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## DOCUMENTS FROM THE DISCUSSION IN SECTIONS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

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## **Editorial Note**

Every section and sympathizing organization of the Fourth International is conducting an internal discussion on the issues before the Fourth World Congress since Reunification (Tenth World Congress). As with the discussion in the Socialist Workers Party, only a small portion of the documents written as contributions to the debate will be submitted to the International Internal Discussion Bulletin. However, many documents from other sections and groups will have a general interest and value to SWP members. Knowledge of these documents will help comrades to understand the context of the debate and clarify the issues being discussed throughout the International. From time to time we will publish selected documents from the discussion in other sections in order to make this information available to the membership of the SWP.

# The LSA Attacks on the Argentine Section and the Response of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency, League for Socialist Action

[In this article by the RCT, reference is made to the Unified Minority Tendency (LSA) (or "Unified Tendency"). This tendency within the LSA/LSO was a political predecessor of the RCT. Reference is also made to the United Minority Tendency (also referred to as the "United Tendency") of the youth organization, the YS/LJS, which had similar political positions. These earlier tendencies in the LSA/LSO and the YS/LJS should not be confused with the United Tendency, which was formed later in the internal discussion in the LSA/LSO and had completely different political views and origins.]

\* \* \*

## Introduction

In June of 1971 the LSA-LSO began the first in its series of public attacks on the PRT (Revolutionary Workers Party), Argentine Section of the Fourth International. In its monthly Quebec organ, *Liberation*, it printed two articles side by side: one, a statement of a small and insignificant group of Brazilian revolutionaries (who have no relation at all to the Fourth International) who call themselves Punto de Partido—this statement was a condemnation of kidnappings as a tactic for revolutionaries (the LSO headlined this statement: "The Marxist View on Kidnappings"); the other was an article concerning the kidnapping of Stanley Sylvester, an Argentine capitalist (director of the Swift de la Plata meat packing factory), by our comrades of the PRT-ERP.

A political paraplegic could grasp the implications of the juxtaposition of these two articles. It amounts to nothing less than a factional provocation to the Fourth International (and the comrades of the PRT). The Political Committee of the LSA-LSO refused to admit this of course. In his report to the Summer 1971 plenum of the LSA-LSO, comrade Dowson describes the Punto de Partido statement as "a document generally Marxist and of interest to our movement" (generally Marxist - sic!) and the ERP article as "a straight factual account of the ERP kidnap action".<sup>1</sup> And so, we are supposed to believe that there is no connection between the two articles. It is amazing to note that, a few sentences later (in that report) Dowson can say that "At this stage in its (the F. I.'s) development it is necessary to create and sustain an atmosphere for collaboration and for resolution in free debate of the differences in our ranks". Dowson proposes to sustain an atmosphere of free and fraternal discussion within the F. I. by publicly attacking the other Sections?!

## The LSA Strikes Again

On April 10, 1972, *Labor Challenge*, the public organ of the LSA in English Canada, published an open and slanderous attack on the PRT-ERP. The article, entitled "LSA on Argentine Kidnapping" (a statement of the Political Committee, LSA-LSO), dealt with the kidnapping of Oberdan Sallustro, the general manager of the huge Fiat Concorde automobile factory, by commandos of the ERP.

The article begins by comparing the activity of our Argentine comrades to that of the FLQ:

"Their action has aroused wide attention across the world, including Canada where an action similar in many ways was carried out in October 1970 under the banner of the Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ)."

The PC statement then accuses our comrades of falling under the influence of "guerrilla strategies":

"Under the influence of guerrilla strategies such as those carried out in other parts of Latin America by Che Guevara in Bolivia or the Tupamaros in Uruguay, many revolutionary militants in Argentina have staked their hopes in dramatic actions by small groups. Such actions, they feel, can spark the masses into moving to overthrow the dictatorship and taking power into their own hands."

The statement continues on to say that the "ERP action, like that of the FLQ supporters in Quebec, reduces the masses to the role of spectators" and asserts that "The task in Argentina as in Canada and Quebec is the construction of such a party (a revolutionary party—RCT) capable of leading the working class in the struggle for power".

This last statement ("The task in Argentina as in Canada . . .") by itself contradicts the resolution adopted by the 9th World Congress of the Fourth International. The comparison between the ERP and the FLQ is nothing more than a slander on the PRT-ERP. And the article, in its totality, is a flagrant violation of the democratic centralism of the World Party. This is what the Unified Tendency said in April—it is what the Revolutionary Communist Tendency says now—and it is what the United Secretariat said when it passed a motion calling the LSA-LSO to order for its factional anti-internationalist action (a fact which the PC has attempted to hush up).

## The PRT and the ERP: Setting the Record Straight

The LSA-LSO gives newspaper coverage to the PRT-

ERP only when there is a kidnapping, and then, it is only for its own factional purposes. Consequently, it is difficult for comrades to ascertain exactly what is the organization and activity of the Argentine Section. And so, it is necessary to elaborate some of these things in order to set the record straight.

The PRT was founded in 1964 and for a whole period the center of its activity was participation in the struggle of the Argentine masses and accumulation of cadre. In 1967, confronted by the Onganía military dictatorship, the party began its discussions on the question of launching an armed struggle and came to the conclusion that the only realistic strategy for struggle under specific conditions was one that combined party building and mass work tasks with a relentless armed struggle against the dictatorship.

After a costly and rather slow period of preparation, the party was able to define its objectives clearly and develop methods of armed struggle. This activity of the PRT was in strict consonance with the political line adopted by the Fourth International at its 9th World Congress in 1969. The ERP (People's Revolutionary Army) was founded by the PRT at its 5th Congress in July of 1970. It subsequently began a coordinated and well-organized armed struggle and military intervention in the struggle that had been initiated by the Argentine masses in 1969. 1969 saw mass political strikes on the part of the Argentine working class and sharp clashes with the army, the character of which was semi-insurrectionary. Mass uprisings have continued to the present, with whole cities being seized by the workers at times. The ERP has carried out its operations in such a fashion as to link up with the workers' mobilizations, and this has allowed the PRT to win important support amongst youth and in major factories. By all accounts, the ERP is one of the best organized and largest of the guerrilla armies on the Latin American continent today (only superceded by the Tupamaros).

It must be emphasized that the ERP is a broad mass organization, having the character of a united front of all those forces who see the necessity of overthrowing the dictatorship by armed means. This, of course, means that it is quite heterogeneous with regard to the spectrum of political views represented within it. But there is no other way to build a mass popular army other than in this way. To the present, the PRT has provided the political and military leadership of the army.

The comrades of the PRT and ERP recognize the key role of the party in the revolutionary process. The Guevarist schema, whereby the army fulfills the role of the party, has been reflected by the PRT.

"The PRT, carrying out the best traditions of Marxism, confirmed by the experiences of triumphant proletarian revolutions around the world, holds that the question of differentiation between the party and the army is a matter of principle . . . The party is a superior form of organization, the kernel of the working class vanguard, and the transmitter of revolutionary process through the mass organizations, both those in existence or yet to be created. The army is a mass combat organization which must be created and directed by the party. This (the party) guarantees the proletarian character of the army's objectives." (*El Comba-*

*tiende*—paper of the PRT, January, 1971)<sup>2</sup>

The kidnapping of Sallustro stemmed directly from moves on the part of the military regime and Fiat to smash the two auto workers unions, SITRAM and SITRAC. The kidnapping of the general manager of that plant certainly won wide sympathy amongst the workers. It is not true, as the *Labor Challenge* statement said, that the article reduced the workers to the role of spectators. Indeed, as the Argentine Army made house to house searches in Buenos Aires for Sallustro, the workers responded with a generalized political strike against repression, paralyzing several cities. The workers' upsurge was only put down after martial law had been declared in a number of provinces and the Army intervened.

## The Marxist View of Terrorism

Marxists are opposed to a policy of individual terrorism. Our condemnation of it is not based upon moralistic or pacifist considerations, but on grounds of revolutionary efficacy. As George Novack said in his article *Marxism versus Neo-Anarchist Terrorism*:

"Individual terror turns its back on the real class struggle by seeking to replace the independent class and political activities of the workers with a duel in the dark between a handful of conspirators and the authorities in which the advantages are on the side of reaction. It demoralizes and disorients the revolutionary movement by concentrating attention upon preoccupations of a handful of terrorists rather than meeting the needs of the specific stage of the class struggle for power."<sup>3</sup>

Can the actions of the PRT-ERP be called acts of individual or neo-anarchist terrorism? Definitely not . . . The PRT-ERP has never turned its back on the real class struggle—on the contrary, its policy has been to link up the military operations of the popular army with the mobilizations of the working class. Have the actions of the PRT-ERP met the needs of the specific stage of the class struggle for power? We must answer Yes. The analysis of the 9th World Congress characterized the whole of the Latin American continent as having entered a pre-revolutionary stage and developed a strategic revolutionary line that involved the launching of armed struggle; it is within that framework that our Argentine comrades have operated. They have, with no small success, applied the continental analysis to the concrete reality of Argentina.

As Marxists, we do not believe in individual terror because it underrates the class struggle. We instead believe in increasing the struggle, in mass terrorism!

"Marxists have always sharply distinguished terrorist adventurism from acts undertaken in self-defense against reactionary assaults, or from violence integrally connected with the progressive side in a civil war or the national liberation struggle of an oppressed people."<sup>4</sup>

It is the analysis of the Argentine comrades that the country has been engulfed in a revolutionary war since 1969. The civil war has been characterized by mass workers' upsurges, political strikes, street-fighting and the armed actions of several vanguard groups and armies. In this context, it would be hard to characterize the actions of the PRT-ERP as "ultraleft".

It is not the task—contrary to what the PC statement says—to build the revolutionary party; rather the central

axis of our strategic orientation in Latin America is the armed struggle, and it is around this central axis that our mass work and the construction of the party proceeds. Such is the political line that was adopted by the 9th World Congress.

The Central Executive Committee of the YS-LJS has gone on record as saying that "The Fourth International has no stand endorsing kidnapping, either as a strategy or as a tactic"<sup>5</sup> Let us make it perfectly clear to the CEC—that for Marxists, kidnappings can never constitute a strategy; a kidnapping is a tactical question. And further, the resolution on Latin America adopted by the 9th World Congress allowed for the employment of such a tactic within the general framework of the armed struggle; the resolution states that it is necessary to "undertake actions in the big cities aimed at striking the nerve centers . . . and at *punishing the hangmen of the regime as well as achieving propagandistic and psychological successes*".<sup>6</sup> (our emphasis—RCT)

## The Statutes of the Fourth International

The 1965 World Congress of the Fourth International adopted a constitution that described the organizational character and statutes of the World Party. These statutes are in full effect until the next World Congress when, it is projected, a new constitution will be adopted. It is instructive to look at some of these statutes since they show that the LSA Political Committee has violated them in publishing the *Labor Challenge* article.

"The Fourth International is governed by the principles and practices of democratic centralism both internationally and nationally, meaning that the greatest possible democracy is practised in internal discussion in working out a political line, whether on an international or national scale, while the firmest discipline is followed in applying this line once it has been decided on by majority vote. This is not merely a preferred method; it is an organizational principle."<sup>7</sup>

"The highest authority of the Fourth International is the World Congress. Climaxing a democratic process of discussion and election of delegates among the national sections, the World Congress determines the political line of the International as a whole on all programmatic issues. In questions involving the national sections, the World Congress serves as the final body of appeal and decision."<sup>8</sup>

"In case of differences between a section and the World Congress, it is the duty of the section to loyally carry out the decisions made by the majority at the World Congress, no matter how serious the differences were or what the position of its delegation was."<sup>9</sup>

What do these statutes mean? For the PRT they mean that it must attempt to implement the strategic line developed for Latin America and adopted by the 9th World Congress of the Fourth International. For the LSA-LSO they mean that it must publicly defend that political strategy and defend our comrades who are trying to implement it. The Fourth International did not order the LSA-LSO to "forget" its differences on the Latin American question. In fact, it proposed that the discussion between the national sections continue through to the next World Congress. But has the LSA documented its disagreements and its position on the Latin American question in the International

discussion bulletins? We have not seen one word! Rather than debate the differences *within* the International, the PC prefers to carry the debate *outside* of our world movement. This, from a section that claims to be loyal to the World Party of Socialist Revolution!

## Why the Political Committee did it

Why did the PC publish the Argentine statement in *Labor Challenge*? The reason that they give us is that since the Sallustro kidnapping was well known to have been carried out by the "Trotskyist ERP" the Canadian Trotskyists had to disassociate themselves from the action, which might lead some persons to believe that our organization "condones acts of individual terror".

It is not difficult to see why the LSA does not want to be associated with the PRT-ERP. Such an association would certainly "turn-off" the LSA's liberal (Liberal) friends in the Abortion Law Repeal Coalition as well as bring shit down on its head in the riding associations of the Second International. So much for the friends and contacts of the LSA.

But there is another reason for the *Labor Challenge* article. As some of us are well aware, the Canadian section does not support the Argentine section at all—but another group, led by one, Nahuel Moreno. This group, known by the name of its newspaper, *La Verdad*, split from the PRT a number of years ago. It is on record as supporting the Popular Front (Unidad Popular) in Chile and the Popular Front (Frente Amplio) in Uruguay. Its leader, Moreno, has at various times proposed to rewrite the theory of permanent revolution (suggesting in his 1962 pamphlet that in certain circumstances the role of vanguard could be played by the urban middle class<sup>10</sup>)—at other times, to liquidate our Latin American sections into OLAS (the revolutionary front established by the Cuban leadership)<sup>11</sup>. We do not make these comments about the *La Verdad* group in order to cover over the problems that exist within the PRT, but only to show to the comrades of the LSA exactly what the PC proposes to replace our Argentine section with. For in fact, it appears that this is what the strategem of the PC is—to have the PRT ousted from the Fourth International and replaced by the *La Verdad* group. When one considers the "favorable coverage" that *Labor Challenge* has given in the past period to the Argentine Socialist Party (PSA, into which the *La Verdad* group has just entered, in order to run in the upcoming elections, from which revolutionary organizations have been banned) with the malicious articles covering the actions of the PRT-ERP, one can only come to the conclusion that the LSA's leadership is engaging in the most distasteful factional maneuvering.

## How the Unified Minority Tendency (LSA) responded to the PC Statement

The comrades of the UMT (LSA), upon seeing the April 10 *Labor Challenge* article, were astonished that the leadership could have stooped to using such miserable subterranean tactics in dealing with its comrades in other sections. However, the UMT members, not having any positions on the PC or majorities in any branches, could do nothing more than to voice verbally their revulsion for

the article to individual members of the leadership. The League tendency, quite correctly, did not boycott *Labor Challenge*, and were in every way loyal to the discipline of our party. We note, that according to the Constitution of the LSA-LSO:

"The leadership is under the control of the membership, its policies always open to criticism, discussion and rectification, within properly established forms and limits, and the leading bodies themselves subject to formal recall and/or alteration. The membership has the right to demand and expect the greatest responsibility from the leaders precisely because of the position they occupy in the movement."<sup>12</sup>

The Unified Tendency recognized that a boycott of *Labor Challenge* would have constituted an improper form of protest. We have a clean record in this respect. The leadership, on the other hand, does not. The Political Committee, in our opinion, has not shown "the greatest responsibility" in its obligations either to the membership of the section or to the Fourth International. We consider that the PC has taken what can only be called a frivolous attitude toward the F. I.

### **The United Minority Tendency's (YS) Response**

The comrades of the UMT (YS) answered the PC statement with a boycott of *Labor Challenge*. Since constitutionally the YS and LSA are separate organizations, individual members of the YS cannot lodge a formal protest with the Political Committee, and the Political Committee has no obligation to answer such a protest. Under these circumstances, the boycott of *Labor Challenge* was the only thing that the United Tendency could do. As sympathizers of the Fourth International and as members

of a sympathizing organization to the Fourth International, the United Tendency felt obligated to respond to the attack on its Argentine comrades. The YS tendency's stand was perfectly principled; it confined its protest *within* the movement, and did not take it outside of the movement (in contradiction to what the PC did, in publishing the Argentine statement).

The "boycott" of *Labor Challenge* was limited to the United Tendency comrades' refusal to sell the April 10 issue of that paper. Subsequently, the CEC directed the United Tendency comrades to end the boycott, and, in respect for the discipline of the YS, we ended the boycott.

### **The Attitude of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency**

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency of the LSA-YS declares its complete solidarity with the Fourth International and asserts here its agreement with the United Secretariat motion calling the LSA-LSO to order for its attack on the Argentine section of the F. I. It is the responsibility of the Canadian section to put forward its criticisms and its position on Latin America in the International Discussion Bulletins, in the same way that the RCT has put forward its positions in the internal bulletins of our section. The internal debates of the International must go on *within* the International. The discussions are too important to be sold on the street corners for fifteen cents.

The RCT reaffirms its support of the Resolution on Latin America, adopted at the 9th World Congress, and will support all measures which facilitate the construction of a strong, democratic-centralist World Party of Socialist Revolution.

August 1972

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1. Reports & Statements adopted by Summer 1971 Plenum of the Central Committee of the LSA-LSO, page 21
  2. reprinted in *Rouge* #110
  3. Marxism versus Neo Anarchist Terrorism, *ISR*, June 1970, page 15
  4. *ibid.* page 16
  5. CEC circular to all locals and members at large, May 6, 1972 page 7
  6. Resolution on Latin America, documents of the 9th World

- Congress, *IP*, July 14, 1969, page 721
7. Statutes of the Fourth International, page 5 of preamble
8. *ibid.* Section II, para 5
9. *ibid.* Section II, para 8
10. *La Revolucion Latinoamericana* (1962)
11. quoted in International Information Bulletin No. 2, Jan. 1971 page 9-10
12. Organizational Character and Constitution of the League for Socialist Action/*Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere*, page 5

# Terrorism, Guerrilla Warfare and the 'Strategy of Armed Struggle': The Leninist View

By Ian Angus

"Of prime importance among the points involved in determining the validity of the new strategy is its connection with past positions of our movement, for this concerns the continuity of our theoretical heritage."

—Joseph Hansen, *In Defense of the Leninist Strategy of Party Building*

## Introduction

The comrades of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency (RCT) have repeatedly expressed their full support of the resolution on Latin America adopted by the 1969 World Congress of the Fourth International. They have, furthermore, insisted that the activity of the PRT(Combatiente) of Argentina is "in strict consonance with the political line adopted by the Fourth International at its 9th World Congress in 1969." ("The LSA Attacks on the Argentine Section and the Response of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency", *LSA/LSO 1972 Discussion Bulletin*, No. 8, p. 2)

The PRT(C), as comrades are aware, was responsible for the creation of the Argentine Revolutionary Army of the People (Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo—ERP), which, among other actions, carried out the kidnapping of Sallustro in 1972 and of the British consul Sylvester in 1971. The comrades of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency hold that such kidnappings are completely within the framework of the 1969 World Congress position. (*Ibid*, p.5)

It is the responsibility of these comrades to defend their position in full before the movement in the pre-convention discussion. They must prove to the movement that the policy they support is the one best calculated to advance the proletarian revolution. They must show that this policy is in fact within the framework of Leninism-Trotskyism and does not, as the "World Movement Report" of the Central Committee argues, represent a substantial concession to ultraleftism.

In my opinion, the arguments of the Central Committee are completely correct. The purpose of this document is to supplement the "World Movement Report" with an examination of the Leninist tradition on the questions of terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and the "strategy of armed struggle." I will try to show that the policies defended by the Revolutionary Communist Tendency are substantially different from the policies which have been defended and carried out by Marxists for seventy years.

We are not blind worshippers of precedent, but Marxism is a science based on history. We examine each problem that confronts us bearing in mind the lessons and experiences of 125 years of class struggle socialism. We do not abandon the theoretical and programmatic conquests of the past lightly; anyone who wishes to argue

that the great Marxist teachers were wrong or that their views are no longer applicable will have to prove the case very concretely and very thoroughly.

It is important for us to be very clear on what the views of our revolutionary predecessors actually were. We often find, in debates with campus radicals and others, that their "new ideas" are conceptions refuted by Marx a century ago. The same happens with debates within the movement. Frequently, and understandably, these debates simply repeat discussions which were held decades ago. This is the case today: the views of the RCT on these questions have been debated before, and rejected by revolutionary socialists.

## Terrorism

Individual terrorism means acts of violence by individuals or small groups directed against members of the ruling class, their representatives and institutions. The work "individual" refers not only to the terrorist and his victims, but also to the separation of such acts from the masses, often the substitution of such actions for mass action.

The revolutionary Marxist position on individual terrorism has been stated many times. Comrades should read George Novack's *Marxism versus Neo-Anarchist Terrorism* (Pathfinder, 1970) and the relevant sections of Trotsky's testimony to the Dewey Commission, printed in *Labor Challenge*, October 9, 1972. (Also in *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, Merit 1968, pp. 489-92)

The comrades of the RCT do not directly challenge the Marxist position. Rather they claim that the actions of the PRT-ERP in Argentina are not in fact acts of individual terrorism as condemned by Lenin and Trotsky.

The PRT-ERP, unlike the classical terrorists, we are told, knows that only the masses can make the revolution. The kidnappings, assassinations and robberies carried out by the PRT-ERP are understood and supported by the masses. The PRT-ERP is careful to explain its actions to the masses, and engages in mass work in addition to guerrilla struggle. "The PRT-ERP has never turned its back on the real class struggle—on the contrary, its policy has been to link up the military operations of the popular army with the mobilizations of the working class." ("The LSA Attacks on the Argentine Section . . ." p. 4) Members of the RCT have chosen to describe the actions of the PRT-ERP as "mass terrorism".

In fact, however, the actions of the PRT-ERP fall precisely into the category Lenin and Trotsky defined and condemned as *individual terrorism*.

The PRT-ERP is not the first group to try to combine mass work and terrorism. Even the great Russian terrorist organization Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) saw

itself as attempting to spark a mass uprising. When it was launched in 1879, Trotsky writes, Narodnaya Volya "did not renounce propaganda among the masses. On the contrary, it decided to devote two thirds of the party funds to it, and only one third to terror. But this decision remained only a symbolic tribute to the past. . . . The whole organization was reconstructed to answer the needs of the terrorist struggle." (Trotsky, *The Young Lenin*, Doubleday 1972, p.33)

Whatever the subjective desires of the revolutionists involved, terrorism has a considerable dynamic of its own. Trotsky summed up the lessons of the Russian terrorist experience in 1909:

"Terrorist work in its very essence demands such a concentration of energy upon the 'supreme moment', such an overestimation of personal heroism and, lastly, such an hermetically concealed conspiracy as . . . excludes completely any agitational and organizational activity among the masses." (*The Case of Leon Trotsky*, p. 490)

The experience in Argentina fully confirms this judgment. In "The Only Road for Workers Power and Socialism" (*International Information Bulletin*, 1972, No. 4) the comrades of the PRT(C) describe their main tasks as first mass propaganda and second preparation for armed struggle in the countryside. In practice this line appears to have meant virtually complete dedication of the party to urban guerrilla actions—terrorist actions. A list published by the PRT-ERP in 1971 cited 26 actions carried out in a period of two months. *Only one* involved the distribution of leaflets. Three consisted of distributions of food and clothing. All of the others involved robberies, hold-ups and small gun battles with the police. (*Intercontinental Press*, July 12, 1971, pp. 670-671)

In addition we have the evidence of the comrades sent by the United Secretariat to investigate the situation in Argentina. Despite its desire to conduct mass work in the factories, the PRT(C) has no forces in the union movement. ("World Movement Report", p.18) Violent actions by an isolated group, as Lenin and Trotsky pointed out, only increase the isolation.

## Lenin's Critique of the Socialist-Revolutionaries

But the Marxist critique of the terrorist strategy does not only apply to those who use it exclusively, nor even only to those who see it as a means of sparking mass actions. The defense of terrorism advanced by Russia's Socialist-Revolutionary party (SRs) had a "Marxist" tinge. The SR's had more members and supporters than the Marxists. Their terrorist actions won wide favor among the masses—they had, in fact, everything in their favor that the RCT claims for the PRT-ERP.

Lenin wrote a series of articles in 1902 on the strategy and program of the Socialist-Revolutionary party. These articles have been reprinted in English in a pamphlet *Revolutionary Adventurism* (Moscow, 1969) and they appear in Volume VI of Lenin's *Collected Works*. Lenin's reply to the SR defense of terrorism reads like a reply to the RCT:

"In their defense of terrorism, which the experience of the Russian revolutionary movement has proved to be ineffective, the Socialist-Revolutionaries are talking themselves blue in the face in asseverating that they recognize

terrorism only in conjunction with work among the masses, and that therefore the arguments used by the Russian Social Democrats to refute the efficacy of this method of struggle (and which has indeed been refuted for a long time to come) do not apply to them. . . . We are not repeating the terrorists' mistakes and are not diverting attention from work among the masses, the Socialist-Revolutionaries assure us, and at the same time enthusiastically recommend to the Party such acts as Balshamov's assassination of Sipyagin, although everyone knows and sees perfectly well that this act was in no way connected with the masses and, moreover, could not have been, by reason of the way it was carried out—that the persons who committed this terrorist act neither counted on nor hoped for any definite action or support on the part of the masses." (*Revolutionary Adventurism*, p. 8)

The assassination of Sipyagin was a popular act. It had the sympathy at least of all politically conscious workers. But Lenin did not accept mass understanding or mass sympathy as sufficient justification for any action. It is not enough that the masses be spectators, even enthusiastic spectators—the possibility of *mass involvement* must be present:

"Without in the least denying violence and terrorism in principle, we demanded work for the preparation of such forms of violence as were calculated to bring about the direct participation of the masses and which guaranteed that participation." (*Revolutionary Adventurism*, p.13)

What then of the argument that dramatic actions carried out by small groups inspire the masses to new struggles, encourage them to enter the struggle, or at least, as Daniel Bensaid suggested in *Rouge*, demonstrate to them "the vulnerability of a system that wants to be faultless"? (Appendix 3, World Movement Report, p.33)

Lenin categorically rejects this conception:

". . . we know from the past and see in the present that *only* new forms of the mass movement or the awakening of new sections of the masses to independent struggle really arouses a spirit of struggle *in all*. Single combat, however, inasmuch as it remains *single combat* waged by the Balshamovs, has the immediate effect of simply creating a short-lived sensation, while indirectly it even leads to apathy and passive waiting for the next bout." (*Revolutionary Adventurism* p. 12)

As Trotsky later wrote:

"Individual terrorism in our eyes is inadmissible precisely for the reason that *it lowers the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to impotence, and directs their glances and hopes towards the great avenger and emancipator who will one day come and accomplish his mission.*" (*The Case of Leon Trotsky*, p. 492 my emphasis)

## Lenin's Alternative to Terrorism

In the last of his 1902 articles on the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Lenin discussed what he saw as the proper activity of revolutionists. He described a strike in the provincial town of Rostov-on-Don, in which thousands of workers held mass meetings to discuss their demands. A few Marxists in the town distributed leaflets which were discussed by the workers. For several days the police and civic authorities couldn't decide what to do, but finally an armed attack was launched against the crowd. Six



workers were murdered, and their funeral served as the occasion for a political demonstration. The strike was broken.

From the viewpoint of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Lenin wrote, "it would perhaps have been 'more expedient' if the six comrades murdered in Rostov had given their lives in an attempt on the lives of individual police tyrants." (*Revolutionary Adventurism*, p. 33)

Since the comrades of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency have defended the kidnapping of Sallustro in Argentina as part of the defense of the auto workers' unions against government attacks, we may ask: would they consider it "more expedient" if the six workers in Rostov had kidnapped the factory manager in order to defend their comrades? The parallel seems clear.

"We, however," said Lenin, "are of the opinion that it is only such mass movements, in which mounting political consciousness and revolutionary activity are openly manifested to all by the working class, that deserve to be called *genuinely revolutionary* acts and are capable of really encouraging everyone who is fighting for the Russian revolution. What we see here is not the much-vaunted 'individual resistance', whose only connection with the masses consists of verbal declarations, publication of sentences passed, etc. What we see is genuine resistance on the part of the crowd, and the lack of organization, unpreparedness and spontaneity of this resistance remind us how unwise it is to exaggerate our revolutionary forces and how criminal it is to neglect the task of steadily improving the organization and preparedness of this crowd, which is waging an actual struggle before our very eyes. . . .

". . . the *only* events that can have a real and serious 'agitational' (stimulating), and not only stimulating but also (and this is far more important) educational, effect, are events in which the masses themselves are the actors, events which are born of the sentiments of the masses and not staged 'for a special purpose' by one organization or another. . . . we are convinced that to *sacrifice* one revolutionary, even in exchange for ten scoundrels, means only disorganizing our own ranks, which are thin as it is, so thin that they cannot keep up with all that is 'demanded' of them by the workers." (*Revolutionary Adventurism*, pp. 33-34)

"Steadily improving the organization and preparedness of this crowd." That is the task Lenin posed to revolutionists. He repeated and expanded on the point, insisting that revolutionists "not permit ourselves to depart a single step from the impending and pressing task of assisting these masses, who have already begun to rise, to act more boldly and concertedly; of giving them not a couple but dozens of open-air speakers and leaders; of creating a real, militant organization capable of guiding the masses. . . ." (*Revolutionary Adventurism*, p. 36)

In a word, Lenin told revolutionists to carry out "the same old task (so dull and 'uninteresting' to the intellectual who is free from 'dogmatic' faith in the working class movement!) of carrying on agitation among the proletarian masses and organizing a mass onslaught." (*Revolutionary Adventurism*, p. 32)

Like the Argentine workers in Cordoba and Mendoza and other centers, the workers of Rostov-on-Don "for several days won for themselves the right to hold political gatherings, fighting off a series of attacks on the part of

soldiers against the unarmed crowd." Lenin concluded: "By this sign shall ye conquer, is all that remains for us to say to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear." (*Revolutionary Adventurism*, p. 37)

What remains to be said today is that Tsarist Russia was by no means a democracy. It was one of the most oppressive dictatorships of all time—more oppressive in many ways than most Latin American countries. In Argentina, for example, although the workers' movement is under constant attack, the basic defensive organizations of the working class—the unions—remain largely intact. In Russia all union activity was stamped out. Most revolutionaries spent long periods in prison and in Siberia. The Bolsheviks were unable, except for brief periods, to publish their newspaper or even to hold conventions in Russia. But Lenin was very clear about a strategy oriented to mass action.

## Under What Circumstances Would We Support Terrorism?

Lenin, of course, did not reject terrorism "in principle"—as the supporters of the RCT have often pointed out. Marxists do not reject *any* method of struggle "in principle." We judge each method according to one criterion: "will this method, used at this time and in these circumstances, advance the cause of proletarian revolution?" If the answer is yes, then we use the method if we are able. If the answer is no, then we don't. We are concerned only with effectiveness, and anyone who reads the works of Marxism on terrorism, including the citations from Lenin made above, will see that effectiveness is the only criterion used.

The RCT goes on to point out that Lenin in 1906 advocated the formation of small armed bands to conduct "mass terrorism" against the Tsarist army. The RCT has insisted that the movement recognize the distinction between "individual terrorism" and "mass terrorism."

Once again this is not a new question. It was dealt with thirty years ago by James P. Cannon in *Defense Policy in the Minneapolis Trial*, now republished under the title *What Policy for Revolutionists—Marxism or Ultra-leftism?* (Merit, 1969). This is a brilliant pamphlet which ought to be read and studied by every comrade.

Cannon discusses our attitude to sabotage as a method of struggle: "Sabotage, to us, means individual acts of obstruction and destruction, substituted for mass action. That is the way Marxism defines it and, thereby, condemns it. Similarly, individual terrorism. But it is necessary to understand that such actions have one quality when employed as *substitutes* for mass action and another quality when subordinated to and absorbed by mass action. Marxism is opposed to terrorist assassinations, for example, but not to wars of liberation waged by the oppressed masses, even though wars entail killing some obnoxious individuals. So, also, with acts of obstruction and destruction as *part of* and *subordinate to* wars waged by the masses, not as substitutes for them. 'Terrorism' and 'sabotage' are then no longer the same things. Everything changes, including the attitude of Marxists, according to what is *dominant* and what is *subordinate* in the circumstances." (*What Policy*, p. 57)

Revolutionary socialists, says Cannon, "admit 'sabotage' only as a minor auxiliary factor in mass actions;

that is, when it is no longer sabotage in the proper sense of the term. The difference is quite fundamental." (*What Policy*, p. 57)

In case anyone should think that the opinion of James Cannon, a founder of World Trotskyism, is not in accord with that of Lenin and Trotsky, here are Trotsky's views on the subject:

"The proletarian party does not resort to artificial methods such as burning warehouses, setting off bombs, wrecking trains, etc., in order to bring about the defeat of its own government. Even if it were successful along this road, the military defeat would not at all lead to revolutionary success, a success which can be assured only by the independent movement of the proletariat. . . .

"The methods of struggle change, of course, when the struggle enters the openly revolutionary phase. Civil war is a war, and in this aspect has its particular laws. In civil war, bombing of warehouses, wrecking of trains and all other forms of military 'sabotage' are inevitable. . . ." ("Learn to Think—A Friendly Suggestion to Certain Ultralefts," *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39*, Merit 1969, p. 6)

It should be noted that Trotsky identifies civil war with the "openly revolutionary phase" of the class struggle. Elsewhere he describes civil war as combining "a spontaneous uprising determined by local causes, bloody intervention by counterrevolutionary hordes, a revolutionary general strike, an insurrection for the seizure of power and a period of liquidating attempts at counterrevolutionary uprising." (*Problems of Civil War*, Merit 1970, p. 8) That is, civil war is a situation of mass struggle of the most profound kind, involving not simply a pre-revolutionary situation but a fully revolutionary one in which the question of state power is posed. Civil war is not simply the violence of a dedicated group of revolutionaries, nor even every case of armed conflict. Civil war implies *dual power* to some degree. Only in such circumstances does Trotsky condone "sabotage."

Cannon comments on Trotsky's view: "Sabotage is admissible as a weapon of the proletarian movement only 'in quotation marks' as elucidated by Trotsky. That is, when, strictly speaking, it is no longer sabotage but a *minor military measure supplementing mass action*. Whoever speaks of sabotage in any other framework does not speak the language of Marxism." (*What Policy*, p. 58, my emphasis)

Similarly, terrorism is admissible only as "a minor military measure supplementing mass action." Whoever speaks of terrorism in any other framework does not speak the language of Marxism.

## Lenin's Conception of Guerrilla Warfare (a)

All of the attempts to claim that Lenin endorsed a strategy of guerrilla warfare are based on a few articles written by Lenin between October 1905 and September 1906. (Joseph Hansen goes over these articles in more depth in "In Defense of the Leninist Strategy of Party Building.")

The use of these articles by the supporters of the strategy of continental rural guerrilla warfare suffers from two critical weaknesses: (1) failure to examine closely what Lenin actually said, the weight which he assigned to guerrilla warfare; and (2) failure to consider the 1906 writings in their own historical context, and in the light of the

subsequent opinions and actions of Lenin and Trotsky. I will deal with (1) after looking at the second and more critical problem. Lenin did, after all, insist that "Marxism demands an absolutely *historical* examination of the question of the forms of struggle." ("Guerrilla Warfare," *Collected Works*, XI, p. 214)

Lenin examined the problem of guerrilla warfare not in the abstract, but in the concrete situation of 1906. 1905 had seen a mass uprising in Russia, the first great revolutionary struggle of this century, the "dress rehearsal" for 1917. Lenin's evaluation was that the 1905 upsurge had been only a beginning, that 1906 would see still greater revolutionary upheavals, including, probably, a peasant war.

Guerrilla warfare had broken out spontaneously in many parts of the country. Lenin saw this as symptomatic of things to come, and urged party cadre in areas where such actions developed to join them, and to place them under control of the revolutionary party.

The same judgment that the revolutionary curve was rising was responsible for Lenin's call for a boycott of the elections to the Duma. As he subsequently wrote: "to be successful the boycott requires a direct struggle against the old regime, an uprising against it and mass disobedience (such mass disobedience is one of the conditions for preparing an uprising)." (*Collected Works*, XIII, p. 25)

This was Lenin's view in 1906. He foresaw in the immediate future, a few weeks or months away, a mass revolutionary uprising. Therefore he supported the involvement of Bolsheviks in armed detachments and called for a vigorous boycott campaign. (In fact, he considered the boycott to be more important than the guerrilla actions.)

A full account of the guerrilla and boycott experience of 1906 is given by Trotsky in *Stalin: A Political Biography*. The relevant sections are reprinted by Joseph Hansen in "In Defense of the Leninist Strategy of Party Building." This book, written in 1940, represents Trotsky's most mature and considered judgment on the Russian guerrilla experience. The judgment is negative.

"Disagreements (on the guerrilla war-boycott strategy) came with the evaluation of concrete historical circumstances. When two major battles of the civil war are separated from each other by two or three months, that interval will inevitably be filled with guerrilla blows against the enemy. But when the 'intermission' is stretched out over years, guerrilla warfare ceases to be a preparation for a new battle and becomes instead a convulsion after defeat." (Trotsky, *Stalin*, Stein and Day 1967, p. 98)

The 'intermission' did stretch out beyond two or three months. The revolutionary wave took a downturn. The boycott campaign failed and the guerrilla groups gradually declined. When the question of guerrilla war came up at the 1907 party Congress, Lenin abstained. He had previously expressed the view that it was not a question of principle and "must be settled by the local practical workers." (*Collected Works*, XI, p. 221) It is worth noting that the majority of "local practical workers" among the Bolsheviks opposed guerrilla actions.

Lenin erred in advocating guerrilla groups because he misjudged the situation. But the comrades of the PRT (Combatiente) turn Lenin's error into a political principle:

"Lenin determined the need to maintain the party's clandestine organization, revolutionary methods and the prep-

aration of armed struggle, *in spite of the 'downturn' in the class struggle.*" ("The Only Road . . ." p. 26. Emphasis added)

They raise this to a general rule, one of the "fundamental theoretical and programmatic contributions to Marxism" made by the Chinese and Cuban leaders and accepted by the PRT(C): "Armed struggle is not initiated simply as the corollary to a triumphant popular insurrection. It can start as a defensive reaction of the masses and their vanguard *under the circumstances of a pronounced downturn in the class struggle.*" ("The Only Road . . ." p. 14, emphasis added)

And in case we did not understand that this judgment has practical implications, they point out that during the years of armed struggle which they envision, there will inevitably be ". . . a long period of downturn during which the working class as a whole will not participate in guerrilla struggles in the country side or the cities." ("The Only Road . . ." p. 30, emphasis added.) The consider that in such cases the party must nonetheless continue guerrilla struggles.

The comrades of the PRT(C) insist that this conception is a Leninist one, based on Lenin's 1906 policy of advocating guerrilla warfare "in spite of the 'downturn' in the class struggle." *But Lenin did not favor guerrilla warfare "in spite of" the downturn in 1906. He favored it because he did not realize that a downturn had taken place!*

The historically inaccurate basis of the PRT(C)'s conception can be seen in the following passage, in which they correctly link the 1906 guerrilla actions with the election boycott campaign:

"At that time, he (Lenin) polemicized against the Mensheviks and Trotsky, who concluded that it was necessary to adopt a reformist, parliamentary, legalistic, non-Bolshevik line, due to the evident decline of the mass struggle following the 1905 defeat. The united pedants of the Moreno club have completely turned this polemic on its head, trying to say that Trotsky and the Mensheviks were right in 1906. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was Lenin's method and line that allowed the construction of the Bolshevik party against the spontaneism of the Mensheviks that was limited to the mood of the masses and the subjective factors." ("The Only Road," p. 26)

We should disregard the polemical exaggerations here—Trotsky never advocated a "reformist, parliamentary, legalistic" line, although he was not a member of the Bolshevik faction.

But Trotsky did oppose the boycott of the Duma in 1906.

Now, Lenin never, at least in writing, evaluated the guerrilla campaign. But he did, on a number of occasions, evaluate the closely-related boycott campaign:

"The Bolshevik boycott of 'parliament' in 1905 enriched the revolutionary proletariat with highly valuable political experience and showed that in combining legal with illegal, parliamentary with extra-parliamentary forms of struggle, it is sometimes useful and even essential to reject parliamentary forms. But it is a very great mistake to apply this experience blindly, imitatively and uncritically to *other* conditions and to *other* situations. *The boycott of the Duma by the Bolsheviks in 1906 was, however, a mistake, although a small and easily remediable one.*" ("Left Wing" Communism: An Infantile Dis-

order, in *Selected Works*, Moscow 1961, Vol. 3, pp. 387-88, Emphasis added)

As for the "spontaneism of the Mensheviks that was limited to the mood of the masses and the subjective factors" which the comrades of the PRT(C) believe prevented them from supporting guerrilla warfare in a time of a downturn in the class struggle, it must be pointed out that Lenin advocated guerrilla warfare in some areas precisely because he thought the mood of the masses was favorable. He insisted that "*there can be no doubt in the mind of any socialist that the sentiments of the masses must be taken into account when organizing guerrilla actions.*" ("Events of the Day," *Collected Works*, XI, p. 167, Emphasis added)

Finally: Why do the proponents of a guerrilla strategy quote only from Lenin's 1906 writings? Lenin lived another 18 years, and led a revolution. Had he nothing more to say on armed struggle? What were the practical consequences of the 1906 guerrilla experience?

In fact, the Bolshevik guerrilla actions produced no valuable results at all, except for some funds for party activities. They did not prevent the serious decline and disorganization of the party after 1907. The guerrilla operations collapsed or were disbanded by 1909—the revival of the party in 1912 came not from guerrilla actions but from the new rise in the mass movements. Lenin did not advocate guerrilla warfare during the fierce repression and revolutionary decline of 1914-1916.

Above all—guerrilla operations played no role in the Bolshevik strategy in 1917. When guerrilla groups did appear in July 1917, Lenin and Trotsky devoted all of their energies to teaching the masses and the ultralefts not to enter the armed struggle too quickly, to wait for the most propitious moment. The 1906 guerrilla experiment was quietly forgotten by all concerned.

The guerrilla activities of the Bolsheviks undoubtedly contain valuable lessons for all revolutionists. But they will not be gained by ignoring the historical context of the judgments of the Marxists who were involved.

## Lenin's Conception of Guerrilla Warfare (b)

Nor will those lessons be learned by ignoring what Lenin actually said in 1906. The discussion of guerrilla warfare has tended to focus an unnaturally bright light on Lenin's few articles on guerrilla warfare. Lenin, however, viewed the guerrilla fight "unquestionably as something partial, secondary and auxiliary." ("Guerrilla Warfare", *Collected Works*, XI, p. 215). He insisted that "the party of the proletariat can never regard guerrilla warfare as the only, or even the chief, method of struggle." (*Ibid*, p. 221)

Lenin's articles on guerrilla warfare are permeated with the concept of flexibility: "Marxism differs from all primitive forms of struggle by not binding the movement to any one particular form of struggle. It recognizes the most varied forms of struggle; and it does not 'concoct' them, but only generalizes, organizes, gives conscious expression to those forms of struggle of the revolutionary struggle which arise of themselves in the course of the movement . . . In this respect Marxism *learns*, if we may so express it, from mass practice and makes no claim whatever to *teach* the masses forms of struggle invented by 'systemizers' in the seclusion of their studies." (*Ibid*,

Lenin's determination to learn from the mass struggle and to apply the most varied forms of struggle contrasts sharply with the elevation of guerrilla warfare to "an orientation and a method," to use Livio Maitan's phrase. This contrast is precisely the difference between guerrilla warfare seen as a *tactic* and guerrilla warfare seen as a *strategy*.

## Tactic or Strategy?

There is no doubt that some comrades, during the debate on whether guerrilla warfare is a "tactic" or a "strategy," thought the question was academic, or a matter of hairsplitting. There was even some feeling that the whole dispute might boil down to a disagreement over the meaning of those words.

The evolution of the debate since 1968, and the actual course of events in the International since the last World Congress, has proven that the distinction is of vital importance, and that the two sides in the debate agreed on what the terms meant—political issues were at stake.

Trotsky defines the two terms as follows:

"By the conception of tactics is understood the system of measures that serves a single current task or branch of the class struggle. Revolutionary strategy on the contrary embraces a combined system of actions which by their association, consistency, and growth must lead the proletariat to the conquest of power." (*The Third International After Lenin*, Pioneer, 1957, p. 75)

We are, in other words, back to the distinction which Cannon insisted upon in his discussion of sabotage: *Strategy is dominant, tactics are subordinate*. Strategy is the overall method and orientation—tactics are the method of putting it into effect. Strategy determines tactics.

Seen in those terms, it becomes clear that the 1969 World Congress Resolution on Latin America in fact advocated a *strategy* of guerrilla warfare. As it said: "the fundamental perspective, the only realistic perspective for Latin America is that of an armed struggle which may last for long years. This is why the technical preparation cannot be conceived merely as one of the aspects of revolutionary work but as *the fundamental aspect on a continental scale*. . . ." (Resolution on Latin America, *International Information Bulletin—Documents on Latin America* 1968-71, pp. 6-7, Emphasis added) And further on: "*armed struggle in Latin America means fundamentally guerrilla warfare*." (*Ibid*, p. 7, Emphasis added)

Armed struggle, which means guerrilla warfare, is *fundamental*. This cannot be interpreted as meaning anything other than a strategy of guerrilla warfare. But this is not Lenin's conception, and Lenin's advocacy of a tactical application of guerrilla warfare cannot be advanced to defend it.

In practice, the comrades of the PRT(C) in Argentina are prepared to conduct guerrilla warfare during "a long period of downturn during which the working class as a whole will not participate in guerrilla struggles." ("The Only Road," p. 30) This is guerrilla warfare seen as a strategy. And so long as the masses do not participate, so long as the masses are only spectators, this strategy is objectively identical with individual terrorism.

Thus the Unified Minority Tendency (now Revolutionary Communist Tendency) misses the point when it says: "The false opposition created by the international minority between party building and involvement in armed struggle as proposed by the Ninth World Congress has no basis in reality." They miss the point again when they say: "The revolutionary parties in Latin America will be built by combining mass work and armed struggle." (*LSA-LSO 1972 Discussion Bulletin*, No. 3, p. 3)

The question is not whether there are irreconcilable contradictions between party building and armed struggle. The question is: Which is *dominant*, which is *subordinate*? Which is *strategy*, which is *tactic*? The position of Leninism has never been to promote armed struggle in the abstract, but rather to see it as one of a number of tactics, of methods of struggle, subordinate to our *strategy* of building a revolutionary party with deep and indestructable ties to the masses.

## Guerrilla Warfare in Trotsky's Military Writings.

In his catalogue of places in Marxist literature in which guerrilla warfare is mentioned, comrade Livio Maitan mentions Trotsky's *Military Writings*. Without going into a long discussion of Trotsky's military views, it is worth mentioning that one of the main features of Trotsky's *Military Writings* is the absolute rejection of the idea that any one method of struggle is the road to victory. Hosts of pseudo-Marxists attempted to create a "proletarian" military doctrine or strategy and Trotsky rejected them. He rejected the doctrine of maneuverability, the doctrine of the offensive and . . . the doctrine of guerrilla warfare!

In fact Trotsky's polemic against guerrillaism is so harsh that the comrade editing the most recent English-language selection of Trotsky's *Military Writings* felt compelled to comment that the view of revolutionists towards guerrilla warfare must of course differ according to whether one is speaking of a fight for power or a defense of a workers' state. "In the current debate over guerrilla war," he writes, "nothing in these writings is pertinent other than the rather obvious point that each national situation must be examined concretely and that actions suitable in one situation should not be mechanically transposed to other situations." (George Breitman, Preface to Trotsky, *Military Writings*, Merit 1969, p. 9)

It is precisely this "rather obvious point" that is at issue in the present discussion. The 1969 Latin America Resolution binds the Latin American sections to a continental *strategy of guerrilla war*. Not only does it insist on armed struggle—it insists on one specific form of armed struggle, something Trotsky refused to do, even during the Civil War.

The attempt to use Trotsky as a defender of guerrilla war as a strategy, as "an orientation and a method" is doomed. In fact, the quotations comrade Maitan himself offers us argue against his position. In February 1919, comrade Maitan writes, Trotsky said:

"The purpose of guerrilla warfare is to wear out a stronger opponent. Guerrilla warfare as such cannot be decisive in achieving final victory over an organized army. Indeed, it does not even contemplate this objective. It limits itself to tying down and obstructing its opponent, to destroying railway lines and spreading chaos. It is

in this area that the weaker force has the advantage over a stronger opponent." (Cited in Maitan, "Once Again On the Revolutionary Perspectives in Latin America—Defense of an Orientation and a Method." *Discussion on Latin America* 1968-1971, p. 80)

But as we have seen, Trotsky views strategy as a "combined system of actions which . . . must lead the proletariat to the conquest of power."

Since, as Maitan quotes from him, Trotsky believes that guerrilla war *cannot* achieve final victory, then it cannot be a strategy. At least Trotsky didn't think so.

Maitan also quotes Trotsky as saying that "guerrilla warfare can achieve miracles when impelled by a class rising up in a struggle for power." (*Ibid.*, p. 80) Again, guerrilla war is presented—in this most favorable quotation—as secondary to the mass struggle.

### 'Guerrilla Warfare Strategy' or 'Armed Struggle Strategy'?

The last World Congress adopted a strategy of prolonged rural guerrilla warfare for Latin America. Yet the Latin America resolution, as comrade Hansen pointed out in 1968, never really makes the case for guerrilla warfare. The concept was sneaked in through the back door. In the third sentence of the second paragraph of section 15—a section purporting to argue that Marxists cannot arbitrarily impose any "universally valid formula" on the Latin American struggle—we were suddenly informed that the innumerable failures of guerrilla warfare were technical, rather than political.

The unstated implication was that the concept of guerrilla warfare is generally valid. The document from that point on assumes that the validity of a guerrilla warfare strategy has been proven. (See Joe Hansen, "Assessment of the Draft Resolution on Latin America," *Discussion on Latin America* 1968-1971, pp. 20-21, for a more complete account of the way in which the strategy of engagement in and technical preparation for rural guerrilla war is introduced.)

The circular method of argument used in the Latin America resolution leaves its defenders free to support it or put it into effect with great flexibility. For example, the PRT-ERP and its supporters apparently see no distinction between "urban guerrilla warfare" as the PRT-ERP practices it, and what the resolution called the "geographical-military" concept of *rural* guerrilla war. Similarly, the Revolutionary Communist Tendency presents the position in such a way as to include any action involving the use of violence.

"The choice of guerrilla warfare as the main axis of the armed struggle for a whole period corresponds to the present historical context of most Latin American countries. Nevertheless, we must take into consideration that as the revolutionary process extends and deepens itself, other forms of struggle will appear, new forms of struggle will probably be created. We cannot a priori say that one form of struggle as such has been outdated. The priority of one form of struggle over another must correspond to the various phases of the struggle; on the other hand, we must take into consideration the fact that various forms of struggle will tend to combine with each other. Urban sabotage and guerrilla warfare, mass mobilizations, armed strikes and occupations, 'armed self-

defense,' land occupations, all will be used. Guerrilla nuclei will naturally spring into action, but militias and eventually, 'popular armies' will have to be created." (*LSA/LSO Discussion Bulletin* 1972, No. 3, pp. 1-2)

What does this "thesis" amount to, insofar as it is not simply a list of types of struggles? It is an attempt to gloss over the fact that the last Congress advocated a strategy of continental rural guerrilla war leading to the conquest of state power. The UMT and its successor, the Revolutionary Communist Tendency (which still accepts the Unified Minority Tendency theses, so far as the movement knows) tries to present a "strategy of armed struggle" for which guerrilla war is only the "main axis" for a "whole period."

Unfortunately, this change only takes them out of the frying pan. The fire is still there. The idea of a "strategy of armed struggle" was decisively rejected by Lenin and Trotsky fifty years ago, in one of the most important debates in the history of Marxism.

### The Third World Congress of the Communist International

In all of the references to the past in the documents of Maitan and Germain and Knoeller, the Third Congress of the Comintern is notable by its absence. Yet the debates at that Congress are more relevant to the present discussion than any of their references. The debates at that Congress, held in June-July 1921, are full of parallels to the present discussion.

The victory of the Russian Revolution of 1917 had an electrifying effect on socialists around the world, and in particular in Europe. All of the most dedicated and heroic elements set about to duplicate the actions of the Bolsheviks. It was generally assumed that the European revolution was only months away, that only a brief period of struggle would be needed to bring capitalism to its knees. Trotsky writes: "In the era of the First Congress (1919) many of us reckoned—some more, others less—that the spontaneous onslaught of the workers and in part of the peasant masses would overthrow the bourgeoisie in the near future. And, as a matter of fact, this onset was truly colossal. The number of casualties was very large. But the bourgeoisie was able to withstand this initial onslaught and precisely for this reason regained its class self-confidence." (*First Five Years*, II, p. 8)

As the Second Congress approached in 1920, the Bolshevik leaders began to come to grips with the failures of two-and-a-half years. Lenin wrote "*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*" a few months prior to the Second Congress in order to point out to the International that more is involved in the fight for workers power than ideological purity and revolutionary dedication. The tactics of proletarian revolution, he showed, are a very complex matter, not to be approached in a single-minded or doctrinaire fashion.

But Lenin still felt that ultraleftism was "at present a thousand times less dangerous and less significant than the mistake of Right doctrinairism (i.e. social chauvinism and Kautskyism); but after all that is only due to the fact that Left Communism is a very young trend, is only just coming into being. It is for this reason that, under certain conditions, the disease can be easily cured; and

we must set to work to cure it with the utmost energy." (*Selected Works*, Moscow 1961, III, p. 446)

At the Second Congress some attention was paid to this question, but on the whole ultraleftism was seen as a minor problem, and the conquest of state power through the spontaneous upsurge of the masses still seemed imminent. But no victory came.

"Because of the relative ease with which the October revolution was accomplished, the victory of the Russian proletariat did not present itself commensurately to the leading circles of European workers as a politico-strategic task, and this aspect of it was not adequately assimilated by them." (Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, II, p. 28)

"It is all too obvious today just what was lacking for victory in 1919 and 1920: a revolutionary party was lacking." (Trotsky, 1924 introduction to *First Five Years*, I, p. 1)

The Russian Revolution seemed so easy—few revolutionists took the trouble to examine the long history of the Bolshevik party, a party rooted in the mass movements, its flexible use of transitional, democratic and partial demands, its combination of legal and illegal methods. They tried to duplicate the Russian experience without understanding it—naturally they failed.

The Cuban leadership faces the same problem today. All over the continent revolutionists have tried to duplicate their actions, with no success. But the Cuban leaders have only called for "more of the same" or have shifted their faith to bourgeois reformers like Torres and Allende.

In contrast, Lenin and Trotsky set out almost single-handedly to re-educate the Communist International. As Trotsky later wrote, "It was only by the middle of 1921 that the fully rounded-out work of building the Communist parties really began. . . ." (*Lessons of October*, in *The Essential Trotsky*, Unwin, 1963, p. 117)

*The Third World Congress was the first to really come to grips with the problem of revolutionary strategy.* Any examination of the early years of the Comintern must take this into account. (This is contrary to the opinion of bourgeois authorities, who like to claim that the Third World Congress marked a step away from revolutionary politics—like the ultraleft, the bourgeoisie tends to confuse revolutionary strategy with violence and radical-sounding phrases.) Trotsky called the Third Congress a "School for Revolutionary Strategy."

Lenin and Trotsky stood firm on revolutionary principle, not bending to the pressures of the impatient and enthusiastic young revolutionists who had joined the International.

The pressure was very strong: *the ultraleft comprised a majority of the delegates and leaders at the Congress.* The Chairman of the Comintern, Zinoviev, defended the ultraleft position, which had that year (1921) led to a disastrous attempt at insurrection in Germany. Bukharin was the principal ultraleft theoretician. Under Lenin's initiative, a "right wing" faction was formed, which won over first the Russian delegation, and eventually the whole Congress. (Trotsky discusses this fight in *The Third International After Lenin*, p. 89)

Trotsky later summed up the position he and Lenin defended:

"The Third Congress of the Comintern was a milestone demarcating the first and second periods. It set down

the fact that the resources of the communist parties, politically as well as organizationally, were not sufficient for the conquest of power. It advanced the slogan: 'To the masses!', that is, to the conquest of power through a *previous conquest of the masses* achieved on the basis of the daily life and struggles." (*Third International After Lenin*, p. 88)

The Communist Parties, which were too weak "politically as well as organizationally," were immensely larger than the Latin American sections of the Fourth International. The German Communist Party had 400,000 members. The French party had 120,000. The Czechoslovak party had 400,000 members in a country of only 12 million. One ultraleft splitoff from the Comintern, the German Communist Workers Party, had 30,000 members, and Lenin dismissed it as a "trendlet."

Lenin and Trotsky told these parties, which were as much as 400 times as large as the largest Latin American Trotskyist groups: Your resources are not sufficient for the conquest of power! Build your parties! Develop your program and your tactics! Above all, *conquer the masses!*

The 1969 Latin American resolution, by contrast, speaks of "assembling a minimum of organized and politically homogeneous forces." (*Discussion on Latin America*, p. 7) Similarly, Germain and Knoeller say that "a primitive accumulation of forces must precede the formation of these (autonomous armed) groups." (*Ibid.*, p. 96)

In Argentina a group of two or three hundred comrades decide that they have assembled the necessary "minimum" of forces, and launch an armed struggle! And comrade Livio Maitan says that "The strategic perspective of the Argentine comrades are following is the one laid down by the Ninth World Congress of the Fourth International." (*Intercontinental Press*, April 26, 1971, p. 388) The comrades of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency agree: "This activity of the PRT was in strict consonance with the political line adopted by the Fourth International at its 9th World Congress in 1969." (*LSA/LSO 1972 Discussion Bulletin* No. 8, p. 2)

How can the RCT justify this? Are they saying that the 1969 World Congress revised or abandoned the Leninist concept of the revolutionary party?

When Lenin and Trotsky spoke of revolutionary parties, they meant organizations of tens or hundreds of thousands of members, oriented to winning the full support of the masses, putting forward a clear Marxist program. The Fourth International will be composed of such parties—but it is suicide to act as though such parties exist today.

In addition to posing the question of party building in correct and unambiguous terms, *the Third World Congress of the Communist International decisively rejected the "strategy of armed struggle,"* in terms that remain valid today.

## Leon Trotsky on the 'Strategy of Armed Struggle'

Trotsky's speeches and articles at and about the Third World Congress fill 150 pages of Volume I and 180 pages of Volume II of *The First Five Years of the Communist International*. All of them, directly or indirectly, concern the necessity for revolutionists to learn to build Communist parties deeply rooted in the mass movements,

to fight to win the support of the majority of the working class. I want to cite part of one speech: "The School of Revolutionary Strategy"—Trotsky's report on the Third World Congress delivered to a general membership meeting of the Moscow Communist Party in July 1921. In this speech Trotsky outlines the main conclusions and direction of the Third World Congress. In a section subtitled "Leftist Blunders and the Russian Experience," Trotsky quotes from the magazine *Kommunismus*, a German-language organ of the International, published in Vienna:

"The principal characteristic of the present period of the revolution lies in this, that we are now compelled to conduct even partial battles, including economic ones, i. e., strikes, with the instrumentalities of the final battle, i. e., with arms in hand." (*First Five Years*, II, p. 27).

This is nothing other than a proposal for a "strategy of armed struggle." It is precisely the strategy of the PRT-ERP, which attempts to win everything from wage increases to baseball uniforms to food hampers with arms in hand.

Here is Trotsky's reply to this conception:

"Here, Comrades, is strategy turned topsy-turvey! At a time when the bourgeoisie is provoking us into *partial* sanguinary battles, some of our strategists want to elevate battles of this sort into a sort of guiding rule. Isn't this monstrous! The objective situation in Europe is profoundly revolutionary. The working class senses it and throughout the postwar period it rushed impetuously into the struggle against the bourgeoisie. But it gained victory nowhere except in Russia. The working class then began to understand that it faces a difficult task and started to build the apparatus for victory—the Communist Party. Along this path it has marched with seven-league boots during the last year. We now have genuine mass Communist Parties in Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria . . . The growth has been enormous! What is the next task? It is for these parties to conquer as quickly as possible the majority of industrial workers and the decisive section of rural workers and even of the poor peasantry, just as we had conquered them in October. *Certain unhappy strategists say instead that since the epoch today is revolutionary, therefore we are duty-bound, at every opportunity, to wage the struggle, even a partial one, with the methods of armed insurrection. The bourgeoisie couldn't ask for anything better!* At a time when the Communist party is growing at a splendid rate, and its wings are becoming extended more and more over the entire working class, it is the aim of the bourgeoisie to provoke the most impatient and combative sectors of the workers to plunge prematurely into battle—without the support of the basic mass of workers—in order, by defeating the working class piecemeal, to undermine the proletariat's faith in its own ability to conquer the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions, *the theory of always taking the offensive and waging partial battles with the methods of armed uprising is so much grist to the mill of the counter revolution.*" (*First Five Years*, II, p. 27-28, emphasis added).

That is Trotsky's conception of the tasks of revolutionary parties. That is the approach which the Bolsheviks

had followed in Russia—a country which was far from falling into the category of countries in which mass movements can flower without repression!

Trotsky rejects decisively the views of the adventurists of 1921—and remember that these adventurists had *memberships* larger than the total vote received by Alain Krivine in 1969, *memberships* larger than the *subscription lists* of any Trotskyist paper. Trotsky, with Lenin, said go to the masses! Join trade unions, burial societies, social clubs, even the most reactionary organizations if necessary—but go to the masses.

Trotsky rejected the view that the party must win the allegiance of the masses by proving its superior skill in the use of weapons. He rejected the view that the party should launch armed struggles in the hope that the masses would follow.

Armed struggle is one of the tactical means used by the vanguard party and the masses at specific points in the class struggle. The fact that we do not expect the bourgeoisie to abandon power peacefully does not in the least contradict this. To claim that armed struggle is the only revolutionary strategy is to say that during the vast majority of the past 125 years the revolutionary movement has not followed a revolutionary course. And that just won't hold water.

## Conclusion

It would, of course, be possible to go into far more detail on the Leninist view of terrorism, guerrilla warfare and armed struggle. We could go through Trotsky's Military Writings in detail. We could examine his proposals for dealing with fascism (mass workers militias, not "autonomous armed detachments"). We could consider why Trotsky rejected terrorism against Stalinist bureaucrats and against fascist officials.

I have not, in particular, dealt at length with the arguments in Lenin's *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, which every comrade should study prior to the convention. It is of the greatest relevance to our present discussion.

All of these materials and more simply reinforce what is demonstrated in this document. The Leninist-Trotskyist position on these vital questions is clear. We view the critical problem of our epoch as the building of a mass revolutionary international party with the deepest possible roots and support among the oppressed masses. *Anything whatsoever that hinders that task must be totally rejected.*

The Latin America resolution adopted at the last World Congress and supported by the Revolutionary Communist Tendency, cannot be judged according to the subjective desires of its authors and supporters, nor by their undoubted dedication to the cause of world revolution. The errors in that resolution opened the door to concepts and actions which are at variance with our movement's traditions. These are not minor academic errors, but errors for which the movement has already paid in the loss of precious cadres. The task before the next Congress is to eliminate these errors and to point the way forward to a workers world.

November 16, 1972