletter group into the fusion, on grounds of programmatic agreement and the strong well-founded reservations of the LF toward the SL "regime" (the skeptical LF had gotten a taste of Cannonite "Leninist democratic centralism" from the Barnes-Kerry regime in the SWP) -- the SL made an attempt to gut and destroy the faction organizationally by simultaneously ripping out its agents precipitously without warning and following similar earlier attempts of the Workers League, fingering the remaining "illegal", "disloyal" faction to the SWP leadership.

This "smart" Zinovievist-Stalinist tactic had two results: an increased political public confusion in the creation of yet another programmatically similar but opponent organization, the Class Struggle League; and the development of a new SL-sponsored

theoretical perversion of the fundamental question of democratic centralism and the vanguard party in order to justify Cannonite/Zinoviev organizational conceptions of the failed fusion, a totally ahistorical, theoretically defective metaphysical separation of the historical Lenin into "before" and "after" compartments. This was a classic case of more blatant than latent revisionism. The LP had written a document, "Democratic Centralism", in which they described the Leninist form of internal relations as "freedom of criticism, unity of action", from Lenin's 1906 article of the same name (Collected Works, Vol. X, pp 442-3). In fact this disembodying of the historical Lenin was one of the best theoretical contributions to the Marxist movement in a generation, despite its severe limitations. But the top clique in the SL did not agree; they took one look at this arrogant heresy and recoiled in horror, for the LP had gone so far as to contrast Leninist norms of functioning with those of the SHP and the SL. It is as clear to the Robertson circle as to ourselves that to encourage internal criticism of anything in the SL would destroy that organization in short order, for obvious reasons. Nor was it overjoyed to learn the LP had discovered that Leninist democratic centralism implicitly but clearly condemned the "organizational methods" which predominated in the Fourth International after the death of Trotsky. This difference with the LP over Leninist standards was escalated into a "principled question", i.e., a split issue; since the SL was clearly in the wrong and counterposed to Lenin's clearly stated views, a "theoretical" cover for the rupture in relations and SL practice became a burning necessity. According to the new SL schema (we had never heard anything like this in the SL, but then most of us had never known what Lenin had written in 1906, either!) the Lenin who had favored party democracy at the time of the 1905 Revolution was "a revolutionary social democrat but not yet a Bolshevik" (1); this Lenin was contrasted with the later Lenin (about which, unfortunately but understandably, nothing was said or documented in the public press of the SL), who presumably held such democratic frills were Menshevism! This casuistic hokum is undoubtedly passed on to the ranks as the essence of Trotskyism, whereas the true father of this particular peculiar dichotomy is to be found in the historical tradition not of Bolshevism but P.F. Eamun.

(In fact, even on the level we have discussed it, the SL argument is unadulterated hogwash. Robertson and his conception of the "Bolshevik" party are so far removed from Bolshevism and Lenin that he is terribly embarrassed by Lenin's strategic approach and tactics in both Russian Revolutions, 1905 and 1917! For reasons of that "unique" political quality of his which we are too polite to mention here, however, he dares openly -- even if obliquely -- to attack Lenin only in the former instance, 1905, implying semi-Menshevism, "ISishness", etc., to him. How they treat his strategy in 1917 deserves the extended study in obfuscatory circumspection we have afforded it in the text of our critique of the SL's "position" on Chile.

(To return momentarily to the Lenin 1906 formulation of democratic centralism, and the SL "before" and "after" myth, we draw the attention of the Robertsonian "theoreticians" to the following passage from a polemic against H. Pivert on the nature of the Bolshevik party:

...the principle of Bolshevik organization is "democratic centralism" assured by complete freedom of criticism and by groupings together with a discipline of steel in action."

--Trotsky, "Labels and Numbers," Writings 1935-36
pp 47-48.

Does the SL also contend that Trotsky never really gave up his Menshevism....?)

Item: Progressive Labor and Democratic Centralism: In the April 1973 issue of Workers Vanguard, the SL paper, two former PL drop outs wrote an article, "PL on the Road to Reformism" which piously lectures PL on their Stalinist internal life. That PL internal life is wholly wretched, we have no doubt. What is particularly interesting about the SL article is its flat refusal -- beyond reflex-action "Stalinist" label-pasting -- to demonstrate the political/programmatic interrelationship between PL's views and this "monolithic" conception of the party, although one would think such an effort would be second nature to any Marxist. Even more interesting and more gurnane here than this elemental methodological failure is the total, mind-blowing chutzpah of the SL attacking PL for the SL's most characteristic internal features! An analogy might help here: you can only grind your teeth and laugh when an outfit like the filthy Realy League (of England) attacks their former bloc partners, the equally filthy OCI (of France) for their treatment of oppositionalists; to quote the SLL, "...the OCI leaders have now resorted to exhuming the political past of (the Hungarian Trotskyist/ Varga to discredit him personally and destroy his self-confidence -- by comparing him to the well-known GPU agent Soblen." (The OCI has apparently distinguished itself by slandering Varga as a 15-year veteran agent of both (!?) the CIA and the GPU). (cf. "In Defense of Principles," The Bulletin, November 20, 1973) The "catch" is that the SLL is probably worse than the OCI, inside; that it is a screwball outfit closer in style, atmosphere and brutality to Roehm's Brown Shirts, and whose ossified lunacy demoralized, broke physically and psychologically and finally destroyed politically a whole layer of the finest British Marxist intellectuals ever assembled together, former CPers who broke with Stalinism and became Trotskyists after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution...all gone.

This is only an analogy, but a fitting one. Scaled down proportionally, it places the SL attack on PL in the proper perspective. A point by point refutation of the SL's hypocrisy on this question is out of order here, but we advise anyone shocked by the NY revelation that the PL leadership issued an internal document against Bill Epton "which can only be characterized as slander and character assassination" -- it can in fact be

better characterized as vile and anti-communist -- to write the SL national office for copies of the 200-odd pages of apolitical swill dumped on us. The SL has been quite circumspect about letting these masterpieces circulate publically, not for reasons of "principle" but because they reek with the true internal atmosphere. (Indeed, the SL is so aware of their exposure in these documents that one of the grounds for the "post mortem" expulsion of Dave Cunningham was that he had "leaked" (having already resigned from the SL) the regime's own documents against us to the IP thereby "sabotaging" the fusion!)

In the same article on PL there is this masterful little section:

"PL still maintains Stalinist norms of "democratic-centralism", i.e., there is no mechanism by which a minority can organize to fight for its position or change the leadership. In contrast to the Leninist norm of factional democracy as the only real guarantee against bureaucratic control, subterranean cliques and a docile membership."

Had we written this passage, and not the two former PL'ers, we would have gone on to stress also the central role of the education of the membership in Marxism and critical thinking, and also the critical importance of timely access to vital information, the purpose of which is to inform the membership and not to be squirreled away in locked files. But let us not cavil; the points in the article are well taken, and so far as they go we agree. But... we would like to find one single major "orthodox", "Trotskyist" organization somewhere in the post-mortem Trotskyist movement which has made even the pretense of living by the "Leninist norms" they all sanctimoniously preach. Perhaps Shachtman's Workers Party, before it collapsed politically after about 1948 or so; perhaps Haston's Revolutionary Communist Party during the war years, before the Cannon-Pablo-Healy combine chewed it up and wrecked it. For that matter, we would like to find one instance where a political struggle -- as opposed to personal defamation, gutter-gossip-congering, heresy-hunting, "disloyalty" charges/trials, and the like -- was the predominant feature in any internal fight. So far as the S/P derived-and-influenced groups are concerned, it has been a thirty-year-long wasteland.

If there is any "mechanism" by which "a minority can organize to fight for its position" in the SL, we were unable to find it. Anyone who thinks the "Robertson regime" can be modified, changed, toned down or removed also believes in the tooth fairy and the Easter Bunny. With the faintest possible exception of the Workers League, the Nixon administration or the SLL (cf. above) we don't know of any organization with a worse record (however cosmetically presented to the public) of "bureaucratic control" than the SL; even the hyper-Stalinist/mutualist

groupings which presently dot the US political landscape are in general more democratic, less screwed-down than the SL under Robertson's white-knuckled control. So far as "deaf", i.e., silent, fearful "memberships" are concerned, we thought what we called the "silent faction" (the regime's "Silent Majority") was that way because they were really mulling over political issues. Maybe they were only thinking about "continuity"?

So far as "subterranean cliques" are concerned: ...!

The reader may draw any conclusion that might spring to mind from the sheer coincidence of the fact the central regime attack on us was entitled "Cliques, Blocs and the Regime" or from this deathless bit of, well...overwrought prose:

"...For it is indeed the Cunningham clique -- as well as the Moore clique with which Cunningham et. al. have for some time maintained a secret personal-political correspondence -- which is at the core of the Byzantine Cellar, peculiar vegetation which grew and grew all the dark until Treiger's coming unstuck and breaking from the SL turned over the rock and exposed them at last.

.....

Subjective, arrogant cliquists have destroyed the innocence of this organization."/!//
("Cliques, Blocs, etc.", June 1972)

You have to admit that that stuff about "peculiar vegetation", turning over rocks, hidden oppositionalists being exposed and "unmasked", etc., is pretty good. There is a history of this kind of writing -- and thinking -- in the movement, but it is also the fact that you never find the names Marx, or Lenin, or Trotsky, signed to it, and it only rarely appeared when they were alive in a position to do something about it. The movement most characterized by this sort of thing has an equally famous individual's name attached to it, but to develop this point here would be slightly premature. But it is not the movement that is the "organic development" of Leninism, but rather its antithesis.

What is not answered in the 200 some pages of garbage and vilification poured out at us is: where do cliques, if that is what they are, come from? The reason it is not answered is simple -- to do so would be to expose a clique-run operation. Cliques exist only, as the WY attack on PL correctly says, when there is no internal democracy, no Leninism, in an organization; a clique hunt/clique fight is virtually by definition a self-exposure of a dead, worthless organization! In a healthy, democratic organization there are and will be no cliques, for the good and simple reason that differences, arguments, gripes will take other, open means of expression.

What is really outrageous about the WY's poisonous stricture against PL is that the whole history of the SL is one long series

of "discoveries" and "confrontations" with cliques! The SL membership does not know this because they know nothing of their own history, but anyone with access to a set of Political Bureau or Resident Editorial Board minutes from 1964 on can find a constant repetition of the theme. (They will find a constant repetition of the same pattern of confessions, contritions, resignations, suspensions or outright expulsions also.) According to the regime documents themselves, there were at least five -- Benjamin-Moore-Cunningham-Treiger-Brosius -- separate cliques in operation just before the June 1972 blowup, and who knows how many others? For all Robertson knew, or suspected, probably half the elected leadership was doing the initial scribing-out work of thinking about starting an opposition. Besides, in compiling such a list one should not forget the Robertson permanent faction which owns the SL -- it is, purely and simply, a leadership clique, based on authority, seniority and mutual-backscratching self-protection, not at all political and not at all dissimilar to the crowd around Barnes (in the SP?) or Wolf-orth or Healy. In retrospect, there is no reason for us to assume these earlier groupings, clique-baited out of the SL, were any better or worse, more or less political, more or less articulate than we were; nor should our recognition that some of these former groups and individuals developed some pretty screwy views or went funny places have a debilitating effect. (The SL has some pretty screwy views, also.) What emerges is this: a constant series of supersensitive preemptive strikes against any criticism of the leadership, a policy of "smashing oppositions in the egg stage", etc., etc. In the ten year history of the SL, in fact, there has been exactly one political opposition standing on any kind of document, the Turner Ellens opposition of 1968. (We discount our own Bay Area opposition of Summer '72 as a bad, morbid, and altogether poor joke.) The Turner-Ellens group was, indeed, "smoked out" prematurely, but due to the massive sloth of the leadership and Ellen's excellent underground work, it was not destroyed in embryo. The only oppositionalists that stand a chance to gather enough pertinent information to develop sufficient consciousness in the SL to want to do something, anything (i.e., get Robertson) before they are gotten are leadership/apparatus breakaways. Both we and the 1968 opposition were of this variety. The 1968 opposition got nine supporters, two major documents, two months of existence and the normal round of "rotten bloc" charges (for Communists if an opposition survives long enough to write a statement it's a rotten bloc; if it's crushed in the egg it's an "unrotted", subjective, paranoid clique), petty harassments, disciplinary charges, suspensions, walkouts, and post-mortem expulsions. In all fairness, it was not a very good opposition in terms of its politics, but it was certainly unique -- the first and last of its kind! (For the record here we have an obligation to state that on the one and only decisive question in the 1968 fight -- the "organizational" question, the nature of the internal regime and the organization itself -- for which we, along with other regime supporters, so liberally and intolerably abused the opposition, we, not they were dead wrong.) But even with this record hanging around its neck, the SL does not flinch: when it tells us that

without "Leninist norms of factional democracy" its organization will get cliques....

Item: The SWP and Watergate: The title of an article in the September 28 issue of WV reads "SWP Uses Watergate Tactics Against Trotskyists", and we laughed ourselves sick when we read these accusations! The SWP has used these kinds of tactics with the connivance of the leadership against its oppositions since at least the initial stages of the Goldman-Horrow opposition in 1943, and it is possible to wonder if this isn't something Cannon learned as the "Bolshvizer"/Zinoviev agent of the CPUSA in 1924-5. The SL Bulletins issued against us are full of purloined and "intercepted" correspondence, private notes fished out of wastebaskets, and the like. The preemptive strike dropped on us was, in most features at least, the end result of a scenario which took weeks, perhaps months, to construct in secret and pull together. Reasons of space alone prevent us from publishing a relevant section of Robertson's widely-circulated January 1973 letter to the British Revolutionary Communist League, in which he alternately denies and justifies the ransacking of oppositionists' apartments. Robertson will undoubtedly not be amused to find some future oppositionist using that passage as a justification to break into his apartment....

We have some questions for the SL'ers here: what on earth have such tactics, such "methods" to do with communism? Where in Bolshevik practice, with all the unfortunate emigre demoralization, squabbling, backbiting, blistering hostility, under nerve-flaying conditions ten times worse than you ever heard of, can you find anything like this? There's a reason you can't find it. It didn't exist....

Item: The Workers League and its "mini deformed workers state" regime: The SL makes this charge against the WL, apparently seriously through crocodile tears and roaring laughter, in the November 9, 1973 issue of WV (cf. "Life in Wohlforth's Workers League"). They thereby admit, albeit in a sideways manner, that the conduct of the internal life of an organization claiming to be "Trotskyist" is a political question. What they mean by their cute phrase "mini deformed workers state" regime, in plain English, is that Wohlforth runs his organization like a Stalinist police state. True enough. All that needs to be added is that this is precisely the way Robertson runs his. The same thing goes for Healy, Lambert, Barnes, Sam Harcy and all the rest of these types; the only difference between them is how often an opposition can actually surface, and how long it lasts after it does, if it can. Everyone around the pseudo-Trotskyist movement knows the bureaucracy in the SWP is worse, more bureaucratic, than the most ossified craft trade union you can name; they also know, or ought to, that both Robertson and Wohlforth run their organizations in a manner fit to make the Barnes-Kerry regime in the SWP look like flaming liberals, that both the SL and WL place a high premium on "smoking out" factions, or proto-factions (occasionally to the point of bragging about it publically!) and that in practice it is far easier to dump Barnes or impeach Nixon,

than to remove Robertson or Wohlforth from their respective posts. The WV article quotes an internal WL resolution on a current factional dispute. We assume that point #3 of this resolution which pretends to give a social/political basis for the existence of a faction fight at this particular time, was accurately copied from an authentic WL internal document (and not accidentally copied down from one of Robertson's diatribes against us last year). If so, the point refers to the WL's "transformation" (i) into a mass organization (ii) and the presumed inability of the skeptical minority to keep up with it (iii).

It is interesting the SL did not choose to comment on the political meaning of this WL resolution, and a self-exposure that they did not. The meaning of the language is quite clear: in line with his gut impulse derived from the degeneration of the PI, Wohlforth is laying the groundwork for a demagogic abuse of the minority for "desertion" from the WL, the Fourth International, and the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Trotsky-"First Four Congresses of the Comintern"-Cannon-Healy "continuity" upon which his puny authority rests, and in so many words accuses them of breaking under the pressure of the "transformation" of the WL, capitulation to the increased pressure of the class enemy, sharpening monstrously with the approaching final crisis of capitalism, etc., etc. The WL minority, whoever, whatever they are, are getting a close-up taste of the SIF/PI-derived penchant for denouncing anyone who disagrees with it (or its "historically chosen cadre"/leadership) as "renegades", capitulators to imperialism, class enemies of the proletariat, and any other slander they can suck out of their thumbs -- or a wine bottle -- at the moment. This stuff was all lifted, of course, straight out of the how-to text books of the Stalin faction in the post-Lenin Russian Communist Party, and similar co-thinkers in the post-Trotsky Fourth International. Under the circumstances, our hilarity at the SL's exposure of this outrage is tinged with cynicism; presumably in this case the normal sequence of events is reversed, and Wohlforth is following Robertson's groundbreaking attempts! (Brief memo to the editor of The Bulletin: "Porsake base envy, and salute a worthy peer"!)

In 1948-49 when the Tito-Soviet split reached its hottest point amid threats of war and invasion, Stalin denounced Tito for running a "Turkish" regime. While the charge was undoubtedly true (despite the Fourth International's painting up Tito as the defender of Leninism!) the charge lost something, coming as it did from that particular source. But for the pseudo-communists of the SL, anger at Byzantium can only be levelled against Stalin, Mao and the Healyites; so far as we are concerned, for the SL to chide Wohlforth for outlawing factions and his "sneering contempt of workers' democracy" is on a level of cynical sanctimonious hypocrisy equivalent to Stalin's rage at Tito, or G. Healy's faked concern for the slanders of the OCI against their oppositionalists!

Enough. We assume our reader is as little interested as we in the internal workings, ecostructure of symbiotic mutual-recriminations of little pseudo-Marxist dingbat clubs whose virtually whole social impact is limited to the nuisances and torments they perpetrate upon their memberships. We want to stress that we dwell on this material only for the purpose of making our points concrete and the magnitude of the question evident. It has two central premises. First, simply to demonstrate the basic conceptual and practical similarity of all these groups, despite what they say of themselves or criticize in others, despite whatever banner -- "workers democracy", for example -- they parade under in public. It is clear that to the limited extent they are known at all they discredit the Marxist movement -- and, inevitably, Marxism itself -- in the eyes of everyone capable of non-cultist critical thought. Second, to demonstrate that however much or for what reasons these groups occasionally "expose" each other by listing their various political/organizational atrocities and general crimes against civilization -- we do not challenge the accuracy of these exposes; all in all, they are undoubtedly true -- they nowhere postulate a historical/theoretical explanation of the origins and sources of these anti-socialist abominations, or explain the apparently inexplicable...that is, how it happens that pure 100% out-and-out Stalinist morality and methods of operation all of a sudden, or even gradually, show up in the "Trotskyist" movement.

For example, the SL on occasion attacks the Workers League as "political bandits." Undoubtedly true. But if this is meant as a political characterization and not simply as a swear word, then it is necessary to ask: what does this mean? where do these techniques come from? In the case of the WL their origins are obvious insofar as the WL is only the American outpost of the British Socialist Labor League. The immediate source obviously lies in the SLL proprietorship of G. Healy. But where in turn does he come from? Along with J. P. Cannon in the US and h. Pablo on the European continent he was the center piece of the "Big Three" post-war Fourth International leaders. How did he rise to such high position? Obviously, again, because he was Cannon's agent/factionalist in the British war-time Revolutionary Communist Party, and in that role along with the other Cannon factionalist Pablo was responsible more than any other factor for the destruction of the RCP after the war. Did he use those sort of tactics, then? Unquestionably, as the internal RCP documents of the period indicate. Then it is fair to say, is it not, that the finger points in a fairly linear fashion to the international extension of the post-mortem "Trotskyist" leadership-clique in the wartime SWP? Unquestionably....

Robertson, of course, knows this as well as we do. But because his claim to "consistency", or "orthodoxy," or "continuity" lies in his identification with the Cannon clique and its methods -- the validity of this identity, this "continuity" is another question, the answer to which lies far beyond the scope of this critique -- he cannot allow his verbal attacks on the

WL leadership and its methods to penetrate beyond word-slinging into an historical evaluation because such an examination would destroy him and his pretences as well as Wohlforth. Rather than take this chance, the recourse to personal/psychological projections substitutes for materialist explanations: Scaly is a bad man and a "political gangster". "Quit Healy!" Period. It goes without saying that the practitioners of these Florentine arts, along with those who "expose" elements of their consequences, undoubtedly pretend this sort of thing constitutes "Leninism" (clearly, it is not only the cold-war ideologues of American imperialism and anticommunism who believe that Stalinism represents the organic continuity of Leninism). That they are able to convince their followers in this abominable mis-evaluation of Leninism/Trotskyism depends totally upon the maintenance of blissful, sheeplike ignorance among the ranks through the medium of Pavlovian-conditioned rank-and-file hostility to "theory", history and any form of critical thought. Trotsky's side comments on this phenomenon in the '39-'40 faction fight in the SWP are exactly relevant and always ignored.

Stalinism is not the continuity of Leninism, as we have noted above, but its antithesis; it came to fruition through the medium of a counterrevolution in theory as well as practice, inside the Russian party and the Communist International as well as the Russian state. A similar thing occurred within the "Trotskyist" movement; after the death of Trotsky the "continuity" of Trotskyism was created, as the Lenin cult replaced Lenin after 1923. Similarly, this "continuity" was rapidly transformed into a fetish because the theoretical capacity of the Cannonite leadership of the SWP and the Fourth International proved -- to put it in the most charitable manner possible -- far too inadequate. The analogy with the Bolshevik Party and the Comintern after the physical incapacitation and death of Lenin -- or for that matter, the Bebel/Kautsky-led Social Democracy after the death of Engels -- is unmistakable.

We have termed this transformation of the SWP -- which for particular historical circumstances of World War II meant the Fourth International -- pseudo-Trotskyism, for which we have adduced a specific political and pathological content. Shachtan and the Workers Party of the 1940's made an attempt in this direction but this earlier evaluation was far too superficial and solely descriptive, and hence, given a historical grounding nor a rounded theoretical comprehension; their analysis died in the late 40's together with the WP as a serious revolutionary contender. From the death of Trotsky on, and on occasion even before (as in the case of the '39-'40 faction fight) the internal conflicts in the SWP over strategy and political perspectives, the flesh and blood of any revolutionary party, found resolution not in argument or debate but by the wielding of organizational outrages, machine pressure, a striving toward internal "peace and homogeneity", i.e., monolithism, filthy gossip and insinuations, the threats of expulsions and all the other "dirty tricks" the continuators so admire and

emulate. In the subsequent political struggles in the SWP/FI over the next ten years or so, outside against the WP and inside first against the Goldman-van Heijenoort-horror opposition, then the Johnsonites -- who referred to the post-war SWP internal atmosphere as a "political gas chamber" -- and finally the 1953 Cochran-Clarke-Bartell tendency, the very language and sense of Trotsky's ideas were even further debased and "Trotskyism", like the Stalinists' "Leninism", became a quotational grabbag in order after the fact to justify any given SWP line at any given moment. By this process the revolutionary doctrine of Trotskyism was sterilized, and the organization which was to carry out this sterilized analysis was killed.

The political destruction of the SWP followed apace with its organizational corruption. Within a year at the latest after the death of Trotsky the SWP repudiated his analysis of Stalinism, labeling the Stalinist army "Trotsky's Red Army" and giving to the counter-revolutionary Stalinist expansion an objectively progressive/revolutionary historical role (almost exactly the very words of its later arch-enemy and officially-approved devil-figure Pablo!). Perfectly at home in the pro-Soviet liberal/radical milieu of Franklin Roosevelt's wartime America, the SWP glorified in pseudo-militarist rhetoric for the Jim Crow Army (the "Proletarian Military Policy"), trimmed their politics in the Minncapolis trials, cheered on the Red Army and boosted Soviet patriotism (reserving their curses for the "Stalin clique"), buried every form of revolutionary work in the trade unions for the duration (under the aegis of "preserving the cadres"), explained to the government their cannon-fodder Blacks would fight better and more efficiently if they would only reverse their policy of racial segregation (i), assigned to Chiang in China and Gandhi's Indian Congress Party a progressive role in flat contradiction to the theory of the permanent revolution, denied the contradiction between the expansion of the Stalinist counterrevolution into Eastern Europe and its conflict with a nascent revolutionary upsurge, made a liberal hash of Lenin's conception of the right of nations to self-determination, instructed their Fourth International adherents in Western Europe in the consuls of Bordiga-like sectarian abstentionism from the mass national resistance movements, and more.

The SWP and WL know all this, and still agree with the wartime SWP! The SL is more circumspect, or at least its leadership is (the ranks neither know nor care; they are "Cannonites" and proud of it!); they attempt in the manner of mediaeval nominalists to break down the unified picture above and assess it as a welter of unrelated "positions". They agree with us on some, prudently keep their mouths shut on all the rest (what can they possibly say?) and whisper to anyone who will listen that we are mensheviks, ISers, or anti-communists. But the fact remains that the political description of the wartime SWP above is not one of a revolutionary party but a dead -- not reformist, not centrist, just dead, irrelevant -- SLP-like organization of no earthly use to anyone, let alone the working class. And it

is from this political corpse that all the contemporary "continuity" springs, whether the claimant is named Dobbs or Barnes, Healy or Pablo, Lambert or Robertson or Wohlforth. In not all these cases is the claim to continuity irrelevant -- indeed, many of them may justly pretend to the mantle of Cannonism. The problem for them is that they thereby maintain the continuity not with Trotskyism, but with its antithesis, the post-Lenin decay of the communist movement.

November, 1973

THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY AND THE TRANSITIONAL METHOD

".... It is entirely sufficient for an anarchist club if the will of the leader commands and the courage of the believers in the face of death obeys. It is, however, not sufficient for a mass party, which does not only want to set masses into motion but which is itself a mass. It is proper to expect of communists that they quickly detect and vigorously utilize every situation conducive to struggle and that they always point to the final aim beyond the aim of the immediate struggle. But no communist is obliged or qualified, for that matter, to detect--as a result of his admission into the Communist party and his carrying of a membership card--a fighting situation where there is none, and where nothing but the will of the Zentrale decides on the existence of such a situation in a secret meeting and for other reasons than those obvious to the proletariat. The Zentrale thus did not even display the simple skill of the Indian chieftain who in a demonstration of his omnipotence stepped outside his tent every morning and said: 'Sun, follow the path which I show you.' With that he pointed with his hand in the direction from east to west. The Zentrale, animated by the same feeling of omnipotence, pointed accidentally in the direction from west to east. It violated in this manner the basic principle which alone will activate a mass party; only the will, insight, and resolution of the masses themselves will put it into motion, and on the basis of these prerequisites a good leadership is enabled to lead. But the Zentrale has also not recognized those conditions which alone can activate a mass party, a mass among masses which is everywhere connected to the proletarians in a personal or professional relationship in the factories and the trade unions, subjected to the strengthening and invigorating influence of sympathy or the paralyzing influence of antipathy or enmity. And this again raises the question: what should be the relationship of the communists to the masses during an action? An action which merely expresses the political needs of the Communist party and not the subjective needs of the proletarian mass is bound to fail. It is impossible for the communists, especially as long as they remain such a minority among the proletariat, to engage in an action in place of the proletariat, or without the proletariat, or in the end even against the proletariat. They can do no more than create by dint of the above mentioned political means situations which will make plain to the proletariat the need to fight and will actually involve it in the fight. The communists are then in a position to lead the proletariat in this struggle by virtue of their slogans."

--Paul Levi, Our Course Against Putschism

It isn't often that the Spartacist League, which modestly proclaims itself "the unique embodiment of Trotskyism in the United States" (Workers Vanguard, September 14, 1977) enters the arena of international working-class politics. But when they do, they distinguish themselves notably, as in all their "activity", as the petty-bourgeois "revolutionary" phrase-mongers they are. In its latest venture into this field -- its approach to the current all-out assault by the Chilean bourgeoisie on the proletariat (WV Supplement, September 13, 1977) -- the SL, utterly unable to pose a revolutionary solution to the concrete situation in which the Chilean proletariat finds itself, resorts to covering its political bankruptcy with a "revolutionary" phrase -- "For workers revolution in Chile!" -- a crackpot call on the proletariat to produce a revolution as the only road out of the present crisis.

A proletarian revolution! No more, no less.

To begin with, there is a problem with this "call". The working class does not, cannot, simply seize power "on call"; an entire transitional period is necessary during which the class prepares itself for this task. The fundamental characteristic of this transitional stage is that the proletariat, leading all the oppressed strata of society, establishes centers of political/armed power (soviets) and through political struggle within these organs tests, exposes and discards its treacherous leadership. Only then is the class in a position to take power. But this indispensable process is impossible without a Leninist party. And this party, created through the unity of revolutionary Marxist intellectuals with the fighting vanguard of the proletariat, must become a mass party by winning large sections of the working class to its banner on the basis of its capacity to lead mass struggles. All this is necessary to establish the foundation from which the party can conquer political hegemony within the organizations of the laboring masses such as soviets and then prepare the insurrection. And there is no other way. History has long demonstrated -- positively in the case of the victorious Russian October Revolution and negatively in all the lost revolutionary opportunities -- that there is no road to socialism other than through the medium of soviets or like organizations led by a revolutionary party. Without this revolutionary party there can be no proletarian revolution. For every self-proclaimed "Trotskyist" we had thought this much at least was ABC, in ceremonial or factional application if not in understanding or practice.

But not for the Robertsonites! Having from the beginning systematically distorted the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky and torn them from all connection with political practice, the Robertson permanent faction which owns the SL has abandoned even the ABC's and the ritual it once used to cover the absence of interest in and knowledge of revolutionary politics; even its beads now lie scattered and broken in perfect accord with the utter cynicism of the priest. Nowhere, nowhere in the WV Supplement do they even mention the party, let alone indicate how it could be constructed in the present situation.

Moreover, this opportunist liquidation of the party principle was in no sense an isolated misformulation on the part of an otherwise healthy revolutionary organization. What this line really represents is simply the crowning touch to the SL's entire non-revolutionary approach to the Chilean struggle.

Three years ago, in Spartacist #19 (Nov. - Dec. 1970) the SL declared that the situation in Chile posed "in sharpest form the issue of revolution or counter-revolution." /emphasis added/ The SL response to the issue of revolution or counter-revolution followed "sharply" enough: they did not write a single article or leaflet for two years; nor for that matter was there any discussion on this central question. When the regime finally worked itself up to produce something resembling an analysis of the class struggle in Chile (the article "Pop Front Imperils Chilean Workers", WV, December '72) they did not so much as mention the role of the assorted 'Trotskyist' formations there for the simple reason the leadership responsible for the SL's 'international work' (sic!) -- otherwise the reliquary of authentic Trotskyist tradition, continuity and the "uniquely correct line" -- didn't consider it important enough to bother to find out. So much for the SL's role in "reconstructing the Fourth International" ...outside Robertson's living room at any rate.

Has the SL learned anything, if slowly, in three years? Does it even dig up and intone the ABC's? Anything, even a formal nod in the direction of constructing a Leninist vanguard in Chile? Nothing. For the next eight months following the December 72 issue WV carried countless articles on their real orientation -- on Progressive Labor, the Workers League, the IS, VNL/CSL... -- but nothing, nothing at all on Chile, where according to them the question of revolution or counter-revolution was posed "in sharpest form". Then, after the attempted coup this June, the August 3 issue of WV carried a one-column-long article, half news story, half pseudo-"manifesto", with pictures -- and though groping half-blindly in the direction of a correct position regarding the military defense of the Popular Unity government, still had nothing to say to the Chilean workers or to the "left" on how to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership. Such is the seriousness with which the SL discharges its international tasks.

By liquidating in practice the struggle for the Fourth International and the vanguard party the SL "call" for revolution in Chile is totally divorced from an international revolutionary perspective and virtually by definition is nationally limited. Moreover, as we have shown, it is devoid of all concreteness and meaning with respect to Chile itself; thus this "call" is completely unserious, a hoax. And this is not accidental, for the exclusive motivation behind this call for "workers revolution!" stands Robertson's tactic of posturing as the most "left" of all the petty-bourgeois/lumpen "Marxist" sects so the SL can "distinguish itself from all other tendencies" in its apparently never-ending struggle for "revolutionary" regroupment. Needless to say, such a call has nothing in common with revolutionary politics.

In the above section of our critique of the SL's "position" on the party we are not accusing them of simple ignorance or the failure to maintain a well-stocked drawerful of "authoritative" quotations for use upon each and every occasion. On the contrary! we are limiting ourselves to demonstrating the meaning and the sources of the 'revolutionism' the article so well describes. Of course, the SL has heard of the concept of the Leninist party; at times, indeed, they have even referred specifically to the need for such a party in Chile to fight against the popular front government. It is precisely this former view of theirs which so vehemently condemns the line we are discussing. Late last year, attacking the popular front, the Castroites of the MIR, etc., they wrote:

The road to victory will be arduous.. The absence of a revolutionary vanguard party is today the fundamental problem facing the Chilean workers. This vanguard must be forged in sharp struggle for a class program, against the popular front and the UP reformists who are doing their best to strangle the revolution. As Trotsky wrote of Spain: "FOR A SUCCESSFUL SOLUTION OF ALL THESE TASKS, THREE CONDITIONS ARE REQUIRED: A PARTY; ONCE MORE A PARTY; AND AGAIN A PARTY."

-- IV, December, 1972

An excellent Trotsky quote. The SL must have thought so, for the sentence is copied into their paper in capital letters. And what does it mean? It means that, without a revolutionary party, there will be no revolution. In fact, it is what everyone — JL, CSL, SWP ... says; it is one of the elementary conceptions of Marxism. The SL tells anyone who might be listening in Chile that to fight the popular front government, a Leninist party is required. That is what they said last year. But now, after the Popular Unity government has been smashed, and not by a working-class offensive but a rightist military thrust; now, after the working class is in retreat; now, they call for the proletarian revolution, but make no mention even of the party. There is not even a formal nod in that direction.

Maybe the vanguard party is there, willing and able to take power? Maybe this vanguard party, non-existent in December, 1972, somehow created itself during the nine months between the December article and the September coup? If so, on what program? Under what leadership?

This party we never heard of. Neither did the SL. By their own criteria, by their own chosen Trotsky quote, not only the lack of mention (or more importantly, lack of conception) of this party in their September pronouncement, a direct appeal from New York to the Chilean working class for revolution now in the absence of the party is fantastic, unreal, surrealistic, nightmarish. What did their quote from Trotsky say? Without a party, no revolution. What else but utter cynicism, and the opportunity to parade around as some kind of super-revolutionaries (who else called for a proletarian revolution to fight the generals?) can account for this 180-degree about-face and the discarding of the complete teachings of Lenin and Trotsky

The abandonment of the struggle to construct the revolutionary international and the Leninist party reduces the WV Supplement to the level of all the SL's other "theoretical" material, i.e., to a passive commentary on events at best projecting an "objective" unfolding of the workers' revolution.

On top of this, when they finally did attempt to provide the Chilean working class with a strategical and tactical line prior to the September 11 coup, the SL committed every conceivable ultra left error on the question of defending the popular front government against the military counter-revolution. As a result, they made a mockery of the transitional program, the Leninist united front tactic and Trotsky's analysis of bourgeois state forms in the epoch of capitalist decay. All this led them to liquidate in practice the political struggle to break the working class from its reformist and Stalinist leaderships.

At the end of the December '72 WV article the SL laid out a series of 'transitional' demands they envisioned as the program for the Chilean revolution. Undoubtedly the SL thought, in the manner of all the 'orthodox' Trotskyist scribes, that these demands -- lifted bodily out of the 1938 Program adopted by the Founding Conference of the Fourth International -- would prove quite sufficient for the revolutionary program for the Chilean proletariat. No need, of course, to analyze the active role of the various 'Trotskyist' tendencies in Chile, or to industriously seek out Marxist revolutionaries there in order to lay the groundwork of a revolutionary party ... no need! All that is necessary for the satisfaction of the world-view is to graft mechanically the demands in the '38 program to each and every situation that comes along and there you have it ... the uniquely correct, the perfect program! The rosary-like recitation of the Transitional Program, to the proper saints in the proper order -- of this, and only this, consists the SL's "exemplary" propaganda work.

But this sterile orthodoxy is apparently reserved for more peaceful periods, because in the rapidly-changing situation a week prior to the coup the SL dropped all their former lip service to transitional demands, veered sharply to the left and hysterically directed the following "call" toward the Chilean workers:

Rather than pressuring Allende...we must indeed call on the workers to break sharply with the bourgeois popular front and the government parties [among which were the Socialist and Communist Parties!!!] to fight for a workers and peasants government based on a revolutionary program of expropriation of the agrarian and industrial bourgeoisie. [leaflet quoted in WV Supplement]

Posed in such a fashion this "call" was guaranteed to fall on deaf ears. It is clear that the Chilean working class, although before the coup steadily moving left to the point where its militancy collided more and more with its leadership, still retained profound illusions in the social democratic and Stalinist parties and for this

reason was incapable at that time of breaking out of the political framework imposed upon it by the popular front and moving into independent opposition against it. For this reason the approach of revolutionary communists in Chile should have pointed toward the resolution of this fundamental question: with what tactics must the vanguard intervene in order to expose the bankruptcy of the reformists and Stalinists, destroy the proletariat's illusions in this false leadership and in the process construct a revolutionary leadership?

This could have been achieved only by demonstrating that in a revolutionary situation, when the issue of popular defense against the counter-revolution was posed point-blank, that the workers' parties participating in the popular front government -- the social democrats and the Stalinists -- play a counter-revolutionary role in that they prevent the self-defensive arming of the working class. In this situation it was necessary to go beyond propaganda and find the means to demonstrate this fact to the working class in such a way that they would thereby learn through their own experiences that only the communists provided a solution to the desperate crisis. Consequently it was necessary for the communists to raise to the reformist leadership those demands for self-defense which when implemented would organize the working class against the rightist counter-revolution and at the same time propel it toward the seizure of state power -- i.e., to pose transitional demands as they arise out of the concrete struggle. Were the pressure of the class struggle and the instinct of self-preservation to force the reformists to implement some or all of these demands it would benefit the communists, since even these partial victories could not help but strengthen communist influence within the working class. And when the reformists refuse to carry out these demands to their necessary conclusion, precisely because of the inherent contradictions in their social and political roles, the working class would see that its old leadership was completely unwilling and unable to pursue the class struggle and would turn toward the communists as the fighting alternative. It was precisely this method of approach to the proletarian revolution by which the Bolsheviks came to power, as we shall demonstrate in a later section -- a method Trotsky quite aptly summed up in the Transitional Program:

From April to September 1917, the Bolsheviks demanded that the /Social Revolutionaries/ and Mensheviks break with the liberal bourgeoisie and take power into their own hands. Under this provision the Bolshevik Party promised the Mensheviks and the S.R.s as the petty-bourgeois representatives of the workers and peasants, its revolutionary aid against the bourgeoisie; categorically refusing, however, either to enter into the government of the Mensheviks and S.R.s or to carry political responsibility for it. If the Mensheviks and the S.R.s had actually broken with the Cadets (liberals) and with foreign imperialism, then the "workers' and peasants' government" created by them could only have hastened and facilitated the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But it was exactly because of this that the leadership of petty-

bourgeois democracy resisted with all possible strength the establishment of its own government. The experience of Russia demonstrated, and the experience of Spain and France once more confirms, that even under favorable conditions the parties of petty-bourgeois democracy (S.R.s, Social Democrats, Stalinists, Anarchists) are incapable of creating a government of workers and peasants that is, a government independent of the bourgeoisie.

Nevertheless, the demand of the Bolsheviks, addressed to the Mensheviks and the S.R.s: "Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power into your own hands!" had for the masses tremendous educational significance. The obstinate unwillingness of the Mensheviks and the S.R.s to take power, so dramatically exposed during the July Days, definitely doomed them before mass opinion and prepared the victory of the Bolsheviks.

The central task of the Fourth International consists in freeing the proletariat from the old leadership, whose conservatism is in complete contradiction to the catastrophic eruption of disintegrating capitalism and represents the chief obstacle to historical progress. The chief accusation which the Fourth International advances against the traditional organizations of the proletariat is the fact that they do not wish to tear themselves away from the political semi-corpse of the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership: "Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!" is an extremely important weapon for exposing the treacherous character of the parties and organizations of the Second, Third and Amsterdam Internationals...

.....

Of all parties and organizations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road for the workers' and farmers' government. On this road we promise them full support against capitalist reaction..

-- "The Transitional Program", Documents of the Fourth International, pp. 201-3

Thus in the period after the attempted coup in June, when the right was testing its strength and the likelihood of a future coup was clearly on the agenda, it was incumbent on Marxists in Chile to direct the following central demand towards Allende, who was at the time simultaneously the head of state and the embodiment of the SP/CP governmental coalition: disarm all the counter-revolutionary forces, the army, the police and the fascist bands! Within this mass agitational demand is concretized the general transitional demand for the break-up of the Popular Front (To the CP/SP -- Break with the bourgeois parties and the generals!), for any motion in this direction on Allende's part would have meant, ipso facto its dissolution and the further resolution of the class forces into two clearly delineated, armed camps. At the same time, the Marxists would have had to direct the following:

demands toward Allende, the social democratic and Stalinist parties: Prepare the defense against armed reaction! Arm the workers! Organize a peoples' militia! Organize cities-wide defense committees open to all organizations who speak in the name of the working class! Prepare for a general strike against the reaction! The question of which class has the capacity and the will to lead society will then be posed concretely and in front of the working class and its allies, not totally abstractly in the SL manner.

However, it is far from adequate just to maintain a correct program, strategy and orientation such as the above; it is likewise necessary to know how to find a road to the masses. No program can be confined to paper and abstracted from the struggle to implement it; if this happens it ceases to be a program. In a situation such as Chile it was imperative Marxists properly assess the conditions necessary to determine where the greatest potential for the building of a revolutionary party lay.

By the time of the September coup a revolutionary crisis had been maturing in Chile over a period of three years. While in this period the workers, the peasants and the poor were the recipients of a number of deep-going social reforms, this otherwise beneficent situation was fundamentally marred by two central features: the working class was consistently held back from struggle against an increasingly enraged ruling class and its imperialist allies by the anti-revolutionary, reformist politics of its leading parties; this situation was further reinforced by the complete absence of any organized communist nucleus. It is self-evident, then, that at least from the time the Popular Front came to power in 1970 communists could play a revolutionary role in the class struggle only by fighting to construct Trotskyist factions inside one or another of the major working-class parties, the CP and the SP. Since an open struggle for a revolutionary program would have been impossible inside the Stalinist CP, and moreover since Allende's social democratic party stood to the left of the Stalinists, a general orientation of revolutionary work inside the SP was absolutely necessary. It was this practical orientation to the social democracy that Trotsky advised his followers in Spain to take in 1936. It was this orientation which proved so vitally necessary in Chile.

By exposing the treacherous policy of the top leadership of the CP/SP bloc to the fighting cadre of these parties communists would have prepared these cadres for the impending military assault of the bourgeoisie and from that vantage could have become the central pivot for the crystallization of a revolutionary wing. Such a development would then establish the basis for the founding of a Leninist-Trotskyist party. (Let us note here that the period of revolutionary work for Trotskyists inside the Chilean SP is by no means at an end; the experiences of the military junta will not destroy illusions in the Allende heritage or in the SP, and on the contrary, increase its appeal in the coming period. In fact, it is precisely now that the most fruitful work in the creation of a left wing can be done there.)

Only with this overall approach would it have been possible then to win the working class away from its class collaborationist leadership, create a revolutionary party and open up the road to socialist revolution.

The SL, however, instead of utilizing the method of the transitional program, simply stood outside the struggle and ultimatically called on the working class to break from both the popular front government and its major political parties and "fight for a workers' and peasants government based on a revolutionary program." Stripped of its pseudo-revolutionary verbiage this call meant: Workers! Abandon your leadership and fight for state power! How such a "fight" could have taken place is beyond human comprehension. In a situation where there was no revolutionary leadership, no Marxist tendency (let alone a party) with any significant influence among the proletariat, when the majority of workers supported the popular front and when the tendency within the class to construct soviets existed in embryo and not in concrete fact...Such a "call", aside and apart from abandoning the political struggle against the reformists, was simply criminal adventurism; or would be if anyone were so rash as to attempt to implement it.

The wise SL "theoretician" who authored this line should have at least taken the time to study the approach Trotsky thought revolutionaries should take in fighting the illusions of the proletariat in popular fronts and other such cross-class blocs of labor bureaucrats and capitalists. (We doubt though that any conceivable amount of study would help this genius.) We apologize to the reader for the length of this quotation; nevertheless we think that here Trotsky makes all the essential points on what constitutes revolutionary tactics. In response to the question: "What should our attitude be toward Peace Councils?" put to him by the British Trotskyist, Collins, Trotsky answered:

The question of the Peace Council bears a certain resemblance to that of the People's Front. For example, in France, we tell the workers that we know that the People's Front is all wrong. While the workers support it, we say to them that we are perfectly willing to collaborate loyally with the working class organizations, the C.P. and the S.P., but we refuse under any circumstances to have anything to do with the bourgeois participants in the People's Front. We do not shout: 'Down with the People's Front!' at present because we have nothing to replace it as yet. In the same manner, we cannot turn our backs on the Peace Councils and say 'Down with the Peace Councils!' because as yet there is no revolutionary party to give a clear lead on the question of war and peace. In the analogy, however, there is this fundamental difference. One is a question of state power in a revolutionary situation. The other is a question of utilizing existing committees as long as they are supported by mass workers' organizations. Therefore, it is necessary to get representatives wherever possible on the Peace

Councils and to direct our attacks in the beginning against certain of the bourgeois participants (who these will be depends on the reaction of the workers to our propaganda). It is understood, of course, that the very first task of revolutionaries in any mass organization is to demand that it be democratically controlled by the workers. That agitation will give us our first opportunity of attacking the private invitations given out by the S.P. bureaucrats to so-called progressive bourgeois figures. By attacking the leading bourgeois pacifists and subsequently the participation of all bourgeois elements, we will inevitably run counter to the class-collaborationist policies of the L.P.-C.P. bureaucrats. We can then say to the workers: "We have our differences with Comrades Morrison, Pollitt and Lansbury, but we are perfectly willing to work loyally with them. They, however, wish to expel us because we refuse to work with open class enemies." This will have the effect of making the L.P.-C.P. bureaucrats bear the responsibility of open class collaboration before the workers. This situation correctly used will discredit not only the bureaucrats but also the entire idea of Peace Councils. But it is first necessary to get on to them.

- Trotsky, "Interview by Collins", Writings 1935-36; pp. 77-8. (Emphasis added)

One would think this statement leaves no possible room for ambiguity on the Marxist approach to fighting reformist and bourgeois liberal illusions within the working class. Moreover, for the enlightenment of those who substitute stuffing the real world into little pigeon holes called "principles" for Marxism it is worth pointing out the context. The above tactic, enunciated by Trotsky, as the "how" revolutionists should approach the working-class parties in the French popular front government was expressed in the summer of 1936. The date is significant. It did not represent an outlook for a period during which the proletariat only slowly accumulated forces for its future revolutionary leap; on the contrary, many other writings of the time beyond the Collins interview indicate he put forth this perspective at exactly the time he considered signalled the beginning of the French proletarian revolution!

But if the previous SL nonsense weren't enough to demonstrate the complete bankruptcy of their claim to represent a Trotskyist political tendency, just wait! There is even more idiocy. The same ultra-left 'logic' the SL applied concerning the question of a workers government was carried over directly when they called for a united proletarian front. And this was their approach: speaking as clearly as one can through a mouthful of water, they called for:

...a united front of all workers organizations to smash the rightist-militarist offensive in Chile, while continuing to struggle for the overthrow of the popular front government of "socialists" and generals by proletarian revolution. (emphasis in original)

A united front of all workers organizations! Which ones?? -- if we may ask this rather non-trivial question? Certainly there was no room in this SL united front for the CP and the SP -- certainly not -- for how could the CP and SP possibly be in a united front which continued to struggle "for the overthrow of the popular front government of 'socialists' and generals"? Then, what workers' organizations did the SL mean? This, not accidentally, they did not say. We are forced to guess now in order to penetrate this rhetorical blizzard, but maybe they mean the MIR plus some "Trotskyist" sect affiliated to the United Secretariat? Plus?...plus the trade union rank and file (which in the main are under the leadership of the CP and SP bureaucrats)? Logically, this had to be the concrete meaning of their call.

Thus the SL's conception of what constitutes a "united front", taken together with their mad call to the Chilean working class to abandon its leading parties (in which the workers still, today, maintain illusions!) and make a direct fight for power (!) all logically reduce themselves to classic examples of the 'Third Period' Stalinists' line of the "united front from below", an approach which in practice liquidates the Leninist united front tactic. This approach was exposed for all time in Germany: in completely circumventing the leadership of the reformist working-class organizations, and instead appealing directly and exclusively to the membership of the social democracy to break with its leadership and join the increasingly spastic struggle against fascism under the banner of the Communist Party, the Stalinists had absolutely no effect whatsoever on the socialist workers, precluded any possible joint KPD/SPD defensive actions against Hitler and...facilitated the Nazi victory. But even the Stalinists during their 'Third Period' were still one up on the Robertsonites: they at least had something the workers could join. The SL had absolutely nothing.

II

HOW THE SPARTACIST LEAGUE TRANSFORMS
LENIN INTO AN OPPORTUNIST AND
TROTSKY INTO AN ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY PEDANT

Now, insurrection is an art quite as much as war or any other, and subject to certain rules of proceeding, which, when neglected, will produce the ruin of the party neglecting them. Those rules, logical deductions from the nature of the parties and the circumstances one has to deal with in such a case, are so plain and simple that the short experience of 1848 has made the Germans pretty well acquainted with them. Firstly, never play with insurrection unless you are fully prepared to face the consequences of your play. [1] Insurrection is a calculus with very indefinite magnitudes, the value of which may change every day; the forces opposed to you have all the advantage of organization, discipline and habitual authority; unless you bring strong odds against them, you are defeated and ruined. Secondly, the insurrectionary career once entered upon, act with the greatest determination, and on the offensive. The defensive is the death of every armed rising; it is lost before it measures itself with its enemies.... [emphasis added]

--P. Engels, Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany

As we have shown, the SL supplement renders the entire politics of the Chilean workers' struggles incomprehensible. The SL claims, "Today [September 14] Marxists must struggle to smash the junta by a workers' uprising." Now this uprising is to be led, organized, coordinated, they don't say; nor do they indicate just who these "Marxists" are, but they appear to be as unsubstantial, as ethereal, as the party that isn't there. Moreover, they add, "To call for support to the [Popular Unity government] is to reaffirm a policy whose suicidal nature is being demonstrated at this very minute!" this is the "political" equivalent of saying a corpse is dead because it isn't alive. This masterful nonsense is wrapped up with a quote from Lenin which says that under certain conditions Marxists offer military support to bourgeois governments against fascist or rightist military uprisings, while refusing political support to or confidence in this government. Perfectly true. Then they mangle the Lenin quote to "prove" this, then say "of course [of course!!!] in the Chilean situation it would be manifestly absurd to call for even military support to the U.P. government, which has already been smashed." To stuff so much boloney into one overheated paragraph is indeed a feat, and serves mostly to confirm our belief that the Stalinization ("transformation") of the SL is continuing apace.

One might have thought the SL would have quit while they were ahead, or at least before they were so hopelessly far behind. Take, for example, the quote they cite in which Lenin makes a distinction between military and political support to a bourgeois, "Kerensky"-like government. At first glance this point would seem to be irrelevant: Why bother to make such a distinction, quoting "authority" and all, to deal with the corpse of the UP? Lenin's distinction between military and political support in any case refers to the Marxist attitude towards living, functioning governments, not dead and dispersed ones. Did the writer just have an unused Lenin quote lying around from a much more important polemic against the IS, and decide to throw it in here to make an undigestible stew a little more palatable? Is it, perhaps, part of a concealed polemic against internal critics who dimly recall an SL critique two years ago against Wohlforth's "Third Period" adventure-songering at the time of the Bolivian betrayal in 1971, and who remember the SL opposed this same kind of loud-mouthed "propaganda" ranting, then? Or is our initial guess right, that this is simply "educated," quotemongering flimflam, designed to impress ("regroup") some other ignorant naifs?

Perhaps, all of them. No matter. All this gobbledegook comes in handy to conceal the fact that three separate situations existed in a short period of time -- reflecting a rapidly changing balance of forces -- and that different tactics were called for in each case to meet the situation and clarify the political necessities. For this situation it is necessary to think out the problems beyond the vague platitudes and truisms common to the movement and saturating the SL pages, isolate the stages and the process, and determine the possibilities and the capacities of the contending social forces in each stage.

In the period before the coup was organized it was the duty of the left wing of the labor movement to call for the military support to the Allende government, simultaneously organizing such support among the working masses while at the same time taking care to destroy illusions in the government, pointing out its vacillations and hesitations, demonstrating wherever possible the utter confusion and incapacity of the government (unable even to determine who its enemies were!) and thus unable to carry out the basic necessity even of defending itself. We have gone into the arguments and slogans which would have facilitated organizing this defense above, and we will not repeat them here. The point of the whole Lenin passage -- not the truncated version that appears in WV -- is to indicate both the nature of the support to the government and the kind of transitional demands that need to be raised simultaneously to that government in order to expose it and educate the class to its real, anti-popular nature.

At this point in our critique we want to subject the entire "Russian" analogy, and especially the letter of Lenin

to the Bolshevik Central Committee to a closer scrutiny, for in this letter is contained not only the strategy that welded together the revolutionary defense of the Kerensky regime; it proved in fact also the central strategy by which the cadres of the revolutionary forces were initially armed and from which position the Bolsheviks regained the support and confidence of the working masses in sufficient numbers to facilitate the swift transfer of power to the Bolshevik-led soviets possible and inescapable. The relevance of the contents of this letter, written at the time of the Kornilov uprising against Kerensky, to the situation in Chile just before the fall of Allende, ought to be obvious to the reader:

Even now we must not support Kerensky's government.... We shall fight, we are fighting against Kornilov, just as Kerensky's troops do, but we do not support Kerensky. On the contrary, we expose his weakness. There is the difference. It is rather a subtle difference but it is highly essential and it must not be forgotten. (emphasis in original)

The "subtle difference" referred to in the passage from Lenin is the difference between military support for a popular front government while refusing it any political confidence, and political support. The revolutionary forces defended the government from the arms of the counterrevolution, while simultaneously planning its revolutionary replacement. This central Leninist strategy for the proper orientation to Popular Front governments was the historical basis for the similar strategies and orientation of the Trotskyists in Spain and Germany in the 1930's.

At this point the SL cuts short the quote and drops the issue, saying in passing that, of course, this is no longer relevant (then, why quote any of it in the first place?) since Allende's Popular Unity government has already been crashed.

Of course, the letter from Lenin to the Central Committee is not irrelevant to anyone interested in comprehending the methods by which revolutionaries orient themselves in the fight against the counterrevolution, and consequently, of course, there is a vital reason why this passage is so severely truncated in the pages of Workers Vanguard. The central section of the letter which the SL chooses to disappear specifically and clearly locates the context in which it is written and the political content of the "change of tactics" for the coming struggle. So far as the context is concerned, the polemic is double-edged: Lenin is arguing against both that tendency in the Bolshevik party and the class which might utilize the proper military defence of the Kerensky government in order to slide over into political support (this tendency is the ostensible target of the letter) and also those sections of the revolutionary forces who might either incline to premature insurrection or refuse outright any kind of defense of the Kerensky regime.

So far as the political content of the "change of tactics" presented in the letter to the Central Committee is concerned, Lenin not only takes the call for revolution off the docket and out of the party's propaganda for the time being -- a fairly substantial tactical change; he clearly and precisely enumerates a series of partial, specific demands fitted to the new situation, which not only stop far short of revolution ("We shall not overthrow Kerensky right now.") but also, however radical and far-reaching, do not even mention the call, or anything like it, in the form of the slogan of the workers' government! What this means, of course, is that the tactics by which the Bolsheviks prepared the ground for the October revolution run exactly counter to each and every "principle" in which every SLer is inundated, up to the ears and over; that any tactic, any programmatic statement that does not contain the magic words "proletarian revolution" or "workers' government" is exemplary of the rankest ... opportunism!

Put another way, we might say what motivates the Robertson leadership to conceal these terribly embarrassing paragraphs is the charitable act of "protecting" the rightist, the grossly opportunist Lenin from the rock-hard, "high-Trotskyist" educated revolutionists of the SL ranks, who would undoubtedly be outraged if only they were to find out the horrible truth about their mentor, Lenin!

Sarcasm aside, there is even a greater reason why the SL does not want to attract undue attention to this passage. We reprint the critical section of this letter here, as it deserves close consideration:

What, then, constitutes our change of tactics after the Kornilov revolt?

We are changing the form of our struggle against Kerensky. Without in the least relaxing our hostility towards him, without taking back a single word said against him, without renouncing the task of overthrowing him, we say that we must take into account the present situation. We shall not overthrow Kerensky right now. We shall approach the task of fighting against him in a different way, namely, we shall point out to the people (who are fighting against Kornilov) Kerensky's weakness and vacillation. That has been done in the past as well. Now, however, it has become the all-important thing and this constitutes the change.

The change, further, is that the all-important thing now has become the intensification of our campaign for some kind of "partial demands" to be presented to Kerensky: arrest Milyukov, arm the Petrograd workers, summon the Kronstadt, Vyborg and Helsingfors troops to Petrograd, dissolve the Duma, arrest Rodzyanko, legalise the transfer of the landed estates to the peasants, introduce workers' control over grain and factories, etc., etc. We must present these demands

not only to Kerensky, and not so much to Kerensky, as to the workers, soldiers and peasants who have been carried away by the course of the struggle against Kornilov. We must keep up their enthusiasm, encourage them to deal with the generals and officers who have declared for Kornilov, urge them to demand the immediate transfer of land to the peasants, suggest to them that it is necessary to arrest Rodzyanko and Kilyukov, dissolve the Duma, close down Rech and other bourgeois papers, and institute investigations against them. The "Left" S.R.s must be especially urged on in this direction.

It would be wrong to think that we have moved farther away from the task of the proletariat winning power. No. We have come very close to it, not directly, but from the side. At the moment we must campaign not so much directly against Kerensky, as indirectly against him, namely, by demanding a more and more active, truly revolutionary war against Kornilov. The development of this war alone can lead us to power, but we must speak of this as little as possible in our propaganda (remembering very well that even tomorrow events may put power into our hands, and then we shall not relinquish it)....

--Lenin, "To the Central Committee of the RSDLP" (Aug. 30, 1917) Collected Works, Vol. 25, pp. 285-89

It is important to note here the manner in which, as Lenin argues at length, these partial demands and slogans should be raised. They are not "characteristic," Bolshevik slogans alone; Lenin argues these slogans should correspond to and become the elemental demands of the masses themselves. Thus, they are intended as "action guides" to educate the "fighting people." In order to further this aim, the task of the Bolsheviks is to motivate these demands in such a manner as to encourage the struggling masses, and especially members of other working-class and peasant-based political organizations, to make these demands their own. For the record, nobody, and certainly Lenin, would deny that Kerensky's was a bourgeois government; it is therefore clear that Lenin rejected (if indeed he ever heard of such a far-fetched thing) arguments such as those raised by the SL that,

...to call on the bourgeois state (even with a popular front government such as Allende's) to outlaw and disarm fascists is to awaken illusions in the masses.

--WV, August 31, 1973

Lenin did not call on Kerensky to outlaw fascists in the classic sense of that term, primarily because there weren't any; the SL objects in an all-encompassing manner, however, asserting hither and yon that they never call on a bourgeois government to suppress another wing of the bourgeoisie. For

ourselves, we will deal with the implications of this argument in the context of Allende's Chile presently; more important here is that Lenin's arguments for the course he chose were based upon the undeniable and historically verified observation that the negative, hostile response of the Kerensky regime to these reasonable and necessary demands would demonstrate before the masses the extent of its collaboration with and dependence upon Kornilov-types and expose the limited, anti-popular character of the coalition government. This is the only way in such a situation that Marxists can possibly break the consciousness of the masses from their long-established, conservative, anti-revolutionary blinders and 'parliamentary' illusions. In a polemic in a similar situation, fighting 'Third-Period' idiocies on the part of the German Stalinists some fifteen years later, Trotsky referred to the above incident, several times, and always in the same manner: at that time, he characterized the 'changed tactic' of Lenin as one of "simultaneously carrying on a flank attack" on Kerensky.

There is a very good reason why the series of partial demands Lenin raises in the above letter are not opportunist errors (of a kind to be hidden away from the fiercer SL revolutionists who might otherwise reject the master along with his political methods). The SL is opposed to calling on the popular front governments to arrest its fascist, counter-revolutionary enemies on the grounds they are both bourgeois, and we will take up this nonsense later. Lenin, of course, never heard of any such absurd principles: in calling upon the Kerensky government to arrest the presumed collaborators of General Kornilov, the Cadet Miliukov and the Octobrist Rodzyanko (1) who were not only not fascists (1) but respectively a liberal imperialist and a reactionary bourgeois, he in fact was calling, in a concrete manner, for the dissolution of the coalition government, in the same manner as the earlier Bolshevik demand, "Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers!" With that slogan, along with the later demand to arrest the representatives of the bourgeois parties, the Bolsheviks in effect were calling for a Menshevik-Social Revolutionary government. This tactic, this incident, represents in concrete, demonstrable form the actual application and use of the transitional method, which, the SL to the contrary notwithstanding, is not a rosary of never-changing slogans but the road to power. We had kidded ourselves, heretofore, that the SL knew this, as we thought every self-styled "Trotskyist" did; in fact we thought it was among the most important of the lessons of October.

What we said above about hiding the contradiction between their own line and Lenin's under analogous circumstances -- i.e. considerations of purely bureaucratic self-protection -- represents some of the impetus behind the SL decision to bury the critical section of the Letter of Lenin to the Bolshevik Central Committee. But there is even more, and what follows raises not only the question of sacred bureaucratic prestige but also the SL's hopeless theoretical/political floundering in a situation where the international class struggle reaches its most

intense heat. As we noted above, in the August 3rd WV the SL responded to the attempted coup with a pseudo-manifesto to the workers and peasants of Chile (the formal title is "Rightist Coup Fails in Chile") which, incidentally and among a lot of phraso-mongering, called for "the outlawing and disarming of all fascist organizations". Obviously, we agree with such a call; as we have demonstrated, such a slogan, together with the clarifying fight to implement it, embodies the central Marxist strategic axis of tearing apart the popular front along class lines, the military defense of the Allende government against the bourgeois counter-revolution and the military preparation for working-class power, and was in fact historically the Bolshevik strategy against both Kornilov and Kerensky.

But it turns out other "forces", namely the Robertson clique in the SL, know better. Not realizing or not caring (who can tell?) that the unchallenged maintenance of arms in the hands of the rightist spearhead were knives pressed to the throat of the working class, in the very next issue of WV (August 31) they published a correction of their former line ("Do We Call on the Bourgeoisie to Outlaw Fascism?"); this exercise in ultimatic tomfoolery categorically and in no uncertain terms reversed their former course and line and answered NO! to their own hypothetical question. It is entirely fitting that they never asked themselves what this would mean in Chile; it is further typical that they did not attempt to explain how and why they made such a 'rudimentary' error in the first place, what its political source was...although such an evaluation would be instinctual to any revolutionist! Instead, the SL substituted rhetoric about how treacherous the bourgeoisie is and came up with a new theory, which we characterize with restraint as the political foundations for the resurrection in 'Trotskyist' clothes, of 'third period' conceptions of 'social fascism'. The principle of this theory, stated as 'we never call on the popular front to outlaw fascism' is based on a simplistic reading of the line "only the working class can smash fascism...". This is of course the PL line. Apart from clashing with basic common sense, and writing out of the history books the Allied Coalition of democratic imperialism and Stalinism which in fact did root out fascism during World War II (!), the SL retreats to general/historical truisms. It is true that in the final historical analysis only the triumph of the working class can forever destroy the threat of fascism, but this is the same as saying that the future for the working class and all humanity lies in either socialism or barbarism. As history has shown, this truth nowhere refers to or applies in particular historical incidents or even world wars. Instead, it represents a classic example in which abstractly true prescriptions in the general become concrete lies in the particular, and the basic truths of scientific Marxism are transformed into dangerous sand to be thrown in the eyes of the working class.

We are not particularly interested in polemicizing with such nonsense as the SL promotes here on its "merits" because it hasn't any, as a few minutes reflection on the state of the

world since about 1936 would clearly demonstrate; the SL's theorizing is simply a blowhard exercise in shabby political idiocy and a total aloofness from reality. As 'proof' of their new theory they make great play, of course, with a couple of quotations from Trotsky. The difficulty is that the politics the SL claims are those of Trotsky, if taken in the context of the ripening revolutionary situation of Chile in the weeks before the fall of Allende, would have played a wholly passive, abstentionist, anti-revolutionary role! A closer look at the context of this fraudulent, ostensibly Trotsky-derived, 'theoretical grounding' of the SL line will clearly demonstrate how the SL deforms and disembowels the Trotskyist analysis of bonapartism; popular fronts and fascism.

To give some credence to their otherwise wholly absurd and meaningless line, the SL quotes two passages from Trotsky's 1934 writings. One is an incidental side comment from the pamphlet "War and the Fourth International" whose major focus is on imperialist war not popular fronts; the burden of the SL-quoted section is that for revolutionaries to call on the capitalist state (any capitalist state?) to suppress the fascists sows illusions about bourgeois democracy, lulls the vigilance of the workers and demoralizes them. The other quotation is more substantive and gives the SL game away, and we quote it here:

Certainly, the Radicals declared themselves for the disarmament of everyone -- workers' organizations included. Certainly, in the hands of a Bonapartist state [1], such a measure would be directed especially against the workers. Certainly, the 'disarmed' fascists would receive on the morrow double their arms, not without the aid of the police.

-- Trotsky, "Whither France?", November 1934.

Does anyone seriously think that this description fits the state of affairs in Allende's Chile, which everyone not running about holding an enormous rug in front of their faces knows has been the most 'left wing' of any popular front government in history, and the most dedicated to carrying out its own, reformist program? The SL's implied comparison between the two situations is simply incredible! What really gives this ideological fast shuffle away is that particular phrase "in the hands of a Bonapartist state"; in "Whither France?" Trotsky was discussing the situation in France in 1934, a France governed not by a popular front regime but a right-wing, semi-Fascist bonapartist government! To use a more accurate analogy, to call on a Franco to disarm the fascists is absurd; to call on the Republican government of Largo Caballero in Spain in 1936 to implement the measures necessary to break Franco's mobilization of the counter-revolution is not absurd, and constitutes in fact but one of the means by which the anti-fascist/anti-capitalist fight is waged. Undoubtedly, the SL can't tell the difference between Caballero/Kerensky/Allende and a rightist Bonapartist; undoubtedly, the rational rest of the world can. So far as 'sowing illusions',

lulling the workers to sleep and all the rest of the points made in the paragraph from "War and the Fourth International" are concerned, Trotsky clearly was not, as the SL would have it, setting down some eternal metaphysical "principle", but as the context of the '34 writings indicate was instead directing a polemic against the Stalinists and social democrats who were preaching exclusive reliance on the bonapartist state apparatus to disarm the fascists, and counterposed this reliance to the independent arming of the working class. Were Trotsky really attempting to go beyond that context, we would have to ask ourselves what this "principle" means in the context of Lenin's call to bloc with Kerensky, for Kerensky to carry out a revolutionary war against Kornilov(!) and to arrest the collaborators and bourgeois ministers in his government. Is Trotsky carrying out a not so subtle polemic against Lenin's conception of the road to power here? Is that what the SL thinks when it conceals the operative section of the Lenin letter? Isn't it clear that the context of the reformist popular front government on the one hand and the context of a rightist bonapartist regime on the other, are wholly dissimilar, and that consequently the tactics by which the working class is mobilized in the one case are radically different from the other?

To push the absurdity further, another passage in the SL article from which we are quoting, "Do We Call on the Bourgeoisie to Outlaw Fascism?", attacks the SWP/Ligue Communiste for the slogan "jail the fascists, not the Ligue." Very good. But ...the context of the article and the correction regarding the line on Chile implicitly identifies the regime of the imperialist Gaullist Pompidou with that of the social democrat Allende! That this passes for Trotskyism in some circles does not mean it has anything in common with Marxism. The whole point of the SL discussion is postulated on the question, whether or not to call on Allende's government to suppress the spearhead of the anti-working class forces, a popular front regime virtually identical with Kerensky's.

If we were to attempt to draw any conclusions from the SL's performance to date on their theorizing about the Allende government and their refusal to place the demand on this particular government to disarm the counter-revolution at a time when this was the pressing need of the working class, we would have to conclude that for the SL a capitalist government is a capitalist government. Period. From the way the SL poses the question, "Do We Call on the Bourgeoisie to Outlaw Fascism?" and not "Do we call on popular front governments to outlaw fascism, and if not, why?" -- that is, the lumping together of all forms of bourgeois rule into "one reactionary mass" -- they obliterate all the precise, critical distinctions Trotsky made in his fight against fascism between bourgeois totalitarianism, military-rightist bonapartism, "normal" democratic capitalism, popular front governments and the like; the SL clearly implies in what they have said regarding Chile that all these distinctions are irrelevant and that therefore the same strategies, the same tactics, the

same 'principles' apply in each and every case. What a travesty of Marxism! Are the governments of the Greek colonels or Cuba under Batista, on the one hand, and Kerensky/Allende, on the other -- that is, the owners of police states and the outermost limits of democratic capitalism -- the same thing? Yes? No? Who can tell?

But if the Robertsonites do hold these are the same thing, fundamentally similar, then how do they account for Lenin's contrary strategy in August, 1917? Clearly, Lenin never heard of this fundamental principle of Leninism. Isn't this why the Central Committee letter from Lenin was disemboweled in the SL press?

If, on the other hand, we are accusing the SL falsely, and it turns out they do not think all bourgeois governments are one reactionary mass and that different strategies do apply to Kerensky/Allende type governments in the same manner as Lenin, then what on earth is the point of basing their approach to Allende on a quote from Trotsky in 1934 in Whither France? in which the question of strategy under an Allende-type government was not, could not be posed for the good and sufficient reason that the government under discussion was specifically described by Trotsky only a few paragraphs beyond the SL-selected section as a rightwing Bonapartist-capitalist regime resting on and "inconceivable without the existence of the fascist gangs." Trotsky said, a hundred times, that the truth is always concrete. Where is the analogy between France in 1934 and Chile in August, 1973? Does the SL think the Allende government rested on the fascist gangs, and for that reason wouldn't disarm and arrest them? If not, what's the point of the quote? Was Trotsky preaching an 'eternal truth' here? For that matter, if Trotsky thought anything like the SL holds he did, what would have been the point to make distinctions like 'popular front' governments anyway?

The truth of the matter regarding the disappearing passages from Lenin and the appearance on the scene of 'replacement' passages from Trotsky which appear on the surface to be completely counterposed to the Bolshevik strategy in 1917, is that the author of the SL's August 3 manifesto attempted to base himself, however ineptly, on Lenin's strategy and tactics during the period of preparation for the October Revolution. This attempt was superceded by the top clique, which has finally discarded the little rags and patches of "Trotskyism" to which it formerly clung in favor of some ultra-left, abstentionist appeal to PL, or Venceremos, or whoever they think they can impress; towards this end, they found some Trotsky quotations which, cut up right and not looked at too closely, appeared to have some superficial resemblance to Chile. The SL was strangled by the contradictions between their permanent tailending of PL-type adventurism in the name of regroupment and the concrete needs of the Chilean workers; for revolutionary situations, whatever their aftermath, have a terrible habit of throwing a political searchlight on opportunists and abstentionists of all stripes.

The trouble with the Trotsky quotations the SL digs up to preach abstentionism in Chile is that they do not deal with a period of the swift transfer of power typical of a revolutionary situation. Since the situation during the last days of Allende was so inexorably similar to the Kerensky/Bolshevik model in 1917, and wholly irrelevant to the situation in France in 1936, and since this contradiction was blowing up in their face in their own words, it was necessary for the SL to conceal their counter-position of Lenin to Trotsky (1), which is what all this fast-shuffling of quotations would otherwise mean. Therefore, the SL chose the path of hinting it was following Lenin (the part of the quotation they actually printed) while in reality disembowelling the central Bolshevik strategy by which the revolution was made. Specifically, what the SL had managed to do was counterpose the line of Lenin and the line of Trotsky on the central question of the road to power and socialist revolution! What to do? Easy. Not throw out Robertson, dissolve the SL and learn something about Marxism, as political seriousness would dictate, of course. No, they just...cut the Lenin quote, did everything possible to draw attention away from the Bolshevik program in the period of defense of Kerensky in the period of the Kornilov uprising, threw dust in the eyes of the readers by some adventurist ranting about proletarian revolution now, when such a call was both hopeless and suicidal, and hoped their political opponents would prove as uninformed about basic Marxism as the clods they have trained their membership to admire and to become.

If it were only a question of exposing the SL farce in the way they cut and paste quotations from Lenin and Trotsky in order to make them ossified sectarians and abstentionists, we would not have wasted our time on the issue. What is important in the whole morass above is the political method by which they transform Trotsky into a formalist pedant and a political opponent of the revolutionary needs of the Chilean working class, to whom the issue of the disarming of the counter-revolution was not a matter of flimflaming quotations but physical survival. This method, which is characteristic in one form or another of all the pseudo-Trotskyist groups who trace their lineage to the SWP after the death of Trotsky -- that is, to the Fourth International of Cannon-Healy-Pablo -- must be cut out of the 'Trotskyist' movement if a revolutionary Marxist international party is to come into existence.

The SL, like all its ilk, deals with formal categories rather than concrete reality. Had they approached the issue in the manner of Marxists and not a petty-bourgeois hoax, that is, had they asked themselves what political form of the bourgeois state in France Trotsky was analyzing, and under what specific historical conditions, they might not have fallen into such a formalist approach to the Chilean popular front government. What Trotsky analyzed in Whither France?, from which he drew the conclusion that it was pointless and fatally dangerous to demand of this government the outlawing and suppression of the fascist organizations, was not a bourgeois state as such, but a particular

bourgeois state in a particular historical period. Those, like the SL and the other 'continuator' of pseudo-Trotskyism, who reduce Marxist thought to the scholastic level of the manipulation of formal categories are forever lost when it comes to comprehending and acting upon the concrete questions of revolution and counter-revolution.

This incapacity on the part of the SL to make the proper distinction between the various forms of bourgeois rule precludes them from formulating a policy which could move the masses around the question of defence of the Popular Unity government. By identifying, as they do, a bourgeois Bonapartist dictatorship based directly upon the very summits of the bourgeoisie, the military and police apparatus, and the organized fascist gangs (this is the form of state Trotsky said existed in France in 1934) with Allende's Popular Unity government, the SL says in effect there is no essential difference between a close friend of fascism and a mortal enemy. Hiding behind the generic category "bourgeoisie" the SL is in the position of identifying a regime which would voluntarily cede power to fascism (Hindenburg in Germany) with a bourgeois regime fascism had to physically liquidate in order to come to power (e.g., the Spanish Popular Front). The blood line drawn between fascism and the Popular Front is totally insignificant for these pseudo-Trotskyists. By refusing 'in principle' to call upon the popular front Popular Unity government to disband fascists on the grounds that it represents nothing but the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie; that fascism is a necessary weapon of the bourgeois regime; and that, therefore, to call on this bourgeois state to liquidate its own weapons serves only to sow illusions within the working class -- the SL has succumbed wholly to the Third Period Stalinists' theory that the reformists are objectively in alliance with fascism! Together with the conception and practice of the 'united front from below', the SL has embraced fully the theory of social fascism.

The fact is that everyone in the world, not only in Chile, knew that some sort of military action was not only inevitable but imminent. During the period of the coup itself, which appears to have lasted well over 24 hours, the situation demanded that the Marxists, were any there, building on the authority and influence they had attracted by the application of their military defeatist tactics beforehand, call on the working class organizations, trade unions, parties, etc., to escalate their military defense of the Allende government to the level of a nation-wide general strike against the military counter-revolution and the entire bourgeois offensive. In this situation the tactic would become that of defending all institutions of the working class with armed militias. Such an overall strategy would not only confront the military plotters with a denial of their social base and capacity to rule; implicitly, it would create a total political vacuum, a period of armed dual power, strip the population of any illusions of the strength and capacity of either the Allende government or the junta, demoralize the military

ranks and pose directly the question of what class could thereafter rule. Through this process, the organization of such general action of the class would, in the field, create those organizational structures; strike committees and the like, which would hold state power immediately upon the crushing of the generals' insurrection.

But this did not happen, at least on a sufficiently wide basis: the opposition was local and easily isolated once the government fell, finally petering out into individual, local military confrontations with bands of the junta's troops. After Allende was crushed, with no effective opposition, the working class had become demoralized and dispersed, and the revolutionary upsurge was dissipated and rolled back, the SL "intervened" with a call for workers insurrection. Under such conditions a call for 'proletarian revolution' (!) is in the best case a call for putschism, a mad adventure -- a deliberate, criminally reckless irresponsibility. Unfortunately, the people who make such mad proposals are rarely the ones who suffer the consequences as justice would demand. The present SL 'policy' is a stabby, cynical playing with the lives of the Chilean workers, political vultures trying to pick some meat off the bones of the past and future victims of the counter-revolutionary tragedy. The real revolutionary needs of the Chilean working class stand in stark contrast to the infantile Robersonite phrase-mongering and pseudo-left posturing; the power of the junta must be broken, and a regrouping of the class together with the restoration of its institutions must be undertaken. We can best formulate these tasks by asking the question: under what slogans, what political understanding, now, can the working class recoup its losses and find the road to power?

A series of democratic and transitional demands to be addressed to the working class primarily and which apply to the present situation would include the following: restore the constitution; legalize all political parties; for a constituent assembly; remove and disperse the troops; immediate release of all prisoners and hostages. The struggle to carry out these demands would set the vast majority of the populace against the junta; the successful accomplishment of these demands would break the junta and destroy its capacity to maintain itself by challenging the new order on which it rests. By what practical means can the workers struggle for their demands against the power of the junta? The present conditions require the formation of underground, illegal committees of action, composed of workers and peasants and speaking in the name of a united front of all working-class organizations. These action committees would have the task of preparing for an extended political general strike to secure its demands and to tear the productive base from the new balance of social forces. The successful maintenance of such a strike would continuously pose directly the question of a transition to power. Idiot sneers about "democrats" and SL-type indifference to the suppression of 'bourgeois' and any other civil liberties by the junta are entirely out of the question.

The situation in Chile is similar in many respects to the state of the German working class following the fascist victory in January, 1933, although with this not at all insignificant difference: in Germany in the 30s, fascism completely destroyed not only the political parties of the proletariat but all their organizations including the trade unions and replaced these unions with fascist labor fronts. These "organized" the German workers into one colossal company union. By this means fascism accomplished virtually the complete political and organizational atomization of the proletariat. In Chile today the Bonapartist military dictatorship has not at all demonstrated the strength, nor yet, for that matter, the desire to carry through such a transformation. If, however, the junta is unable to stabilize the situation and restore order, if it is unable to effectively police the working class, then it will undoubtedly attempt to cede power to a native fascism; under these conditions, the Chilean revolution will be rendered virtually impossible for an entire period, unless this time by impetus from abroad (either directly, say by an Argentinian workers' revolution, or indirectly -- and this applies of course to the entire South American continent -- from the spread of victorious proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries.) Thus, so long as fascism in Chile has not taken power in its own name the victory of the proletariat is still possible! There is still time and opportunity for the class to regroup and this time under the banner of a Trotskyist party. But for this one must have a correct strategy and program.

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OPPORTUNISM AND ADVENTURISM: NOT ANTIPODES BUT TWINS

...And the Zentrale? It met in Berlin and "accelerated the action" [after the uprising was already lost]. During a session of the Zentrale, convened days before the termination of the action, of the members present five voted against three for the termination of the action. But here as elsewhere they became victims as well of their own snares of "slackness," "opportunism" [!] and "inactivity" laid for others. In the face of the three votes, pressing for sticking it out, the other five did not dare to force through their own position for fear of being suspected of insufficient revolutionary drive [!]. Three vague "reports" from three districts indicating "some action," that the farmhands of East Prussia were "on the move" were sufficient. Accordingly, new messengers were dispatched in order to "accelerate the action." And what were the reasons given by those three diehards? We do not know whether all three shared it, but one of them offered as a reason that the action had to be driven on, now that it had been lost, to forestall possible attacks from the "left", necessitating a defense only against the "right" [i.e., the Levi "right" in the KPDI].

What could one possibly answer to that? Even the behavior of Lucienorff pales by comparison. He, at least, conscious of certain defeat, had enemies of his own class meet their death. The others, however, had their own flesh and blood perish in a cause which they themselves had already recognized as lost, simply to save the position of the Zentrale. We do not wish a penance on the comrades who did this, and with whom we ourselves lived through many good and bad times. But may they burden themselves, for their own sake and for that of the party in whose interest they may have believed to have acted, with just one castigation: To never again show their faces to the German workers... (emphasis added)

-- Paul Levi, Our Course Against Putschism

The really frantic fear of the SL that someone, somewhere, might call them "opportunist" has proven in this case and several others recently to have pushed them into the somewhat odd stance of adventuristic passivity, demanding that California farmworkers or Chilean workers, or someone else, carry out one or another automatic adventure. Yet the history of Marxism has demonstrated convincingly that putschism and adventurism, like sectarianism of all kinds, are only the product of opportunism, opportunism standing in fear of itself. That is the significance of the passages from Levi's polemic against the "March Action," Our Course Against Putschism, printed above. When the SL says "proletarian revolution!", you have to swallow your disbelief that one speaking in the name of "Trotskyism" could utter such rubbish and realize that the point of all this rhetoric is designed to impress the hell out of PL and whenever else the SL is

"regrouping" toward these days. It ought to be obvious that if the Chilean workers were still unable, due to their illusions and lack of informed Marxist leadership to push beyond the popular front toward revolution before the coup, then it stands to reason, if that word doesn't offend the pseudo-Trotskyists overmuch, then in a period of sharp downturn and bloody repression they are even less able at the present time to make an assault toward state power. It is not only a question of organizational structure but also of the decay of the subjective factor, consciousness. The military smashing of the class under fascism or rightist reaction does not destroy the illusions of the class in their reformist or Stalinist leadership (as seems to be the opinion of the author of the SL prescription) but, on the contrary, preserves and strengthens these illusions, demoralizes the class, makes the workers more responsive to half-hearted and "compromise" solutions, undercuts their faith in their capacity to rule, etc., etc. This in turn changes the actual relationship of class forces. What is the point of studying the history of Trotsky's struggles against fascism and his massive analysis of the subject and its ramifications if one has not learned even that much? The truth is that the revolution is objectively impossible in Chile at the present time, until the balance of forces is radically altered (and the construction of a Leninist party is the most decisive factor in the rearrangement of the proletariat), and one ought to say that such outright. For ourselves, we think it important to remind the reader of Lenin and Trotsky's frequent and savage remarks about the "revolutionists of the phrase" and their advice to drive such parasites out of the movement, and we characterize the SL's clowning with a paper knife clenched in its teeth as just that. For, if Robertson's Chilean policy has not proven a totally criminal one in actual fact, it is not due to him or his policy but solely due to the fact no one in Chile could take it with sufficient seriousness to try to implement it -- if indeed, any Chilean ever hears of it, since it is written not as advice of any kind to the Chilean workers, but to appeal to the unfortunates in the U.S. idiot left.

It is part of the historical record in which the movement claiming Lenin's revolutionary mantle was transformed into its opposite, that such plans were actually put into practice about which the Robertsonites only fantasize. We have already quoted at long length twice from the denunciation the earlier head of the German Communist Party, Paul Levi, wrote against his party immediately upon the demise of the infamous "March Action" in 1921; he called it "the greatest Bukharinist putch in history". At the time it was so; afterwards, several other 'actions', bureaucratically devised and implemented, overtook and surpassed the 'March Action'. There had been the threat of one in Russia in 1917, several months before the time became ripe for the actual seizure of power by the soviets; these incidents were dealt with by both Lenin and Trotsky in some of their most important writings, and we are left with the choice of determining whether the leading figures of the SL are ignorant of

these basic works, or whether they cynically "forgot" about them.

Here is Lenin, writing after the above-mentioned Kornilovite counter-revolutionary revolt and on the very eve of power:

"...if the Bolsheviks did not even set out to start an insurrection on July 3 or 4, if not a single Bolshevik body [as opposed to individual members and supporters] even raised such a question, the reason for it lies beyond the scope of our controversy with Korvaya Zhizn. For we are arguing about the lessons of 'civil war', i.e., of insurrection, and not about the point that obvious lack of a majority to support it restrains the revolutionary party from thinking of insurrection.

"If the revolutionary party has no majority in the advanced contingents of the revolutionary classes and in the country, insurrection is out of the question [!]. Moreover, insurrection requires: (1) growth of the revolution on a country-wide scale; (2) the complete moral and political bankruptcy of the old government, for example, the 'coalition' government; extreme vacillation in the camp of all middle groups, i.e., those who do not fully support the government, although they did fully support it yesterday.

-- Lenin, "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" (October 1, 1917) Collected Works, Vol. XVI.

In Our Course Against Futschism Levi quoted part of this passage to demonstrate the absurdity of attempting a revolutionary "galvanizing" of the working class through the mad "theory of the offensive" when none of these prerequisites conditions noted by Lenin existed in Germany in March 1921. Our task is even easier. Insofar as the SL strategy of calling for insurrection in Chile is concerned, not only did the revolutionary party not have the required authority, influence and majorities in the "advanced contingents of the revolutionary classes and in the country", not only did the working class still maintain its illusions in the coalition government of Allende and the reformist and Stalinist parties, but as we and everyone else have pointed out, there was no revolutionary party at all! Again: the fundamental question in Chile is constructing such a party, not idiot proposals to do those very things which without the prior existence of a revolutionary, Leninist party are impossible!

Trotsky also attacked manifestations of ultra-leftism in the period preceding the conditions for the October revolution. He referred constantly to the 1917 events and political struggles within the Bolshevik party throughout his struggles years later against the ultra-leftism of the Canton soviet and the 'Third Period' Stalinist line in Germany. In

one of his major works on the dynamics of proletarian revolution he fought against this pseudo-putschist Robertsonian line as it was pushed by the appointed leadership of the KPD at that time:

"The party came to the October uprising, however, through a series of stages. At the time of the April 1917 demonstration, a section of the Bolsheviks brought out the slogan: "Down with the provisional government!" The Central Committee immediately straightened out the ultra-leftists. Of course, we should popularize the necessity of overthrowing the provisional government; but to call the workers into the streets under that slogan--this we cannot do, for we ourselves are a minority in the working class. If we overthrow the provisional government under these conditions, we will not be able to take its place, and consequently we will help the counterrevolution. We must patiently explain to the masses the anti-popular character of this government, before the hour for its overthrow has struck. Such as the position of the party." (Emphasis added)

-- Trotsky, "Against National Communism",
in The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany, p. 97.

A premature attempt at insurrection without the prior winning of authority, influence and the necessary majorities of the working masses, functions as an active aid to the counter-revolution because it isolates the vanguard elements from the mass, sets them up for annihilation and thus beheads the leadership of the revolution. This in turn renders the revolution impossible; the commensurate bloody defeats atomizes and lowers the consciousness of the masses, demoralizes them and their willingness to struggle for a long time to come. From this we can determine the real anatomy of ultra-leftism, that it chooses to go into battle prematurely, before completing the tasks (or deriding their significance) of the central work of the party in winning the confidence and allegiance of the advanced sectors of the broad masses. It may be an expression of theoretical and practical inexperience in the party ranks, and of revolutionary impatience; it is also the preferred "left" policy of a bureaucracy which, cynically abusing the trust of the inexperienced, believes it can turn revolution on and off like a faucet as its factional needs demand (e.g., Comintern policy in Germany and China). Unfortunately for bureaucratically-inspired putschism, the working masses do not always do just anything, no matter how foolish, suicidal or anti-larxist, at bureaucratic behest. "Communists", of course, will and do, and this earned them the reputation as, among other things, hopeless bunglers among wide sections of the German workers, who consequently were reinforced in their support for the sunnier-seeming Social Democracy. Anyone who reads and understands the central

works of Marxism on revolutionary strategy and tactics knows it was precisely this adventurist phenomenon (together with the Bordigists and the Dutch sectarian abstractionists) against which Lenin fought in "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder", and it was this disease which was excoriated, although unfortunately incompletely, at the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921.

But there are premature insurrections and premature insurrections. There are the classically premature insurrections, such as the March Action and the incidents in the Bolshevik party in 1917 we have discussed above, when the frustration and rage of elements of the vanguard at social democratic and reformist treachery push beyond the boundaries of the objectively possible situation, but which express, in a distorted and even suicidal way, the rising tide of revolution. For the sake of clarity we should distinguish between these phenomena and those which take place in the aftermath of defeat, when the situation has for one reason or another or another been missed or has been aborted before reaching fruition. These uprisings, or putsches, take place when the revolutionary tide is in rapid ebb, and the institutions of the working class are falling under the hammer blows of the armed bourgeoisie. These are something other than simple, classic ultra-leftism, and it is this far more deadly disease that is mirrored in the SL's call for insurrection in Chile. It is necessary here to maintain the proper proportion; if the more deadly disease we are about to describe is traic betrayal, the SL's call is merely a farcical one.

Trotsky devotes a major section of his "Critique of the Draft Program of the Comintern", in The Third International After Lenin, to the Stalinist policy in China during the revolutionary period 1925-27. We are here interested primarily in his remarks regarding the infamous 'Canton Soviet', and we refer any supporter of the SL's policies in Chile to them, for the analogy is obvious and the consequences for the Chilean working class, had they attempted to carry out such a mad line are graphically depicted there. What happened there was that, after years of carrying out the Comintern-inspired opportunist course of conciliating Chiang and painting up his Kuomintang in bright revolutionary colors, the CCP fell into Chiang's trap and the massacre of literally thousands of the Chinese vanguard followed. After the situation was lost, Stalin did an about face for reasons of factional prestige and ordered the CCP to steer a direct course for proletarian revolution. The inevitable happened: the reaction wreaked its vengeance upon the Communist movement with such fury that the CCP ceased to exist as a party with a base in the working class and never again, over decades, recovered that base. Here is how Trotsky described that period:

"Seeking to insure themselves against their past [opportunist] line, the leadership monstrously forced the course of events at the end of last year and brought

about the Canton miscarriage. However, even a miscarriage can teach us a great deal concerning the organism of the mother and the process of gestation. The tremendous and, from the standpoint of theory, truly decisive significance of the Canton events for the fundamental problems of the Chinese revolution is conditioned precisely upon the fact that we have here a phenomenon rare in history and politics, a virtual laboratory experiment on a colossal scale. We have paid for it dearly, but this obliges us all the more to assimilate its lessons.

.....
Of course it is not all a question of calling the Communist Party of China to an immediate insurrection for the seizure of power. The pace depends entirely upon the circumstances. The consequences of defeat cannot be removed merely by revising the tactic. The revolution is now subsiding. The half-concealing resolution of the ECCI, the bombast about imminent revolutionary onslaughts, while countless people are being executed and a terrific commercial and industrial crisis rages in China, are criminal lightmindedness and nothing else. [1] After three major defeats an economic crisis does not arouse but, on the contrary, depresses the proletariat which, as it is, has already been bled white, while the executions only destroy the politically weakened party. We are entering in China into a period of reflux, and consequently into a period in which the party deepens its theoretical roots, educates itself critically, creates and strenghtens firm organizational links in all spheres of the working-class movement, organizes rural nuclei, leads and unites partial, at first defensive and later offensive, battles of the workers and peasant poor.

--Trotsky, Third International After Lenin, pp. 181; 194-5

The end of this passage outlines precisely the type of partial, transitional demands by which the party can reform itself and rebuild its influence and ties within the working class and the peasantry, while the earlier passage castigating the resolution and bombast of the Comintern as "criminal lightmindedness" are fitting commentaries on the similar proposals of the SL today. The dynamics of the two situations, the crushing of the revolutionary sentiments and movement in China in the late '20s and Chile today, are entirely similar even though the magnitude is qualitatively different. But the need to regroup the class and build a party is the main task of marxists in Chile now, and Trotsky's suggested tactics enumerated above are based on a similar prognosis and strategy. One central difference between the two situations needs mention here; the lack of even the nucleus of a Leninist vanguard, and the continued adherence of the working class to the mass reformist and Stalinist parties. The regrouping of the working class would posit the burning necessity in Chile at this time for a defensive united front to maintain the organizations of the working

class. And while a proletarian revolution there is now off the docket for the foreseeable future, and the concrete features of the future offensive of the Chilean working class are presently unforeseeable; the prospect for the necessary future regroupment of the class under the hegemony of a Leninist party is not nearly so dark as was the situation in China when Trotsky wrote his work.

We can summarize our views on the general subject of putschism, including the above distinction of premature and post-mortem adventures, and the SL's policy for Chile, precisely in this way: "premature" putschism represents in itself a tremendous setback for the working class and is itself capable of destroying great mass parties, as was the case with German communism, but a policy of a putsch carried behind the back of the working class after a great defeat of the class, betrayed by social democratic and Stalinist treachery ... that represents the liquidation of the revolutionary perspective itself.

-- November, 1973