

LTT's Struggle in the IWP Against the Stream

The following has been excerpted from factional documents produced by the Left Trotskyist Tendency during its political struggle inside the International Workers Party from April to June 1986. Corrections have been made for style and grammar.

Revolutionary Platform? Or Adaptation to Centrism?

The party program contains elements of adaptation to the backwardness of the Peace and Freedom Party (P&FP) registrants. The first alarm on the direction of the party came when comrade Perez declared in a San Francisco branch meeting that we planned to get 400,000 votes (no more, no less!) for Trotskyist candidates. He added that this campaign was the big chance for the party to break its isolation and become a major left organization in the USA. In order to achieve such a huge undertaking, the party started to manifest opportunistic tendencies in its bloc with the "progressive" taste of P&FP registrants. In the article we published on Emma Mar, for example, we didn't mention the programmatic and other principled differences we have with her and the other centrists. We didn't mention the "small" fact that she ran in 1984 as a vice-presidential candidate with Sonia Johnson, whom we characterized as a petty-bourgeois candidate. She was really the candidate of the Citizens Party for which she ran openly on an anti-working class capitalist program. Instead, however, the reader gets the impression that Emma Mar is a principled socialist who is part of our own slate of candidates....

But why don't we support the centrists *critically*? Why don't we make a clear distinction in our paper between our program and theirs, as has always been the tradition in the Leninist movement? In order to guarantee winning the primaries, the leadership of our party counts on all the votes that the Mars and the Condit's can get for us through their delicate intrigues and connections in the P&FP. We counted on their numerous phone calls to their friends and registrants, etc. But when one starts to mix one's banners with the centrist banners, one doesn't stop with hiding criticisms. In order to receive the maximum number of votes, we adapted to the platform of the centrists and the sectors of the registrants who are not by any means committed to vote for us in advance. In other words, we didn't only conduct an unprincipled bloc with the centrists, but we also bent our electoral platform to the backward mentality of the registrants....

The opportunist likes to say what sounds good to the workers' ears. He (or she) "agrees," of course, with the need for fundamental changes, but only the gentlemen of the bourgeoisie and their institutions (courts, different agencies of the state, etc.) are allowed to implement them. The opportunist "forgets" that the bourgeois institutions cannot be reformed, but must be destroyed by the independent mobilization of the working class.

Our electoral platform (*Working Class Organizer* No. 22) adapts to such opportunistic tendencies.... The program calls for "Outlawing the use of court injunctions, the police [!] and the National Guard [!] against strikes and demonstrations." But in order to "outlaw" the police and the National Guard, it is necessary to arm the workers. If we don't call for worker and minority armed defense guards against the police, the National Guard and the scabs, we give the workers illusions in the bourgeois courts. And precisely on the question of defense guards, the platform is very weak....

...when I read the proposal for "eliminating all tax loopholes for the rich, corporations etc.," I was truly appalled. The whole question is not how to make the capitalists pay the minimal taxes that their government gently "imposes" on them, but rather who should control the corporations: the capitalists and their government, or the workers? Don't even Reagan and the Democrats promise to enforce the laws against "loopholes"? What do we propose? A stricter law?....

Unfortunately some of the opportunistic tendencies to bend to the registrants are exhibited strongly in the mailing. For the reader, the mailing (in particular Meg's letter) sounds like radical social-democratic rhetoric against the Democrats and the Republicans. We committed some serious mistakes. First our party name is not even mentioned.... Were we afraid to lose votes? Furthermore, the whole presentation of the candidate (Meg) is false. She is presented as an advocate of reforms against the Democrats and the Republicans and not as a revolutionary socialist. For example, the letter reads: "All of the money and resources that the State Assembly is presently pouring into police funding and into subsidies for big business should be directed toward the public educational system instead. In addition, these proposals and others will require a dramatic restructuring [!] of the tax system, shifting the burden [!] onto big business".... "Restructuring" and "shifting the burden" is the logical conclusion of "closing loopholes," etc. Just the language itself implies something other than the class struggle....

In a polemic on the platform, the comrades of the secretariat have claimed that a revolutionary party can have several platforms (they make a distinction between a platform and a program); one for the electoral arena (that is, to get votes) and the other for the class struggle. In a sharp discussion in the Political Bureau and the branch meeting in San Francisco, they argued that this is just an electoral program, and that it doesn't have everything that our full program calls for....

We have to start from the objective situation and the objective needs of the class struggle and not the expectations and mentality of P&FP voters. This was in essence the methodology used in the Transitional Program. And this is why Trotsky explained, when he combatted tendencies within the SWP which adapted to

the mentality of the workers: "I say here what I said about the whole program of transitional demands. The problem is not the mood of the masses but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks which are determined by objective facts and not psychology." I believe that the tendency not to start with the objective needs of the class struggle is reflected in the party positions on the questions of disarmament and divestment.

Pacifism and Communism

What is a minimal demand? Is it anything that will produce a mass movement? Let's take the demand for a [nuclear weapons] "freeze" and negotiations for peace [in Central America]. On the surface they both look like good minimal and democratic demands. If "peace" and "freeze" can be achieved through negotiations, then it seems that there will be money for jobs and it will improve the standard of living of the masses. If tomorrow, for example, there is a big movement within the university for the "freeze," will we change our *international* perspectives on the freeze to adapt to the students? Or will we always start with what the slogan means in the international arena of the class struggle?....Although both demands ("peace negotiations" and "freeze") have in the past produced mass movements...we didn't support them because in the larger international context they meant betrayal of the Central American revolution and the defense of the USSR.

Calling for disarmament (and it doesn't matter whether its unilateral or bilateral) is giving grand illusions to the masses. This is exactly what Lenin and Trotsky said dozens of times in their writings. Trotsky wrote:

"Marxists irreconcilably reject the pacifist slogans of 'disarmament,' 'arbitration' and 'amity between peoples' (i.e., between capitalist governments), etc., as opium for the popular masses. The combinations between working class organizations and petty-bourgeois pacifists (the Amsterdam-Pleyel committee and similar undertakings) render the best service to imperialism by distracting the attention of the working class from reality with its grave struggles and beguiling them instead with impotent parades."

—"Open Letter for the Fourth International," 1935

Anybody who is a serious Marxist, who claims that today it is correct to call for disarmament, must show what has changed in the material world, or more accurately, in the character of the imperialist system, to abandon the principled understanding of Marxism that the slogan of disarmament is "opium for the popular masses." I think that nothing has changed and in fact the slogan of disarmament is used today by pacifists, Stalinists, reformists and centrists in the same way it was used by their peers in the 1930's....

Perhaps imperialism has changed its character and can disarm itself? Or maybe the reformist, pacifist, and centrist parties changed their character and today are using the "freeze" and "disarmament" [slogans] not as a means of sowing illusions...but as a means to mobilize the workers to take power? Or perhaps a combination of both makes the slogan of disarmament more progres-

sive?....

The call for unilateral disarmament (as a "left" version of disarmament) is wrong, in particular if it is used without a call for arming the proletariat (the way we did in the 1984 elections, for example). It really becomes a pacifist position with a left face. Anybody with such a position is more likely to bend before the more openly reactionary pacifist position ("Freeze and Reverse the Arms Race") because, in reality, both positions give the illusion that disarmament can occur without a socialist revolution....

Trotsky wrote: "To the enervating slogan of 'disarmament' they [Marxists] counterpose the slogan of *winning the army* and *arming the workers*. Precisely in this is one of the most important dividing lines between Marxism and centrism drawn."

On Divestment and Sanctions

Marxists, in examining a demand, first ask themselves how the demand reflects in the international arena of the class struggle. What class is using it and for what? Is it used to help or to retard the revolutionary process? Only after these questions are answered, do Marxists deal with how to use a demand in the "concrete" situations of the different regions and universities. These are secondary and tactical questions. First we have to decide if the demand is progressive or not from the objective international perspective of the class struggle—not from the present consciousness of the students, which is regional and subjective.

Those who start with the "concrete" regional and fragmented expression of the class struggle will always end up adapting to it. Perez's real methodology is adaptation to the consciousness of the students....

The call for sanctions is wrong in principle. It gives nothing but illusions and opium to the masses that the "good" democratic imperialist states can teach the dictatorships "a lesson" and be on the side of the struggling masses....The Stalinists and the reformists, by restricting the anti-apartheid movement to a one-point program movement (divestment), diverted the masses' energy toward pressuring the capitalists and the imperialist state—without giving the masses a program to fight that would link the struggle against apartheid to the struggles here in the U.S. (i.e., seriously organizing solidarity strikes and actions with the South African workers, linking them to the U.S. working class struggles against concessions, etc.)....

What was Trotsky's position on supporting imperialist sanctions while asking the working class to go beyond sanctions by the bourgeoisie (our party's left version of "critical" support for full divestment)?....

"Most dangerous of all, however, is the Stalinist policy. The parties of the Communist International try to appeal especially to the more *revolutionary* workers by denouncing the League (a denunciation that is an apology), by asking for 'workers' sanctions,' and then nevertheless saying: 'We must use the League when it is for sanctions.' They seek to hitch the revolutionary workers to the shafts so that they can draw the cart of the League. Just as the General Council in 1926 accepted the general strike but behind the curtains concluded a deal with the clergy and

pacifist radicals, and in this way used bourgeois opinion and influence to 'discipline' the workers and sabotage their strike, so the Stalinists seek to discipline the workers by confining the boycott within the limits of the League of Nations.

"The truth is that if the workers begin their own sanctions against Italy, their action inevitably strikes at their own capitalists, and the League would be compelled to drop

all sanctions. It proposes them now just because the workers' voices are muted in every country. Workers' action can begin only by absolute opposition to the national bourgeoisie and its international combinations. Support of the League and support of workers' action [by the Stalinists] are fire and water; they cannot be united."

—"Once Again the ILP," November 1935