

ERNEST MANDEL -
WHY THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL?

DOCUMENT FROM THE DISCUSSION FOR THE FOUNDING CONFERENCE OF
THE LIGUE COMMUNISTE - 1969

"It is possible for a national grouping to maintain a constant revolutionary course only if it is firmly connected in one organisation with co-thinkers throughout the world and maintains a constant political and theoretical collaboration with them. All purely national groupings, all those who reject international organisation, control, discipline, are in their essence reactionary."

(from 'On the unification of the British section' -
International Secretariat of the Fourth International 1938)

For members and contacts of the International Marxist Group -
British section of the Fourth International

INTRODUCTION

Birmingham IMG has decided to reproduce this document because it is a very concise argument for the necessity to begin to construct a revolutionary International. However, in order that the document be fully comprehensible, it is necessary to say something about the situation in which it was written. The Ligue Communiste - the now banned French section of the FI which has reappeared under the name "Front Communiste Revolutionnaire" - was formed in 1969 from a fusion of two organisations (JCR, PCI) and the many new militants they had recruited in May 1968. In the debate which took place for the founding conference an ultra-left tendency, based on the Paris region and led by Riviere and Creache, intervened in the debate to, amongst other things, oppose the affiliation of the new organisation to the Fourth International. This minority found a big echo amongst sections of the youth who had been recruited through the May-June upsurge, and at one time it looked as if they were going to win at the founding conference. Their document opposing affiliation to the Fourth International was entitled "Internationalism and the International". Ernest Mandel intervened in this debate (under the guise of "Andre") and this present document is his critique of "Internationalism and the International". Comrades will grasp from Mandel's document the extremely confused nature of the Riviere-Creache minority, who walked out of the Ligue in 1970 with 200 members of the Paris region, to form the organisation "Revolution!". This tendency has evolved considerably since its departure from the Ligue (for example it has abandoned the definition of Russia and Eastern Europe as workers' states for its own unique combination of the theories of state capitalism and bureaucratic collectivism) and is guided by one basic principle - at all times be to the left of the Ligue!

In the 1969 debate Mandel's document was a turning point in favour of those advocating affiliation to the Fourth International. His document is a devastating critique of all those whose enthusiasm for a revolutionary international "in principle" or "at some point in the future" is not matched by any enthusiasm for actually doing something to bring it into existence.

P. Lawson

BUILD THE PARTY - BUILD THE INTERNATIONAL!

The document 'Internationalism and the International' declares war on organisational fetishism, which, according to the authors consists in particular in identifying "internationalism as international organisation". Truly, it's a grave sin to wish to harmonise our analysis, our concepts, with our action and our organisational forms. The interest of the debate for the International itself doesn't need to be demonstrated. It is not a matter, nevertheless, of professing faith in vibrant internationalism (even the worst social democrats and stalinists do that gladly), but to set ourselves the task of solving the problems of the construction of the International starting with the present situation. However, this debate is important because it clarifies also our conception of building a revolutionary party, which is inseparable from building the International.

Specific National Characteristics and World Revolution.

Starting with a phrase of Marx's and passing across twenty years of the contribution of Lenin and Trotsky - not forgetting Rosa Luxemburg and many others - the document Internationalism and the International reproaches some comrades with under-estimating the "specific national characteristics" of the revolution, which will start in one country and extend itself internationally. "The classics of Marxism have taught us that each revolution occurs under specific national conditions". For some comrades, on the contrary, it is a question neither of peoples nor circumstances, but only of the "fetishism" of the International.

Since the document sees fit to repeat that "the living soul of Marxism is the concrete analysis of a concrete situation", let us see if we can, by such an analysis, concretise the relations between the national specificity of the revolution and the international nature of the revolution in our epoch.

1. The specific national characteristics of the revolution in the imperialist epoch are themselves, at least partially, a function of the international context. The underdeveloped countries are underdeveloped in relation to the industrialised countries (and not in the absolute or abstract). Monoculture is literally "imported" from abroad. Russia and China were the "weakest links in the imperialist chain" because of the way they fitted into the world market. The "pure" specific national characteristic of Russia was the muzhik, who by himself would never have made the revolution.. The "concrete" specific national characteristic combined this muzhik with the proletariat (produced by the entry of foreign capital into Russia), the weakening of Czarism (due to its international defeats at the hands of Japan, Germany etc.) and the role of the international social democracy (produced by European developments as a whole).

2. The specific national characteristics of the revolution are only partial, relative and not absolute. Otherwise, no strategic rule, no historical law could be formulated and Marxism would be completely useless. The heralds of the absolute "specific national characteristics" of the Russian revolution were the Narodniks and their

social-revolutionary heirs, who denied the capitalist development of Russia and the leading role of the proletariat in the coming Russian revolution, and who thought that a leap from the primitive peasant commune to modern communism possible. To detach "specific national characteristics" from the wider historical context is the classic excuse of all opportunists for rejecting the strategic teachings of Marxism. Under the pretext of "specific national characteristics" of the Chinese revolution, Stalin-Bukharin subordinated the Chinese communists to the Kuomintang in 1925-7 with well-known results. In Indonesia, under the pretext of "specific characteristics", Aidit maintained, until the eve of the general's coup d'état (and with the approval of Mao) that the Indonesian state was a "special" state: half bourgeois and half popular. We all know the disastrous results.

3. If every socialist revolution starts on the national level, the rhythm of its international repercussions is extremely rapid. A year after October, Russia was at war with a dozen interventionist armies. Less than a year after the victory of the Chinese revolution, China was confronted with US imperialism in Korea. The logical conclusion is that this will be repeated next time.

4. The internationalisation of capital, which, in comparison to the years before the second world war, has recently made very pronounced progress, confronts revolutionaries with complexes of "specific national characteristics" which cannot be separated as easily as some comrades suggest. France possesses a specific imperialist state, within the framework of the Common Market (which severely limits its own economic and commercial independence and tomorrow will perhaps equally limit it on the monetary and budgetary level), within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance (which limits this independence on the military level also, whatever the Gaullists may say). It is foolish to speak of inter-imperialist competition in the abstract, without taking into account the international interpenetration of capital in our epoch, in the concrete circumstances of today. Of course there is no such thing as "super-imperialism"; inter-imperialist competition is always an important factor and even intensifies. But it exists in a concrete world context qualitatively different from the situation before the first and second world wars. No great inter-imperialist war is conceivable in this new context. It is competition in the framework of an alliance. For failing to understand this, the PCF burned its fingers in the CED affair. The pro-chinese almost did it at the time of the De-Gaulle-Peking flirtation.

When this document says that internationalism is first of all a taking of positions on all questions (which are of determining importance for the world movement); when it adds that "an analysis of the world situation is the pre-requisite for any technical-structural scheme for constructing a world organisation";- it in reality creates a cleavage between the immediate national practice of class struggle, and the international dimension of this struggle which is added "by the analysis". This distinction is incomplete, and therefore false mechanistic and abstract. In the imperialist world, all revolutionary struggle, even if it starts in a national framework, immediately has an international dimension. The armed resistance in South Vietnam was no more "purely Vietnamese" than the May revolution was "purely French". It has not taken long to see this borne out in real life, as much in the enemy camp as in that of the revolutionaries. Therefore, it must be concluded that the international character of the class struggle and of revolution in our epoch has objective roots in the structure of world economy.

and of world politics (including "military politics"). Internationalism, then, is first of all the conscious recognition of this reality. Analysis is conditioned by this reality, that is, conditioned by an effective intervention to change it.

To be internationalist means to understand that it is impossible to overthrow capitalism in France without overturning the Common Market and the Atlantic Alliance, ie without running up against the international bourgeoisie. There is no revolutionary struggle in France "which is sustained" by an international analysis. There is a revolutionary struggle in France which possesses immediately and inevitably an international dimension. This international dimension exists independently of our will.

The relationship of forces on a national scale exists in an international context, and this international context (the relation of forces on an international scale) reacts on the national relation of forces. All revolutionary action always has international implications, whether one is conscious of them or not. The whole question is whether or not it isn't better to be conscious of them, if it isn't better to orient , at least partially, the international implications in a desired direction, towards desired ends. In other words, the whole question is to know whether or not it is advisable to abandon oneself in this area to the spontaneity of the "repercussions", or if it is not preferable to prepare them, even with limited means.

Mass Revolutionary International and Organised International Vanguard

The comrades wax ironic about the illusion of artificially creating leadership or leading from a central point "The NLF, Black Power, Castroism, student struggles (everywhere in the world), mass strikes (everywhere in the world) the Cultural Revolution in China, etc." What this caricature is supposed to demonstrate is the impossibility of creating, at the present stage in the process of the world revolution, a "mass revolutionary international" right away. Clearly our proposal to join the Fourth International does not proceed from a grotesque illusion of giving leadership to all these mass movements which are all, objectively and on a historical scale, "progressive", that is, which ultimately bring closer the world socialist revolution. But precisely because of this irregular, contradictory and complex character of the "actual movement", revolutionary Marxists cannot content themselves, each one in his own country, to adapt to it.

Was it merely necessary to be a good militant of the May revolution in France, without critical perspectives, without any opinion on the way the spontaneous movement could open the way towards the initiation of dual power, towards the overthrow of French capitalism, without any effort to correct the lack of organisation, the insufficient consciousness etc.?

Should a Chinese Marxist be content to be a good Red Guard without any opinion on the problem of how to put the brake on bureaucratisation, whether this should be achieved by selection or, instead, by election of organs of leadership; without any opinion on the Mao cult, of freedom of tendencies for all comrades of the workers' movement ?

Should an American revolutionary be content with advocating black power, without asking the question of how the major social forces can be mobilised against the power of big capital in the United States, without trying to develop a revolutionary socialist programme for all of the workers ?

The passage from the Communist Manifesto which our comrades use as evidence, proclaims that in all actual liberation movements throughout the world, communists count first of all "interests which are independent of nationality and common to the whole proletariat", and that they represent always "the interests of the movement as a whole".

Don't revolutionary Marxists have a duty of carrying out precisely these tasks which the mass movements are not yet at the present stage, able to carry out ? And won't they be able to do this all the more effectively if they are organised internationally ?

It is not a matter of a mass revolutionary international; it is a matter, more modestly, of an international vanguard organisation such as it is today: weak, too weak in relation to its tasks, but stronger than its numbers would imply, both by the force of its programme and by its organisational cohesion. Neglect this cohesion, and you modify the situation only in one direction: weakening the vanguard. It is hard to see how this weakening could contribute to the progress of the socialist revolution.

The Logic of Spontaneism : Opportunism and Tailism

But here the comrades' opportunist slip is showing, as it is after the appeal to principles. " If we proceed, under the pretext of building an organisation, to a cascade of preliminary expulsions (voluntary or involuntary) we will cut ourselves off from the international revolutionary movement as it is today". Clearly this means: if those who, all the while basing themselves on the on the objectively progressive character of the struggle of "the NLF, of Castro, of the Red Guards, of Black Power, of student rebellions, of economic strikes", try to go beyond the limits of the movements and defend within them the interests of the whole proletariat and "represent always the interests of the movement as a whole", they will cut themselves off from the actual movement !

From this position, the only way open is that of adaptation to the "actual movement" with all its imperfections, in other words, vulgar opportunism and tailism. It goes without saying that in order to be consistent, this reasoning cannot limit itself to the international domain. Its implications on the national level would incontestably have liquidationist conclusions. It is, on the contrary, vital to participate in the actual mass movement, while defending within the programme strategy and organisation of revolutionary Marxism; and this defence is the best way to assure the worldwide victory of the movement. From this it follows that there is no contradiction whatever between immediate national and international organisation, and participation in the day-to-day movement.

We agree with the comrades completely when they proclaim the primacy of programme over organisation: "From now on we must ask ourselves the decisive questions for the whole international movement; these questions don't come out of our heads but are posed concretely across the cleavages and lines of separation in the world working class movement".

But why the question's exhortative form? Are these questions only posed right now? Is our movement to be deprived of all reference, all its past, all its experiences? Has it not furnished the answers to the important questions, such as social patriotism and imperialism, "peaceful roads to socialism" or proletarian revolution, the one-party regime, "revolution by stages" or permanent revolution in the under-developed countries, the dogma of the infallibility of the general secretary or socialist democracy self-management and the right of tendencies and of a plurality of workers parties in a socialist regime?

On all these important questions, the positions we have defended conform to those of the Fourth International; they are wholly or in part different from all other large currents (reformist, Khrushchevite, Maoist, Castroist, anarchist), of the international working class movement. Is it not up to us from now on to associate with those with whom we agree to carry on a more effective struggle as part of an international revolutionary tendency?

When our comrades say "An analysis of the world situation is a prerequisite for any tactical-structural scheme for constructing an international organisation", they commit a double error of method. "The analysis" of the world situation must include elements of different quality: structural elements which refer to historical tasks of the world revolution (in each of the three sectors of the world: imperialist countries, semi-colonial countries, bureaucratically deformed or degenerated workers' states); and conjunctural elements which involve tactical estimations. To refuse to join with those who share our strategic views under the pretext of differences over conjunctural problems, or simply the possibility of such differences, is to exhibit an obvious "organisational fetishism".

"The analysis" of the world situation is detached from revolutionary practice on the international scale. What then is this analysis? A literary exercise? A perusal of the newspapers with commentary? Our comrades can't seem to understand that to affirm that a revolutionary analysis is the work of an international organisation, does not mean that "good structure produces good thought" but signifies simply that a theoretical analysis can be verified only in practice.

And how could anyone wish to have an international analysis without an international practice? How could anyone wish to have a concrete analysis of the problems of the Latin American revolution, unless this analysis is to be applied to Latin America by Latin American revolutionaries, and results in part from that practice; to analyse Black Power without

this analysis being applied by North American revolutionaries, to analyse mass strikes in Britain unless this analysis is to be verified by the action of British revolutionaries? And how could an international analysis be verified without permanent contacts, discussions, exchanges of experience, international co-ordination, that is to say without an international organisation?

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The comrades add a bizarre argument: "Why shouldn't another revolution tomorrow introduce another perspective? Why wouldn't this other perspective today introduce another organisation, another revolution tomorrow?"

All this seems to mean is: we will not associate ourselves internationally with the Fourth International, since that would cut us off from future organisations (that is, presently non-existent!) and would make it more difficult to join with them. This replaces the construction of the vanguard by a dependence on spontaneous generation, awaiting the coming of the Messiah. And what then is this new perspective which will give rise to another organisation, another revolution? Why do they wait before revealing to us this miraculous solution which will open to us so many doors? Do our comrades hold this perspective in reserve or do they hope to discover it by way of a long analysis and brain-racking? In any case, it is still a matter of gratuitous hypothesis and they only alternative they offer consists of a pyramid of hypotheses. It is curious that at this point the comrades abandon the "realistic" point of view they have claimed to defend.

Reality of the Fourth International today

The current association of the revolutionary Marxist vanguard on the international scale, we repeat, is not a mass revolutionary international. No one pretends to see the precise forms and stages by which we will pass from the first to the second stage, anymore than anyone can foresee all the stages of the construction of the revolutionary party. If the given factors of the problem were found to be modified - by new realities, massive ones, and not hypotheses, - it would be necessary to re-examine the problem.

We are not fetishists about organisational forms. If tomorrow mass revolutionary parties arose in one or many countries, outside the Fourth International, we could only be pleased by this fact and examine the organisational conclusions which would have to be drawn from it. But today, these parties don't exist. Refusing to associate with the existing revolutionary forces internationally is assuredly not the best way to hasten their rise.

Let us not pretend to be naive. Infinite analysis will not reveal the existence of non-existent currents or parties. It is precisely in recognising the importance of programmatic agreement that one must logically recognise the necessity of associating with all who agree with such a programme. This programmatic agreement exists with no other tendency.

There are, undoubtedly, national groups which don't belong to the Fourth International, but which have no profound programmatic differences. Without trying to examine the origins of this regrettable situation in every case, we should consider this as a problem to be solved, and see our own affiliation to the Fourth International as a stage in the struggle to construct the revolutionary international organisation of the Marxist vanguard.

The Specific Forms of International Organisation

" Depending on circumstances, Marxist theoreticians, guides of the proletariat, judged it necessary or not to create or perpetuate an International," write the comrades. This passage, and others, make one think that the International serves an episodic, conjunctural role, that is has no permanent necessity and that on the whole we could easily do without it. Even further, one gets the impression, that in the comrades' minds the Internationals - "which are all dead" - have played a largely negative role, and that one must be careful under these conditions about building a new one.

What is singular in our comrades' analysis, is that while extolling the virtues of "concrete analysis", they shut themselves up in abstractions and end up discovering general laws independent of historical periods, independent of the stage of the development of capitalism and independent of the proletariat's situation.

Indeed the historical survey of the attitude of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky with regard to the problem of organisation which they present to us, is totally abstracted from the concrete and fundamental historical line of distinction: that of the imperialist epoch.

That Marx could live between 1850 and 1864 without an International; that Engels waited from 1876 to 1889 to reconstitute the International, has nothing to do with the present period. That one could validly imitate this behaviour in the imperialist epoch, and above all in the contemporary period, in which the class struggle has acquired a more directly international character than ever before, is a truly bewildering conclusion.

In order to be able to use their historical survey in such a way as to make the reader sceptical about the immediate necessity of an international organisation, the comrades are not afraid to commit two violations of historical truth:

1. They declare that Lenin "refused" to build a new International from 1914 to 1919.
2. They declare that Trotsky hesitated a long time before founding the Fourth International, from 1933 to 1938.

The reality is otherwise. Right from the time that the political collapse of the Second International had become apparent, Lenin proclaimed: "The Second International is dead, long live the Third International" (article of 1st November, 1914.) Right from the time that the political collapse of the Third International had become apparent, by the capitulation of the German Communist Party before Hitler,

Trotsky proclaimed : "The Third International is dead, long live the Fourth International."

And, right from the time that Lenin and Trotsky made these declarations, not having the habit of opposing their practice to their theory, they set themselves the task of organising a new international. A reading of the articles and letters of Lenin from 1914 to 1918 will show how passionately he followed the factional struggles in the social-democracy of every country, in order to separate the internationalists from the social-patriots and the partisans of revolution ("of transforming the imperialist war into civil war") from the centrist pacifists. His organised international faction saw the light of day at the Zimmerwald Conference: this was the "Zimmerwald Left".

Trotsky didn't act any differently. He began by organising on the international scale those partisans of the Fourth International that he had broad programmatic agreement with.

Our comrades manifestly confuse international organisation and the "official proclamation" of the International or the latter's title. It is true that Lenin and Trotsky waited five years before "proclaiming" the International (others - like Rosa Luxemburg - thought the the proclamation was premature.) But they didn't wait a single day to organise internationally those comrades in struggle who shared their programmatic ideas.

That is what the discussion is all about today. One [^]may believe that the International was born "prematurely". It is true that it is not a mass international; that remains to be built. But the Fourth International is a reality; it has cadres, organisation, activities in about fifty countries. Our programmatic orientation is identical with that of the Fourth International. Is it not necessary, under these conditions, to wage together the struggle for the mass revolutionary international, ? If one wishes to consult what Lenin and Trotsky did, the answer is obvious.

Centrist Arguments Against the International

It is also interesting to note the continued existence of the centrist arguments against the necessity of a new revolutionary international organisation. At the Zimmerwald Conference Lenin prides himself on having gathered around the Bolshevik Party, "the Marxists of consequence of Russia, Poland, Lettonia, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and the Netherlands". (That is, having created the embryo of an international organisation: an international faction). (The Revolutionary Marxists at the International Conference of 5-8 September 1915 - article of 1st October 1915)

But at this same conference the French delegate hesitated to approve this line. "We didn't come here to find a formula for the Third International", they say, (Lenin answers them: but the compromise manifesto you have approved already contains a formula for the Third International !), "in France the workers are different." Here is how Lenin answered the centrists who in 1915 hesitated on the question of the new International:

" But from this fact (the situation in France is 'different') the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the French socialists will arrive later at the general European level of revolutionary actions of the proletariat; not at all that these actions are useless. The problem of finding out at what rhythm, by what path, and in what forms the proletariat of different countries is capable of realising the transition towards these revolutionary actions is a problem that has not been posed at this conference, and couldn't be posed here. For that, the prerequisite facts are missing. Our task for the moment is to convey the correct tactic, and afterwards the events will indicate the rhythm of the common movement and the modifications (national, local, union)."

So we see: Lenin doesn't say: since there is no mass movement to co-ordinate everywhere, lets wait before putting the organisation, the International, into practice. No: he says, until these movements are produced, in order to accelerate their ripening and raise the level of consciousness, let us organise immediately internationally so as to propagagate these actions.

Let's return for a minute to the famous "tasks which revolutionaries assign themselves" on which would depend "the need revolutionaries have for an international". These tasks must be specified on two levels:

a) On the level of objective historical necessity, it is clear that the world-wide struggle of the working class, the centralisation of imperialism's counter-revolutionary role, demand an international co-ordination of revolutionary activities, the absence of which considerably strengthens the enemy. That is what Che Guevara expressed in his famous proclamation on the war in Vietnam: "Create two, three, many Vietnams". The experience of Stalinism undoubtedly sustains no small degree of distrust by people who, fearing manipulation, have a tendency to identify centralisation with bureaucrat-isation. But it is really exhibiting very little comprehension of the immediately and concretely international character of struggles throughout the world to get heavily ironic on the subject of this centralisation condemning an International to be contrary to the initiatives of the masses.

Undoubtedly the International of the masses, which corresponds to an urgent and permanent necessity in relation to the daily reality of the class struggle in our era, is not realisable today because of the gap which continues to exist between the historic necessity and the continuing insufficient maturity of consciousness of the masses and the weakness of the organisation of the vanguard. But it is necessary to realise that this gap is an evil, for which humanity pays and will continue to pay a very heavy price (the comrades in Brazil, Vietnam and Indonesia have paid very heavily in the course of the last few years.) At the moment, with the modest forces at our disposal, we cannot modify this situation in a decisive way.

b) But what we can do is to join immediately, internationally, with the vanguard which shares our strategic and programmatic views. This association, considering our tasks, permits at the same time a better grasp of the international reality,

(an international theory verified by international practice); therefore more effective activity on the national scale, continued activity on the international scale, thus accelerating the re-inforcement of the vanguard and the reduction of the time which separates us from the advent of the mass revolutionary international.

It should be added that the necessity of this international vanguard organisation even emerges from immediate practical tasks; co-ordination of specific actions in the student, worker and anti-imperialist milieu; preparation and support for revolutionary initiatives in certain countries (Latin America, Africa), solidarity which goes beyond the financial stage, or that of Platonic demonstrations; acceleration of the ripening consciousness by critical communication and assimilation of the experience of the vanguard in other countries. We can only realise this imperfectly because of our limited forces. But this is certainly not a reason to refuse under the pretext that it cannot yet be done "perfectly", any more than we should refuse to build a political organisation knowing perfectly well that it is not yet a mass revolutionary party.

Organisational Fetishism and Bureaucratic Messianism

To show the necessity of an international organisation flows from the international nature of the class struggle, it would seem, is to exhibit "organisational fetishism". But to deduce from the specific national characteristics of the revolution the need for a national organisation "for the moment", is this not succumbing to the same fetishism ?

"The connection between the world revolution and the world organisation is neither an abstract political nor a moral tie." Quite right, we agree. "It should be thought of first as a function of the world situation and secondly as experienced not by international offices, but by the revolutionary movements which exist effectively throughout the world." Here, the non-sequitur, or rather the accumulation of non-sequiturs, is bewildering.

If we are to understand correctly, everything that is not "thought of in relation to the world situation" and "experienced by the existing revolutionary movements" is "abstract". This is at best a narrow and arbitrary definition of the word "concrete".

Why should the world situation be more concrete than the structure of the world market or the military strategy of imperialism ? And why should what has already been experienced by every "effective" revolutionary movement be "concrete", but not what has been experienced by a third or a tenth of them ? Was the guerrilla not "concrete" when Fidel was the only one applying it effectively in Latin America ? Did the Zengakuren's demonstrations have no international value until the French and German students had imitated them ? Isn't this struggle for this international transplantation of experiences "concrete" ?

Is any struggle for a programme not yet applied by the masses "abstract" ? Was Karl Liebknecht "abstract" when he alone distributed leaflets with the slogan "the enemy is in our own

country" during the imperialist war, inasmuch as this slogan had not yet been tested by any "mass movement" in any country? Didn't Lenin, from his office, invite all socialists to do the same, before having permitted the masses to "experience"?

But he was surely a great "fetishist" about organisation. In order to bring their struggle against "organisational fetishism" to a conclusion, our comrades have to elevate tailism to the level of a principle.

The glorification of the "actual movement" and the "spontaneity of the masses" as an antidote for international organisation condemns our comrades to use the arguments of all the partisans of "national communism", in favour of "national roads towards socialism": "We feel that these images", they write, "camouflage poorly what they cover up: the underestimation of the initiative of the masses and of the national or continental conditions which give revolutions their rhythm and their form, in other words, their specific strategies".

Since it is the Fourth International that is under discussion, it would be better to specify where and when it "underestimates the national or continental conditions" which give revolutions their specific strategies. In Latin America? In Africa? In North America? America? In Western Europe? In Eastern Europe? In the Middle East? The discussion would gain clarity if this had been done.

In reducing the problem to two factors: the "world situation" and the "experience of the actual movements", the comrades eliminate the key factor, that is, the conscious role of the vanguard and its programme. Do they think that the initiative of the masses, however heroic, can by itself spontaneously reach the level of consciousness and organisation necessary for the overthrow of world capitalism? Do they think that the masses are capable of reproducing spontaneously the lessons of a century of accumulated experiences in revolutionary proletarian struggles, in other words, the programme of the world revolution? Shouldn't those who have assimilated these experiences, this programme, organise themselves to make it understood to the rest, (naturally not only by propaganda, but also by action as well?)

Our comrades declare that Lenin would never have taught that it is impossible to have revolutionary theory and practice without a revolutionary vanguard organisation, and in this way show a failure to grasp the very essence of the Leninist theory of the party. In Chapter One of "What is to be Done?", in the same chapter (d) entitled "Engels and the Importance of Theoretical Struggle" - where we find the phrase 'Without revolutionary theory no revolutionary movement' - there is also the sentence underlined by the author: "Only a party guided by vanguard theory can play the role of vanguard combatant". All of Lenin's "What is to be Done?" is centred around the idea that outside of a revolutionary organisation, the worker or intellectual, even with the best of intentions, risks falling under the influence of a petty-bourgeois or bourgeois ideology; and that between organisational coherence, revolutionary practice and revolutionary theory, there is an indissoluble dialectical interaction. In the same work, written in 1902, Lenin mentions not only the international essence of the movement, but also the analysis. However, we are told in 1969, that "specific national characteristics" must once again get the upper hand.....

Spontaneity and Organisation

In the course of the discussion we have drawn some conclusions upon which it is necessary to throw some light. The argument being put forward by comrades against international organisation is in reality an argument which belongs to the spontaneists.

If the comrades were consistent, they would reject the construction of a vanguard organisation in France with the same arguments which they used to demonstrate that it is not necessary to build an international organisation, or at least, that the conditions for its construction are not present today.

The accusation against the Internationals made by our comrades, great amateurs of the concrete, sins in a small detail. It does not try to understand the reasons for the failures of these internationals. They didn't fall from the sky, dear comrades. They are very simply and very directly the consequence of the degeneration of the principal parties, or in the case of the Third International, the principal party - the Bolshevik party and the Soviet state. This elementary fact has escaped the notice of our comrades; but therefore the accusation should be extended and directed primarily against the parties which are the source of the bankruptcy of the Second and Third Internationals. It is in any case impossible to dissociate the bankruptcy of the Internationals from the bankruptcy of the parties. It would be good to know what conclusions the comrades draw here.

What do our comrades finally propose ? To start again from the beginning, disregarding the principles which have guided our action in the past and which have successfully undergone the test of events ? They feign ignorance of the political points of reference which we hold in common with the Fourth International which they say "Should not be privileged" in relation to the positions taken by other tendencies. They propose a rupture with the past, without advancing any perspective to replace it, except a stammering spontaneism. It is necessary to be clear and not to play games with methodological debates: their hostility to the Fourth International is a hostility to its programme. It would be better for the clarity of the discussion if the debate freely and frankly unfolds on this terrain.

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