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The Permanent Revolution in the Postwar Period

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The Permanent Revolution in the Postwar Period

(A critical review of Farrel Dobbs' Document)

The Fourth International (International Committee) conference held in Leeds in 1958 adopted a draft resolution on the world situation prepared by Farrell Dobbs, one of the most important leaders of the Socialist Workers Party of the United States. The criticism made by Nahuel Moreno raised an important set of theoretical, methodological and political issues and concluded by proposing some amendments, which were ignored — same as his Theses on the revolutionary united front — by the International Committee's leadership and its main components who were, precisely, the leaders of the American section.

Below we publish the report given by Nahuel Moreno at the extraordinary meeting of the Latin American Secretariat of Orthodox Trotskyism, in January 1959. It was published in the *International Discussion Bulletin*, edited by mimeograph.

The Editors

The comrade author of the Draft Resolution has not had the intention of making an exhaustive document but only one as general as possible and viable to promote an intense discussion at the next meeting of the International Committee, and in our national directorates. In this character, we have approved it.

My intervention in the last meeting of the International Committee, which I summarise in this memorandum, was the product of a single day of studying the document. This is the reason I consider these criticisms are anything but a finished document.

The criticisms that can be made to Farrell Dobbs' document are of two types: general and partial, in each of the points. In my oral intervention, I only touched, for reasons of time, the general ones; although I made it clear I also had particular criticisms. I put them to you as I thought I would bring them up at the meeting.

1. The method

I think how the theses are written is not adequate. It is not a matter of stating a series of characteristics at each point, but of pointing out the dialectical connection from phrase to phrase and from point to point, what is fundamental and within it, what is the

contradiction and its determining dynamics, to specify the accessory elements and their influence on the fundamental contradiction. The best example is thesis G:

The Second World War prepared objectively for the socialist revolution the workers of Eastern Europe. The Stalinists and Social Democrats weakened the revolution and helped restore the power of weak and discredited capitalism. Yankee imperialism could begin preparations for a counter-revolutionary war. The production of armaments helped sustain a superficial economic high, which contributed to a weak social stability favourable to imperialism.¹

I think the correct way is to say:

“In 1943, a revolutionary stage opened in Europe which was betrayed by Stalinism, which diverted the mass movement towards collaboration with the bourgeoisies destroyed by the war. Stalinism could continue betraying the working class thanks to the economic boom that followed the reconstruction of the economies. The crisis of imperialism was, however, so tremendous, that the revolution triumphed in a distorted way in Eastern Europe. Indeed, to prevent the revolutionary situation in the Eastern European countries (its weakest links), imperialism was forced to accept a sui generis dual power: that power be in the hands of the Red Army and the national bourgeoisies (agents of imperialism itself) to avoid a true dual power. When the Cold War took place, Stalinism liquidated this sui generis dual power, foreign to those countries, in its favour. Anyhow, imperialism led by the United States and thanks to Stalinism could reconstitute itself in the West of Europe and start the cold war and the manufacture of armaments, to preparation for the war against the USSR and against the revolution in the world. The colonial revolution, with the colossal triumph of the Chinese Revolution, dealt a tremendous blow to the plans of imperialism and forced it to postpone the same.”

As much as or more serious than the writing is the fact the entire document has a stratospheric nature, it is not concrete nor does it analyse the experiences.

2. The structure

I think the general structure is not wrong, but that essential phenomena and chapters have to be clearly defined. It occurs to me that the general division and the essential definitions must be the following:

A. The revolutionary process in the postwar period and the stages

1) In 1943, the most colossal world revolutionary process known to date was opened. This rise of the mass movement was dialectically combined objectively with a massive diversion of the European and Japanese masses, to rebuild their economies destroyed by war, and subjectively by the control of this rise of the workers' movement and the colonial masses movement by Stalinism as a global apparatus, and socialism, the union bureaucracies, the bourgeoisies and petty bourgeoisies as national apparatuses.

2) From the year 1945 to 1947 we have a revolutionary situation throughout continental Europe. Stalinism and socialism are in charge of saving the European bourgeoisie and Yankee imperialism which, starting in 1947, launch together against the USSR and prepare their counter-revolutionary war. The workers' movement is diverted by Stalinism towards the reconstruction of the economy. The consequence of the anti-imperialist offensive is the liquidation of imperialist domination in China and capitalist domination in Eastern Europe.

3) The victory of the Chinese Revolution, the most important revolutionary victory since the Russian Revolution, moves as of 1949 the world revolutionary axis to the colonial revolution, which has only spread. Each imperialist offensive did nothing more than undermine and deepen the chronic crisis of imperialism. The Korean War transformed

¹ We could not locate the 60-year-old document by Farrell Dobbs, and we have been forced to retranslate from the Spanish translation. [Translator]

the Chinese Revolution, prompting it to liquidate the important remains of landlords and capitalists.

4) The colonial revolution reaches the Arab world after the fall of Farouk² and has only deepened. Today that revolution begins to attract Africa, which has set in motion.

5) But this process of revolutionary extension produced a qualitative change from the moment it arrived in the Soviet zone. The death of Stalin means the beginning of the revolution of the Soviet masses. It has the same chronological importance as the fall of Chiang Kai-shek in China or the fall of Farouk for the Arab world. With a fundamental difference, as a direct product of this revolutionary process of the Soviet masses, we find that the crisis of the bourgeois, bureaucratic, or opportunist parties of all mass movements begins.

6) The imperialist economic boom has characteristics of a chronic economic crisis of the imperialist regime, and not of a general rise. The boom is based primarily on the production of means of destruction, which causes a permanent inflationary result that leads, in increasingly short periods of time, to semi-crisis or deterioration.

7) The working masses of the metropolitan countries have reflected this course and general stage of the world revolutionary process. The economic semi-crisis of the last two years has been reflected in a violent offensive by the bourgeoisie of the metropolitan countries — especially French, English and Yankee imperialism — against the standard of living of their own workers. This has led to serious resistance and movements of the metropolitan working class. At the head of this process have mainly been the black workers in North America and the Algerians in France.

Anyway, the end of the Hungarian revolution has produced a setback in the entire European workers' movement and has accelerated the imperialist and bureaucratic offensive.

B. The thesis of the permanent revolution has been confirmed and enriched with new content

Undoubtedly, the thesis of permanent or in permanence revolution has had a resounding confirmation in this postwar period. The most important theoretical and programmatic problem lies in this fact: the revolutionary process in this postwar period has enriched and given a new content to the thesis of permanent revolution.

The thesis of the permanent revolution is formulated around two revolutions, the bourgeois-democratic and the socialist, combined as national revolutions and with the world revolution. It is geographically evident that today the permanent revolution on a world scale encompasses three categories of revolutions and not only two since the political revolution has been added to the bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions. The world proletariat is today faced with the task of carrying out not only the socialist and bourgeois-democratic revolutions but, in almost half of humanity, the political revolution. This is a phenomenon that does not deny but enriches and completes the theory of permanent revolution.

Moreover, I believe this combination of the three revolutions takes place not only geographically, but in a different manner, they are combined in each geographical sector. This is a theoretical problem that I dare putting for your consideration, but which I do not consider exhausted, not even solved.

The bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution were previously combined, closely linked only in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. But today we find that within the same workers' revolution of the metropolitan countries, the democratic revolution plays a role of the first magnitude, intimately linked to the workers' revolution. The problem of blacks in North America and Algerians in France is the best example. These

² **Farouk I** (1920–1965) was King of Egypt and the Sudan, succeeding his father, Fuad I, in 1936. His full title was "His Majesty Farouk I, by the grace of God, King of Egypt and the Sudan, Sovereign of Nubia, of Kordofan and of Darfur". He was overthrown in 1952 by military coup d'état.

workers are the most exploited sector of the working class in those countries, suffering from capitalist exploitation and at the same time imperialist exploitation and discrimination. England will not be an exception, and in two or three years it will follow in the footsteps of France and the United States; in England, we will have a racial problem posed directly or indirectly by imperialism with its economic crisis.

The same goes for the political revolution. Undoubtedly, in the struggle of the glacial countries against the Stalinist bureaucracy, the national problem is an engine of fundamental importance. In turn, the political revolution is only a stage or phase in the process of the workers' revolution in Europe, for the Soviet Socialist Federation of European States.

But that intimate combination of the three revolutions I think also occurs in the zone dominated by capitalism. The process that degenerates the USSR and the Communist International is the same that degenerates and elevates the bureaucratic, reformist and counter-revolutionary leaderships of the mass movement throughout the world. This process takes different forms and meanings in a union, a workers' party or a workers' state. But the existence of these different forms does not mean they are not part or links of greater or lesser importance to a world process of the class struggle. This general process of victory of the "labour" bureaucracy over the workers' movement and of totalitarian control of the mass movement organisations — including the Soviet state — obeyed an objective reason: the advance and the victories of the world counter-revolution since the year 1925 to 1943.

The political revolution in the USSR, despite its colossal significance, is only the most dramatic and intense part of a process that is also global, not only in the USSR and its area of influence. The growing offensive of the mass movement is reflected — and will be increasingly reflected — within the workers' movement itself, in the relationships between the opportunist and counter-revolutionary leading organisations and the mass movement. I believe the fight to the death against the union bureaucracy in the United States is intimately combined; it is part of the same process of revolutionary struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR and the glacial. This does not mean we put an equal sign to both struggles since the fight against the Stalinist bureaucracy means fighting nothing less than against a gigantic state apparatus. But not putting an equal sign cannot mean we do not understand the domination of the bureaucracy over the world workers' movement is part of a world process, and that the victory of the workers' movement over the bureaucracy is also the result of a world process, with fundamental characteristics in each region, but part of the same process.

In this sense we can say the political revolution (or whatever name we give to the world process of liquidation of the bureaucracy's domination over the workers' movement, including the USSR) is intimately combined with the bourgeois-democratic and working-class revolution; it is influenced not only geographically, but internally, in each revolutionary process. And I do not elaborate more in this respect because our theses (on the revolutionary united front)³ are quite broad.

C. The combination of strategies

Just as today the theory of permanent revolution is enriched, I believe our Transitional Program is also enriched while at the same time it is widely confirmed. In this sense, I believe we must deepen the three fundamental strategies of Trotskyism at the present time: the proletarian united front, as the main instrument of the workers' revolution; the anti-imperialist united front, as the main instrument of the bourgeois-democratic revolution combined with the socialist revolution in the backward countries and —if we accept our criterion referred to the imperialist countries — also in the metropolitan countries, with the struggle against the counter-revolutionary bureaucracies and their organisations (whatever the name we give to this struggle and the different tactics and strategies it gives rise to).

³ Known as **Theses of Leeds**, and available for download from www.nahuelmoreno.org.

I believe a general document should emphasise the survival of these three strategies and their tactical combination with the Transitional Program. I also do not want to elaborate because our theses are broad and categorical in this regard.

4. It does not raise the general characterisation of Yankee imperialism

It is a contradictory situation, combining the essential characteristics of the oldest imperialisms (England, France) and new ones (Germany, Japan). Like the old ones, it has a huge democracy and wealth but based on colonial exploitation; like the new ones, as it tends to colonise it accelerates its totalitarian tendencies, its armament production, and so on. This is why the masses are not essentially imperialist.

5. Does not raise the United Nations as the most important revolutionary superstructure on the global scale

This postwar period presents us with the existence of a superstructural apparatus unknown to humanity, a true world organisation such as the UN. This is the main counter-revolutionary superstructure in the entire world and obeys a combination of factors: 1) world revolutionary rise; 2) the existence of the USSR and a Stalinist apparatus agent of the counter-revolution on a world scale; 3) this allows American imperialism, stronghold of the world counter-revolution, the creation of a world superstate based on the counter-revolutionary agreement with the Stalinist apparatus. This agreement has continued and continues despite its crises (Cold War, Korea, etc.). The UN is a counter-revolutionary parliament on a world scale, the indirect reflection of the world revolution.

6. Germany

The resolution forgets Germany, the country of greatest potential revolutionary importance in the world. In this capitalist country the workers', political and national revolution are clearly combined since there cannot be a united Germany without a workers' and political revolution that leads to the Soviet Socialist Federation of Europe.

7. Total opposition to paragraph 17

Pabloism has in fact eliminated the metropolitan revolution from the world revolution, especially ignoring the American masses. Paragraph 17 commits the opposite mistake in relation to the construction of the Trotskyist movement since it eliminates the colonial and semi-colonial parties as an active, vanguard factor in the construction of the World Party of the Socialist Revolution.

I voted for the joint resolution precisely because — despite its tremendous gaps, especially in relation to the colonial and political revolution — it raises the workers' revolution in the metropolitan countries. But I am completely against paragraph 17.

First of all, it is a general, theoretical paragraph. It is not a thesis for two or three years but forever. In that sense, I believe the only thing we can say is that, in the construction and development of our Trotskyist movement, there is a specific refraction of the well-known laws of uneven and combined development. This means, among other things, there is no mechanical relationship between objective and subjective development and we can have magnificent Trotskyist parties and leadership in backward countries, and terrible parties and leadership in advanced countries. That is, we must carefully distinguish and

not confuse between the construction of socialism (a fundamentally objective process) and the construction of our movement (a fundamentally subjective process).

The same goes for Trotskyist cadres and parties. Pablo in some of his documents belittles or seems to belittle the importance of already existing Trotskyist parties and cadres, and he would seem to believe in the possibility of Trotskyist parties and cadres that would occur by spontaneous generation.

Specific additions to the document (by paragraph)

2. To point out that the defensive position and the reduction of the domination of imperialism develop until paroxysm the imperialist tendencies and the retrograde, counter-revolutionary aspects of metropolitan capitalism.

To emphasise that “developing socialism”, the anti-capitalist dynamics is manifested at present also in the movements of the working class and colonial masses of the entire world, including the blacks and workers of the United States, albeit in an unconscious, immature way.

3. Point out that not only there was and there is a Stalinist reaction, but also social-democratic, bureaucratic and national-bourgeois reactions.

4. There is a need to divide the Stalinist conceptions in relation to a) USSR policy (socialism in one country, peaceful coexistence); b) policy of the communist parties in the capitalist countries (popular fronts, parliamentary way to socialism, although these two are linked or, rather, the second subordinated to the first). But the most important division must be made in relation to the rise of the world revolution, between before and after 1943.

5. By pointing out that the radicalisation of the masses is “delayed and distorted by Stalinism and Social Democracy” add the union bureaucracies and the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois leaderships of the colonial masses movement.

Specify throughout the paragraph the stages of the world revolution: a) European revolution from 1943 to 1947; b) to distinguish in the colonial revolution between 1942-1949 and 1949-1954 (overthrow of Farouk); c) in 1953 the death of Stalin marks a new stage in the whole revolutionary process in Europe and the metropolitan countries, by the beginning of the political revolution.

7. Point to the First World War as the beginning of the imperialist crisis. Avoid all fatalism about the immediacy of a crisis of overproduction. There is a possibility that over a period of a few years the economic agreements between imperialism and the bureaucracy will expand, which gives a slight respite to the imperialist economy.

9. It should be noted:

a) If the workers’ movement of the world and especially the Soviet one continues to rise, more or less permanent agreements are possible between the bureaucracy and imperialism, against the world revolution and especially the Soviet revolution.

b) Emphasise the theoretical possibility of civil wars as a culmination of the political revolution that will confront the bulk of the Stalinist bureaucracy against the glaciis peoples and the Soviet workers. This would accelerate the first counter-revolutionary agreement between the bulk of the bureaucracy and imperialism. The history of the Russian-German social-reformist parties, which faced with revolutionary danger joined the counter-revolution, would be repeated with Stalinism.

c) Distinguish two essential phenomena. The Stalinist bureaucracy has only the possibility of subsisting as a privileged sector — not dominant — with the imperialist counter-revolution because the workers’ revolution sweeps it from the historical scene not only as a dominant sector but also as a privileged one. The dispute between the bureaucracy and imperialism is, for the first, to remain dominant.

The politics of the bureaucracy and imperialism when the latter is on the offensive differs greatly from the policy they have when the masses are on the offensive. This profound difference is still not very clear because neither the offensive of the Soviet masses has taken acquired an overwhelming character, explosive and with some permanence.

Or underscore the role of the UN in the essential counter-revolutionary agreement kept in the postwar period (until now) between the bureaucracy and imperialism. §