BRAZIL, FRANCE: The Working class struggle

The Black People struggle in United States
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in United States
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Brazil:
The Trotskyist struggle against the coup and for an independent policy of the working class

At this moment, the Planalto presidential palace is occupied by the leader of the putschist government, Michel Temer of the PMDB1, who was Dilma Roussef’s vice-president. The fight continues against this coup. The class organizations are standing firm and have a responsibility to maintain unflinching resistance: for the defense of democracy, for the respect and sovereignty of the popular vote and rights, in particular by organizing the working class with a view to a general strike to counter the coup.

For the meanwhile, the usurper occupies the seat of the presidency of the republic, but a showdown is coming. The working class has not yet spoken its final word. It is time to fight for the victory of the class.

But in the heat of this fight, it is already possible to draw a first necessary balance sheet: in what context did the rebel offensive prosper? In Brazil, the putsch process was realized in the framework of imperialism’s offensive to recover ground it had lost on the continent. Several governments, which are also targeted by the imperialist escalation, have condemned the coup, and two of them, Venezuela and Ecuador, have recalled their ambassadors.

The ‘O Trabalho’ current of the PT (Workers Party), Brazilian section of the IV International, while developing its fight on a line of anti-imperialist united front, made its position clear through the Dialogue and Action Pétiste (DAP)2, in June 2015, during the 5th Congress of the PT, stating:

“For our part, we do not feel that the Founding Manifesto is out-dated. (...) The crisis that now threatens the PT is instead linked to the abandon of the bases on which the party was founded. (...) Exploitation and oppression are still there. Inequalities in Brazil are deep. And it is only through their struggle that the workers will emancipate themselves. To do this, they need a party.

“Three issues, in our opinion, focus the current problems that no political cowardice can postpone any longer: for a fully sovereign Constituent Assembly and against the sabotage of political reform; No to the Levy adjustment plan!; reconstruction of the PT!”

In fact, the imperialist offensive on the continent has prospered in Brazil in the wake of the policy of the PT national leadership and the government, the submission to imperialist policy, adaptation to the rotten institutions, with a policy of alliances that gradually distorted the PT.

The offensive aimed at destroying the party made its way beginning with the ‘470’ criminal prosecution, by which four PT leaders were condemned and sentenced without evidence, without the party leadership doing anything at the time. The supreme federal tribunal, which dealt with the 470 cases, is, historically, an accomplice and instigator of coups. It happened so in 1964, and this has been repeated in 2016.

Today, it is the Lava Jato operation, ordered by a judge in close relationship with the US State Department, which is the main legal arm of the putsch, under the guise of fighting corruption.

Thirteen years of class conciliation policy - and especially in 2015, with the implementation of the adjustment plan after the most polarized election of the four, which brought the PT into federal government - have allowed the process leading up to the coup to ferment. The usurper of the 2014 presidential term, Temer, was endorsed by the top leadership of the PT up until March 2016 – the moment when he announced his break with the Dilma government, as the purported “guarantor” of governability.

The illegitimate government invested after the suspension of President Dilma’s mandate

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1 Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), a bourgeois party, member of the government coalition. Temer is its leader.

2 Political grouping in the PT, in which participate the ‘O Trabalho’ current, for the defense of an independent policy, on the slogan “act as the PT did”.

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2 Structural adjustment plan of then-Finance Minister Joachim Levy, appointed by Dilma with the support of Lula. The plan imposed sacrifices upon the majority of the working people.
comprises six former ministers from past Lula and Dilma governments.
These elements of the balance sheet have begun to develop in the continuing heat of the battle which, in order to emerge victorious, further highlights the line upon which the Trotskyists fight in backward countries under imperialist oppression (domination).
This situation of counter-revolution unleashed by imperialism on all continents was analysed by the IX World Congress of the IV International (February 2016), which said in its final declaration:

"In the dominated countries, the worker parties or those which claim to stand for ‘anti-imperialism’ and which have developed in the struggle to defend the nation (and which have survived) are faced with a dilemma with the new offensive launched by imperialism: either survive and develop, by helping to unite the nation under the leadership of the class, realizing national democratic tasks, in order that they rise up against the claims of imperialism and its oligarchic agents, or else disappear."

We recapitulate here, on the basis of documents and articles published in the newspaper O Trabalho, the combat of the Brazilian section of the IV International within the worker organizations (PT and CUT in particular) in the direct class struggle since June 2015. That month, the PT held its Fifth Convention. The putschist offensive – which began on the morrow of the proclamation of the PT victory in the presidential election of October 2014 – made its way on the path traced by implementation of the ‘fiscal adjustment’, which imposed immense sacrifices upon the working class.
The fight which is continuing poses the demand for a break with the bourgeoisie, which today is translated by the demands: no institutional co-existence with the putschists, reaffirmation on the part of the PT and President Dilma of their commitments on behalf of the oppressed majority of the nation.

Misa Boito,
May 22, 2016

Documents and articles of O Trabalho

DOCUMENT 1

"Since March 13, mobilizations led by the CUT for the defense of rights have rejected the adjustment policy applied by the government (the Levy plan) and Dilma and demanded the implementation of the program approved in the elections of 2014. The party top leadership, submitting to government policy, did not commit itself to these mobilizations. The policy of attacks on workers, of fiscal adjustment, brushed aside the party rank-and-file which had ensured the election victory.

*The best course is for the PT to say no to the Levy plan,*" said the headline of the lead article of O Trabalho No 767 (sold at the Fifth Congress of the PT). The same edition published the Manifesto by trade unionists of the CUT and members of the PT that we had helped to build, headlined: "*The PT is turning back to the working class*" and sent to delegates of the Congress.

(…) The re-election of Dilma barely eight months ago only happened because the majority had rejected the anti-worker and anti-nation policy of the PSDB, the same as the one so casually imposed by Levy.

(…) A manifesto of the CUT leaders and members of the PT was now made public, which was a real help to the PT Congress, saying: "*We consider that the regressive and recessive tax adjustment policy, inaugurated with the appointment of Joaquim Levy at the Ministry of Finance, pits the PT against the working class.*" Wouldn’t it be better if the PT heeded this warning?

(…) The best thing that the PT Congress could decide would be to say "No to the Levy plan" and to join the fight, which will continue, for the defense of the interests of the workers and the nation.

This battle that we have developed in the party and in the concrete struggles, we will wage it at the PT Congress with delegates who identify with Dialogue and Action pétiste. The fight will continue, alongside the workers."

(June 2015)
DOCUMENT 2
Trade unionist Manifesto in the PT Congress:
"The PT is turning back to the working class"

This Manifesto of CUT trade unionists and members of the PT, addressed to the 5th Congress of the PT bearing over 400 signatures, was published on June 11. Headed by CUT president Vargas Freitas, and all members of the national leadership of the CUT, it synthesizes the positions, which have been defended publicly since the beginning of the year:

"We, trade union members of the PT and the CUT, we address the delegates of the 5th National Congress of the PT (...), because we consider that the situation of our party at this time is very serious. (...) We consider that the regressive and recessive policy of fiscal adjustment inaugurated with the appointment of Joaquin Levy at the Ministry of Finance, pits the PT against the working class and the masses, who were its main bases of support.

(...) It is our duty, as trade unionist leaders of the PT, to defend the working class. We will never abdicate this role, even if that means a clash of positions between us, the party and the government (...).

"It is in this spirit we want to intervene in the 5th Congress: we want the PT to turn back to the working class!"

(June 2015)

DOCUMENT 3
With Dialogue and Action pétiste, the O Trabalho current submitted a thesis to the 5th Congress of the PT, in which the Manifesto below was made known (excerpts)

"The PT was born out of a decision by the exploited people to fight against an economic and political system that cannot solve their problems, because it only exists for the benefit of a privileged minority." (founding manifesto of the PT, 1980).

Dialogue and Action pétiste introduced itself for the first time to the party Congress on the theme "Save the pétisme in the PT". We do not believe that the PT manifesto is out-dated or does not correspond with the age of globalization.

The crisis that now threatens the PT is instead linked to the abandonment of the bases upon which it was founded (...). Three issues, in our opinion, focus the current problems that no political cowardice should postpone any longer:

1. **Fight for a sovereign Constituent Assembly able to carry out political reform.**

   This is essential to pave the way for popular reforms. Impossible with this congress (parliament)! This fight is also a fight against rampant careerism and parliamentary cretinism. Either we modify the system, or the system will eventually modify the PT (...).

2. **No to the Levy adjustment plan!**

   (...) We do not want to repeat the tragedy of socialist parties, which, once in government, have betrayed their program and were swept away. We want: lower interest rates and control of foreign exchange, the abandon of balanced budgets, public investment and renationalization, reindustrialization and protection of trade, tax reform and a wealth and inheritance tax.

3. **Reconstruction of the PT**

   We are for abandon of the infamous PED⁴ and for the return to the democratic grassroots meetings, where delegates can discuss face-to-face, deliberate upon policy and elect their leaders.

   (...) Economists and intellectual friends of the PT condemn this policy of fiscal adjustment. The leaders of popular movements (...) and youth organizations criticize and combat the budget cuts. And the leaders of the CUT vigorously demand a change in economic policy. Finally, there were more than 500,000 lay-offs this year.

   That's enough of the Levy plan, not one more month of this adjustment policy!

   Comrades,

   We came to the Congress to discuss and find a solution with all of you. We do not have a ready-made truth. We do pretend either to have an infallible leadership or leaders of great genius. The outcome must be found collectively, on the ground of the PT.

   Yes, the construction of a front is necessary to deal with the reaction that is linked to the imperialist centers. But this will not replace the Workers' Party - the PT is needed more than ever!

   (...) For the defense of the PT! Down with the Levy plan! Stop with the PED and return to holding rank-and-file meetings! For a sovereign Constituent Assembly, able to change the political system."

(June 10, 2015)

Dialogue and Action pétiste

⁴ PED: Internal direct election process, which eliminated discussion in the party.
BRAZIL: THE TROSKYIST STRUGGLE AGAINST THE COUP...

DOCUMENT 4
O Trabalho: "The Brazil and the PT that the 5th Congress did not listen to"

"(...) The trade unionists' manifesto, the majority of them identifying with the majority current (Build a new Brazil), is the most visible sign of a growing process in which sectors of all the currents seek to resist the course that has been taken, and which shows the contradiction between the party's policy and its social base.

This process could indicate a recomposition in the party, seeking to reconnect with its original commitments, which is the only positive outcome possible for a workers' party.

The 'O Trabalho' current, which is part of the PT, alongside the comrades of Dialogue and Action pétiste, will continue to help fight this good fight.

DOCUMENT 5
O Trabalho: "Unity for the defense of democracy, of rights, and against the Levy fiscal adjustment"

The CUT National Congress brought together 2,300 delegates from October 13 to 16, 2015.

"As of its opening on the evening of October 13, the CUT's 12th National Congress weighed upon the acute political and economic crisis conditions in the country.

"As of the opening ceremony, the plenary meeting was already filled with shouts such as "I want the Dilma I voted for, out with Cunha, and take Levy with him!"

Dilma made a stern speech against "moralizers without morals" who were working for her impeachment, affirming that she would defend the mandate she had received from the people against any coup attempt. ("There will be no coup!", the hall cried back.)

But she said nothing about the economic policy of her government whose popular bases of support had been eroded, and she left the scene before hearing other speakers.

Lula, in a well-calculated speech, said: "We cannot remain a month or even a week talking about lay-offs, we need growth, business management and income redistribution." "There is no country that has restructured and which has improved the economy," he said.

In the presentation of the activity report made by leaders of the different forces present in the CUT leadership, Julio Turra said:

"The past 10 months focus, not only on a positive balance sheet of activity, but also an historic balance sheet of the place of the CUT, attached to the defense of the working class, independent of the bosses and governments - including those that it helped elect - and autonomous regarding the parties, including the one of which a majority of its activists are members.

"This is what has allowed the CUT to be the axis of resistance against the offensive of the Right, bringing the popular movements together in the streets, in a situation of paralysis and crisis of the PT and implementation by the government of a policy contrary to its own social base. It is the position that we must maintain in the difficult and complex period ahead."

A delegate observed that this was the CUT's 'Out with Levy' congress.

(no. 775, October 2015)

DOCUMENT 6
October 19, 2015, the Dialogue and Action pétiste (DAP) national committee met. After 45% of the delegates to the PT Congress and 100% of the delegates to the CUT Congress had demanded an end to the fiscal adjustment policy, and in the absence of a sign of change in policy on the part of the government, the DAP adopted a 'manifesto of alarm'.

(no. 776, end of June 2015)
The alarm manifesto

"One year after the second round victory of Dilma and the PT, the situation is alarming. The commitments to advance popular reforms (...) have been set aside. The social situation is deteriorating with Minister Levy’s fiscal adjustment to restore fiscal balance, to reduce the debt and to pay the banks (...).

“The government is threatened with impeachment by the putschist opposition (PSDB, DEM, etc.), who manipulate the courts (TCU, TSE) and rely on the president of the Chamber, Cunha (PMDB), while other sectors of the PMDB of Temer and Renan play a double game.

“Thus, the more the government "gives", the more the market "requires". The more we cede ground to the PMDB and Co. in the ministry, the more they exercise blackmail against the government in Congress. This is the way to disaster! (...) We have reached the limit!

"No need to wait for the 2016 election to know what will happen, if it goes on like this.

Dilma, in the Congress of the CUT itself, called on workers to counter the impeachment process. The 2,000 delegates have not hesitated to defend her mandate ("There will be no coup!" they chanted) or demand a change of economic policy. "Out with Levy!" they repeated."

That is what everybody who voted for Dilma in the second round of the presidential election thinks (...).

A different policy

For our part, Dialogue and Action pétiste, we will act as the PT used to!

We will strengthen the struggle for a different policy, an end to the budgetary balance policy, and a move toward the political reform that a Constituent Assembly must achieve, paving the way to popular reforms.

By going in this direction, the PT and Dilma-led government can still recover popular support. This is not easy, of course, but the current path is of a foretold disaster, as has happened in Greece or other countries where left-leaning governments which have applied right-wing remedies have lost their social base and lost themselves.

We must go out onto the streets, as the PT used to, supporting the mobilizations and protest strikes, as we have been doing since the CUT’s historic day of March 13, "for the defense of Petrobras, of rights and for political reform." (...)"

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DOCUMENT 7

On December 16, more than 1.3 million people demonstrated against the coup and for a different economic policy, for the defense of rights and jobs. On the 18th, Dilma dismissed Minister Levy.

O Trabalho: "Down with fiscal adjustment!"

"The year 2015 was marked by the mobilization of organizations (..), which reached its high point on December 16, with thousands on the streets against the putsch and the fiscal adjustment (...) .

"The fiscal adjustment is in the interest of the putschists who want impeachment.

In 2015, the government’s economic policy of concessions to the interests of finance capital had the effect of encouraging the putschists by sacrificing national and majority interests, by attacking the rights of workers and social conquests, to feed the plunder by speculative international capital. The CUT is right to propose a large mobilization in Brasilia in March (...). It is not possible, during the fourth term of the PT, hard-won by the mobilization of those who want to move forward, and not backward, toward social conquests, that resources continue to be drained into the speculators’ pockets.

"All our forces must be involved to bring down the fiscal adjustment. Dialogue and Action pétiste began the year by gathering its base groups, preparing its national meeting in March, in order to strengthen the fight for a change of economic policy (...).

“However, the putschists will be back in 2016, as part of a general offensive on the continent, of which the hot-spot is the situation in Venezuela.

"Only the mobilization of the social base that elected Dilma can stop the putschists. It is for this social base that Dilma must govern. Down with the fiscal adjustment!"

(Editorial, no. 779, January 14, 2016)
DOCUMENT 8

On February 26, the national executive of the PT met. For the first time in 13 years, the party leadership uttered virulent criticism against government policies and proposed an "emergency program". Despite its limitations, this was a program of measures going in the opposite direction to the fiscal adjustment policy. In O Trabalho, no. 781, Markus Sokol gave an account of this meeting.

"Time for a decision: will Dilma listen to her party?"

February 19, the Dilma government, through Minister Nelson Barbosa, announced a series of measures corresponding to the requirements established by the International Monetary Fund, including the implementation of the government's spending caps, thus compromising civil servants' salaries, spending for social programs and an increase in the minimum wage.

After the announcement of its determination to carry out social security reform, this was a new slap against the social base that assured her (Dilma's) re-election and which had, through its organizations, countered the attempt led by the PSDB\(^5\) to expel Dilma from the presidency.

On February 24, Dilma endorsed the unacceptable agreement reached by the PSDB for approval in the Senate of a bill revising the distribution of the Pre-salt\(^6\) oil reserves. This had previously been a small step, but an important step, on the path of national sovereignty, for the control of the nation's wealth. (...) The government fails to disarm the reaction and with every day it further irritates its social base.

This social base is still resisting (...) and puts pressure on the leaders of its organizations, pressure that must not be ignored, if only as a matter of survival.

On February 26, the PT national leadership adopted an emergency program distinctly different from the government's economic policy (...).

The national encounter of Dialogue and Action pétiste is to discuss this new situation and maintain its readiness to continue to "act as the PT did" in accordance with the original commitments of the party. In this perspective, starting with a meeting of groups to prepare this encounter, the preparation of March 31, including the march on Brasilia, is the order of the day. (...) The question asked in the "alarm manifesto" by Dialogue and Action pétiste is to discuss this new situation and maintain its readiness to continue to "act as the PT did" in accordance with the original commitments of the party. In this perspective, starting with a meeting of groups to prepare this encounter, the preparation of March 31, including the march on Brasilia, is the order of the day. (...) The press and the opposition reacted with fury (...). The editorial in the Estadão (March 1) held that "Lula suddenly abandoned any claim to serve as a bridge between capital and labor".

A step forward

It is an extreme and dramatic situation. The government elected by the PT attacks its social base, as living conditions get worse. The opposition has begun to vote for some of the government's plans, but continues with rallies for impeachment. Polls show a plunge in popularity of the PT.

It is in this situation that the PT national leadership responded with a limited but significant step forward. It helps organize the

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\(^1\) Among the measures of the national emergency program:
- important reduction of the basic rate of interest (...), increase public investment, prevent change in the exchange rate, reduce the cost of credit and encourage the resumption of growth;
- use a part of international reserves for a national fund for development and employment, intended to finance works of infrastructure, sanitation, housing, energy renovation and urban mobility;
- amplify the program "My house, my life";
- resumption of agrarian reform, with an immediate priority for the distribution of land for workers who occupy land;
- taxation of income on equity capital (...).

\(^5\) PSDB: Party of the Brazilian social democracy.

\(^6\) The Pre-salt layer is a geological formation on the continental shelves.
resistance - the CUT, with fronts and other organisms - and calls for a march on Brasilia for March 31 - effectively acting against the government’s economic policy. And it opens a fundamental debate by convening a "Conference on economic policy" in relation to the emergency program.

It is also important that the resolution on the situation said that "the serious fight against institutional corruption and its spread requires a deep change of the functioning of State institutions, by a democratic political reform which should be the object of a specific Constituent Assembly". (...) The 22 measures proposed comprise a fund-raising program to invest, promote employment and consumption. Not to make a budgetary profit to pay interest to banks.

It still needs to be developed in order to stand up.

(...) 5 months ago, Dialogue and Action Baptiste launched an alarm manifesto: either Dilma change her economic policy, or the PT has to change its relationship with her. She has not yet changed. But it seems that relations have begun to change slightly."

Markus Sokol, February 2016

**DOCUMENT 9**

On April 17, the Federal Chamber accepted the application for impeachment, and transferred it to the Senate. On May 11, the Senate voted the acceptability of the application and suspended President Dilma for a period of up to 180 days, the maximum delay possible pending a ruling.

**O Trabalho: The coup will not pass!**

It is time to carry the struggle forward!"

It is time to organize a barrier against the coup and for rights

"367 scoundrels of the PMDB, the PSDB, DEM, of the PP, the PSD, the PPS, etc., have shown their true faces: the Congress of the Republic is a band of corrupt characters, accused or defendants, of traitors to their homeland and torturers elected by the bosses, a national disgrace!

"The scoundrels have voted the Lava Jato, framed up by the judiciary, the prosecutors and the federal Supreme Court (STF), and under the control of the main mass media. They voted an impeachment without there being any criminal responsibility - thus a coup against popular sovereignty. Under the direction of Cunha, they hope to get away with this (...). It is he, finally, who raised the arms of the 367 scoundrels!

History will not absolve them. Nobody will forget the leftists and the undecided that were on the wrong side of the barricades (...).

**It is today and now!**

The committees against the coup, which are already beginning to form, must now cover the whole country to help raise and organize the force, which will put down the coup.

Dilma is the President; she must adopt urgent measures to let all the people know what is at stake: she must lower the interest rate, use the reserve to create jobs, increase social programs, agrarian reform and the program "My house, my life" (MCMV), as proposed by the PT "emergency program". That’s enough of the fiscal adjustment, either Levy’s or Barbarossa’s version.

It is impossible to realize national unity, or even a provisional agreement, with those who want to sell the Pre-salt deposits, reduce our rights, and destroy our organizations. There has been enough running after those who have nothing in common with the people. The necessary unity is that of all political and social sectors who are against the coup, which voted against the impeachment.

No credit can be accorded a judiciary which manoeuvres against the people and which in Brazil have always served the elites (...).

The O Trabalho current, Brazilian section of the IV International has entered in this struggle aware of what is at stake. Around the world, other sections have committed themselves, alongside the International Liaison Committee (ILC), in demonstrations and delegations to embassies in solidarity against the coup. Our destiny is joined with the destiny of the peoples.

In Brazil, the O Trabalho current calls on its activists to discuss in the coming days, to take stock of errors - adaptation to rotten institutions, with the policy of alliances without conditions - and also of various positive results, and the responsibilities of those who hold office.

But above all, we invite all members of the PT to regroup around Dialogue and Action pétiste to
“The majority of over two-thirds of the Senate has validated the impeachment of Dilma, as the House did previously by an over two-thirds majority, without there being any criminal responsibility, which is a blow against democracy.

This is the will of the venal and corrupt politicians, at the instigation of the judiciary, on a proxy mandate from the bankers, big landowners and multinational companies, in collusion with the media.

But this is not the sovereign will of the 54 million people who, when they were consulted democratically, elected Dilma, who is therefore the only legitimate President of Brazil.

In her speech on quitting office for 180 days – the duration of her trial - Dilma denounced the coup made possible by sabotage of the government. And she accused the putschists of wanting to liquidate the program on which she was elected in 2014. That is correct. But that is also what ministers Levy, first, and then Barbosa, had begun to do with the fiscal adjustment. This important mistake has affected the popular base of the government.

Today, Dilma has reaffirmed her commitment to social rights and against any repression of the people. She declared herself ready to fight to the last day of her mandate and called on the people to remain united and mobilized, called for resistance.

In a note, the president of the PT said that “we will not rest until the President of all Brazilians, elected in free and direct elections, is returned at the helm of the State, as that is the sovereign and constitutional will of the Brazilian people. No to the coup! Out with Temer! We will be back!”

The CUT, as well as the MST, the CMP, the UNE and the MTST have declared Dilma the sole legitimate President and Temer illegitimate (...).

General strike, out with Temer!

The time has come for working people and youth organizations to organize - and we have less than 180 days for this - a real general strike against the coup, for the defense of rights, for "Out with Temer!" There is no other way to halt the impeachment.

May 10, the action day to block the country, has been a rehearsal, due to an only partial involvement by trade union leaders who are reluctant (...). All organizations must engage themselves. Leftists and the hesitant will bear a heavy responsibility if they continue to accompany the putschists.

We cannot rely on corrupt and manipulated institutions. We cannot accept any agreement of cooperation or coexistence with the putschists or their program - there is no "lesser evil".

The parliamentary groups, at all levels, governors and mayors of the PT, must engage in this struggle.

Nothing is more important than to rout the coup!

(...) There must be a sovereign Constituent Assembly which carries out state political reform from top to bottom, paving the way for never accomplished popular reforms - agrarian, fiscal, urban, re-nationalization, etc. That is what Dilma must lead, once restored in the Planalto presidential palace.

And the first unavoidable step towards this, is the expulsion of the usurper Temer from government (...).

Fight with us!

The O Trabalho current in the PT, as the Brazilian section of the IVth International, is committed to fight against the coup, with the comrades of the International Liaison Committee, by delegations to embassies, meetings and demonstrations, helping to build a broad global front of condemnation of the coup in Brazil.

The O Trabalho current in the PT has helped with determination to implement the first act of resistance - March 13, 2015. Since then, we have helped provide the CUT and the PT with the necessary watchwords for resistance against adjustment and against the coup - especially alongside our comrades of Dialogue and Action Pétiste.

It is with yet more determination that we are now acting to bring together forces for the decisive battle.

We of the O Trabalho current in the PT present to the comrades, activists, the youth and trade unionists, a flag without blemish, and we invite them all to commit themselves alongside us.”

(April 18, 2016)
DOSSIER ABOUT EUROPE: 
TWO CONTRIBUTIONS

1. The European scope 
of the French working class’ fight 
for the repeal of the El Khomri law

While this article is being written (May 24), a 
fight is being waged at the gates of the oil 
refineries on strike where the barricades set up 
by strikers to stop the outlet of fuel were violently 
attacked by CRS squadrons (1).

In response to the government’s decision to 
make the law enforcement forces intervene 
brutally against the picket lines, the calls to strike 
launched by the trade unions federations 
CGT/CGT-FO/SUD immediately multiplied: in the 
RATP (2), the SNCF (3), in EDF (4), in the 
armouries, in nuclear industry, in air 
transportation... the trade unions’ motions flow in 
from all over the country to manifest their 
solidarity with the refineries’ workers on strike.

The information coming from trade unions 
instances indicate that, in the majority of districts, 
the 8th day of action scheduled on May 26 is 
being actively prepared. As well as the national 
inter-branch demonstration called jointly by the 
organizations CGT, CGT-FO, FSU, SOLIDAIRES, 
UNEF, FIDL And UNL, which aims at bringing 
together tens of thousands of demonstrators in 
Paris on June 14 to demand again that the 
government repeal its law, at the moment when 
the Senate begins to discuss it.

The provocative attitude of the government 
provoked the exact reverse of what it expected. 
The workers immediately showed that they were 
not willing to retreat and that they were one with 
their organizations to demand the repeal of the 
law.

At this stage of this situation, nobody can 
predict - in the least the government - what will 
be the outcome of this tug of war, which has even 
gained in intensity these last few days. 
Everything is open... including, of course, the 
effective repeal of the law. The objective towards 
which new forces continue to get together has 
gained, everyday a little more, the support of the 
huge majority of the population (70% according 
to the polls).

But if we can’t seriously predict how this 
situation will unwind, we can however say-
without risk of being mistaken - that this 
formidable mobilization, which has developed 
and has patiently consolidated itself for these last 
three months within the French working class,

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1 CRS are a special military force dependent on the Ministry of 
Interior and mainly used “to maintain order” – translator’s 
note.
2 RATP: Parisian public subway company.
3 SNCF: Public railways company.
4 EDF: Public electricity utility.
has already undermined the foundations of the power which chose to take over the most deadly demands of the ruling circles of finance capital which immerse, everyday a little deeper, humanity in a global chaos.

We can add - here again without any risk of being mistaken - that this mobilization has already caught the attention of large segments of the working classes of the major European countries and of tens of thousands of cadres of trade unions organizations in their respective countries.

As everything is being done, on all sides, to lessen the significance of what has been ripening these last three months on the very terrain of the class struggle in France, to the national peculiarities of this country "episodically subject to sudden spells of fever", nobody however will be able to prevent the workers in Germany, Spain, Belgium, Italy or in Great-Britain... confronted with the same attacks from their governments, from seeing in the battle now fought in France, as well as the positions of the main trade union organizations supported by the majority of the workers and the population, a powerful echo of the debates taking place in their own countries. A link all the more solid that it connects everyone to the core of what sustains the class struggle: the unbridled offensive the imperialist monopolies determined to destroy all the social and political gains of the working class registered in the legislations of different national States, first among which are the last remnants of the political democracy.

THE NATURE OF THE CURRENT OFFENSIVE

The socialist government Holland-Walls, by deciding to attack the work code, which is the key-stone of all the social relations established in France since the end of the second World War, has triggered a real chain reaction.

By inscribing in the law - what none of the preceding governments had dared to do before - the reversal of the hierarchy of norms to make the local firms' agreements prevail over the branch agreements, they decided purely and simply to reap apart the collective protection of salaried workers, protection up to now guarantied by branch agreements.

Under the guise of adaptation of the legal regulation of the "labour market" to "the economy of the XXI century", they decided to free themselves from all the regulations preventing the total individualization of the worker's rights. They decided to delete what regulated the relations between workers and bosses, which were gained by the two great revolutionary waves of 1936 and 1945 and registered in the legal arsenal of the bourgeois State. Just that!

By attacking the legal framework regulating the work relations in the bourgeois society, Hollande-Valls-Macron directly call into question the existence of independent trade union organizations, which - among other things - depend on a daily basis, through the organized collective action of the workers, the rights of the workers gained by the class struggle and registered in the laws of the Republic (Work Code).

It is possible that they did not evaluate how this threat may unsettle the balance of the political and institutional relations, which constitute the bases of a "peaceful" functioning of the bourgeois State.

By deciding to attack what none of their predecessors had dared to do, they publicly rallied the appeal of Kessler (5) to "erase 1945 and the programme of the CNR" (6). They have obviously underestimated the strength of the symbols that crystallize, for the working class and the people of this country, the memory of decades of heroic class struggles.

In short, under the direct pressure of the demands of the finance capital, Hollande ventured himself, at the end of his mandate, to set the bar very, very high.

THE DECISIVE QUESTION OF THE CLASS

INDEPENDENCE OF TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS

Brought to power in 2012, benefiting from the rejection that struck Sarkozy’s politics, Hollande became, on the very evening of his election - for the ruling circles of the finance capital which are not much concerned with the right-left cleavage - the one who had now to succeed in the "reforms" which Sarkozy had not dared to undertake.

It was Hollande’s task to elaborate quickly a strategy that would allow him, while relying on his Left majority, to paralyse the labour movement from any serious resistance of the working class to the « reforms » required by the IMF and the European Union, armed wings of the finance capital.

All the strategy of this government consisted in trying, around the theme of the "social dialogue", to re-organize the labour movement around the "gathered trade unionism", of which the CFDT would become the axis with the perspective of taking a major step forward in the direction of the establishment of a corporatist order, logical extension of the bonapartist institution of the V Republic.

But, Holland hit the wall of the stark reality of the class struggle.

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1 Denis Kessler, former cadre of the Medef, the major bosses professional organization.
2 CNR: National Council of Resistance, formed at the end of the Second World War, in France.
Within the independent organizations of the class, ordered to saw off the branch on which they are sitting, the militants and cadres, who had prepared in an uninterrupted fight of months and years for the defense of the independence of their organizations and against the “gathered trade unionism”, mobilized to reject the power grab constituted by the decision to have the El Khomri law passed. Expressing the feeling of union members and, more generally, of the mass of workers, they have arrayed themselves so that the leading instances of their organizations clearly and unambiguously take a stand for the repeal of the law.

Their fight - this deserves to be underlined - has overcome relatively easily the resistances, which opposed the formulation of a clear and neat demand of repeal. They smartly relied on the feeling - shared up to the top of the organizations - that what was at stake was their own survival, to push the leaderships to go as far as possible on this orientation. Particularly - in light of their respective histories - in the CGT and CGT-FO which took the stand of forming the axis of mobilization, which the class needed to start to move. This does not mean evidently that at the next stage (maybe sooner than expected) the directions, subject to the pressure and the blackmail of chaos from the State, will not try to avoid a confrontation - in line with their political orientations and their connections - and sustain a strategy of “return to calm”. But they know that they will deal with this new stage while relying on the feeling of confidence in their own forces that the workers and militants have gained during these three months of combat alongside with their unions.

The “socialist” government of Holland, when launching this attack against the material basis of the organization of the working class as class, has initiated a process of unprecedented scope, dynamiting (particularly by deciding to resort to the 49-3 article) its political majority after having lost the core of the social base it claims to represent.

It has, in the same move, revitalized and updated an ancient discussion which has not ceased - admittedly with ups and downs according to the periods - to develop within the labour movement. A discussion rooted in the debates which preceded the creation of trade union organizations in this country and which pushes today the two branches coming from the old historic CGT, the CGT and the CGTFO, to come nearer in front of the corporatist threat incarnated by the “yellow union” coming out of faith-based organizations created by the Church to stall the development of the old CGT and so smother the diffusion in the working class of the ideals of the revolutionary socialism.

The resurgence of this debate impacts the political traits of the current developments in this country.

The breach that happened with the constitution a wide front CGT, CGT-FO, FSU and Solidaires, which refused to give in and maintained, against all odds, to demand the repeal of the law, reinforced the confidence of the workers in their capacity to take hold of their organizations, to gather up in a large united front against the unbridled offensive they are undergoing.

This clear and neat breach with a “trade unionism” which has, in a provocative manner, sided with the government so far as to applaud the repression of strikes and blockages, sharpens the contradictions and contributes to free the workers and the militants from the fetters which, in the name of a fraudulent conception of “unity”, aimed at chaining them to the “gathered trade unionism”.

It has opened the paths on which different sectors have begun to advance towards a confrontation - concerning either the railroads, some sectors in the energy or in chemistry - against the wall of the demands of capitalist monopolies waging an attack to dismantle, pillage and privatize all the public services.

While this article is being written, the strike is expanding. Whatever the result of this extension, whether it turns out or not in a general strike, it reaches from one sector to the next, new companies, it establishes new connections, which are openly in the framework of the preparation of the shock which more and more workers perceive as inevitable.

**A NEW STEP HAS BEEN MADE TOWARDS THE OPENING OF A REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS**

“The impossibility for the ruling classes to maintain their domination in a non-modified form”, one of the objective conditions for the opening of a revolutionary crisis, formulated by Lenin, seems to be already completed.

As for “the increase of the activity of the masses which, in ‘peaceful’ periods, let themselves passively be exploited but which, in stormy periods, are called by the whole crisis as well as by the ‘submit’ itself towards an independent historical action”, it seems to be seriously maturing.

The situation which is developing in France, under the direct pressure of a powerful mobilization of the working class - at a moment when, in the whole of Europe, all the governments, all the institutions of the European Union are sinking into the crisis - is becoming for
the champions of the imperialist order on all continents a major issue and, hence, an element of the domestic policy in every country.

In 1934 (in Wither France?), at the beginning of the revolutionary wave that would culminate in June 1936, Trotsky wrote:

"Capitalism has brought the means of production to such a level that they are paralysed by the misery of the popular masses, ruined by the selfsame capitalism. The whole system has thereby begun to decline, decompose, and rot. Capitalism not only cannot give the toilers new social reforms, nor even petty alms. It is forced to take back what it once gave. All of Europe has entered an era of economic and political counter-reforms. The policy of despoiling and suffocating the masses stems not from the caprices of the reaction but from the decomposition of the capitalist system. That is the fundamental fact, which must be assimilated by every worker if he is not to be duped by hollow phrases. That is precisely why the democratic reformist parties are disintegrating and losing their forces one after another throughout Europe."

These lines seem to have been written in 2016. Eighty years have passed, history has known multiple rebounds... why is it interesting then to remind them?

Obviously - some people will say - the revolutionary wave, which has surged in 1936, stalled by the leaders of the Popular Front could not wage war to the end against the capitalist regime of exploitation. It has however - will we answer the sceptics - forced the bourgeoisie, threatened to lose everything, to concede a base of social reforms, which still constitute the solid foundations the class as class.

It's a fact, disarmed by its leaders, the working class was subject to the counter-offensive launched as of 1937 by the bourgeoisie. It was defeated after the failure of the general strike of November 1938. It could not prevent the war... Its organizations were banned. But six years later, it stepped in again in the breaches opened by the collapse of the Vichy regime, it reconstructed its class organizations and re-established, through its class activity, the solid foundation of the social reforms that it had gained from the Popular Front government in June 1936. To all this it added a "detail": the Social Security...

Once again the political leaderships of the working class, the SFIO and the PCF, saved the bourgeois State by helping it to reconstruct itself. But - shall we add again to the attention of the sceptics - despite the permanent counteroffensive of the bourgeoisie and its agents to implement the large program of economical and political counter-reforms Trotsky is speaking of, despite the blows struck to amputate or denature these gains, they have not succeeded in destroying the bedrock of what we call the "social gains of 36 and 45", and which form the core of the working class.

If there is a lesson to be learned from all this history, it is that the preservation of that bedrock is to be credited to the daily, multifaceted and relentless fight waged, up to now, by the working class and by its class organizations (however reformist they can be) to defend the gains which structure it as a class and make their organizations class organizations.

A fight which integrated - depending on the developments of the political situation and its possibilities - a whole arsenal of actions ranging from simple regular negotiations with the business leadership and the government to the demonstrations which periodically marked the political life of this country.

One can hardly find a clearer expression, in a class society, of the permanence of the class struggle, which never ceased to manifest itself - even during the periods, which were not marked by the great upheavals like the ones of 1953, 1968, 1995, 2003, and 2010 only to mention a few dates.

A permanence that - despite the severe political defeats undergone - manifests itself in the preservation of the base of the main social reforms gained by two revolutionary waves and preserved since. A bedrock the defense of which concentrates the fight of the masses to break open, against the decadence and the decomposition of the system, a way out politically compliant with their aspirations and with democracy.

In this sense, the reference to trotsky's quote is not a simple literary one. The currentness of the fight to preserve the gains of 36 and 45 open a way which will inevitably raise again for the working class the question of the historic tasks that the leaderships prevented them to settle during the two precedent revolutionary waves. The offensive waged by the "socialist" government, whatever its timing, leads to this confrontation.

At the head of the warring coalition formed to intervene in the Middle East under the command of the American imperialism, the Holland government decided to "burn its vessels" and to bring itself forward as a vanguard for the implementation, in France, of the demands of the finance capital enunciated as directives of the MFI, the World Bank and the European Union...
It is no longer a battle to amputate such or such gain of the working class, it is the “total” which is the order of the day. Holland committed, to the main representatives of the imperialist monopolies - which are impatient -, to break the lock which represents, for all Europe, the “resistance of France” to “reforms” - or to be more accurate, of its working class.

He is doing so at the very moment when must be erased all the traces of the “compromise” conceded at the end of the war to save its system of exploitation and reconstruct bourgeois States in a devastated Europe.

**THE WHOLE FRAMEWORK OF POLITICAL RELATIONS ESTABLISHED AFTER THE WAR ON THE BASIS OF THE RECONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL STATES HAS OUTLIVED**

On the field of ruins of Europe devastated by the war, the camp of the imperialist victors had to concede, in the years 1945-1950, to save the bourgeois order, the reconstruction national States. It had, in front of the of the revolutionary wave which was beginning to surge in France, in Italy, in Greece..., to integrate in the legal framework of the national States in the process of reconstruction, social gains in total contradiction with the demands of the capitalist monopolies, hence in the medium or long term with the States recently reconstructed.

This "compromise" has outlived. The merciless war waged, on a world market about to collapse, by the headquarters of the imperialist monopolies in view of a permanent reconquest of markets, of sources of raw material, of ways of communication necessary for the transport of merchanides and raw material, as well as the formation of military coalitions allowing them to impose their rule... dismantles the bases of any national economy and, also of all the sovereign national States that had been put in charge, at the end of the war, to guaranty the imperialist order on the continent.

All the subterfuges consisting in "reforming" the Bretton-Woods agreements to adapt the financial regulations established at the end of the war, to new relationships between powers, everything that was undertaken concerning the regulation of the global financial system (based on Nixon’s declaration in August 1971) to try to postpone the limits of the,... crisis of the capitalist system of production... have reached a final term. The policy consisting in having the central banks flood the market with billions of billions of dollars has reached its limits. The “top economists” who uselessly alarm the competent authorities have acknowledged this. The time for truth has come.

All the contradictions of the capitalist system have reached an explosive degree of tension.

Bolloré, Pouyanné (Total), Mittal, Frérot (Veolia), Mestrallet (Suez)... don’t care about the national economy and the millions of jobs it is supposed to maintain, the world is their hunting terrain and the scale under which they cannot operate without condemning themselves. The only thing, which counts, is the rate of exploitation of the salaried hand-labour.

Hence, all that was conceded in Europe to the working class, under the direct pressure of the class struggle (whatever the form in which these gains have been inscribed in the national legislations), must disappear for the sake of the so-called productivity of the industry and services of each country.

**THE WORKING CLASSES OF ALL THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES LIVE AT THE SAME TIME**

Everything must disappear, in France as well as in Germany, only to take the example of these two countries in which the social gains of the working class were integrated, for historical reasons, under eminently different forms. If it is not necessary, on the one hand, to re-examine in this article the connection between the gains of 1945 in France and the revolutionary wave (confiscated) of 1945-1947, on the other hand the question of Germany, which plays a major role today in Europe, deserves some development.

After the crushing of attempts of the masses to oppose the restoration of the imperialist order (restoration organized by the victors and based on the reclaimable shambles of the Nazi State apparatus) by allied and soviet occupation forces, in order to make the defeated pay the price of the "collective responsibility on the German people", the German working class amputated a part of its forces by the division of Germany, succeeded nevertheless in regrouping its forces in a difficult fight to reconstruct, step by step, its class organizations destroyed by the Nazis in 1933.

It all happened in a period when the American imperialism had reached the conclusion that it could not avoid - due to the strategic demands of the cold war - to re-establish Germany in its prerogatives of a sovereign State inserted in the international division of labour. With all the consequences that such an acknowledgement implied at the level of relations between classes on the domestic scene.

Even if the major gains of the German working class guaranteed by the system of collective contracts in use in this country - enlarged to the whole of Germany after the reunification - were inscribed in the framework of the institutional relations of “co-management” (Mitbestimmung) with all its restrictions (particularly concerning the exercise of the right to strike), even if they are marked by the political environment where they
were settled, the ruling circles of the global imperialism demand that they completely be called into question. They demand that the deregulation of the work relation be continued much further than what Schröder engaged in 2003 with his Agenda 2010.

Much like what is happening in all Europe, it is a government of great coalition ravaged by an unprecedented crisis, which is in charge of this task. All the institutional system relying (to quote Trotsky) on the collaboration of democratic parties which are crumbling and losing their strengths one after the other all over Europe, in this case the two large parties SPD and CDU, is threatened and, with it, all the functioning of the institutions of the federal Republic founded in 1949.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MASS RESISTANCE

The working classes of all the European countries live at the same time: that of the organisation of the mass resistance to the policy of destruction of the material and political bases of the European nations by the imperialist monopolies and by the governments subject to them.

In that sense, the situation which is developing in France does not constitute “a happy exception”; it is the visible part (coming as an avant-garde) of a maturing process which spreads all over Europe, as testify the recent developments in Belgium, Spain, Great-Britain or Germany, where powerful warning strikes and demonstrations summoned by the trades unions, in a process of negotiations, have reached an unusual scale.

A process fuelled by the crisis unsettling the European Union and its institutions and which is the expression of the inability of the ruling circles of imperialism to substitute, in this situation of acute crisis, to failing national States rejected by their peoples, “a supranational governance” guaranteeing the public order necessary to tackle what can only be called a counterrevolution.

The chain designed to drag millions of workers towards a future of misery and decay is about to break in all of Europe. It is about to break precisely where the contradictions are concentrated, where the governments are in charge of warranting the power of the capitalist system of exploitation: the governments of the national States in what Rumsfeld called “the old Europe”. Governments which have entered an irretrievable process of decay, whatever the forms it has taken: bonapartist in France, parliamentary in Germany or Great-Britain, monarchy in Spain...Because they are in charge of implementing practically this policy of destruction, it is against them that the exploited masses legitimately rise up in each country, and not against the abstraction of a disincarnated fight for a break with the community institutions by way of petitions and proclamations to the gallery. It is the defeat of the national governments, which will blow off those institutions and their treaties, which operate only in as much as the national States relays them.

“The enemy is in our own country” as Liebknecht and Lenin taught us.

THE RESPECTIVE PLACES OF THE PARTIES AND TRADE UNIONS IN THE CRISIS OPENING UP IN EUROPE

During the last three months in France, the lever of mobilization of the working class -as well as the majority of the French people – was spectacularly provided by the great union confederations, whereas the parties availing themselves of the defense of the workers’ interests and of democracy (the PS and the PCF), entangled in the compromises linking them to the Left government and to their institutional events which secure the functioning of the bourgeois State, the most important of which being the presidential election of 2017, have appeared as being totally off-track.

Nothing is accidental in this positioning. It brings us back to the nature of the crisis, which undermines the foundations of all the current governments in Europe.

The decadence of the democratic parties Trotsky is talking about is linked to the inevitable destruction, by the imperialist monopolies, of the productive bases of the national States (remote remnants of the progress achieved in the construction of national economies during the period of ascending capitalism), and, as a consequence, of their legal and institutional framework.

The only social force capable, due to the fact that it has nothing else to lose but its chains in the capitalist society; the only force able to oppose – while defending its very existence as class the survival of which is antagonistic to all the current political order - to the destruction of the productive forces of the nation, is the organized working class, hence the working class founded on its class organizations. It only, can reorganize them (productive forces) under its control at the continental level (United Socialist States of Europe).

It is nor fortuitous that when the destructive offensive of imperialism concentrates on the attempt to deprive the working class of all its rights, the class organizations played, in France, the prime role, whereas the political parties engaged in a confused debate on the adaptation of the laws of the Republic to the alleged needs of the “new economy”, on the just distribution of
riches in this society, or on the democratization of the institutions of the V Republic... were rejected.

Does that iron out what differentiated for 150 years the trade unions from the labour parties?

Or to raise the question otherwise: should the balance sheet that we can draw of the respective positioning of trade unions and parties in this first stage of the major confrontation to come bring us to conclude that a process is engaged that would justify a substitution of the class trade union organizations to failing democratic parties? Absolutely not!

In front of the upcoming events, the working class will need more than ever, in its struggle for emancipation, a class organization capable of regrouping masses of workers to combat exploitation without distinctions of political, nor philosophical or religious opinions.

The respect of the independence of the trade union organization toward different labour parties, established as a principle by the founders of the old CGT to avoid the influence of the socialist members of parliament, remains topical.

The respect of this principle does not however erase the fact that the class organization is, as regard the historical policies that it is (and will be) confronted with, crossed by diverse political currents and opinions.

The debate engaged on the means of action being implemented in the class struggle, on the strategy to adopt... demands that the revolutionary militants help, while respecting the independence of the class organization, the vanguard that has just arisen to the forefront to engage in the construction of the party which the working class needs to, by itself and for itself, open the way to a political outcome consistent with its needs and the restoration of democracy.

"Partial reforms and patchwork, Trotsky writes, will do no good. Historical development has come to one of those decisive stages when only the direct intervention of the masses is able to sweep away the reactionary obstructions and lay the foundations of a new regime (...).

Abolition of private ownership in the means of production is the first prerequisite to planned economy, Marx foretold that out of the economic collapse in which the development of capitalism must inevitably culminate – and this collapse is before our very eyes – there can be no other way out except socialisation of the means of production.

The productive forces need a new organiser and a new master, and, since existence determines consciousness, Marx had no doubt that the working class, at the cost of errors and defeats, will come to understand the actual situation and, sooner or later, will draw the imperative practical conclusions.” (Marxism in our time - April 1939)

**IT IS IN THE LIVE POLITICAL EXCHANGE WITHIN CLASS ORGANIZATIONS THAT RELATIONSHIPS OF TRUST EVOLVE IN THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN CONSTRUCTION**

"Existence predating conscience...", it is in the live political exchange between militants and cadres within the class organizations engaged in the mobilization for the repeal of the El Khomri law that links are formed, in what is still only the first stage of a head on confrontation with the power and the State, and thus relations of confidence within the revolutionary party in construction.

It is for all these reasons that the militants of the French section have great hopes in the success of the national conference of militants summoned on June 4th in Paris. A proposal put forward by the V congress of the POI, and taken up since by many labour militants of all political and unionist’s origins who engaged in its preparation. This conference is bound to have a large echo among thousands of cadres who are starting to move in the main European countries. A huge shock is preparing in Europe. The maturing process of the conditions of this shock is developing over the whole continent.

What form does it take in each country? How will the resistance which appears within class organizations - however engaged were they in the beginnings of the implementation of this deregulation and destruction policy imposed by the imperialism - at this time when it appears in full light, up to the tops of these organizations, that they are required to simply saw the branch on which they are seated, combine with the new forms which is taking, in this latest period, the resistance of the large masses?

This is what the militants of the European sections of the IV International will have to find out and express with the greatest precision in order to, learning from the current political developments, strive to propose tracks for a coordinated political action meant to facilitate the development of these processes.

Let’s bet that the next developments of the situation in France, with all the political questions that they will raise, will be watched with the greatest attention at the continental level. The prime responsibility of the IV International will be to provide these militants the full dimension of the debates in which the militants and workers are engaged on the eve of a new period - remembering that they foreshadow their own future.

by Marc Gauquelin.
2. Great Britain: ahead of the referendum on EU membership

Great Britain cannot escape the crisis gripping all European governments – and which threatens to dismember the institutions built over the last 30 years within the framework of the European Union. Britain is still an industrial power, but more importantly it is, through the City of London, one of the world’s leading financial centres. The cradle of industrial capitalism, as well as of parliamentary (bourgeois) democracy, it has also seen the development of one of the world’s most powerful workers movements.

These national characteristics have meant that, in order to safeguard its global role, the British bourgeoisie has sought to strike a decisive blow against the workers movement. It did so with its bloody repression of the miners’ strike in 1984-85, which was minutely and even militarily prepared with a view to breaking the most powerful of the trade unions, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and thereby open the way for the destruction of all workers’ rights.

The historic 1985 defeat of the miners, and the acceptance by leaders of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Labour Party of the anti-trade union laws passed under Thatcher, effectively prevented any major class struggle taking place for nearly 25 years thereafter. The working class and its organisations entered a period of considerable retreat.

Thirty years of Conservative Party government, interspersed by the Tony Blair-Gordon Brown period of so-called ‘New Labour’ (the right-wing of the Labour Party, now renamed ‘Progress’) constituted an objective retreat through the destruction of workers’ rights, as well as a subjective retreat: thousands of members quit the Labour Party, the level of unionisation dropped, and major trade unions disaffiliated from the Party.

This process resulted in a resounding defeat in the general election of May 2015 for the Labour Party, which had already been in opposition since 2010. Contrary to general expectations, the Tories won an absolute majority in the House of Commons.

The election of Corbyn: expression of a new rise of the British working class

The defeat of May 2015 opened a crisis in the Labour Party, coming as it did on top of the rout of the party in the Scottish elections of 2011 and the Scotland independence referendum of 2014, both symptoms of the crisis of the monarchical institutions of the British state to which the leadership of the Labour Party remains attached. Ed Miliband resigned as party leader and there began an internal process to elect a new leadership (see La Vérité/The Truth N°87).

The crisis within the Labour Party allowed Jeremy Corbyn, a left-wing Labour member of Parliament for 33 years, who had never held a leadership or government post, to present himself as candidate for head of the party despite undemocratic internal election procedures. In the space of a few weeks, he went from being a ‘token’ candidate, an outsider, to the favourite of party members and sympathisers. This led leaders of the trade unions, under pressure from their members, to give him their support too. In the run-off, Corbyn obtained 49.5% of the vote among party members, 84% of those of sympathisers registered to vote, and 50% of the trade union vote. “Blairism is dead and buried,” The Guardian newspaper felt able to write the following day. While that may have been going too far, the ‘New Labour’ candidate, Liz Kendall, won just 4.5% of the vote, compared with 50% for Blair in 1997.

‘New Labour’ might have sought to weaken the link between the Labour Party and the British working class, but the election of Corbyn as party leader has demonstrated that Labour remains – organically – the party not only of the trade unions, but also that of numerous other groupings such as those for the defence of low-cost or council housing, public service defence associations and so on, whatever their political tendency. It is this particular, organic, link between the party and the trade unions that the Blair-Brown decade failed to destroy. Between June and November of 2015, an increase of 200,000 party members was recorded, taking the total to 600,000. If the resistance has at this stage not
taken the form of open class struggle, this is because it remains strait-jacketed by Thatcher's anti-union laws and the permanent compromise between the TUC leadership and the government.

Since his election as party leader, Corbyn has remained within the framework of British parliamentary politics, which he has never intended to place in question, and has been calling for an election victory... in 2020. But in seeking to reappropriate their party, the Labour Party, in order that it finally implement policies in favour of the workers, the working class and the youth pose the problem of how in the immediate to confront the reactionary policies of Cameron and his government. That is to say, what to do between now and 2020?

**THE SPECTRE OF MAJOR CLASS CONFRONTATION HAUNTS CAMERON**

It is not overdoing it to say that the situation has recently undergone a major change. The Cameron government is well aware of this, which is precisely why it presented an anti-trade union bill in October 2015, and which was voted into law in May this year. At the outset, the bill provided for:

- raising the minimum level of the number of workers voting in favour of a strike, notably in the public sector, for it to be legal, with a new vote having to take place every six months if the conflict continue;
- a weakening of union rights, such as reduction in the amount of time off allowed for workplace delegates;
- increasing the possibility of bringing court action against unions and their officials, making identifying armbands obligatory for pickets and obliging union officials to announce to the police the holding of a strike meeting or other action two weeks in advance;
- authorisation for employers to use strike-breaking labour;
- an attack on union finances by putting an end to payment of union dues by automatic deduction from salaries in the public sector (the so-called check-off system);
- An attack on the finances of the Labour Party and the organic link between the party and the trade unions by abolishing the automatic contribution to party funds made by Labour Party-affiliated unions on behalf of their members. The change would reduce party funds by some £6 million a year. Instead of having to opt-out of paying the political levy, union members would have to opt-in.

These attacks on union finances would mean a return to the legal situation imposed on the unions in 1927, in the wake of the unsuccessful 1926 general strike, and only abolished in 1945. The aim of the Trade Union Bill is evidently to weaken the unions and tip the balance of power further in favour of the employers and the bourgeoisie in the inevitable event of the working class seeking to engage in direct class struggle.

There have been a whole series of strikes and mobilisations since 2012, including attempts to organise coordinated action involving more than one sector, something not seen since the end of the 1980s. There was a massive mobilisation in 2010 by students against cuts in education spending and increased tuition fees. In the middle of 2015, in order to further dismantle the National Health Service, the health minister opened negotiations with the British Medical Association, the doctors' professional body, in an attempt to increase the working hours of hospital doctors, provoking huge and unprecedented resistance. In a few months, the level of unionisation of the so-called junior doctors went from 50 to 90%, and in a strike vote by referendum organised by the BMA, out of the 78% who voted, 90% voted to strike. This was a remarkable result, in a sector not generally regarded as part of the working class and whose organisation is not even in the TUC. However, the NHS, founded in 1948, should be considered as among the historic conquests of the British working class. Since the beginning of 2016, the junior doctors have struck on eight days, two of these being days of total strike in which they refused even to ensure emergency cover.

In a situation where the class struggle remains legally hampered, but where there is resistance, the junior doctors' strike has become a focus of attention for trade union and political militants. Hundreds of trade union and local Labour Party bodies have supported the doctors by visiting the hospital picket lines, by voting motions of support and by collecting funds for them, in an expression of the search for class unity in defence of the NHS.

Teachers faced with a government plan for complete privatisation of primary and secondary education decided at the national conference of their union, the National Union of Teachers (which is affiliated to the TUC), that they too will organise a vote by referendum on whether to hold a strike. At the NUT conference, an official of the junior doctors in the BMA presented a letter of support for the teachers signed by 2,000 doctors. The NUT then decided to take joint action with the junior doctors. Now, in Britain sympathy and solidarity strikes are forbidden. But on the evening of April 26, the first of the two all-out strikes by the doctors, the NUT and the BMA held a joint demonstration in London. Among the 5,000 participants were Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, his right-hand man – in contradiction with the obstinate refusal of the Labour Party apparatus to support the doctors' strike.

As in each instance of the class struggle in Britain, the unresolved issues of the miners' strike of 1984-85 arise again: how to prevent the strike from being isolated? How to organise united action by all the trade unions, including strike action, given that Thatcher's laws, maintained under Blair-Brown's "New Labour", remain in force? In discussions of the situation, the reference to the strike of 1984-85 is regularly resonant. As are the contradictions. When
the Public and Commercial Services Union and the Fire Brigades Union, on the evening of the doctors' strike, called on the TUC to organise a national demonstration in defence of the NHS and in support of the doctors, the TUC leadership refused. The same request was also made to the Labour Party, without result.

**The Crisis within the Labour Party**

The crisis opened by the general election defeat of May 2015 and the subsequent election of Corbyn as party leader is far from over and cannot be resolved in the short term. Corbyn was elected by the party grass-roots, but he and his supporters have against them a majority of Labour members of Parliament and the party apparatus. He has thus even named to his 'shadow cabinet' – his planned government line-up, if Labour wins the 2020 general election – Blairites such as Hillary Benn and Lucy Powell. The Labour Representation Committee, the historic left wing of the party, is incapable and refuses to engage a frontal fight. For support, Corbyn leans upon the Momentum group, which emerged from his leadership campaign, which because it is partly outside the Labour Party causes less trouble. The aim of the party apparatus is to keep the thousands of members who have recently joined or rejoined the party from taking part in party meetings and to drive them out. When Cameron decided in November 2015 that Britain should take part in the bombing of Syria, 60 Labour MPs voted with the Conservatives, among them Hillary Benn, Corbyn's 'shadow foreign minister', against the view of the grass-roots and of Corbyn himself, who for years was a leader of the 'Stop the War' coalition. Part of the party machine is even ready to sacrifice the next elections in order to get rid of Corbyn.

As the recent local and municipal election were a relative success for Labour – a slight gain after years of defeats – they cannot get rid of Corbyn without attacking the grass-roots and risking blowing the party apart. But the right-wing of the party, abetted by a hostile press and broadcast media, nevertheless contrived to launch a campaign of smear and slander against figures such as former London mayor Ken Livingstone and a young back-bench woman Labour MP, accusing them of anti-Semitism because they had dared to criticise Israel. The accusations, launched shortly before the local elections, were an indirect way of attacking Corbyn's leadership.

**The European Union Referendum is Hastening the Crisis of All the Parties and Institutions**

The May 2015 general election victory was a surprise for Cameron too. After five years of reactionary government formed by an alliance of the Conservative Party with the Liberal Democrats as the junior coalition partner, the Tories won an absolute majority in the House of Commons and were thus able to form a government without such an alliance. But the confidence that this victory gave the Tories evaporated within a few months. At the centre of the crisis is Cameron’s promise to renegotiate the terms of Britain’s membership of the European Union and submit these to a referendum on whether the country should stay in or quit the EU.

Because of its status as former leading world power and the possessor of the most important colonial empire, the United Kingdom and its bourgeoisie were for a long time hostile towards the Common Market, as the forerunner of the EU was known. However the decline of British industry and the dominant role of finance capital, especially its most parasitic elements, changed the game. Whatever the media may claim regarding Thatcher's hostility toward the European Economic Community as it then was, it was she who definitively won the Conservative Party and reticent sectors of British capital over to the EEC. True, having taken on the British working class and destroyed a large part of its rights and gains, she saw no cause to pay for mainland European governments still lagging behind in this respect. But the interests of the City of London are irremediably linked with those of the EU. The City, which is a fiscal paradise, or tax-haven, in the heart of London, constitutes the entry port for capital from around the world, and especially US capital, for the EU free-trade zone. The City is the leading centre for currency speculation, particularly concerning the euro, and an economic collapse of the EU and the euro would have a devastating effect upon it. However, in the framework of the crisis of the EU (debt crisis, refugee crisis, etc.), and confronted with its own population, the British bourgeoisie demands that other European governments bear a greater proportion of the burden.

Three European summits held over three months failed to produce an accord for Cameron. What he finally obtained allows the United Kingdom to limit the number of refugees permitted to enter and cuts social benefits for European Union citizens for their first four years in the country. Those in the Conservative Party who had wanted more are now campaigning against Cameron and for Britain to quit the EU. The fear, expressed by the international press, is that this accord creates a dangerous precedent for all the EU member states, threatening a total break-up of the EU. The agreement, which was supposed to settle matters and allow everyone, Conservatives or Labour, to campaign for remaining in the EU, has in fact settled nothing. Six ministers in Cameron’s government, and former London mayor Boris Johnson, are in favour of a vote to quit the EU, though for Johnson what is at stake is not so much the EU as his desire to replace Cameron as Tory leader – either in 2020 or this year, should Cameron lose the referendum and be forced to resign.

Since the deal made in Brussels, the Cameron government has gone from crisis to crisis. On March 16 Chancellor of the Exchequer (finance minister) George Osborne unveiled the 2016 budget and announced additional spending cuts of £3.5 billion by 2020, on top of those already made. Work and
Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith resigned two days later in protest at the cuts, which would have reduced disability and other social benefits, saying these were indefensible given that the budget favoured higher-earning tax-payers. In fact, Duncan Smith is one of those campaigning for a vote to leave the EU and no longer wanted to be associated with a government which could lose the referendum. These particular planned cuts were then restored. Two months later came the 'Panama Papers' revelations which showed that the Cameron family fortune had been invested in offshore funds (not in itself illegal under British law). Thousands of angry demonstrators gathered outside the prime minister's official London residence calling on him to resign. A demonstration already planned for a week later in defence of public services saw 150,000 marching in the streets to similar cries of 'Cameron out!' and 'He's got to go!'

Then came the announcement of a government plan to completely privatise primary and secondary school education. Under a new Education Bill, all schools in Britain would become so-called 'academies', Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced, provoking a demonstration in London by thousands of angry teachers, and leading the National Union of Teachers conference to decide on a ballot of its members for a strike. Morgan had started out by saying she would not shift her position, but ended by partly retracting when she accepted that certain 'high-performing' schools would be left untouched. However the NUT has maintained its call for a strike in early July. On top of all this has come pressure from finance capital with the notable announcement by the Tata group of the sale of all its British steelworks, including that at Port Talbot in south Wales, the biggest such works in Europe, threatening thousands of jobs. It is in this situation of economic, political and institutional crisis that the government is asking the electorate to vote on June 23 in favour of its reactionary deal with the EU. At present, polls of voters' intentions show the 'stay in' or 'leave' positions neck-and-neck.

**ALL THE DOMINANT POLITICAL FORCES ARE IN FAVOUR OF STAYING IN THE EU**

With a divided Conservative Party (it will not be financing any campaign – either to leave or stay in) Cameron cannot win alone. The support of the employers and finance capital also do not suffice. He needs the support of the Labour Party leadership, which has for many years now been pro-EU, in contradiction with much of its grass-roots membership and support. Corbyn himself has the image of an anti-EU figure (he voted against in the 1975 referendum), even if he announced after his election as party leader that Labour would campaign to keep the UK in the EU whatever the agreement that Cameron brought back from Brussels. The left wing of the party and the rank-and-file of the unions are anti-EU, while the right-wing Blairites in the party unconditionally support Cameron, including the anti-immigrant part of his deal. But the majority of the militants who elected Corbyn leader hate the Blairites.

The party apparatus has been pushing Corbyn to commit himself more deeply in favour of a 'stay in' vote, and he has done so with good grace, but without conviction. A rally by the 'Labour In' movement in London attracted a mere 150 people. Hardly had he been elected mayor of London than the Labour candidate, Sadiq Khan, stated that he had done a deal with Cameron to help the latter win the referendum. That still leaves the trade union movement.

The leadership of the TUC has come out in favour of staying in the EU, as have the leaders of big unions such as Unite, Unison and the PCS, which between them account for nearly half of the country's unionised workers. Shamefully, these union leaders have campaigned by claiming that all workers' rights in Britain are guaranteed by the EU. But it will be difficult to get trade union members to vote massively in favour of the EU with the anti-trade union bill in the course of being adopted.

Cameron and former TUC general secretary Brendan Barber (both of them members of the 'Stronger in Europe' umbrella group which includes bosses and both Tory and Labour politicians) signed a joint article in The Guardian in favour of the EU. At the same time, the House of Lords has, with the government's agreement, struck out a number of clauses of the anti-trade union bill.

And TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady even suggested that the trade union bill had distracted her from campaigning against a 'Brexit' as much as she would like: "In a practical way, I have been going up and down the country banging on about the trade union bill, when I would much rather be spending at least some of my time going up and down the country banging on about why a Brexit would be a big gamble on workers' rights and jobs." (The Guardian, April 4)

In effect, Cameron has partly retreated on the trade union bill, in exchange for the support of the TUC for a vote to stay in the EU, notably in order to allow the trade unions to finance the 'Labour In' campaign which needs the unions' financial support. The TUC for its part has consistently refused to mobilise a campaign against the trade union bill, limiting itself to putting pressure on members of Parliament.

The clauses of the bill concerning the check-off system and the political levy that union members automatically pay to the Labour Party, as well as the restrictions on time off from work for union delegates, have as a result been withdrawn, as have the requirement of prior notice of strikes and the use of strike-breaking employees. But the conditions, under which strikes are legal, such as minimum thresholds of votes in favour of a strike, and police registration of strike organisers, have been maintained or simply eased.
As regards those in favour of Britain leaving the European Union, they are campaigning together with the most reactionary of the anti-EU Tories and even the far-right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) of Nigel Farage. The 'Vote Leave' campaign, which has the backing of Boris Johnson and the millionaire Labour Party donor John Mills, has been designated by the Electoral Commission as the official bearer of the campaign. It includes the 'Labour Leave' group, but also an employers group, Business for Britain, and the sole UKIP member of Parliament, Douglas Carswell. Alongside this group is the rival 'Grassroots Out' officially supported by UKIP, but also by Labour MPs Graham Stringer and Kate Hoey, a former minister under Blair, as well as George Galloway, a former MP of the far-left Respect party, and the Campaign Against Euro Federalism.

The effect of these various cross-party groupings has been to associate a vote to quit the EU with the worst Conservative and far-right reactionaries, thereby largely preventing the emergence of an independent working class expression in terms of class-based demands.

The Socialist Workers Party (founded by Tony Cliff, and not to be confused with the American party of that name with which Trotsky was closely associated) has an important base within the British trade union movement, and the railway workers union RMT (the only union officially for 'Brexit'), have set up a committee calling for 'Lexit' (a left-wing exit from the EU). However they avoid dealing with the problem of the Labour Party and its leadership on the question. This is unsurprising regarding the SWP, which has consistently refused to fight for a united workers front with or inside the Labour Party, while the RMT has a denunciatory attitude towards Labour since disaffiliating from the party.

It is likely that the rate of abstention in the referendum will be high and that this decides the outcome. A vote to leave would considerably accelerate the crisis in British political parties and institutions, as well as the EU itself.

It is for that reason that Barak Obama and Hillary Clinton have called on the British people to vote to remain in the EU. But even a victory for those that want to keep the UK in the European Union can only retard the crisis. No equilibrium will be restored, for the election of Corbyn as Labour Party leader and the process under way within the workers movement to link the doctors’ strike with the struggles of other sectors are the expression of a movement which seeks to get rid of Cameron, the Conservatives and the policy of spending cuts implemented with the support of the EU.

The united mobilisation of the working class will once again pose the unsolved problems of the miners' strike of 1984-85, of united action to overcome the isolation of struggles and that of the anti-union laws enacted under Thatcher and accepted by the leadership of the TUC and the Labour Party, including Corbyn himself.

The influx of members into the Labour Party and the constitution of Momentum as a pro-Corbyn pressure group only half in the Labour Party poses the question, albeit confusedly, of the need for a Labour Party government which breaks not only with the Tories but also the Blairites, a government which restores workers' rights and public services. Such a government would have to break with finance capital and its institutions: the European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank. It is discussion of these questions that the bulletin Labour News, currently at its issue No 7, seeks to have with militants of the Labour Party, the trade unions and Momentum, in order to organize them in the Labour Party and gather together the vanguard.

by Marius MacPherson

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**Marika Kovacs (1932-2016)**

Our comrade Marika died on June 5th, 2016. Member of the French Section of the IV International, she was actively involved, when a student in Budapest, in the Hungarian revolution of the workers' councils in 1956. A workers' revolution and a political revolution against stalinism.

Forced to leave Hungary in the aftermath of the harsh and bloody stalinist repression, she ended up in France. Some years later, this is where she got in contact with militants of the IV International and after a thoroughly reading of The Revolution Betrayed, she joined the IV International. As she wrote it: "to remain communist, I became Trotskyist".

We will pay tribute to our comrade Marika in the next issue of *La Vérité/The Truth*. 
The year 1963 saw a turning point in the struggle of Black Americans for the defense of their rights and civil liberties. This turning point, which culminated with the great March on Washington of August 28, 1963, led to efforts to found an independent Black party, the Freedom Now Party.

The Socialist Workers Party, an American organization, which claimed allegiance to the program of the IV International and which held its convention in July of that year, adopted a resolution, which constitutes a reference on the Black Question in the United States.

The text is the result of deep and extensive reflection upon the objective place of the Black question in the class struggle in the United States, but above all upon the place for independent action by Black workers in the American class struggle.

We publish this document, preceded by a presentation from our comrade Lybon Mabasa, leader of the Socialist Party of Azania (South Africa) under the heading “Black People in the United States”.

The Truth/La Vérité

Presentation
Black People in the United States

In 1999 the first sitting of the International Tribunal on Africa took place in Johannesburg, Azania/South Africa and the second sitting was in Los Angeles in the US. The decision to have that sitting in the US was not accidental but related particularly to the intrinsic and historical link of the struggles of black people in the US and those of the African people in the continent itself. While the tribunal was able to put focus on what has created today’s nightmare for Black people in the US and those in the continent, starting with slavery which not only depopulated the African continent but destroyed millions of lives in its wake, through to the horrors of colonization and to continued enslavement of black people through both overt and covert white racism that was institutionalized particularly in the US and South Africa.

The relationship of the struggle for freedom for Black people in Azania/South Africa is not a new phenomenon but throughout the years great and respected leaders such as Malcolm X, Dr Martin Luther King and a host of others in the US always spoke of that link and the liberation movement in Azania/South Africa also benefitted greatly from the rich experiences of the struggle against white racism in the US. However, what was not lost was the full understanding of the historically evolved symbiotic link between white racism and capitalist exploitation. Capitalism always used white racism to create colonies of the super exploitation of black people and their labour. In the US, that country became great through the back breaking and excruciating exploitation of black slaves, similarly the beauty of white South Africa was also built on the same conditions as that of the US, a situation that has not changed much today in the mines though there is talk of ‘democracy’ and the Mandela dispensation.

The dawn of a new political order in South Africa has failed to address the centuries old inequalities in our country just like what has happened in the US after the co-called celebrated success of the civil rights movement, black people still catch hell despite the presidency of Barack Obama. Despite the demise of formal and legislated Apartheid South Africa has evolved to become one of the most unequal societies in the world with Blacks often worse off than they have ever been before, this despite the unbelievable wealth that has been accumulated by those in the ruling party.

Steve Biko, the founding father and leading light of the Black Consciousness Movement called Black Consciousness the most positive call to have come from the black world over a very long period because this was a call for black people to define themselves and their condition and choose for themselves the appropriate weapons to fight white racism on their own terms and conditions without the tutelage and paternalism of the white world. While this has been true in Azania/South Africa we believe is also true in the US where similar calls have been made.

In Azania/South Africa we had to define for ourselves who Black people were and what made us to define ourselves in those terms and I believe that definition to some extend relevant even in the US. The term ‘BLACK’ according to the Black Consciousness philosophy was first, to be used as
a political term describing certain people who live and experience certain political, social and economic conditions, in the same manner as the term ‘WHITE’ in South Africa and the world is commonly used. White people have always represented themselves as a homogenous group with same interests especially when it comes to how they deal with black people.

Similarly therefore, the term 'Black' did not refer largely to skin colour, texture of one's hair or even the colour of one's eyes or even the amount of melanin in one's skin but it become a political term that referred to all those who were by law and tradition discriminated against, economically exploited and socially degraded and who as a group, saw 'Black solidarity' as the first step of fighting against the racist Apartheid system championed by the white minority regime. In the SASO/BPC trial Biko went to great length explaining why it was necessary for Black people to have an independent struggle especially in the face of ruthless white racist rule.

In South Africa white people had achieved that unity in exploiting Black people, so it did not matter whether they were French Huguenots (1688), British Settlers (1820) or the Dutch Settlers of 1652. Their tribes and origins were subordinated to their whiteness. Lots of people of European descent came to settle in South Africa on the simple basis of being ‘white’ and willing to pursue the full program of white racism. On the position and state of Black people, white people, were all agreed and united, even those thought to be progressive could not fathom themselves being equal to Black people, some even proposed qualified franchise to the inferior Black people. They were united notwithstanding the fact that there were exceptions, there are always exceptions to every rule, however, common knowledge and science informs us that exceptions do not negate the rule, on the contrary, they enforce it by the very nature that they are exceptions.

This approach united all those who were at the receiving end of the Apartheid system irrespective of all the privileges afforded to some of them. The so-called Coloureds were made second class citizens, the so-called Indians third class citizens and Africans were the lower class. The problem was never with the receiver of a privilege but the giver who uses privileges to bring about divisions and patronage. It was this institutionalized racism that determined one's position in relation to the means of production. So, the aspiring capitalist who was not classified white was subordinated to even to a white hobo who by his decision to exercise his right to vote could decide the quality of life for all outside.

The Black Consciousness philosophy became a nation building philosophy that united all the socially degraded, economically exploited and politically exploited people, - the Black majority around their common struggles and experiences. Also what became even more clearer was the fact that there were those amongst us who were not white but were pandering and striving for ‘whiteness’ because ‘whiteness’ to them represented power and as a result they could not find common course with us and those were referred to as ‘non white’ despite in some cases some of them having the darkest of skin, this much the same as Malcolm X’s explanation of a ‘house nigger’ whose whole being is that of keeping the master happy irrespective of all the harm done to other slaves.

That is why we as SOPA support the call for an independent Black Workers Party in the United States that would become a component part of the Labour Party, not as a precondition but a necessary step towards the building of greater unity of the working class. Black workers and Black people in the U.S. -- coming first from the history of slavery followed by racist political and economic exclusion -- have a responsibility to organise themselves around the peculiarity of their situation and conditions before joining the collective struggle of other workers in the setting up of a Labour Party. This is in a way different but similar struggle of Black people in Azania. Decades after the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., just like now after twenty one years of Democracy in South Africa, Black people in both countries have not had a real break despite both being led by people or leaders who are not white.

More than any other national group in the United States, it was the excruciating labour of slave men and women that helped establish the nation that today is the USA. They literally built that country with their sweat and blood, and quite a lot of it. Black people cannot willingly accept plans that have deliberately been put in place in order to make them completely lose out as it is presently happening, a situation where unemployment in the Black community is generalised and their young die early from the horrors of the ghetto, including gangs and drugs.

This is why it was necessary for Black workers and Black people to constitute and organise themselves into a political party that will be responsible in addressing their peculiar situation and conditions before they could even think of joining the larger struggle of the whole American working class in the Labour Party. White workers and Black workers must come together as a class in the Labour Party to fight for their common interests as a class. But today, as a result of their histories, white workers and Black
workers in the U.S. are not all coming from an even turf or level playing field. There are national political accounts for Black people that remain open and unresolved. It is up to Black workers, Black people and their political leadership to develop a program to address them.

We still contend that it will always be helpful if Black people in the US mobilise themselves and in the process of building their independent party or movement are able to run a completely independent candidates for political office at all levels who are in no way beholden to both the Democratic and Republican parties.

We in Azania/South Africa, still need to hear voices of Black people in the political arena of the United States speaking out forthrightly against the pillage of our continent, against the wars devastating the peoples and nations of Africa, and against the unprecedented onslaught against working people in the United States itself - particularly Black Americans especially the youth who are subject of daily untrammelled murders. We need to hear Black voices in public office speaking out against the imperialist wars and occupations of Iraq, Afghanistan, Haiti and the present devastation in the Middle East, all in the name of the phony "war on terrorism". We don't hear these voices speaking out against using our sons and daughters as cannon fodder in their wars for oil and imperial domination. We need to hear these voice to give us hope to carry on in our own countries.

Today, our continent is on the edge of the abyss. The unity of the struggle of black people in the US and Azania/South Africa can be a great step in our fight against imperialism and in a limited way we can start to turn things around, so that we can forge our own solutions -- something that is not possible as long as Black people are denied political sovereignty over their own countries.

Finally we think the position of black people in the US is very important to all people struggling against US imperialism but more to black people in Azania/South Africa who have shared common experiences under institutionalised white racism and were denied all rights in countries they had built. It is for this reason that we continue to seek greater links in our efforts to build a cohesive movement and parties against imperialism.

We still affirm our commitment to opening a discussion with black people and comrades in the US on all issues of common interests and experiences including the issues of independent Black candidates and a Black Workers Party, component of the Labour Party not as a precondition. We are looking forward to pursuing among other these discussions.

by Lybon Mabasa
Freedom Now

“The New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation and the Tasks of the SWP,”
adopted by the 1963 Convention of the Socialist Workers Party

I. “FREEDOM NOW”: A NEW STAGE

Under the banner of “Freedom Now,”¹ the Negro² struggle for equality has entered a new stage. This is comparable in significance to the change that occurred in the 1830s when a wing of the Abolitionist movement, previously dominated by schemes for piecemeal purchase and deportation of the slaves, raised the explosive demand for immediate and complete emancipation.

The most notable characteristic of this new stage in the Negro struggle is the clear and sharp rejection of gradualism³, which is the program, method and perspective of capitalist liberalism⁴. Freedom Now is an essentially radical and potentially revolutionary demand. It brings its advocates, regardless of their particular views, into growing conflict with the White House and the Southern Democrats, with the labor leaders as well as the liberals, with Negro as well as white exponents of moderation, compromise and tokenism.

The ruling class of this country cannot grant this demand. Neither can it suppress or sidetrack the movement. That is why a consistent struggle to achieve it will stimulate profound changes not only in race relations but also in class and political relations in the United States.

¹ From International Socialist Review, Vol24 No.4, Fall 1963, pp.103-113. Transcribed & marked up by Einde O’Callaghan for ETOL.
² As of this note, all the footnotes are by The Truth/La Vérité – editors’ note. In this document we have, in the French version, used the word ‘blacks’, while the English texts speak of ‘negroes’, which was the word that revolutionary and democratic organizations used to describe themselves, as opposed to the racist term ‘nigger’ used by slave-owners. Since then, such organizations have opted for the term ‘Black’ to describe themselves, and this is now the most common usage, along with the term ‘Afro-American’.
³ The gradualists are in favor of liberation by stages.
⁴ In the United States, the ‘liberals’ are the left wing of the Democrat Party. The term ‘liberalism’ refers to that tendency.

Freedom Now sentiment is generated from numerous sources: by urbanization, industrialization and migration as a result of which three-fourths of the Negroes live in cities rather than rural areas and one-half outside the South; by inspiration from the colonial revolutions against white imperialist domination in Africa, Asia and Latin America; by the smallness, futility and slowness of concessions offered to the demand for equality; by the conviction that the rulers of this country will never grant equality voluntarily or without pressure, and that their difficulties in the cold war make them more vulnerable to pressure; by disappointment in the old-style Negro leaders and the labor bureaucrats. It is spurred by the growth of racial consciousness and solidarity, which flows from common experiences of oppression and is strengthened by historical and contemporary evidence that the Negro must rely on himself first of all if he is to make any progress. This sentiment is bolstered in some circles by a questioning or repudiation of the values of capitalist (white-dominated) society.

The results have been a spread of the Negro struggle into every corner of the country; a sizable increase in the number of active fighters, with the most important new reinforcements coming from the student youth, who are not encumbered by the skepticism, routinism or defeatism of many of their elders and are imparting a new vigor and vibrancy to the struggle; assertions of independence, coupled with heightened self-confidence and growing determination that the Negro will decide his own goals, work out his own tactics and lead his own struggles; more openly expressed feelings of mistrust and suspicion of whites and bitter resentment against paternalism in any form; the raising of new demands and proposals that are unacceptable to most liberals (special consideration or priority for the needs of the Negro to compensate for centuries of oppression and deprivation, adequate and effective Negro
representation in all places and at all levels, bloc voting, etc.). This new phase has already witnessed a significant growth of Negro nationalist and separatist sentiment along with the appearance of new national organizations and hundreds of local groups dedicated to equality. This is all part of the ferment, discussion, experimentation, and lively search for ideas, methods, programs and leadership capable of guiding the struggle for equality to victory.

The new period which was definitively ushered in with the Battle of Birmingham in May 19635 has been marked by the following features:

1. The struggle is acquiring an ever greater mass character. It actively involves hundreds of thousands ranging from students and middle class people to the most disinherited and dispossessed of the city ghettos. They have stepped onto the arena of action as a mass force of constantly growing dimensions and dynamism.

2. Mass action in various forms has now recrossed the Mason-Dixon line6. The opening punch was delivered in the fight for jobs at the school construction site in Philadelphia which spread to New York and other places. The dam burst with the turnout of a quarter million Negroes in the June Freedom March in Detroit7, the biggest protest demonstration of its kind in this century. From the start the demands in the North are on a higher socio-economic level than those in the South, striking deeply into the established class structure.

3. The impact of these events has shocked the Kennedy administration, provoked a political crisis in the country and compelled federal, state and local governments to take steps not even remotely contemplated before the upsurge of the Negro revolt. The Kennedy administration does not intend to grant equality. It is anxious to contain and, if possible, buy off the leadership by offering the minimum of concessions to keep the mass movement from moving too fast and far ahead.

4. The top Negro leaders feel even more nervous and unsteady. They are being forced to talk, and in some cases even act, more militantly because they fear the power of the revolt which they did not unloose and cannot control. They also fear that the ruling class upon whom they rely will not grant enough concessions soon enough and that the mass movement will continue to sweep around them and beyond them, dragging them along as they try to slow it down. The profound insecurity of the official leaders, their lack of control over the masses, the emergence of new forces and potential new and bolder leaders are positive signs of an ascending revolt that is becoming more and more radicalized.

5. In the South at this stage the civil rights struggle has some special traits distinguishing it from the rest of the country.

a) Because of the glaring and intolerable violations of the most elementary democratic rights, Southern freedom-fighters are in a position to expose and dramatize the injustices of Jim Crow 8, constantly embarrass the federal government and deepen the indignation against segregation not only throughout the United States but throughout the world.

b) In parts of the South where Negroes are a majority, such moves as the call for the election of a Negro sheriff in Leflore County, Mississippi have a highly explosive character because they directly challenge and endanger the white supremacist structure9. Voter registration drives in rural areas

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5 This campaign in Birmingham (Alabama) in the Spring of 1963 led to clashes between young blacks and the white municipal authorities, to massive demonstrations against segregation which were violently repressed, but the struggle spread to the whole of the South and a number of segregationist laws were abolished. Martin Luther King summed up the philosophy of this campaign when he said that the purpose of 'direct action' was to create such a crisis situation that this would inevitably open the door to negotiations.

6 Since the end of the American War of Independence, the Mason-Dixon line had marked the frontier between the abolitionist states of the North and the slavery states of the South. Separating Maryland from Delaware and Pennsylvania, the line was established between 1763 and 1767 by two British surveyors, Charles Mason (1728-1786) and Jeremiah Dixon (1733-1779). The black slaves who used the clandestine 'iron railroad' had to cross this line in order to try to gain freedom (see note 32). Even after the Civil War, this frontier has remained a strong symbol of the cultural divide between the states of the North and the South.

7 The Freedom March of June 23, 1963 in Detroit (Michigan) is considered one of the most powerful demonstrations of that era. The number of participants is estimated at 150,000. Let us recall that at the end of the march, at a rally before 25,000 people held in Detroit's Cobo Hall, Martin Luther King for the first time used his famous expression 'I have a dream' which he would use again two months later after the March on Washington of August 28, 1963.

8 'Jim Crow' is a term used to designate segregationist law in the Southern states. The Jim Crow Acts were in force from 1876 until the 1960's in the municipalities of the South. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 abolished them.

9 The separatists are imbued with a racist ideology, which considers that the White race is superior to others, and must dominate them.
where uncompromising Negro candidates might become mayors, judges, or sheriffs could upset the whole balance of power there.

c) What happens in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia has immediate repercussions upon the moods of the movement in the North. Any outrage and outbreak of violence, or any outstanding demonstration and achievement in the South, arouses the Negro communities in the rest of the country. Thus the intensification and extension of the struggle in the South is a sharp goad to the national civil rights movement. Conversely, the advances of the Northern struggle, such as the direct actions for jobs, tend to feed back into the South and raise the struggle there to a higher level.

II. THE PRESENT TENDENCIES

The *Freedom Now* forces face the task of uniting into an effective movement and equipping themselves with a program, a philosophy and a perspective. Success in these efforts will depend on correct evaluations of the competing tendencies now in the field, of the intentions of their racist enemies, and of the Negro movement's relations with other sections of the population.

The NAACP¹⁰ was for a long time the dominant civil rights organization. But its relative influence has declined and it is today challenged on all sides. Its leadership, middle class and liberal, relies mainly on legal and legislative action and discourages mass action, initiative and struggle. Afraid of being outflanked and bypassed by more militant organizations, they have attempted to modernize their "image," but the NAACP remains the chief protagonist and symbol of gradualism. The Negro masses may appreciate it as a legal defense arm and legislative lobby, but they do not feel welcome in it and most do not belong to it.

A Pacifist tendency has acquired strength and its leaders prominence since the late 1950s. Its main organizations are the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, headed by Martin Luther King¹¹ (11), and the Congress of Racial Equality¹² (12). Their prestige derives in part from the fact that, unlike the NAACP, they have sanctioned and participated in certain kinds of direct action. But King's pacifism also has the opposite effect of restraining the full unleashing of mass struggle and initiative. He preaches "love" of the racist enemy and threatens to cancel civil rights struggles whenever the masses display a readiness to defend themselves against racist violence. Although King speaks the rhetoric of *Freedom Now*, it is not accidental that the liberals support him as "the right kind of Negro leader" while the Kennedy administration feels he can be used to keep the masses from getting out of control.

There is an essential difference between pacifism, which preaches no resistance to assaults at all times and at all costs, and a defensive pacifism imposed by an unfavorable relation of forces. The need for organized self-defense against white supremacist gangs and police officials is as yet openly supported only by small groups of Negro militants. The Ghandist-pacifist leaders¹³ are ready to rely upon government military force while they repudiate in principle the adoption of self-protective measures by Negroes who are menaced with attacks by Jim Crow elements who are shielded by or may even be part of the state apparatus.

The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee is a tendency distinct from King and CORE. It originated in the desire of militant students to strike out on a road different from that of the gradualists. It does not preach a binding commitment to Gandhism. For its leaders, nonviolence is rather a tactic than a dogma or principle and one that does not exclude the right of self-defense. SNCC is a vanguard-type movement whose main emphasis is on direct

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¹⁰ NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, founded in 1909. Its mission: 'To promote equality of rights and to eradicate caste or race prejudice among the citizens of the United States; to advance the interest of colored citizens; to secure for them impartial suffrage; and to increase their opportunities for securing justice in the courts, education for the children, employment according to their ability and complete equality before law.'

¹¹ The Southern Christian Leadership Conference is an American civil rights organization created in January 1957. It played an important role in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. It is closely associated with its first leader, Martin Luther King (1929-1968).

¹² The Congress of Racial Equality, or CORE, is an American organization of struggle for civil rights founded in Chicago in 1942. It played a major role in the Afro-American civil rights movement. CORE is open to 'whoever believes that men are born equal.' Its action mainly concentrated upon the fight against racial segregation institutionalized in the South of the United States by the 'Jim Crow' laws. It also participated in the struggle against discrimination in employment and housing in the North.

¹³ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), or Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the movement for the independence of India, and symbol of non-violence and mass civil disobedience. He inspired numerous black civil rights militants.
action as a means of organizing the Southern masses for independent struggle.

The Negro American Labor Council was formed to fulfill the indispensable function of leading and coordinating the fight against discrimination in industry and the labor movement. Because of their numbers and strategic position as a link between the labor movement and the Negro community, Negro unionists can play a crucial role in enlisting union support for the independent struggles of the Negro people and Negro support for the unions. But outside of a few cities the NALC has so far failed to recruit many Negro workers into its ranks. Partly this failure is due to the tight bureaucratic grip on the organization by the A. Philip Randolph leadership. The NALC is weakened by the fact that most of its leaders owe their union posts to appointment by the union bureaucracy and are afraid to jeopardize these by undertaking bold actions unacceptable to the Meanys and Reuthers.

The Muslims, headed by Elijah Muhammad, are the most dynamic tendency in the Northern Negro community today. Previously a small, uninfluential religious sect, they have acquired a considerable predominantly working-class membership in the Northern cities, a more substantial following, and the respect of millions of Negroes who are stirred by their forthright denunciation of racial oppression and their determination to free themselves from white domination. Nationalist and separatist, they reject not only gradualism and tokenism, but also the right of their oppressors to control and exploit Negroes. They boldly declare the capacity and right of the Negro people to govern themselves. Important weaknesses include their failure to understand the economic causes of racism and their lack of a program of action enabling them to participate in and influence partial, immediate and transitional struggles of the Negro masses. In the last year the Muslims have begun to overcome their isolation by greater flexibility in their approach toward other Negro organizations. An important and promising step forward was their recent declaration in favor of political action in the form of election campaigns to elect black candidates.

The most radical tendencies with a social or political orientation have been inspired by the example of the Monroe, N.C., movement headed by Robert F. Williams. Monroe has made valuable contributions to the theory and practice of self-defense. However, the movement has been weakened by the persecution, frame-up and exile of its leader.

Significant parts in promoting the struggle against liberalism and gradualism are being played by newly-formed regional and local groups in all parts of the country.

It is from among these groups and currents that the Negro leadership of an effective struggle for equality will be gathered and united. But it is necessary to add that at the present stage none of these tendencies, including the biggest, can claim the affiliation of more than a small percentage of the Negro people. The Freedom Now movement is forming, re-forming, learning, developing, preparing, defining and refining. However, the great mass of the Negroes, concentrated in the big ghettos of the North and South, have yet to be heard from.

III. NEGRO NATIONALISM TODAY

General definitions of nationalism are inadequate for understanding and explaining Negro nationalism in the United States today. While it has resemblances to the insurgent nationalism in African countries, and to the nationalism of oppressed minorities in the old Russian Czarist empire, American Negro nationalism also differs from them in certain important respects. Moreover, Negro nationalism is still in an early stage of its development and will surely undergo changes in the future. A definitive analysis will have to wait until Negro nationalism becomes a mass movement and acquires firmer and more fixed features than it

14 The Negro American Labor Council was constituted for the defense of the demands and rights of black workers in the face of the apathy of leaders of the AFL-CIO.

15 Asa Philip Randolph (1889-1979), Afro-American worker-militant for civil rights, founded the first black trade union in the United States, the NALC. However the NALC remained linked to the AFL-CIO, which did not help its development. In August 1963 he took part in the March on Washington alongside Martin Luther King.

16 George Meany (1894-1980) and Walter Reuther (1907-1970) were respectively president of the two big union confederations, the AFL and the CIO, up until their fusion in 1955. They then became president and vice-president respectively of the new combined organization.

17 Historically, the black nationalist North American movement claiming allegiance to Islam, founded in 1930 and opposed to the integration of blacks in American society. Led by Elijah Muhammad (real name Elijah Poole, 1897-1975) of the black nationalist religious organization Nation of Islam.

18 Robert Franklin Williams (1925-1996), civil rights militant in Monroe (North Carolina), where he organized a dynamic branch of the NAACP. Advocate of self-defense militia, and author of a work summing up his positions: Negroes with Guns (1962).
now displays. Nevertheless, it is already possible to draw a number of conclusions for guidance.

Capitalism segregates the Negroes, confines them in ghettos, builds walls around them and binds them together in common resentment against racial discrimination, proscription, deprivation and abuse. This is the soil in which Negro nationalism is rooted and grows. It is an outgrowth of these conditions, a reaction against them, a way of resisting and fighting them. In the past the hope that these conditions could be eliminated tended to weaken Negro nationalist sentiment and suspend its activity. However, the belief that these conditions will exist in this country forever, or for another lifetime, serves to nourish, strengthen and activate Negro nationalism.

The intensification of separatist moods among Negroes in the Northern cities expresses a rejection of American class society from top to bottom and a strong desire to break free from the evils of that society. It is their verdict that the present “American Way of Life” has nothing worthwhile to offer Negroes. In the absence of a revolutionary labor movement or powerful socialist vanguard, the radicalism of the Northern ghetto masses flows through channels of race-consciousness, repudiating US society as the white man’s world. The urge to tear loose and separate from the social fabric of US capitalism is not far removed from the urge, under different forms, to abolish that system in revolutionary struggle.

The 1948 convention resolution of the Socialist Workers Party noted the appearance and growth of an embryo Negro “nation within the nation.” It is still an embryo today, but bigger and more mature. Racial-national sentiments have been fed and stimulated by the mockery of tokenism at home and the successes of colonial revolution abroad. The Negro is keenly aware that as a second-class citizen he is both a citizen and not a citizen. He sees plausibility in the concept of internal or domestic colonialism, which correctly stresses the many similarities between the capitalist treatment of the Negro people in this country and the imperialist treatment of colonial peoples.

But the American Negro people are in a situation with some unique aspects. They are an oppressed minority without a clearly defined geographical, language or cultural basis for differentiation from their oppressors. Negro nationalism is at this point a broad medium for “self identification,” a method of differentiating a racially oppressed minority from its oppressors and of uniting it ideologically and organizationally to free itself from oppression. Negro nationalism plays a function for the Negro people here in many ways like that which class consciousness plays for the working class.

James Baldwin’s attempt at a definition of nationalism is a useful one to build on. This author said it means, “that a certain group of people, living in a certain place, has decided to take its political destinies into its own hands.” Applied to the United States, as it was meant to be, this means that large numbers of Negroes have decided, and more are in the process of deciding, that they cannot leave their future in the hands of the white oppressors but must unite with other Negroes and decide for themselves what they want in and from the United States.

This consciousness is the basic feature of Negro nationalism today. It is expressed in various ways – most commonly in the stimulation of racial pride, declarations of independence, the desire for Negro leadership and control of the civil rights struggle, mistrust of whites – and it is present to varying degrees in most Negro tendencies, both integrationist and separationist.

Viewed in this light, Negro nationalism, as it now exists, should not be equated with Negro separatism, the tendency that advocates creation of a separate Negro nation. The two are not the same thing. All separatists are nationalists but not all nationalists are separatists. Nationalism expresses the desire of Negroes to decide their destiny, including, among other things, their attitude toward the question of a separate nation. Nationalists want the right to decide their destiny, and to create an independent movement and other conditions that will make it possible for them to decide their destiny. But so far they have not made a choice in favor of a separate nation.

For many Negroes, nationalism is considered and may prove to be a way of uniting the mass of the Negro people and forcing the

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The nationalism of Chiang Kai-shek is the question of separatism for a future stage, neither rejecting nor endorsing it now.

The first big task of the Negro struggle is the mobilization and unification of the Negro masses in an independent movement to fight for their equality – an indispensable condition for an eventual revolutionary alliance of the working class and the Negro people. Negro nationalism is progressive because it contributes to the creation of such an independent Negro movement. It will remain progressive so long as it fulfills that function, whether the struggle be fought along integrationist or separatist lines.

Revolutionary socialists welcome the growth of such Negro nationalism and give its participants wholehearted collaboration in the fight against our common enemies. For us, Negro nationalism and revolutionary socialism are not only compatible but complementary forces that should be welded closer together in thought and action. The common sympathy and support for the colonial revolution and hostility to imperialist domination is an important bond between the two movements.

Revolutionary socialists must be ready to learn from militant Negro tendencies and to absorb everything progressive in their spirit and ideas; at the same time it must never be forgotten that we have things to contribute as well as learn. The nationalist tendencies still lack a comprehensive and realistic program to solve the problems of the Negro people, and many nationalists have confused conceptions. Revolutionary socialists must be simultaneously firm and patient in demonstrating that Marxism, properly understood and applied, is valid and relevant for the Negro struggle – firm because of our confidence in the correctness of the socialist program, patient because we know that the logic of the Negro struggle inevitably leads it into socialist channels.

Nationalism itself is an empty vessel which can be filled with vastly different contents. The nationalism of Chiang Kai-shek is the opposite of that of a Chinese Communist revolutionist or a Fidel Castro. Militant Negro nationalists can have wrong ideas and petty-bourgeois illusions. Negro Marxists have to imbue the nationalist sentiments and struggles of their people with a revolutionary, scientific, anti-capitalist content and direction.

They will be greatly aided in this work by the progress of the colonial revolution. The ideas of socialism are being adopted by more and more of the colonial peoples striving for national and social liberation in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This popularity of Marxist and anti-capitalist doctrines, movements and governments among the non-white races will exert an increasing influence upon the vanguard elements of the Negro struggle here which will lend strength to the positions of the SWP.

Negro socialists must bring forward, as an inspiration and guide for American Negroes, the example of Cuba where the overthrow of capitalism through the socialist revolution has uprooted discrimination and established genuine equality and fraternity of black and white citizens ninety miles from the Southern coastal states.

IV. SEPARATISM AND A SEPARATE NATION

The theoretical position of revolutionary socialism on Negro separatism was first worked out at the Socialist Workers Party convention in 1939. Now, when Black Muslim influence has made separatism a live political issue among many people, it needs to be restated, adapted to current conditions and made unmistakably clear.

In 1939, we foresaw the possibility that the Negro people, as part of their struggle to end centuries of oppression and exploitation, might some day decide that they want a separate nation, controlled and administered by themselves. We said that if this happened, it would settle the long theoretical dispute about whether or not Negroes are a national minority as well as a racial minority, and that we, as supporters of the right of self-determination, would support the Negro demand for a separate nation and do everything in our power to help them obtain it.

22 Fidel Castro (born August 13, 1926), Cuban nationalist leader, one of the main leaders of the Cuban revolution, which overthrew the military dictatorship of General Batista in 1959; head of the Cuban government from 1959 until 2008, when he was replaced for health reasons by his brother Raúl Castro.
23 This refers to the resolution entitled "The Socialist Workers Party and Negro Work", voted by the SWP convention on July 11, 1939, after numerous discussions between SWP leaders and Leon Trotsky. It is reproduced in the works by C.L.R. James under the title The Negro Question (see footnote 19).
In taking this position we did not become advocates of a separate nation, as the Communist Party used to be, nor do we advocate it now. What we advocate is the right of the Negro people to decide this question themselves. All we commit ourselves to do is support their fight to achieve whatever they decide they want, whether it be equality through integration or equality through segregation, or both.

It appeared to us in 1939 that the mass of the Negro people had not yet expressed themselves on this point, or had not expressed themselves definitely. Nine years later, in the resolution adopted at our 1948 convention, we noted that the growing “feeling of racial and national solidarity among the Negro people thus far aims solely at acquiring enough force and momentum to break down the barriers that exclude Negroes from American society, showing few signs of aiming at national separatism.” It was clear that the vast majority of the Negroes were integrationist in the sense that they favored abolition of each and every discriminatory and segregationist device and institution in this country. But we did not take that to mean that the Negro masses had reached a conclusive position for or against separatism. We felt both in 1939 and 1948 that the question was still “open” – that the Negro people might make a different decision about separatism in the future.

By 1963 the situation has changed considerably, but not decisively. On the one hand, the Muslims, the strongest advocates of separatism, have made serious organizational gains and growth of their general influence has been even greater. On the other hand, more Negroes than ever before are actively engaged in assaulting the Jim Crow barriers. If such activity makes them integrationist, it is necessary to point out that a profound division of feeling agitates many Negro integrationists. They have mixed feelings of attraction and repulsion in relation to the Muslims.

In general, Negro thought and discussion about separatism and related questions is much more intense than 15 or 24 years ago. But the mass of the Negro people has not yet taken any settled stand on these questions, and we must still await their definitive decision.

Until the Negro masses decide, the SWP neither advocates nor opposes a separate nation. We defend the right of the Negro people to make such a decision. This means we defend the rights of separatists to meet, speak, write and circulate their views and be free from government or vigilante assaults and frameups. It means refuting the slander that the Muslims and other separatists are “counterparts” of the White Citizens Councils and the Ku Klux Klan. It means countering the widespread but mistaken notion that separation, freely chosen by Negroes, is “equivalent” to segregation imposed by white supremacists.

Our attitude toward separatists, including the Muslims, is a friendly one. We recognize that the mere existence of the Muslims has had healthy effects, pushing rival Negro tendencies to the left and thereby imparting an impetus to even purely integrationist battles. We note with interest that, far from being a hardened sect, the Muslims have shown capacity during the last year to change in a direction that better serves the interests of all Negroes. However, they have still to develop a program of action for the struggles now taking place.

Where we differ with them, we differ in a friendly way, and we seek collaboration with them on mutually acceptable projects. We make it plain that we are not opposed to separation, if that should be the will of the Negro masses. Instead of attacking separatism as “utopian,” we seek to point out the revolutionary implication of the mass struggle for it and urge its advocates to develop radical methods, tactics and programs as the only way to achieve it.

If the Negro people should decide they want to separate, we would openly come out in favor of granting them separation. At the same time we would continue to fight before, during and after any separation which might take place, to abolish all racial inequalities and the cause of such inequalities in the United States. In that sense, we are and will remain integrationists, whatever else happens. We are convinced that the revolutionary struggle for socialism and the establishment of a socialist government will eliminate the basic causes of racial antagonism, and create the conditions for equality and integration of all in a new type of living together.

V. THE CAPITALIST ORIENTATION

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24 The White Citizens Councils formed a White supremacist organization in 1954 mainly in the South of the USA.
25 The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) is a racist organization founded on December 24, 1865. It is responsible for numerous violent attacks and aggressions carried out against Blacks. Largely present in the Southern states.
The future of the Negro struggle depends first of all on what Negroes do about it. It depends on what their allies do – or do not do – about it. And it also depends on what their enemies do about it.

The ruling rich are the foremost enemy of the Negro people. The capitalist class introduced the system of racial oppression in this country, first in the form of slavery; they continued it under other forms after slavery was abolished; and they maintain it today. The rich initiated and have continued racial oppression because it was and is a convenience in the exploitation of labor, a source of super-profit, and a method for dividing the labor force and disrupting its efforts to unite against its exploiters.

That the responsibility for racial oppression rests on the capitalist class is not at all contradicted by the fact that other sections of the population, including the working class, are infected to one degree or another with race prejudices and poisons. If this were not so, Jim Crow could never have existed. But the capitalist system injected these prejudices into the white workers and reinforced them by granting the white workers concessions and privileges at the expense of the Negroes. The chief responsibility belongs on the capitalists, not on the workers who go along with racial discrimination and who are themselves victims as well as beneficiaries of racism. It is necessary to ceaselessly combat racist prejudices and practices of the workers too. Yet we must keep in mind that it is not the workers but the capitalists who have the political and economic power in this country and who control the propaganda-information-education-police apparatuses. It is an incontrovertible fact that the capitalists have used their power to perpetuate rather than abolish racial oppression.

Gradualists, even when forced to admit these historical facts, answer that things are different now or soon will be. They claim that steady and substantial progress has been made in recent years; that the gains already made indicate that this progress will continue indefinitely until it results in the total eradication of the color line; and that this process will be accelerated by the government because of its propaganda needs in the cold war. The evidence does not support these claims.

Progress is actually slow, small and uneven. Moreover, in some areas there is retrogression rather than progress. Average Negro family income in 1962 was 54 percent of average white family income whereas ten years before it had been 57 percent. While the incomes of both groups rose during this decade, that of the whites rose more, and so the income gap has been growing greater, not smaller. The rate of unemployment among Negroes has been around twice that among whites since the end of World War II, which is a greater disproportion than existed during the depression of the 1930s. During recessions the gap grows bigger, reaching a rate 2½ and 3 times that of whites.

Negro children still receive an average of 3½ years less schooling than white children. The proportion of dilapidated housing occupied by Negroes is more than five times as big as that occupied by whites. On average, Negroes still die seven years sooner than whites; discrimination from the cradle to the grave costs the Negro this much of his life span. There is still not a state in the country where a Negro may not be subjected at any time to humiliation, abuse, or worse.

The real trend is exemplified by the school situation in the South since the Supreme Court decision in 1954. Its restricted application is deliberately obscured since schools are classified as “desegregated” if one or a handful of Negroes is admitted. The fact is that after nine years less than 8 percent of Southern Negro children attend the same school as whites. At this rate it will take another century before the Southern school system is open to Negroes.

Where small gains have actually been made, their benefits have not been equally distributed. Some Negroes have been able to obtain jobs in areas previously closed to them (professional, clerical, white collar) and to attain the income and status of the Negro middle class (which is proportionately smaller, more insecure and less well paid than the white middle class). At the other pole, conditions of large numbers of Negroes have deteriorated badly because of unemployment and automation. Negro workers are hardest hit by the effects of automation. Overall, the gains of the more fortunate minority of Negroes are more than offset by the increasingly chronic poverty and deprivation imposed on the majority of the Negro people.

Studying the present trends in the light of the past, revolutionary socialists conclude that racial oppression can be abolished in the United States only if the present capitalist profit system is eliminated and replaced by a system based on production for use. Critics of this position reply
that history has provided examples of capitalist countries relatively free of racism. Therefore, they conclude, racism is not an indispensable component of all capitalist societies and so American capitalism can be rid of this feature without necessarily abolishing capitalism itself.

Such thinking is misleading because it is based solely on generalities. The SWP conclusion is based on a concrete analysis of the nature and contradictions of the specific capitalist structure in the United States. This has had a history different from other capitalist countries, out of which specific economic and political relations developed, out of which specific interests, needs and institutions arose and still flourish. This particular capitalism, the American, may be forced to modify some of the features of its race system. But the ruling class will never willingly abolish it because it has too much of a stake in its maintenance, because it knows that attempts to uproot it in the South would inevitably give birth to a regional political revolution that would tend to become transformed into a social revolution.

American capitalism is not just tarred with racism. Its very roots are inextricably intertwined with racial oppression and it knows that pulling up the latter would endanger the former. To be sure, Jim Crow genuinely embarrasses the American ruling class in its foreign relations and diplomatic maneuvers. But it would rather go on being embarrassed than to risk the consequences of any serious effort to get rid of the cause of the embarrassment.

There is no evidence in anything happening now that the capitalists or their government intend to eradicate racial oppression in our time. Even their spokesmen who deplore the situation do not believe it will be eliminated in this century. Their real perspective is not to abolish racism, but modify it, reform it, remove some of its secondary features, repeal the laws that make segregation mandatory—and to do this little at a pace so slow it will extend over several generations in a way acceptable to the Southern white supremacists.

At the very most, the capitalist goal is to establish throughout the country relations between the races like those that now exist in the North — where formal segregation is not sanctioned or is even prohibited by law, but where the rankest segregation and inequality exist in practice. They hope that this gradual process of reform will enable them to claim abroad that American democracy is improving race relations at home; that it will avert explosions in the South that could spread to the North; and that it will contain Negro discontent and rebelliousness at home.

They are also prepared to grant additional posts and concessions to a thin layer of the Negro middle class in the hope of using them to restrain the Negro people as a whole. Where they cannot buy off opponents, they will use harassment, intimidation and persecution to suppress and break up Negro groups, which refuse to submit to the capitalist power structure. The best American capitalism holds out for the mass of the Negro people is not the prospect of equality in this generation or the next, but the promise that formal inequality may be removed some time in the remote future.

VI. THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND THE NEGRO STRUGGLE

Historically, it has been shown that the more radical and democratic the leadership of organized labor is, the more it seeks to wipe out racial barriers and integrate Negro workers in the unions, to solidarize itself with the Negro people as an oppressed minority and to promote a fighting labor-Negro alliance against their common enemies.

The opposite is also true. When conservative or liberal-sounding bureaucrats dominate the labor movement, their main concern is the preservation and expansion of their own privileges and powers. They do everything they can to avoid fighting the capitalists about anything; they subordinate and betray the interests of the union rank and file, the unorganized workers and all other oppressed groups; and they are indifferent or hostile to the Negro struggle for equality.

The role of the labor movement is one of the crucial differences between the 1930s and the 1960s, and it bears directly on the present moods and activities in the Negro community.

The youth of today find it hard to appreciate how profoundly the rise of the CIO affected race relations. It brought about the 20th century’s first major progressive shakeup and reversal in these relations. Until then, discrimination and segregation had been growing

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26 The CIO split off from the AFL in 1935. Its promoters wanted to build industry-based trade unions, while the AFL organized workers on a craft basis.
worse and harsher in every area, including the old AFL unions, which had always turned their backs on the Negroes. Then, with the coming of the CIO, for the first time in many decades, the Negro worker saw a powerful hand held out to him and an invitation extended to enter the house of labor, or at least one floor. Despite previous painful and discouraging experiences with whites, the Negro workers rallied magnificently to the new industrial unions and played a key role in smashing the open shop27 in basic industry. No other group was more loyal or devoted.

This was not because the CIO, even in its best days, fulfilled all its obligations to Negroes. But, unlike every other major force, it welcomed the Negro. This held out the promise that the growing unfavorable trend of race relations in the country could be reversed. Although the Negroes never won complete equality in the unions, through their own efforts and with the aid of the CIO they did gain a strong foothold in the unions and industry, from which they could exert leverage for further gains. Before the stagnation of the labor movement set in during the late 1940s the Negroes had reached their present imposing numbers inside organized labor (1½ million). Equally important, the CIO, by its very existence, served as a shield behind which the Negro community as a whole was able to consolidate its forces, develop new and more independent demands, and lay the ground for the struggles of today and tomorrow.

Much has changed in the last quarter century. With the aid of the government and the employers, the labor bureaucrats have house-broken most of the unions and decimated or destroyed radical influence in them. Militant oppositional groups, which were usually the Negro’s closest ally inside the unions, are now absent or impotent. The labor movement has been on the defensive for years. The capitalist-minded bureaucrats are guided by class collaboration, not class struggle. In practice, this means not fighting the employers but seeking deals with them – sometimes to preserve the conditions of the older, more privileged, higher seniority workers and always at the expense of the weaker and most exploited workers, of whom the Negroes and other minorities form a large part.

The bureaucrats pledged to eliminate racism when the AFL and CIO merged in 1955. But, as with every other progressive task, they have given only lip service to this pledge. They even blarne the rank and file union members, rather than themselves, for its non-fulfillment. They simply cannot understand why the Negroes are demanding more from the labor movement than they did when they first joined it in the 1930s. Some labor bureaucrats harbor racial prejudices, and all of them, like their liberal friends, are guilty of paternalism. When the Meany and Reuthers instruct the Negroes to take it easy and wait, and this doesn’t work, they react to the demand for equality with outright hostility or tokenism. Their only real interest in Negroes is collecting their dues and keeping them tied to the Democratic Party.

Inside the unions some Negro members have become discouraged or demoralized and abandoned the fight against the bureaucracy, as some white militants have done. Negroes outside the unions confuse the labor bureaucracy with the labor movement as such. They fail to recognize that millions of white workers have reason to hate the bureaucrats too and will seize the first chance they get to throw the bureaucrats off the backs of all the workers, white and black.

Some Negro nationalists are disposed to declare the unions “dead” and write them off. They disregard the fact that on the surface the labor movement appeared to be even deader in the late 1920s and early 1930s, not long before the upsurge of industrial unionism. Also evident is a tendency to counterpose independent Negro organization to a labor-Negro alliance, as though these two things were in contradiction, and even to reject the desirability and possibility of a militant labor-Negro alliance. The mobilization and merger of the forces needed to eliminate racism are considerably complicated by these feelings and beliefs, for which the labor bureaucracy must be held primarily responsible.

However, the consequences of the default of the union leadership have not all been negative. Awareness that the labor bureaucracy cannot be counted on to defend the Negro workers or the Negro people has strengthened the desire of Negro workers for their own means of defense and advancement inside the labor movement. This is reflected in the formation of the Negro American Labor Council and in the hundreds of formal or informal Negro caucuses or clubs inside local unions. Outside the labor movement it has been a big factor in stimulating nationalist sentiment and activity, and generally

27Open shop: enterprise in which the trade unions do not exercise control over recruitment, as opposed to the closed shop where the trade unions control recruitment and enforce union membership.
strengthening the feelings of self-reliance and the trend toward independent action and struggle.

Unlike capital, labor has been and is capable of playing differing roles in relation to the Negro struggle, depending on which forces are at the head of the unions. Revolutionary-socialists recognize that the labor movement in the grip of its conservative and capitalist-minded bureaucracy is increasingly remote from the rank and file and is shamefully defaulting on its responsibilities to the Negro people.

But the unions don’t belong to the bureaucrats, who have usurped the power they hold and betray the ranks they are supposed to represent. As happened after the 1920s, we anticipate that the union movement will be transformed and radicalized again, and at a higher level than in the 1930s, by the effects on the working class of the crises and contradictions of capitalism and the failure of non-radical methods to solve the problems of automation, unemployment, speedup, inflation, insecurity and the war danger.

The coming radicalization of the labor movement will be accompanied by and accomplished through the creation of a left wing in the unions. This cannot be some vaguely “progressive” formation interested mainly in winning union offices, but a group that will be distinguished by class struggle policies, an independent labor party orientation, and active support for the Negro struggle inside and outside the unions. Militant Negroes will contribute to this big change both by forming their own groups in the unions and helping to build and be part of a left wing, or closely connected with it. To abstain from either of these tasks would be to insure the continued dominance of the labor bureaucracy, at the expense of the living conditions and rights of 1½ million Negro union members, 6½ million other Negro workers who want to be union members, and the Negro people as a whole.

VII. INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION

The Negro struggle is above all a political struggle – that is, its solution requires political action. The coming labor-Negro alliance will operate in many areas and through many forms, but above all it will be a political alliance. And yet it is precisely in the field of politics that up to now practically all tendencies in the Negro movement are weakest and least independent, both in theory and practice.

Some tendencies ignore politics, but politics do not ignore them. The effect of political abstention is to leave the monopoly of political power in the hands of capitalist parties and demagogic politicians who use that power against the Negro people. Others recognize the importance of politics and participate in politics – but only in the two major parties that are opposed to Negro equality. Among politically active Negroes are some whose main interest is in electing Negroes to office. But these are repeatedly frustrated because the Negro Democrats or Republicans whom they help elect usually turn out to be captives and apologists for the corrupt capitalist political machines rather than consistent spokesmen for the Negro people.

Most current tendencies reflect, to one degree or another, the desire of the Negro masses to determine their own destiny – to have their own organizations, their own leaders, their own strategy, tactics and programs. But few of these tendencies have expressed a similarly independent spirit in the vital field of politics by breaking with the parties of their oppressors and organizing to challenge their political monopoly. Yet such a break and such a challenge are implicit in everything that has happened up to now. It is contradictory and self-defeating to talk about Freedom Now while accepting the right of the white supremacists and gradualists to jointly wield the political power of this country.

The idea of a Negro party, a civil rights party or an equal rights party, is not a new one. Representative Adam Clayton Powell has talked about it on and off during recent years. Liberator, the Liberation Committee for Africa magazine, wrote about the need for an “Afro-American political party” during the 1962 election campaign. More recently Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Muslims, has advocated that Negroes run and elect their own candidates to public office because “there will be no real freedom for the so-called Negro in America until he elects his own political leaders and his own candidates.” William Worthy has spoken along similar lines.

The basis for such a party already exists. Millions of Negroes are concentrated in the big cities of the country, North and South. United in a party of their own, they are so situated

28 Adam Clayton Powell (1908-1972), Democrat congressman elected to the House of Representatives in 1943 for the Harlem quarter of New York, becoming the first Afro-American to hold an influential position in Congress.
29 William Worthy (1921-2014), American journalist and militant. He notably worked for The Baltimore Afro-American and also took part in the civil rights movement.
geographically that they could sweep the elections in dozens of congressional districts. They could send a bigger bloc of Negroes to Washington than they did in Reconstruction days and elect a sizable body of state and city legislators who would for the first time be beholden to no one but the Negro community. Both nationally and locally they could hold the legislative balance of power and be in a position to compel bigger concessions from the dominant parties. More fundamentally, with a party of their own Negroes could take a lead in undermining and changing the whole power structure.

The immense implications of such an independent Negro course in politics illustrate graphically the truth of the revolutionary-socialist analysis that the independent Negro struggle tends to stimulate, spur and shake up the major forces in the country. The creation of a Negro party running its own candidates would rock the whole political structure to its foundations. It would throw the Democratic Party into a crisis. Without the majority of Negro votes which it now gets, it could never again hope to hold national power. The only place it could go would be down. Organized labor would be faced with an excruciating dilemma too. Its coalition with the Democrats is justified on the ground that the Democrats can “win.” But when it becomes plain that they cannot win, the unions would be forced to reconsider their whole political policy. Advocates of a labor break with the old parties would get a bigger and better hearing from the ranks. Thus the creation of a Negro party would benefit not only the Negro but his present and potential allies.

The Socialist Workers Party contends that racism, like unemployment, exploitation and war, can be abolished in this country only by independent political action aimed at taking control of the government out of the hands of the capitalists and their parties. As a step in this direction, we have long advocated that the unions break from the Democratic Party and form an independent labor party that would seek to politically unite workers, farmers and Negroes and elect their representatives to office. In addition, and for the same reason, we have also endorsed and supported representatives of the Negro community whenever they have run for office independently of and in opposition to the old parties, even when they were not socialists.

Extending this policy in the light of current developments, we publicly express our readiness to support and collaborate with any Negro party or Freedom Now Party that runs candidates of its own in opposition to the capitalist parties and seeks to elect representatives whose primary allegiance will be to the Negro community. Our support of such a party in no way conflicts with our own independent socialist political campaigning or with our continued advocacy of a labor party. On the contrary, we believe that a Negro party, a socialist party, and a labor party would find much in common from the very beginning, would work together for common ends, and would tend in the course of common activity to establish close organizational ties or even merge into a single or federated party. Revolutionary socialists don’t care whether capitalism and racism are abolished by a single party or by a combination of parties, just so long as they are abolished.

VIII. STRATEGY OF THE NEGRO STRUGGLE

In previous convention resolutions, the SWP predicted that the Negro movement would precede and outpace the labor and anti-capitalist movements. This prediction was based on the fact that while the Negro community is predominantly proletarian, the Negro people are more than just another more heavily exploited section of the working class, and the Negro movement is more than just a part of the general working-class movement.

As an oppressed minority, the history of the Negroes is different, their position in society is special, their consciousness is influenced by racial, national and international as well as class factors, and they have developed their own standards, their own methods of action and their own forms of struggle. Although they are a minority numerically, they are a compact minority, knitted together by capitalist segregation in the ghetto and by a common sense of resentment against injustice, and they often play a role disproportionate to their numbers, a vanguard role. This prediction has been strikingly confirmed by recent events, which sees the Negroes in motion and out front while the labor movement is standing still and lagging behind.

Previous SWP resolutions have also analyzed the special factors tending to radicalize
the Negro movement. The Negro struggle is the struggle of an oppressed minority for democratic rights, for equality. But because the American capitalist class will not grant equality, it tends to merge with the wider struggle for the abolition of capitalism, for socialism. Under the banner of democratic rights, the Negroes learn to reject the myths about American democratic capitalism, and through their own experiences in fighting for democracy they reach deeply radical conclusions, frequently ahead of other sections of the potentially anti-capitalist forces. This analysis has also been verified and validated by recent developments which find the Negro movement becoming radicalized, rejecting gradualism and passing beyond liberalism, which is still the dominant ideology of the labor movement.

These disparities between the Negroes’ growing activity and radicalization and labor’s relative inactivity and conservatism have at this stage raised a number of complicated problems. In addition, they have produced some questioning and even rejection in certain nationalist circles about a third aspect of the SWP’s traditional analysis of the Negro struggle, expressed in the following perspective: while the labor and Negro movements march along their own paths, they do march to a common destination, and the freedom of the Negroes from oppression and of the workers from exploitation can be achieved only through the victory of their common struggle against capitalism.

Our differences with such nationalists do not concern the facts. We both agree that a gap has appeared between the Negro movement and the labor movement and that present relations between them are strained or cool. We disagree over the meaning of these facts, their significance for the future, what to do about them. Since the relations between these two movements are the key to the future of this country, and through it of the world, they deserve the most sober appraisal and searching study.

The fact that the tempos of development of the two movements are uneven is neither new nor really surprising. Since their origins and histories are different, they have rarely marched in step. At the present time it is not the Negro movement that is laggard or out of step but organized labor. The complications occur, not because Negro radicalization is premature or unwarranted, but because labor radicalization has been retarded and is long overdue.

Faced with the disparity of development between the two movements and the frictions generated by it, the liberals do not prod the labor leaders to hurry up, go ahead, initiate a new course. They tell the Negroes to slow down and wait. The union leaders and Negro gradualists offer the same advice. And even some radicals and ex-radicals do the same in effect when they exaggerate the dangers of Negroes “going it alone.”

But the Negro movement will not wait, should not wait, and should push ahead with an expansion of its independent action. To do anything else would set back the Negro cause for many years. We say this without the slightest modification of our fundamental view that the Negroes cannot win their goal of equality in this country without an alliance with the working class.

Although Negro independence and radicalization may not produce large-scale common action with organized labor under present circumstances, it will hasten common action eventually. In previous SWP resolutions, we explained that because the Negroes are doubly exploited, their struggles have exceptional effects on the social and political life of this country. Their fight for simple democratic rights tends to upset the status quo. Their special demands introduce unsettling elements into the consciousness of the working class as a whole, disturbing the relations between the classes and inside the classes. Their independent action serves to spur, stimulate, awaken, excite, inspire, divide, unite, and set into motion other, bigger forces.

Correctly appraised, the independent course of the Negro movement, and even its essentially nationalist aspects, does not signify a permanent and principled repudiation of a labor-Negro alliance. What militant Negroes object to is any alliance based on subordination or gradualism in which the Negroes are merely a junior partner supplying manpower but having little to say about the policies and tempo pursued by the team. What they want is an alliance that will include Freedom Now as one of its main demands and in which the Negroes will have an equal voice in setting policy.

There is no inconsistency, in logic or practice, between organizing or reorganizing the Negro movement along independent lines and achieving alliances with other sections of the population. Many Negroes view doing the first job
as an indispensable condition for successfully doing the second. They believe – correctly, in our opinion – that they must first unite, shape and orient their own movement. Only then will they be able to bring about an alliance of equals, where they can be reasonably sure that their demands and needs cannot be neglected or betrayed by their allies. This does not mean that they cannot begin forging links with the most progressive elements in the labor movement even now. But they feel that if any temporary conflict arises between these two tasks priority should be given to the imperative need of creating an independent Negro movement.

The strategy of the Negro struggle in the coming period can be expected, if our analysis of the past and the present is correct, to follow the course of uniting, dividing and uniting.

Numerically, Negroes are today about one-ninth of the population. (One-fifth at the time of the American Revolution, one-seventh at the time of the Civil War.) For some, this is a reason or pretext for the feeling that there is nothing much Negroes can do until the white majority changes its racial attitudes; Negroes can only follow, not lead. This is just another way of saying that the Negroes must – wait.

Revolutionary socialists emphatically reject this approach. Our analysis has demonstrated that the Negro has a vanguard role to play, that his independent struggle will set other currents into motion, and that the worst thing he can do is wait. This is one of the telling differences between a revolutionary approach and a liberal approach, however the latter may be dressed up. Being a minority is not a reason for waiting, but a reason for developing a course of action and program that takes this fact into account and finds ways of overcoming it.

Throughout American history militant Negroes have always understood that their progress depends on their own readiness and ability to struggle. The tactics of today’s struggle are necessarily different in this country than in countries like South Africa or Angola or Kenya, where black people are the great majority, and where simple majority rule can mean an end to racial oppression. But here, as in Africa, the liberation of the Negro people requires that the Negroes organize themselves independently, and control their own struggle, and not permit it to be subordinated to any other consideration or interest.

This means that the Negroes must achieve the maximum unity of their own forces – organizational unity, in a strong and disciplined nationwide movement or congress of organizations, and ideological unity, based on defeating, exposing and isolating gradualism and other tendencies emanating from their white oppressors. This phase of the process is now beginning.

Having united their own forces, the independent Negro movement will then probably undertake the tasks of division and alliance. It will seek ways to split the white majority so that the Negro disadvantage of being a numerical minority can be compensated for by division and conflict on the other side.

That has happened at earlier crucial points in American history. When the whites became divided between revolutionists and Tories31 in the American Revolution, the Negroes allied themselves with the former, and were able to gain emancipation from slavery in many Northern states. In the first half of the 19th century the independent struggles of the Negroes – slave insurrections, mass escapes via the Underground Railway32, sabotage, etc. – helped to widen the breach between the North and South and prepare the way for the Civil War. In the Civil War itself the Negroes threw their weight on the Northern side, pressured the North into accepting an emancipation policy, and provided the military balance of power. In the 1930s, when a division among the whites occurred along classic class lines, the Negroes drove in the wedge by giving overwhelming support to the CIO, helping to batter down the open shop and effect their own entry into the labor movement.

In each of these cases, the process of social division was accompanied by or led to a process of social and political alliance in action. That is how we see the future too. United, the Negro people through their independent struggle will help to divide the white population – between those who most benefit from racism and those whose interests are really damaged by racism. In the process of this struggle, the Negroes will both seek and find alliances. The major one will be with an insurgent working class, and especially with its most anti-capitalist forces.

31 The name Tories was given to ‘loyalist’ colonialists who took the side of the British Crown against the American Revolution.
32 Very efficient clandestine railway network which allowed thousands of slaves to escape with the help of anti-slavery activists, present throughout the territory of the United States as far as Canada.
The general alliance between the labor movement and the Negro fighters for liberation can be prepared for and preceded by the cementing of firm working unity between the vanguard of the Negro struggle and the socialist vanguard of the working class represented by the Socialist Workers Party. This is the primary task of the SWP in the present period of the Freedom Now movement.

**IX. The Role and Tasks of the Socialist Workers Party**

The role of the Socialist Workers Party is to assemble and programatically equip the forces that will lead the coming American Revolution to abolish capitalism and racism. This function is indispensable because American capitalism is so powerful and racism is so deeply rooted in it. If the SWP did not exist it would be necessary to form another organization to carry out this function, which no other existing political party, big or small, now aspires to fulfill.

The SWP operates in an arena wider than the Negro struggle, narrowly considered. For militant Negroes concerned first and foremost with the Negro struggle, this may at first appear as a disadvantage or liability. It is neither.

The SWP agrees that the first task of Negroes is to organize themselves independently. But the Negro movement does not and cannot exist in isolation from other forces and conflicts at home and abroad. The broader perspective and concern of the SWP with the totality of social struggle is an invaluable asset. Its revolutionary activity in the labor and other mass movements provides a means of enlisting allies and neutralizing potential enemies of the Negro movement in both its present formative and its future stages, and of connecting the class struggle with the Negro struggle in such a way as to strengthen both.

The SWP seeks to equip both revolutionary whites and Negroes with the best set of scientific tools yet devised to change society – Marxism. Drawn from and fusing the lessons of American and world experiences, Marxism is constantly enriched, refined and rendered more effective by the experience of new struggles. It illuminates the causes of racism and points to the method for eradicating them. The SWP has long sought to “Americanize” Marxism (that is, to apply it to American conditions and use American conditions to modernize and expand Marxism itself). In order to accomplish this, it must now also work to “Afro-Americanize” Marxism (that is, apply it to the specific conditions of the Negro people and use the experience of their struggle to further concretize and enrich Marxism).

The SWP believes and acts on the belief that the working class cannot achieve its aims without the Negro people achieving theirs. The American revolution for a socialist democracy cannot succeed unless it is based on an equal and mutually acceptable partnership between the working class and the Negro people. It is this belief, deeply ingrained and expressed in the SWP’s program and practice, rather than any written or verbal assurances or pledges, which affords an objective basis for regarding the SWP as different from other organizations most of whose members are white.

Its unblemished record in the class struggle and the Negro struggle during hot wars and cold, its uncompromising attitude toward capitalism and all its agencies and ideas, have earned the SWP the right not to be considered as just another party, or even just another radical party. Unlike the Communist Party, the SWP has never called on Negroes to subordinate, suspend or give up their struggle for any other interest or cause, national or international. Unlike the Socialist Party, the SWP has never urged Negroes to support any of the political parties of their oppressors, and its opposition to gradualism in the Negro struggle is matched by its opposition to that same policy in all other fields. Unlike the Socialist Labor Party, the SWP does not belittle, stand aside from and turn its back on the immediate and partial struggles of the Negroes, but views them as a necessary and hopeful link to future, more fundamental struggles and participates in them actively and wholeheartedly. White or black, those who understand the need for a revolutionary-socialist party will find the genuine article in the SWP.

The present tasks of the SWP in connection with the Negro struggle for liberation are:

1. To better educate the entire membership; give ourselves a deeper and more sensitive understanding of the feelings, aspirations and needs of the Negro people; become more closely acquainted with their history, their current tendencies and organizations, the obstacles they face; above all, absorb, steep ourselves in the revolutionary character of their struggle, so that it becomes and remains a central feature of our work at all times.
In this way we can inoculate ourselves against paternalism and other conscious or unconscious manifestations of the racial pressures that capitalist society brings to bear on everyone, even within the revolutionary party dedicated to ending capitalism.

2. To provide, through the party leadership, permanent help, guidance, coordination, encouragement and expansion of our work in the Negro struggle.

3. To devote more attention, energies and forces to the Negro struggle.

a) While our white members cannot aspire to leadership of Negro organizations, they can play important auxiliary roles there when permitted to join and can help our Negro members when not permitted to join. Their direct participation in the struggle is doubly important in branches where we have few or no Negro members, since this is one way of contacting and recruiting Negro members. White members have the duty to fight against racism wherever they are and can greatly promote the party’s work by fulfilling this duty. White members in the unions have the vital tasks of combating inequality on the job and at the hiring gate, supporting battles for Negro representation at all levels of union leadership, helping to build a left wing unequivocally committed to aiding the Negro struggle, working for labor collaboration with existing Negro movements and wherever possible persuading the unions to initiate such collaboration.

b) Just as most workers in the party are expected to work in their unions and most students to work in campus organizations, so most of our Negro members will belong to Negro organizations, which they seek to build along militant lines. They work to unite the Negro community around a Freedom Now program. They join and help to promote independent Negro electoral activities. If members of unions, they help to form Negro groups and a broad left wing in the unions, and whether union members or not they propose collaboration between the labor and Negro movements whenever feasible. Negro Marxists have irreplaceable functions to perform in the struggle of their people. They serve as a two-way channel of communication between the movements of the Negro masses and the conscious struggle for a Socialist America. In the Negro community they popularize the ideas and proposals of revolutionary socialism. With the help of Marxist methods, they exercise their rights, as Negroes, to help form the ideology of their race, including its attitudes toward integration and separation. In the SWP they strive to equip themselves for the role of revolutionary leadership in the mass movements and remain alert to see that the party as a whole understands and pays the necessary attention to the problems of the Negro struggle.

4. To expand and strengthen the party’s Negro cadre and forces in the Negro organizations and the civil rights movements, by:

a) Recruiting revolutionary Negroes and helping to train them for leadership in the party and mass movements.

b) Bringing more of our present Negro membership into the party leadership at all levels.

c) Widening our contacts among individual Negro radicals and collaborating with them closely and fraternally if they decide to form radical or socialist groups of their own.

d) Recruiting revolutionary whites, especially youth, like the Freedom Riders33 34 who are already engaged in courageous struggles for civil rights.

5. To develop, in collaboration with other Negro militants, a series of demands and proposals which will connect the needs of the struggle at its present stage with its ultimate aims. The proposals for a thirty-hour week at forty-hours pay and a Freedom Now party should figure prominently in such a program today.

6. To expand and improve the party press’s treatment of the Negro struggle and expand the circulation of our literature among Negro militants.

The seriousness with which we apply ourselves to these tasks will be a test of our capacity as a revolutionary party.

July 1963

33 Freedom Riders: groups of youths – both white and black, in equal numbers and often from the North, -- who waged a campaign for civil rights in the South. They travelled by bus in order to put to the test a Supreme Court ruling (Boynton v. Virginia), which outlawed segregated public transport.
The Great March on Washington, on Tuesday August 27, 1963: view from the Lincoln Memorial toward the Washington Monument.
40 years after the adoption of the Portuguese Republic Constitution, written two years after the start of the April 25th 1974 revolution, our review deals with a theme already addressed several times in former issues (cf. La Vérité/The Truth n°9 of April 1994 and La Vérité/The Truth n°86 of June 2015).

In the articles mentioned above we very clearly characterised the fact that in 1974 in Portugal a proletarian revolution had started. It may be underlined that we were the only political force to characterise it as such – both internationally and in Portugal. And the Constitution of April 1976 is contradictory: on the one hand it reflects the intense struggle of the working class and population outside the Constituent Assembly (from factories to hospitals, from the country to the cities, from schools to army barracks); and on the other hand it also reflects the ways the bourgeoisie was seeking to reconstruct the apparatus of its State that had been dismantled by the revolution.

La Vérité

PORTUGAL:
42 YEARS OF REVOLUTION
AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

FROM REVOLUTION...

42 years ago, on April 25 1974, in Portugal a proletarian revolution started the last to date proletarian revolution in Europe.

42 years ago, the people took to the streets to overthrow Salazar’s regime –the oldest dictatorship in Europe –which for 48 years had repressed workers and silenced the people, had sent thousands of young people to fight the colonial war (1), had forced hundreds of thousands of workers to emigrate (seeking better living conditions) or to go into exile (in order to flee from repression and torture by the Pide (2).

It is not surprising therefore that the people and the youth, thirsting for freedom, peace, bread and democracy, seized the opportunity opened by the military coup and took to the streets demanding what had so far been denied them, demanding all of that and more: to take their own destiny into their own hands:

- they invaded the Pide premises and arrested its agents;
- they unlocked prisons, freed political prisoners and put in their place “Pides” and saboteur capitalists and bankers;
- they dismissed (“in order to clean up”) the “heads” from public services who had collaborated with the Pide;
- they demanded the end of the colonial war, the independence of the colonies and the return of all soldiers who had been sent there;
- they demanded the end of censorship and freedom of the press;
- they expelled employers and management, sabotaging the economy, from companies and banks, by transferring management control to Workers Commissions (CT) elected by general assemblies within the firms – these were true double power organs ;
- they occupied un-tilled fields (3) and they organized production and distribution of agricultural goods through Agricultural Cooperatives elected by agricultural workers ;
- they occupied unoccupied buildings and houses and they created Housing Cooperatives ;
- they placed public bodies at the service of the citizens:
- they gave young people and adults free access to education, and free access to public health for all the population;
- they created a universal system of social security, etc.

42 years ago an entire people rose and was on the move; it created its own democratic power and representation organs (CT), it set up the beginnings of the foundation of a new society – a socialist society.

1 Colonial war against the African peoples of Angola, Guinea/Cape Verde and Mozambique.
2 Pide: Salazar’s abhorrent political police. It arrested and tortured thousands of workers and political activists.
3 In large agricultural estates (“latifundias”), situated in Alentejo, in the south of Portugal.
...TO COUNTER-REVOLUTION

On November 25th 1975 American imperialism (in conjunction with the Kremlin bureaucracy and the Portuguese bourgeoisie) – with the complicity of the traditional parties of the labour movement (PS and PCP) – in order to block the way to the Portuguese revolution, fomented a counter-revolutionary military coup aimed at destroying the conquests obtained, and forcing the labour movement out of the positions it occupied.

In spite of the reactionary nature and the purpose of the coup instigators – to ban trade unions and workers political parties – the result of the coup was limited; such was the balance of power between the classes. In spite of the checking influence of November 25th 1975, the bourgeoisie and imperialism were not able to do away with the working class’s conquests and the forms of revolutionary organization; these remained intact. In this context the Constituent Assembly (with a majority of PS and PCP MPs) carried on elaborating the constitution of April 1976, writing in these conquests and forms of revolutionary organization of the working class.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL TEXT...

As a result and a reflection of the revolutionary period that was still very present, the 1976 Constitution included and established fundamental freedoms and guarantees, economic rights such as the nationalisation of strategic sectors of the economy (banks, insurance, water, electricity, transport...) and its irreversible character; social rights such as universal rights to housing, health, education; labour rights such as the right to strike, the banning of "lock-outs", workers’ rights to demonstrate, to assemble and to organize in trade unions and Workers Commissions.

In the 1976 text the Constitution established the transformation of Portugal "into a society without classes" and it asserted its "aim to insure transition towards socialism" through "the democratic exercise of power by the working classes."

In its form the text was an "offense" to the parties of the bourgeoisie. This is why they have constantly presented the revision of the Constitution as one of their main political demands.

From 1976 up to now the Constitution has been submitted to a whole series of constitutional revisions aimed at permitting the privatisation of nationalised sectors (banks, insurance, electricity...) and the transposition "within internal law" of the (...) “dispositions of the treaties governing the European Union (...), inasmuch as this supremacy of the European Union laws do not contradict the (...)” “fundamental principles of the legal democratic State”.

In the course of the last 40 years the Constitution has remained an "obstacle" for the Portuguese bourgeoisie (in spite of seven revisions adapting it to market economy and to the European Union during that period).

In a distorted manner, political "struggle" in Parliament around the Constitution reflects the conflicting interests underlying class struggle. Workers and the population cling to the rights, freedoms and guarantees inscribed in the Constitution, to use it in their resistance and mobilisation against the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, successive governments and the forces of the bourgeoisie and of imperialism demand the annulment of the rights, guarantees and social conquests preserved in the Constitution. We are undoubtedly for the defence of rights, freedoms, guarantees and other conquests, which are an anchor point for the emancipation of the working class. But we do not confuse the defence of these conquests with the Constitution that records them. But even though the Constitution of 1976 is not our constitution, we are not indifferent to the bourgeoisie’s attacks against the conquests recorded in it.

...AND THE ROLE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL TRIBUNAL!

The Portuguese bourgeoisie has never given up its aim: the suppression from the constitutional text of the articles that consecrate, even though in a distorted manner, the conquests of the revolution (the social functions of the State and the labour rights).

Since it could not succeed in doing this without passing an agreement with the PS (4), the PSD-CDS coalition, using the “state of emergency” and the implementation of the Troika “Memorandum”, used the absolute majority it had in Parliament at the time in order to obtain, in absentia and against constitutional principles, a whole set of laws that were the legal basis for pursuing the destruction of social conquests.

They started with attacks against labour laws. A substantial part of Labour Law was to be abrogated. In its stead, the law on collective lay-offs and the law making collective agreements obsolete were strengthened. Half reduced overtime pay. Pensions were reduced drastically. The tax contribution for workers (IRS) was substantially increased, while that of employers (IRC) was reduced. After impairing the status of civil servants, the government proceeded to lay them off by tens of thousands. The dismantlement of the National Health Service, of Social Security and public education was started with financial cuts in these sectors. The government lost control over strategic public companies and it privatised others by selling them off to big national and foreign economic groups.

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4 Constitutional revisions require a two-third majority in Parliament; this is why without an agreement with the PS, the PSD and the CDS were incapable of achieving the revision of the Constitution by themselves.
During the four and half years of right-wing government majority (PSD-CDS) there was a marked constant resistance and mobilisation of the workers against these attacks; the government was several times in danger of being overthrown, if the leaders of the labour movement had so wanted. In this process PS, PCP and BE (Left Block) MPs addressed the Constitutional Tribunal (TC) concerning the unconstitutional measures taken by the government.

Some of the TC decisions (“grounds of principle”) blocked some of the government’s attacks; this was the case in 2012, concerning scrapping holiday and Christmas bonus for civil servants and pensioners; in 2013 the TC ruled as unconstitutional the enforcement of what was called “extraordinary solidarity contribution” (CES) to pensioners receiving over 1350 euros a month.

Yet though the Constitutional Tribunal played an important role in the resistance of workers against attacks, the deciding action, which undermined the strength of the PSD-CDS government, was the mobilisation of the population and of the working class.

Though we are not unconcerned with the conditions of the development of our class’s struggle, we do not underestimate decisions taken by the TC. This is why we support its decisions “clamping down” certain laws and attacks against the working class.

This position does not mean we defend the TC. We do not defend the TC (5), for it has also adopted contradictory and hieratic measures such as allowing unconstitutional laws in the name of the “financial adjustment” imposed by the “Troika”.

The leaders of the labour movement have used TC decisions to try and convince workers that the TC was the only force that could face up to the government and to the President of the Republic Cavaco Silva (6).

In so doing the PS and the PCP, aided by the BE, shirked their own responsibilities and gave the TC the role that should in fact be their own.

They transferred on the TC their own responsibility of forcing the government to step back from the attacks on Constitutional rights; by doing so they sought to minimise the importance of the working class as the determining force in the struggle to defend these conquests.

**THE IMPORTANT MOMENTS OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE “TROIKA” AND AGAINST THE PSD-CDS GOVERNMENT**

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5 The Constitutional Tribunal (TC) is an organ of the bourgeois State.

6 Cavaco Silva (former Prime Minister and former leader of the PSD), President of the Republic until January 2016, preceded the present President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who was also elected thanks to the division between the PS, the PCP and the BE. The PS sponsored two candidates, while the PCP and the BE each presented their own candidate.

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The mobilisation of the population and of the working class was the determining, decisive action that reversed the force of the PSD-CDS government.

The first important step countering the increasingly serious attacks of the PSD-CDS government was when the government announced the increase of the single social tax (TSU) (7).

The government intended to impose a rise on workers’ social contribution, whilst reducing that of employers, thus making workers pay for employers’ organisations. The working population felt this was a provocation and this triggered off the movement.

On September 15th 2012 over a million people took to the streets demanding the annulment of the rise of the TSU. The measure was withdrawn. This was a great defeat for the government. Its effects were soon to follow.

After the people had inflicted that defeat on September 15th 2012 (annulment of the rise of the TSU), after the TC rejected the cuts in civil servants’ wages, and after the massive strike of teachers on June 18th 2013 against lay-offs, the PSD-CDS momentarily wavered. For a whole week the government disappeared. It was so fragile that it could have been overthrown with a push. The leaders of the PS, of the PCP and of the trade union confederations did not do that; they allowed the PSD-CDS government, hated by the people and by the workers, to re-establish itself.

The weeks long strike of the teachers during exams, the demonstration in Lisbon of over 80,000 teachers, followed by the massive general strike of teachers on June 18th 2013, was the blow that brought down the already weakened pillars of the PSD-CDS government. This movement brought about the collapse of the governmental structure; this was marked by the resignations of Finance Minister - at the service of the Troika, Vitor Gaspar, and of the State Minister, Paulo Portas (president of the CDS).

The state of political agony and disorientation of the government, contaminating its supporting parties and forces, had nothing to do with “tantrums”, “disloyalties” or palace intrigues. The causes of this political crisis were deep and originated far back, as explained by Vitor Gaspar in his letter of resignation:

“(…) The erosion of public opinion towards policies (…) of budgetary and financial adjustment following the proposed modifications of the single social tax”; in other words the determined struggle of the people against austerity measures;

“The failure to meet the limitations (…) of the deficit and of the debt for 2012 and 2013 (…)”; in other words the incapacity to overcome the resistance of public servants, notably the struggle of the teachers who forced the government to go back on the massive lay-offs it had announced;

7 The TSU is a contribution to the Social Security system presently financed by employers' organisations by 23.57% on the payslip of the worker and 11% for the workers on their payslip.
"These repeated variances have undermined my credibility as Finance Minister"; in other words, the resistance of the people and the struggle of pensioners resulted in the failure of the government to implement its announced plans, in spite of the cuts in pensions.

It is true that the demand for the resignation of Vitor Gaspar was the immediate cause which preceded and triggered off the events that succeeded it at a staggering pace; but the panic, the disorientation and the state of agony of the PSD-CDS government find their true causes in the problems that faced major employers and big finance: trying to overcome the resistance and the struggle of the immense majority of the people against the attacks and measures of the “Troika” and of the government.

This is the background preceding and preparing the electoral defeat of the PSD and of the CDS in the elections of October 14th 2015, which have given the PS, the PCP and the BE the majority in Parliament.

**HOW WE CHARACTERISE THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN PORTUGAL AFTER OCTOBER 4TH 2015 ELECTIONS**

A new political setting derives from the parliamentary elections of October last –giving the majority once more to the parties claiming to defend the historical interests of the workers.

This setting reflects the enormous mobilisations that have taken place in Portugal.

**The balance of power between classes has changed in favour of the working class.**

The October 4th 2015 elections are the end of a phase and the beginning of another in the political situation in Portugal. They are a turning point of class struggle in Portugal.

Through their action – in the fields of class struggle and of elections - workers and the various sectors of the population have defeated the parties of the bourgeoisie (PSD and CDS), with a minority in the Assembly of the Republic, and they have given the Parliamentary “Left” (PS, PCP et BE) the majority.

This had already taken place at other moments.

**What difference is there between the present situation of a “Left” majority and the situations of a “Left” majority in the past?**

- The movement of the working class and of the masses has forced the apparatuses (PS, PCP, BE) to go further than they wanted;
- The Assembly of the Republic (AR) has not given in to the constitutional coup attempted by the President of the Republic, trying to force the PS to form a government led by the PSD.

**The leading apparatus of the PS, under the pressure of socialist militants and of the movement of the class, was forced to:**

- break off negotiations with the right-wing coalition “PaF” (8);
- present a motion of rejection, approved by all the parties of the parliamentary “Left”;
- take the initiative of negotiating parliamentary agreements with the PCP, the BE and the PEV in order to form a PS government;
- force Cavaco Silva to step back from his attempts to impose “managerial” governments against the Assembly of the Republic, and bring him to swear in a PS government.

**WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THE TURNING POINT IN THE SITUATION?**

First, the turning point is marked by a double defeat of the bourgeoisie.

Cavaco Silva invited the PSD leader to start making contacts to form a government that would be validated by the PS, but the PSD leader failed totally. The PS broke with the “tradition” of validating a right-wing government (PSD-CDS); the PS turned its back on negotiations with the PaF coalition.

The government – formed at great pains by Passos Coelho with second rate personalities – was rejected by a majority of PS, PCP and BE MPs – as could be foreseen.

For the first time since April 25th 1974, the PS was at the head of the transformation of an absolute majority of the left into a joint political majority.

Contrary to what was asserted by Cavaco Silva – who had pretentiously announced that he had weighed “all possible alternatives” – this conclusion, this unexpected refusal by the PS to validate a right-wing government, took the bourgeoisie by surprise; it left its hegemonic fraction bewildered and disoriented. To start with, the PSD and the CDS accused the PS of being putschist, they said that the government it was about to form was illegitimate because it would be based on a fraud. Then the PaF coalition revealed the scope of its rage against the PS’s “unexpected” decision to make an alliance with the PCP and the BE – in Passos Coelho’s and Paolo Portas’s declarations, and in inflammatory appeals vociferated in meetings.

With the overthrow of its government (PSD-CDS), the bourgeoisie used the second institutional pillar on which it relied: Cavaco Silva, who also uttered threats and insinuated that he would not swear in the PS government; he said that this government was supported by political forces whose “paradigm” and principles were opposed to NATO, to the “budget treaty” and to the European Union.

Cavaco Silva did all he could to avoid appointing the PS general secretary (Antonio Costa) as Prime Minister – he appealed to the most reactionary wing of the PS to rebel against the PS leadership, he led endless consultations with “personalities” of the upper bourgeoisie and of big Finance, etc.

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*PaF (“Portugal a frente”: Forward Portugal – NDT) was the acronym of the electoral coalition of the PSD and the CDS; they used it to stand for the general elections of October 4th 2105 where they were defeated.*
Through Cavaco Silva, big Finance reiterated an attempt at a constitutional coup, as it had done so unsuccessfully in 2013. However the bourgeoisie failed in all its attempts of continuing to rule through its own parties directly.

Since this ultimate attempt had also failed, Cavaco Silva finally designated the PS General Secretary as Prime Minister and swore in a PS government; the bourgeoisie and financial capital were forced to rule indirectly through the PS (the social-democratic apparatus) – with the support of the PCP (Stalinist apparatus) and of the BE (a “centrist” apparatus) – in order to defend the private property of the great means of production at the hands of the upper bourgeoisie and of financial capital.

The second aspect of this turning point is as follows: for the first time in Portugal apparatuses were forced to form a PS government, with the support of the PCP and the BE (through the power of the working class movement).

This turning point corresponds to a groundswell that developed in the period before the parliamentary elections, and came to the fore during the electoral campaign. This turning point was expressed by the population “urging” the “left” parties to put an end to their division, to unite and to fight the Right in the struggle for power.

It was very notable during the electoral campaign that the popular masses openly criticised the policy of division, especially the PCP’s. Many people, fearless working class women, not fearing to confront political leaders, approached Jeronimo de Sousa, and told him face to face: “Left-wing parties must unite and not fight each other!” “You must find an agreement!” “The people can take this no longer!” “Fight the Right to gain power!”

This groundswell came to the fore in the elections; it found its expression on the electoral ground of the movement of the class, and above all of its increasing will to put an end to the government of the bourgeoisie and to its destructive action.

Resulting from the struggles of the working class in various sectors (strikes at Efacec, Panrico, INEM, TAP, civil service, teachers), this groundswell brought the defeat on the electoral ground of the strategy of class division started by the BE, but first and foremost by the PCP. This forced the apparatuses to go further than they would have wanted and to form a PS government supported by the PCP and the BE.

Is the PS government a Popular Front government?

In the text “The decisive hour in France” (December 18th 1938), Trotsky defined the Popular Front in these terms:

“The Popular Front is a coalition of parties. Every coalition, that is, every durable political alliance, has by necessity as its program of action the program of the more moderate of the coalesced parties. The French Popular Front has signified, since its debut, that the Socialists and Communists placed their political activity under the control of the Radicals. The French Radicals represent the left flank of the imperialist bourgeoisie.”

Although it is not a “Popular Front” government in the terms defined above by Trotsky, the PS government is undoubtedly a class collaboration government.

The PS government results from the movement of the working class that forced the apparatuses to go further than they wanted: the PCP and the BE, as a product of the policy of division (assimilating the PS with the PSD) and of submission to imperialism, pledge to support the PS government but do not want to be part of it, whilst giving conditional support to the implemented policies and measures – “our support (the PCP’s) to the PS government depends on its policy. If the policies are in favour of the workers, the PS government may rely on the support of the PCP.”

The government arrangement – PS government supported by PCP and BE – and the position of these two parties (“conditional” support) towards the government, represent in the present situation the “possible solution for a government”; it is approved by the political and trade union apparatus leaders (PS, PCP, CGTP and UGT), in conjunction with the BE, as a means to try and contain the movement of the workers.

The movement of the workers addresses its organisations to demand from the government that they abrogate all destructive measures and all workers’ and pensioners’ wage and pension cuts, and that they recover the purchasing power that has been lost. After their victory over the PSD and the CDS, having elected a majority of PS, PCP and BE MPs, workers want the immediate abrogation of anti-labour legislation, they want to recover the labour rights and social rights that were suppressed by the PSD-CDS government.

Nothing may justify that laws such as collective lay-offs and the annulment of collective agreements should remain, when there is a majority of PS, PCP and BE MPs in Parliament.

Within the BE – a centrist party and parliamentary support of the PS government – disagreements and signs of distancing are beginning to develop concerning some of the measures taken by the PS government.

TIME IS SHORT

Time is short. The European Union and its Headquarters (Financial Capital) are beginning to consider that formal democracy might prove to be inefficient in the face of the deep crisis in Europe; and that it might prove to be a form of “shaky” government, confronted with the necessities, the rhythms and the speed of the crisis.
The bourgeoisie is beginning to try other “solutions” in its attempts to dismantle the organisations of the working class – war, resorting to terrorism, provocations and attacks, resorting to fascist hordes. It does so in different ways, according to the balance of power in each country, but its survival instinct (as a class) brings it to that.

The turning point in the Portuguese situation is an additional factor in this process; but this factor contradicts and weakens those aims and necessities of imperialism.

In Portugal there is a conjunction of circumstances tending to deepen the crisis of the leading apparatuses of labour parties and of trade unions;

- the defeat of the bourgeoisie by the popular masses;
- unity imposed on apparatuses, defeating the policy of division;
- the “reservations” of the stalinist and centrist apparatuses towards the PS government.

All these circumstances, combined with the deep crisis that is splitting apart the foundations of the European Union, will tend to dislocate and deepen their crisis, releasing militants and working class cadres; these militants the POUS must try and recruit within its ranks, in the movement of its intervention in class struggle.

by Pedro Nunes

Lisbon: April 27, 1974, the crowd and activists amassed outside the barracks of the Republican Guard, in which Prime Minister Marcello Caetano, who succeeded the dictator Salazar, found refuge during the revolution...
Anti-trade union repression in Guadeloupe and Spain
(a document of the ICRC)

We believe it useful to reproduce large extracts of a brochure produced by the International Committee Against Repression (ICRC, for the defence of trade union and political rights) concerning certain aspects of the anti-trade union repression in Guadeloupe and Spain.

This is a document which illuminates certain sometimes insufficiently known aspects of the class struggle and which, in the domain which is proper to the ICRC, contributes to aiding the resistance to government and employer offensives.

Militants of different sections of the IV International have been and are in the forefront of this activity, alongside hundreds of trade union activists and labour and penal law lawyers.

For the struggle against anti-trade union repression to have a reality, a fight which will have its high and low points, it must be composed of practical initiatives. That is why, for most of the time, it focuses upon individual cases of repression which, so to speak, concentrate this activity.

La Vérité

Contribution concerning the fight against certain penal instruments and anti-trade union repression with which the labour movement, and trade union organisations in particular, are confronted

(...)

We hereby submit the experience of this continuing struggle and the questions, which it raises for consideration by all.

For years, one has witnessed the mounting use of penal law in the social field, sometimes by successive slides. Dispositions included in the Penal Code and penal procedure, either specially drawn up against the labour and democratic movement, or written for other reasons but used in this way, tend to modify the exercise of trade union rights and to throw into question one of the essential prerogatives of workers’ organisations and a fundamental right of the working class itself: that of the right to strike.

Through different aspects, trade union freedom itself is thrown into question. A dreadful mechanism has been instituted which tends to replace an essential democratic rule – the free confrontation of antagonistic interests: those of the salaried workers and the trade union organisations which represent them on the one hand, and those of the employers on the other – by recourse to penal proceedings. Public prosecutors, directly dependent upon the Justice Ministry – in the cases which are of concern to us – and penal law in general have thus become veritable war machines in the hands of governments directed against workers’ organisations, against worker-militants.

The anti-trade union instruments, which exist, are numerous; we will deal here only with those with which we have been confronted. In order not to make this contribution too long and involved, let us now get to the meat of the matter – without, let us repeat, proposing to examine all aspects of anti-trade union repression, which would require entire volumes.

**THE QUESTION OF GENETIC TESTS IN FRANCE AND GUADELOUPE**

The origin of the Automated National File of Genetic Prints (FNAEG, in French)
This file was created on the basis of article 706-54 of the Code of Penal Procedure arising out of the law of 98-468 of June 17, 1998, relating to the prevention and repression of sexual offences and the protection of minors. The conditions of the functioning of this file were established by the articles R 53-9 to R 53-21 of the Code of Penal Procedure arising from the decree N° 2000-413 of May 18, 2000, and article A 38 of the same code of procedure.

Thus article 506-54 of this code provides for "the institution, with a view to facilitating the identification and detection of sexual offenders, of an automated national file aimed at centralising genetic traces as well as genetic prints of persons convicted of such offences".

The circulars published in the Official Bulletin of the Justice Ministry state the exceptional nature of the file (our emphasis), "the aim of prevention and protection of minors, and the particular question of repetition of offences of a sexual nature which justify the conservation of data for as long as possible".

It is thus on the basis of the law of 1998, and on nothing else, that the FNAEG was originally established. Already broadened in 2001, the Internal Security law N° 2003-239 of March 18, notably its article 29, radically and definitively altered the nature of the file.

How and why?

Beginning with that law, the Automated National File of Genetic Prints has been extended to include a multitude of other offences including shoplifting, tagging of billboards, those who uproot genetically modified plants and causing damage to property. The majority of offences covered by the Penal Code have thereby entered the scope of the FNAEG.

The national file, which comprised some 2,000 samples in the year 2000, numbered 150,000 in 2005 and by 2012 reached the figure of two million persons. The present rate of evolution is estimated at 30,000 new samples a month. Among these are those of rapists, drug traffickers... and trade union militants. By broadening the scope of application of the FNAEG, penal law has changed the initial nature and function of the national genetic file.

The field of application of the FNAEG has become so wide that, combined with the notion of "disturbing public order" – a notion of almost infinite elasticity and intrinsically arbitrary, which would require a detailed analysis – that it today permits DNA tests practically without limit.

It was the law of 2001 signed by the interior minister in the government of Lionel Jospin which created the "offence of refusing to provide a DNA sample", which in reality serves almost exclusively the repression of militants who do not wish to figure in the FNAEG originally reserved for sexual offenders. Then two decrees of October 16, 2009 completed the law of 2001, permitting the collection in the file of data relating to political, religious, philosophical or trade union activities, with the aim of "preventing offences against public security''. To crown it all, the government of Hollande, under the signatures of Manuel Valls and Jean-Marc Ayrault, by the decree of May 7, 2013, multiplied the range of the law. It now suffices that an officer of the judicial police demand, for example in the course of an assembly, a strike, or a demonstration, that a trade union militant or worker provide a DNA sample and the supposed suspect refuses, for the latter to be liable to up to a year's imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 euros. This is a sword of Damocles hanging above the heads of trade union organisations, their officials and militants. Between 2003 and 2010, a profusion of legislative texts has extended the scope of DNA tests to include the most serious offences as well as the slightest.

(...) A refusal to submit to a DNA test, apart from the fact that it can entail a summons leading to trial and conviction, (though not automatically) in no way closes the affair. That is because such a refusal is considered an "unlimited" offence. That is to say that, to cap this iniquitous procedure, a person given a suspended prison sentence for refusing to give a sample can still be required by the authorities to provide one. In effect, such a person could find himself considered a repeat offender that is to say in a situation where the suspended prison sentence becomes a real one and the fine evidently becomes heavier.

**From being a file of an "exceptional nature" as the law stated, the FNAEG has become an everyday tool**

The ICRC is not alone in holding that there has been a shift in the practice of penal law under the pressure of security concerns. For several years now, trade union militants acting in the exercise of their mandate and prerogatives have found themselves in the dock faced with the blackmail of being forced to submit to a DNA test. A scientific technique developed with the precise stated purpose of protecting citizens from sexual delinquents is thus being diverted from its original aim and is becoming a weapon in the hands of the State in order to threaten, dissuade – terrorise if need be – those who resist.

It is thus that in Guadeloupe we have seen a mind-boggling concatenation of trials of trade union militants - most of them members of the General Union of Workers of Guadeloupe, the UGTG – and this has accelerated since the general strike of 2009. One does not have to be a specialist in social questions to understand that the state machine has been and is being used as weapon of revenge. How else can one interpret the fact that some 100 trade union militants have been hauled before the courts since that date?

If one compare the size of the salaried population of Guadeloupe with that of mainland France, that corresponds to about 15,000
prosecutions for the same period. A frightful figure!

Of course not all of the prosecutions have been related to refusals by trade unionists to submit to DNA tests. Charly Lendo, former assistant secretary of the UGTG, was discharged – thanks to a considerable campaign in Guadeloupe and at international level – after being accused of manslaughter over the accidental death of a motorcyclist who rammed into a barricade at high speed.

He and his fellow militant of the Hotel, Tourism and Restaurant Workers Union, José Naejus, were both nevertheless sentenced to pay a fine of 1,000 euros for refusing to provide a DNA sample in a previous trial. This was also the case for Denis D. Both Charly Lendo and José Naejus had been discharged of other accusations relating to the struggle in the hotel and catering industry.

Jocelyn Leborgne, another leader of the UGTG summoned for refusing to submit to genetic tests, was last year discharged by the court of Pointe-à-Pitre. The public prosecutor appealed against that decision – an appeal that was dropped on May 15, 2016, the same day as the trial, which in effect confirmed the original discharge of Leborgne. But this definitive discharge was on the basis of a "technicality", the prosecutor having failed to observe the time limits, in the words of the court chairman. This "technicality" was in fact a vain attempt to save the face of the prosecutor’s office. Everybody knows that it was the mobilisation of the UGTG, of its militants, of trade union organisations in the Caribbean and numerous countries (Mexico, Brazil, Spain, Switzerland, Algeria, France), combined with the yawning political crisis in mainland France, which accounts for this success.

But we should note that this sword of Damocles hangs not only above the heads of the militants named above; it has proved to be a permanent threat to union organisations and each of their members. For even when the cases brought by employers are dismissed, the authorities still hold in their hands the supreme weapon: obligatory DNA tests which, as we have seen, can be used against those who refuse to submit, on pain of up to a year in jail and a fine of up to 15,000 euros.

(...) The slightest trade union struggle involving a street demonstration, a mass meeting or a strike picket is liable to lead to obligatory DNA tests for those who participate. It is by no means an exaggeration to say that we are seeing a move toward criminalisation of trade union activity.

If Guadeloupe has constituted a kind of "test case" in this respect, in terms of the scale of repression, which has developed there, mainland France is not exempt from these threatening mechanisms, even if their use so far has not attained similar proportions – which does not diminish their importance.

Total arbitrariness, discretionary powers – it is in such terms that it appears to us necessary to characterise the question of genetic tests used against trade unionists.

In all there are now no less than 137 offences, which are today susceptible to allowing recourse to genetic testing. It would be difficult to widen the scope any further. With such a tool in the hands of prosecutors and their officers, there is a permanent "open season" in the hunt for trade unionist prey.

**ARTICLE 315.3 OF THE PENAL CODE OF THE SPANISH STATE: WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?**

The origin of Article 315 line 3 is the Franco-era Penal Code, when it was called article 496.

Article 315 line 3 dates from the present Penal Code of 1976. Although "revamped", this article, like its previous version, provides for charges against militants involved in a strike, and in particular their participation in strike pickets. We know, and this is fundamental, that the right to strike, like other workers' rights, has been won by the struggles of the working class. We also know that the fight against anti-strike measures employed for years figures among the necessities for the defence of the very existence of workers' organisations.

This form of war against trade union organisations has been extended without precedent since the principal trade union organisations of the Spanish State, the CCOO and the UGT, launched various calls for a general strike. The year 2015 saw the unleashing of an avalanche of prosecutions orchestrated by the Justice Ministry through its various prosecutors. More than 300 trade union militants and officials across the country have been charged and face the threat of heavy fines and heavy prison sentences.

The same year saw the passing, "for good measure", of a law known to militants as the "gagging law" – a law which aims in effect to ban the right to demonstrate.

In mid-2015, a group of lawyers specialised in labour law joined in a campaign launched in Spain (and in France) for the abrogation of article 315 line 3 of the Penal Code under which more than 300 trade unionists of the UGT and the CCOO are being prosecuted for their trade union activities. They have demanded the complete abandon of all the prosecutions.

In June 2015, at the Bourse du Travail in Paris, officials of the French union confederations CGT and CGT-FO held a joint press conference alongside the ICRC with the participation of Pablo García-Cano, CCOO delegate at the John Deere factory in Getafe and himself one of the accused, and of Ruddy Tessier, assistant secretary-general of the UGTG (Guadeloupe). A decision was taken to give an international character to the campaign for the defence of Jocelyn Leborgne, a UGTG leader (see above), and for the abrogation of the infamous article 315 line 3 of the Penal Code and to respond to the invitation of trade union leaders and lawyers of the Spanish State for an encounter in Spain on the
occasion of the emblematic trial of 8 Airbus trade unionists.

More than 80 organisations from France but also trade union organisations of Germany, Portugal, Switzerland, Brazil, Mexico, the United States, Great Britain and Algeria were involved. And on November 20, 2015, was constituted an international commission for the abrogation of article 315 line 3, in the presence of a delegation from France composed of the ICRC, lawyers and trade unionists, at the headquarters of a prestigious firm of lawyers of Atocha. There was then an international rally convened by the international commission in February 2016 in Madrid, in the notable presence of trade union representatives of the CUT of Brazil, and from Portugal, the ICRC and unionists from France, supported by messages from the Spanish confederations CCOO and UGT, in the presence of Spanish members of parliament and lawyers and militants under prosecution (notably those of Airbus) whose trial was to open in the following days. The trade union organisations of the Madrid region held impressive demonstrations on the day that the trial of the 8 Airbus militants opened. The 8 were discharged, which was an important victory for them, for all salaried workers and their organisations. It was also a victory for international solidarity.

A brilliant victory, but which poses the question of the numerous other current prosecutions against militants under article 315 line 3.

All the political forces claiming to stand for the workers’ and democratic movement in Spain have committed themselves to the abrogation of article 315.3. But at the time of our writing this contribution, the article still figures in the Spanish Penal Code. Just like the instruments dangerous for democratic freedoms, which allow the authorities to demand DNA, tests in in mainland France and in Guadeloupe and which are also still part of the French Penal Code.

(...) The successes won over the last year – the discharge of Charly Lendo, former assistant secretary-general of the UGT, discharge for the 8 Airbus trade union militants in the Spanish State in 2016, discharge in March 2016 for Jocelyn Leborgne – demonstrate for us that, with the support of workers’ movement mobilisations in the countries concerned, based upon trade union unity, international solidarity is not just "a fine thought" but can constitute a sometimes far-reaching element in the fight to defend the workers’ movement and its militants. It is a factor and a constituting element of the balance of forces between the classes and in relation to governments.

The ICRC has taken part in conferences organised by the International Liaison Committee (the International Entente) of Workers and Peoples (ILC) in Berlin, Madrid, Algiers and Paris, and quite naturally finds itself alongside the ILC in contributing to campaigns launched by the latter.

The ICRC, 40 years old this year, has by nature always been against war and exploitation. With its modest means, it will continue to take its place, in its own way, alongside those who, like the International Liaison Committee (ILC), struggle for human emancipation.

by Gérard Bauvert

This contribution is based upon documents drawn up by the ICRC in the course of the struggles mentioned here, as well as the militant efforts of trade unionists of the CCOO and the UGT of the Spanish State, lawyers for these confederations, and upon documents drawn up by the UGT and its lawyers in the course of our joint actions.