

Lessons from the Struggle for the Fourth International The ‘French Turn’

In 1938 Trotsky and his co-thinkers founded the Fourth International with the declaration that “The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.” The crisis of leadership remains a profound problem in this period of retreat for the international working class. Today the Fourth International exists only as a program and as a legacy of the struggle for revolutionary continuity after Lenin. The Stalinist bureaucracy that strangled the revolutionary movement born of the great October Revolution of 1917 now proclaims its intention to dismantle the remaining social conquests of that victory.

As revolutionary Marxists, we stand on the record of the first five years of Lenin’s Third, or Communist, International (Comintern). But the process of revolutionary regroupment carried out by the Trotskyist movement, which led to the creation of a new world party in opposition to the betrayals of Stalinism, is no less significant. Much less has been written, however, about the organization founded to oppose the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern. Yet the founding of the Fourth International took place under conditions more closely resembling those that revolutionaries face today. Whereas the Comintern was launched with the enormous political authority and material power of the Soviet workers state behind it, the Trotskyists in the mid-1930s were both few in number and relatively isolated from the more advanced sections of the working class, which remained under the sway of the Stalinist and social-democratic parties.

The tactical reorientation of the Trotskyists in the mid-1930s from open party-building to entry work within the leftward-moving sections of the Second International—the “French turn”—played a critical role in laying the basis for the creation of the Fourth International. This experience holds many valuable lessons for militants who struggle for its rebirth.

From the Third to the Fourth International

In 1928 the Stalinized Comintern, recoiling from the spectacular failures of its opportunist attempts to ally with the British trade-union bureaucracy and Chiang Kai-shek, lurched to the left and proclaimed that capitalism had entered the third (and supposedly final) period of its existence. According to the theory of the “Third Period,” mass proletarian insurrection was always and everywhere on the immediate political agenda. A tactical corollary to this woodenheaded “leftism” was the conception that the mass reformist social-democratic parties were “social fascist” formations that were too foul to be touched in any kind of alliance. This notion proved suicidal for the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), the largest section of the Comintern. As Hitler’s Nazis gathered strength in the early 1930s, the German workers movement sat by and did nothing. The refor-

mist cretins who led the Social Democratic Party (SPD) made impotent appeals to the capitalist state to curb the fascists, while the KPD ignored Trotsky’s calls for a workers united front with the social democrats to resist Nazi terror. Idiologically proclaiming “after Hitler, us,” the KPD concentrated its fire on the SPD “social fascists.” By dividing the proletariat, the KPD helped clear the path for the Nazi victory (see “The Myth of the ‘Third Period’” and “Leninism and the Third Period: Not Twins, But Antipodes” 1917 Nos. 3 & 4).

Until 1933 the Trotskyist movement functioned as an external faction of the Comintern that sought to return it to its original role as an organizing center for world revolution. But the KPD’s ignominious surrender to the fascists without firing a shot demonstrated that it was finished as any kind of revolutionary party. In the aftermath of this horrendous defeat, Moscow’s brazen claim that the KPD’s strategy and tactics had been vindicated was obediently swallowed by every Comintern section. This proved beyond doubt that the Third International was a thoroughly corrupted and bureaucratized machine without any revolutionary capacity. In July 1933 the International Left Opposition renamed itself the International Communist League (ICL), and took up the struggle for a new, revolutionary international: the Fourth International.

1934: Social Democrats Turn Left, Stalinists Move Right

The victory of the fascists in Germany immediately raised the stakes for the whole European workers movement. On 6 February 1934, French fascists and monarchists stormed the Chamber of Deputies in an unsuccessful coup. The French working class responded with a massive and spontaneous general strike that cut across traditional party lines. This joint action by the French Socialists and Communists was the first collaboration of the Second and Third Internationals since the initiation of the “Third Period.” It resulted from a powerful impulse for unity in the rank-and-file of both parties in the face of a growing fascist threat.

In response to this mass pressure, the French Communist Party (PCF) executed a characteristic Stalinist about-face, and suddenly began making overtures to Leon Blum’s Socialists, the Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO), for a unity pact against the right. But this was not a united front in the Leninist sense. From its sectarian “Red” fronts, which excluded anyone who would not accept the Stalinist characterization of the social democrats as “social fascists,” the PCF proposed to cooperate with the SFIO on the basis of a mutual abstention from public criticism! This was intended as a first step toward the “organic unity” (or fusion) of the two parties.

The evident bankruptcy of the Third Period and the

KPD's collapse discredited the Stalinists in the eyes of many left-wing workers internationally. One of the consequences of this was that the principal beneficiaries of the renewed surge of proletarian militancy in 1934 were not the Comintern sections, but the reformist sections of the Second International, some of which began to emit quite unexpectedly radical noises and to sprout militant left wings. The French social democrats in particular began to move from their entrenched reformism towards a temporary, unstable and relatively boisterous centrism.

The Necessity of Entrism

Trotsky quickly realized that the Stalinists' "unity" turn and the rapid growth of the left wing of the social democracy presented new dangers and new opportunities in France. If the movement towards "organic unity" between the two mass workers parties went ahead, the few hundred French Trotskyists, organized in the Communist League (LC), would be sidelined—or even worse, the Stalinists might succeed in completely excluding them from the left.

At the same time, the upsurge of leftist sentiment within the proletariat created an opportunity for revolutionary Marxists, if they could find a way to intervene in this development from *within*. Yet this required that the Bolshevik-Leninists give up their independent organizational existence and enter one of the two major workers parties as a faction. Trotsky argued that, "The League must take an organic place in the ranks of the united front. It is too weak to claim an *independent* place." ("The League Faced with a Decisive Turn," June 1934). Maintaining a separate organizational existence would be a serious political mistake because:

"By placing ourselves on the level of the united front as a weak organization, we are condemned in the long run to play the part of a poor relation who must not raise his voice too high so as not to incur the displeasure of his host. In this manner, our organizational independence avenges itself upon our political and ideological independence."

—"Austria, Spain, Belgium and the Turn"
1 November 1934

Entry into the Communist Party was clearly out of the question: its internal life was completely bureaucratized, and in any case the Trotskyists had long ago been characterized by the Comintern as the sworn enemies of the working class. The SFIO, however, was advertising a far more democratic party regime; in late 1933 its "neo-socialist" right wing had split away, and the Blum leadership, which had lurched to the left as a result, was now openly encouraging all self-proclaimed revolutionaries to join the SFIO to fight for socialism. So in June 1934 Trotsky proposed that the French section join the SFIO. After a two-month discussion period, the Communist League entered the SFIO in September 1934 as the Bolshevik-Leninist Group (GBL), with its own press, *La Verite*, and full factional rights.

Opposition to the French Turn

The "French turn" tactic was hotly debated within the ICL. In France the entry was fiercely opposed by two

factions—those of Pierre Naville and Rene Lhuiller, both of which split from the group over the issue. In the U.S. a group centred around Hugo Oehler denounced the turn as a violation of fundamental Leninist principles. Erwin Bauer, a leader of the exiled German section, left the Trotskyist movement over the question. In early 1935 George Vereecken led a split from the Belgian section after the majority voted to enter the social democracy.

The opposition saw the entry as a lowering of the revolutionary banner and a capitulation to the reformist Second International, which had been abandoned as bankrupt twenty years before. Some opponents of the new turn—Oehler for example—condemned all entries into non-revolutionary organizations on principle; others rejected it on tactical grounds. Some, like Pierre Naville, couldn't seem to decide. But the pseudo-intransigence of the opposition only thinly disguised a reluctance to engage in struggle for the allegiance of the mass of the working class. As Trotsky acidly commented in December 1934, "It is much easier to defend 'intransigent' principles in a sealed jar."

It was essential that the ICL sections strike quickly when the chance came to prevent the social-democratic left wings from passing over into the Stalinist camp. And despite criticisms from some ICL members that the turn meant ignoring the Comintern ranks, the growing rapprochement between the Second and Third Internationals made entry into the social democracy the best avenue for intersecting workers in and around the Communist Party.

Lenin vs. "Left-Wing" Communism

The objections to the French turn echoed the arguments of ultra-left elements in the Comintern a decade and a half earlier. The "left-wing" communists condemned Lenin's call for revolutionaries to enter the reformist-dominated unions and to run candidates in bourgeois elections. Lenin argued in his "*Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder*, that communists cannot spend all their time talking about what should be. If they are to get anywhere, they must take account of the political realities of the world as it is. At its Third Congress the Comintern leadership was forced to admit that in many countries they had not been able to win the mass of the class away from reformism simply through revolutionary propaganda. It was therefore necessary to find a new path to hegemony in the proletariat. The united-front tactic, which was elaborated at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in December 1921, and approved by the Fourth Congress in 1922, provided a framework for the Communist Parties to bloc with the reformists in struggle to advance real, if only partial, interests of the class, while reserving the right to ruthlessly criticize the political errors of their partners. The Leninist united-front tactic thus combined programmatic intransigence with organizational flexibility.

Lenin's proposal that the Communists should also be prepared to extend critical electoral support to candidates of mass reformist workers parties when they campaigned against the parties of the capitalists, was an

extension of the united-front tactic. The ultra-lefts of the CI agonized over how revolutionaries could call for a vote for the betrayers who had supported the inter-imperialist war, and who defended the continued enslavement of the colonies. But the critical support tactic was thoroughly principled. It was premised on the understanding that the parties of the Second International are “bourgeois workers’ parties;” i.e., working class in social base and historical origin but bourgeois in program. While the reformist workers parties attempted to reconcile the aspirations of the exploited with the maintenance of the capitalist social order, they simultaneously represented, at least on an organizational level, a deformed expression of the political independence of the proletariat. It is this contradictory character that Lenin sought to exploit with his advice to the small British Communist Party that it should call on the workers to vote for Labour, while warning that the social democrats would not act in a consistently pro-working class fashion. The idea was that once in power, the social democrats would expose their essentially pro-capitalist character, thus making it possible to regroup the more militant sections of their working-class base.

Just as the critical support tactic was an extension of the Comintern’s electoral and trade union tactics, the French turn was a further extension of the united front. In 1920 Lenin had advocated that the British CP affiliate to the Labour Party, because the Communists lacked the social weight to expose the reformist leaders to their base through directly initiating joint work. The Trotskyist entry in the 1930s should be seen as an application of this tactic.

What the opponents of the French turn could not see was that Trotsky proposed entry in order better to be able to *expose* the reformist Blum leadership, while inoculating left-wing elements in and around the social democracy against the syphilis of Stalinism. The turn was a bold tactic aimed at winning new adherents for the Marxist program. But to the opposition the mere fact of entry *in itself* constituted “submission” and “capitulation” to Leon Blum, and a betrayal of Lenin’s struggle to split the Second International. Trotsky replied:

“Lenin had in mind a break with reformists as the inevitable consequence of a struggle against them, and not an act of salvation regardless of time and place. He required a split with the social patriots not in order to save his own soul but in order to tear the masses away from social patriotism.”

—“Sectarianism, Centrism, and the Fourth International,” 22 October 1935

The Contradictions in Reformist Workers Parties

The experience of the French entry was closely studied by the whole international Trotskyist movement as it unfolded. When the resolution of the Bolshevik-Leninists received over a thousand votes at the June 1935 convention of the SFIO’s Seine Federation, Thomas Stamm, a leading opponent of entrism in the American section, had to admit that the votes had been cast for a revolutionary program, but argued that they still had little or no political significance because the GBL resolu-

tion was:

“put in the form of policies for the Socialist Party to adopt. There is no word in them nor any hint of the idea that the policies can be realised only by a party standing for the 4th Internation[al], that is to say, by a new party independent of both the S.P. and the C.P....[The votes] were cast for the perspective of imposing these policies on the SFIO, that is to say, making it a revolutionary Marxist Party, or to put it another way, reforming it.”

—“1,087 Votes—What We Gave; What We Got—An Evaluation,” 8 July 1935, *Internal Bulletin of the Workers Party U.S.*, No. 1

The majority in the Workers Party (WP) disputed the Oehlerites’ suggestion that it was *theoretically* impossible to win the majority of an organization like the SFIO to revolutionary politics. In motivating the French section’s entry in 1934, Trotsky recalled that the French Socialist Party had voted to affiliate to the Comintern in 1920:

“There, in spite of the break of the Bolsheviks with the Second International, the whole section was won over to the Third International. We know of no law that says that a repetition of the Tours Congress is impossible. On the contrary, many of the prevailing conditions speak for such a possibility.”

—“The League Faced with a Turn” July 1934

Whatever the likelihood of winning a majority of the SFIO, the possibility could not be ruled out in theory. Moreover, the stance taken by the entrists on this question had extremely important *tactical* implications, as Max Shachtman, a WP leader, reminded Stamm:

“[O]ur French comrades do not orient their *fundamental perspective* upon the prospect of capturing a majority in the S.F.I.O., not because it is ‘theoretically impossible’, but because...it is *practically unlikely* that the SFIO can be captured by the Fourth Internationalists. But for the Bolshevik-Leninists in the SFIO to proclaim *in advance* that they have no hope or aim of capturing (‘reforming’) the SFIO, would mean to defeat their aims in advance. It would mean, first, laying themselves open to the charge of driving immediately towards an artificial split and thus giving the bureaucracy unnecessary pretexts to expel them prematurely. It would mean, second, that they would get no hearing from the Leftward moving workers in the SFIO who labor under the illusion that all that is required to make their party all-sufficient is the gradual victory of a revolutionary group inside of the party and the consequent adopting of a revolutionary program and leadership. This illusion can be dispelled only in practice, by their own experience, and not by ultimata by us laid down by us in advance. ‘You want to reform your party, comrade?’ our people will and do say. ‘Very well, then, join with us in an organized way in order to fight against Blum and Co. and for the revolutionization of our party. We shall soon see whether or not M. Blum and his cohorts will allow us to progress in our party along our line without resorting to bureaucratic expulsion measures.’”

—“On the ‘Reform’ of a Socialist Party,” 22 July 1935, *Internal Bulletin of the Workers Party U.S.*, No.1

The “French Turn” in France

Though a potentially important lever, the entry tactic was no guarantee of success. There were substantial risks involved in such a tactic, as Trotsky willingly conceded to the French opponents of the SFIO entry, for it

was necessary to avoid both opportunist adaptation and sectarian formalism. But in politics there are risks in any course of action. Trotsky also noted that the French section's organizational independence had not prevented it from adapting to Blum before the entry, a reference to the LC's softened criticism of the SFIO in the wake of the February 1934 events.

The execution of the turn by the French section was beset with problems at every juncture, and it could be summed up as a story of missed opportunities. The group's inability to fully exploit the immense possibilities of the turn was largely due to its internal problems. For over a year Trotsky had been critical of the LC's petty apolitical factionalism, study-circle mentality and routinist failure to vigorously pursue the ICL's reorientation towards launching a new international. Trotsky had also hoped that bringing the LC members into contact with broader layers of working-class militants in the SFIO might serve as an antidote to some of the chronic ailments of the French section.

The problems of the French section could largely be traced to a long-running feud between two factions: one led by Pierre Naville, and the other by Raymond Molinier and Pierre Frank. Naville, a founder and central figure of the French section, was a talented theoretician and propagandist who tended to be very conservative tactically, and was organizationally inclined to passive routinism. Molinier was just the opposite. He was extremely energetic and always had some new plan in the works, but was politically unreliable and frequently displayed an excess of programmatic flexibility.

When Trotsky initially proposed that the LC enter the French Socialists, Naville was flatly opposed. He led a damaging split from the organization over the question in August 1934. What followed was somewhat farcical: the international leadership eventually persuaded Naville to enter the SFIO, but could not induce him to join the GBL (which was dominated by the Molinierists) inside the party. Although there was some collaboration between the two groups, they did not reunify until September 1935. The fact that the Trotskyists were divided into two factions within the SFIO, coupled with their tendency to be politically soft towards centrist currents, severely limited their impact. Nonetheless, the gains achieved by the Bolshevik-Leninists in their fifteen months inside the SFIO clearly justified the entry. In a year they had more than tripled their size, and won large sections of the Parisian Seine Federation and the Socialist Youth.

Exiting the SFIO

By the time of the SFIO's June 1935 Mulhouse Congress, Trotsky concluded that it was time to get out. The Trotskyist GBL appeared to have won as much as it was likely to from the entry; the international class struggle and the movement toward war were intensifying. It was necessary to consolidate the forces won in the social democracy into a disciplined, independent organization rather than dissipate them through a prolonged stay in the SFIO.

There was another important reason for the break: at

Mulhouse the SFIO endorsed the explicitly multi-class People's Front with the Communist Party and the Radicals, a liberal-democratic party of the petty bourgeoisie. When the Trotskyists had entered the SFIO, its leaders had been calling for workers to join their party to fight the bosses. The difference between the GBL and the SFIO leadership had thus been over how best to advance the struggle for socialism. But participation in the People's Front meant that the SFIO leaders had established a common political front with the class enemy. This dramatically shifted the political ground.

The class-struggle rhetoric disappeared as the SFIO tops began to advocate the subordination of specifically working-class interests in favor of unity with the supposedly progressive, anti-fascist wing of the bourgeoisie. This was coupled with threats to expel critics of the popular front. On 1 August 1935, Trotsky wrote to the GBL: "In order to make an alliance with the bourgeois Radicals, [the workers] must separate themselves from the Bolshevik-Leninists." In other words, it was time for the GBL to separate itself from the SFIO.

GBL Response

The exit from the SFIO proved just as messy and confused as the initial entry. The GBL leadership initially responded to Trotsky's proposal to leave with surprise and reluctance. But the SFIO leadership soon launched an offensive against its left critics and expelled thirteen youth leaders. Trotsky proposed that the GBL should respond to this with an aggressive ideological offensive against the class treason of the popular front, and by openly advocating the creation of the Fourth International. But the GBL leadership was more inclined to play for time by making concessions to placate Blum. The Naville group agreed with Trotsky's proposal, whereas the Molinier/Frank faction wanted to stay in and try to influence the centrist "Revolutionary Left" current around Marceau Pivert. It soon became clear that Molinier's orientation towards the Pivertistes amounted to an adaptation to their centrist program.

When Molinier was unable to win the GBL majority to his position, he flagrantly broke discipline and began publication of a new "mass paper," *La Commune*, a lowest-common-denominator centrist journal designed to appeal to the Pivertistes and provide a shortcut to rapid recruitment. In December 1935, the Molinierists were expelled; once again the GBL was split. Molinier's mass-press gimmick proved a flop and his group was soon isolated.

After months of hedging and making partial concessions, the Bolshevik-Leninist majority finally stiffened its resolve and prepared to break with the SFIO. Meanwhile, Molinier had given up on the Pivertistes, and in January announced the foundation of the "Committee for the Fourth International" (CQI). So once again, at a moment that demanded the greatest possible political clarity, the French Trotskyists were split into two competing groups—a fact that could hardly have made a favorable impression on serious working-class militants in the SFIO. In late May 1936 the two groupings were briefly reunited. But barely a month passed before

Molinier was once again expelled, this time for dubious business activities. The new split was to last seven years.

These inconclusive factional struggles sapped the energy of the French section, and paralyzed its ability to act during a critical period of intense class struggle. In May 1936 the electoral victory of the Popular Front sparked a huge strike wave, the biggest the country had ever seen. The SFIO and the Stalinists were caught unaware, and had their hands full trying to get the workers to go back to work. One of their key arguments was that too much militancy threatened the “unity” with the bourgeois Radicals, upon which the Popular Front was founded. For a short period much of the working-class base of both the PCF and the SFIO was far to the left of their leaders (see *June 1936: Class Struggle and the Popular Front in France*, J. Danos and M. Gibelin). The inability of the French Trotskyists to take advantage of their position as the only organized national opposition to the strikebreaking of the PCF/SFIO leaderships squandered much of the political capital amassed through the fight they had waged within the SFIO against the Popular Front.

Spain: The Price of Abstention

In drawing the lessons of the French experience, Trotsky observed that, “Entry into a reformist centrist party in itself does not include a long perspective. It is only a stage which, under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode.” The Trotskyist entries in the 1930s were predicated on the existence of indigenous left wings within the national sections of the reformist Second International. Such opportunities are relatively unusual and always fleeting. Moreover, a failure to take advantage of them can be extremely costly, as the experience in Spain in the period preceding the outbreak of the civil war demonstrated. Trotsky had repeatedly demanded that the Left Communists, the Spanish section of the Left Opposition, find a way to intersect Largo Caballero’s left Socialists. In 1934 the youth section of the Spanish social democracy had declared itself for the Fourth International. But Andres Nin and the leadership of the Left Communists opposed any entry into the Socialist Party. Ignoring the Socialist youth, they courted Joaquin Maurin’s Workers and Peasants Bloc, a Bukharinite formation that had split from the Comintern to the right.

In September 1935 the Left Communists turned their back on the Trotskyist movement and fused with Maurin’s reformist group to form the centrist Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM). In classical centrist fashion, the POUM sought to substitute maneuvers and equivocation for revolutionary intransigence, and before long found itself underwriting the Popular Front government formed in February 1936. By providing the popular front with a left cover, the POUM constituted an obstacle to the consolidation of a serious proletarian opposition to the disastrous Stalinist policy of class collaboration. The Socialist youth organization—which could and should have provided a recruiting ground for the Spanish Trotskyists—fused with the Communist Party youth in early 1936. They ended up supplying the Stalinist machine with a pool of cadres with which to

break the back of the Spanish Revolution. The tragic result was Franco’s victory and the crushing of the Spanish workers movement.

American Entry

Probably the most successful entry in the 1930s was that of the ICL’s American section. The Workers Party (WP) had been launched in December 1934 as a fusion of the Trotskyists with A.J. Muste’s American Workers Party. In the year following the fusion, the left wing of the Socialist Party underwent a period of rapid growth. Tensions between the “Old Guard” right wing and the leftward moving “Militants” came to a head in December 1935 when the New York “Old Guard” walked out of the party. Within a few months the split was consolidated nationally.

Although Muste and a small section of the WP membership resisted the proposal for entry, the bulk of the organization enthusiastically embraced the turn. The near unanimity with which the WP’s March 1936 national convention endorsed the turn was due to the ideological struggle carried out earlier with the Oehlerites.

Unlike the French Bolshevik-Leninists, the Americans had to make substantial organizational concessions to gain entry into the Socialists. They had to give up their press and were only permitted to join as individuals, not as a body. But these organizational concessions proved fully warranted by the results. The American Trotskyists emerged from the Socialist Party at the end of 1937 qualitatively transformed: they had more than doubled in size, and had won over the majority of the Socialist youth. They had also gained a substantial intellectual periphery, and built a basis for important trade-union fractions among auto and maritime workers. Moreover, by gutting the SP’s youth and left wing, they effectively sterilized the social democrats as a political competitor for a generation.

While in the U.S. the Trotskyists avoided the debilitating splits and standoffs that so damaged the credibility of the French Bolshevik-Leninists, the American entry was not perfect. In retrospect James Cannon observed: “There is no doubt at all that the leaders of our movement adapted themselves a little too much to the centrist officialdom of the Socialist Party” (*History of American Trotskyism*). But the difficulties were overcome, partly as a result of Trotsky’s forceful interventions with the leadership. After regrouping the Socialist left wing, the Trotskyists founded the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) on New Year’s Day 1938. The SWP became the leading section of the Fourth International, which was launched later that year.

Pabloist Entrism: Liquidationism *Sui Generis*

The ICL’s “entrist” turn in the mid-1930s under Trotsky’s leadership was both an application and a *development* of the tactics employed by Lenin’s Comintern. Despite the difficulties encountered in its application, it was a tactic which accelerated the building of a revolutionary international through a temporary retreat on the question of organizational independence.

In the early 1950s a new and untested leadership of the international, headed by Michel Pablo, began pushing a very different kind of “entrism:” deep entrism, or “entrism *sui generis*.” Unlike the entrism of the 1930s, this new orientation was not a tactic to build an independent revolutionary vanguard, but rather a proposal to liquidate the precious Trotskyist cadres into the mass Stalinist and social-democratic reformist workers parties, as well as into petty-bourgeois nationalist movements. Pablo’s revisionist perspective was an impressionistic response to the seemingly inexplicable expansion of Stalinist state power in the period following the Second World War.

The Pabloites claimed that the Korean War was the opening shot in a global “War/Revolution,” in which the Soviet bureaucracy would be compelled, despite itself, to overthrow world imperialism, and begin the construction of a planned economy on a global scale. They argued that because there was insufficient time to construct viable Trotskyist parties prior to the impending “global class war,” the duty of Trotskyists was to act as a “ginger group” to accelerate the reformist parties’ supposedly inevitable motion to the left. Pablo’s perspective was explicitly premised on a rejection of the centrality of the conscious factor in history (i.e., the Trotskyist vanguard as the carrier of the historically evolved program for human liberation). According to Pablo: “the objective process is in the final analysis the

sole determining factor, overriding all obstacles of a subjective order” (“Where Are We Going?”, January 1951).

Instead of a tactic to advance the struggle to forge a Leninist party, Pablo’s entrism *sui generis* represented a strategic abandonment of the necessity of revolutionary leadership in favor of a policy of adaptation to the “objective dynamics” of history. The fact that a world socialist revolution is without doubt historically necessary does not guarantee that it will automatically triumph. The agency of such historic transformations can only be conscious human beings. As Marx observed in the *Holy Family* in 1845:

“History does *nothing*...It is *man*, real, living man who...possesses and fights; ‘history’ is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims.”

The task of revolutionaries—*our* task—is to create the revolutionary instrument, a reborn Fourth International, capable of leading humanity out of its prehistory into a new classless epoch. In order to prepare for the struggles of the future, it is necessary to assimilate the lessons of the past. Few episodes in the history of the Marxist movement have been subject to more distortion and misunderstanding than the record of the French turn of the 1930s, yet it is a chapter in the history of our movement rich in lessons for today. ■