



Nahuel Moreno

**Speech on the
opportunistic
shift by
Lambertism**

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Foreword

The Fourth International–International Committee (FI-IC) was founded in December 1980 in Paris. The following year this unification of the currents of Trotskyism led by Nahuel Moreno and Pierre Lambert respectively was thwarted.

The convergence had arisen from the time the majority of the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International, headed by Mandel, the French LCR and the American SWP, supported the expulsion from Nicaragua by the bourgeois Sandinista government in August 1979 of the Simon Bolivar Brigade that the Bolshevik Tendency, led by Moreno, had promoted from Bogota. Lambertism supported the expelled brigadists and denounced Sandinismo.

In May 1981 Social Democrat François Mitterrand became President of France. Since that time, the OCI (u) —Internationalist Communist Organisation (unified)— began to implement a policy of direct capitulation to the new government. A crisis began that culminated, a few months later, with the final breakdown of the FI-IC, because of the shift to opportunism by the current guided by Pierre Lambert. This situation led to the regrouping of Morenism forces with groups and leaders of Lambertism who rejected this revisionist course.

In the heat of the debate and given the need to get a positive outcome to the will to establish a principled international current, some central points quickly emerged. First, it was concluded that Lambert was denying the common program approved for the FI-IC in the conference of December 1980. This program had been elaborated based on the paper by Nahuel Moreno *The Transitional Program Today*, presented in 1980 in Paris for the discussion with the OCI leadership (available for downloading in www.nahuelmoreno.org). Second, it emerged that it had been assumed, wrongly, that there was a political and principled agreement on how to respond to popular-frontist bourgeois governments, and hence this was not subject to common elaboration and debate. Reality showed that it was not so and that a very important gap existed which should be filled. Third, in light of the controversy that led to the dissolution of the FI-IC, it emerged that the common document adopted had formulations on the subject of workers' united front which could lead to a wrong conception, and the need to rectify them explicitly and forcefully.

To enrich and complement the text of *The Transitional Program Today*, we include in this edition the speech on the opportunist shift by Lambertism that Nahuel Moreno presented at the international meeting in January 1982 in Bogota (Colombia), which founded the International Workers League – Fourth International (IWL–FI). Also, www.nahuelmoreno.org has available writings and speeches on the subject of revolutionary politics in the face of popular front governments and the controversy on the tactics of the workers' united front of that meeting.

The Editors

Speech on the opportunistic shift by Lambertism

[...] Comrades, I don't want to give a comprehensive report for the simple reason that for a Trotskyist the basic principles of revolutionary policy towards popular front governments are more than known. It is a more than a well-known issue, it's super well known. I still believe there can be no one claiming to be a Trotskyist who does not think that if one denounces every day as traitors the socialist and communist parties when they weren't in power, from the moment they climb to power in the imperialist and counter-revolutionary government they must be denounced more than ever: if previously we did it daily now we must make it every minute of the day.

Trying to delve into this issue, we find that Lenin and Trotsky regarding popular-frontist governments had identical analysis and policy but that they had not made a finished elaboration in any work. This problem, which we thought so simple, is full of subtleties. For example, Lenin wrote countless works indicating that no support was to be given to any measure of a government like those of Russia in the year 1917, nor do we make the smallest agreement or front with the treasonous workers' parties which are part of it. Regarding the support to measures of the bourgeois governments, from Trotsky, there is only what comrade Earl quoted, about his response to Shachtman and the policy of the French section concerning measures of Blum in 1936, which counted with his support or advice. Both positions of the Old Man are very clear: supporting measures of popular-frontism is betrayal.

Unfortunately, there is no pamphlet by Trotsky, or work, specifically dedicated to this topic. Instead, regarding the popular-frontist governments and the traitor parties comprising them, there are sharp and categorical articles by Trotsky demanding their permanent denunciation and the need to mobilise the masses against them. Because of this conjunctural and journalistic character of the works by Lenin and Trotsky on popular-frontism and Kerenskyism, there are open theoretical problems that we must discuss.

For example, on the worker's front, which not only should we study it in relation to this discussion but to the Theses themselves. [...] Comrade Alberto said in passing something very important: to what extent the transformation by the OCI (u) of the united workers' front tactic in a principle and a strategy is one of the fundamental keys to understanding their capitulation to popular-frontism? I am inclined to believe the Comrade is right.

There are other problems like this. But all these problems are based on a series of fundamental principles of Trotskyism which are what we defended in the three documents¹ that we lay for discussion and to vote in general lines. I say general lines because —I must insist— there are theoretical issues to be discussed. But some principles remain unshakable, the programmatic basis of Trotskyism. These principles are those we knew but, as Hegel used to say, they are known by all but not acknowledged. In this meeting, they will be proclaimed in normative form as fundamental principles of Trotskyism.

Well, what are we going to vote in this conference? [...]

We vote that under a popular front government as under any other bourgeois government, our principled policy is:

¹ They are *The betrayal of the OCI (u)*, *The Mitterrand Government, its Perspectives and our Policy*, and *Letter to the CC of the POSI*. The three documents are by Nahuel Moreno and available for downloading from www.nahuelmoreno.org.

- That under popular-frontist governments the central goal of Trotskyism, its first task, remains the same as under the other types of bourgeois governments: to convince the working class and its allies to take in their hands the government and power, that there is no solution to any of the evils of capitalism—from misery to fascism—if workers do not make a revolution against the government and the bourgeois state to impose its government and state. Our whole strategy and tactics aim to teach these primary and fundamental truths to the workers.

- That, therefore, it is our duty to denounce systematically and relentlessly the bourgeois imperialist governments and the capitalist state, whoever may be at its head. The hopes of the masses and all other phenomena that we consider for tactical adequacy of this denunciation can never mean a change in the policy of attacking the bourgeois government minute by minute, whether or not it is popular-frontist.

- That all support to measures of a bourgeois imperialist government, therefore counter-revolutionary (including the popular-frontist), is a betrayal of Leninism, whatever such measures may be. The policy of supporting “anti-capitalist measures and rejecting the capitalist” or “supporting the progressive and rejecting the reactionary” is pure Menshevism because it instils among the workers the treacherous notion the government is not counter-revolutionary, bourgeois or imperialist, but a hybrid that at times can be bourgeois and at other times anti-capitalist.

- That, on the contrary, it is our duty to always denounce the bourgeois governments and never support any of their measures, however progressive it may seem this, besides deceiving the masses, would give political weapons to the government for implementing all their counter-revolutionary policies, of which its “progressive measures” are an inseparable part.

- That, however, we will defend from all bourgeois and imperialist attack, the “progressive measures” which are regarded with sympathy by the working class when they are threatened by more reactionary bourgeois sectors. We will also use them. This defence or use does not stop us from criticising the bourgeois government, whether or not popular-frontist.

- We Trotskyists neither “advise” a bourgeois government (even popular-frontist) nor do we believe they can have an anti-bourgeois and anti-imperialist policy. To think otherwise is a reactionary utopia serving the counter-revolution. A utopia because it claims that a bourgeois government can have an anti-bourgeois policy; and reactionary because it disarms the working class by creating false expectations of their mortal enemy, the government.

- We Trotskyists do the opposite: we explain to the masses the chronic inability, of class, a bourgeois government- has—even a popular-frontist one—to go in favour of the working class and its inevitable need to defend capitalism and imperialism, whether it is a government of the bourgeois right or the bourgeois workers’ parties.

- None of the above means the Trotskyists do not take part in the physical struggle between bourgeois sectors. The Fourth International is for the “transformation of all imperialist war into a civil war”. Likewise, the Fourth International takes part in the civil war in the most “progressive” bourgeois camp, in the field of Kerensky against Kornilov, in the field of the semi-colony against Japanese colonial invasion, with the Spanish Republic against Franco. But these military interventions are mere tactics to get the working class to understand it must take power right now, getting rid of Kerensky, Chiang or Negrin. To accomplish these tasks, it is essential to build a Trotskyist party, and this must be systematically explained to the masses: only by building this party they will have a leadership who will not betray them, and that will lead them to the taking of power.

- As an essential part of these tasks, it is imperative to sweep off from the mass movement the treacherous workers’ parties and for that, we must drum home that no trust can be placed in them and denounce them systematically. And when one of these treacherous workers’ parties rises to a bourgeois imperialist government, we must attack it more than ever. It is at this moment, when the masses may believe that the presence of the workers’ party in government makes it their own when we must denounce that it has become more counter-revolutionary than ever.

All this takes the shape as a fundamental methodological issue, which comes from the discussion with all the revisionist currents. We must distinguish between objective reality and our rules and policies. What does this statement mean? Here's an example.

The OCI (u) could only use two quotes from Trotsky in defence of its position in France: one says we must not excite the masses, we have to explain to them; the other, that the French workers, in their second wave, will fight against enemies of the Blum government, and not against Blum and, therefore, we have to place ourselves at the forefront of this struggle. The leadership of the OCI (u) makes a false interpretation, to say the least, confusing our policy with adaptation to reality.

Let's suppose the Colombian masses decide to fight against Belisario Betancur (conservative) and not against the liberals who are in government. This is a fact and as such we take it, but without adapting to it because our policy is not for the masses combat the conservative bourgeoisie and refrain from attacking the liberal bourgeoisie. But if the masses tend to make a big strike to expropriate the conservative bourgeoisie, it would be sectarian to deny this fact and not to be the best fighters and leaders of that struggle. But the action of the workers is not our policy or rather, does not exhaust our program for that struggle. We go into this process intending to bring the masses towards our program, whose focus is always political: to liquidate the state and the government. And everything we do has one goal: to educate the masses on the belief that if they do not throw down the state apparatus and the government of the day to impose a government of themselves, there is no possibility of overcoming any problems.

It is a matter, then, to start from the reality that the masses are going towards a general strike only against the conservative bourgeoisie to bring them closer to our program: the fight against all the bourgeois system, including the liberal bourgeoisie, especially against their state and government.

This contradiction between what the masses believe and what we believe it is first and foremost, we solve it by the tactical route, but a tactic that continues vindicating the principles. What does this mean? The leadership of the OIC (u) interprets that Trotsky says (in the second of the quotations above) not to attack the Blum popular-frontist government, but only its imperialist enemies. But for both Lenin and Trotsky, the principle is "always attacks the bourgeois government, whether popular-frontist or not". The tactic only shows how we must do this systematic attack, taking into account, among other phenomena, the consciousness of the masses.

For example, if the workers believe the great enemy is the anti-Mitterrand bourgeoisie, anti-Blum, or anti-liberal in Colombia and that we only have to mobilise against them, we will be at the forefront of this struggle but without ceasing to attack for one minute the government of Blum, Mitterrand or the liberals. How? Telling the masses that with the Blum government is difficult to defeat La Rocque because it doesn't give us weapons for it capitulates to the bourgeoisie because it doesn't really confront them. And regarding Mitterrand, we tell them we don't trust he will face the bourgeoisie because he's their servant. This is what is tactical: to systematically attack the popular-frontist government but starting from the fact that the masses believe they must fight only against the enemies of the government and not against it, raising the issue of power and the state in a way understandable to the workers. Telling them, "the government in which you trust will do nothing against their bourgeois enemies, only your initiative and mobilising will defeat the bourgeoisie".

This confusion between objective reality and our program and principles by the OCI (u) is deliberate and characterises all revisionist currents that believe there are no principles or, if any, that they are for the holidays. However, the fight for our principles and our program is daily; the only thing that changes daily is the tactic, namely, how to express or explain them. If instead of taking the reality to develop our program and principles we adapt to the actual process of the stages of the mass movement, we are committing a betrayal: capitulating and tail-ending the popular-frontist government or any bourgeois government in which the workers believe.

In this discussion, there are class issues that characterise both the OCI (u) and the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League, Mandelism) and Pablo [the leader who led the opportunistic revisionism since the 1950s]. Marxism has not only a class policy but a class analysis. If we say —as

the OCI (u) and LCR do— that a government made up by bourgeois can practice class struggle in favour of the workers or to adopt “progressive measures” or follow an “anti-capitalist course” we are committing a political crime. I touch on this point to refute the vulgar, revisionist argument that we should not close the door on the possibility or hypothesis that a bourgeois government becomes anti-bourgeois. Vulgar, because when thinking this way all scientific, class meaning is lost; just as it happens with the pacifists who tells us: “How nice would be that we all loved each other, that no war existed, etc.”, without seeing that there is a class that hates the workers and inevitably carries out wars and exploits humanity. There are still others who, using a vulgar thought, think we could support “progressive” measures and resist those that are not because maybe the Mitterrand government will take the path of class struggle. From the methodological point of view, of Marxism, this is the total abandonment of class analysis and politics. Pure revisionism as analysis and as policy, because all bourgeois governments inexorably practice class struggle in the bourgeoisie’s service and, for reasons of class, are completely and utterly unable to practice it in the proletariat’s service. The character of a government —bourgeois or proletarian— is not an amorphous or secondary phenomenon. If it is bourgeois, it practices the class struggle in the bourgeoisie’s service and, therefore, we have to denounce it as such, because to offer the government means by approving of its measures is a betrayal to class politics. There are no governments of undefined gender; it is either bourgeois or proletarian. And when the OCI (u) says the Mitterrand government has a dilemma, “either class collaboration or class struggle” and that its policy is to push towards the “class struggle” the OCI (u) is committing two crimes: one in the analysis and another in politics.

I wanted to emphasise this methodological character in the ongoing discussion because making a class definition of the governments and from there developing our policy is also a matter of principle. The leadership of the OCI (u) will attempt to bring Trotsky’s quote about the possibility that workers break with the bourgeois parties and establish a workers’ and peasants’ government, or the history of all communist parties or of Castroism which broke with the bourgeoisie in this post-war. They will insist that what they are practising is the tactic of the workers’ and peasants’ front of the *Transitional Program*, of demanding that the workers’ parties break with the bourgeoisie and make up a worker’s and peasant’s government. In our last work, we already explained this is an artful deception by the OCI (u) leadership to hide their revisionism. They do not advice or demand from workers’ parties other than a bourgeois popular-frontist government, which not only is not the same, but it is the opposite.