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Socialist Action USA: A contribution to the pre-World Congress discussion

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We have read with great interest the draft resolution produced to open a critical discussion on the *Role and Tasks of the FI* and we have read the responses, amendments and critiques. We find ourselves in agreement with a number of important points raised in some of these latter contributions.

We begin by stating our general agreement with a report authored by Comrade Sabado for the February 2009 meeting of the International Committee entitled, "*The Crisis Overdetermines all of World Politics.*" This document is in general accord with and strikingly parallels the resolutions approved on the worldwide economic crisis by recent Socialist Action plenums and by our National Convention (See socialistaction.org). [We are also in general agreement with the texts on ecology and women's liberation.]

The long period of relative capitalist prosperity that emerged in the post WW II era, based on the slaughter of 80 million people in the second imperialist conflagration and the associated destruction of the infrastructure of both the "enemies" and "allies" of U.S. imperialism, has come to an end. We have traced this evolution for several decades, regularly noting the repeated boom and bust cycles – all in the context of what Ernest Mandel accurately described as "oscillations around a declining curve." Today's crisis has had devastating effects on the world's people as never before in our time.

Yet we have also noted that with few exceptions there exists a giant gap between the repeated blows struck by world capitalism and a concerted response on the part of the working masses. The unprecedented layoffs, foreclosures, union-busting, social cutbacks, environmental destruction, degradation of poor nations, seemingly endless imperialist wars and more, have largely been unanswered. There have been important struggles, partial victories and massive mobilizations, none which have yet opened the door to the emergence of formations capable of changing the present relationship of forces. This, in our view, is the music of the future, the near future, we estimate. While we do not agree with the general line of *The Role and Tasks of the FI* text, we appreciate its being alert to the importance and inevitable emergence of such forces.

It has been world capitalism's long-term relative prosperity, accompanied by the steady atrophying of the traditional mass parties of the working class – now followed by a ferocious capitalist offensive – that explains in large part why the FI and virtually every other current in the revolutionary socialist movement have often been disoriented in the search for effective strategies and tactics to rebuild the fighting social movements that are a prerequisite for increasing political clarification [testing ideas in practice] and FI growth. The pressure of difficult times has always weighed heavily on revolutionary movements. As we saw in the relatively submissive but angry years following the 1929 Great Depression, it took a while, some 4-5 years, until the U.S. working class began to shake off the blows delivered against it. But when it did the new organizations it discovered proved capable of shaking the foundations of the American capitalist order. The same can be said of many other nations.

Today a central focus of the deliberations of the World Congress is the nature and purpose of the International itself as well as its associated national sections.

The strategic orientation of the FI from its founding in 1938 has been the construction of mass revolutionary socialist, that is, Leninist parties – internationalist to the core – armed with the method embodied in the Transitional Program, deeply integrated into the struggles of masses, programmatically based on the achievements of the first four congresses of the Communist International and the Trotskyist Left Opposition and aimed at the organization of the working class and its allies among the oppressed for the seizure of power. We have always understood that

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capitalism will never yield to a blunt instrument – to a loose association of disparate and undisciplined forces lacking the perspective of the independent mobilization of the vast majority to abolish the system once and for all and embark on the socialist reconstruction of society.

Our movement has often reviewed the basic elements that constitute the periodic revolutionary crises that are inevitable in the evolution of capitalism. The Russian model still largely embodies what we can expect and what kind of party is required for success.

There are no magic party-building formulas. Each country presents its peculiarities as the Tasks draft properly notes. There will be splits, fusions, regroupments, united front fightbacks, principled joint electoral campaigns, parliamentary maneuvers, “new anti-capitalist parties,” new mass reformist workers’ parties, centrist formations moving to the left and right as well as more advanced formations like soviets and armed defense bodies. All of these can present opportunities for revolutionaries to build Leninist parties for the conquest of power, provided only that this is their reason for being.

By definition, Marxists seek to learn from their mistakes and benefit from their successes. We appreciate the reference in the Role and Tasks draft to “... the lessons drawn from the evolution of the Brazilian PT and of Communist Refoundation in Italy.” Unfortunately, the text neglects to explain what these lessons are. This is always helpful not from the vantage point of self-criticism but rather, in the spirit of scientific socialism – to learn from our experiences and pass on the knowledge gained to the next generation.

Comrades participating in the present discussion have noted “disasters” we suffered in Mexico and Brazil. In Brazil comrades subordinated Leninist party building to participation in a rapidly degenerating workers’ party that, in alliance with bourgeois forces, became the austerity-imposing government of Brazil. A DS (Socialist Democracy) comrade was rewarded with a key ministerial position in a coalition capitalist government.

In Mexico, the FI’s largest section of 5,000, has almost disappeared, in part due to its electoral illusions that its parliamentary gains were matched by real influence in the class struggle and later to the PRT’s support to the presidential campaign of Cuauhtemoc Cardenez and his capitalist PRD. In Italy our participation in Communist Refoundation (RC) has been a demonstrated failure, with RC’s continued rightward and unprincipled direction essentially compelling our comrades to leave. The RC experience included a major error of political principle when a leading FI comrade cast the decisive vote (in a formal vote of confidence) in the Italian Parliament that kept the coalition capitalist government in power. We do not intend to dwell on these negative experiences other than to observe that the reference to them, as such, in the majority text is a modest but important step forward.

We do not object to the construction of “anti-capitalist parties” provided only that our objective is the simultaneous construction of our own revolutionary socialist party. How this is to be accomplished is a tactical question. We are not ones for imposing tactics from on high or from afar. The latter are subordinate to our strategic orientation. If the majority comrades believe that a “new anti-capitalist party” is a substitute for a Leninist party, however, we are talking about a horse of a different color.

Comrades appear to appreciate the “triptych:” “New epoch, new program, new party.” We can certainly agree that we are entering a new epoch. World capitalism faces a crisis from which it can find no way out except at the expense of the earth’s people, not to mention at the expense of an environment capable of sustaining human life itself. The present crisis goes to the core of the system and exhibits virtually all the elements that Marx described. But recover it will, over time, in grotesque forms and at humanity’s expense, provided only that it is not challenged by mass Leninist parties organized internationally and armed with our historic revolutionary socialist program.

We are concerned that while a number of pages of the Tasks draft are devoted to the concept of the new-anti-capitalist party, the term remains vague or subjected to multiple and counterposed explanations.

The text states in Point 7:

“In the new anti-capitalist parties which may be formed in the years to come, and which express the current stage of combativeness, experience and consciousness of the sectors that are the most committed to the search for an anti-capitalist alternative, the question of a new International is and will be posed. We act and we will continue to act so that it is *not posed* in terms of ideological or historical choices, which are likely to lead to divisions and splits. It must be posed on a double level, on the one hand real political convergence on tasks of international intervention, on the other pluralism of the new formations, which must bring together currents of various origins: Trotskyists of different kinds, libertarians, revolutionary syndicalists, revolutionary nationalists, left reformists. So in general, when there have been concrete steps toward new parties, we have proposed that the new broad anti-capitalist party function with the right of tendency or currents, and that the supporters of the Fourth International in these new parties organize themselves in ways to be decided, according to the specific situation of each party.” [Emphasis added].

It appears that the new International, proposed along with new anti-capitalist parties, will be a political reversion wherein “ideological and historical choices... will not be posed.” Since “anarchists, revolutionary nationalists, left reformists and revolutionary syndicalists” will be welcome, one can only guess whether the “ideological issues” of class independence, or building a working class party or fighting for a working class government and/or socialism will be a pre-requisite for membership since such issues, according to the draft, “will not be posed.”

However, this contradictory text appears to have an answer to our question. Point 4 states, “We want to get involved in this reorganization to create a new left that is capable of meeting the challenge of this century and rebuilding the workers’ movement, its structures, its class consciousness, its independence from the bourgeoisies at the political and cultural level.” Minus the fact that the term “socialism” is absent from descriptions of what the new International and new anti-capitalist parties are to be based on, this sounds more like the FI’s historical and ideological wellspring and quite different from the lengthy formulation from Point 7 that we quote above. We can only wonder which description is to be operative.

We are informed that a “convergence on tasks of international intervention” will be a central criteria for membership. It is necessary to ask if these “tasks” are more in the realm of the tactics of a mass action united front than a political framework of a “new anti-capitalist party.”

We want to learn how the inclusion of “left reformists,” not to mention other enumerated categories, squares with “anti-capitalism” and class independence. Is the term employed to designate radicalizing and politically independent individuals or important reformist currents whose tradition and history center on the search for a “kinder gentler capitalism?”

We are informed that posing ideological and historical questions is “... likely to lead to divisions and splits.” But it is fair to note that most of the FI’s past regroupments that ignored critical ideological and historical differences led to debilitating splits and major loses.

We are informed in the *Role and Tasks* draft that there are to be divergent ideological components of the new anti-capitalist parties that necessitate the “right of tendencies or currents” to be established as an acceptable form of internal organization. We see this as an assurance that FI comrades would retain some form of identity, perhaps a current, tendency or faction, that functions to promote the FI’s perspectives. Are we participating in these new formations to promote membership in a Leninist party and socialist revolution? This appears to be key, and especially

so since questions of ideology and history *are not to be posed*.

We are to build these parties, according to the text, not on the basis of ideology or the lessons of history but based on agreement on tasks, on actions! Of course, such agreements are always an essential part of a healthy and principled unification process. But in a party that has been consciously constructed to be based on diffuse and disparate currents, immediate tasks or actions have a strong tendency to become subordinated to the larger questions of class independence and the very purpose of the party in the first place.

Finally, we must express our concern regarding the repeated references to parliamentary activity – ranging from pledges to never support in parliamentary elections Social Democrats who are the now designated as “social liberals in power to manage the capitalist state...” to the improved electoral results of our comrades who are participants in anti-capitalist parties of one variety or another in other countries (Portugal, Denmark, etc.).

Here again, we are assured that the FI majority seeks to promote the independent organization and mobilization of the masses through the vehicle of a “new left” party. But we can’t help but hear, at least faintly, another side of this new venture, that is, that we seek to become the new electoral alternative, perhaps a mass electoral alternative, to a disintegrating Stalinism and Social Democracy. This objective is certainly not without merit. But like our FI comrades in Mexico, Brazil, and perhaps Italy and elsewhere, preferencing the tactic of electoral activity can become the proverbial spoonful of tar that destroys the barrel of honey. Parliamentary activity has always been subordinate to the construction of a mass Leninist party for socialist revolution.

The survey conducted by the European Bureau indicates that in those countries where our comrades have participated in some form of new anti-capitalist party, some measure of electoral “success” has been achieved. To our knowledge, however, this not been associated with a growth of our section’s cadre. We should add that the great “electoral successes” of our comrades in Mexico, and Brazil led to their undoing as revolutionary socialist parties.

We are hopeful that the World Congress debates will clarify our questions and observations.